

**Storytelling and the Crusades: an examination of the importance of  
storytelling in our understanding of the crusades from the earliest written  
accounts to a present-day novel, 'Kyrie Eleison'**

PhD thesis

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## Declaration

I certify that this work does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Signed: .....

## Summary

While it is generally accepted that the crusades significantly shaped the evolution of chivalric romance, courtly love and the knightly stereotype, the First Crusade (1096–1099) in particular has a resonating significance that even continues to shape contemporary ideas, representations and beliefs.

The participants of the First Crusade were shaped by fictional narratives of various kinds. The Bible, itself reinterpreted to suit changing circumstances in history, was a key text, even shaping military strategy. Similarly, when recording and making sense of the historical facts about the capture of Jerusalem, ecclesiastical historians drew on phrases and tropes from epic literature, suggesting that such texts influenced individual and cultural understanding of identity and the world.

After the military successes of the First Crusade, knights were seen to have gained the approval of God in a holy enterprise, which gave lay knights a special prestige and a new sense of self-worth. Crusading ideals, coupled with troubadour conventions, gave rise to the heroes of chivalric romance, who, though a step removed from the crusaders of medieval history books, represented the crusader ideal *par excellence*—men with the strength, morality and spirit of the crusaders, but stripped of all suggestions of ecclesiastical control. These narratives, in which morality was enforced through a code of violence by knights who were a law unto themselves, quickly influenced the self-identity of European aristocratic and knightly classes, where powerbrokers play-acted as narrative heroes in the everyday world.

Miguel de Cervantes in *Don Quixote* satirised those who would idealise storybook knights, and his layered work called into question storytelling itself and fiction's influence on society. *Don Quixote* was a challenge to the fictionalised crusader-cum-chivalric knight, but despite Cervantes the ideal would survive.

Historian Jonathan Riley-Smith has demonstrated that Walter Scott's historical novel, *The Talisman*, play-acted in costume by more recent Western powerbrokers such as the German Emperor, may have forever changed modern Middle East/West relations, standardising perceptions of crusading and Saladin in the modern Middle East.

The crusaders understood themselves through fictional narratives and storytelling, and, as fictionalised characters themselves, they have influenced Western culture and identity ever since. Some suggest that the current age is one of a clash of cultures and that cultural values and exports—be they explicit or subtle—can exacerbate cultural tensions.

However, although crusading ideas still reappear occasionally in political rhetoric, the West is wary of crusaders and their anachronistic ideals and quick to spot them in their native form. But, perhaps because of such wariness, crusaders have taken on new guises in the modern age with the result that the values of the chivalric knights, those idealised crusaders, have been sustained. In popular culture in general and in American comic books in particular, superheroes are lone champions who yearn for an unreachable ideal, answer only to themselves, and enforce morality through violence; such figures can be seen as carrying medieval values into the modern world. In such popular guises, crusader narrative fiction and its ideals may still be influencing the self-understanding of those in the West and dictating how the West represents itself across cultural divides. The presence of such disguised versions of the crusades and crusaders in our collective consciousness hinders our proper understanding of what the crusades meant, not just to the crusaders themselves but for us.

These ideas and more are synthesised in the creative work, 'Kyrie Eleison', which uses storytelling to suggest how crusader identities were formed and then re-interpreted through fiction. At the same time, the creative piece attempts to present the crusaders in recognisable human terms so as to try and overcome the difficulties modern readers might have in understanding crusader motivations, both because the crusader mindset is so different to our own and because we are likely to be influenced, consciously or unconsciously, by simplistic conceptions of the crusades which still permeate popular culture.

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## General Introduction

*Is there a thing of which it is said, "See, this is new"? It has already been, in the ages before us.*

Ecclesiastes 1:10 [NRSV]

*each definition [of crusade] runs the risk of detaching it as a specific war of the Church from the general development of medieval society, of making it an event [occurring] on the borders of Christendom, as opposed to locating its deep-rootedness in Christendom's central structures.*

Norman Housley, *Contesting the Crusades*<sup>1</sup>

When I set out to write the creative piece 'Kyrie Eleison', an historical trilogy set during the First Crusade, two challenges immediately presented themselves. As a student of literature I wanted to keep *narrative* in focus, both in my thinking about the medieval world and my recreation of it. I felt I should try to reproduce convincingly the world and the mindset of the pilgrims at the time, as understood by historians of our own time, and my representations of participants and conditions must remain within the bounds of plausibility.

To understand further how the crusaders saw themselves, I also read beyond modern history books, returning to the crusaders' own histories. Such histories show that the bounds of what an audience will find plausible have shifted. It has been noted that history itself can be represented in a number of genres which might suggest various intentions, and the medieval histories can be classified as belonging to different genres to those of today, with more explicit foci on storytelling, supernatural influence, morality, didactic instruction, and the overt championing of ideologies.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ernst-Dieter Hehl, 'Was ist eigentlich ein Kreuzzug?', in *Historische Zeitschrift* 259 (1994), 297-336, at p. 333, quoted in Housley, *Contesting the Crusades*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), pp. 6-7.

<sup>2</sup> Perhaps history can never escape such traps. Richard T. Vann, paraphrasing Isaiah Berlin, suggests that 'as long as history is written in ordinary language, it will be suffused with the moral meanings and connotations which are inextricably embedded in everyday speech.' Richard T. Vann, 'Turning Linguistic', in *A New Philosophy of History*, ed. by Frank Ankersmit and Hans Kellner (London: Reaktion Books, 1995), pp. 40-69 (p. 43).

In these histories we see that the crusaders themselves were heavily influenced by narrative. The stories of the Bible were so real to the crusaders that they attempted to recreate scenes from biblical tales, hoping for the same results. They walked barefoot around Jerusalem, like Joshua at Jericho, during a desperate siege and when troops were harassing them with arrows from the walls. The narratives of figures such as Christ, Job and Abraham heavily informed the Church's reasoning for offering crusaders an indulgence and thus the entire reason for individuals to go on crusade. The crusaders were continuing the narrative of a Jerusalem that for them continued from the Bible: indeed they felt they might be writing a new biblical chapter. It became clear to me as I read the early accounts of the crusades that the crusader pilgrims understood themselves through story, and story influenced their actions, on both the strategic and personal levels. The Bible positions the world itself as part of a story with a beginning, middle and end, which continues to influence Western consciousness even today.

It is thus clear that the Bible influenced the crusaders and so must help shape my creative piece. The medieval histories, influenced by the Bible and with narrative elements that have been discounted by historians today, would also be useful. What other stories did the pilgrims tell themselves? There is a shift in Western literature right around the time of the First Crusade. Pre-crusade we see the heroic epic—stories such as *Beowulf*, in which heroes struggle violently against monsters. The heroic epic itself shifts with *The Song of Roland*, written at about the time of the First Crusade. The version it offers of the story of Roland's death reveals the influence of the Crusade: violence and the personal capacity for feats of arms are both celebrated, and the monsters are Muslims; I note in passing that in the real historical episode represented in *Roland* the antagonists were Christian Basques.

First Crusade histories drew upon the epic genre, deploying the language of the epic and casting some of its figures as epic heroes in a vein similar to *Roland*.

My first problem was thus to attempt to represent the crusaders as they understood themselves. It became apparent to me that storytelling influenced both the self-understanding of the crusaders and how they comprehended their roles as they journeyed to Jerusalem. Storytelling also shaped how the people of the

Middle Ages came to understand and reinvent the crusader as a lasting heroic icon. If I was to represent the crusader accurately, I must engage with the kinds of storytelling that formed and reshaped the crusader. I understood from the histories that a similar kind of intertextuality to that of the histories would be needed in my creative piece.

Shortly after the First Crusade came the birth of troubadour poetry, celebrating love, eroticism, and a longing for the unattainable woman. The King Arthur legend also begins to take hold of the Western imagination around this time. These converge in the chivalric romance, particularly in the Arthurian romances, in which noble knights serving great kings perform deeds of arms, but now always in service to their inner selves and in answer to their psychic struggles. They long for women who seem as unattainable and ethereal as that other great romance quest object, the Holy Grail. These stories may well have been influenced by the obsession over personal guilt and redemption that flowed from the indulgence granted to the crusaders. Crusaders had quested, fought and suffered to make up for their sins in the eyes of a divine and unknowable Christ and his Virgin mother, and crusaders themselves had entered myth as celebrated heroes and as models for the heroes of romance.

Once again, in this post-First Crusade era, fiction influenced people's personal lives, as manuals on chivalry were written, Arthurian fantasies acted out and Arthurian objects fetishised like holy relics.

The First Crusade was a liminal moment. Whether it truly birthed these literary ideas or simply reflected them is open to debate, but the historical fact of the First Crusade is indelibly imbedded in this artistic shift. This awareness brought me to my second problem in representing creatively the First Crusade: in a post-9/11 world where heroic ideas are arguably still influenced by these knights of chivalry, when these post-crusader echoes are only once removed, how was I to unravel my own biases and those of my contemporaries? The facts of the First Crusade, and even the original stories that influenced its participants, had been obscured behind a tangled growth of literature. I realised I would have to address some of these later narratives in my book. How to do that when, on the one hand, I wanted my crusaders themselves to be plausibly located within a strictly specific historical period?

My solution was to write my story on two ‘levels’. One level would be that of the more-or-less straight historical novel, in which I play with the idea of how the crusaders were subconsciously and almost helplessly influenced by the culturally dominant narratives of their day. The second level would be of stories within the story, told by a storyteller character existing on the first level. These stories would embody my reflections on post-First Crusade narratives. They would reflect upon how the crusade and its ideals have been echoed, reinvented, and further fictionalised ever since. Reading the medieval histories, we see the participants of the crusade transforming into figures of myth and legend, and so my storyteller would start as a gossip, repeating the histories of the characters around her, and grow to become a storyteller, mythologising the crusaders even before they reach Jerusalem.

Echoes of the literary crusader might be heard at any time in the last nine hundred years of Western literature, but I have chosen a few key texts that were influential, enduring, and particularly suited to the metatextual ‘discussion’ of my creative piece.

Miguel de Cervantes lived in the twilight of the crusading era, fighting for the Holy League against the Ottomans in the Battle of Lepanto in 1571 and spending time as a prisoner of the Muslims, and he wrote that great satiric book mocking the fictional knight, Don Quixote. Even more widely, *Don Quixote* lampooned those who were blindly influenced by fiction, and specifically by reading. *Don Quixote* seemed to have so much in common with my way of thinking about the crusades that it became a key text. Its metatextuality influenced how I would deconstruct the storybook crusader in my creative piece. The romance knight would survive Cervantes’ expert assault, and be rejuvenated by many later writers. One of these was Sir Walter Scott, whose novel *The Talisman*, set during the Third Crusade, may, modern historian Jonathan Riley-Smith argues, have influenced the popular perception of the crusaders and their opponents in the modern world, both in the Middle East and the West.

In the modern reimagining of the crusades Sir Walter Scott looms large. The 2005 Ridley Scott film *Kingdom of Heaven* owes more to Scott than the work of historians. Despite the best efforts of modern historians and historical novelists, it is arguable that we are still in the ‘Scott era’ when it comes to the popular and mass media understanding of the crusades—Westerners full of spirit but often

thuggish oppose mysterious, almost magical, ideologically driven but extremely enlightened Muslims. We must remember that, in the case of this view of Muslims, positive stereotypes are still stereotypes which obscure the facts. When it comes to literature that influenced the writing of my trilogy and stories which are discussed in the 'literary game' of the novels, I stop at Scott, only because the myriad voices that have come since have never quite drowned him out. I focus on Scott at the expense of figures between him and Cervantes because Scott's stories about the crusades influence modern popular understanding of them so much.

Key pieces of storytelling from beyond the era of the crusades thus also inform this second 'level' of my creative piece, as I attempt to suggest through intertextuality and metatextuality how storytelling has continued to shape and reshape understanding of the crusader.

A question that extends from this study can be asked: in what ways are the crusaders and their fictional echoes continuing to influence personal identities in the West today? Are we as blind as the crusaders, following narratives as if we have no choice, even into distant wars, hoping that the 'Western story' will see us redeemed at the end? Thus, in the final part of this exegesis I step beyond the works that directly influenced my creative piece and discuss how this idea of the narrative influence of crusader ideals might be extending into the modern world. Though chivalric knights from romance are not crusaders themselves, they are only a step away. They are 'fictionalised crusaders' in an idealised form. I suggest that American comic book superheroes are only one further step away from chivalric knights, and are in some ways the same fictional figures at heart, simply with different costumes. We are wary of crusaders now, and so they have had to change their garb if they were to continue promoting their ideals in earnest. Superheroes may influence personal identities, and I believe they may influence cultural tensions in a post 9/11 world. I hope to suggest that the ideals of the crusaders, ideals that have been expressed strongly in idealised fictional versions of the crusaders, are still speaking to the West, and the West might do better to be more aware of them and their continuing influence. This, I hope, implies that my creative piece itself has relevance and value to the modern reader—the processes it describes may still be having an impact today.

The creative piece intends to show how the crusader began and how he transformed himself down the ages. I hope to show the literary crusader's warts

and his strengths, so that we are more aware of how crusaders, and stories, continue to touch and shape people in the West. I hope to hold a funhouse mirror up to the West and some of its stories, so that, looking at this slightly enlarged and distorted version of themselves and their hidden cultural values, the Western reader might become more aware of subconscious narrative influences he or she might otherwise take for granted. Walter Scott's crusaders may have influenced the West's relations with the world in the past, and caped crusaders may be doing the same today, so it would seem advantageous to be aware of the descent of some of these anachronistic moral (or amoral) archetypes.

My structure is itself indebted to a great narrative tradition—Esther, my storyteller, is like Scheherazade of *The Arabian Nights*. The frame story of the *Nights* existed in the Middle East in some form in the eighth century, translating from Indian texts, possibly including stories from the *Panchatantra*, *Baital Pachisi* and the Buddhist *Jataka Tales*, but by the tenth century had taken on its own Arabic identity.<sup>3</sup> It continued to grow to the thirteenth century and beyond. It had its modern title by the twelfth century. The oldest surviving Arabic manuscript dates from the fifteenth century.<sup>4</sup> These stories-within-stories most likely influenced Giovanni Boccaccio's *The Decameron* (1353), and *The Decameron* almost certainly influenced Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* (late fourteenth century).<sup>5</sup> Here is a positive transmission from Muslim culture to Christian (along, perhaps, with the troubadour tradition).<sup>6</sup> These stories are post-crusades but, as they are themselves so important in the history of literature and as they suggest a positive creative link between cultures, they seemed the perfect texts with which to be creating allusive connections. *The*

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<sup>3</sup> See Robert Irwin in the Introduction to, *The Arabian Nights: Tales of 1001 Nights*, 3 vols. (London: Penguin Books, 2010), 2, ix-xviii (p. ix).

<sup>4</sup> Irwin, p. x.

<sup>5</sup> 'In 1372, still only about thirty years old, Chaucer traveled as part of an embassy to Genoa and later visited Florence, where he might have met Petrarch and Boccaccio, two famous poets he draws on repeatedly throughout his work.' Joseph Glaser in the Introduction to Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales in Modern Verse* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2005), p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> The possible links between Boccaccio, Chaucer, and an early as yet unknown translation of the *Nights* are fascinating, and *The Decameron* and *The Canterbury Tales* contains elements from the *Nights*. For example, the unique 'mechanical flying horse of brass...is not the only element of Arab origin in the "The Squire's Tale"; for the episode in which Princess Canacee (who has acquired a magic ring that allows her to understand the language of birds) eavesdrops on a female falcon which tells of its desertion by a tercel, or male hawk, must derive ultimately from "The Tale of Taj al-Muluk and the Princess Dunya" in the *Nights*', Robert Irwin, *The Arabian Nights: A Companion* (London: Tauris Paperbacks, 2010), Amazon Kindle e-book, location 1737-42.

*Canterbury Tales* is a story of pilgrims entertaining each other with stories on the way to visit a holy place, and this has parallels with my trilogy. *The Arabian Nights* is about a woman who tells tales to a powerful man so her barren kingdom can once again be fruitful, and so that she herself can be saved, and this is thematically very similar to Esther's story in my trilogy, whose life has become empty since the death of her husband and baby; she must rejuvenate her own creative possibility, as well as her identity as a woman in the medieval world.

Throughout my thesis, words and ideas such as 'fact', 'truth', 'fiction', 'literary', 'narrative' and 'popular culture/literature' all need careful deployment. The idea of history itself is full of subtleties; ways of presenting and understanding the past have changed down the ages. When I speak of history, I am speaking of history as understood by the consensus of historians today. Let us call it 'historical fact', and note that for 'facts' to have cultural meaning, they must be interpreted. The resulting interpretations can be shaped by ideology, and by the power relations of those making historical claims over those who remain silent. 'Fiction' can contain truth; great fiction may be true in terms of the way it reproduces human truths within a signified and conventional artificiality. As Hess notes,

Pablo Picasso is reported to have said: art is a lie that makes us realize the truth. The art of fiction tells truth because it is the truth of life that goes into making good fiction: love, hate, fear, courage, delight, sorrow, betrayal, loyalty, confusion, choice, circumstance, luck, injustice.<sup>7</sup>

'Fiction' in this thesis can mean narrative texts generally understood not to be literally true. I will include the Bible in this, as even medieval scholars championed the value of allegorical truths in biblical tales. 'Literary' I might use loosely from time-to-time, as what is 'literary' from one era to another can change. Indeed, while 'literary' today implies cultural value, artistic worth and cultural elitism, what was written for a less discerning audience can become 'literary' over time. We will assume that literary means 'written down', of cultural value, and perhaps 'influential'.

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<sup>7</sup> Carol Lakey Hess, 'Fiction is Truth, and sometimes Truth is Fiction', *Religious Education: The official journal of the Religious Education Association*, 103:3 (2008), 283-285 (p. 280). Hess cites Dore Ashton, *Picasso on art* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1988) as the source of this Picasso quotation.

‘Popular culture’, finally, and ‘popular literature’ are fraught terms. One might say that the chivalric romances, for example, were ‘popular literature’, and part of the mass media of their day, but such ‘popular literature’ was still only enjoyed only by a wealthy elite and existed in very few copies (and may indeed have been largely oral in its presentation and tradition). Here, ‘popular literature’ is lay literature, a literature of the people which may or may not have aligned with the interests of the Church. ‘Popular’ means that a work of secular fiction was widely disseminated and influential across space and/or time.

Popular fiction, whether transmitted in writing or orally, influenced the motives and actions of the crusaders, and this process is represented in my creative piece ‘Kyrie Eleison’. Popular fiction influenced the people who made history, in the sense of participating in and representing events that are remembered today. These real people and their ideals were then transformed again in fiction, which represented essential aspects of their ideals. Fiction both warped the crusaders and the facts of their lives and caused them to endure in the imagination of the West, and to influence future human beings. This process of the crusades being fictionalised, and the layers of fiction gradually obscuring the facts of the crusades from modern eyes, is represented in the creative piece ‘Kyrie Eleison’ through the character of Esther and her various stories-within-the-story.

Stories shaped the crusaders, and stories have shaped our view of them since, and thus ‘Kyrie Eleison’ is, like *The Arabian Nights*, *The Canterbury Tales*, and *Don Quixote*, a story about storytelling.

**Part I: How the Crusaders and their peers used storytelling techniques when representing the First Crusade, and how stories from the era may have influenced the crusaders' own self-understanding.**

*'No one should be surprised that I make use of a style very much different from that of the Commentaries on Genesis or the other little treatises; for it is proper and permissible to ornament history with the crafted elegance of words; however, the mysteries of sacred eloquence should be treated not with poetic loquacity, but with ecclesiastic plainness.'*

Guibert of Nogent, *The Deeds of God through the Franks*<sup>8</sup>

*'...each generation has fashioned its own crusades.'*

Christopher Tyerman, *The Invention of the Crusades*<sup>9</sup>

**The Bible and the Medieval World**

The Bible underpins the First Crusade. Indeed, one could say the Bible underpins the whole of Western society. Its sway was even stronger during the Middle Ages, when the West began its rebirth and the foundations for the modern world were laid.

As William R. Cook and Ronald B. Herzman note, expressing a generally held view, '[t]he Bible was far and away the most influential and important book for the Middle Ages'.<sup>10</sup> The Bible is fundamentally important to any discussion of the Middle Ages in the West as it was a text that directly influenced and subtly informed all aspects of life. During the First Crusade its text informed objectives, interpretations of events, and real life battle plans.

People in the Middle Ages were familiar with the Bible in a way that is difficult for most of us now to understand. As one example, the Rule of St. Benedict required monks to sing the entire Psalter (Book of Psalms) every week,

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<sup>8</sup> Guibert of Nogent, *The Deeds of God through the Franks* (London: Echo Library, 2008), p. 20.

<sup>9</sup> Christopher Tyerman, *The Invention of the Crusades* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998), p. 100.

<sup>10</sup> William R. Cook and Ronald B. Herzman, *The Medieval World View: An Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 3.

and psalms were often sung at secular churches.<sup>11</sup> Certain psalms, such as Psalm 91, were sung by monks every day.<sup>12</sup> Many across the various strata of society would have been intimately familiar with biblical tales, and scholars and those who knew Latin would have been able not only to recognise biblical verses but to quote them without difficulty. Cook and Herzman elaborate on the claim quoted above:

If one judges by the influence the Bible has now, even to practising Christians, one will underestimate its importance to medieval culture. Perhaps at no time in history has a culture been so influenced by a single book. Modern scholars will read a great many more books in the course of their careers than their medieval counterparts, the explosion of material in all fields being one of the significant cultural changes that has taken place since the Middle Ages. But those books that medieval scholars knew, they knew exceedingly well; and the book that they knew best was the Bible.<sup>13</sup>

Medieval society considered that, in the words of Paul's Epistle to the Romans, the 'proper value of study and human knowledge is to lead a person to God'<sup>14</sup> and that important knowledge came from God and was to be found in the past, not in the future or in new discoveries. As Cook and Herzman further note,

One of the significant differences between the medieval and modern world is that modern men and women are constantly searching for and discovering new truths, while truth in medieval society was perceived as having been discovered in the past.<sup>15</sup>

All of this is important when considering the crusades and medieval histories, poetry and literature. Medieval society and the Bible offer an example of intertextuality *in extremis*.

The Bible was seen to contain literal truths and stories of allegorical import, with emphasis on the former or the latter depending on the commentator, but it was a fiction that evolved. It is the first link in our chain of slippery narratives that shaped and reinvented crusader identity.

### **The Influence of Bible Stories on the Military Strategy of the First Crusade**

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<sup>11</sup> Cook and Herzman, pp. 6-7.

<sup>12</sup> Cook and Herzman, p. 10.

<sup>13</sup> Cook and Herzman, p. 82.

<sup>14</sup> Romans 1:19-20, quoted in Cook and Herzman, p. 19.

<sup>15</sup> Cook and Herzman, p. xxi.

The First Crusade was influenced by the Bible in more than just its ideology. Obviously, preaching relied on biblical quotations and allusion, and justification according to revered biblical scholars such as St Augustine (though he was a figure not widely known outside papal circles at the time). The fetishising of the Holy Land in general and Jerusalem in particular was reliant on biblical text, but the military leaders of the First Crusade also executed military operations in accordance with passages from the Bible. The most remarkable of these occurred during the siege of Jerusalem itself. After experiencing a vision of the Crusade's deceased spiritual leader Bishop Adhemar, Peter Desiderius demanded that the already thirsty and starving soldiers—who had spent more than two years of hardship wandering through Anatolia across mountains and deserts and who had lost huge numbers of their fellows in battle—fast for three days and walk barefoot around the walls of Jerusalem in procession, as Joshua had done at Jericho in the biblical book of *Joshua*. The leaders agreed and on 6 July 1099 the march began and sermons were held on the Mount of Olives.<sup>16</sup> The crusaders were fired at from the walls as they walked.<sup>17</sup> The walls did not promptly collapse as at Jericho, but the crusaders did eventually take the city and perhaps the ritual and the story gave the soldiers the requisite morale to fight harder. It could have been a cleansing ritual, and emotional climax to the long struggle to mark that they were about to reach their goal. It also allowed disgruntled leaders to publicly reconcile during an air of penitential carnival, yet to modern eyes it seems an incredible risk considering the siege was interrupted and the crusaders exposed themselves to more danger and deprivation, all while Fatimid reinforcements were on the way. But the pilgrims' quest was inspired by the perceived literal truth of the Bible and they implemented its stories literally in their hope for victory.

The three cities that are the focus of struggle in all First Crusade histories, though mostly important because of physical location, strategic importance and Byzantine interest, were also key locations of significance to ecclesiastic mythology. Nicaea was where the first ecumenical council of 325 had taken

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<sup>16</sup> Christopher Tyerman, *God's War: A New History of the Crusades* (London: Penguin Books, 2007), p. 156.

<sup>17</sup> Thomas Asbridge, *The First Crusade: A New History* (London: The Free Press, 2005), pp. 309-10.

place, which condemned the heresy of Arianism, and clearly defined early Christianity; even today the term ‘Nicene Creed’ is applied to the profession of faith for many Christians.<sup>18</sup> Antioch was where the term ‘Christian’ was coined and St. Peter founded his first bishopric.<sup>19</sup> Jerusalem was of course the site of the Crucifixion and ascension of Christ, as well as being the city of David. Jerusalem was connected to heaven, which was often referred to as ‘New Jerusalem’.

The Pope did not command attacks on Jews and any such actions were widely condemned, but people extrapolated their own implications from going to liberate the Holy Sepulchre of their heavenly Lord who had been, according to the Bible, insulted by the unbelievers. What is commonly known as ‘The First Holocaust’ was perpetrated in the Holy Roman Empire. Jews were extorted and slaughtered as perceived Christ-killers by rampaging crusader pilgrims, and even Godfrey of Bouillon, who was to become first Advocate of Jerusalem after its capture, and later to be esteemed as one of the nine worthies of chivalry and eulogised as another Joshua, took part in the extortion of Jews.<sup>20</sup> Attacks on Jews were not specified in the Crusade ethos but those familiar with the New Testament stories added their own meaning, out of zealousness and hopes of financial advantage.<sup>21</sup>

As Jonathan Riley-Smith says, ‘by September 1099 it was occurring to the participants that their success fulfilled the prophecies of scripture’,<sup>22</sup> and those who wrote the histories of the Crusade in the next decade or two were not at a loss to find biblical links. At various points before, during and after the First Crusade,

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<sup>18</sup> Norman F. Cantor, *The Civilization of the Middle Ages* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1994), p. 56.

<sup>19</sup> Steven Runciman, *A History of the Crusades Volume 1: The First Crusade* (London: Penguin Books, 1991), p. 213.

<sup>20</sup> The nine worthies of chivalry were, by one reckoning: the medieval figures of Charlemagne and Godfrey of Bouillon; the classical figures of Hector, Julius Caesar and Alexander; and, the Jewish Old Testament figures of Joshua, David and Judas Maccabaeus. The Book of Maccabees was not considered apocryphal in the Middle Ages. See Richard W. Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 200.

<sup>21</sup> ‘The next two books, Joshua and Judges, tell the story of the conquest of the Promised Land from their native inhabitants, the Canaanites. Perhaps the most famous stories in these books are Joshua at the battle of Jericho, and Samson and Delilah. These books were seen as especially relevant to the Crusades, wars fought with the aim of capturing the Promised Land again. Imagery from Joshua and Judges pervades Crusades chronicles; the epitaph of the man who conquered Jerusalem in the First Crusade refers to him as another Joshua. More subtly, the theory of causation in Joshua and Judges—warriors will triumph in battle only if they act morally—is used to explain victories and losses in battle in the Crusades,’ Cook and Herzman, p. 4.

<sup>22</sup> Jonathan Riley-Smith, *The First Crusade and the Idea of Crusading* (London: Continuum, 2009), p. 100.

the storytelling of the Bible shaped how the crusade and the crusaders were understood, and how they understood themselves.

### **The Bible and ‘Kyrie Eleison’**

In ‘Kyrie Eleison’ I have attempted to highlight both the importance and the slipperiness of the Bible, as well as its influence on personal identity, through extensive intertextual links. Biblical quotations appear throughout the trilogy, demonstrating that the Bible is at the forefront of crusader thought. Rather than being chosen for their immediate impact out of context, these quotations are usually intended to provide thematic links or juxtapositions between the text of ‘Kyrie Eleison’ and the biblical stories from which they are sourced. For example, early on the aristocrat tells a story of rebels mutilating his wife, and it is preceded by the quotation from Judges 16:28 ‘Then Samson prayed to the LORD, “O Sovereign LORD, remember me. O God, please strengthen me just once more, and let me with one blow get revenge on the Philistines for my two eyes.”’ This relates not only to the aristocrat’s revenge of blinding on those who mutilated his wife, but it also foreshadows how the aristocrat’s tale will conclude. At the end of the book the aristocrat realises that his revenge caused so many long-lasting problems for the king of England that the king asked the aristocrat to go on crusade purely so he could take the aristocrat’s land and give it to the families of the aristocrat’s enemies in compensation, leaving the aristocrat’s new wife and his daughters vulnerable, their fates unknown. The aristocrat vows to get revenge as he hastily returns home, weakened by the rigours of the crusade and with few followers and little wealth. He will attack his enemies even if he is doomed to failure, and the Samson allegory, with allusions to Samson’s violent end, returns in some of his final thoughts:

But if it was war he could take a few of them with him, he could pull down some of the pillars holding up the part of world he once commanded and watch it all come crashing down on his enemy’s heads, even if it cost him everything.

The aristocrat has his hair tended all along by Esther, who, like Delilah, pricks constantly at his weaknesses and his masculine ego. He is subconsciously living up to a biblical identity.

Some biblical quotations appearing in ‘Kyrie Eleison’ are more important for how they were used ritually; their context is cultural rather than narrative. Introducing a scene in which the knight kills a Turk is the quotation from Isaiah 26:20: ‘Go, my people, enter your rooms and shut the doors behind you; hide yourselves for a little while until his wrath has passed by.’ This is a funeral text, but it was also a text used during ceremonies during which people became anchorites or anchoresses and were locked away in cellars, never to participate in the world again, so they could seek God on their own as ascetics.<sup>23</sup> Used in ‘Kyrie Eleison’ at such a moment it symbolises the fact that killing a human being makes the knight an outsider. He has crossed a spiritual threshold and entered a kind of death-in-life, and, through guilt, must forever remain cut off from the world he knew, like an anchorite.

Paul the peasant sees the Bible as literally true. He believes he is physically walking to New Jerusalem, where he will meet his dead sister.<sup>24</sup> In contrast, the character Diggory in Esther’s tale, ‘The Story of the Young Priest’ struggles with the metaphorical and allegorical truths of the Bible.

‘Explain to me the four meanings of the word “Jerusalem”, as it appears in the Bible—the historical, the tropological, the allegorical, and the anagogical. You.’

‘It is a city in Judea,’ said Diggory. ‘It is the soul. It is the ... the Church Triumphant in heaven.’

‘You forgot the allegorical.’

‘It is the ... It is the ...’

‘It is the Church Militant here on earth!’

Esther shares similarities with her biblical namesake. Esther in the Bible gains power through her link to a ruler, King Ahasuerus. Through many scenes involving feasts within the palace, she uses the power of her voice to save her people and destroy her enemies. Esther in ‘Kyrie Eleison’ is attached to the aristocrat, whose influence lifts her from obscurity and saves her from starvation. She attends several banquets throughout the story, including a feast with crusaders in Caen at the *Abbaye-aux-Hommes*, and two wedding feasts. Words are again her source of power—the words of her stories. Her betrayer in this case is

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<sup>23</sup> Robert Bartlett, *England under the Norman and Angevin Kings 1075–1225* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 440.

<sup>24</sup> ‘The supernatural was perceived as real and proximate. Heaven, hell and the place between where souls waited for redemption, if not as yet fully understood as purgatory, were not abstractions.’ Tyerman, *God’s War*, p. 87.

the same figure as her benefactor—at Antioch the aristocrat allows her to be exiled with other women who are accused of ‘tempting’ the men with their presence. When Esther returns, her stories undermine the aristocrat, questioning his decisions and even the very nature of the crusade. In each of the interconnected stories she tells of six brothers and their serjeant the central character dies, and this plays up to the aristocrat’s fears. In the Book of Esther, Esther’s enemy Haman is killed by methods he suggested be used against the Jews—his evils are visited back upon him. Esther similarly uses the aristocrat’s own words against him, by recycling elements he had previously related to her from his own life in her stories, so as to point out his hypocrisies. As the biblical Esther saves her people, the Jews, so Esther restores dignity to her own people—her dead husband, baby and mother—through the journey of redemption to Jerusalem.

Esther knows of the biblical tale. She is inclined to see herself as being linked to the character. Having a Jewish name is highly unusual for a Norman from Caen, and late in the trilogy we learn that her mother insisted on it. Embroidering a small tapestry of the biblical Esther for a festival at a nunnery was Esther’s mother’s proudest moment before having children. Esther is reminded of this during a flashback to the emotional shock of her mother’s funeral.

‘She was so proud of it. I think it was one of the proudest moments of her life, besides having you three, of course,’ and she crossed herself at the thought of Esther’s second sister who had never made it past infancy. ‘She swore she was going to name her baby Esther. Your father wouldn’t have it, not for your sister there. He decided on your sister’s name. But your mother got her way the third time. She got her way with you. And that’s why you,’ and the woman laughed, ‘that’s why you have had such a difficult time of it, I suppose! All because of a piece of cloth.’

Esther watched the woman, as if waiting for more of the story.

‘Oh look at you!’ said the older woman. ‘You’re beaming now! You like this, I can see. Look what I’ve done, I should never have reminded you! You’ll be giving all your own babies outlandish names now! I can see it, you’re as stubborn as her.’

The ‘outlandish names’ refers to the fact that the names of the characters in the stories Esther tells are, for the most part, not true medieval names, but the sorts of corruptions one finds in modern medieval and neomedieval novels.

Esther is aware of and emotionally invested in her connection to a biblical character—does this narrative control her life? Like a self-fulfilling prophecy, has she made choices that would bring her more into line with her biblical ideal? Biblical precedents influence her self-understanding, as they did for many crusaders.

Various sermons are given to highlight alternative interpretations of biblical stories. Christ's demand that Peter sheathe his sword in the Garden of Gethsemane because 'those who live by the sword die by the sword' is used in sermons both condemning and endorsing the violence of crusaders.<sup>25</sup>

Christ told Peter to sheathe his sword in the garden of Gethsemane when Peter had attacked one of the guards come to carry away Jesus. Jesus said that he who lives by the sword may die by it, and you know the truth of that now more than any other. You may die a little yourself every time you take the life of a fellow man. For aren't all men made by God? Even the pagans and the blasphemers? Aren't they too in God's image?

Christ told Peter to sheathe the sword because there will be a time when that sword is needed again! Note that Christ did not tell his favourite Apostle, the rock on whom the Church is founded, to throw his sword away, but only to sheathe it, until it may be called upon to be used again, in a just cause, in a right battle! Do not fight the guards now, in Jerusalem, he meant. Keep the sword safe in its sheath until Jerusalem truly needs the help. Unsheathe the naked blade when naked force is all the enemy understands, when men who do not love God stalk the streets of the Holy City, when evil masquerading the shape of God's image must be cast out! Keep the sword safe for when all the world weeps and cries out for the Holy Places to be purified!

The books of Job, Ecclesiastes and Jonah all run like seams throughout the substrata of the book until, at the walls of Jerusalem, Esther's stories and novelistic 'reality' collide to ask the question: is crusading even necessary? Should they believe in the God of Jonah and the whale, who would save even unbelievers despite the protestations of His messenger, or should they believe in

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<sup>25</sup> How this apparently pacifistic message could be used to endorse Holy War is linked to the idea that Christ approves of the Apostles having two swords at the Last Supper (Luke 22:38). These two swords came to symbolise the spiritual and the material power of the church. It is St Peter who cuts off the ear, and the Popes are the symbolic successors of this 'rock of the church'. Christ did not tell Peter to throw the sword away but only to sheathe it which, medieval theologians claimed, implied that the sword would be needed again later. St Bernard used such ideas in his preaching of the Second Crusade. See for example Jonathan Riley-Smith, *The Crusades, Christianity and Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), p. 11, Jonathan Riley-Smith, *What Were the Crusades?*, 4th edn (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 50, and Tyerman, *God's War*, p. 28.

the God who makes Job's Leviathan, a destroyer terrible and unstoppable, wrecking all without apparent meaning? Do they choose the whale or the Leviathan? Or are choices meaningless in a world where there is a time for peace and a time for war, good men suffer and bad men triumph, and God's wishes are utterly unknowable and all is vanity? In Esther's stories, each character hears of Job's Leviathan before they die, until the Leviathan becomes foreshadowing for death. Later, on the shores of the Holy Land near Ashdod, they are reminded of that other whale at the very site where Jonah was supposedly vomited onto the shore. As Armstrong points out,

The diaspora Book of Jonah shows real compassion to non-Jews. When Jonah warns the pagan people of Nineveh that unless they repent God will destroy their city, they do repent and the city is spared. Jonah is furious about this and goes off to sulk, but God gently teases him out of this absurdity. The Jewish prophet is to save the Gentiles as well as the chosen people...In the diaspora a humanism developed in Judaism that would ultimately enter Christianity through Jewish Jesus and St. Paul and help to shape the tradition of Western humanism.<sup>26</sup>

God, creator of Leviathan in Job, is inscrutable and His wishes impossible to know, and good men suffer. God in Jonah's story is gently teasing, forgiving, and makes His wishes clear. God in Ecclesiastes, the biblical book which shapes the life of the surviving brother in Esther's final tale, has apparently left men to their own devices. Believers can choose between destruction and compassion. At a similar point in Book Three of 'Kyrie Eleison', Esther remembers seeing an anchoress being locked away in Caen, and she realises that none of them had to leave home in order to journey to the spiritual Jerusalem and save their souls.

'What ... what is she doing?'

'She's an anchoress. She'll stay in that little chamber the rest of her life. She's given herself to God. She's in there alone, seeking her own solitary way to New Jerusalem.'

The implication is that the pilgrims could have done it alone, without hurting anyone else.

The further links between the Bible and 'Kyrie Eleison' are too extensive to go into detail about here, but, as the Bible informed most aspects of medieval life, so does it inform most aspects of 'Kyrie Eleison' and the inner life and the

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<sup>26</sup> Karen Armstrong, *Holy War: The Crusades and Their Impact on Today's World* (New York: Anchor Books, 2001), p. 17.

narrative choices of every character in it. The storytelling of the Bible is key, and characters consciously or unconsciously attempt to shape their lives to fit its stories. As the storytelling of the Bible influenced the First Crusade, and the self-understanding of those Europeans involved, it also must influence the storytelling and characters of 'Kyrie Eleison'.

### **Medieval Histories of the First Crusade**

Medieval First Crusade histories see the first attempt to fit the events and character of the Crusade into narrative and give them meaning. It is the first time the historical events are recorded and the first time, I would argue, that they are fictionalised. The anonymous *Gesta Francorum: The Deeds of the Franks and the other Pilgrims to Jerusalem*,<sup>27</sup> one of the earliest sources, was started possibly by a participant under Bohemond during the siege of Antioch. There are other primary sources, but the *Gesta Francorum* in particular was very quickly used as the basis for histories written by clerical men at a further remove from the action. Historians claimed they wanted to improve on its crude language, but they wanted to stake claims as well, and offer their own ecclesiastical interpretations of what events meant and what they indicated for the future. In a world where knowledge was seen to come from the past and learning of any kind was drenched in the text of the omnipresent Bible, perhaps it was natural to interpret any experience through a biblical lens, but the First Crusade became more in the hands of the historians—it became a continuation of those very events from the Bible, as rich in allegory and metaphor as it was in literal truth.

One might not consider the Bible a history by today's standards, but it fits right in with the definition of history from the Middle Ages up to the coming of the Enlightenment. As Marc Z. Brettler notes in the introduction to the historical books of the Bible in a recent Oxford edition,

The idea that historical writing should capture the events “as they really were,” that historians should attempt to write an objective account of the events of the past, is a notion that developed in European universities in modern times. Before that, history was

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<sup>27</sup> *Gesta Francorum: The Deeds of the Franks and the Other Pilgrims to Jerusalem* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

often didactic in nature, teaching the readers how to be good citizens or how to lead proper religious lives.<sup>28</sup>

In the early Christian Church of Augustine's time it was much the same.<sup>29</sup>

Medieval humanity also felt that history was best used for moral instruction.<sup>30</sup> As Robert Levine points out in the introduction to Guibert of Nogent's First Crusade account, *The Deeds of God through the Franks*, 'history was a branch of rhetoric during the middle-ages (i.e., it was a part of literature)'.<sup>31</sup> Speaking of a fourteenth-century author who saw Godfrey of Bouillon—a First Crusade prince and first Latin ruler of Jerusalem—as an icon that Charles VI of France should admire, Christopher Tyerman says: 'Mézières was not in position to distinguish between the past of legend and the past of history. Nobody was, but this was not necessarily as much of an impediment as it may seem to a modern audience.'<sup>32</sup> In the Middle Ages history was used in such a way that it might best edify and give moral instruction, for to do any less would be to defy history's very purpose.

Evidence suggests that the biblical book of Deuteronomy was written in the seventh century BCE and was intent on reforming Jewish law in light of a new political landscape and concerns about Jewish spiritual identity during the final waning of Assyrian domination. 'Deuteronomy actually challenges and revises earlier law in support of its new religious vision' and 'provides a remarkably comprehensive program for cultural renewal', says Bernard M. Levinson.<sup>33</sup> Thus, the older texts concerning the story of Moses leading the people out of Egypt and to the Promised Land (Exodus to Numbers) were supplemented, long after Moses, the traditional author of the earlier books, was dead. Yet in Deuteronomy, Moses is seen to update the old law and validate the new for a contemporary audience.

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<sup>28</sup> Mark Z. Brettler, 'Introduction to the Historical Books', in 'The Hebrew Bible', *The New Oxford Annotated Bible: New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha*, ed. by Michael D. Coogan (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 309-13 (p. 309).

<sup>29</sup> 'Since history was a part of God's plan for salvation, it is not surprising that for Augustine the purpose of historical writing was never merely to present factual information. History should instruct and edify people and advance them toward salvation,' Cook and Herzman, p. 105.

<sup>30</sup> 'The provision of examples illustrative of perennial values and of the working of divine providence was, in the medieval eye, one of the prime functions of history. In this context of historical interest we thus see the lives, the personal qualities and the actions of the epic heroes of the new cult (of chivalry) coming to be envisaged more clearly as an object lesson to knighthood,' Maurice Keen, *Chivalry* (London: Yale University Press, 1984), p. 105.

<sup>31</sup> Robert Levine in Guibert of Nogent, p. 6.

<sup>32</sup> Tyerman, p. 95.

<sup>33</sup> Bernard M. Levinson, 'Introduction to Deuteronomy', in 'The Hebrew Bible', *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, ed. by Michael D. Coogan, pp. 240-42 (p. 241).

Seventh century BCE authors did not write the new laws in their own voice, but rather, they put them in the mouth of Moses, attaching them to that older figure of key traditions to grant their words authority. The old traditions were out-of-date and needed renewal, but all wisdom was seen to come from the past, so a respected historical figure was depicted as bringing about the changes. ‘Pseudepigraphy’ is the word for attributing authorship to figures from the past or using them as literary speakers for a later text, and this technique is used throughout the Bible. Here is what we would see as fiction consciously designed to have a substantial influence on the future.

This idea was taken further by those who upheld biblical tradition, to great controversy, in what has been called ‘the best-known forgery in history.’<sup>34</sup> History itself was changed by a pseudepigraphical work, the ‘Donation of Constantine’, forged by the medieval Roman Catholic church and ‘rediscovered’ to give weight to a claim of papal suzerainty over the monarchs of Europe. The document, written in the eighth century, was supposedly penned by Constantine, the first Christian Roman Emperor, and granted the pope authority over the clergy and the Western Roman Empire. It claimed that Constantine first gave his crown to the pope but that the pope graciously returned it. The document was used to bolster papal claims of supremacy over secular leaders and power over the naming of bishops, and it contributed to the eleventh- and twelfth-century Investiture Contest with the Holy Roman Empire which was to have such a radical impact on the history of Germany specifically and the West in general. The Investiture Contest was also looming large in the background reasons for the preaching of the First Crusade. As Norman F. Cantor says,

the papacy thought it necessary to express its ideology through the medium of a forged document...because of the nature of legal concepts in the early Middle Ages. The good law was the old law; law was virtually equivalent to custom, and new claims had to have some customary or historical basis...The forged character of the Donation of Constantine does not convict the eighth-century popes of moral turpitude; the document was merely a legal way of expressing papal ideology.<sup>35</sup>

The implication is that history in the Middle Ages was fluid, and all that flows from the past is truer than the present. And when history is written down, and

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<sup>34</sup> Cantor, p. 176.

<sup>35</sup> Cantor, p. 177.

filled with the voices of key and respected historical figures, then it has true weight. The Bible shaped medieval thought and underpinned the First Crusade, but the Bible itself underwent many shifts and reinventions, just as First Crusade histories were soon to do. The Bible was not the only piece of storytelling that shaped how people understood the Crusade.

Biblical language and reference entered the history of the crusades as soon as histories were written down, which was to be expected, but elements of myth, poetry and epic romance were also key parts of these histories within a decade or so after the conclusion of the First Crusade. History became clearly and consciously linked to fiction as soon as it was recorded, and pseudepigraphical speeches were put in the mouths of crusader heroes such as Bohemond. Stories from the era influenced the crusaders' self-understanding, and they used storytelling techniques when representing themselves, but both of these notions came out only more strongly once initial crusader accounts were filtered through the perspectives of their contemporaries.

We will look at some of the idiosyncrasies of two medieval First Crusade histories written from the *Gesta Francorum* and see what they share and how they differ, as both suggest things about authorial intention and narrative influence. We will see how the storytelling techniques used and stories the crusaders were familiar with were brought even further to the forefront of historical accounts by writers of a more literary bent, each with different goals.

As these works record the facts of history and reinvent and reinterpret, they give an insight into both the mindset of the crusaders' world, and how elements of society would position the crusaders. 'From the beginning, the crusades, rather like the Norman Conquest, were an invention of writers at various removes from the action,' says Christopher Tyerman, and Robert the Monk is a case in point.<sup>36</sup> His use of techniques of the storyteller influenced how his contemporaries understood the Crusade as much as his use of the techniques of the historian did.

In addition, the way storytelling influenced these histories informs the writing of the creative piece 'Kyrie Eleison', and helps shape how characters and

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<sup>36</sup> Tyerman, p. 119.

their motivations are portrayed in that trilogy. A summary of at least a sample of these histories is important as it makes clearer the reason for the intertextual approach taken in ‘Kyrie Eleison’, as well as the reason specific intertextual references were made.

### **I: Robert the Monk**

Robert the Monk’s *Historia Iherosolimitana* was the most popular history of the First Crusade in the Middle Ages, surviving ‘in the best part of one hundred manuscripts, more by several orders of magnitude than any other First Crusade source’.<sup>37</sup> It was probably written within a decade or two of events and, although its precise date is a matter of dispute, at least one authority considers that ‘there is a strong circumstantial case for dating Robert’s text to 1106–7’, which places it at the most eight years after the capture of Jerusalem.<sup>38</sup> Crusades historian Steven Runciman calls Robert’s history ‘popular and somewhat romantic’, dating it to 1122,<sup>39</sup> while Jonathan Riley-Smith says ‘there are strong reasons for supposing that it was completed by 1107,’<sup>40</sup> noting it must have been completed by 1108 because other later sources drew on it. The history was written by a monk in Reims who had witnessed the preaching of the Crusade at the Council of Clermont, an event not present in some other accounts. It was also written because the *Gesta Francorum*—the history that was Robert’s main source—was, he says in his *Sermo apologeticus*, ‘uncertain and unsophisticated in its style and expression’ and he (or the abbot who commissioned him) desired to bring the events of the Crusade a wider readership, an aim that apparently was successful. He hopes that anyone who hears his version will ‘try and emulate it’. Riley-Smith argues that Robert and other monks who authored histories of their own and worked so quickly after events were part of a ‘theological refinement’ of the Crusading idea and an elucidation of recent history,<sup>41</sup> creating a ‘theologically

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<sup>37</sup> Carol Sweetenham, *Robert the Monk’s History of the First Crusade: Historia Iherosolimitana* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2006), p. 8.

<sup>38</sup> Sweetenham, p. 7.

<sup>39</sup> Runciman, p. 330.

<sup>40</sup> Riley-Smith, *The First Crusade and the Idea of Crusading*, p. 136.

<sup>41</sup> Riley-Smith, pp. 135-52.

acceptable interpretation of their triumph'.<sup>42</sup> Robert the Monk's work was itself later adapted and rendered into verse.<sup>43</sup> Frederick I of Germany was given 'a glossy new edition' of Robert's work before embarking on crusade in 1189.<sup>44</sup> Robert is most valuable to historians today for contributing what is probably an eyewitness account of the Council of Clermont and the preaching of the Crusade.<sup>45</sup>

It is likely that Robert wrote the work as part of Bohemond of Taranto's touring of France in 1107. Bohemond was urging a new crusade against the Greeks, which did not eventuate. He had become a celebrated hero of the First Crusade and the Latin ruler of Antioch. In these circumstances, Robert's work was part of a propaganda exercise, and it selects, omits, plays down and even blatantly alters a few details relating to individual members of the First Crusade who had been close to the French court, making the French look better in every respect and saying of Bohemond, an Italian Norman of Norman stock, that 'he had inherited the highest principles from his French father, but they were tainted by elements from his Apulian mother.'<sup>46</sup> The most striking change is having Hugh of Vermandois, brother of the King of France, die on a mission from Antioch instead of in the later Crusade of 1101, a fact Carol Sweetenham, a translator of Robert, points out most of Robert's contemporary audience would have known.<sup>47</sup> Robert makes much more of the action centre around Hugh than most other sources, who have Hugh as a secondary participant, but then, as Sweetenham makes clear, Robert was writing from Reims, the city in which the kings of France were crowned.<sup>48</sup> Bohemond also married the daughter of the French king. Obviously, the Byzantines receive a very poor showing in Robert's work. This is despite the fact that nationalism in general was not a part of the initial conception of the crusades as a movement, though most priests writing about it brought a

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<sup>42</sup> Jonathan Riley-Smith, *The Crusades: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), p. 112.

<sup>43</sup> Tyerman, *God's War*, p. 245.

<sup>44</sup> Tyerman, p. 418.

<sup>45</sup> Sweetenham, p. 42.

<sup>46</sup> Sweetenham, p. 191.

<sup>47</sup> Sweetenham, p. 176.

<sup>48</sup> Sweetenham, p. 19.

clear national bias and focus.<sup>49</sup> The wars went beyond borders and fought for a kingdom of God; according to Riley-Smith they fought for a transcendental Christian republic, Christendom as a universal state, existing both in heaven and on earth.<sup>50</sup>

To sum up, Robert is refining the theological meaning of the Crusade for the Church; celebrating the events; celebrating Bohemond as a part of Bohemond's pageantry as he tours France attempting to inspire a new crusade; and, giving the French an even more positive role than they might have had before. Finally, he is also making the history more accessible. To this mix he adds a large amount of the Bible, which is to be expected in any medieval text, but Robert casts the Crusade in the light of a continuation of Old Testament events. This puts his history into a very direct relationship with the Bible. He also inserts many tropes from the popular fiction of the time. This suggests that stories from the era influenced the self-understanding of the generation around the First Crusade. Storytelling techniques were used to represent and make sense of the First Crusade, and representations of the Crusade were already being adapted and reinvented.

First to the use of the Bible. I am indebted to the work of Carol Sweetenham here, as I cite her translation, biblical footnotes and introductory essay. It is useful to compare Sweetenham's insights on Robert here with the content of another medieval history by Guibert of Nogent, later. Sweetenham's insights show up the intertextual references that are so important to our discussion of storytelling's influence on how the crusades were understood, and which are so important for 'Kyrie Eleison'.

Robert claims that God is pleased when 'an account should be written for the faithful of any miraculous deed he has brought to pass on earth', describing the work of Moses and the recording of the books of Joshua and Judges. He cites these as precedents, saying, 'since the creation of the world what more miraculous undertaking has there been (other than the mystery of the redeeming cross) than what was achieved in our own time by this journey of our people to Jerusalem?'.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> 'The spirit of nationalism, hatched after the First Crusade, dogged medieval scholarship down to the present century.' Tyerman, p. 107. I use nationalism in the medieval sense loosely, as nations as we know them did not exist.

<sup>50</sup> Jonathan Riley-Smith, *What Were the Crusades?*, p. 24.

<sup>51</sup> Sweetenham, p. 77.

The papal legate to the Crusade, the Bishop of Le Puy, is described as being ‘like a second Moses’<sup>52</sup> and Isaiah 43:5-6 is quoted, in asserting that in the coming of Le Puy and Raymond St Gilles, a crusader prince, ‘now we see in actual fact what God promised through the mouth of the Prophet Isaiah’, though Robert changes one of the directions mentioned in the biblical text to match events he is describing, east becoming north.<sup>53</sup> Robert sees the entire Crusade as a realisation of the prophecies of Isaiah, a figure who foretold the destined conquering of Jerusalem and who offered ‘an apocalyptic vision of a purified people and Jerusalem as the religious capital of the world’,<sup>54</sup> and Isaiah is quoted throughout, especially once Jerusalem is liberated and ‘prophecy’ has been fulfilled. Specifically, ‘On that day the Sepulchre of the Lord was glorious as the prophet foretold’<sup>55</sup> echoing Isaiah 11:10 ‘and his dwelling was glorious’, and

[w]hen they were about two miles away from the city they began to sound trumpets, brass instruments and horns and all kinds of musical instruments in triumph, so that the hills and mountains echoed back the harmony in melodic tones and as it were joined with them in rejoicing in God. And so what Isaiah says about the spiritual Church of the faithful came true in reality: *the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing.*<sup>56</sup>

This comes from Isaiah 49:13: ‘Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult, O earth; Break forth, O mountains, into singing!’ and 55:12 ‘the mountains and the hills before you shall burst into song, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands’. It finishes with a justification for the Crusade—pilgrims are now safe—followed by:

Isaiah says of these pilgrims and gates: *therefore thy gates shall be open continually; they shall not be shut day nor night.* This prophecy was fulfilled in our time, because now the gates of Jerusalem were opened *to the sons of the pilgrims* which used to be closed in their faces day and night.<sup>57</sup>

This refers to Isaiah 60:11 ‘your gates shall always be open; day and night they shall not be shut, so that nations shall bring you their wealth, with their kings led in procession’. Robert further suggests, somewhat ironically as he has just

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<sup>52</sup> Sweetenham, p. 83.

<sup>53</sup> Sweetenham, p. 90.

<sup>54</sup> Joseph Blenkinsopp, ‘Introduction to Isaiah’, in ‘The Hebrew Bible’, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, ed. by Michael D. Coogan, p. 974-77 (p. 977).

<sup>55</sup> Sweetenham, p. 201.

<sup>56</sup> Sweetenham, p. 212.

<sup>57</sup> Sweetenham, p. 212.

described Jerusalem's capture and the slaughter of its people in lurid detail, that the name of the city 'translates into "Peaceful" in our language' and should have been changed to 'Jesusalem'.<sup>58</sup> There is a strong implication that the crusaders are like the Israelites going to the Promised Land. Godfrey kills a Turk who is 'a second Goliath'.<sup>59</sup> Excerpts from Proverbs appear frequently. Exodus is quoted heavily after the Battle of Dorylaeum, including, 'Now we realise, God, that Thou art *guiding us in Thy strength unto Thy holy habitation, Thy Holy Sepulchre.*'<sup>60</sup> This is but to touch on the biblical language flowing through Robert's text, and it is important here because, though Robert was a monk and therefore inhabited a thought-world dictated by constant encounters with biblical language, he actually casts the Crusade as the fulfilment of biblical prophecy and an event extending from the pages of the Bible itself.

Robert does not use only biblical language to enhance his history. His work is filled with fictional passages, reference to historical epics and various forms of popular poetry, and his characters are made intentionally larger than life.<sup>61</sup>

History and popular fiction are effortlessly and consciously mixed in Robert's work. This informed the writing of the creative piece 'Kyrie Eleison'. Godfrey is described as taking 'the same route as Charlemagne' on his pilgrimage to Constantinople. Although Charlemagne was a real historical figure he had become highly romanticised by this time, and his pilgrimage to Constantinople was entirely fictional.<sup>62</sup> There is a *planctus*, a verse lament inserted quite suddenly into the text to describe the 'desperate grief' of a wife. The *planctus* had a tradition in Latin and vernacular poetry.<sup>63</sup> Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is quoted.<sup>64</sup> As Sweetenham makes clear, there are many similarities to *The Song of Roland*. She compares Robert's

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<sup>58</sup> Sweetenham, p. 213.

<sup>59</sup> Sweetenham, p. 133.

<sup>60</sup> Sweetenham, p. 112. Italics used by Sweetenham to show the wording used direct from the Bible, in this case *Exodus* 15:13.

<sup>61</sup> Again, Sweetenham has already done the work here, and I quote her so that I may compare Robert and these themes to other histories and apply Sweetenham's discoveries to my larger discussion of the mythologising of the crusades.

<sup>62</sup> Sweetenham, p. 84.

<sup>63</sup> Sweetenham, p. 140.

<sup>64</sup> Sweetenham, p. 198.

Eventually their weapons – though not their bravery – gave out, and they ended their lives with an exemplary death in battle, for God, and angelic spirits took their souls up to heaven.<sup>65</sup>

With *The Song of Roland's*

He proffered his right glove to God;  
 Saint Gabriel took it from his hand.  
 Roland laid his head down over his arm;  
 With his hands joined he went to his end.  
 God sent down his angel Cherubin  
 And with him Saint Michael of the Peril.  
 With them both came Saint Gabriel.  
 They bear the count's soul to paradise.<sup>66</sup>

Also, as Sweetenham notes, it is revealing to compare the graphic hyperbole that suddenly interrupts the history when Godfrey battles a Turk, one of the few and certainly the most detailed descriptions of individual combat and death in the history:

He raised the sword and plunged it into the left side of his shoulder-blades with such force that it split the chest down the middle, slashed through the spine and vital organs and, slippery with blood, came out unbroken above the right leg. As a result the whole of the head and the right side slipped down into the water, whilst the remaining part of the horse was carried back into the city.<sup>67</sup>

With the *Roland*:

He strikes a pagan Justin of Val Ferree,  
 Severing his head right down the middle.  
 He slices through his body and his saffron byrnie,  
 His fine saddle, ornamented with gold and gems,  
 And sliced through his horse's spine.<sup>68</sup>

There are similar metaphors, which may have simply been common to the Middle Ages, in both texts: 'Just as a stag runs before the hounds so the pagans take flight before Roland',<sup>69</sup> and *Roland's* image recurs in Robert, 'See how your enemies are watching you march forward, necks straining forward like terrified stags or does, more inclined to flight than fight.'<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Sweetenham, p. 87.

<sup>66</sup> Glyn Burgess, *The Song of Roland* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), p. 105.

<sup>67</sup> Sweetenham, p. 133.

<sup>68</sup> Burgess, p. 73.

<sup>69</sup> Burgess, p. 89.

<sup>70</sup> Sweetenham, p. 169.

Hugh, the brother of the French king, is one of the only others besides Godfrey and Bohemond who is singled out in the history and allowed a similar moment of gory glory.

He spurred his horse, flecked with foam, towards him, thrust the lance into his throat and stopped him breathing. That was the end for the wretch. He fell immediately to the ground and yielded his soul to the infernal deities.<sup>71</sup>

This image has parallels not just in Western epic and poetic tradition, but also the Arabic stories of *The Thousand Nights and One Night*, the following coming from ‘The Discourse of the Old Woman’ found in ‘The Tale of King Umar Al-Numan and His Two Remarkable Sons, Sharkan and Du Al-Makan’. This tale is something of an Arabic *Song of Roland*:

...the prince launched his own javelin, which struck the Christian full in his tattooed cross. His unbelieving soul fled through his backside and went to mingle with the fires of hell.<sup>72</sup>

Sweetenham notes of the Bishop of Le Puy that ‘Adhemar is a warrior bishop like Turpin in the *Roland*.’<sup>73</sup> Pirrus, betrayer of Antioch, has in the history a moment that follows the traditional *alba*, a ‘song describing the parting of lovers at dawn’ as he waits for the tardy Bohemond to appear and take the city. ‘The light of dawn is approaching and that swelling birdsong foretells the approach of first light.’<sup>74</sup>

We cut from the story of the Christians to debates inside the pagan warlord Kerbogha’s tent, where his mother quotes Deuteronomy, Exodus, Numbers and Psalms in order to convince him that it is foolish to fight the Christians.<sup>75</sup> She has gained her knowledge through arcane forms of divination open to the literary archetype she embodies, the aged diviner and herald of the future. Not only is she a fictional figure; she is a common fictional type. The ‘Saracen as diviner’ is a trope that would continue into Scott’s time and beyond, and it is indeed that from which the title of *The Talisman* is derived, as the talisman of the story is an arcane device with healing powers Saladin employs to cure Richard the Lionheart.<sup>76</sup> The witches in *Macbeth* are similar figures.

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<sup>71</sup> Sweetenham, p. 171.

<sup>72</sup> *The Book of the Thousand Nights and One Night*, trans. Powys Mathers and J. C. Mardrus, 3 vols. (London: Routledge, 1989), 1, p. 444.

<sup>73</sup> Sweetenham, p. 62.

<sup>74</sup> Sweetenham, p. 145.

<sup>75</sup> Sweetenham, pp. 155-56.

<sup>76</sup> ‘Of all people who ever lived, the Persians were perhaps most remarkable for their unshaken credulity in amulets, spells, periapts, and similar charms, framed, it was said, under the influence

Kerbogha says ‘by Mahommed’ and speaks of the Caliph as being ‘the Pope of our religion’<sup>77</sup> and he looks forward to the glory of imprisoning the King of France, by which he means the brother of the king of France, Hugh of Vermandois.<sup>78</sup>

Everything about the Muslims is the mirror of the Christian world, the only world from which Robert can construct any sort of meaning,<sup>79</sup> and Muslims embody devils and antichrists as they hope to give themselves up to ‘every pleasure of the flesh’<sup>80</sup> and an ‘infinite number of’ them wait ‘panting like wild beasts’ in anticipation of killing the Christians.<sup>81</sup> Here we see Orientalism in an early form, with an Orient that can only exist in relation to and as an opposite to and temptation for the West. As Edward Said notes:

In a quite constant way, Orientalism depends for its strategy on this flexible *positional* superiority, which puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand...[t]he scientist, the scholar, the missionary, the trader or the soldier was in, or thought about, the Orient because he *could be there*, or could think about it, with very little resistance on the Orient’s part.<sup>82</sup>

If the Caliph is ‘their pope’, then ‘they’ are only imitating the positionally superior West. The West remains the central player to those who would be its imposters. The ultimate imposter to the Orientalist Christian, therefore, is Mohammad, as Said explains:

One does not qualify the phrase, neither does it seem necessary to say that Mohammad *was* an imposter, nor need one consider for a moment that it may not be necessary to repeat the statement. It *is* repeated, he *is* an imposter, and each time one says it, he becomes more of an imposter and the author of that statement gains a little more authority in having declared it<sup>83</sup>

We will see more of how Church historians try to position Mohammad in Guibert of Nogent’s work, but the key here is that already in these histories, the Muslim

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of particular planets, and bestowing high medical powers, as well as the means of advancing men’s fortunes in various manners.’ Walter Scott, *Introductions and Notes from the Magnum Opus: Ivanhoe to Castle Dangerous* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), p. 395.

<sup>77</sup> Sweetenham, p. 153.

<sup>78</sup> Sweetenham, p. 154.

<sup>79</sup> Argument appears in Sweetenham and she cites N. Daniel, *Heroes and Saracens: a reinterpretation of the chansons de geste* (Edinburgh, 1984).

<sup>80</sup> Sweetenham, p. 154.

<sup>81</sup> Sweetenham, p. 84.

<sup>82</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), p. 7.

<sup>83</sup> Said, p. 72.

enemy are not human beings—they are background characters, enemies who admire the West and justify its struggles. To quote Said again,

In a sense the limitations of Orientalism are...the limitations that follow upon disregarding, essentializing, denuding the humanity of another culture, people, or geographical region. But Orientalism has taken a step further than that: it views the Orient as something whose existence is not only displayed but has remained fixed in time and place for the West. So impressive have the descriptive and textual successes of Orientalism been that entire periods of the Orient's cultural, political, and social history are considered mere responses to the West. The West is the actor, the Orient a passive reactor. The West is the spectator, the judge and the jury, of every facet of Oriental behaviour.<sup>84</sup>

As for the illusion of historical fact, Robert of course could not have known any of what was happening in Kerbogha's tent, and neither can any eyewitnesses he spoke to (though later Robert vehemently claims to have spoken to an apostate eyewitness for his report of the goings on in the enemy camp at the Battle of Ascalon, aware perhaps that his readers might question it and wanting to round his story off, beginning and end, with two eyewitness accounts). Nor did his sources, such as the anonymous *Gesta Francorum*, which depicts the original scene of Kerbogha and his mother, have any way of knowing what was happening in the Muslim camp. It was a pure dramatic device; fiction is added to help make a history follow all the rules of a good story with clear protagonists and antagonists, turn-arounds and cliffhangers. It is the failings of the Muslims and their beliefs and their admiration for the pilgrims that casts an even better light on the crusaders. The crusaders are validated by the compliments of their enemies.<sup>85</sup> Robert's other speeches justifying and explaining the actions of the crusaders are mostly spoken by Bohemond. Incidentally, the Fatimid leader at Ascalon is given the name 'Clemens', and Robert delights on a Latin pun between 'clemens' and 'demented', but this name applied uniquely by Robert to caliph al-Musta'li bears a remarkable similarity to Clement III, antipope from 1080 to 1100.<sup>86</sup> Robert shows his political leanings again.

In short, Robert did not just make references to and imply a continuation of the Bible, he also infuses his history with elements of popular poetry, the

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<sup>84</sup> Said, pp. 108-9.

<sup>85</sup> Noted in Sweetenham, pp. 66-67.

<sup>86</sup> Sweetenham, p. 204.

language of popular epics and structural conceits common to popular storytelling to make his history entertaining and accessible, and yet he says of his work in his own introduction that his ‘story will contain nothing frivolous, misleading or trivial – nothing but the truth’.<sup>87</sup> He uses storytelling techniques when representing his contemporaries, though he takes his cue for some of this from the *Gesta Francorum*, which was written by a crusader, and this suggests that such storytelling techniques came naturally to First Crusade participants. Stories from the era either influenced Robert’s understanding of the world, or he expected them to successfully influence his readers’ understanding of the world. He is using elements of fiction to reinvent and adapt the history of the First Crusade by fitting his knowledge of factual events into a framework heavily informed by fictional narratives of the time. The techniques of storytelling are used to create a certain understanding of the First Crusade and to give it and its participants a particular identity.

The version we have of *The Song of Roland* was not written down until after Robert,<sup>88</sup> between 1130 and 1170 (though versions of the poem were said to be recited before the Norman invasion of 1066, inspiring them no doubt to great real-world deeds)<sup>89</sup> so Robert’s work looks both to the past and the future. It is both popular and sacred and he has no fear about calling it both a history and the truth. Words put in the mouth of Moses contribute to words put in the mouth of Bohemond and become a part of history. Like the Donation of Constantine, Robert is legalising and legitimising the Church’s position: his work helped to clarify the meaning of the Crusade and its iconography, its almost-martyrs and its rituals. As such the account was part of a template for later crusades and it is no surprise to find Frederick I reading it before he himself goes on crusade. Robert’s work also thus has a part to play in later events of historical fact and so helps to influence real world actions and change real world lives. What Robert claims is

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<sup>87</sup> Sweetenham, p. 77.

<sup>88</sup> ‘...the Crusades had a significant impact on the literature and art of the twelfth century. The *Song of Roland*, composed between the First and Second Crusades, is replete with the language and ideas of the Crusades.’ Cook and Herzman, p. 236.

<sup>89</sup> ‘The poet Wace claims that a song of Roland was sung to the Normans by a certain Taillefer before the Battle of Hastings. The poem has been dated as early as 1060 and as late as the second half of the twelfth century, but the most frequently accepted date is around the very end of the eleventh century (1098–1100). This would place the poem at the time of the First Crusade...the overall spirit of the poem appears to be that of the First Crusade,’ Burgess, p. 8.

the truth does actually become the truth as crusading grows into a movement spanning the centuries.

History and fiction here are one and the same, and elements of what Robert inserted, such as the speeches in the enemy camp, were also evident in the earliest recorded eyewitness accounts such as the *Gesta Francorum*. Such undefined borders between history and fiction were not an aberration. Speaking of the works of the fifth century BCE writers Herodotus and Thucydides, who were both key figures in the birth of the tradition of Western history, Ann Curthoys and John Docker find that,

in both these foundational works there is a double character, each is a search for truth...and at the same time each enters into the world of literary forms, in Herodotus' case in terms of a profusion of stories and a delight in storytelling itself, in Thucydides' case in terms of a single genre, tragedy.<sup>90</sup>

It is perhaps fitting that, as Curthoys and Docker note, Herodotus has been known both 'as the Father of History' and 'the Father of Lies'.<sup>91</sup> The blending of fiction and history is not new; this has been a tension in Western history since the beginning.

Within ten years the history of the First Crusade had been thoroughly reworked, re-historicised and mythologised, according to the precepts of good storytelling—the ideals of the crusaders were clarified into a new fictional ideal of heroism, transcendent morality and self sacrifice.

Such techniques were not deployed in just the most widespread medieval history of the First Crusade. They were also used in one of the less influential, and sometimes with different effects. It is possible that the work of Guibert of Nogent was less widely read than Robert's because of how Guibert decided to position his crusader protagonists in terms of power and agency in his act of storytelling.

## **II: Guibert of Nogent**

Guibert of Nogent (c. 1055–1125) composed his history of the First Crusade, *The Deeds of God through the Franks*, between 1106–1109, around the same time as Robert the Monk wrote his account. They both worked during the flurry of

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<sup>90</sup> Ann Curthoys and John Docker, *Is History Fiction?* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2006), p. 48.

<sup>91</sup> Curthoys and Docker, p. 13.

crusading enthusiasm as Bohemond toured France. Guibert's narrative includes several contemporary details which make it easier to date: he describes Godfrey's brother Baldwin as king of Jerusalem and says he 'still rules there'<sup>92</sup> and is 'still now the ruler of Jerusalem'<sup>93</sup> (Baldwin I was king from 1100–1118) and Robert of Normandy 'now languishes in jail'<sup>94</sup> (he was imprisoned from 1106 until his death in 1134). Guibert was a more cynical, ostentatiously educated, impatient and gossip-loving writer than Robert, and he shows his prejudices at every turn: coming from an aristocratic background, he has contempt for the poor and thinks very badly of the Jews. Guibert was a French Benedictine monk who also sought to rewrite the text of the *Gesta Francorum* to better show the Church's interests and interpretation of events. He is best known today for his autobiographical memoirs (1114–1117) which cast light on a medieval mind full of contradiction and psychological tension. His First Crusade account employs deliberately difficult Latin, for he says:

my mind loves what is somewhat obscure, and detests a raw, unpolished style. I savor those things which are able to exercise my mind more than those things which, too easily understood, are incapable of inscribing themselves upon mind [sic] always avid for novelty<sup>95</sup>

And he defends himself by stating:

if anyone accuses me of writing obscurely, let him fear inflicting on himself the stigma of weak intellect, since I know for certain that no one trained in letters can raise a question about whatever I may have said in the following book.<sup>96</sup>

The main difference between Guibert's crusade account and that of Robert the Monk is Guibert's resounding unpopularity amongst his contemporaries. His work 'did not circulate widely in the middle ages, and no writer of his own time mentions him.'<sup>97</sup> We know more about Guibert than any other medieval chronicler of the First Crusade, yet his work barely made a splash in his own time. However, there is still value in looking at his attempts to reinterpret events according to church doctrine and his own prejudices, as both he and Robert undertook the same mission but in slightly different ways. For both of them,

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<sup>92</sup> Guibert of Nogent, p. 47.

<sup>93</sup> Guibert of Nogent, p. 122.

<sup>94</sup> Guibert of Nogent, p. 49.

<sup>95</sup> Guibert of Nogent, p. 81.

<sup>96</sup> Guibert of Nogent, p. 22.

<sup>97</sup> Robert Levine's introduction to Guibert of Nogent, p. 3.

relating the events of the First Crusade was as much an exercise in storytelling as it was in recording history. They would give the Crusade and its participants a certain identity in their narratives, so that this historical event could be transformed into a didactic tool to teach Christian values and European and Christian primacy. Robert's heroic depiction of the crusaders would be influential, but Guibert's, perhaps due to a particular aspect of his portrayal of human power and agency, would not, and this tells us something about how the crusaders hoped to understand themselves, and how society preferred to understand the crusaders.

### *Guibert the historian and researcher*

Guibert makes us very aware of his somewhat uncomfortable role as an historian. He frequently gives us insight into his research and his intentions. For a medieval historian, he had a remarkable enthusiasm for modernity and disregard for ancient biblical histories.

Guibert gives another version of Pope Urban's speech, that missing urtext that both set the crusade in motion and was the first to be fictionalised (as we would see it) and re-interpreted. Guibert is careful to define crusader motivations:

simply to protect Holy Church they waged the most legitimate war...God ordained holy wars in our time, so that the knightly order and the erring mob, who, like their ancient pagan models, were engaged in mutual slaughter, might find new way of earning salvation.<sup>98</sup>

The way Guibert approaches the Bible is quite different from Robert. Whereas in Robert, the First Crusade fulfils biblical prophecy, in Guibert, the Crusade exceeds the achievements of characters in the Bible, particularly the work of the Jewish tribes depicted in Old Testament stories, of which Guibert is dismissive. 'I have seen what God has done in these times—miracles greater than any he has ever performed'.<sup>99</sup> He says he is writing an account to improve on the *Gesta Francorum* because the Crusade 'deserved being told with greater dignity than all the histories of Jewish warfare'.<sup>100</sup> Quite uncharacteristically for a medieval historian he says that modern times are an improvement on the past, '[s]ometimes

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<sup>98</sup> Guibert of Nogent, p. 25.

<sup>99</sup> Guibert of Nogent, p. 21.

<sup>100</sup> Guibert of Nogent, p. 22.

but not always incorrectly, certain mortals have developed the foul habit of praising previous times and attacking what modern men do',<sup>101</sup> although he says this to argue that the Jewish victories of the Old Testament are nothing compared to the victories of Guibert's day, as the Jews did not know Christ. The First Crusade is superior to everything in the Old Testament: as he says 'the recent and incomparable victory of the expedition to Jerusalem, whose glory for those who are not totally foolish is such that our times may rejoice in a fame that no previous times have ever merited.'<sup>102</sup> He stresses that the victory was won not for nationalistic reasons, not 'to widen our borders', but for 'the Holy Church they waged the most legitimate war.'<sup>103</sup> Here he is legitimising and clarifying the papal theory of Holy War, a recent innovation, and linking it very plainly to Augustine's theories of Just (or legitimate) War. He goes to some lengths to describe men leaving their old ways of selfish warfare and lifestyles to take up the just cause of Holy War, a propaganda tool the Church will use for generations. They were 'without a king, without a prince',<sup>104</sup> being led only by God, which fitted in with current Church ideas about the primacy of the Church over all Christian states, and the primacy of the Pope as its leader. He repeats, 'let us not admire the fleshly wars of Israel, which were waged merely to fill the belly.'<sup>105</sup> The Jewish kings of old were nothing compared to the crusaders, whose coming brings a new Christian empire in place of the old Jewish one:

Not Ezra nor Judas Machabee did as much, after your sufferings...The world fights for you and yours; concern for you involves almost the entire age. Once Judea, when it was at its strongest, could match your glory.<sup>106</sup>

Guibert even urges the crusaders now in Jerusalem to destroy Egypt and Persia. 'I ask that you be the ruin of Persia and not of yourself. Attack the prince of Babylon, and whatever stands in the way of Jerusalem'.<sup>107</sup> Guibert pronounces:

We have said many times, and do not hesitate to repeat, that this had never been accomplished in any age. If some one cites the sons of Israel and the miracles God performed for them, I shall offer something more miraculous<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Guibert of Nogent, p. 24.

<sup>102</sup> Guibert of Nogent, p. 24.

<sup>103</sup> Guibert of Nogent, p. 25.

<sup>104</sup> Guibert of Nogent, p. 113.

<sup>105</sup> Guibert of Nogent, p. 113.

<sup>106</sup> Guibert of Nogent, p. 123.

<sup>107</sup> Guibert of Nogent, p. 123.

<sup>108</sup> Guibert of Nogent, p. 132.

He goes on to describe the crusader's suffering and various parts of the 'Christian drama', saying that the only manna the crusaders had in the desert was the spiritual kind. 'The ancients, who excelled in their victories in war, refrain from excessive pride, when they think of how modern men have done better than they.'<sup>109</sup>

At the same time Guibert shows a general scepticism with which a modern reader might sympathise. Partly this is a reflection of his own arrogance and self-righteousness, and it must be noted that he is an unremitting believer in the Holy Lance discovered at Antioch. While he even dismisses another historian, Fulcher of Chartres's,<sup>110</sup> doubts about it—and even many of the most zealous medieval authors were doubtful of its authenticity—nonetheless he shows some reservations about believing things that many other medieval authors take for granted. As Guibert reinterprets, he questions. He points out that there are two places he knows of, both claiming to possess heads of John the Baptist (Angers and Constantinople) and that some places in France claim to both have the same 'martyr or confessor, but a single entity cannot occupy two spaces simultaneously.'<sup>111</sup> He laments the fact that 'saints are not permitted to enjoy the peace of permanent burial they deserve.'<sup>112</sup> He dismisses the story of two clouds that were said to form the shape of a cross, as he saw the clouds that caused such devotion but to him 'they scarcely seemed to form anything other than the shape of a crane or a stork'.<sup>113</sup> Most gratifying for modern historians, he scoffs at the tendency to grossly exaggerate numbers in some medieval accounts, 'he dares to estimate that those who set out for Jerusalem numbered 6,000,000. I would be surprised if all the land this side of the Alps, indeed if all the kingdoms of the West, could supply so many men'.<sup>114</sup> He is exaggerating the numbers claimed by his source here, but using it to reflect upon an earlier exaggerated figure as well as his source's inflated estimate of 600,000 (modern estimates put the size of the crusader army 'at its greatest...around the 50,000-60,000 mark including non-

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<sup>109</sup> Guibert of Nogent, pp. 130-31.

<sup>110</sup> Fulcher of Chartres, *A History of the Expedition to Jerusalem 1095-1127* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1973).

<sup>111</sup> Guibert of Nogent, p. 33.

<sup>112</sup> Guibert of Nogent, p. 33.

<sup>113</sup> Guibert of Nogent, p. 143.

<sup>114</sup> Guibert of Nogent, p. 148.

combatants’).<sup>115</sup> Though his derision sometimes has ulterior psychological motives, it is a good reminder that not all medieval men took reports of miracles and the sizes of armies at face value. He speaks of a priest who carved a cross in his forehead and claimed it was given by God, but it oozed to show his guilt, and he relates that many others tried to fake that they had been miraculously marked with crosses by using makeup and other trickery. He uses such examples to question an account that drowned crusaders washed up with crosses on their bodies. Guibert shows a critical awareness as well as a consciousness that texts can use images and figures to push certain interpretations of events and influence understanding.

Guibert himself is very conscious that he is reworking history. He writes, ‘I have seen what God has done in these times—miracles greater than any he has ever performed—and now I see a gem of this kind lying in the lowest dust.’ He says he offers ‘a model to correct (or perhaps corrupt) the history’<sup>116</sup> and notes:

How can it be surprising if we make errors, when we are describing things done in a foreign land, when we are clearly unable not only to express in words our own thoughts and actions, but even to collect them in the silence of our own minds?<sup>117</sup>

Guibert laments that he can’t see the intentions of men. He speaks of his words as ‘harshly barked out,’<sup>118</sup> and says, ‘whatever I have added, I have learned from eye-witnesses, or have found out for myself.’<sup>119</sup>

Guibert comments late in his work on Fulcher’s history, which appeared as Guibert was writing, and is quick to dismiss what it says and where it differs from him, going through article by article. He edits Fulcher’s episodes with his own interpretations. He says of Fulcher:

Since this same man produces swollen, foot-and-a-half-long words, and pours forth the blaring colors of vapid rhetorical schemes, I prefer to snatch at the bare limbs of the deeds themselves, with whatever sack-cloth of eloquence I have, rather than cover them with learned weavings.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> John France, *Victory in the East: A Military History of the First Crusade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 142.

<sup>116</sup> Guibert of Nogent, p. 22.

<sup>117</sup> Guibert of Nogent, p. 22.

<sup>118</sup> Guibert of Nogent, p. 23.

<sup>119</sup> Guibert of Nogent, p. 22.

<sup>120</sup> Guibert of Nogent, p. 142.

Here Guibert surely does not show much self-awareness. He is correcting Fulcher's 'little work' because it was 'erroneous and in rough language.'<sup>121</sup> This reference to Fulcher demonstrates again that Guibert was part of a movement of reinterpreting and popularising the Crusade. Several accounts were coming out all at the same time. Fulcher denies that the lance discovered in Antioch was genuine, and Guibert argues against him. In all this Guibert gives a marvellous sense of history in relentless and confusing motion, of people hoping to adapt and reinterpret the events of the Crusade in their own ways and with their own agendas, each scrabbling to outdo the other, and yet in the broad strokes they show similar goals of positioning the Crusade so its ecclesiastical aspects are shown in the best light. They wish to reinforce the religious and cultural identity of the West. It is the storytelling techniques they use that achieve this.

### *Guibert the propagandist*

All the same kind of French (or, more suitably to the age before the nation of France existed, Frankish) propaganda is in Guibert as is in Robert. Due to Guibert's aristocratic background there is a particular flavour in his text of nobility's greatness and suffering as opposed to the 'dregs' who show steadfastness but otherwise are fearsome and die like flies. Bohemond becomes a mouthpiece for ecclesiastic interpretations of the Crusade but he is a less glowing figure here than in Robert; however, like Robert, Guibert plays up the Norman-Italian Bohemond's connections to France: 'Since his family was from Normandy, a part of France, and since he had obtained the hand of the daughter of the king of the Franks, he might very well be considered a Frank.'<sup>122</sup> He celebrates the French as the Pope's chosen people at the expense of the Germans who 'prefer to remain under a daily, or even eternal excommunication',<sup>123</sup> as he refers to the Investiture Contest. He says the French name is 'admired as far away as the Indian Ocean' while that of the Germans has 'amounted to nothing'.<sup>124</sup> The Crusade gives, as Pope Urban had hoped, moral power to the Catholic Church in

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<sup>121</sup> Guibert of Nogent, p. 142.

<sup>122</sup> Guibert of Nogent, pp. 34-35.

<sup>123</sup> Guibert of Nogent, p. 36.

<sup>124</sup> Guibert of Nogent, p. 36.

its struggles against Germany, Guibert is stating. Similarly, the Byzantines here are entirely bad and their emperor is a liar, in keeping with Bohemond's attitude while he toured France as Guibert was composing his text. Guibert cannot set his class prejudices aside even when attempting to praise Bohemond. Bohemond's father, Robert Guiscard, is a 'new man' 'born to a family of no great distinction' who left 'his native land voluntarily or was driven from it I don't know' assembling 'a group of thieves' who used 'disgraceful treachery' to get what they wanted.<sup>125</sup> While this is not an entirely inaccurate description of Robert Guiscard, who struggled with a pope and the Byzantines to claw his way to power by seizing tracts of lower Italy and Sicily (Guiscard can mean *the fox* or *the weasel*), Guibert's choice of language seems to suggest that Robert's class origins are the main affront.

Stephen of Blois was married to the daughter of William the Conqueror; he fled from Antioch and his inaccurate report of crusader defeat perhaps contributed to the Byzantine emperor not sending aid to the crusaders at Antioch. Stephen is quite stunningly forgiven in Guibert's account, where he rides 'shrewdly' to see from afar many Turks at Antioch and retreats 'in an understandably human fashion'. He is 'a man of the utmost probity, energetic, pre-eminent in his love of truth'. Stephen was to die on the Crusade of 1101, and Guibert has this save him: 'And I certainly think his flight (if, however, it should be called a flight, since the count was certainly ill), after which the dishonourable act was rectified by martyrdom, was superior' to those who stayed and committed 'criminal behaviour.'<sup>126</sup> Stephen's actions most certainly were understandably human, but Guibert is damning of William the Carpenter and Peter the Hermit attempting to flee in an earlier scene. But then, they were not high-ranking members of the French nobility, and neither were they martyrs. Stephen of Blois is spoken of like a saint in the very passages that describe him fleeing Antioch and abandoning his mission. Interestingly, Guibert contrasts Stephen's actions with those who used the excuse of having gone over the walls of Jerusalem to later 'safely commit any crime' back home, and there may be some psychological insight here, perhaps based on things Guibert had seen in France.<sup>127</sup> Another

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<sup>125</sup> Guibert of Nogent, p. 51.

<sup>126</sup> Guibert of Nogent, pp. 94-95.

<sup>127</sup> Guibert of Nogent, p. 95.

French nobleman, Hugh, the younger brother of the king of France (the same man eulogised in Robert the Monk's account) has his nobility emphasised: 'The first line of battle...was led by Hugh, who truly was, as his cognomen indicated, great'.<sup>128</sup> Hugh of Vermandois (also known as 'the Great') is later sent to speak to the Byzantine emperor and, instead of delivering a reply to his friends involved on a quest where the suffering itself is supposed to be penance, he goes home to France. He gets the same treatment as Stephen of Blois: 'no one should complain about the return of such a man who later died with the deserved repute of a martyr and a fine soldier' (Hugh also died in 1101 trying to fulfil his vows).<sup>129</sup> Noble knights can do no wrong, and this is an idea that is to filter quite neatly down into the later chivalric romances.

It is characteristic of Guibert that as people are dying of thirst outside Jerusalem, he describes events in the following way. Barley bread was baked for the army, and water carried from far away in animal hides:

How many jaws and throats of noble men were worn away by the roughness of this bread. How terribly were their fine stomachs revolted by the bitterness of the putrid liquid. Good God, we think that they must have suffered so, these men who remembered their high social position in their native land, where they had been accustomed to great ease and pleasure, and now could find no hope or solace in external comfort, as they burned in the terrible heat.<sup>130</sup>

According to the *Gesta Francorum*, the earlier anonymous account on which Robert's and Guibert's works are based, 'we suffered great distress and affliction every day' due to foul water and barley bread, and the pain of a shared brotherhood is generalised again when 'we were suffering so badly from the shortage of water that for one penny a man could not buy sufficient to quench his thirst'.<sup>131</sup> In Guibert instead the sacrifice and suffering of the nobles is emphasised because their fare does not match what they are used to at home. He writes from his biases, using narrative to reinforce social identities. Guibert can only understand these figures through his biases, but it is his religious rather than social biases that eventually truly set him apart from Robert.

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<sup>128</sup> Guibert of Nogent, p. 98.

<sup>129</sup> Guibert of Nogent, p. 102.

<sup>130</sup> Guibert of Nogent, p. 117.

<sup>131</sup> *Gesta Francorum: The Deeds of the Franks and the Other Pilgrims to Jerusalem*, pp. 89-90.

Whenever a nobleman opens his mouth he is speaking for the Church, but as usual this is especially true for Bohemond. ‘In the most severe battles it is not you, but Christ, who has fought’ he says at Antioch, adding that with God’s assistance they ‘have achieved triumphs impossible for mere human beings’ and telling them to ‘strive mightily to emulate Christ, who carries your banners’.<sup>132</sup> The theme of the Christian superman emerges again as Bohemond speaks more like a priest or a papal legate than a military leader. Bohemond in reality was to stay jealously guarding his newly conquered city as the others fought for Jerusalem without him. Later in the same scene Bohemond says to his constable, ‘understand that our motive is to aid all of Christianity by redeeming Jerusalem for God and liberating his tomb.’<sup>133</sup> Guibert could be attempting to craft a character of psychological complexity, which it seems the historical Bohemond was, but it seems more likely his purpose is simple Church propaganda.

Fascinatingly, Guibert attempts a description of the Muslim faith. This key example of Orientalism, very nearly contemporary to the First Crusade, is revealing, and I will elaborate on it here because I found it useful, in the creative piece ‘Kyrie Eleison’, for highlighting the long tradition Western cultural assumptions handed down through writing, and the extent of Western cultural baggage. Guibert’s work is propaganda, satire and misinterpretation, but it does cast an interesting light on the West’s understanding of the Muslims at the time, revealing what kind of understanding the returning crusaders brought back with them; Guibert claims to have spoken to many upon their return, learning from ‘those who were present on the expedition’.<sup>134</sup> The crusades, of course, were just one of many stepping stones on the development of Orientalist thinking in the West. As Said says,

Consider how the Orient, and in particular the Near Orient, became known in the West as its great complementary opposite since antiquity. There were the Bible and the rise of Christianity; there were travelers like Marco Polo...there were the redoubtable conquering Eastern movements, principally Islam, of course; there were the militant pilgrims, chiefly the Crusaders. Altogether an internally structured archive is built up from the literature that belongs to these experiences. Out of this comes a restricted number of typical encapsulations: the journey, the history, the fable, the stereotype, the polemical

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<sup>132</sup> Guibert of Nogent, p. 74.

<sup>133</sup> Guibert of Nogent, p. 75.

<sup>134</sup> Guibert of Nogent, p. 22.

confrontation. These are the lenses through which the Orient is experienced, and they shape the language, perception, and form of the encounter between East and West.<sup>135</sup>

Guibert's polemic against the Muslim faith certainly attempts to add an early entry to the 'literature' of this 'internally structured archive'.

Guibert represents the origin of Mahomet whom he describes sarcastically as a 'marvelous law-giver' prone to epileptic fits, with Muslim marriage habits giving the 'opportunity to fulfil lusts' with 'multiple whores' and engage in 'abnormal acts'.<sup>136</sup> After promoting the religion that 'has wipe[d] out [Christ's] name from the furthest corners of the entire East, from Africa, Egypt, Ethiopia, Libya, and even the more remote coasts of Spain—a country near us',<sup>137</sup> Mahomet falls down in a fit and is eaten by passing pigs, which is Guibert's way of explaining why Muslims do not eat pork. Guibert claims that only the law-giver's heel is left, and it is worshipped, no doubt a reference to the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, which contains the foundation stone that is supposed to be imprinted with Mohammad's heel-print from when he left on his night journey to receive a message from God. Guibert goes into lurid detail about the digestive process of the pigs and what anything eaten by them would become, speaking further on the animals breaking wind and saying:

What if there is some truth in what the Manicheans say about purification, that in every food something of God is present and that part of God is purified by chewing and digesting, and the purified part is turned into angels, who are said to depart from us by belching and flatulence: how many angels may be [sic] believe were produced by the flesh eaten by these pigs and by the great farts they let go?<sup>138</sup>

Here we can see the pronounced and supercilious sarcasm of Guibert's crudely-minded satirical style. Muslim propagandists also resorted to scatological satire of Christianity and saintly relics.<sup>139</sup> What is interesting though is that, besides Guibert going to lengths to call Mahomet a prophet and not a god, which was a common enough mistake in the Middle Ages and even appears sometimes today among non-Muslims, is that Guibert includes a scene where Mahomet has a secretly-trained cow approach him on command with a book of law attached to its

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<sup>135</sup> Said, p. 58.

<sup>136</sup> Guibert of Nogent, p. 31.

<sup>137</sup> Guibert of Nogent, p. 31.

<sup>138</sup> Guibert of Nogent, p. 32.

<sup>139</sup> See for example *The Arabian Nights: Tales of 1001 Nights*, trans. Malcolm C. Lyons and Ursula Lyons, 3 vols (London: Penguin Books, 2010), 1, pp. 424-25.

horns, to the amazement of the people. Could this be a reference to Sura II of the Koran, *The Cow*? It is the lengthiest Sura in the Koran and contains references to many figures also found in the Old Testament, such as David and Goliath, Moses, Abraham and Ishmael; it enumerates many Muslim laws such as the Fast of Ramadan and Pilgrimage, as well as many day-to-day laws, and it contains the Throne verse, which is the verse recited before entering sick chambers, and which is inscribed on tombstones and religious buildings and recited at the end of ritual prayer.<sup>140</sup> The central story, however, is of a cow that is sacrificed so that the identity of a murderer may be revealed when suspects are struck with the cow's flesh, for no wrongdoing is hidden from God. It also lays out some of the tenets of Just War in the Muslim sense:

And fight in the way of God with those  
who fight with you, but aggress not: God loves  
not the aggressors.

And slay them wherever you come upon them,  
and expel them from where they expelled you;  
persecution is more grievous than slaying.

But fight them not by the Holy Mosque  
until they should fight you there;  
then, if they fight you, slay them—  
such is the recompense of unbelievers—<sup>141</sup>

There are many possible reasons why Guibert might have chosen to mock this Sura in particular. *The Cow* is an easy name for Guibert to make fun of, and it is the largest and in some ways most fundamental of Muslim texts. But one cannot help but wonder if there might have been another reason this particular Sura filtered down to Guibert and grabbed his attention. One can almost imagine a crusader in Jerusalem after the bloody conquest being told several passages from *The Cow* by remaining Muslim locals in an accusatory or retaliatory tone. Could a Muslim have been telling the crusaders that God sees all, and that murder will not go unpunished? Could they be informing them that now Muslims have the right to fight Christians even in the holy places, and to expel them, and that any Jihad will be just in Muslim eyes? Could they have been attempting to instruct conquering Christians on their own versions of Old Testament tales, or the tenets of their

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<sup>140</sup> Alfred Guillaume, *Islam* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1968), pp. 74-75.

<sup>141</sup> Sura II:185, *The Koran: Interpreted* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 25.

faith? We of course can never know, but it seems likely that if outsiders were to come into contact with any part of the Koran, verses from *The Cow* were very probably what they would have heard. Perhaps in Guibert's mockery here we see a hint of genuine contact occurring in the Levant, and of stories which were brought back by the crusaders and told to Guibert. Guibert perhaps knows enough of the Koran to mock one of its Suras, which is more than one might expect of a monk living in France at the dawn of the twelfth century. Other First Crusade accounts and reinventions do not bring quite the same levels of anti-Muslim propaganda to the subject as Guibert does. In his innocuous statement about the cow, reflecting a Sura that lays out just cause for a Jihad if holy places are threatened, could Guibert be unwittingly foreshadowing the future rising intensity of the Holy War from both sides? I highlight this also because I employed some passages from the Koran in 'Kyrie Eleison', as I will discuss later, and Guibert's work suggests (enough for the author of historical fiction, anyway) that some information from the Koran may have become known in Europe because of stories told by returning crusaders.

Guibert's story of the Crusade is didactic, with clear biases. It is a story with 'good guys' and 'bad guys'. He is trying to use narrative to structure and reinforce identity. For Guibert, the greatest 'good guys' of all were those who had died.

### ***Guibert and martyrs***

Guibert's greatest emphasis is on martyrs, and this is also his most telling ecclesiastic reinvention of the events of the First Crusade. Here perhaps he is reflecting an element of the crusaders' own self-understanding, and how they adapted contemporary religious narratives to comfort themselves during times of stress. Dead contemporaries become a part of the religious story and manage to inhabit the Bible's narrative world with its figures from storytelling. Storytelling perhaps helped participants not only to understand but to cope with the Crusade. In Guibert's eyes, all the pilgrims who died on the journey sit with God as martyrs. As Guibert at times seems particularly to mourn over the men and women who died on the failed Crusade of 1101 (likely to have been even a greater number than all of those who went on the First Crusade), perhaps there is

something of the trauma of loss here, of trying to heal wounds recently suffered. One thinks of the gravity of the words on World War I memorials after the shocking impact of that war. As Guibert claims to have spoken to many returning crusaders, and as he comes from a knightly aristocratic background that had connections to crusading families—he claims to have grown up with one knight who died on crusade—perhaps he had to be something of a counsellor to these emotionally scarred men trying to return to normal life as he coaxed stories from them.<sup>142</sup> Surely, if dead friends are martyrs, then the grief of survivors is softened. The dead transcend reality and, in the self-understanding of grieving families, become a part of the story of the Bible as they take a place beside its narrative heroes. They live, in a sense, inside the Bible, in the short blank space between the stories of Christ and his early followers and the Book of Revelation. The idea that the fallen crusaders are martyrs also serves Church needs when it comes to the meaning of the crusade.

It was not immediately clear to the pilgrims that their dead were martyrs, and the idea only appeared slowly over the course of the expedition, as increased suffering, a great loss of life and successes that seemed miraculous inspired greater religious fervour. Though the quest was penitential, martyrdom is traditionally associated with saints and a passive submission to death for the sake of Christian beliefs, not active warfare, and martyrdom was not a given from the outset. The idea that warriors could be martyrs had been broached by Pope Leo IX in 1053 but it was a topic of debate. The Church was later to use the idea in propaganda but never fully embraced it, as no dead crusaders were ever canonised or even beatified for their deaths on crusade, which would seem logical if they were true Christian martyrs.<sup>143</sup> Jonathan Riley-Smith argues that, ‘the conviction that dead crusaders had achieved martyrdom once again seems to have dawned gradually on the participants with the crossing of Asia Minor, as they became certain they were engaged in a divine enterprise,’<sup>144</sup> but Guibert is convinced of it and constantly repeats the fact, much more vehemently than in other reinterpreted accounts.

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<sup>142</sup> ‘From the time I was a child I knew him, and I watched his fine disposition develop,’ Guibert of Nogent, p. 80.

<sup>143</sup> Discussed in Riley-Smith, *What Were the Crusades?*, pp. 65-66.

<sup>144</sup> Riley-Smith, *The First Crusade and the Idea of Crusading*, p. 116.

Peter the Hermit and his fellow pilgrims of the doomed People's Crusade, who are described by Guibert as 'comical' 'dregs' who behave 'insolently' and with 'arrogance', become 'the first martyrs God made in the nearly desperate state of our modern times'<sup>145</sup> when they are killed by the Turks and some are decapitated for refusing to give up the Christian faith. They give Christ 'new honors', 'ornamenting our age' and have fragrant laurels on their brows as they 'prepare to offer their throats to the swift blade'.<sup>146</sup> Later on during the Crusade proper, because being 'tortured to death by daily pain' is worse than dying by the sword, those who starve will not 'be deprived of the more noble crown of martyrdom.'<sup>147</sup> While the pilgrims are surrounded at the Battle of Dorylaeum, Bohemond rouses them by saying, 'if these bodies have only survived to be offered for the glories of martyrdom, how, I ask, can you be terrified of this sight?'<sup>148</sup> Subsequently, facing the enemy, 'they were brave as lions, but, what is more fitting, brave as martyrs'.<sup>149</sup> Later, outside Antioch, 'those who were found, because of their proven faith, to be acceptable, received glorious rewards after death for their sufferings,'<sup>150</sup> as Guibert adds a hesitant note, ensuring that good conduct is also required for martyrdom. The next sentence is telling: 'For those who needed to expiate their sins, the outpouring of blood alone was the most potent way to purge their guilt.' Here Christian symbolism, with the blood of Christ and other rites, has taken on a new slant. Almost unconsciously it is being mixed in with this new warlike Christianity. Christ purges humanity's guilt on the cross, and these soldiers purge their own with the blood of other men. The blood of Christ at mass has become a mark of mass slaughter. Guibert is combining the very symbolism of the Catholic rite to justify and reinvent Christian ideals in the light of crusader success. Similarly, at Antioch, 'it was right that on the day before the Christians were to fast they grew fat on what they most desired, the blood of their evil enemies.'<sup>151</sup> This sits uncomfortably with later accounts of crusader cannibalism of the Turkish dead, which Guibert tries loosely to pass off

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<sup>145</sup> Guibert of Nogent, p. 45.

<sup>146</sup> Guibert of Nogent, p. 45.

<sup>147</sup> Guibert of Nogent, p. 58.

<sup>148</sup> Guibert of Nogent, p. 59.

<sup>149</sup> Guibert of Nogent, p. 60.

<sup>150</sup> Guibert of Nogent, p. 76.

<sup>151</sup> Guibert of Nogent, pp. 75-76.

as a fearsome ruse used by the peasant Tafurs, while at the same time suggesting that perhaps only the lower classes committed the crime.

Bishops and priests sallying from Antioch await ‘the gift of martyrdom’ and the soldiers beside them in their ‘inmost hearts were preparing to undergo martyrdom’.<sup>152</sup> Each man has become a reflection of Christ’s sacrifice. They are sacrificing themselves for all those back home, is the implication; we should not only feel sympathy, but also devotion, just as we might feel for the ‘humiliating Crucifixion’<sup>153</sup> Christ underwent for humankind. This is the same author who has a crusader boasting about how rich and powerful he has become in the Levant<sup>154</sup> and who urges, as we have seen, crusaders to fight on into Egypt and Persia. These are all different facets of a recruitment drive: guilt, temptation and a call to arms. Guibert says of Christ’s attitude to the crusaders, ‘I say today’s men are the ones whom he more truly saves, because he truly receives as his children those whose bodies he has allowed to be slain, and whom he punishes in the temporal world’<sup>155</sup> after denigrating the Jews of old because they walked the desert with the luxury of wives, full bellies and angels who were visible to them.

Guibert makes it very clear that the crusaders who died were martyrs, thus easing the pain of those who have lost loved ones, easing the fears of future crusaders, and creating a sense of debt amongst his contemporaries during a time when intercessory prayer and acts for loved ones by others, even by strangers such as monks, was commonly believed to be beneficial. In this way Guibert recharacterises the First Crusade as a sacrifice, an example and a spiritual debt we have an obligation to pay back, and each of its knightly and priestly participants become heroes. Guibert is quick to condemn the criminal knight and the lacklustre priest, and other individuals who do not fit with his worldview, but he leaves no doubt that the general mass, in his eyes, was composed of heroes, each one a particularly sacrificial, Christian kind of superman. This kind of thinking would become part of the crusade movement. It is perhaps the particular way Guibert tries to position these supermen in relation to supernatural forces that made his account unpopular in his own time—one particular narrative choice

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<sup>152</sup> Guibert of Nogent, p. 99.

<sup>153</sup> Guibert of Nogent, p. 149.

<sup>154</sup> Guibert of Nogent, p. 146. The knight claims to have an annual salary of 1500 marks and 100 castles under his command.

<sup>155</sup> Guibert of Nogent, p. 130.

perhaps meant that Guibert was telling a story his contemporaries did not want to hear. According to a strict interpretation of religion, Guibert may have been accurate, but Guibert's final attempt to give a certain identity to the Crusade and its participants would not become a part of the lasting image of the ideal heroic crusader.

### *Guibert and the power of God*

A key issue in Guibert is that he puts the whole event down to the power of God and takes the agency away entirely from the human participants, which is much farther than Robert dares to go. Robert instead leaves the issue of whether it was divine or human power that captured Jerusalem unresolved, at least in an explicit sense, and the glory is shared. Even Guibert's title tells us his view. *Gesta Francorum*, Guibert's primary source, translates as 'The Deeds of the Franks' and Guibert calls his reworking *Dei Gesta per Francos* 'The Deeds of God through the Franks'.

He hammers the point home again and again, attempting to strengthen his adaptation and reinvention of the First Crusade, attempting to add a 'meaning' that he hoped his contemporaries might identify with and that might influence their understanding of the world and themselves. Human beings are part of a story in which God is the protagonist. 'I have always been certain that it was brought to completion only by the power of God alone, and through those men whom he willed',<sup>156</sup> he says in his introduction. 'I place little value on the names of the people about whom we are speaking, but I beg you not to shun their leader, Christ',<sup>157</sup> says Kerbogha's mother. A Babylonian prince hears that 'Franks—that is, God working through the Franks' have taken Antioch.<sup>158</sup> 'Therefore praise should be offered to the heavenly lord, and utter silence to the human being',<sup>159</sup> Guibert says in one of his more outspoken moments, after pointing out that the crusaders had no earthly king, only God. God leads them, 'the lambs whom he had made out of wolves'.<sup>160</sup> God co-authors Guibert's text, as he says, 'We thank

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<sup>156</sup> Guibert of Nogent, p. 21.

<sup>157</sup> Guibert of Nogent, p. 87.

<sup>158</sup> Guibert of Nogent, p. 115.

<sup>159</sup> Guibert of Nogent, p. 141.

<sup>160</sup> Guibert of Nogent, p. 142.

God for having composed these deeds with his own spirit, through our mouth.’<sup>161</sup> It is no doubt this particular aspect of Guibert, his outright denial of the power of men during a journey that was to give the knightly class so much moral justification and such a strong self identity, that contributed to Guibert being so unpopular in his own time, and yet it gives us looking back an insight into what some churchmen were trying to say about the First Crusade, and what interpretations and reinventions they were trying to place on its events, when they were given full rein. The men in question wanted to think of themselves as heroes, and not just by being martyred. We see this in the soon to arise chivalric romance. In this way, Guibert had little to say to the lay knight. It could not have helped that he described a priest as dropping ‘fouly’ from the Church to become a knight.<sup>162</sup> The chivalric ethos would describe itself as working in tandem with priesthood, often even shunning the rules of the Church and excelling (chivalric authors would imply) or matching (chivalric authors would carefully and tactfully concede) priests in faithfulness.<sup>163</sup> The widely-understood narrative of the First Crusade would come to influence personal identity and self-understanding. It would become a great piece of storytelling, and early adaptations and reinventions of the crusaders would lead to further narrative transformations, creating figures and identities that persist in some form even today, but Guibert’s adaptation was not to be the one that stuck. Here we have an example of someone who tried and failed, and it is interesting to see why. Perhaps it was that, for men of the Middle Ages, God was not to be the protagonist of this story—that honour belonged to the fighting man. It is this ideal quasi-religious fighting man, who decides morality for himself rather than having it decided for him by God or by society, who lingers on with us today.

As an aside, there is an interesting insight in Guibert as to how Church ideas were communicated to the common people. A priest describes having a vision in Antioch and the Apostle Peter appears before him, asking the priest if he recognises him. The priest doesn’t, and then ‘in a cloud above his head a cross appeared, like those one sees in paintings’. Peter asks again if the priest

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<sup>161</sup> Guibert of Nogent, p. 151.

<sup>162</sup> Guibert of Nogent, p. 89.

<sup>163</sup> See for example Geoffroi de Charny, *A Knight’s Own Book of Chivalry*, trans. Elspeth Kennedy (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), pp. 90-99.

recognises him, and the priest says, ‘O lord, I can recognize your identity only because I see above your neck the figure of the cross, which customarily represents your image wherever it is painted.’<sup>164</sup> The complex language of medieval saint iconography is demonstrated here, with each saintly figure in church decoration having some identifying symbol accompanying them, ensuring that they can be known regardless of whether one is literate or not. As saints can be recognised from certain stock images, so can stock phrases point to the icons of fiction.

### *Guibert and popular fiction*

Guibert consciously uses fictional techniques when writing his ‘history’. Elements of popular fiction are not as strong in Guibert’s work as in Robert’s but they are still evident. To keep the ‘story’ of the Crusade going, a priest on the People’s Crusade is given, as his camp is being destroyed by the Turks, a piece of pseudopigrapha that is not in the *Gesta Francorum* source:

Good Jesus...you are here as my protection. Since I am holding you, let the hope of flight disappear. I shall enter into an eternal pact with you. I am killed, and you, God, shall carry out the sacred things we have begun.<sup>165</sup>

Guibert compares the Crusade to the siege of Troy, saying there are more crusaders than there were warriors at the ancient site.<sup>166</sup> He has Franks and Turks distantly related and gives speeches to fleeing Turks that no crusader could possibly have heard.<sup>167</sup> He indulges in fanciful and metaphor-laden combat descriptions that would have been perfectly at home in popular epics, such as: ‘the air became clouded with arrows and other kinds of missiles, and the brightness of the solar globe was covered by a shower of flying spears’<sup>168</sup> and ‘the swift right hand, thirsting for the filthy blood, inflicted sword wounds. Like a line of flying crows, like a countless flock of thrushes, thus the arrows blocked the celestial light, crowding and darkening the air with the hail of spears.’<sup>169</sup> Some have clear parallels in *Roland*, and may have been stock phrases for describing

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<sup>164</sup> Guibert of Nogent, p. 90.

<sup>165</sup> Guibert of Nogent, p. 46.

<sup>166</sup> Guibert of Nogent, p. 49.

<sup>167</sup> Guibert of Nogent, p. 61.

<sup>168</sup> Guibert of Nogent, p. 77.

<sup>169</sup> Guibert of Nogent, p. 74.

soldiers gathered for battle, such as the first time we see the army together outside Nicaea. ‘Their armor burns more brightly once it has drunk the sun’s rays. Their helmets, shields with yellow bronze, and belts blaze,’<sup>170</sup> says Guibert, and in *Roland* ‘their weapons gleam in the sun; / Hauberks and helmets give off flashes of light, / And so do their shields, which are richly painted with flowers, / And their spears and their gilded pennons.’<sup>171</sup> Stock phrases are a strong feature of oral storytelling and may have been passed on by epic poets.<sup>172</sup>

Godfrey again kills a giant, as in Robert. ‘Godfrey struck his guts so forcefully with his sword that the trunk of his body fell to the earth, while the legs remained seated as the horse moved on.’<sup>173</sup> There is a lengthy blow-by-blow description of Godfrey fighting a bear ‘of enormous size’, again casting him in a David vs. Goliath role. It is the lengthiest and most detailed description of single combat in the history and the only bearing it has to the plot is to show Godfrey’s character. His own sword wounds him more than the bear does. Godfrey is already being recast as one of the future nine worthies of chivalry. Godfrey was wounded by a bear in reality (something Guibert skips during the chronological telling of events, adding it later) but in more matter-of-fact histories there are no such stirring accounts, as in Guibert’s late addition, of Godfrey ‘pinned under [the bear’s] terrible limbs’ and Godfrey driving ‘the point of his blade into the depths of the beast’s body’ and the bear feeling ‘the metal gliding through his viscera’, descriptions which come from the epic genre.<sup>174</sup> Godfrey’s brother, and second after Godfrey as ruler of Jerusalem, appears in a similar story with a bear. Baldwin is wounded and refuses to allow a doctor to wound a Saracen in a similar manner so that the wound can be studied. Instead, a bear is wounded and the doctor gains insights that enable him to cure Baldwin.<sup>175</sup> Great men in far away

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<sup>170</sup> Guibert of Nogent, p. 57.

<sup>171</sup> Burgess, p. 97.

<sup>172</sup> ‘Homer...had some kind of phrase book in his head. Careful study of the sort Milman Parry was doing showed that he repeated formula after formula...Homer stitched together prefabricated parts’ and ‘...we know how the bards learn: by listening for months and years to other bards who never sing a narrative the same way twice but who use over and over again the standard formulas in connection with various standard themes.’ Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy* (New York: Routledge, 2005), pp. 22, 58.

<sup>173</sup> Guibert of Nogent, p. 121.

<sup>174</sup> Guibert of Nogent, pp. 121-22.

<sup>175</sup> Guibert of Nogent, pp. 122-23.

lands had fierce animal symbolism tied into their legend more than a century before Richard the Lionheart.

Once again the enemy culture can only be understood in Christian and Orientalist terms. They are opposites, anti-Christians, evil mirrors of the Westerners who exist only to oppose them. Kerbogha ‘had asked for and received permission to kill the Christians from the chief pontiff of their heresy (for even they have their Pope, in the likeness of ours)’.<sup>176</sup> Once again lengthy speeches and conversations take place in the pagan camp, explaining events, and casting a good light on the Christians (or, in this case, more on the Christian God) by the words of the enemies who look on the Christians from the ‘outside’ with awe. On seeing some poor weapons of the Franks, Kerbogha laughs and dictates a letter ‘to our Pope’ (i.e., the Caliph), instructing him to tell the people that they should give themselves:

up to pleasures: in greater security than to which you are accustomed, eat the finest foods; lie with multitudes of wives and concubines to propagate the race, so that the increasing number of sons may oppose the Christians, whose number now grows.<sup>177</sup>

Again Kerbogha’s mother comes in with a speech and a warning, saying that Christ ‘customarily defends his own men, though they be weak and ignorant, purely for his own glory’ and this time she quotes Psalms 81:8, 78:6, 92:3 and Romans 9:25.<sup>178</sup> She is again a diviner, but this time she gets her information from astronomy and ‘certain secret books of a pagan sect’ from one hundred years ago. She predicts her son’s death and matter-of-factly refers to herself and her son as pagans and Christians as the true faith.<sup>179</sup> Kerbogha asks if Bohemond and Tancred are gods or men and he is informed they are men.

Cutting off heads and displaying them, something the crusaders seem to have been fond of, ‘is, of course, the custom of the Gentiles’<sup>180</sup> and the crusaders are merely indulging in local custom. When the Turks mourn they do it in an almost womanly fashion, ‘they did not restrain their grief with a few modest tears, but, putting aside all shame, they screamed in public agony.’<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> Guibert of Nogent, p. 85.

<sup>177</sup> Noted in Guibert of Nogent, p. 87.

<sup>178</sup> Guibert of Nogent, pp. 87-88.

<sup>179</sup> Guibert of Nogent, p. 88.

<sup>180</sup> Guibert of Nogent, p. 75.

<sup>181</sup> Guibert of Nogent, p. 78.

The Turks are always shown as being sexually profligate and chaotically fecund, and Guibert often demonstrates a streak of misogynistic discomfort when presenting women, as in the following odd description:

young women came with quivers full of arrows, looking like a new form of the ancient Diana; they seem to have been brought here not to fight, but rather to reproduce. When the battle was over, those who were present asserted that new-born babies, born by women brought by this purpose on the expedition, were found thrown into the grass by these women, who, in their urgent flight from the Franks, could not endure the burden, and, more concerned for themselves than for their babies, heartlessly cast them away.<sup>182</sup>

He later has Saracen women hide gold in their wombs, and crusaders must punch Saracens in the stomach to make them cough up treasure. He claims the Saracens are insane.<sup>183</sup> Saracens make a cup from a Christian's head.<sup>184</sup> Kerbogha becomes a devil figure when a delegation comes from the crusader camp to speak. The two parties insult each other in a series of challenges and Kerbogha offers to let the crusaders go and give them great swathes of land if they renounce their faith.<sup>185</sup> Pyrrus' treachery on the walls of Antioch is attributed to his red hair.<sup>186</sup>

Turks reappear as astrologers and diviners, but fascinatingly they prophesy not only that Jerusalem will be lost to them, but that they will conquer it back, and they tell this to Robert of Flanders years before the First Crusade. Placed as it is near the end of his work, Guibert perhaps meant this as a recruitment call to the Levant, but he becomes an inadvertent prophet himself.<sup>187</sup>

Again the storytelling devices and tropes of the epic make their way into a medieval history so that it can better edify and instruct the population. Again words are put in the mouths of historical figures for the ends of the author, and historical people are reinvented as new icons for a new purpose that most neatly fits their function as characters in a story. Figures such as Godfrey of Bouillon became medieval icons. He was known as a rare example of chivalric purity, idolised even by figures in stories, for he was a great fiction himself. As Christopher Tyerman says, '[e]verywhere the image of Godfrey de Bouillon hovered over the imagination of the later Middle Ages, in drama, song, tapestry

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<sup>182</sup> Guibert of Nogent, p. 93.

<sup>183</sup> Guibert of Nogent, p. 150.

<sup>184</sup> Guibert of Nogent, p. 151.

<sup>185</sup> Guibert of Nogent, p. 98.

<sup>186</sup> Guibert of Nogent, p. 106.

<sup>187</sup> Guibert of Nogent, pp. 138-39.

and literature.<sup>188</sup> The process began here, as early historians of the crusades adapted and reinvented the historical figure to fit the mould of a hero from narrative epic.

### *Guibert's legacy*

While Guibert claims he is writing the truth, and goes to lengths to validate his historical sources and defend his position as a legitimate historian, he is also clear that he is rewriting and improving not just the style of history, but its essence. Taking agency away from knights in favour of the Church and God and allowing himself to celebrate only the dead may have contributed to the unpopularity of Guibert's work, but with Robert and Guibert we see two churchmen reinterpreting events during a period when there was a flurry of similar activity. Robert did it in a way that was to prove enduringly popular and to even be used as inspirational reading for later crusades, but Guibert's work gives us an insight into how churchmen might have thought about the crusades, and how far their reinterpetive emphases might have shifted, if they gave free rein to their opinions. The subtle ecclesiastic ideas in Robert are made explicit in Guibert. A decade had not even passed before the Crusade had been mixed with the language of popular epics and Church reinterpretation, and medieval icons such as Godfrey of Bouillon, presented as one of the nine chivalric worthies, were to be the direct result.

What prevented Guibert's work from being as influential as Robert's was perhaps the lack of agency he gave to the crusaders. Everything happens in his work because of the power of God. The image of the crusader that would endure, as we will see, was that of a fighting man imbued with his own moral compass, a man who hardly needed even priests. He had a direct relationship with God, in the sense that he had God's approval and acted in God's best interests, but it was the knight himself who was to be the powerful determining agent of moral righteousness. Guibert's failed attempt is useful for us because it casts into a starker light the ideal crusaders the people of the Middle Ages, and people since, have preferred. Guibert's interpretation may have been accurate according to

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<sup>188</sup> Tyerman, *The Invention of the Crusades*, p. 94.

certain interpretations of medieval Catholicism, and according to what some crusaders themselves thought as they begged God outside the walls of Antioch to allow them to succeed, but the protagonist we remember from the ‘story’ of the crusades was to be a different one, a fighting man who implicitly had God’s approval and was a law unto himself. This is the image which was to become so dangerously a part of the subconscious of the West. The work of Guibert and Robert is similar in many ways, and both reveal many things about medieval history’s reliance on didacticism and intertextuality, but the key difference was that Guibert gave credit to God and did not make true heroes of violent men, and this may have doomed him to obscurity.

The histories show us the kinds of narrative that helped structure medieval European thought and identity. Various features of storytelling helped medieval people understand the First Crusade and its participants, and they also helped to reinforce the spiritual and cultural identity of the West in opposition to its neighbours.

### **Use of medieval histories and narratives in ‘Kyrie Eleison’**

The histories influenced the depiction of the crusaders in the creative trilogy ‘Kyrie Eleison’ in many ways. Guibert’s observation of how people recognise saints through visual iconography comes through in a scene with the peasant Paul near the end of the final book when, in Jerusalem, he uses carved depictions of saints to teach:

‘This is Saint Remigius. You can see because he has the dove, the book and the lamp...This is Saint Boniface. You can see because his sword is stuck through a book...This is Saint Julia. You can see because she has the palm and the crucifix...They torture her by the hair and they cut off her hair. The handmaiden of Christ is flogged. If Christ wears the crown of thorns and is flogged for me, why should I not have my hair diminished and be flogged for him? She is put on a cross. Her master is asleep and cannot save her. Her soul takes flight. A dove comes from her mouth. Her day is May twenty-second.’

All these figures have relevance to the story: Remigius made the Franks Christian; Boniface is killed after bringing people together because of the importance of a book; Julia, with doves from her mouth and who kept her purity

even in the face of a noble marriage, has many parallels to the trilogy's Esther character.

The Koran makes its influence felt on the periphery of the creative piece, as in Guibert. Two passages from the Koran influence 'Kyrie Eleison'. There is a loose reference to Sura XVI 'The Bee':

And thy Lord revealed unto the bees, saying:  
 'Take unto yourselves,  
 of the mountains, houses,  
 and of the trees, and of what they are building.  
 Then eat all manner of fruit and follow  
 the ways of your Lord  
 easy to go upon.'  
 Then comes there forth out of their bellies a drink  
 of diverse hues wherein  
 is healing for men.

Surely in that is a sign for a people who reflect.<sup>189</sup>

And in Esther's tale, 'The Story of the Innocent Brother', the character Guibert (named after the historian, when many of her story-within-the-story brothers intentionally have names that better suit modern neomedieval storybook characters than medieval people, suggesting the gradual distortion of the Middle Ages through literature):

...thought of the bee with its stinger and coloured livery, so much like a knight, serving and protecting its superior in the hive. It made its home in trees, on hills, and on houses, constructing a fortress. The bees ate from the soft parts of flowers and crawled across the sweetest fruits, tasting, always fascinated, and from that they somehow made honey. Honey healed men, it was golden, with many other colours reflected in its shifting surface, and it was the sweetest thing Guibert knew. Children everywhere craved it and men spent large sums on it. And it was all so mysterious, what the bees did in their hive and how they did their work, which was known only to them. They made a bounty that was perfectly suitable to men, even as men cast themselves from paradise. What greater miracle, what greater proof of God, did anyone need, Guibert thought, than honey and the bee? The spontaneous idea moved him deeply.

Before that, when the knight is sick, he reflects:

The bee toils in humiliation. Christ humiliated on the cross. For them all. Humiliated by man. Out of love he allows himself to be humiliated.

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<sup>189</sup> Sura XVI:70, *The Koran: Interpreted*, pp. 265-66.

The bee works as God asked and does not fear humiliation, just like Christ. It is not prideful. Its honey is useful for humanity, and it is perhaps an example for humankind and is cited as proof of God's plan. God is all around us, so do we need to find Him in Jerusalem?

Similar ideas coalesce in the other Koran quotation, which is used twice, from Sura XXXIII 'The Confederates':

We offered the trust to the heavens and the earth  
and the mountains, but they refused to carry it  
and were afraid of it; and man carried it. Surely  
he is sinful, very foolish.<sup>190</sup>

The first time it is seen is after the Battle of Dorylaeum. In a personal interview I had with Dr Scott Redford, Director of the Research Center for Anatolian Civilizations, Istanbul, he elaborated on the idea that elements of Western medieval heraldry could have been inspired by encounters with Seljuk Turks during the First Crusade. Part of this influence can potentially be seen in the heraldic motto, because Muslim rulers, who used flags with animal imagery, would sign documents with an appropriate Koran quotation rather than with their names. So, in 'Kyrie Eleison', after the Battle of Dorylaeum, when the crusaders are raiding Turkish leader Kilij Arslan's camp, they find such a document and the following scene takes place:

'Yes, it is a ... a sign they have left to indicate who they are.'

'And what does it say?'

'It says ... We offered trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, but they refused to carry it and were afraid of it; and man carried it. Surely he is sinful, very foolish.'

'All of that, that is his sign?'

'Yes, it is one of their sayings, I think.'

'All of that, that is his name, the name of this baron?'

'No, not his name, but it is how he makes his mark.'

Later, near the end of the book, at the siege of Jerusalem, crusader princes debate religion with a captured Saracen, a 'real' episode recounted by First Crusade primary source historians such as Albert of Aachen.<sup>191</sup>

<sup>190</sup> Sura XXXIII:70, *The Koran: Interpreted*, p. 435.

<sup>191</sup> *Albert of Aachen Historia Ierosolimitana History of the Journey to Jerusalem*, trans. Susan B. Edgington (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 411.

‘In his religion, the animals and the trees and the mountains were offered free will, and they said no, they did not want the responsibility. Animals are one with God, all day they praise God, and they are in complete surrender to God and His will. Only mankind took the choice. Only mankind accepted free will, and God gave them His trust,’ people repeated around the camp.

When the pilgrims offered the erudite captured Muslim very valid reasons to throw off his old faith and convert to Christianity, he countered with compelling arguments of his own.

One day they brought him out before the Tower of David and beheaded him in full sight of the walls.

This links back to the running theme of animals representing an encounter with God and the unknowable: a boar that wounds the knight and changes his life at the beginning; the birth of puppies gives the knight the most sure sign of faith; the knight’s cousin’s horse watches silently over him while he dies outside the walls of Jerusalem.

The horse stood above him, a great shadow and a shape. It touched his face as if trying to rouse him. The knight was too hurt to be afraid of anything that was not his wound and was not oncoming death. He felt the lips on his cheek, just barely, on the edge of his consciousness. The knight’s bloody hand lay near his belt pouch, inside of which were those few hairs. The horse stood by until the knight’s chest stopped moving. It touched his cheek with its lips again. It sent him on his way.

Human beings are far from God and deaf to His words, and so must make blundering choices of their own as they attempt to interpret reinterpret God’s will.

The Turks are never much represented in ‘Kyrie Eleison’, and they only get substantial speaking parts in Esther’s stories-within-the-story, in which they live up to the crusaders’ ideas of Turks as ‘Others’ and as opposites. Pilgrims say that Turks are heretics because of the heat of their native countries, as does Guibert, and speak of the Caliph as being ‘their pope’. This maintains the Orientalist natures of the medieval histories. Esther’s stories also challenge this Orientalism in ‘The Story of the Serjeant’, in which a man cannot see Muslims and pagans as anything but zeroes, or blanks, because they do not follow his faith, and this leads him to underestimate his enemies and be tricked and killed. Marc, in ‘The Story of the Guilty Brother’, imagines that the Muslims live in a world where all sin is possible and no-one is judged. He thinks he can escape his sense of guilt by going to Muslim Egypt. He sees a Turkish man and woman flirting,

being very recognisably human, and he realises that no such profligate world without limits exists.

Those two people he could barely hear and couldn't understand were so human. Something in their actions rushed Babylon from his mind. It was a real place. It was actual. People lived and loved and suffered there...the empty deserts, the places where sin could never be forgiven, they did not exist, at least not to Marc. He'd lost them in the games of the two lovers.

The world in 'Kyrie Eleison' is Western crusader-centric, as was their understanding of it in the histories, though hints of other ways of thinking peek through if one knows what to look for. 'Kyrie Eleison' is an analysis of Western perspectives for Westerners, a mirror to show Western values influenced by this kind of literature.

The histories suggest that popular epics informed medieval thinking almost as much as the Bible, and so *The Song of Roland* is important in 'Kyrie Eleison'. The brothers in Esther's story claim to be fans of Roland, and they hear a version with magical characters and giants while in Caen, showing that it was always a story influenced by fantastic ideas of the monstrous. Roland was in flux, and we now have the version most clearly influenced by the crusades.

They heard of the battle which had been Roland's noble undoing.

'I've always loved this, Diggory,' Guibert said delightedly.

'Me too,' he said, and the three brothers smiled together.

...

'Magic! There was no magic in it before!' exclaimed Henry later.

There was a giant too. The story had been altered and reflected the ideas that had been preached about their pilgrimage east. In the story the men of the church had a more prominent role, explaining the importance of fighting the Saracen. As always, the entertainers must have taken their cue from popular feeling. Songs about Roland, they heard, had been sung to their grandfather before crossing the *Oceanus Britannicus* with the Conqueror. As children they had imagined they were stabbing giants and wicked Saracens at various times. Guibert had pictured himself spinning his sword through three foes and cutting a man and his horse in pieces with one blow.

The knight and his cousin played Roland as children. The knight was Charlemagne and his cousin was Roland, but, when a preferred playmate arrived, the cousin was relegated to the place of Oliver. To emphasise his ousting, the knight held the cousin down while he threw his cousin's Roland horn to the dogs. During the second siege of Antioch, the knight and his cousin fight desperately with a small band of others atop the mountain to stop Turks from pouring through

the only gap in the defences and into the city, just as Roland and his few companions supposedly fought in a pass and protected Charlemagne's forces heading to France from the Muslims. The cousin dies off the page and the knight reflects on their boyish games. The implication is that the cousin was trying to prove, consciously or not, that he deserved the Roland role, and, like Roland, he died. Narrative influenced his personal identity and world view, to his death.

I was always Charlemagne and he was always Roland, whenever we played. He even got ... he got a horn, a real big one made from the horn of a great big bull. He called it Oliphant. Said he was Roland with Oliphant. But then this other boy was playing with us. Riding with us, around the edge of my father's land. He said he wanted to be Roland.

To capture further ideas of biblical suffering and redemption suggested by the histories, I looked forward a few centuries to the morality play *Everyman* (placed after 1485). As Bartlett notes, religious plays held at Easter depicting the three Marys coming to Christ's tomb and finding it empty due to the resurrection 'had taken place in English churches since Anglo-Saxon times'.<sup>192</sup> An early Miracle Play 'of St Katherine' was performed during the time of Henry I, who was an adult during the First Crusade and took the throne just after it, in 1100, and the text of a twelfth-century *Play of Adam* survives, showing great attention to set design and stage direction.<sup>193</sup> Dramatised religion and staged accounts of the fall of man and the resurrection of the perfect sinless saviour are things with which it is likely the crusaders were familiar. The Bible fed new narratives that might have helped to cement biblical worldviews.

As a morality play, *Everyman* differs from these earlier miracle plays. Morality plays are a particular feature of the later Middle Ages. However, *Everyman* is exemplary of an allegorical mode of thought that was natural for people throughout Medieval Europe. It provides a good example of how such habits of thinking would eventually be expressed artistically. *Everyman* therefore seemed appropriate to use as an inspiration for depicting a medieval worldview influenced by Catholicism.

As Esther's fictional group of brothers die one by one, it is as if various excuses for going on crusade are being stripped away. One goes for guilt, one goes for adventure, one goes for faith, and so on. But there are also parallels with

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<sup>192</sup> Bartlett, p. 531.

<sup>193</sup> Bartlett, pp. 531-32.

*Everyman*. In *Everyman*, the eponymous character (note the generic naming of the knight and the aristocrat in my story) is gradually abandoned by Strength, Beauty, Fellowship, Material Goods and other such allegorical figures as he meets Death, and only Good Deeds will speak for him and go with him beyond the grave. Esther's cycle of stories links with this idea, as each brother who dies, one-by-one, is personified by a trait, 'The Amorous Brother,' 'The Bold Brother,' and so on. Esther starts as a gossip (or historian) before she becomes a storyteller, and much of the gossip she repeats is from the life of the knight. We know her stories are partly built of incidents from his life. The fictional death of each brother points to a part of the knight dying, like *Everyman*.

His cousin dies, just as Cousin in *Everyman* abandons the hero.

*Cousin*. Cousin *Everyman*, farewell now,  
 For verily I will not go with you;  
 Also of mine own an unready reckoning  
 I have to account: therefore I make tarrying.  
 Now, God keep thee, for now I go.<sup>194</sup>

The knight loses his squire and his horse, which for him represent Strength. He is ravaged by illness and starvation and so loses his Beauty. He loses his sword, shield and *maille coif*, thus parting with his Worldly Goods. Discretion is abandoned as illness forces him to behave like an animal, voiding his bowels and vomiting, drinking foul water from a filthy skin, and constant contact with others mean that those around him all see his foibles. As he lies dying the Five Senses fail him, and even Knowledge begins to fade. He feels that his Good Deeds are not enough. He has made his Confession but his Good Deeds remain unknown, and according to an on-the-fly interpretation of crusader theology, he has not reached the Sepulchre and succeeded in his penance. The only Knowledge he has at the end is of his own perceived failure. He has no-one to accompany him to death except the horse, a mute animal, a silent witness. 'Death' rides a horse in the Book of Revelation.

*Death*. On thee thou must take a long journey:  
 Therefore thy book of count with thee thou bring;  
 ...  
 For before God thou shalt answer, and show

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<sup>194</sup> *Everyman and Other Miracle and Morality Plays*, ed. by Candace Ward (New York: Dover Publications, 1995), p. 46.

Thy many bad deeds and good but a few

...

*Everyman*. Full unready I am such reckoning to give.

I know thee not: what messenger art thou?<sup>195</sup>

The knight is an existential *Everyman*.

Place names and descriptions from various First Crusade accounts are also peppered liberally through ‘Kyrie Eleison’. The Bosphorus is ‘The Arm of St George’ (Fulcher of Chartres), Anatolia is ‘Romania’ (Fulcher of Chartres), Germans are ‘Teutons’ (Albert of Aachen), local heretical (from the crusader point of view) Christians are ‘Paulicians’ (*Gesta Francorum*), Turks and Egyptians are ‘Saracens and men of Babylon’ or ‘Hagarites’ or ‘Ishmaelites’ or ‘pagans’ (*Gesta Francorum*, Raymond of Aguilers, Anna Komnene). Byzantines are ‘Greeks’ (Guibert of Nogent). Jerusalem is sometimes referred to as ‘she’ (Robert the Monk), though this occurs in the Prophetic books of the Bible such as Isaiah as well (see for example Isaiah 62). Crusaders are ‘pilgrims’ and ‘soldiers of God’, etc. As in Anna Komnene’s *Alexiad*, Eastern Romans in the story call crusaders variously ‘kelts’ and ‘barbaroi’. The First Crusade accounts are one of the basic touchstones for the language of ‘Kyrie Eleison’, to give it a distancing and otherworldly effect. ‘Kyrie Eleison’ itself, or ‘God have mercy’, refers to the only part of the liturgy that is the same in both Latin and Greek rites as the Latin crusaders have this key encounter with Eastern Christianity and find that the brotherhood of the Church is not so universal.

Even the absence of a name sometimes has a particular parallel in the crusader writing. The knight encounters the anonymous author of the *Gesta Francorum*, who is said to have written part of his account by the siege of Antioch and to perhaps have been writing along the way. Drunk at the later siege of Arqa the knight steps on a man’s hand:

The knight himself had his turn for stumbling drunkenly through the camp later, lost between fires, looking for his spot. He was interrupted with a shout.

‘Hey, watch out! You stepped on my hand! I need that to write with! I’ve been writing a history of us here. It’s about the deeds of the Franks. Well, you certainly won’t be in it now. It doesn’t matter, you can’t have done anything important anyway, because I’ve never heard your name before.’

‘So?’ mumbled the knight. ‘I don’t know who you are, either.’

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<sup>195</sup> *Everyman and Other Miracle and Morality Plays*, p. 39.

He took a few halting steps away and urinated by the complaining man's campsite. This is a double joke on the anonymity of the *Gesta Francorum's* scribe and the knight not being named. Another anonymous character, the aristocrat, borrows a term of affection used in a real crusader letter from Stephen of Blois to Adela when he sends his wife a letter that begins: to my 'sweetest and most amiable wife'.<sup>196</sup>

Conflicting information in the various accounts is sometimes dealt with by the characters in the story not being sure of what is really happening. Peter the Hermit's meeting with the enemy general Kerbogha during the second siege of Antioch is one example. Some accounts suggest that Peter was offering a challenge, while others suggest surrender. It is left for the reader to decide which account they find most convincing.<sup>197</sup>

Many historical details come from the medieval accounts, but some individual scenes are mimicked: for example, there is Tancred's ascent on the Mount of Olives when first reaching Jerusalem, to see over Jerusalem's walls and gaze at the Dome of the Rock:

He fixed his gaze on the city from the Mount of Olives with only the valley of Josaphat dividing them. He watched the scurrying people, the fortified towers, the roused garrison, the men rushing to arms, the women to tears, the priests turned to their prayers, the streets ringing with cries, crashing, clanging and neighing. He was amazed by the bronze dome of the temples of the Lord, at the unusual length of Solomon's temple, and at the circle of the spacious arcade, as if it were another city within the city. He turned his eyes frequently toward Calvary and the church of the Lord's Sepulcher. Although what he was seeing was far off in the distance, he was high up and these places were visible from this height.<sup>198</sup>

And in 'Kyrie Eleison', this famous account is repeated when the knight does the same:

The higher they got the more they could see behind the walls. Scurrying men moved about, and the roused garrison marched in squares, and men were rushing to arms. Soldiers stood behind the parapets. Priests in the city would be praying. Women would be weeping. They could sometimes even hear a neighing horse or a clanging signal in the

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<sup>196</sup> From 'Stephen, Count of Blois and Chartres, to His Wife, Adela, Antioch, 29 March 1098', in *Chronicles of the First Crusade*, ed. by Christopher Tyerman (London: Penguin Books, 2012), pp. 183-85 (p. 183).

<sup>197</sup> For a discussion of the differing accounts of the purpose of Peter the Hermit's mission to Kerbogha, see Asbridge, pp. 229-32.

<sup>198</sup> *The Gesta Tancredi of Ralph of Caen: A History of the Normans on the First Crusade* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2010), pp. 129-30.

still air. All inside would be watching, expecting an attack from all the pious pilgrims mounting the hill. Those people all lived in the Holy City. The knight could see the streets and buildings those walls hid, the places he himself wanted to tread, the living heart of Jerusalem they hoped to capture.

Great structures began to appear when they turned to look behind them. There was the Temple of Solomon, with its great shining cupola atop porcelain covered columns and arches, all mounted on a great octagon of a building. The area around it was a city within a city. There the Saracens venerated their God. There the Jews claimed the Divine Presence had come to rest. It was there where Abraham bound Isaac, offering up his only son in sacrifice to God.

Such a view as one ascends the Mount of Olives offers a similar experience for a person visiting Jerusalem today. Personal experience can supplement the crusader account.

In the histories are scenes which it seems would have been impossible for a pilgrim to have witnessed, such as what Muslims said and did during the massacre of the initial People's Crusade. These occur in Esther stories, thus allowing their unlikeliness to be downplayed and their didactic qualities to be given full rein, because they appear within an environment that is very clearly signposted as being fictional. One might well ask, 'how did Esther know?' She also uses her fiction to speak about the unspeakable: for example, in 'The Story of the Innocent Brother' she addresses the 'First Holocaust', when crusaders extorted and murdered Jews in the Holy Roman Empire while on the way to the Holy Land. The Church at the time disapproved. It is as if Esther is reminding the crusaders of their guilt, just at the moment when the expedition is beginning to flounder and suffer at Antioch and some begin to wonder why God is punishing them.

A key feature of 'Kyrie Eleison', particularly towards the end, is that the pilgrims are trying to interpret things as they go along. Very few ever heard the Pope's original words or promises. Success and failure could both have a spiritual dimension at various times, suggesting reward or censure. No act can ever be enough to truly redeem oneself from sin, as forgiveness comes from God's grace. How can they truly make themselves worthy before God? When are people martyrs? What kind of violence is right in the eyes of God? A certain interpretation of this process leads the knight to believe he is still full of sin and not worthy of his redemption as he dies outside the walls of Jerusalem. All these

things would be sorted out by the history writers and ecclesiastical interpreters over the next few decades, but for the participants on the ground, they did not always have the luxury of such certainty. Their pre-interpreted world also becomes one of existential terror, and uncertainty over vital details of interpretation to do with spiritual matters is a major theme throughout ‘Kyrie Eleison’.

In all these ways I try to represent the crusaders as having world views and identities that are informed by narrative, and by some narratives that were being shaped as they travelled. Many of these narratives were the same as those that would help to shape the first the histories written about the crusaders—the intertextuality of the latter informs the intertextuality of ‘Kyrie Eleison’. In the creative piece the characters create themselves and the First Crusade through story—‘Kyrie Eleison’ is a story about the importance, the power, and the dangers of storytelling.

The fictional crusader did not stop developing once the early historians had told their stories of him. The fictional crusader had a long way to go, and many more stories to tell, before he started whispering in our ears. He was just getting started.

## Part II: How representations of the crusader have been adapted and reinvented in fiction at key moments throughout the ages

*'The invention of the crusades began in 1095: it has not ended yet.'*

Christopher Tyerman, *The Invention of the Crusades*<sup>199</sup>

### Crusader Knight to Chivalric Superman: Troubadour Poetry and Arthurian Romance

I will attempt to define the First Crusade pilgrim as he has come down to us both from the medieval histories, and from what we can glean of his motivations from modern histories.

#### *The Crusader Knight of the Medieval Histories*

<i>Character Trait</i>	<i>Central Idea</i>
He is willing to die for the greater good, for his brothers and indeed for the sake of the entire Christian world and those back home. To die is preferable to breaching the oaths he has made, for to die while upholding his oaths means he will be granted immediate access to heaven.	Christian martyrs.
He has a moral code, based on public oaths, which comes from on high and transcends all else, and it is enacted on the world through individual violence. It takes precedence over local laws and calls men from many nations.	Church approved Just War.
He wears a symbol representing his special status, his willingness to suffer, and his oaths.	The cross on the chest, the shoulder, or (for a returning crusader) the back.
He acts also for personal spiritual reasons, often related to guilt, and is happy to suffer for this publicly and to be seen to be doing public acts of violence or self-abnegation to overcome his shame.	Penance in the form the physical hardship and danger of the quest to Jerusalem.

<sup>199</sup> Tyerman, *The Invention of the Crusades*, p. 126.

His true self is realised only through an act of narrative, in which secrets relating to personal identity are laid bare, but the revelation itself must be paid for by suffering before the self can be fully actualised.	Confession and contrition.
His spiritual redemption can only be accomplished by leaving his family and going on a great journey to an object imbued with special spiritual significance, but in essence the object represents a transcendent journey to the centre of the self.	The liberation of the Holy Sepulchre, and its tying in to the medieval ideas of the multiple personal, physical and heavenly natures of Jerusalem.
His enemies are those who oppose God's law, though they fight well, and even admire him, and this proves his righteousness. His enemies exist only in opposition to him, and their purpose is a test from on high.	Muslims, though his true 'enemy' is his own sin.
His motive is of primary importance, and if he lies or strays from purity in his motive, he will be justifiably punished.	The importance of pure intent in contrition. To be forgiven, one must genuinely repent of past sins.
Though a man of family, and for whom name, title, and the production of future sons is often vitally important, he goes through a period of enforced, priest-like celibacy while family is left behind or postponed in favour of his mission. If he does think of a woman, it is the unreachable and unknowable Virgin Mary.	The mimicking of priestly chastity.
He has been made pure, but he must not sin again, though he might be tempted, or his mission will fail because he will be judged unworthy.	The pure state after confession; the priest-like vows that make him temporarily a 'warrior of Christ'.

Each historian might define the crusader differently, but these to me seem some key features of the crusaders, categorised and understood by contemporary historians. These traits became clear as the spiritual relevance of crusader success was argued over and defined.

As we can see from the chroniclers, success at Jerusalem in the First Crusade was assumed to have come from God. During an age where trials by fire and combat were seen as revealing God's will and were judicially valid, capturing

the Holy City on earth revealed whom God favoured to the entire Christian West.<sup>200</sup> And it was not priests who captured Jerusalem. Pope Urban's representative was dead. The victors were lay knights. As Christopher Tyerman notes, 'the crusade justified its soldiers and so became an important part of the self image of the dominating military aristocrats of western Europe.'<sup>201</sup> Matthew Strickland tells us that 'Ecclesiastical attempts to redefine the role of the knighthood in Christian society in the wake first of the Gregorian reform and then of the First Crusade could only help to sharpen knights' consciousness of membership of an *ordo equestris*.'<sup>202</sup> Soon, the bombastic confidence this gave them was visible in burgeoning chivalric fiction and Arthurian romance. Norman Housley writes:

Although there is much that is contested in the history of crusading, one advance that has been made in the course of the last half century would probably be disputed by nobody: that the crusades played a central rather than a peripheral role in the development of medieval Europe.<sup>203</sup>

Crusading influenced the development of medieval European fiction as well. The famous Holy Grail of Arthurian romance is essentially an embodiment of the purity offered by pilgrimage to a relic or a holy site, of which the most sacred was Jerusalem's Holy Sepulchre. Crusading was the great purifying quest. In chivalry, knights were just a small step behind the clergy in righteousness, and perhaps a step ahead if no priests were looking.<sup>204</sup> Validation in the First Crusade created a tough, chivalric superman, the 'knight in shining armour' that endures as an ideal of masculine heroism to this day. Following others, I posit that chivalric knights could not have existed without crusaders.

Before the First Crusade is *The Song of Roland*, a simplistic hack-and-slash epic. Within eighty years of the First Crusade is Chrétien de Troyes. His characters' greatest enemies were often themselves and they struggled with inner desires in much the same way as a crusader doing penance might have had to do.<sup>205</sup> *Lancelot, Knight of the Cart* and *Erec et Enide* are stories of quests of

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<sup>200</sup> On judicial duels and God's will, see Bartlett, pp. 180-83.

<sup>201</sup> Tyerman, pp. 83-84.

<sup>202</sup> Matthew Strickland, *War and Chivalry: The Conduct and Perception of War in England and Normandy, 1066-1217* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 149.

<sup>203</sup> Norman Housley, *Contesting the Crusades* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), p. 144.

<sup>204</sup> As we saw above in de Charny, pp. 90-99.

<sup>205</sup> I am not the first to point out this shift in literary ambitions around either side of that historical bookmark that was the First Crusade. See for example R. W. Southern, *The Making of the Middle*

penance, in which knightly glory can only be restored by punishing one's own faults of character. Inner motive and inner flaws—the psychology of characters—begin to be paramount in literature that grows increasingly more complicated.

Troubadour poetry was another of the fundamental influences on courtly love and the subsequent chivalric romances.<sup>206</sup> 'William the Troubadour', as William IX, Duke of Aquitaine (1071–1126) was known, was one of the leaders of the doomed Crusade of 1101 (the 'second wave' of the First Crusade), which saw, en masse, the thwarted quest to fulfil a spiritual longing by reaching a spiritual objective. William is one of the earliest known troubadours whose poems have survived.<sup>207</sup> After William was nearly killed on crusade (he took 'a swarm of girls' according to Guibert of Nogent or was accompanied by 'the feminine sex' according to Albert of Aachen),<sup>208</sup> making it to Antioch with only his squire, he went to Jerusalem a beaten man, more of a pilgrim than a warrior, 'having witnessed the destruction of his huge army ostensibly doing God's work against the pagans'.<sup>209</sup> He returned home and composed songs with pilgrim protagonists.<sup>210</sup> Gerald A. Bond, interpreting Orderic of Vitalis, suggests William may, in writing of his trials in his journey to Jerusalem, have composed the first crusader songs.<sup>211</sup> According to Gerald A. Bond, 'William of Malmesbury had connected the failure of the Count's Crusade of 1101 with his beginning to compose songs', and his crusade against the Spanish Moors in 1120 was successful after his 'renunciation of singing'.<sup>212</sup> But the crusades were always in the air throughout William's career as politician, poet and lover. 'The crusading spirit and the ascetic and mystical philogyny of [preacher] Robert of Arbrissel

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*Ages* (London: The Cresset Library, 1990), who relates the shifts more widely to St Bernard (that great Second Crusade preacher) and St Anselm.

<sup>206</sup> 'From troubadour love the rest of chivalry takes its cue.' Richard Barber, *The Knight and Chivalry* (London: Sphere Books, 1974), p. 104.

<sup>207</sup> 'Standing alone at the very beginning of the troubadour tradition', Gerald A. Bond in William IX (Duke of Aquitaine), *The Poetry of William VII, Count of Poitiers, IX Duke of Aquitaine* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1982), p. lv.

<sup>208</sup> This suggests that he was a figure who enjoyed earthly loves and lusts as well as spiritual ones, which is to play into troubadour poetry and the later chivalric knight. Bond, in William, Duke of Aquitaine, p. xxxv.

<sup>209</sup> Bond, p. xxxvi.

<sup>210</sup> Bond, p. l.

<sup>211</sup> See the note of Orderic Vitalis included in Bond, p. 121.

<sup>212</sup> Bond, pp. xxxvi-xxxvii.

were the two religious ideas that most directly affected the life and times of Count William.<sup>213</sup>

The influences of the Crusades, in a word, exercised at the time a great influence among the trouveres of the north of France, and the troubadours of the south, forming the subject of these songs, and aspirations of the ears and hearts of their warlike audiences. That these high tales in which the virtues of generosity, bravery, devotion to his mistress and zeal for the Catholic religion, carried to the greatest height of romantic perfection in the character of the hero, united with the scenes passing round them, exercised a salutary effect on the chivalrous hearers, none can doubt.<sup>214</sup>

There are also suggestions that Muslim love poetry—the like of which can be seen throughout *The Arabian Nights*—transmitted from Muslim Spain to southern France, helped shaped the troubadour tradition.<sup>215</sup>

The ‘Code of Courtly Love’ is broadly familiar to most Westerners:

Chivalry and the worship of fair ladies are so intimately bound up as to become almost indistinguishable; the knight who aspires to military glory does not yearn to lead armies in Alexander’s footsteps, does not dream of the gold of power, but longs to shine for his prowess as an individual, that he may earn the silver of his lady’s love...Once her love was won they would be as sure against their opponents spears as any hero of the romances, and from her all spiritual wealth would flow.<sup>216</sup>

The woman was key; the knight longed for her, fought for her, and his prowess was nothing if not recognised and actualised through her, even if love was to be unfulfilled. His quest for the nigh-unreachable lover is much like the spiritual journey to Jerusalem which, as noted earlier, was often a ‘she’. The woman could also be a stand-in for more ethereal spiritual females such the Virgin Mary.

Karen Armstrong sums up the courtly love of the troubadours and the chivalric knight of the romance:

Like the mystic, the knight is engaged on an individual quest that he undertakes alone, not in the massive Crusader armies. Journeying, seeking and suffering, the knight roams all over the world but his journey has no end in this life. He is in search of love and it is far more important to suffer and even die for this love than to possess the beloved and reach an earthly fulfilment. He confidently expects a union of love that always remains in the future tense, a spiritual promise that inspires his quest for an ideal. Instead of being the prelude to a holy war, in the courtly myth, the journey has become a prelude to love.

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<sup>213</sup> Bond, p. xxxix.

<sup>214</sup> Walter Clifford Meller, *A Knight's Life In The Days Of Chivalry* (Whitefish: Kessinger Publishing, 2005), p. 254.

<sup>215</sup> Bond, p. lxvi.

<sup>216</sup> Barber, p. 71.

Instead of leading to an aggressive conquest of a physical land, the new journey of the courtly knight, like the journey of the mystic, has no physical end.<sup>217</sup>

The knight in ‘Kyrie Eleison’ carries on his journey a braid from a longed-for girl. He has never properly known her but he comes to think of her often when he is suffering or afraid. He buries most of the braid in Bethlehem in an attempt to celebrate her and aid her spiritual journey.

The knight thought, should he put Mathilda’s braid somewhere in Jerusalem? Thinking of Jerusalem he pictured pain, and death, and a man on a cross, and wars, and nails. No, that wouldn’t be the right place for her. Wouldn’t it be better here? Wouldn’t she like that more? Here was birth, and loving eyes, and new life, and beginnings, and a baby amongst the animals, and hope being given to the world. This was a better place for her to be.

This idea of the discreet love token (or even love itself) given to the gallant knight takes its cue from troubadour poetry.

If milady wants to grant me her love,  
I am ready to take it and be grateful for it  
And to conceal it and speak sweetly of it  
And to say and do what pleases her  
And to hold dear her reputation  
And to promote her praise.<sup>218</sup>

Courtly love, for all its emphasis on the woman, still celebrates the male knight and implies a selfishness on his part.

This “chivalric love” ...treats women as the pretext of, and vehicle for, the statement of male prowess and social standing...a lady is one of the essential pieces of *bon conres* (good equipment) for a good knight; like a good horse, a good woman is a symbol of virile excellence in both a personal and social sense.<sup>219</sup>

The Saxon peasant woman the Norman knight did have intimate relations with (and whom he essentially exploited for his carnal urges) has no name, not to protect her as a troubadour poet might protect his lady, but because she is little more than knightly equipment he is using to ‘train’ for future ladies. She is described as being ‘the girl who is not a horse’. The knight seduces her by comparing her to a horse and looking for a tail. In one woman (Mathilda) we see the purity of courtly love, and in the other (the peasant girl) the celebration of

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<sup>217</sup> Armstrong, p. 224.

<sup>218</sup> Song 9 in *The Poetry of William VII, Count of Poitiers, IX Duke of Aquitaine*, p. 35.

<sup>219</sup> Bond, pp. lviii-lix.

male virility, and a woman as an 'object' that enhances male prowess. These are the two sides of troubadour and chivalric love: the idealisation of women and the dismissing of them as objects to further male causes.

'Have you seen a horse?' asked the knight. He was in one of those light and surprisingly good moods that descends at rare moments and brings out the qualities a man likes in himself.

The girl understood him because she shook her head. The knight had been only sixteen.

'Are you my horse?' he asked on a whim, smiling.

She laughed and shook her head.

'Are you sure? Are you sure you're not my horse?' he said, walking up to her, still wearing all his riding gear, smelling of animal, bruised and with a scratched and dirty face from his fall. Perhaps it was the accident, and emerging unscathed, and the danger of losing such an expensive beast but the thrill of seeking it that had him in such a jolly mood.

'I'm sure,' she said, in the adequate colloquial language of the knight, covering her lower face with her hand which held her apron.

'Don't have ears? A mane? Four legs?'

'No sir.'

The knight grinned. He looked her over, pretending to check for horse ears.

'Sure that's not a mane?'

'It's not a mane.'

'Looks like a mane.'

'It's just my hair.'

'Don't have a tail?'

She shook her head earnestly and then suddenly laughed.

'Have you checked?'

'No,' she said, and then she actually looked back over her shoulder, just to show him she had checked, and she smiled.

'When you go home, you should check yourself for a tail again, just to make sure.'

'All right,' she said, giggling.

The knight does not properly know either of the women, but with Mathilda at least he begins to assume she has some independent soul by the end, and gives up her braid so that a part of her fetishised body may be in a holy place. In the difference between his view of these two women we see the difference between the pre-Crusade Aude of *Roland*, who promptly dies of grief the instant Roland's death is announced, and the cunning temptresses of some of William the

Troubadour's bawdier poems, who, though still represented as male fantasies, at least have desires and lives of their own.

See now, Aude came to him, a beautiful girl.  
 She said to the king: 'Where is Roland the captain,  
 Who swore to take me as his bride?'  
 Charles is overcome with grief and distress;  
 He weeps and tugs at his white beard:  
 'Sister, dear friend, you ask me about a dead man.  
 ...  
 Aude replies: 'These are terrible words.  
 May it not please God or his saints or his angels,  
 That I live on after Roland's death!'  
 Drained of colour she falls at Charlemagne's feet.  
 She died at once, may God have mercy on her soul!  
 The Frankish barons weep for her and mourn her.<sup>220</sup>

One can only imagine this is supposed to increase the tragedy of Roland's death, or to imply some sort of mass infertility in the land that the death brings. Perhaps it explains the return to the Dark Ages that occurred after the death of Charlemagne, who here is already an old man. Aude simply exists to react and her identity is linked entirely to her husband-to-be.

In William the Troubadour's *Song 5*:  
 In Auvergne, beyond Limousin,  
 I went along all alone, in pilgrim's guise;  
 I came across Lord Warren's wife  
 And Lord Bernard's;  
 They greeted me openly  
 In the name of St. Leonard.  
 ...  
 Lady Agnes said to this Lady Hermessen:  
 "We have found what we are looking for;  
 Sister, for the love of God let us give him lodging,  
 For he is indeed mute  
 And our secret will never be  
 Known through him."<sup>221</sup>

The women invite the poet to a prolonged sexual encounter (in which they play the dominating roles) while their husbands are away. The link of these women to

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<sup>220</sup> Burgess, p. 147.

<sup>221</sup> Song 5 in *The Poetry of William VII, Count of Poitiers, IX Duke of Aquitaine*, pp. 19-23.

their husbands is oppressive to the expression of their identities, not key to it. They exist beyond their husbands, and continue to exist, one presumes, perfectly happily after the poet and the ‘hero’ of the bawdy song has left. Is it too much to suggest that in such post-crusade sex romps, narrative is complicating and more attention is being paid to internal motivation? Are these female characters closer to being three-dimensional? The knight begins by treating both key women as Aude-like figures, there to enable him, but ends by recognising independent humanity and three-dimensionality in Mathilda, who ironically is the woman he knows less.<sup>222</sup> For a character who has perceived women as being much like Aude in *Roland*, a step towards seeing them as being reminiscent of the female figures in troubadour poetry, as independent women who are sometimes unreachable and who have wants of their own, is a step forward.

Women were, to an extent, powerful and unreachable in actuality during crusades. Large-scale campaigns were occurring at a great distance from the home. Women were left in charge of estates and laws had to be enacted to protect their rights.<sup>223</sup> A notable absence of powerful men left some women as important powerbrokers. Women had to be impressed, flattered and grovelled to just as male nobles had to be, and meanwhile their husbands fretted over affairs from a distance, worried about infidelities that could bring their worlds crashing down. Perhaps crusaders even longed for lost love during times of extreme stress. Letters were sent back and forth and the image of the crusading husband departing sadly from home, not to return for years and with longing implicit, began to be recorded.<sup>224</sup> The ideal, distant woman might have been the Virgin Mary, but some

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<sup>222</sup> The fact that he is a Norman born to a powerful landowner and the lower class woman he is actually intimate with is a Saxon peasant of course adds another dimension to his exploitation of her, and one which might have suited Walter Scott’s tastes.

<sup>223</sup> Jonathan Riley-Smith, *The First Crusaders 1095–1131* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 138.

<sup>224</sup> Take for example an ‘early twelfth century sculpture of a man and his wife, which once stood in the cloister priory of Belval in Lorraine...the cross sewn on the front of his cloak shows him to have been a crusader, dressed as all crusaders would have been for most of the time, as a pilgrim. The woman, in a gesture of great tenderness, even anguish, has her arms around him and her face pressed close to his. The crusader stands quite still, staring forwards and a little upwards. Is he leaving, with his eyes already fixed on a first sight of Jerusalem, or has he just come back, his mind still filled with the horrors he has witnessed? Is his wife determined not to let him go or is she passionately welcoming him home? Whatever scene the figures were supposed to be depicting, it was popular: a similar one, carved in oak by the master of Salzburg and depicting Louis IX of France...dates from a century and a half later. It recalls one of the most clear and straightforward messages of the sources for crusading: that women were inhibitors.’ Riley-Smith, *The First Crusaders 1095–1131*, pp. 99-100. This image is on the cover of the 2002 edition, and though artistic conventions might require a cross on the front under any circumstances, I would

crusading knights would have recognised such literary figures from their own lives.

A knight keeping the beloved's hair as a token, almost a saintly relic, is a common motif, and Lancelot obsesses over some of Guinevere's hair he finds in a comb in the romance *The Knight of the Cart*, to name just one tale of many:

Never will the eye of man see anything receive such honour as when he begins to adore these tresses. A hundred thousand times he raises them to his eyes and mouth, to his forehead and face: he manifests his joy in every way, considering himself rich and happy now. He lays them in his bosom near his heart, between the shirt and the flesh. He would not exchange them for a cartload of emeralds and carbuncles, nor does he think that any sore or illness can afflict him now; he holds in contempt essence of pearl, treacle, and the cure for pleurisy; even for St. Martin and St. James he has no need; for he has such confidence in this hair that he requires no other aid.<sup>225</sup>

The image of a knight with a lady's hair was taken even further in the real world by a cross-dressing German obsessed with romances, the Bavarian knight Ulrich von Lichtenstein

For the *Venusfahrt* [1227]...equipped himself for the role of Frau Venus with a magnificent costume (and a brace of long blond plaits); attired in it, he made his way from Italy to Bohemia, offering a general challenge to all comers to joust with him in honour of his lady. To each comer who broke three lances with him he promised to present a gold ring: but if the challenger was defeated, he was to bow to the four corners of the earth in honour of Ulrich's lady...His fantasies were more exaggerated than most, but they reflect something of the genuine spirit and tastes of his age and class.<sup>226</sup>

The chivalric hero crystallises in the romances, and the earliest surviving Arthurian Romances we have are by Chrétien de Troyes. Here we see, represented in art, all the traits that are to define masculine heroism up until the present day. Interestingly, the chivalric romances were not about figures contemporary to Chrétien and his audience. Rather, they were about figures from an idealised and imaginary past, a 'golden age'. They were fictional narratives of an imaginary history, influencing the self-identities of their day.

...the three most important sources of the new romantic epic were English romancing about the past, the Celtic genius, and the amatory doctrines of the Angevin courts of

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note that the cross was supposed to be worn on the back between the shoulder blades upon return, and so to me the sculpture suggests a departing crusader. The theme of women as inhibitors is an interesting one as we turn to *Erec et Enide*.

<sup>225</sup> Chrétien de Troyes, *Four Arthurian Romances*, ed. by William Wistar Comfort (Amazon.com: Amazon Digital Services, 2012), Amazon Kindle e-book, location 5600-04.

<sup>226</sup> Keen, pp. 92-93.

love...English chroniclers had for some time been turning their attention to the kings of remote antiquity; in doing so they laid the foundations of a particular fantasy which had a distinct ideological bearing.<sup>227</sup>

The chronicler Geoffrey of Monmouth (d. 1154) popularised King Arthur in the 1130s with his *Historia regum Britannie*, but it ‘is certain that stories about Arthur were being told in the Celtic-speaking regions in the early twelfth century’.<sup>228</sup> The Norman poet Wace composed the *Romance of Brutus* in 1155, ‘dealing with the legendary history of Britain from the time of Brutus, its founder’ and Wace ‘is the first to mention the Round Table.’<sup>229</sup> William of Malmesbury (d. c. 1143) was another early chronicler to mention Arthur in the *De Gestis Regum Anglorum* and: ‘William of Malmesbury indicated that, to his mind, one important use of history was to instil nationalistic fervour in the common man by showing him examples of brave national heroes from the past’.<sup>230</sup> Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table were a medieval sensation, at least among those who consumed their stories:

Medieval romance was a literature of the people, but it was not a literature of the common people. Its place was the court...by “court,” we mean not only those who were actually members of it but also those who wished to think of themselves as members.<sup>231</sup>

It was Chrétien de Troyes, writing in the second half of the twelfth century, who brought us the Holy Grail and Lancelot and, ‘so far as we know, first recounted the romantic adventures of Arthur’s knights, Gawain, Yvain, Erec, Lancelot, and Perceval’.<sup>232</sup> *Erec et Enide*, ‘Chrétien’s earliest ‘story of adventure’, as he himself calls it, was written about 1160’.<sup>233</sup> Chrétien may be the earliest Arthurian romance writer whose work survives, but he was commenting on traditions and characters already understood by his contemporaries, and he may not have been the first to tell these stories in the form of romances:

Some critics would go so far as to maintain that Chretien came toward the close, rather than at the beginning, of a school of French writers of Arthurian romances. But, if so, we

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<sup>227</sup> Friedrich Heer, *The Medieval World: Europe 1100–1350*, trans. Janet Sondheimer (London: Sphere Books, 1974), p. 163.

<sup>228</sup> Bartlett, pp. 249-50.

<sup>229</sup> Bartlett, pp. 250-51.

<sup>230</sup> Lee C. Ramsey, *Chivalric Romances: Popular Literature in Medieval England* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), p. 70.

<sup>231</sup> Ramsey, pp. 7-8.

<sup>232</sup> William Wistar Comfort in the Introduction Chrétien de Troyes, *Four Arthurian Romances* (Amazon.com: Amazon Digital Services, 2012), Amazon Kindle e-book, location 29.

<sup>233</sup> Barber, p. 105.

do not possess these earlier versions, and for lack of rivals Chretien may be hailed as an innovator in the current schools of poetry.<sup>234</sup>

Geraldine Heng argues that the medieval romance was born out of the First Crusade, but as an attempt at healing, which was possible by imagining a golden age of the past where everything was ordered and proper. Heng suggests considerable angst was caused by stories of Christian cannibalism during the First Crusade. Regardless of whether we accept Heng's argument, her dating reinforces the fact that the chivalric romance emerged in the wake of the First Crusade:

I locate the point at which a narrative shaped itself into the pattern we now recognize as medieval romance in Geoffrey of Monmouth's audacious *History of the Kings of Britain* (*Historia Regum Britannie*), created around 1130–39: a moment that also witnesses the first appearance of King Arthur's legend in literary form in the West...Geoffrey's exemplar materializes, I argue, as a form of cultural rescue in the aftermath of the First Crusade, a transnational militant pilgrimage during which Latin Christian crusaders did the unthinkable—committing acts of cannibalism on infidel Turkish cadavers in Syria, in 1098, with the attendant traumas of shock, pollution, and self-denaturing that accompany the violation of horrific taboos—and cultural fantasy was instantiated in order that the indiscussible, what is unthinkable and unsayable by any other means, might surface into discussion.<sup>235</sup>

One could imagine that the motive might not just be healing; fictionalising crusading types and turning them into medieval popular heroes allows every reader or listener to take part in the myth, even if their families had not sent members on that famous quest. The 'dodge' from crusader to chivalric knight does not necessarily weaken the strain of crusader thinking in Europe. It may have helped make the majority of European ruling classes supporters of the crusades and sympathisers with European efforts in the Levant.<sup>236</sup>

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<sup>234</sup> Comfort in Chrétien de Troyes, location 92-94.

<sup>235</sup> Geraldine Heng, *Empire of Magic: Medieval Romance and the Politics of Cultural Fantasy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), p. 3.

<sup>236</sup> Heng convincingly argues that the Arthurian stories in Geoffrey of Monmouth, basis as they were for the chivalric romances, spoke more to contemporary politics and the state of the crusading Levant than they did the past ages of history in which they were set. Arthur battles a cannibalistic, pork-eating giant from a region that can be interpreted to mean inner Syria. The armies of the Romans against which Arthur battles are full of characters named after figures and civilizations contemporary to the First Crusade, and are much more similar to Byzantine (who called themselves Romans) polyglot armies than those of ancient Rome. The Byzantines and crusader states, of course, endured strained relations. Arthur's death allows his kingdom to be invaded by Muslims. The story seems to capture anxieties about the future of the states of Outremer as the afterglow of crusading success begins to fade. Arthur, at his birth as a figure that would inspire whole subgenres of chivalric romance, was more a crusader king than he was a British one. See Heng, pp. 46-51.

From the very inception of the genre, Arthurian romance is imbricated in the history of medieval European empire formation in the Levant: a colonial experiment for which the cultural rescue and popularity of Arthur's deeds offer ideological support.<sup>237</sup>

In chivalric romances, knights are the final authority. They decide when they have done wrong and how they will make up for it, and their most temperamental decisions are treated with gravity by those around them. Priests, preferably hermits outside of the ecclesiastical structure, can give advice, but they are not necessary for the larger part of the story. In *Erec et Enide*, it is King Arthur who plays the most important role in Erec's coronation, not any bishop. King Arthur is a hero as Godfrey of Bouillon was a hero. These romances began to flourish during the golden age of crusading and in the First Crusade's afterglow, before the shock of Jerusalem's loss in 1187 and the subsequent Third Crusade. The 'second wave' Crusade of 1101 and the Second Crusade of 1145 were not successful, but Jerusalem was still in Christian hands and so that most important symbol remained intact in medieval minds.

The stories of these knights were not always distinguishable from reality: A 'two-way traffic' connected these men of war, law, and politics with Arthurian romance no less than *chanson de geste*. Many owned copies of these texts, which seem to have been readily passed from one set of hands to another, often registering considerable wear...Geoffroi de Charny, the leading French knight of the mid-fourteenth century, apparently knew romances like the *Lancelot do Lac* and wrote easily (and disapprovingly) of men who would love Queen Guinevere if they could only boast of it...Romance and other categories became indistinguishable in the minds of those who wrote and those who read. The authors of historical works sense no gap between the actions they describe in chronicle and biography and those in imaginative literature; often they stress the links between the types of writing.<sup>238</sup>

Chivalric romances changed the identities and self-understanding of people from the era, and tournaments in full Arthurian regalia were not uncommon. Knights staged tournaments in full King Arthur gear and 'quested' for young women in forests.<sup>239</sup>

Knights in the real world even tried to defend the honour of their ladies in the same way as the romances.

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<sup>237</sup> Heng, p. 46. Of course, I would argue that to call crusading 'colonial' is fraught and misleading, at least in terms of what we mean when we speak of colonialism today, but that is a discussion for elsewhere.

<sup>238</sup> Kaeuper, p. 31.

<sup>239</sup> Keen, p. 93.

An English knight died outside Douglas Castle in Scotland, trying to live up to such a belief. His enemies found he carried a letter from his lady saying he must hold the castle a year to win her love. Sir Thomas Gray tells the better-known story from this part of the world. A page whose lady-love gave him a helmet with a gilt crest, telling him to make it famous in the most dangerous part of Britain, charged headlong into the besieging Scots outside Norham Castle. After they ‘struck him down, wounded him in the face, and dragged him out of the saddle to the ground’, the garrison, on foot, rescued him as they had pledged to do.<sup>240</sup>

Here is not the piety of crusaders marching barefoot around Jericho, but again we see people taking foolish military risks for the sake of living up to ideals from storytelling. The chivalric knight is the ideal version of the crusader, writ large. He is the crusader knight, fictionalised, and then the fiction was play-acted as reality. Fictional narratives, stemming from idealised history, influenced personal and social identities in the real world.

I have space only to barely touch on key traits of Arthurian romance here, but I will highlight a few recurring tropes that are, in my opinion, vital. In Arthurian romances we see that deeds must be witnessed, usually by women, and that identity is only enabled by action, remaining secret before that. Knights often fight shadow selves to make up for past wrongs. *Erec et Enide*, from circa 1160, is about a knight who wishes to spend more time in bed with his wife than performing deeds of arms.

But Erec loved her with such a tender love that he cared no more for arms, nor did he go to tournaments, nor have any desire to joust; but he spent his time in cherishing his wife. He made of her his mistress and his sweetheart. He devoted all his heart and mind to fondling and kissing her, and sought no delight in other pastime. His friends grieved over this, and often regretted among themselves that he was so deep in love...All the knights said it was a great pity and misfortune that such a valiant man as he was wont to be should no longer wish to bear arms.<sup>241</sup>

Enide is described thus: ‘What shall I say of her beauty? In sooth, she was made to be looked at; for in her one could have seen himself as in a mirror.’<sup>242</sup> When others make fun of his lapse, Enide overhears and tells Erec. To redeem himself he takes her through the wilderness, demanding she remain a silent witness, and performs heroic deeds, including fighting shadow selves and figures who reveal

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<sup>240</sup> Kaeuper, p. 212.

<sup>241</sup> Chrétien de Troyes, location 766-72.

<sup>242</sup> Chrétien de Troyes, location 314-15.

names and identities only after defeat. At the end, having proven himself beyond a doubt, Erec is made king of his homeland by King Arthur. Enide is not named in the text until she marries Erec, as it is marriage that gives the women her identity:

When Erec received his wife, he must needs call her by her right name. For a wife is not espoused unless she is called by her proper name. As yet no one knew her name, but now for the first time it was made known: Enide was her baptismal name.<sup>243</sup>

In *Lancelot, Knight of the Cart*, Lancelot spends most of the poem without an identity. It is only once he is losing a one-on-one battle that his name is revealed, when a maiden calls out to him to make him aware that Queen Guinevere is watching. This gives him the courage to defeat his opponent. Identity, even for the already famous Lancelot, is defined by success or defeat in battle.

Then she came to the Queen and said: "Lady, for God's sake and your own as well as ours, I beseech you to tell me, if you know, the name of yonder knight, to the end that it may be of some help to him." "Damsel," the Queen replies, "you have asked me a question in which I see no hate or evil, but rather good intent; the name of the knight, I know, is Lancelot of the Lake."<sup>244</sup>

The author must go to great lengths and undertake much verbal juggling to keep Lancelot's identity secret, saying 'he who had been on the cart did not say that he would pledge...' rather than give a name. His crime is to refuse to submit immediately to the shame of travelling on a cart when Guinevere demands it. He has a moment of hesitation, and this faltering of inner motive leads to the plot of the entire story as he voluntarily abases himself again and again and fights many foes, shadow selves and Jungian archetypes to earn back his identity in the face of his lapse.

Esther's stories speak to these later adaptations of the crusader. One of her characters foresees the future trend once they are close to Jerusalem:

'None of them back home will know what it's like out here, not really. To them we'll look like Rolands, or Charlemagnes, or ...' said Lambard. 'We'll be just as solid.'

...

Diggory was thoughtful for a moment. 'If we actually succeed, if we reach Jerusalem, if we free the Sepulchre, what will they all say back home?'

'You really haven't thought it through, have you?' asked Lambard, smiling...'If we make it, if we are successful in Jerusalem...They're not going to say priests did

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<sup>243</sup> Chrétien de Troyes, location 672-74.

<sup>244</sup> Chrétien de Troyes, location 6086-89.

it...Knights. They'll be the heroes. They're the ones doing the work. If they succeed they'll know, and the whole world will know, that God approves of them, the fighting men. What authority the fighting man will have! His morals will come from God then, not from priests!...The Pope? He's worried about King Henry. But what a small worry that will be. If we don't all die out here, he's handing authority over to every knight with a sword.'

'Knights are just ... soldiers, on horseback ...'

'They won't be if they take Jerusalem back for God. Every one of them will have the power of God's word.'

Esther's 'Story of the Amorous Brother' tells a tale similar to *Erec et Enide*. Henry has to choose between lying in comfort with a beautiful Byzantine wife and fulfilling his oath to go on crusade. The knight and the aristocrat, in not having names, follow the tradition of the romances. Usually characters receive names once they have done some act to fully activate their identities. This suggests that the knight and the aristocrat never manage that and finish only half-formed, unable to self-actualise and to live up to romance and social ideals.

In Esther's 'Story of the Bold Brother' Lambard is imprisoned in a tower, like Lancelot in *Lancelot, Knight of the Cart*, and subjected to attention with a sexual undertone, as is Lancelot by Guinevere. Instead of refusing to debase himself by entering a cart, he refuses to debase himself by reading a religious text (supposedly Ecclesiastes, but actually a collection of psalms) when his abusive jailer asks it of him, and he is punished by much worse debasements, which remake his self-identity.

Towards the end of this, the longest and most complex story-within-a-story, Lambard competes with a parody of the aristocrat for the attentions of a handmaiden. Uncharacteristically for the romances, the handmaiden is suddenly revealed, through internal monologue, not to want either of them, and to be trapped as an unwilling object of male enablement. Shortly after this the stories-within-stories end, unfinished, to draw attention to the fact that they are crafted fictions. The reader is yanked back into the 'real' trilogy, itself a fiction. Esther would have you question the tales she references and the tale she is herself in. By extension, she would have the reader question all fictions involving knights and crusades.

### **Fictional Objects Made Actual**

While the relationships that link popular literature, history and the representation of real world issues have been a feature of contemporary cultural studies, in the Middle Ages the difference between fiction and fact was not always so clear. Richard the Lionheart himself claimed to have the sword Excalibur, or Caliburn, and he may have believed its authenticity, despite the fact that ‘by the early thirteenth century, to call something ‘a story of Arthur’ meant that you thought it a pack of lies’.<sup>245</sup> Even if he didn’t believe the sword was real, the King of Sicily at the very least appreciated both its propaganda and its monetary value, for he sold Richard an entire fleet of ships in return for Caliburn.<sup>246</sup> Richard’s presence on the island with an army may have influenced the King of Sicily’s decision, but Richard was not the only royal claiming to own a fictitious historical sword in this era. King John had Tristan’s sword from *Tristan and Isolde*, an originally separate story that became a part of the Arthurian corpus.<sup>247</sup> Arthurian romances became so popular that ‘Henry II was supposedly one of the forces behind excavations at Glastonbury that revealed the tombs of Arthur and Guinevere’, ‘tournaments...with Arthurian motifs...were known as ‘Round Tables’, and ’ in the thirteenth century, the names of romance heroines such as Isolde became popular among the nobility.<sup>248</sup> Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table were a medieval phenomenon and paralleled the cult of saints and the worship of their corporeal leavings.

This phenomenon was concurrent with the birth of chivalric literature and the knightly class’s new confidence in its special secular identity outside of Church control. They were mythologising themselves and creating their own relics from stories as the relics of the Church were both beyond their ken and tainted by aspects of ecclesiastical dominance. The narrative of the romances crept into their self-identities and aided their self-understanding.

Interestingly, we today are not immune to this fetish-like obsession with the power of fictional weapons—I need merely mention the word ‘lightsaber’, or

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<sup>245</sup> Bartlett, p. 251.

<sup>246</sup> Emma Mason, ‘The Hero’s Invincible Weapon: An Aspect of Angevin Propaganda’, in *The Ideals and Practice of Medieval Knighthood III: Papers from the Fourth Strawberry Hill Conference 1988*, ed. by C. Harper-Bill and R. Harvey (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1990), pp. 121-38 (pp. 129-30).

<sup>247</sup> Bartlett, p. 251.

<sup>248</sup> Bartlett, p. 251.

the fact that former Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger had the prop sword from the *Conan* film on the wall of his Governor's office,<sup>249</sup> or that John Milius, the writer of *Magnum Force*, insisted that he be paid in part with the prop *Magnum Dirty Harry* made so famous that even Ronald Reagan was using the catchphrase 'make my day' in political speeches.<sup>250</sup> An obsession with such objects is just one example of how storytelling can cross over into the real world and influence identity and self-understanding.

### **The Romances as a Guide to Life**

It was not just objects from romance that enabled the identities of people in the Middle Ages. Geoffroi de Charny wrote *A Knight's Own Book of Chivalry*, a guidebook on how to behave like a knight of romance. Charny, born c. 1306, was 'the first documented owner of the Shroud of Turin' and he died clutching the oriflamme, the 'sacred banner of the kings of France', in his hands at the battle of Poitiers in 1356.<sup>251</sup> He crusaded against Smyrna in Anatolia, survived the Black Death, founded a chivalric order called the Company of the Star and lived the life of a professional soldier and aristocrat, almost constantly in battle. In Charny's text we have medieval chivalry at its purest, without the rose-tinting of more recent times. 'To see genuine medieval chivalry we must demolish the structures, many of them venerably Victorian, which stand in the way...Geoffroi de Charny is as close to the genuine voice of knighthood as we are likely to get.'<sup>252</sup>

We see many things in Charny recognisable from the romances. Shame is to be avoided, as it is the true enemy of chivalry.

And the aforesaid men of worth teach you that if you want to be strong and of good courage, be sure that you care less about death than about shame. And those who put their lives in danger with the deliberate intention of avoiding shame are strong in all things.<sup>253</sup>

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<sup>249</sup> Jonathan Lloyd, 'Arnold Keeps "Conan" Sword in Office' (NBC Los Angeles, 2009) <<http://www.nbclausangeles.com/news/local-beat/Yes-He-Still-Has-the-Conan-Sword-55033992.html>> [Accessed 2 September 2010].

<sup>250</sup> Carl James Grindley, 'The Hagiography of Steel: The Hero's Weapon and Its Place in Pop Culture', in *The Medieval Hero on Screen: Representations from Beowulf to Buffy*, ed. by Martha W. Driver and Sid Ray (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2004), pp. 151-66 (p. 159).

<sup>251</sup> Richard W. Kaeuper, 'Historical Introduction to the Text', in Geoffroi de Charny, *A Knight's Own Book of Chivalry* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), pp. 1-46 (p. 1).

<sup>252</sup> Kaeuper in Geoffroi de Charny, pp. 1-46 (pp. 2-3).

<sup>253</sup> Geoffroi de Charny, p. 72.

He closely paraphrases Augustine's treatise on Just War. Just Warfare is important for the chivalric knight, and warfare and violence have a moral dimension:

Were anyone, therefore, to say that those who are engaged in a career of arms would not be able to save their souls, they would not know what they were saying, for in all good, necessary and traditional professions anyone can lose or save his soul as he wills. But when in the profession of arms, in which one can and should win these high honors, one can indeed make one's personal career honorably and valiantly and save one's soul, as for example in the practice of arms in wars which have been begun in the proper manner and in due form and in the battles which ensue.<sup>254</sup>

Judas Maccabeus from the Book of Maccabees in the Apocrypha, a martial figure admired in First Crusade histories, is held up as the prime example of a great biblical warrior to be emulated. Charny goes to great lengths to explain that knighthood is both more difficult and at least equally, but possibly more, spiritually valid than many forms of priesthood. His arguments are lengthy, but to summarise: though monks must fast and wake at night to pray and confess, that is nothing compared to the hardship of the knight, who must sometimes sleep outside or lose whole nights of sleep on watch, who must be exposed to the weather, who must sometimes go without food and who risk injury. Though monks must be spiritually pure, knights must always be ready to face their God. They must frequently confess and have clear consciences, because they know they could face God at any time. Monks are able:

...to dwell in abbeys and cloisters, in the places ordained for the service of Our Lord and for such prayers, orisons, and fastings that they are bound and obliged to perform by their vows, each one according to the articles of their religious rules; they are spared the physical danger and the strenuous effort of going out onto the field of battle to take up arms, and are also spared the threat of death...But the order of chivalry, it can truly be said and demonstrated that it is the most dangerous both for soul and body, and the one in which it is necessary to maintain a clearer conscience than in any other order in the world.<sup>255</sup>

The spectre of death changes knights and makes them long for goodness:

Hence one could well say truly that of all the men in the world, of whatever estate, whether religious or lay, none have as great a need to be a good Christian to the highest degree nor to have such true devoutness in their hearts nor to lead a life of such integrity and to carry out all their undertakings loyally and with good judgement as do these good

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<sup>254</sup> Geoffroi de Charny, p. 89.

<sup>255</sup> Geoffroi de Charny, pp. 90-91.

men-at-arms who have the will to pursue this calling, as has been set out above, wisely and according to God's will. For there is in such men no firm purpose to cling to life; they should rather show firmness in the face of death and be prepared to meet it at any time, for it often happens that these people die without the leisure to fall ill of fever or other physical ailments from which a person might suffer for a long time and reflect on his past deeds...one can say in all certainty that of all the conditions of this world, it is the one above all others in which one would be required to live with the constant thought of facing death at any hour on any day...for it is a life spent in great effort and endurance and perilous adventure arising from others' hate and envy, where many would like to cause one's death.<sup>256</sup>

Knights are thus of the greatest estate in the world. They are arguably more pure than the clergy, whose job it is to be pure. Closeness to death, which it is true no good Christian should fear, is a part of their lives and this gives them a need for purity, which in turn gives them and their violence a moral authority.

Charny was not widely read or influential, but he is an example of a practitioner of the time looking inward, and an example of how one storied knight of the era saw himself and his world. In works like that of Charny the fictional romances spawned guidebooks on how to behave like the heroes of fiction, and no-one would have been surprised by that, as such fictions had become part of the fabric of aristocratic society.

The arguments of Charny as to why knights are to be favoured over priests are paraphrased in a suitably less developed form in a speech in 'Kyrie Eleison' by Robert, Duke of Normandy (called 'count' in the text as he is in medieval histories), before a battle at Iron Bridge:

'A monk will worship Christ and glorify his name,' said the Count. 'He will endure hardship, fasts and personal suffering, he will arise at all hours to pray and sing the glory of heaven. But we, doing Christ's work, must risk death and mutilation every hour of every day, we must eat when we can, we must sleep outside, we must be ready for death at any moment, our consciences clear, because death dogs us. So how much more important is a clear conscience for a knight than for a monk? How much more does a knight endure and does he risk in the name of God?

'Who thinks of God more, at every hour, and knows he must be ready to meet him? Monks pray to save the world of their Christian fellows. We the soldiery pour out our blood for our brothers.'

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<sup>256</sup> Geoffroi de Charny, p. 99.

It is as if a realisation of knightly spiritual authority is just sneaking into their consciousness as they approach Antioch and the greatest trial of the First Crusade.

Charny left a written record of the extent to which storytelling and fictional crusaders turned into the chivalric knights of romance influenced self-understanding in the Middle Ages. People modelled themselves after figures from story—figures inspired by and adapted from the crusaders.

### **The Lure of a Golden Age**

As already mentioned, chivalric romances tended to happen in a ‘golden age’ of the past. Medieval settings are often used in a similar way today, as a place where we fantasise about the restoration of conservative values and ideals that are not politically correct enough to be breathed aloud in polite company. Tom Henthorne’s essay, ‘Boys to Men: Medievalism and Masculinity in *Star Wars* and *E.T.: The Extra- Terrestrial*’, notes:

To an extent, the neomedievalism in mid-to-late twentieth-century America can be understood as a reaction to the social transformations that followed World War II, particularly those related to gender. At a time when traditional values were increasingly under attack, this new medievalism tended to affirm the existing social order by idealizing the Middle Ages as a period of peace and order, when both conventions and authority were respected. It also promoted supposedly chivalric values—faith, loyalty, courage, and, for women at least, chastity—by reducing complex medieval narratives such as those of Chrétien de Troyes and Robert de Boron to simpler tales about knights in shining armor and damsels in distress. Not every neomedieval work was set in the Middle Ages, of course. By the seventies and eighties, one could read about alternative medieval worlds in fantasy novels such as *The Chronicles of Amber*, “joust” with others atop flying ostriches at the local video arcade, and see Indiana Jones quest after the Holy Grail in the theatre.<sup>257</sup>

According to Henthorne this peaked in films such as *Star Wars*.<sup>258</sup> A desire to return to ‘social order’ can have much darker exclusionary undertones:

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<sup>257</sup> Tom Henthorne, ‘Boys to Men: Medievalism and Masculinity in *Star Wars* and *E.T.: The Extra- Terrestrial*’, in *The Medieval Hero on Screen*, ed. by Sid Ray and Martha W. Driver (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2004), pp. 73-89 (pp. 73-74).

<sup>258</sup> And perhaps back with a vengeance with the popularity of *Game of Thrones*.

...neomedievalism and neoconservatism were both reactions to the supposed excesses of the late sixties and early seventies, particularly those associated with the feminist and other liberation movements.<sup>259</sup>

Modern neomedievalism demonstrates the Middle Ages is seen as a safe ground, a golden age one can look back to, where conservative values are allowed to rule and feminism, multiculturalism and other movements that offer a plurality of views are suppressed or safely contained in a world of ordered hierarchy. This is inherent before we even consider Post-Colonialism and Orientalism, and any discourse that gives voice to a non-Western point of view. Such discourses are safely excluded from a world of order and hierarchy (in which one naturally fantasises about being near the top). One cannot help but wonder whether modern neomedieval, neoconservative fantasy novels set in fake versions of the Middle Ages which celebrate, in various guises, men being men and knights doing what good knights do include, at some unspoken level, a Western desire to be victorious crusaders and, by implication, reject 'evil' cultural Others.

As 'Kyrie Eleison' seeks to challenge such Western assumptions as medieval golden ages, self-actualisation through violence and Orientalism, I tend to think of it as an 'anti-fantasy' novel.

The idea of a 'golden age' has lured people in the past and continues to do so now. It may be comforting in times of stress and confusion to imagine simplified morality and a highly ordered world which excludes outsiders and reduces uncertainty. Identifying with such golden ages from storytelling suggests a retreat from the complexity of the world, and a desire to return to storytelling archetypes that invite no questions. It is particularly easy to embed reductive cultural biases, such as Orientalism, in such tales. The golden ages of storytelling suggest a shrinking rather than an enlarging of self-understanding. Transforming the era of the crusades into a mythical golden age, as many fantasy novels and historical novels tend to do, is particularly fraught.

### *The Chivalric Knight of Arthurian Romance*

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<sup>259</sup> Henthorne, pp. 73-89 (p. 74).

Reflecting back upon our definition of crusader identity as given in the histories and public perception, how close is the chivalric knight?

<i>Character Trait</i>	<i>Central Idea</i>
He is willing to die for the greater good, for his brothers at the Round Table and indeed for the sake of the entire Christian world and those back home. To die is preferable to breaching the oaths he has made, for to die while upholding his oaths means he will be granted eternal fame.	The Nine Worthies of Chivalry. Shame for the knight is worse than death.
He has a moral code, based on public oaths, which comes from on high and transcends all else, and it is enacted on the world through individual violence. It takes precedence over local laws and calls men from many nations.	The knightly oath of the Round Table; oaths taken at the dubbing ceremony.
He wears a symbol representing his special status, his willingness to suffer, and his oaths.	Heraldry. For example, King Arthur has a recognisable banner; Givret the little has a saddle which portrays 'a golden lion' in <i>Erec et Enide</i> ; Lancelot's shield has a lion in <i>Cliges</i> , and Erec has a shield with many 'different devices, some with stripes and some with dots'.
He acts also for personal spiritual reasons, often related to guilt, and is happy to suffer for this publicly and to be seen to be doing public acts of violence or self-abnegation to overcome this shame.	The act of shame or of slipping from the ideal that propels the story. See for example Erec's public quests to show chivalry is more important to him than lust, or Lancelot's public humiliations to overcome his doubts about getting in the humiliating cart when ordered by Queen Guinevere. Being seen is vital as the knight's inner self is actualised by others and by external acts.
His true self is realised only through an act of narrative, in which secrets relating to personal identity are laid bare, but the revelation itself must be paid for by suffering before the self can be fully actualised.	The delayed revelation of identity. Identity is given after success or failure in combat, or marriage. The 'lapse', like confession, that often happens at the start of the story enables self-actualisation or 'redemption' by the end.

<p>His spiritual redemption can only be accomplished by leaving his family and going on a great journey to an object imbued with special spiritual significance, but in essence the object represents a transcendent journey to the centre of the self.</p>	<p>The Holy Sepulchre is replaced with similar icons appropriate for each story: the holy grail, the cart of Guinevere, the battles of Erec while his marriage is put on hold. All of these are found in distant places or in the wilderness.</p>
<p>His enemies are those who oppose God's law, though they fight well, and even admire him, and this proves his righteousness. His enemies exist only in opposition to him, and their purpose is a test from on high.</p>	<p>Monsters and shadow selves. Knights, dwarves and giants often seem to embody the failings the knight is trying to overcome. They exist because of the hero and are part of his personal journey of self-actualisation.</p>
<p>His motive is of primary importance, and if he lies or strays from purity in his motive, he will be justifiably punished.</p>	<p>The faithful knight. Lancelot strays from this when he hesitates, for just a moment, to obey his Queen and lover. Erec strays from this when he enjoys love more than deeds of arms. Outward deeds indicate inner motive, and so quests must be undertaken to prove motive.</p>
<p>Though a man of family, and for whom name, title, and the production of future sons is often vitally important, he goes through a period of enforced, priest-like celibacy while family is left behind or postponed in favour of his mission. If he does think of a woman, it is the unreachable and unknowable ideal woman.</p>	<p>The ideal woman. Erec and Lancelot must both go through chaste periods to earn this final love. Only through chastity is love earned. Chastity becomes proof of knightly heroism, and is rewarded by love and sex, though often at the end or 'outside' the tale. Chastity is a form of suffering.</p>
<p>He has been made pure, but he must not sin again, though he might be tempted, or his mission will fail because he will be judged unworthy.</p>	<p>The knightly oath represents a code that must be obeyed for life. It is a purity that, if one breaches, one can no longer be considered a part of the fold, and much of the drama comes from this.</p>

Medieval histories created an idea of the crusader that was one step removed from reality but which was to be powerful enough to lay the template for all future crusades. A step removed from this is the chivalric knight of the romance, but he is simply a lay crusader, a crusader adapted to wider narratives beyond the Holy Land, a crusader for times when there are no crusades to sing about. It might not

be too far to say he is the idealised narrative crusader, boiled down to essential parts, packaged in a digestible format and given to everyone so that all can share in one of the great idealised historical movements of the Middle Ages. He is a step removed from the historical crusader, but in terms of fiction, he *is* the crusader, expertly adapted. He is the crusader perfected, where the Church is largely removed and the chivalric knights themselves are of primary importance.

This is the figure from storytelling that influenced the way people understood knights, and by extension the crusades, for centuries. It was also a heroic archetype that people might attempt to live up to in the real world. One man in particular spotted the foolishness of this, and tried to make everyone else understanding how foolish such stories, such ideals, and such play-acting were.

### **Don Quixote: The Chivalric Romance Dismantled**

*Don Quixote*, by Miguel de Cervantes, Part One published in 1605 and Part Two in 1615, satirises chivalric romance by having a character so influenced by his reading of such books that he dresses as a knight and sallies forth— anachronistically and with no sense of the real workings of the world—on a knightly adventure. More often than not his chivalric actions produce the opposite of their intended results; for example, Don Quixote frees criminal convicts and fights their guards.

Cervantes himself had actually been in a ‘crusade’ of sorts. The Battle of Lepanto of 1571 in which he lost his hand involved ‘The Holy League’—an alliance of European Catholic states, including the Knights Hospitaller—against the Muslim Ottomans. Christian participants carried a banner blessed by Pope Pius V, who had encouraged the struggle, and the ‘Catholic fleet at Lepanto was financed largely by church taxes and the sale of indulgences.’<sup>260</sup> Lepanto, however, was a victory which ‘changed nothing’.

Allegedly, when Selim II (1566-74) asked his vizier how much it would cost to replace the lost fleet, the vizier replied: ‘The might of the empire is such that if it were desired to

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<sup>260</sup> Norman Housley, ‘The Crusading Movement 1274–1700’, in *The Oxford History of the Crusades*, ed. by Jonathan Riley-Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 258-90 (p. 288).

equip the entire fleet with silver anchors, silken rigging, and satin sails, we could do it.’

Indeed the Ottomans did swiftly build a new fleet<sup>261</sup>

To recruit for the Holy League, Pope Pius wrote on 12 March 1572 ‘[w]e admonish, require and exhort every individual to decide to aid this most holy war either in person or with material support’ and as a reward to those who went, gave aid or aided others to go, the Pope would:

...grant most full and complete pardon, remission and absolution of all their sins, of which they have made oral confession with contrite hearts, the same indulgence which the Roman pontiffs, our predecessors, were accustomed to concede to crusaders going to the aid of the Holy Land.<sup>262</sup>

After various successful counterattacks by the Ottomans in 1574 and 1576, King Sebastian of Portugal, ‘a romantic figure who was obsessed with crusading’, fought back with ‘what may have been the last old-fashioned crusade’ in 1578.<sup>263</sup> The resulting battle ‘of the Three Kings’ saw the defeat of Portugal and the death of its king.

Cervantes was involved in some of this later activity as well. After Lepanto in 1571:

He spent the next four years on campaign around the Mediterranean, taking part in Spanish expeditions to Navarino (1572) and Tunis (1573). He was returning with his brother, who was also a soldier, to Spain in 1575 when their ship, the *Sol*, was seized by Algerian corsairs, and he spent the next five years as a captive in Algiers.<sup>264</sup>

With various moments of triumph, injury and captivity, Cervantes saw every side of warfare, and all while in the background a pope recalled stories of the great crusades of days gone by. Cervantes also had prolonged contact with Islamic culture (even more than the average Spaniard of the era) through his extended captivity.

Whatever noble speeches inspired the Battle of Lepanto, Cervantes evidently became very disillusioned with it all afterwards, as *Don Quixote* shows, and the wound he received was something that would never have happened to a knight in a romance (but such wounds do happen to Don Quixote).

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<sup>261</sup> Robert Irwin, ‘Islam and the Crusades 1096–1699’, in *The Oxford History of the Crusades*, ed. by Jonathan Riley-Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 211–57 (p. 256).

<sup>262</sup> Riley-Smith, *The Crusades: A History*, p. 290.

<sup>263</sup> Riley-Smith, *The Crusades: A History*, p. 288.

<sup>264</sup> Stephen Boyd in the introduction to Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, *Don Quixote* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 1993), p. vi.

As a Spaniard, Cervantes lived in a culture that to this day bears the marks of cross-cultural contact between Muslims and Christians as they fought back and forth for *Al-Andalus*. Indeed, one of the metatextual jokes of *Don Quixote* is that it has been translated from an old Arabic manuscript: ‘The History of Don Quixote de la Mancha, written by Cid Hamet Benengeli, an Arabian historian.’<sup>265</sup> The notes tell us that ‘Benengeli’ means ‘aubergine-like’ in Arabic.<sup>266</sup> He accuses the Arabian of having ‘suppressed the truth’ because he is one of ‘our enemies’; he should have ‘enlarged on [Don Quixote’s] praises’ because historians:

ought to be exact, sincere, and impartial; free from passion, and not to be biased either by interest, fear, resentment, or affection, to deviate from truth, which is the mother of history, the preserver and eterniser of great actions, the professed enemy of oblivion, the witness of things passed, and the director of future times.<sup>267</sup>

We are advised regarding the novel that ‘if in any point it falls short of your expectations, I am of the opinion it is more the fault of the Infidel, its author, than the subject’.<sup>268</sup> Of course, transmission of knowledge between Islam and Christianity (often through Jewish mediators) occurred for centuries in Spain, and Muslim Spain likely influenced troubadour culture, troubadour culture in turn influencing chivalry.<sup>269</sup> When stories were shared between Christianity and Islam, transmission probably occurred in Spain, not in the crusading Levant.<sup>270</sup> Contact with Islamic Spain gave the West Arabic numerals, algebra, and a returned Aristotle,<sup>271</sup> and influenced figures such as the scientifically minded Gerbert of Aurillac (d. 1003), otherwise known as Pope Sylvester II, who was so learned that later generations called him ‘a necromancer’.<sup>272</sup>

Cervantes slips in his jokes and his references to European culture early in the novel. All the tropes of chivalry we have seen are there: Don Quixote claims that when he achieves ‘the most famous deeds of chivalry that ever were, are, or ever shall be seen in the universe’ he will be ‘the nine worthies all in one; since

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<sup>265</sup> Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, *Don Quixote*, trans. by P. A. Motteux (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 1993), p. 50.

<sup>266</sup> Cervantes, p. 770.

<sup>267</sup> Cervantes, p. 51.

<sup>268</sup> Cervantes, p. 52.

<sup>269</sup> Bond in *The Poetry of William VII, Count of Poitiers, IX Duke of Aquitaine*, p. lxvi.

<sup>270</sup> Cantor, p. 296.

<sup>271</sup> Cantor, pp. 138-39.

<sup>272</sup> Tom Holland, *Millennium: The End of the World and the Forging of Christendom* (London: Little, Brown Book Group, 2008), p. 106.

my achievements will out-rival not only the famous exploits which made any of them singularly illustrious, but all their mighty deeds accumulated together.’<sup>273</sup>

Don Quixote ‘so hated the traitor Galalon, that for the pleasure of kicking him handsomely, he would have given up his housekeeper, nay, and his niece into the bargain’.<sup>274</sup> Galalon, of course, refers to the betrayer of Roncesvalles, the villain of *The Song of Roland*. Don Quixote gives many of the same reasons that a knight is ‘within two fingers’ breadth’ of being preferred to a Carthusian as those Geoffroi de Charny’s *A Knight’s Own Book of Chivalry* gives for knights being preferred over the clergy:

Those religious men have nothing to do, but with all quietness and security to say their prayers for the prosperity of the world; we knights, like soldiers, execute what they do but pray for, and procure those benefits to mankind, by the strength of our arms, and at the hazard of our lives, for which they only intercede. Nor do we do this sheltered from the injuries of the air, but under no other roof than that of the wide heavens, exposed to summer’s scorching heat and winter’s pinching cold. So that we may justly style ourselves the ministers of Heaven, and the instruments of its justice upon the earth; and as the business of war is not to be compassed without toil and labour, so the religious soldier must undoubtedly be preferred before the religious monk<sup>275</sup>

In a typical chivalric piece of sophistry, he then tactfully backs away and, after his bravado, cedes the point somewhat unconvincingly to the ‘holy recluse’, perhaps thinking of the hermits who are the eternal advisers of knights in stories.

Chivalric love itself is reduced to a fantasy. One need only think of the modern joke of the ‘Canadian’ (or ‘Tasmanian’) girlfriend a teenage boy claims to have that others have never met and who in fact is not real, or the ‘manic pixie dream girl’ trope of independent movies, where a girl exists only to forward the plot of the male character and to help him achieve his dreams, apparently having no dreams of her own.<sup>276</sup> Don Quixote’s lady love Aldonza Lorenzo of course has

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<sup>273</sup> Cervantes, p. 30.

<sup>274</sup> Cervantes, p. 11.

<sup>275</sup> Cervantes, p. 68. For Charny, see the notes, above.

<sup>276</sup> For this unfortunate modern trope, see ‘Manic Pixie Dream Girl’ (tvtropes.org, n. d.) <<http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/ManicPixieDreamGirl>> [Accessed 27 September 2012], or ‘Manic Pixie Dream Girl’ (Wikipedia, n. d.) <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manic\\_Pixie\\_Dream\\_Girl](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manic_Pixie_Dream_Girl)> [Accessed 27 September 2012], or Jessica G., ‘Manic Pixie Dream Girls Are the Scourge of Modern Cinema’ (Jezebel.com, 2008) <<http://jezebel.com/5033744/manic-pixie-dream-girls-are-the-scourge-of-modern-cinema>> [Accessed 27 September 2012]. For the Canadian Girlfriend, see for example ‘Girlfriend in Canada’ (tvtropes.org, n. d.) <<http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/GirlfriendInCanada>> [Accessed 27 September 2012].

no idea of Don Quixote's affections for her, or that she has been renamed 'Dulcinea', and the peasant villager who is a 'notable, strong-built, sizable, sturdy, manly lass and one that will keep her chin out of the mire' in no way resembles Don Quixote's fantasies.<sup>277</sup> Don Quixote even freely admits that most women in literature are nothing more than empty male fantasies who bear no resemblance to reality. They exist to enable men:

Pray thee, tell me, dost thou think the poets, who every one of them celebrate the praises of one lady or another, had all real mistresses? Or that the Amaryllises, the Phyllises, the Sylvias, the Dianas, the Galateas, the Alidas, and the like, which you shall find in so many poems, romances, songs, and ballads, upon every stage, and even in every barber's shop, were creatures of flesh and blood, and mistresses to those who did and do celebrate them? No, no, never think it; for I dare assure thee, the greatest part of them were nothing but the mere imaginations of the poets, for a groundwork to exercise their wits upon, and give to the world occasion to look on the authors as men of an amorous and gallant disposition<sup>278</sup>

For love to be celebrated and fictionalised, so must the lover. The knight quests for an imaginary ideal, the purpose of which is to make him appear 'amorous and gallant'. Don Quixote is pleased to imitate the actions of his fictional hero Amadis de Gaul when it comes to expressing his despair at being parted from his love. He will sigh and write prose in the wilderness in a rehearsed manner, consciously following the actions of his male idol. For love in the romance, it is the form that is important, not the feeling. Don Quixote expects Sancho to describe Dulcinea's 'scent so odoriferous, pleasing, and sweet' and is instead met with a description of her sweat, which was 'a little unsavoury' because 'she had wrought hard, and sweat somewhat plentifully.'<sup>279</sup> Meanwhile, Don Quixote, a man in his fifties, tries dutifully to maintain his virginity for his 'high lady'. Sancho is lying about having just visited Dulcinea, of course, but Don Quixote explains it away as Sancho being the victim of magic. The man fooled by stories will use the foolish logic of his stories to keep up his self-deception. Sancho might claim 'my first motions are always in my tongue,' but, Cervantes tells us, it is the poets who are speaking a load of excrement.<sup>280</sup> The poets also make errors about geographical details, such as which ports can be landed at where, and their

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<sup>277</sup> Cervantes, p. 163.

<sup>278</sup> Cervantes, p. 164.

<sup>279</sup> Cervantes, p. 216.

<sup>280</sup> Cervantes, p. 212.

errors are mistaken for truth, ‘because they have the air of the extravagant stories in books’.<sup>281</sup> Meanwhile, an inn-keeper cannot help but believe what is in books because:

a pleasant jest that you should attempt to persuade me now that these notable books are lies and stories; why, sir, are they not in print? are they not published according to order? licensed by authority from the privy-council? And do you think they would permit so many untruths to be printed, and such a number of battles and enchantment, to set us all a-madding?<sup>282</sup>

Even in Cervantes’ time, reality and identity had become so influenced by story that reality is constantly threatened by fiction, which demands it yield its place. Story need only be reproduced enough times in writing to become fact. How easily the world is fictionalised. At this point in the novel of *Don Quixote* we then get another story, *The Novel of the Curious Impertinent*, about the dangers of lies and fictions, in which each character has a different perception of truth and a different idea of reality. To get at the truth about whether a beautiful Italian wife can be seduced, lies are told, falsehoods are staged, trickers are tricked and injuries occur. So with this interlude, stories-within-stories are told, all to draw attention to the lies of storytelling.

In long diatribes against romantic fiction, Cervantes both makes fun of and improves and supports his own work. A canon declares:

I have not seen a book of knight-errantry that composes an entire body of a fable with all its parts, so that the middle is answerable to the beginning; but on the contrary, they form so many limbs, that they rather seem like a chimera or a monster, than a well proportioned figure.<sup>283</sup>

This describes both the physicality of *Don Quixote*, and the rambling nature of *Don Quixote*, with its sidetracks into other stories and frequent interruptions by long discussions on the merits of literature. *Don Quixote* must ramble because it is summoning up a library on which to comment. In *Don Quixote*’s case the rambling is a strength, as it adds layers of subtlety and a self-reflexiveness that mean it is strengthened by being a ‘chimera’, in order to demonstrate what literary chimeras are. The canon continues:

How can any tolerable judgement be pleased, when representing an action that happened at the time of King Pepin or Charlemagne, they shall attribute it to the emperor Heraclius,

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<sup>281</sup> Cervantes, p. 214.

<sup>282</sup> Cervantes, p. 225.

<sup>283</sup> Cervantes, p. 336.

and bring him in carrying the Cross into Jerusalem, and recovering the holy sepulchre, like Godfrey of Boulogne, there being a vast distance of time betwixt these actions? This they will clap together pieces of true history in a play of their own framing, and grounded upon fiction, mixing in it relations of things that have happened to different people, and in several ages.<sup>284</sup>

Plays and stories overtake histories, ‘but the worst of it is, that there are idiots who look upon this as perfection, and think everything else to be mere pedantry.’<sup>285</sup> The fiction takes over, because the public finds it more palatable and pleasing, and history is fictionalised.

Some of the arguments against the romance have echoes of Plato’s argument against the poets in *The Republic*. Plato claims that artists create impressions of things far removed from their original reality. For example, an artist does not have to know how to make a bed to paint a bed, or know the craft of a bootmaker to paint a bootmaker and his tools, and the painter may make some mistakes while painting, but to an uneducated observer, this will appear as reality. An artist with a very limited understanding of the world must convincingly replicate an entire world, but a world where basic function has been lost: a painted image of a bed cannot even perform a bed’s original function, it cannot be slept in, so in a sense, it is so far divorced from its original purpose that it is useless. Poetry manipulates emotions that most people in a civilised society would want to keep in check, and so stirs feelings best left unstirred.<sup>286</sup> This idea of art being idle and insidious, inspiring humanity’s baser nature, is present in similar arguments in *Don Quixote*. Romances ‘are all but chimeras and fictions of idle and luxuriant wits, who wrote them for the same reason that you read them, because they had nothing else to do.’<sup>287</sup> Though they describe ‘shipwrecks, storms, skirmishes and battles’ and ‘the subtlety of Ulysses, the piety of Aeneas, the valour of Achilles’<sup>288</sup> (using Homeric examples, as does Plato), ‘all good governments’ should see that ‘good plays’ are seen instead of ‘bad ones’. The viewer of a play or reader of a book may then be ‘pleased with the comic part, informed by the serious, surprised by the variety of accidents, improved by the

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<sup>284</sup> Cervantes, pp. 339-40.

<sup>285</sup> Cervantes, pp. 339-40.

<sup>286</sup> Paraphrased from Plato, ‘The Republic, Book X’, in *The Republic* (The Internet Classics Archive, n. d.) <<http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/republic.11.x.html>> [Accessed 27 September 2012].

<sup>287</sup> Cervantes, p. 225.

<sup>288</sup> Cervantes, p. 337.

language, warned by the frauds, instructed by examples, incensed against vice, and enamoured with virtue'.<sup>289</sup> 'The bow cannot always stand bent, nor can human frailty subsist without some lawful recreation.'<sup>290</sup> This is very similar to, though less extreme than, Plato's conclusion, that 'hymns to the gods and praises of famous men are the only poetry which ought to be admitted into our State.'<sup>291</sup> Just like Plato, these musings come in dialogue arguments, in this case between a canon, a curate and a barber.

Cervantes also observes, after speaking of the 'subtlety of Ulysses...the misfortunes of Hector, the treachery of Sinon, the friendship of Euryalus, the liberality of Alexander, the valour of Caesar' etc. (again we get some of the chivalric Nine Worthies with Hector, Alexander and Caesar), that 'all those actions...may make up a complete hero, sometimes attributing them all to one person, and at other times dividing them among many.'<sup>292</sup> One sees foreshadowings of Jung, or a more complex shadow of *Everyman*. Meanwhile Don Quixote has absorbed so many disparate fictional identities that they have overwhelmed his own, and so even in the text new fictional identities break through in the form of novellas and poetic interludes.

Don Quixote defecates in his captivity when knights in story do not. Violence causes him to lose a tooth and part of his ear, and he is gradually worn down as the story progresses. The limitations of reality keep dragging Don Quixote back down to earth. 'Reality' is almost a character in the book, and could be Don Quixote's greatest enemy, prowling around always to undo his fantasies, as well as his breeches.

Reality intruded during the writing of the book as well, but before being informed of this, the reader is gently mocked: 'reader, gentle or simple, or whatever you be'.<sup>293</sup> We learn (or, for contemporary readers, are reminded) at the introduction to Part Two that Cervantes lost control of his work. Before Cervantes had published the second instalment, an imitator published a far inferior

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<sup>289</sup> Cervantes, p. 340.

<sup>290</sup> Cervantes, p. 341.

<sup>291</sup> Plato.

<sup>292</sup> Cervantes, p. 337.

<sup>293</sup> Cervantes, p. 367.

continuation of the *Don Quixote* story.<sup>294</sup> Thus fiction commenting on fiction was further reinterpreted as it was grabbed at and fought over by admirers and imitators. It turned out to be a blessing in disguise as this adds a whole new layer of surrealism to Cervantes' own second part, demolishes the fourth wall and lifts the work truly into the realm of genius. Copyright and ownership was clearly just beginning to become an issue since the days of the Middle Ages when authors openly stole from each other without citation; in the introduction to Part One, besides recommending that an author who wishes to appear clever drop scattered Latin phrases—annotations related to the Bible, quoting chapter and verse, are encouraged—the author writes ‘be sure you bring in Goliath...(who will not cost you one farthing)’ in copyright!<sup>295</sup> One may steal from, reproduce, comment on and re-interpret out-of-copyright texts as much as one wants, even in Cervantes' day, and, just like in ours, it may even allow an author to feign learnedness (as does the author of ‘Kyrie Eleison’ with his open source biblical figures). Chivalric romance looked back to a golden age of the past. Cervantes (and future novelists) look forward to a golden age when great texts and characters are in the public domain!

In Part Two we see reality influence fiction and be cleverly fictionalised. The *Don Quixote* imposter's second book becomes a part of the world of Cervantes Part Two: the impostor exists in the world of Don Quixote, and many people around Sancho and the Don read his work. The first book, as well, is common knowledge by the time the pair undertake the latter part of their adventure. Sancho marvels at how the author could have written things ‘that passed betwixt nobody but us two’ and Don Quixote concludes that ‘the author of our history must be some sage enchanter,’<sup>296</sup> but he is also a ‘son of a mongrel’ because he has ‘thrust’ into his history of *Don Quixote* ‘a novel, which he calls, “The Curious Impertinent”’; not that it is ill-writ, or the design of it to be disliked; but because it is not in its right place, and has no coherence in the story of Don

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<sup>294</sup> ‘A person, who wrote himself a native of Tordesillas, published an impertinent book by that name [the second *Don Quixote*], printed at Tarragona, while our author was preparing his second part for the press.’ Footnote in Cervantes, p. 367.

<sup>295</sup> Cervantes, p. 6.

<sup>296</sup> Cervantes, p. 383.

Quixote.<sup>297</sup> The characters point out errors in the earlier novel, whether an intentional comment on romance continuity errors or not:

he has forgot to give an account who it was that stole Sancho's Dapple; for that particular is not mentioned there; only we find by the story that it was stolen; and yet, by and by, we find him riding the same ass again, without any previous light given us into the matter. Then they say, that the author forgot to tell the reader, what Sancho did with those hundred pieces of gold he found in the portmanteau in Sierra Morena; for there is not a word said of them more; and many people have a great mind to know what he did with them, and how he spent them; which is one of the most material points in which the work is defective.<sup>298</sup>

Sancho tries to speak more cleverly because he knows his every action is being written down, and of course his speech is full of malapropisms and mixed metaphors.<sup>299</sup> 'Blessed be the mighty Allah' begins Chapter VIII of Part Two, reminding us of the translation conceit, and that, in translation, our noble knight can serve different religions as well as fictional ideals. Text again is changed by the loss of control an author has once it is out in the world.

The imitator had the Don follow with his Part One plan to go to Saragossa and take part in knightly tournaments, but Cervantes has the heroes in Part Two, now aware of the falsehoods written about them in the inferior copy of Part Two, resolve not to go there, and to go to Barcelona instead. Cervantes staunchly refuses to 'go' where his imitator did, the easy route of taking 'the "quixotic formula" and work[ing] it to death.'<sup>300</sup> Cervantes' best retort to his imitator is that he did it much better.

In *Don Quixote*, the whole world has been made topsy-turvy by fantasy. The whole world has been fictionalised. Don Quixote looks at biblical figures and to him they are all knights.<sup>301</sup> This is indeed how crusaders and Church propaganda recast and reinterpreted them. Medieval art depicted figures of the past in contemporary dress, so the soldiers carrying out the Massacre of the Innocents as well as early martyrs like St George and his ilk became knights in medieval art and sculpture. The past was never far away because it was always just the present with whatever fictional glasses people chose to wear. As madness

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<sup>297</sup> Cervantes, p. 386.

<sup>298</sup> Cervantes, p. 388.

<sup>299</sup> Cervantes, p. 404.

<sup>300</sup> Boyd's introduction to Cervantes, p. xii.

<sup>301</sup> Cervantes, p. 683.

overtakes the whole world in the story, and as the reader grows dizzier and dizzier, Don Quixote slowly becomes more sane. Nobles play-act as peasants in ‘New Arcadia’, the opposite of what Sancho does when he rises to become governor of an island. When the whole world is play-acting their false versions of the past, Don Quixote’s sincerity somehow does not fit in. The romances he bases his ideas on are relics, and that romance is shown up to be the anachronism it is.

Don Quixote finally sees a copy of this fake second part and throws it away ‘in a huff’, declaring, ‘made stories are only so far good and agreeable, as they are profitable, and bear the resemblance of truth; and true History the more valuable, the further it keeps from the fabulous.’<sup>302</sup> A notary later signs an affidavit condemning the fake. Fiction is denounced as fake by a notary in fiction.<sup>303</sup>

The Don’s death at the end, the author notes, is proof against him having a third sally, and a final possessive declaration of the author’s ownership of the character. Copyright ultimately costs *Don Quixote* his life and this is the climacticmetatextual joke at the end. Don Quixote, the great pretender, is protected against other pretenders. Stephen Boyd, in his introduction, speaks of:

The ‘great theme’ of the whole book: the endlessly-various, multi-layered interaction of literature and life, of writing, reading and behaving; the fact that everyone not only lives his or her life, but also invents it.<sup>304</sup>

*Don Quixote* sits at a key juncture in the history of the crusades, between the fictionalising of the crusades through chivalry and today. Cervantes wrote in the twilight era of ‘real’ crusading, one of the last in a long line of authors writing with experience ‘from the field’. To him, people had already, through identifying with and mimicking fiction, changed history. Chivalry and the crusading that underpinned it were already anachronisms, but still influential anachronisms, and so Cervantes might have felt he had a duty to lampoon such things.

While ‘Kyrie Eleison’ has no direct references to *Don Quixote*, thematically the texts share many similarities. Both are about characters influenced by fictional narratives. Characters try to live up to fictional heroes and go on epic quests based on story. Both books are about storytelling, and

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<sup>302</sup> Cervantes, pp. 715-16.

<sup>303</sup> Cervantes, pp. 757-58.

<sup>304</sup> Boyd in Cervantes, p. xi.

particularly about false heroes from history. Sancho Panza starts as the earthy voice of reason and ends up mad, in a way, as his master turns sane. Sancho has even governed an island by this point, and he believes in tales as his master renounces them. Paul the Peasant starts fully absorbed in the stories of the Bible, but is still very pragmatic and fatalistic, and, like Sancho, is a lower class character. By the end he is dressed as a knight (after picking up knightly gear piece-by-piece throughout the book) and even named a defender of Jerusalem. When he attempts to return to Europe a new round of crusaders, those of 1101, see him and imagine him to be the ideal crusader, the crusader that is already entering into myth. He leads them on another sally which we know, historically, will send them to their doom. Paul finally knows he cannot reach New Jerusalem on foot but he will never stop trying. The crusaders in general, coming home with tales of loss and horror, have lost some of their Don Quixote-like delusions, but Paul's have only increased. He has embraced the self-important delusions of his 'masters':

'You were in Jerusalem? You were a pilgrim?' he is asking, and they are surprised, and then they want to show Paul to people. 'This knight defended Jerusalem.'

'Your first steps in Europe again then, for years!' he adds. Then, 'We are going for God, to free us from our sins. Edessa ... Then we will stop to pray at Jerusalem because God wills it.'

There is an army of them. Hundreds of hundreds, like before. They have crosses on their clothes. They are talking about men Paul has seen. The old man with one eye. He is there and leaves, they say. The man like the poplar in autumn. He is a prisoner of the Saracens. The king who is not a king of Jerusalem that is not New Jerusalem is dead. Paul knows this. His younger brother is king now.

The people are asking Paul to come with them, 'Please, you have been before, you know the way ... God has sent you to us.'

But God has sent them. It is a sign, Paul thinks. He will not see the green fields today. He knows no-one there now anyway. God wants him in the greatest city and he will go to the greatest city, the holiest city with the greatest churches. He will lead these ones there.

By contrast the knight loses his equipment bit by bit and grows weaker, just like Don Quixote, and dies before the end. His madness is not fully cured, though, and this means he is convinced he dies a failure for not living up to unreachable ideas.

Esther leaves her final tale unfinished and then disappears from the narrative, reminding the reader of the artificial nature of the trilogy. Her stories-

within-the-story (and *Don Quixote* uses stories-within-stories as well) challenge aspects of storytelling related to crusading and chivalry, and highlights hidden ideologies such as Orientalism and the denial of Feminism, and then her sudden departure and her unfinished tale shout both that this was all simply fiction, and that these tales are *not* finished, and they continue to be spun. In both ‘Kyrie Eleison’ and *Don Quixote* narratives are untrustworthy. They can lead people astray and bite back.

‘Kyrie Eleison’ takes much of its intertextual approach from the medieval histories. It takes its metatextual approach from *Don Quixote*. The way it draws attention to and comments on its own storytelling, and how it references and lampoons popular or notable works while at the same time having such works influence its characters and its episodes, are all cues taken from Cervantes. Cervantes saw that the anachronisms of chivalry and the crusading that underpinned it were still influencing the rhetoric and politics of his own time. He saw that the lure of the ideals of chivalry were still strong, and potentially destructive. He may have felt it his duty to satirise idealistic knights and to use his art to draw attention to the foolishness of it all, to show how such figures were all built on storytelling and not history. ‘Kyrie Eleison’ works in a very similar way, with similar goals.

‘Kyrie Eleison’ is full of irony and satire, and that satire occurs throughout the book and whenever Esther tells a story, but it is satire offered with a very straight face. If satire uses ‘humour, irony, exaggeration, or ridicule to expose and criticize prevailing immorality or foolishness, esp. as a form of social or political commentary’ (*Oxford English Dictionary*), then Esther’s stories are satires in almost every sense, although the ‘humour’ is literary.<sup>305</sup> All my crusaders are thus Don Quixotes. Both ‘Kyrie Eleison’ and *Don Quixote* are about storytelling and its influence on identity and self-understanding, and both use irony, exaggeration and ridicule to make their points.

Cervantes is important to any discussion of the development of the crusader in literature because his work demonstrates that the development of the crusader-cum-chivalric hero has not been a smooth one. This hero, and

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<sup>305</sup> ‘satire, n.’, OED Online, Oxford University Press (March 2014)  
 <<http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.flinders.edu.au/view/Entry/171207?rskey=3hFS2Q&result=1&isAdvanced=false>> [Accessed 10 May 2014].

identification with his anachronism, has been challenged before, and expertly so. ‘Kyrie Eleison’ does not appear in a void, and it would be remiss not to mention this kindred text. *Don Quixote* shows that the influence of crusaders from storytelling on real world politics, rhetoric and self-identity was seen by at least one author as being what by now must be considered a perennial problem.

*Don Quixote*’s sally, its metatextual deconstruction of knighthood, did not deal the fictional crusader a killing blow, but it did leave a lasting wound. Knights could never be taken quite so seriously again, and perhaps it is because of Cervantes’ work that the fictional crusader has to disguise himself today. ‘Kyrie Eleison’ is but another phase in the battle. It uses storytelling to show that the crusades as we understand them, and all their heroes, are really just constructions of story, accretions of words, stock phrases, and famous scenes, just like poor confused Don Quixote himself. Don Quixote dies so there can be no more sallies, and in an attempt to put these issues to bed. The same issues are still with us, however, so Esther leaves her own metatextual stories unfinished, to draw our attention to the fact that the trilogy itself is just a tale, and all the crusaders in it are just as fake as any of the others from the many texts intertextually referenced throughout—when we refer to these figures we are referring not to history but to ideals of story, imaginary ideals particular to Western culture which are not innocent flights of fancy but which instead have extremely problematic historical and moral backgrounds.

Despite the efforts of Cervantes, fiction was again to grant the fictionalised crusader enormous power and influence—and the fiction which has the most power over our view of the crusades today, and which may indeed have altered history, was that of Sir Walter Scott. Others adapted the crusader-cum-chivalric knight between Cervantes and Scott, but we leap ahead to Scott because his depiction of the crusades is still so relevant to us now.

### ***The Talisman and the Ideal of Saladin***

Jonathan Riley-Smith describes, in the chapter *Crusading and Islam* of his book *The Crusades, Christianity and Islam*, an extraordinary event.<sup>306</sup> Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany, on 31 October 1898, entered Jerusalem through a specially made hole in the wall in pseudo-medieval, pseudo-pilgrim, pseudo-nineteenth-century military garb as part of a tour organised by Thomas Cook Jr. Thomas Cook Jr himself followed, accompanied by men dressed as knights with the symbols of the Order of St John, and carrying a banner in the style of a medieval standard on which was written 'Thomas Cook and Son'. Inside the city the Kaiser put on the mantle of a Teutonic Knight, was present at the dedication of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, bought land on Mount Sion so he could build the German Catholic abbey of the Dormition, and sponsored the construction of a German hospice on the Mount of Olives, 'in the chapel of which he and his wife were portrayed, surrounded by...eight German crusader kings'.<sup>307</sup> On 8 November in Damascus he visited Saladin's tomb, which he paid to restore in Germanic royal style, dedicating the work to 'The Hero Sultan Saladin' and laying a bronze gilt wreath 'From one great emperor to another.' At a banquet afterwards he called Saladin 'one of the most chivalrous rulers in history...who often had to teach his adversaries the true nature of chivalry'. Riley Smith tells us, 'With this bombastic theater the Kaiser reintroduced Saladin to the Muslims, who had almost completely forgotten about him' and the Egyptian poet Ahmad Shawqi was soon asking 'how it was that Saladin's greatness had been ignored by Muslim writers until they had been reminded of it by Kaiser Wilhelm.'<sup>308</sup> Kaiser Wilhelm had become a great fan of Sir Walter Scott after being introduced to his books by his English mother,<sup>309</sup> and Scott's popularity across Europe had seen other Western leaders visit Saladin's tomb.

Riley-Smith argues that the re-emergence of the figure of Saladin in the Middle East stems from the West's obsession with him, granting him 'legendary status as a non-Christian paladin of chivalry'. He claims that this obsession came

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<sup>306</sup> Elizabeth Siberry also writes of this event in her essay, 'Images of the Crusades in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries', but I will be referring to and paraphrasing Riley-Smith's account and conclusions. Elizabeth Siberry, 'Images of the Crusades in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries', in *The Oxford History of the Crusades*, ed. by Jonathan Riley-Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 363-84.

<sup>307</sup> All information and quotations from Jonathan Riley-Smith, *The Crusades, Christianity and Islam*, pp. 63-4.

<sup>308</sup> Jonathan Riley-Smith, *The Crusades, Christianity and Islam*, p. 64.

<sup>309</sup> Riley-Smith, p. 65.

in significant part from Scott's crusader novels, in particular *The Talisman*, and that Western perception of the crusades as a national and imperialist enterprise stem from French crusades historian Joseph-François Michaud, who wrote during the French Restoration and the July Monarchy, and who said of the crusades, 'Names made famous by this war are still today objects of pride to families and country. The most positive of the results of the First Crusade is the glory of our fathers, this glory which is also a real benefit for a nation' and 'France would one day become the model and centre of European civilisation. The holy wars contributed much to this happy development and one can perceive this from the First Crusade onwards.'<sup>310</sup> Scott, on the other hand, represented the crusaders as childlike and boorish encountering, a more sophisticated Islamic world. Riley-Smith points out that Scott places the crusaders:

in one context—the central Middle Ages—and their opponents in another—the nineteenth century...Under his faux-oriental clothing, Scott's Saladin was patently a modern liberal European gentleman, beside whom medieval Westerners would always have made a poor showing.<sup>311</sup>

Scott's popularity ensured that his representation of the Levant became a standard one. Europeans were backwards and colonial and the Muslims were vastly more advanced, assailed by barbarians. As Riley-Smith writes, Scott's 'vision of the past was an unreal one.'<sup>312</sup>

Scott had great influence. As Ann Curthoys and John Docker note, a 'crucial figure' at a 'crucial moment in the development of modern professional "scientific" history' was nineteenth-century Leopold von Ranke.<sup>313</sup> Curthoys and Docker continue,

In his 'Autobiographical Dictation (November 1885)', a year before he died, Ranke noted that the 'romantic-historical works of Sir Walter Scott, which found a reception in all languages and all nations, contributed principally toward awakening a participation in the deeds and achievements of the past'. Scott was important for inspiring a nineteenth-century interest in history, and his novels were, Ranke admits, 'attraction enough for me, and I read these works with lively interest'. But he also 'took objection to them'. He found himself 'offended' by the way that Scott had knowingly created historical portraits

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<sup>310</sup> Riley-Smith, p. 53.

<sup>311</sup> Riley-Smith, p. 66.

<sup>312</sup> Riley-Smith, p. 66. Also, an interesting inversion of Edward Said. The need for 'good guys' and 'bad guys' in the 'story' of the crusades seems to prevent us from representing all the participants as equally human; equally good and equally flawed.

<sup>313</sup> Curthoys and Docker, p. 52.

that ‘seemed, even in particular details, to be completely contradictory to the historical evidence’: ‘I could not forgive him for accepting in his narrative biased tendencies which were totally unhistorical, and presenting them as if he believed them.’<sup>314</sup>

Curthoys and Docker write that, ‘In his old age Ranke recalled how important to his own conceptions and projects was his youthful rejection of the novels of Sir Walter Scott.’<sup>315</sup> Such was Scott’s influence and his uncertain position—his storytelling could inspire people to become historians, but then these same historians might list among their greatest achievements their rejection of the literary Prometheus who set the initial spark of their careers. His work was seen by this ‘crucial figure’ in modern history as influential, seductive, inspiring, and dangerous.

The 2005 Ridley Scott film *Kingdom of Heaven* continues to deploy a number of Sir Walter Scott’s tropes: a wise Saladin wants peace with crusaders; pilgrims come from a backward Europe and are led into error by psychotic religious orders.<sup>316</sup> Despite the many voices of current historians and current historical novelists, it seems we are still in the ‘Scott era’ when it comes to popular lay understanding of the crusades. As Riley-Smith says in another essay for *The Times*:

*Kingdom of Heaven* will feed the preconceptions of Arab nationalists and Islamists. The words and actions of the liberal brotherhood and the picture of Palestine as a Western frontier will confirm for the nationalists that medieval crusading was fundamentally about colonialism. On the other hand the fanaticism of most of the Christians in the film and their hatred of Islam is what the Islamists want to believe. At a time of inter-faith tension, nonsense like this will only reinforce existing myths.<sup>317</sup>

Before Scott’s novel appeared, Saladin, a Kurd, had not gained much fame in the Middle East. If the crusades were recalled it was customary to remember more violent and successful figures such as Baybars. The crusades were always a sideshow, taking second place to internal Muslim conflicts or much more profound dangers, such as conflict between Sunni and Shi’a Islam, the invasion of the Turks or Mongols, or the rise of the Mamluks. As Riley-Smith points out, the Ottomans were to gain far more territory in the Balkans and in Hungary than the

<sup>314</sup> Curthoys and Docker, pp. 61-62.

<sup>315</sup> Curthoys and Docker, p. 61.

<sup>316</sup> Ridley Scott, *Kingdom of Heaven* (20th Century Fox, 2005).

<sup>317</sup> Jonathan Riley-Smith, ‘Truth Is the First Victim’ (The Times Online, 2005) <[http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts\\_and\\_entertainment/film/article388261.ece](http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/film/article388261.ece)> [Accessed 2 September 2010].

Egyptians, Turks and Syrians ever briefly lost in the crusades. Riley-Smith further notes that, '[o]ne often reads that modern Muslims have inherited from their medieval ancestors bitter memories of the violence of the crusaders. Nothing could be further from the truth.'<sup>318</sup> For Muslims, unbelievers were all linked together; 'unbelief is one nation', as tradition has the Prophet saying. As Suha Taji Farouki explains,

An unbeliever [kafir] is anyone who follows a religion other than Islam. He is neither a believer nor a Muslim. Idolators, Jews, Buddhists, Christians and Communists are exactly the same in this respect—all will be consigned to Hellfire on the Day of Judgement.<sup>319</sup>

Riley-Smith points out that an Arabic term for a 'crusader' was only 'introduced in the middle of the nineteenth century by the Christian intelligentsia'.<sup>320</sup>

Wilhelm's visit came at a time when the Ottoman Empire seemed oppressed from all sides. They had lost large swathes of territory and global power was turning solidly to the West. It was a ripe time for nationalism and a nostalgic looking back at the glory days of the past. By 1899 the first Muslim history of the crusading movement by Sayyid 'Ali al-Hariri stated, 'Our most glorious sultan, Abdulhamid II, has rightly remarked that Europe is now carrying out a crusade against us in the form of a political campaign.'<sup>321</sup> The crusades were now seen as a solely destructive attack against an enlightened Middle East. 'Saladin, now Arabized, was given heroic status and within fifteen years of the kaiser's visit an Arab author, warning against the threat posed by Zionist settlement in Palestine, had adopted Saladin as a *nom de plume*'.<sup>322</sup> Western intervention in the Middle East becomes revenge for the crusades. Saladin moved from Middle Eastern nationalists to pan-Islamists to Jihadi fundamentalists. Many Middle Eastern leaders have depicted themselves next to Saladin and Saddam Hussein appears beside him on a postage stamp, a massive irony considering Saladin's Kurdish ethnicity. Osama bin Laden claimed he was fighting crusaders, and al-Qaeda videos have appeared marking the score between Jihadists and

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<sup>318</sup> Riley-Smith, *The Crusades, Christianity and Islam*, p. 68.

<sup>319</sup> Riley-Smith, p. 71, quoting Suha Taji Farouki.

<sup>320</sup> Riley-Smith, p. 71.

<sup>321</sup> Riley-Smith, p. 68.

<sup>322</sup> Riley-Smith, p. 72.

crusaders.<sup>323</sup> ‘Western blood carries the spirit of the crusades within itself. It fills the subconscious of the west,’ says Sayyid Qutb.<sup>324</sup> Riley-Smith argues that Scott’s fiction reflects one of two main streams of thought running through Western crusades history. Meanwhile, Scott’s work, and much admired mid-twentieth century historian Steven Runciman, who follows in Scott’s vein, help to feed a sense of Western guilt about events that occurred nearly a thousand years ago, perpetrated by individuals with mindsets and understandings of the world and reality that both sides would find incomprehensible today.

Saladin in Scott’s book is an enigma, a master of disguise. He literally embodies the entire Middle East as it turns out that nearly every Middle Eastern character we encounter is actually Saladin in disguise.

The world from which he comes, though his weapons and equipment are described with great love by Scott, is as indefinite and as dictated by a deeply Christian perception of the world as are Robert the Monk’s infidels. Would an audience have believed that a Christian king could so conveniently leave off his duties to disguise himself in all manner of ways and fraternise with the enemy? Indeed, Scott says in his introduction to *The Talisman*:

...I felt the difficulty of giving a vivid picture of a part of the world with which I was well nigh totally unacquainted, unless by early recollections of the Arabian Nights’ Entertainments; and not only did I labour under the incapacity of ignorance, in which, as far as regards Eastern manners, I was as thickly wrapped as an Egyptian in his fog; but my contemporaries were, many of them, as much enlightened upon the subject, as if they had been inhabitants of the favoured land of Goshen.<sup>325</sup>

No wonder, then, that his Saladin worships Iblis, the devil by his Islamic name. Saladin in Scott exists only for his interaction with the Christians, to shed light on their failings. He exists for them and his world seems to revolve around them. The Muslim world he comes from is romantic but impossible to touch; he almost seems to appear from a different reality. Richard the Lionheart may be boorish,

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<sup>323</sup> Riley-Smith, pp. 63-78. Bin Laden called the wars in Bosnia, Chechnya, Iraq and Somalia ‘Crusades’, for example, ‘Your mujahidin sons and brothers in Iraq have taught the US a hard lesson while in the fourth year of the Crusaders’ invasion, they are steadfast and patient and keep killing and wounding enemy soldiers every day.’ Osama bin Laden, ‘Transcript of Osama Bin Laden’s Speech, April 2006’ (South Asia Terrorism Portal, n. d.) <[http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/pakistan/document/papers/Transcript\\_osama.htm](http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/pakistan/document/papers/Transcript_osama.htm)> [Accessed 2 September 2010].

<sup>324</sup> Riley-Smith, p. 74.

<sup>325</sup> Scott, *Introductions and Notes from the Magnum Opus*, p. 393.

crude and prone to childish tantrums, but he is more recognisably human than the idealised Saladin. Saladin is the ‘Other’ of the West, but in this case an ideal that medieval man is striving for, and may reach one day. The crusaders are the boors, not yet raised to Saladin’s nineteenth-century ideal. Saladin is the noble enemy who can ennoble those who fight him.

Edward Said notes that Oriental figures in Western literature are ‘always represented as outsiders having a special role to play *inside* Europe’, whether as potential invaders in *The Song of Roland*, despoilers of European identity at the Holy Sepulchre and slayers of pilgrims in Crusader accounts, or later, as the wife-killer Othello. Said argues these figures are to Islam ‘as stylized costumes are to characters in a play; they are like, for example, the cross that Everyman will carry, or the particolored costume worn by Harlequin in a *commedia dell’arte* play.’<sup>326</sup>

Scott’s heroes are the West and his Other is the West. Behind Scott’s writing is also the subtext that the boorish West will one day rise over his sophisticated Middle East and should not forget what, he claims, the Middle East already knew long ago. There is an obligation to at least behave as well as the infidel did over five hundred years previously.

Scott has no doubt his Saladin is fictional. He describes his intent:

The period relating more immediately to the Crusades which I at last fixed upon, was that at which the warlike character of Richard I., wild and generous, a pattern of chivalry, with all its extravagant virtues, and its no less absurd errors, was opposed in the scales to that of Saladin, in which the Christian and English monarch showed all the cruelty and violence of an Eastern sultan; and Saladin, on the other hand, displayed the deep policy and prudence of a European sovereign, whilst they contended which should excel the other in the knightly qualities of bravery and generosity. This singular contrast afforded, as the author conceived, materials for a work of fiction, possessing peculiar interest.<sup>327</sup>

Scott’s traditional ‘Other’, with his Orientalist cure, is closer to Scott’s ideal man than the boorishness of the passionate crusaders. Perhaps Scott believed that the virtues of Saladin’s rather Spartan civilisation, all ‘bone, brawn and sinew’, would, when the mantle of so-called progress was passed on to the West, be most truly articulated through the European ‘habit of expressing...sentiments aloud and boldly’, because Europeans, like Richard, are ‘more accustomed to command than

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<sup>326</sup> Said, p. 71.

<sup>327</sup> Scott, *Introductions and Notes from the Magnum Opus*, p. 294.

to obey.<sup>328</sup> Richard's civilisation is shown to be in its infancy, with an immaturity that would fade with time but with a vigour that would, someone of Scott's time might think, give to the world new progress and new empires. Saladin 'cures' King Richard. He helps guide the West out of immaturity so, Scott and his contemporaries (and modern Orientalists) might infer, the West can take its 'place in the sun'.

Saladin embodies all the ideals of Scott's own time and that is his clear function in the text. Riley-Smith's notes on *Kingdom of Heaven* tell us how such texts as *The Talisman* are used to reflect current politics. On *Kingdom of Heaven*, the film-makers earnestly follow outdated stereotypes.<sup>329</sup> Riley-Smith was not alone in his attacks on such elements in *Kingdom of Heaven*, as Dr Jonathan Philips and Amin Maalouf joined him in denouncing the film to journalist Charlotte Edwardes:

Prof Riley-Smith, who is Dixie Professor of Ecclesiastical History at Cambridge University, said the plot was "complete and utter nonsense". He said that it relied on the romanticised view of the Crusades propagated by Sir Walter Scott in his book *The Talisman*, published in 1825 and now discredited by academics...Dr Jonathan Philips, a lecturer in history at London University and author of *The Fourth Crusade and the Sack of Constantinople*...said that by venerating Saladin, who was largely ignored by Arab history until he was reinvented by romantic historians in the 19th century, Sir Ridley was following both Saddam Hussein and Hafez Assad, the former Syrian dictator. Both leaders commissioned huge portraits and statues of Saladin, who was actually a Kurd, to bolster Arab Muslim pride...Amin Maalouf, the French historian and author of *The Crusades Through Arab Eyes*, said: "It does not do any good to distort history, even if you believe you are distorting it in a good way. Cruelty was not on one side but on all."

Sir Ridley's spokesman said that the film portrays the Arabs in a positive light.

"It's trying to be fair and we hope that the Muslim world sees the rectification of history."<sup>330</sup>

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<sup>328</sup> Scott, *The Talisman*, p. 13.

<sup>329</sup> 'The makers of the *Kingdom of Heaven* follow a modified version of the constructs of Scott and Michaud. A cruel, avaricious and cowardly Christian clergy preaches hatred against the Muslims and most of the crusaders and settlers are equally stupid and fanatical. At the same time the Holy Land is portrayed as a kind of early America, a New World welcoming enterprising immigrants from an impoverished and repressive Europe. And in the midst of all the bigotry a brotherhood of liberal-minded men has vowed to create an environment in which all religions will co-exist in harmony and is in touch with Saladin, who shares its aim of peace...No one can object to romantic fiction, but the film-makers have boasted that "authenticity coloured every facet of the production".' Riley-Smith, 'Truth Is the First Victim'.

<sup>330</sup> Charlotte Edwardes, 'Ridley Scott's new Crusades film "panders to Osama bin Laden"' (The Telegraph Online, 2004)

Christopher Tyerman simply writes that the film's 'fundamental, meretricious historical errors nonetheless attract[ed] the fury of Muslim activists and right-wing Christians alike.'<sup>331</sup>

Scott's Saladin is the version that has subsequently grown in power and identity both here and in the Middle East. Saladin has had more myriad disguises in the past two centuries than he ever had in *The Talisman*.

Of course, keeping Edward Said in mind, one must take caution. The Orientalist would assume a passive Middle East responding to an active West. The Orientalist would say, of course the West would give the Middle East Saladin, its greatest champion! I find Riley-Smith's argument convincing, but one must raise such points.

As Christopher Tyerman says, Riley-Smith's 'work has been infused by a desire to understand the crusaders' motivations on their own terms, however alien or contradictory those motives may appear to modern eyes.'<sup>332</sup> This naturally drew me, as an historical novelist, to his pioneering work. It was his essay on Kaiser Wilhelm II that inspired my trilogy and exegesis. But, when considering many potential voices, one must announce possible biases. Riley-Smith is a Roman Catholic, a Knight of Malta, in the Sovereign Military Order of Malta, which ultimately descends from the Knights Hospitaller, as well as being a Knight of St John.<sup>333</sup> These orders, of course, trace their heritage back to crusader originals, and such a descent would mean any academic with such connections would be aware that he might have to defend himself from accusations, warranted or not, of such honours biasing his views. As Riley-Smith's essay is a key feature, it is proper to declare these potential avenues of attack to those who might be inclined to make them.<sup>334</sup> Tyerman, for his part, says Riley-Smith's definition of

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<<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/northamerica/usa/1452000/Ridley-Scotts-new-Crusades-film-panders-to-Osama-bin-Laden.html>> [Accessed 22 April 2014].

<sup>331</sup> Christopher Tyerman, *The Debate on the Crusades* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), p. 235.

<sup>332</sup> Tyerman, *The Debate on the Crusades*, p. 232.

<sup>333</sup> Larry Pullen, 'Jonathan Riley-Smith Biography' (Gifford Lectures, n. d.)

<<http://www.giffordlectures.org/Author.asp?AuthorID=278>> [Accessed 14 September 2010].

Also, Tyerman, *The Debate on the Crusades*, p. 232.

<sup>334</sup> The fact I find myself in agreement with Riley-Smith is in some sense less relevant, as a large focus of this exegesis is on research and writing which informed the construction of my trilogy rather than on arguing about the authority of one esoteric school of crusades studies over another. Riley-Smith's work both informed and inspired my creative work.

the crusades is ‘thought by some to be too neat and theoretical, at times parodying papalist apologia.’<sup>335</sup>

*The Talisman*, while not widely read today, still looms large in popular perceptions of the crusades, and *The Talisman* appears in ‘Kyrie Eleison’ in two ways. The first is in my ‘magical Muslim’ figure in the story-within-the-story, about Orientalism, ‘The Story of the Serjeant’. Here a white European protagonist’s token minority Muslim friend Yuszuf imparts mystical knowledge about the number zero, and this knowledge is meant to enlarge the white character’s understanding of himself. Yuszuf, ‘born somewhere in Africa’, then makes some lascivious remarks, because he is from the exotic east where all is allowed, and disappears. ‘Yusuf’ is Saladin’s name, with ‘Salah ad-Din’ (the Righteousness of the Faith) being a title.<sup>336</sup> Almost every Muslim character in *The Talisman* turns out to be Saladin in disguise, and so it seemed an appropriate joke that one of the few Muslim speaking parts in ‘Kyrie Eleison’ could also be this timeless, magical Saladin.

‘It’s zero, it’s nothing,’ said Yuszuf.

‘I see no use to it,’ said Johannes, sitting before the fire, eating frumenty. ‘I’m not going to go and buy zero loaves of bread. I either have bread or I don’t. No need to count how much I don’t have.’

‘No, you don’t understand. It is the nothing that is. It is a mystical number. It is nothing and everything. In its emptiness is infinity. Written, it is a perfect circle. Expressed, it quantifies absence. It makes not is. It cannot be divided or multiplied. It is perfectly complete in its absence. Sit with it and think a while, and you will see it too. I learnt of it in Cairo. Zero! It opens the mind.’...‘We all come from nothing. God made us,’ said Yuszuf, looking at the zero he was making with his fingers as if for the first time. ‘I know whose zero I would like to touch my lips to.’

There is also a story-within-a-story, the only one not told by Esther but by a character which is subaltern to the subaltern, a shadow of Esther and an indicator of who she might become if not for the aristocrat’s support—a prostitute.

‘The Story of the Two Ruffians and the Man They Took with Them’ is about cannibalism, which both foreshadows the infamous cannibalism by the crusaders at Ma’arra which must soon appear in the text, and also points to the fact that, in this story, I am cannibalising two literary sources. Where Esther’s

<sup>335</sup> Tyerman, *The Debate on the Crusades*, p. 223.

<sup>336</sup> Armstrong, p. 235.

stories are subtle, this one is blatant and crude. It is violent and graphic, and where Esther riffs on themes from other texts, this one steals from them wholesale, like a cannibal with a bag of bones. The crusader cannibalism at Ma'arra, during which they consumed their Muslim foes (and their own sources admit this), is supposedly the most shocking aspect of the First Crusade. I suggest that the bigotry crusade narratives managed to bury beneath the flesh of Western culture is more shocking by playing that bigotry to the hilt here. The shock of the bigotry of the text may even overshadow the shock of the cannibals for the modern reader.

I take the anti-Muslim elements from Guibert of Nogent and the anti-Muslim elements from *The Talisman* (which were spoken by Saladin himself) and mix them together in one speech, which comes from the mouth of a Muslim. It thus shows that, centuries apart, some prejudices and misunderstandings had not changed. The Muslim here is clearly just an Orientalist creation, a mouthpiece for Western views and created by a Westerner. Again, I stress, this is one story among several, and in context, it is supposed to make a startling juxtaposition to Esther's usual tales. It is a satire, but in this case Juvenalian rather than Horatian. It may make the reader uncomfortable, but is not discomfort one of the indicators of a triumphant Juvenalian satire?

The story takes many phrases from Guibert of Nogent's history and *The Talisman* as follows, quoting from 'The Story of the Two Ruffians and the Man They Took with Them' and footnoting my sources. Early on the tale includes a biblical quote that suits the famine-struck land around Antioch, but which is also used by Scott:

*All its soil burned out by sulfur and salt, nothing planted, nothing sprouting, unable to support any vegetation, like the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboim, which the LORD destroyed in his fierce anger*

Deuteronomy 29:23<sup>337</sup>

Further phrases recur:

Finally the mountains began to soften and, issuing from those rocky and dangerous defiles, aching knees got some relief<sup>338</sup>

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<sup>337</sup> 'The whole land around, as in the days of Moses, was "brimstone and salt; it is not sown, nor beareth, nor any grass groweth thereon;'" Scott, *The Talisman*, p. 4.

<sup>338</sup> 'The warlike pilgrim had toiled among cliffs and precipices during the earlier part of the morning; more lately, issuing from those rocky and dangerous defiles, he had entered upon that great plain', Scott, p. 3.

The fight scene with a Turk shares elements with *The Talisman*. In Scott's work, Saladin and Richard fight at a desert oasis by the Dead Sea. Here, two cannibals fight a Turk by an icy pool amidst freezing mountain rocks.

Albert's spear arced downwards and the Turk knocked it aside with ease, cutting through the wood as he did so, his blade of rippled and watery Damascus steel.<sup>339</sup> Rainald had been able to close during that moment like a hawk attacking a heron and his short sword flashed towards the Turk's lean flank, but the Turk whipped around and took the blow on the back, where his round buckler, furred at the back with rhinoceros skin on the front, had been slung.<sup>340</sup>

The Turk had strength in his bended knee and he thrust Rainald away. Meanwhile in the struggle though the Turk had grabbed Rainald's belt, and rather than be thrown away, Rainald was cast upwards, and spun and twisted in the Turk's grasp. As his belt drew tight around his body and he slid within the loop of leather, the Turk had gotten around to his side and partway behind Rainald.<sup>341</sup>

The Turk's horse had retreated a distance and watched them all as if insulted for the interruption to its watering. There was an intelligence in its eyes that was almost human.<sup>342</sup>

When they converse, the Turk speaks as Saladin does in *The Talisman*.

'You don't know about my tribe but you fight against me, foolish Nazarene?'<sup>343</sup>

'Reason! I'd sooner be a misbelieving Jew and obey their laws.'<sup>344</sup>

I could not resist throwing in a reference from another famous Orientalist work about the Middle East:

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<sup>339</sup> 'The person and proportion of the Saracen...might have been compared to his sheeny and crescent-formed sabre, with its narrow and light, but bright and keen Damascus blade,' Scott, p. 14.

<sup>340</sup> '...so that he was enabled to wield the light round buckler of the skin of the rhinoceros, ornamented with silver bosses, which he wore on his arm...A second time, like a hawk attacking a heron, the Moor renewed the charge,' Scott, pp. 6-7.

<sup>341</sup> 'Even in this deadly grapple, the Saracen was saved by his agility and presence of mind. He unloosed the sword-belt, in which the Knight of the Leopard had fixed his grasp, and thus eluding him, mounted his horse, which seemed to watch his motions with the intelligence of a human being, and again rode off.' Scott, p. 8.

<sup>342</sup> See again the reference to a horse's anthropomorphic possibilities in the above note.

<sup>343</sup> 'Valiant Nazarene, is it fitting that one who can fight like a man should feed like a dog or a wolf', Scott, p. 15. See, '...mediæval Jews called the Christians *Notsrim*, or "Nazarenes," to derogate them and deny their key belief that Jesus of Nazareth had been the Messiah or Christ.' Avner Falk, *Franks and Saracens: Reality and Fantasy in the Crusades* (London: Karmac Books, 2010), Amazon Kindle e-book, p. 67.

<sup>344</sup> 'Even a misbelieving Jew would shudder at the food which you eat, as if it were fruit from the trees of Paradise.' Scott, p. 15.

‘Your blue eyes ...’ said the Turk. ‘Forgive me for staring, but it is like looking at the sky through the empty eye sockets of a skull. Perhaps such transparency of flesh reveals your natural weakness, and your race’s early grave.’<sup>345</sup>

The Turk’s story then repeats Guibert of Nogent’s crude indictment of Muslim beliefs:

‘The prophet, known also as Mahomet, because of his sexual excess with this woman, contracted epilepsy, which we also call the falling sickness, and he would often lie in his soiled bed grinding his teeth and foaming at the mouth.’<sup>346</sup>

‘He had a cow, which he had trained to come to him, and if she heard his voice or saw him she ran to him out of love and no-one could stop her. He had written a book and he tied this to the horns of the animal and hid her in his tent. He would speak on a high place or a pulpit, and the cow would hear her beloved master’s booming voice and she would go eagerly rushing to his feet, as if in worship of him.’<sup>347</sup>

‘But the law-giver was sadly taken from our midst. One day he was walking and he fell to one of the fits he was given to. As he twisted in his terrible pain, he was discovered by some pigs, which promptly devoured him, leaving only his heels. These heels are sacred to us. His limbs, which were holy to us, became the excrement of pigs. His sweetness and the breath of his that had spoken our truths came forth in the stench of pigs. For is it not by chewing and eating that all things are purified, and become angels, who leave us by belching and farting? How many angels were produced by the flesh these pigs ate and the great farts they gave? No-one can be sure, but we venerate each of them.’<sup>348</sup>

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<sup>345</sup> ‘She questioned me about the women of the tribe of Christians and their way of life, marvelling at my white skin, and the horrible blue eyes which looked, she said, like the sky shining through the eye-sockets of an empty skull.’ T. E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 1997), p. 208.

<sup>346</sup> ‘And since the vessel of a single bed frequently received their sexual exchanges, the famous prophet contracted the disease of epilepsy, which we call, in ordinary language, falling sickness; he often suffered terribly while the terrified prophetess watched his eyes turning upward, his face twisting, his lips foaming, his teeth grinding.’ Guibert of Nogent, p. 29.

<sup>347</sup> ‘Meanwhile, he had a cow, whom he himself had trained to follow him, so that whenever she heard his voice or saw him, almost no force could prevent her rushing to him with unbearable eagerness. He tied the book he had written to the horns of the animal, and hid her in the tent in which he himself lived. On the third day he climbed to a high platform above all the people he had called together, and began to declaim to the people in a booming voice.’ Guibert of Nogent, p. 30.

<sup>348</sup> But now to describe how this marvellous law-giver made an exit from our midst. Since he often fell into sudden epileptic fit, with which we have already said he struggled, it happened once, while he was walking alone, that a fit came upon him and he fell down on the spot; while he was writhing in this agony, he was found by some pigs, who proceeded to devour him, so that nothing could be found of him except his heels...He who has lived by the pig is chewed to death by the pig and the limbs which were called blessed have become pigs’ excrement. May those who wish to honor him carry to their mouths his heels, which the pig has poured forth in stench. What if there is some truth in what the Manicheans say about purification, that in every food something of God

As Karen Armstrong notes:

The monstrous Muslim is...a projection: Christians could not accept their holy violence or their repressed sexuality, so they projected all this onto the enemies they were fighting in the Holy Land, who were already seen as the inhuman enemies of God.<sup>349</sup>

Thus are the Muslims in Scott and Guibert of Nogent, and thus is this satirical Muslim here. He then goes on to paraphrase Scott's Saladin, that enduring figure for both the Middle East and the West when it comes to the crusades, and his story of being raised by the devil:

'As for myself and my own lineage,' said the Turk, 'There were once elemental spirits of living rock, made before Adam. These spirits did not want to worship a clod of earth in the shape of a God and they rebelled against heaven. They were, during the reign of King Zohauk in Persia, given form by the Powers of Darkness fed by a cruel king on the blood of human sacrifice. Seven houris were given to these creatures so that they may have their daily oblation of human blood. Each houri was alike in loveliness and could only be told apart by their heights, which gradually rose in easy gradation above each other like the steps to paradise. The spirits fell in love with the wise and beautiful houris and disappeared with them. These houris and these spirits had seven sons, and these sons gave rise to seven tribes. I am descended from one of those tribes. Our forefathers disdained even omnipotence because we would not do homage to a clod of earth. And our valour is known throughout the universe. And you Franks, I hear, come from the Trojans? It is a good lineage, but not nearly so ancient, no?'<sup>350</sup>

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is present and that part of God is purified by chewing and digesting, and the purified part is turned into angels, who are said to depart from us in belching and flatulence: how many angels may be [sic] believe were produced by the flesh eaten by these pigs and the great farts they let go? But, laying aside these comic remarks intended to mock his followers, my point is that they did not think he was God, but just a man and a leader, through whom divine laws might be transmitted.' Guibert of Nogent, pp. 31-32.

<sup>349</sup> Armstrong, p. 231.

<sup>350</sup> "Know, brave stranger," he said, "that when the cruel Zohauk, one of the descendants of Giamschid, held the throne of Persia, he formed a league with the Powers of Darkness, amidst the secret vaults of Istakhar, vaults which the hands of the elementary spirits had hewn out of the living rock long before Adam himself had an existence. Here he fed, with daily oblations of human blood, two devouring serpents, which had become, according to the poets, a part of himself, and to sustain whom he raised a tax of daily human sacrifices...the band of ravening slaves, whom he had sent forth to purvey victims for his daily sacrifice, brought to the vaults of the palace of Istakhar seven sisters so beautiful, that they seemed seven houris. These seven maidens were the daughters of a sage, who had no treasures save their beauties and his own wisdom...so like were they to each other, that they could not have been distinguished but for the difference of height, in which they gradually rose in easy gradation above each other, like the ascent which leads to the gates of Paradise. So lovely were these seven sisters when they stood in the darksome vault, disrobed of all clothing saving a cymar of white silk, that their charms moved the hearts of those who were not mortal. Thunder muttered, the earth shook, the wall of the vault was rent, and at the chasm entered one dressed like a hunter, with bow and shafts, and followed by six others, his brethren...'Zeineb,' said the leader of the band,—and as he spoke he took the eldest sister by the hand, and his voice was soft, low, and melancholy,—'I am Cothrobb, king of the subterranean world, and supreme chief of Ginnistan. I and my brethren are of those who, created out of the pure elementary fire, disdained, even at the command of Omnipotence, to do homage to

The literary game is shouted out loud here, and the satire should make the reader uncomfortable, but seeing such clear signposts might perhaps encourage readers to look for further games inside ‘Kyrie Eleison’, and to identify more subtly expressed prejudices in the real world. The story is meant to be a distorting funhouse mirror held up to the Western readers. And aren’t Orientalist Others just funhouse mirror distortions of one’s own cultural evils? It might be a slap in the face for some readers, but I believe a book about the crusades, if honest, must contain a slap or two. I believe it is essential to undermine the dominant popular views of the crusades which emanate from Scott. Scott has been inadvertently influential politically, which suggests the power of these storytelling crusaders, and still informs modern films and misconceptions about the crusades. I must target his text specifically and bombastically if, like Cervantes, I am to draw attention to the textual nature of the crusades figures which dominate popular consciousness. Scott’s storytelling has influenced our understanding of the crusades, and I attempt to fight against that in my trilogy.

### **Crusading Rhetoric In Modern Times**

The West has made errors that have helped fuel the view that the crusades are ongoing. Recently there was controversy over coded biblical reference being inscribed on gunsights being used by Western forces in the Middle East.<sup>351</sup> George W. Bush himself infamously used the word *crusade* in 2001—‘This crusade, this war on terrorism is gonna take awhile. And the American people

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a clod of earth, because it was called Man. Thou mayst have heard of us as cruel, unrelenting, and persecuting—it is false—we are by nature kind and generous—only vengeful when insulted, only cruel when offended. We are true to those who trust us; and we have heard the invocations of thy father, the sage Mithrasp, who wisely worships not alone the source of Good, but that which is called the source of Evil. You and your sisters are on the eve of death; but let each give to us one hair from your fair tresses, in token of fealty, and we will carry you many miles from hence to a place of safety, where you may bid defiance to Zohauk and his monsters.’...They gave the tribute which Cothroband demanded, and in an instant the sisters were transported to an enchanted castle on the mountains of Tugrut, in Kurdistan, and were never seen by mortal eye. But in process of time seven youths, distinguished in the war and in the chase, appeared in the environs of the castle of the demons. They were darker, taller, fiercer, and more resolute, than any of the scattered inhabitants of the valleys of Kurdistan; and they took to themselves wives, and became fathers of the seven tribes of the Kurdmans, whose valour is known throughout the universe.” Scott, pp. 27-28.

<sup>351</sup> ‘Gunsights’ Biblical References Concern US and UK Forces’ (BBC News, 2010) <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/8468981.stm>> [Accessed 2 September 2010].

must be patient. I'm gonna be patient'<sup>352</sup>—although he may have had in mind the more recent use of the term in US wartime rhetoric when Eisenhower referred to the war against Nazi Germany as 'the great Crusade'. Even then, Bush was recalling inappropriate rhetoric—Eisenhower's 1948 published account of World War II events was called *Crusade in Europe*, and Elizabeth Siberry notes that for Eisenhower the use of the word 'crusade' was not accidental. In fact, he intended it in a very literal sense. She demonstrates this when she quotes from his book:

Only by the destruction of the Axis was a decent world possible; the war became for me a crusade in the traditional sense of that often misused word.<sup>353</sup>

Osama bin Laden leapt on Bush's remarks immediately, saying

After the US politicians spoke and after the US newspapers and television channels became full of clear crusading hatred in this campaign that aims at mobilizing the West against Islam and Muslims, Bush left no room for doubts or the opinions of journalists, but he openly and clearly said that this war is a crusader war. He said this before the whole world to emphasize this fact...Let us investigate whether this war against Afghanistan that broke out a few days ago is a single and unique one or if it is a link to a long series of crusader wars against the Islamic world. Following World War I, which ended more than 83 years ago, the whole Islamic world fell under the crusader banner – under the British, French, and Italian governments.<sup>354</sup>

In the same statement, bin Laden calls Australians 'crusaders' for their actions in East Timor. According to him:

Therefore, we should view events not as separate links, but as links in a long series of conspiracies, a war of annihilation in the true sense of the word...These battles cannot be viewed in any case whatsoever as isolated battles, but rather, as part of a chain of the long, fierce, and ugly crusader war.

Bin Laden's statements were riddled with such references.

Riley-Smith has a telling quotation related to the Dardanelles campaign of World War One, in which Australian and New Zealand ANZACs were deployed, along with French and Indian troops, in a majority British force (indeed the campaign has defined Australians and Australian identity since):

Basil Bouchier, a London vicar who was serving as an army chaplain, described the war as "the holiest that has ever been waged...It is the honour of the most high God which is

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<sup>352</sup> Manuel Perez-Rivas, 'Bush Vows to Rid the World of "Evil-Doers"' (CNN.com, 2001) <<http://archives.cnn.com/2001/US/09/16/gen.bush.terrorism/>> [Accessed 2 September 2010].

<sup>353</sup> Siberry, pp. 363-84 (p. 383).

<sup>354</sup> Osama bin Laden, 'Bin Laden Rails against Crusaders and UN' (BBC News, 2001) <[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/world/monitoring/media\\_reports/1636782.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/world/monitoring/media_reports/1636782.stm)> [Accessed 2 September 2010].

imperilled” and viewed the Dardanelles campaign as “the latest of the crusades. Should Constantinople fall it will be the greatest Christian victory that has occurred for hundreds of years...A vision arises before the mind of Byzantium once again a Christian city; St. Sophia once again the home of Christian worship, and who knows, once again the Holy Land rescued from the defiling grip of the infidel.<sup>355</sup>

Christopher Tyerman reminds us again of how the idea of the crusades featured in the recasting of World War I, when he speaks of General Allenby’s capture of Jerusalem and Damascus from the Turks:

Hardly surprisingly, one veteran of the campaign, Vivian Gilbert, penned *The Romance of the Last Crusade – with Allenby to Jerusalem* and a contemporary account of the fall of Jerusalem in 1917 was described by its author, H. Pirie-Gordon, as ‘the final continuation of William of Tyre’.<sup>356</sup>

It is not only extremists or fundamentalists in the Middle East who believe a crusade is still occurring, and Israel and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have of course been a focus.<sup>357</sup> The history of the crusades has been heavily influenced by popular fiction, both at the time the First Crusade was recorded and in the present day. And when people like Osama bin Laden claim they are fighting crusaders and Saddam Hussein was represented standing beside a Saladin who, being so divorced from his Kurdish heritage, must surely be closer to Scott’s figure than to history’s, this has real world consequences for people living their lives in the present.

Having less to do with historical reality than with reactions to imperialism, the Nationalist and Islamist interpretations of crusade history help many people, moderates as well as extremists, to place the exploitation they believe they have suffered in a historical context and to satisfy their feelings of both superiority and humiliation.<sup>358</sup>

Though it was never Walter Scott’s intention, his popularity and his ability to spread across cultures and into new contexts saw that he contributed to the

<sup>355</sup> Riley-Smith, *The Crusades, Christianity and Islam*, p. 78.

<sup>356</sup> Tyerman, *The Invention of the Crusades*, p. 124. Tyerman quotes La Monte, ‘Some Problems’, p. 60.

<sup>357</sup> For the belief in the Middle East that the crusades are ongoing, see ‘Christianity: A History – Crusades’, directed by Dimitri Collingridge and written by Rageh Omaar, on *Compass* (ABC Television, 2010). Also, see Jonathan Riley-Smith *The Crusades, Christianity and Islam*, p. 76, in which he discusses being approached to appear on an Egyptian television documentary, the premise of which was that a Western crusade is continuing. Also, Frank Gardner compares Bin Laden to Saladin and says, of people in Saudi Arabia, ‘They too, would like US and British forces to leave Saudi Arabia. Many Saudi Islamists, who have little direct contact with the West, see these troops as colonial invaders, as latter-day crusaders come to defile the birthplace of Islam.’ Frank Gardner, ‘The Cult of Bin Laden’ (BBC News, 2001)

<[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/1560482.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/1560482.stm)> [Accessed 2 September 2010].

<sup>358</sup> Riley-Smith, p. 76.

cultural perception of history and created nationalist and religious fundamentalist icons where there had been none before, and fundamentalist religious warfare was ironically the very thing his book was criticising. Jerome de Groot points out:

Whilst Scott may have thought of his audience as largely Scottish and British, his novels immediately became read, admired and mimicked throughout Europe, North America and the British Empire; his work reached Brazil, Australia and Russia, influencing writers from Alexander Pushkin to Alexandre Dumas, from James Fenimore Cooper to Marcel Proust. Scott's work spoke to newly independent nation states and allowed the site of the historical novel to be a crucible for the discursive formation of states and races<sup>359</sup>

It is a commonplace that Scott 'invented' the historical novel with his Waverley Novels but he quite unintentionally spoke to the future as well as the past and his present. As Milan Kundera says in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*:

If the French Revolution were to recur eternally, French historians would be less proud of Robespierre. But because they deal with something that will not return, the bloody years of the Revolution have turned into mere words, theories, and discussions, have become lighter than feathers, frightening no one. There is an infinite difference between a Robespierre who occurs only once in history and a Robespierre who eternally returns, chopping off French heads.<sup>360</sup>

Scott made the past immediate, and as a result we find ourselves repeating it over and over, unable to find that terrible lightness that so appalled Kundera.

'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God,' the Gospel of John begins, and the power of words to shape the world extends far beyond Genesis. Narratives feed identity and feed history, and history then feeds narrative, so that the cycle may start anew. Looking at the crusades, we see this recurring theme of people being influenced by the narrative fictions with which they identify, and these people then going on to shape the facts of history.

John of Salisbury said in his twelfth-century *Metalogicon*, on the field of learning:

Bernard of Chartres used to compare us to dwarfs perched on the shoulders of giants. He pointed out that we see more and farther than our predecessors, not because we have

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<sup>359</sup> Jerome de Groot, *The Historical Novel* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), pp. 93-4.

<sup>360</sup> Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (London: Faber and Faber, 1999), p. 3.

keener vision or greater height, but because we are lifted up and borne aloft on their gigantic stature.<sup>361</sup>

If, in our perceptions of the crusades, we are perched atop giants, then perhaps they are the kind of larger-than-life storybook giants against whom Don Quixote might battle, striking madly as wine sloshes about on the floor.

Writing about the crusades in fictional works is fraught: a modern novel must paradoxically accept both the fictionality of our own understanding of the crusades and at the same time fight against some of the popular notions fiction has fostered, all while using fiction to make its point. It must be Picasso's 'lie that makes us realize the truth'.

The idea that there is an 'ongoing crusade' can be implied by Western works, particularly by neomedieval fictions. This same notion is a favourite of anti-Western propaganda and is particularly dangerous. Cervantes saw the cost of powerbrokers continuing to promote crusading well past its use-by date. The 'ongoing crusade' also wrongly suggests that we can understand any crusade, even the First, entirely in present-day terms. The events belong to a past age. Any attempt to recreate them imprints on them modern biases.

The writer of the modern crusade novel then seems obliged to highlight as many of these biases and these fictional traditions as possible, hinting at what lies beneath, hinting at what modern historians have learned, but subtly suggesting to readers that such a world is as unknowable—as unknowable as the mind behind the eyes of a watching animal, such as those that observe the knight character as he dies outside Jerusalem; or as unknowable as the mania of the zealous, illiterate peasant—Paul continues on his endless crusade as he becomes the crusader version of Kundera's 'Robespierre', 'eternally' 'chopping off French heads'. All such attempts at truly knowing the First Crusade are 'vanity', as repeated references to Ecclesiastes throughout 'Kyrie Eleison' remind us, and so, like Cervantes, we can be better served by deconstructing the fictional crusader—we can metatextually pull apart the crusader identity layer by intertextual layer, revealing that each is a page from a story and beneath is just a tired old man, belonging to a different age, ready to finally be laid to rest. If we do this we might realise how alien is this creature we are left with, and we might see that he has no

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<sup>361</sup> Quoted in Cook and Herzman, p. 270.

relevance to our age. We might see that we have used this unknowable entity as a means of carrying anachronistic and potentially harmful prejudices and biases into the present.

And so we finish with what has influenced and inspired the creative piece, and turn to a discussion of one aspect of how the issues raised in this thesis continue to play out in the popular culture of today. The fact that these issues do continue suggests that highlighting the ever-evolving influence and fictionalisation of crusaders has relevance. We might point to obvious instances in which fictional crusaders champion their values through film, video games, or novels, but I believe it is more useful to explore a perhaps less obvious but quite pervasive way they still speak to us, disguised on the outside but with their anachronistic values very much intact.

### **Caped Crusaders: Chivalric Knights with new secret identities**

*It is my hypothesis that the fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural.*

Samuel P. Huntington, 'The Clash of Civilizations?'<sup>362</sup>

*The image of the crusader is unshakeable in western mentalities. However alien the motives or justifications, crusading still resounds in the imagination as much as the intellect, a persisting icon of western culture.*

Christopher Tyerman, *The Invention of the Crusades*<sup>363</sup>

We have seen that fictional narratives influenced original crusaders, and that fictional narratives about the crusaders may have influenced people who helped shape the facts of history. We have seen that rhetoric relating to the crusades still has the potential to cause offence, to be used as propaganda, and to exacerbate tensions between the West and the Middle East.

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<sup>362</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, 'The Clash of Civilizations?', in *The Clash of Civilizations: The Debate*, ed. by James F. Hoge, Jr. (New York: The Council on Foreign Relations, 2010), Amazon Kindle e-book, location 50-513 (location 57).

<sup>363</sup> Tyerman, *The Invention of the Crusades*, p. 1.

So how are all these discussions of crusader ideals persisting in fiction, which we know can influence identity and the facts of history, relevant to today? My analysis above shows how easily today we can punch the crusader back down whenever he dares rear his head.

For this final part of the exegesis we move beyond ‘Kyrie Eleison’, so that we may look at how its themes, and the previous themes of this exegesis—of crusader knights, born in narrative, reinventing themselves so their ideals can appeal to new generations as they reappear at key moments throughout the ages—relate to the contemporary, post 9/11 world.

Surely, after the attack of *Don Quixote* and in an era when we are sensitive to such things, the fictional crusader knight, obvious in his anachronism, should be long buried in the past? We are savvy enough now that there would be an outcry if he appeared un-ironically in popular fiction as if his ideals were ones to follow.

And this is exactly why he had to go underground, and assume a new, secret identity. When he appears as an actual crusader knight he tends to be apologetic or ironic because he will be so highly scrutinised—see *Kingdom of Heaven* as an example. For his essential ideals, methods, and morality to remain untouched, for his heart and soul to remain true, he had to drop the guise of a knight and make his latest sally virtually naked—or at least with his underwear showing.

Though this discussion about superheroes and their crusader influences has no direct intertextual parallels in the creative piece, ‘Kyrie Eleison’, it is important to highlight how these modern crusaders carry anachronistic values into the modern world. Islamic extremists might claim the crusade is ongoing, and that Westerners are crusaders, and bumbling western politicians might misuse the term ‘crusade’ in rhetoric, but does this really suggest that the fictional crusader has widespread cultural relevance and influence? For the fictional crusader to still be exerting influence on personal and national identities, he would have to exist in a far more widespread format. Indeed, if he does not, then would there be any need to write ‘Kyrie Eleison’, a book intended to expose the fictional evolution of the crusader so we can spot him in the modern day? The trilogy has relevance because the anachronistic moral codes of the fictional crusaders are still with us, and Westerners are still identifying and connecting with such figures, and we can

spot them if we know where to look, using the indicators peppered throughout this thesis and through the entirety of 'Kyrie Eleison'. This thesis and the creative trilogy lay bare the foundations so we can spot the myriad ways the crusader is rebuilt in various media.

The crusader was created by story soon after events, and then he became the chivalric knight. In this thin disguise, this minor adaptation, he survived down the centuries. Attacks like *Don Quixote* have made us wary of him, and Walter Scott's crusaders are easy to spot and to challenge in an era where the very term 'crusade' can make people uncomfortable and put them on alert. Just like organisms, ideas must adapt and evolve to survive. The fictional crusader simply changed his costume, kept most of his values intact, and went on being one of the West's heroic ideals.

The storybook crusader is carried into the modern West in many forms of media, including fantasy novels, video games, television and film, but I have chosen to discuss comic books because they are one of the less obvious places to look, and so a discussion of them suggests the pervasiveness and adaptability of this storybook crusader and his anachronistic values.

Having Esther tell stories of superheroes in 'Kyrie Eleison' might strain credibility, as the historical novel is set in a world that allows the reader to suspend disbelief. 'Kyrie Eleison' does reference the chivalric knights that would become superheroes, and Paul has an obsession with 'costume', so that readers may spot parallels. This entire discussion has been leading to how the fictional crusader survives in the modern world, and so, stepping beyond the trilogy 'Kyrie Eleison', here he is. 'Kyrie Eleison' is the text, and now we discuss one of many areas in which its core ideas are playing out in the real world.

There have been many rival claims for the influences that went into creating American comic book superheroes: stereotypes drawn from Greek myth, Jewish migrant identity, and the influence of Friederich Nietzsche being some of the more compelling.<sup>364</sup> I contend that one of the greatest influences has been the fictional knight and the ideals of chivalry, those heroes that are only one step away from the crusader knights, and indeed are the crusader knight idealised in

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<sup>364</sup> Gerard Jones, 'Superheroes' Secrets Are out, and the World Just Shrugs' (smh.com.au, 2004) <<http://www.smh.com.au/news/Opinion/Superheroes-secrets-are-out-and-the-world-just-shrugs/2004/12/12/1102786951866.html>> [Accessed 2 September 2010].

narrative fiction. In the comic book the original violence underlying and integral to the ideal of chivalry, a violence watered down and even ignored in chivalry's modern socially polite meaning, can be restored, albeit in a slightly weakened form. The knight is once again superhuman in his abilities and his ideals, and he demonstrates his will and his goodness with the strength of his arms.

The knight-as-superman is not new; he was a superman in the day of the chivalric romance as well, as Ramsey points out:

Although later ages remembered the Arthurian stories best, medieval audiences seem to have given the most attention to those knights whose exploits surpassed all bounds of reasonable human endeavour and encroached on the fantastic and the supernatural. These are the heroes who kill 300 opponents single-handedly, who battle dragons, and who conquer whole empires aided only by badly outnumbered forces. Unlike some other medieval heroes, their travels seldom carry them to the lands of the faerie; they operate in a world that is as close a representation of the real world as any found in the romances, but their deeds are exaggerated beyond natural proportions. They are the medieval supermen.<sup>365</sup>

The superhero genre as mainstream was born in the 1930s with the first appearance of two of its most iconic and instantly recognisable figures: Superman and Batman. The characters have been adapted into various media and reinvented over the years in many ways, so that most who know the characters may never have even read a comic book. But in the background, the comics have been in continuous publication for more than seventy years, with both characters featuring in multiple titles a month for the last twenty. Films, cartoons and t-shirt images are testament to their continuing popularity. Boys across the Western world, and even beyond, despite language barriers, can usually instantly recognise not only an iconic superhero such as Batman, Superman or Spider-Man; they can also often provide the name of his alter ego, describe his day job, his 'origin story' and perhaps even name his base of operations. Superheroes are a prime example of popular literature as the characters themselves have become woven into the cultural fabric of the West. Since 9/11 there have been a raft of superhero films and audiences seem to have an unending hunger for their simplified morality,

Comic books remind us of the visual language used by the Church and other medieval authorities to teach the illiterate of the Middle Ages. The Bayeux

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<sup>365</sup> Ramsey, p. 45.

Tapestry is essentially a comic; it cannot be absorbed all at once, one has to walk around it, watching each event unfold pictorially, one image after the other. Stained glass windows and church statuary served a similar purpose, representing with iconography and visual shorthand the stories of saint's lives and events from the Bible. Medieval manuscript illuminations and church frescoes also worked in similar ways.

### **Batman as Knight**

Batman is known as 'The Dark Knight' and 'The Caped Crusader'. He is a wealthy aristocrat who lives in Wayne Manor, a name which recalls to us immediately the fact that manor is the typical name for a medieval knightly landholding. His wealth provides him with the opportunity to enact his personal crusade, which psychologically seems almost to be a penance for his inability to prevent his parent's death at the hands of a mugger. Batman's alter ego is handsome and beloved by women, often called 'millionaire playboy Bruce Wayne', just as in medieval romances, being handsome was par for the course for knights, and indeed was often a mark of kingship or inner nobility. He wears armour—his costume is not just for decoration, it is supposed to be plated with bullet-proof Kevlar. He has a cowl reminiscent of the winged helmet of a Teutonic knight. In place of a cloak he has a cape. On his chest he wears a bat emblem—much like crusaders bore a cross, the symbol of their devotion and their heroism, on their chests or right shoulders. Indeed, most superheroes have an instantly recognisable form of heraldry in their symbols, which are often worn on their chests (the S of Superman, the spider of Spider-Man, the lightning bolt of the Flash, the lantern of the Green Lantern, to name just a few). Batman has a utility belt, and for knights the sword belt was a powerful symbol of who they were, strapped on during the dubbing ceremony. Even the famous superhero's underwear, worn on the outside, can be seen as a visual adaptation of the knightly costume. A knight would have worn a hauberk and a tunic, hanging down around his hips beneath his sword belt. Knights themselves wore tight leggings to enable ease in horseback riding, with bandages wrapped around the legs (a sort of gaiter) being another symbol of knighthood, while Batman wears boots. The silhouette of a knight is maintained.

Like Roland's Veillantif, Batman has a famed and named 'steed' in the Batmobile. Batman in the comic books has a squire in Robin, a teenager who accompanies him into battle, but also in Alfred, the trusty butler who patches him up and maintains his household and batcave fortress or underground 'castle'. He does not use an Excalibur or any form of sword but he is replete with named gadgets used for crime-fighting, such as the 'batarang' and the 'batrope'. Like Batman, knights in chivalric romance and later often took on animal names, such as Chrétien de Troyes's 'Knight of the Lion' or Walter Scott's 'Knight of the Couchant Leopard'. In real life we have Richard the Lionheart. In addition, animals frequently appeared in heraldry associating knights with animals, both in the Middle Ages and later.

Batman has sworn an oath to fight crime and injustice, which has many parallels with the oath of chivalry. It places artificial and self-imposed limitations on his behaviour. In his case, he must not kill. He must not allow innocents to die, even if it means that an enemy might overpower, escape or get the better of him. He has a code and much of the drama takes place when Batman must test how close to the edge of his code he can morally travel (see particularly the film *The Dark Knight* and Alan Moore's 1988 graphic novel *The Killing Joke*).<sup>366</sup> This is similar to the chivalric romances, where much of the drama comes from characters having to make up for breaches in the code of chivalry, such as Erec in *Erec and Enide*, who forsakes chivalry to spend time in bed with his wife and must spend most of the romance righting this wrong, or Lancelot, who must make up for hesitating when asked to debase himself by Queen Guinevere in *Lancelot, Knight of the Cart*. Crusaders must not sin, or God will not allow them victory. Violence must be moral if it is to win God's approval.

Batman is friends with a kind of king in Commissioner Gordon, but perhaps it is more useful to see Gordon as a representative of the Church. Gordon is like the formal Church fighting against immorality; in this case, the immorality of crime. Knights refused to be bound by formal ecclesiastical rules and in fact claimed superiority over them, even a moral right to transgress against them. They placed themselves physically and morally as being superior to any earthly

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<sup>366</sup> Alan Moore (writer), Brian Bolland (illustrator), and John Higgins (colourist), *Batman: The Killing Joke* (New York: DC Comics, 1988).

king or institution. Thus Batman, the knight errant, outshines the aging and white-haired Commissioner Gordon in every way. Gordon is bound by ineffective rules and the physical vulnerability and moral corruption of his police force. The kingdom is weak. The Church is impotent. Batman is able to rise beyond ecclesiastical rules and formal laws to do what needs to be done; as knight-errant he roams Gotham city, saving damsels in distress from muggers and defeating evil. Morality, or Batman's personal idea of morality, chosen by him without outside checks, comes from his fists. The police do not stop Batman because they admire his moral superiority.

Medieval romances were as obsessed with identity as comic books are with secret identities. Knights routinely meet and fight, only to reveal themselves to each other later. Names are not given until defining actions such as victory, defeat or marriage have taken place, even if it means characters must go unnamed for the majority of a poem. Identity was very often a secret to be discovered in medieval romances. For example, Colin Morris points out that in the Grail stories of Chrétien de Troyes, heroes like Perceval go through most of the tale without names, having 'curious periods of anonymity,'<sup>367</sup> and Perceval only earns his name after discovering his true self.

This fits with obsessions over interior motive that came about around the time of the First Crusade. The twelfth century is often depicted as being 'the birth of the individual', no doubt aided by confessional culture that put the state of one's personal soul in pride of place.<sup>368</sup> The early stages of this can be seen in crusading. If people are questing to Jerusalem to make up for their sins, then the intention of the sinner became of paramount concern. Outward identity and interior motive: we all have secret selves. As Batman is a knight, he must have a disguise, and he must have dual identities, if he is to fit into the mode of the medieval romance that was inspired by the crusades.

Batman is ostensibly a man, like the knight in the chivalric superman stories, and yet his abilities show him to be far beyond even the peak of human potential, a full superman in his own right, somewhat like Roland fighting off hordes of Moors. He routinely battles armed opponents hand-to-hand and yet is

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<sup>367</sup> Colin Morris, *The Discovery of the Individual 1050–1200* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), p. 137.

<sup>368</sup> For an extended and fascinating discussion of this see the landmark work of Morris.

hardly ever shot, and though he is often wounded, it is rarely serious. He regularly beats people to a pulp but no one ever falls the wrong way and dies—breaking Batman’s code—and people are not killed in the crossfire. Cervantes, who took such great pains to show the impact of fantasy-style violence in the real world, would have been appalled.

Like in *Roland*, violence in this world is celebrated. Order is restored by contests of physical strength. Instead of long descriptions, for the violence is demonstrated visually, we have the garish sound effects so famously linked with comics. Instead of the sword cutting the horse and rider in twain we have the *crunch* and the *pow* and the *bam* of fists hitting skulls. Language is reduced to the most raw and effective way of viscerally portraying flesh struggling against flesh. ‘Punch-’em-ups are as standard a feature of superhero comics as they are of chivalric romances, and that is just how things are, a rule of the genre,’<sup>369</sup> says the comic book critic Roz Kaveney. The fact that traditional superheroes do not dwell on the gore to such an extent as *Roland* has something to do with the Comics Code, but it is worth saying in passing that by the time of the chivalric romance superman story the gore of the older *Roland* had fallen out of style.

Most of the battle descriptions themselves seem rather tired. They do not have anything like the realism, bloody detail, or imagination of the combats in older epics such as the *Chanson de Roland*. What they do have is a ritual of threat and conquest.<sup>370</sup>

Comic violence is very ritualised: the hero bursts in, usually with a comment or witticism; there is a flurry of violence and the action hones in on the hero and his chief antagonist. Often the antagonist initially escapes, sometimes by exploiting the hero’s moral code, but a rematch is sure to take place. It is similar in the medieval romance, when men will challenge each other to duels, tournaments are a constant feature and even bandits will line up to fight one-on-one.<sup>371</sup>

Batman has a list of enemies that reminds one of entries in a medieval bestiary: Two Face, Killer Croc, Catwoman, Poison Ivy.<sup>372</sup> Even the Penguin—an unlikely name for an enemy—reminds one of the fantastic powers that were attributed to otherwise mundane creatures in such bestiaries. The panther in the

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<sup>369</sup> Roz Kaveney, *Superheroes! Capes and Crusaders in Comics and Films* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2008), p. 14.

<sup>370</sup> Ramsey, p. 53.

<sup>371</sup> We see this in *Erec et Enide*, for example. See Chrétien de Troyes.

<sup>372</sup> Robert Bartlett calls the twelfth-century, the time the chivalric romance was born, ‘the great age of the bestiary’. Bartlett, p. 674.

bestiaries has perfumed breath; the beaver is self-castrating; the fox lies on its back pretending to be dead to catch birds; the crocodile has dung with magical properties; bear cubs are unformed and must be licked into shape by the mother; the barnacle goose grows from a tree, lynx urine hardens into a precious stone.<sup>373</sup> Unseen animals had magical powers and moral properties, and how they behaved was a moral lesson instructing human beings in how to come closer to God. Batman lives in a similar world where animal attributes represent moral forces and the unlikely, the supernatural and the metaphorical become actual. Batman has many unlikely beasts to fight in his quests.

Batman's mission to fight crime and evil is an endless battle he could never win. Thus he must fight figures that embody certain traits, so that his one-on-one conflicts have emotional value. This is no different to the superman of the chivalric romance. As Ramsey points out in relation to the heroes of medieval romance:

Although the hero's enemies are often whole armies and kingdoms, his battles are generally fought against individual opponents, one at a time...The audience was less interested in armies fighting armies than in one man sallying out against the world and subduing it by force.<sup>374</sup>

And indeed, during the dying days of the cold war era, Batman had an opponent called the KGBeast, representing all of the USSR. These comic book contests of man against man, protagonist and antagonist each usually with their own perverse code of conduct, have something to them of the medieval joust.

Batman's enemies, against whom he fights again and again, are clearly coded types: the Scarecrow represents fear; Poison Ivy represents lust; Killer Croc represents the beast within; the Riddler embodies mystery itself. Batman fights social and psychological forces more than people, and that is why they can never truly be beaten and why they always recur.<sup>375</sup>

Batman has at least one major enemy from the Middle East. Ra's Al Ghul, a name which in Arabic means 'The Demon's Head', originated from an Arabic

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<sup>373</sup> David Badke, 'The Medieval Bestiary: Animals in the Middle Ages' (2010) <<http://bestiary.ca/index.html>> [Accessed 2 September 2010].

<sup>374</sup> Ramsey, p. 52.

<sup>375</sup> As an interesting etymological side note to the discussion of 'Supervillains', the word 'villain' descends to us from 'villein' or 'vilain', a word for serf in the Middle Ages. It is humorous to think of superheroes battling super-peasants in some kind of eternal class struggle, as knighthood itself quickly grew into a class of its own and began to embody a superior caste.

tribe six hundred years ago.<sup>376</sup> He uses supernatural pools, ‘Lazarus Pits’, situated at ley lines to give him long life, much in the way that Saladin in Scott’s *The Talisman* has magical healing powers by means of his ethnicity, or the way that Kerbogha’s mother in First Crusade accounts can divine the future. Ra’s Al Ghul does not have a named mother but a beautiful daughter, Talia, who is a constant temptation for Batman and in fact, in recent comics, it is revealed that Talia secretly had a son from Batman (a son who was so wild and murderous that Batman, with his constrained morality of violence, must tame the boy). Edward Said notes, with some exasperation, that the West is obsessed with the sexual possibility of the Orient:

Why the Orient seems still to suggest not only fecundity but sexual promise (and threat), untiring sensuality, unlimited desire, deep generative energies, is something on which one could speculate... one must acknowledge its importance as something eliciting complex responses, sometimes even a frightening self-discovery, in the Orientalists<sup>377</sup>

Ra’s constantly hopes that Batman will become his heir. They are often depicted fighting in the desert with swords, and at each encounter, Ra’s prefers to use this weapon. Batman is, of course, an expert swordsman. Ra’s is an international terrorist, leader of the ‘League of Assassins’,<sup>378</sup> who wants to end most of human life on the planet so that he can create a perfect world in his image. Ra’s al Ghul first appeared in 1971 and so is a mid-career addition to the Batman rogue’s gallery. While taking into account Ra’s al Ghul’s Middle Eastern identity we must also acknowledge a Fu Manchu influence in his origins. Ra’s al Ghul fits as an enemy of both the modern superhero of the comic book and the medieval superman of the chivalric romance, as, according to Ramsey:

Superman stories deal with problems of control, mainly control of one’s environment, and they appeal to audiences who share (or fear) a sense of impotence. Superheroes in the twentieth-century comic book and other popular literature are primarily eradicators of crime. In the medieval superman stories, most of the heroes’ enemies are noblemen from other lands, men identified only by name (or rank) and homeland. From this it seems clear that the threats against which author and audience felt a need for protection and

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<sup>376</sup> See for example Dennis O’Neil, *Batman: Tales of the Demon* (New York: DC Comics, 1991).

<sup>377</sup> Said, p. 188.

<sup>378</sup> It is worth remembering that the English word for ‘Assassin’ comes from ‘Hashashin’, a derogatory term for a radical Islamic sect that killed important religious and political individuals, often at the cost of their own lives, in the Middle East during the time of the crusades. See for example Bernard Lewis, *The Assassins: A Radical Sect in Islam* (London: Phoenix, 2003).

which called for the abilities of an extraordinarily strong hero were rank and geography.<sup>379</sup>

And so we come to one of Batman's other, not-so-secret identities.

### **Batman as Crusader**

Batman is a knight first, but sometimes his status as a crusader comes to the fore. In the seventy-plus year run of the comics arguably one of the most important storylines and events in the extensive fictional life of the character was the death of his squire, Robin. Robin was canonically dead for twenty years of real time, an extraordinarily long-lasting demise in comic book terms.

Two Robins, Dick Grayson and Tim Drake, have grown up to become independent heroes in their own right. The Robin that was Jason Todd was killed in the 1988 four-part storyline *A Death in the Family*, playing out in *Batman* issues 426 to 429.<sup>380</sup> In this story, so important in the history of the character, Batman, one of the West's great pop culture exports, is most obviously a crusader.

The plot revolves around Batman's arch enemy the Joker attempting to sell a nuclear bomb mounted in a cruise missile to Arab extremists who hope to bomb Israel. The Joker is depicted as speaking fluently to the extremists in their own tongue. The Joker is offered a position in the Iranian government by Ayatollah Khomeini and he later becomes the Iranian delegate to the UN. Even the Joker is scared when he first meets the Ayatollah. The Joker describes himself at one point as being a 'victim of Reaganomics'.<sup>381</sup>

Batman and Robin journey across Lebanon and the Middle East in search of Robin's birth mother. Red herring mother possibilities include a Mossad agent. Bruce Wayne travels at one point on a fake Irish passport, implying he is a member of the IRA. Robin's true mother is a formerly corrupt aid worker in Ethiopia, blackmailed by the Joker into giving out medical supplies to sell on the black market. The Joker beats Robin nearly to death with a crowbar, and then

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<sup>379</sup> Ramsey, pp. 48-49.

<sup>380</sup> Jim Starlin (writer), Jim Aparo (penciller), and Mike DeCarlo (inker), *Batman: A Death in the Family* (New York: DC Comics, 1988).

<sup>381</sup> Part Two, Starlin, Aparo, and DeCarlo, p. 8.

blows Robin and his mother up with TNT. Robin dies when trying to protect his mother from the blast with his own body, but she is killed anyway.

Batman goes to fight the Joker in revenge for Robin but finds he cannot touch him, because as an ambassador for Iran the Joker enjoys diplomatic immunity. When warned off by the CIA and told that the US is in delicate negotiations with Iran, Batman bitterly jokes about the Iran-Contra affair, saying ‘Another arms for hostages deal?’<sup>382</sup> The Joker enters the UN General Assembly in New York in full Middle Eastern dress, and he is described in the text that accompanies the first image of him dressed that way as ‘death personified’.<sup>383</sup> When speaking to the assembly he says, ‘I am proud to speak for the great Islamic Republic of Iran. That country’s *current leaders* and I have a lot in *common. Insanity* and a great love of *fish*.’<sup>384</sup> He continues, saying that both he and Iran ‘get no respect’ and ‘we’ve both suffered unkind *abuse* and *belittlement!* Well, we aren’t going to take it anymore!! You’ll *no longer* be allowed to *kick* us around!’<sup>385</sup> He then proceeds to take off his Middle Eastern dress, revealing toxic gas canisters he has strapped to his body. He attempts to gas the assembled UN delegates to death but is stopped by Superman and Batman. He detonates bombs he has hidden in the auditorium and escapes, apparently killed in a helicopter crash but sure to return. Batman is quite prepared to kill the Joker at this point and violate his own moral code, and the next few years see Batman as especially violent and traumatised by his companion’s death. He is often told by his friends that he goes too far in beating information from petty criminals and the like.

As Ramsey notes, when speaking of the ‘superman stories’ of chivalric romance:

The crusades have profoundly influenced the superman romances, and in them it is insufficient to extend the hero’s power over a kingdom; instead, the scenes of his conquests include the Mediterranean area, both the Western and Eastern Empires, Africa and the Near East.<sup>386</sup>

It is noteworthy that the final battle against the Joker occurs on American soil, in keeping with Ramsey’s comment that ‘Domestic power *is* the ultimate issue, for

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<sup>382</sup> Part Four, Starlin, Aparo, and DeCarlo, p. 1.

<sup>383</sup> Part Four, Starlin, Aparo, and DeCarlo, p. 11.

<sup>384</sup> Part Four, Starlin, Aparo, and DeCarlo, p. 13. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>385</sup> Part Four, Starlin, Aparo, and DeCarlo, p. 13.

<sup>386</sup> Ramsey, p. 46.

in all the superman romances the final battle is fought at home.<sup>387</sup> The traditional enemy of the superhero becomes a personification of perceived threats to the superhero's nation. When the Caped Crusader fights the Joker, he is battling Middle Eastern extremism, with the Joker clearly standing in for Iran, Arabic extremists and America's enemies in general. Not stopping him is 'insane' and allowing him in the UN is equally insane. In preventing the Arabic extremists from bombing Israel, Batman is once again protecting the Holy Land. The Joker is approached by Khomeini shortly after killing Robin, almost as if this act of killing a child finally promotes him into the big league of world criminals, where he will be taken seriously. *A Death in the Family* also has Bruce Wayne speaking Farsi to get around in Lebanon, demonstrating on the part of the writer a poor knowledge of the intricacies of the Middle East.<sup>388</sup> Nothing has changed; Ramsey notes of the chivalric romance and superman stories, 'Sometimes, in fact, the romance writers betray their geographical ignorance in startling ways, as when Bevis goes boar hunting in Egypt and on his return to the city is attacked by some foresters.'<sup>389</sup>

It is interesting also to note that references to the story in current-day comics represent the Joker during this period as a delegate of a fictional nation called Qurac, a generic Middle Eastern Arab state with one letter different from the alternative anglicised spelling of Koran, 'Quran' and the source of many terrorists in the DC comics universe.

Not all superheroes fit so perfectly with the knightly mould, but I will briefly extend my analysis to the other DC icon (and archetype for all superheroes), Superman, to suggest that the knightly type holds true in general.

Superman is an alien from the planet Krypton, but the general story of the baby sent away on a river in a basket of reeds derives from the biblical Moses; he is the disenfranchised nobleman raised by farming peasants, possessing the knight's natural nobility which reveals itself in the way he is instantly recognised as physically and morally superior to his lessers. He is raised on a farm in the American heartland and travels to the big city where his power is able to fully develop. Ramsey says of the protagonist of the medieval 'superman stories', that

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<sup>387</sup> Ramsey, p. 49. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>388</sup> Or a determination to offer an exaggerated picture of the influence of Iran on that country.

<sup>389</sup> Ramsey, p. 50.

‘though born a person of some rank, he is always suspected of being low-born, and his social progress is marked by a series of disguises and false identities.’<sup>390</sup> Superman also has a clear emblem on his chest, shaped like a knight’s kite-shield, and his noble qualities are further embodied in his physical beauty. He also has a moral code not to kill. Superman has an ice fortress castle ‘The Fortress of Solitude’ he retreats to which is full of wonders. He goes about most of his adventures thinking of a woman, his untouchable love and often damsel-in-distress Lois Lane, just as knight’s quest in order to gain glory for their beloved. However, like the chivalric romance, Lois Lane’s really important role is in realising the goal of the hero to prove himself. The fates of Lois and Clark change with each age, and more recent comics for a time actually had them married and with Superman’s identity revealed to her, but unresolved romantic longing was the general tenor of their relationship for fifty years. Superman’s two identities also reflect a chivalric romance tension. Ramsey, speaking of the chivalric romance *Ipomedon* as a type, writes that ‘The underlying conflict is between the independent man, the one who needs no one and is needed by everyone, and the man dependent on others, particularly on women.’<sup>391</sup>

Superman’s disguise is unlike Batman’s. The Batman fantasy is narcissism either way: he is a rich, handsome playboy or a powerful, feared hero. In his disguised form Clark Kent is more of an oaf and a dunce.

This is one of the great fantasy rituals of popular fiction, a self-aggrandizing, even narcissistic fantasy. The hero is desired by name and needed in fact. No one else will do and he knows it, but he is reticent, and this makes him the more hotly pursued. He appears humble and timid, but we relish his power...the dual role of poor pilgrim and glamorous knight and the use of disguise contribute greatly to this orgiastic dream of self-importance.<sup>392</sup>

Here Ramsey is speaking of the chivalric romance and superman story, *Guy of Warwick*, but his comment applies equally to mild-mannered newspaper reporter Clark Kent.

Superhuman powers were not at all unknown in medieval chivalric romances, though they were surprisingly absent in the genre known as ‘superman stories’, which pretended reality. However, in the genre that can be called ‘Child

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<sup>390</sup> Ramsey, p. 45.

<sup>391</sup> Ramsey, p. 65.

<sup>392</sup> Ramsey, p. 55.

Exile' stories they were common, as the lost noble child had to be recognised by his power. In fact, superman stories and child exile stories in the medieval romance had many overlaps.<sup>393</sup> A boy's nobility in *Havelock* is shown by beams of light that shoot from his mouth when sleeping, and Superman has similar beams of light from his eyes.<sup>394</sup> Beauty is a power that has people recognised as nobles and accepted into court. The eponymous hero in *Havelock* is able to throw a stone twelve feet farther than anyone else and fight sixty attackers with a door bar, and Superman has even greater strength.<sup>395</sup> Havelock is known as the tallest and the strongest in his kingdom, enabling him to marry a woman who appears above his station but who is actually responding to the powers that spring from his inherent nobility.<sup>396</sup>

Superman's chivalry, in the modern and traditional sense, is even more evident. He is the 'boy scout', the embodiment of all modern values, superior to everyone around him, an example. The modern, watered-down version of chivalry certainly describes Superman, with his traditional farm-boy values. Even the description of him as a 'boy scout' recalls Robert Baden-Powell and his book, fundamental to the scouting movement, *Scouting for Boys*, which includes in Part IV 'Endurance and Chivalry' a chapter called 'Chivalry of the Knights', with references to St George and the knight's code.<sup>397</sup> Superman's further symbolism as a Christ figure, saviour and redeemer of mankind, morally perfect and physically transcendent, is an ideal which no author of a chivalric romance would shy away from, as knightly heroes are often depicted as bordering on being superior representatives of God on earth over the Church, a hair's breadth away from Christ, whereas priests are perhaps a slightly thicker hair's breadth away. Superman has one weakness, his powerlessness against Kryptonite, which harks back to more basic and older heroic stereotypes, such as Achilles and Samson.

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<sup>393</sup> 'In plot, their stories...are similar to the child exile romances,' says Ramsey, p. 45.

<sup>394</sup> Ramsey, p. 37.

<sup>395</sup> Ramsey, p. 37.

<sup>396</sup> Ramsey, p. 37.

<sup>397</sup> Baden-Powell tells us helpfully in Part IV, Chapter VII, 'Chivalry—that is, the order of knights—was started in England some 1500 years ago by King Arthur.' Sir Robert Baden-Powell, *Scouting for Boys* (Amazon.com: Amazon Digital Services, 2012), Amazon Kindle e-book. For Superman as the 'Big, Blue, Boy Scout', see many sources, such as Mark Waid, 'The Real Truth about Superman: And the Rest of Us, Too', in *Superheroes and Philosophy: Truth, Justice, and the Socratic Way*, ed. by Tom Morris and Matt Morris (Peru, Illinois: Carus Publishing, 2005), pp. 3-10 (p. 5).

Chivalric knights tended to have a single personality flaw that would sometimes lead to self-punishment or self-imposed weakness, as we saw exemplified in *Lancelot, Knight of the Cart* and *Erec et Enide*.<sup>398</sup> ‘Kryptonite’, for these knights, is any breach of their code that then forces them to make themselves weaker or put themselves in a vulnerable position. Erec’s weakness is Samson’s; it is simply expressed in a way that is more rooted in psychology than the basic symbolism of the earlier tale. This fascination with psychology and inner motive stems, arguably, from the concern with personal intent that expanded parallel to and in concert with the early crusades, with all their earnest and less-earnest penitents.<sup>399</sup>

Superman teams up with other heroes (including Batman) in the Justice League. They sit about a round table when they meet in the Hall of Justice, which is located either in orbit around earth or on the moon, and one of their members, Arthur ‘Aquaman’ Curry, king of Atlantis, is known by his people as ‘King Arthur’.

Like chivalric knights, superheroes are generally sexless. Like crusaders, they are outsiders. Like both, they are above mortal law and experts at deeds of arms. As Jewett and Lawrence point out,

In the modern superhero story of the American monomyth...helpless communities are redeemed by lone saviour figures who are never integrated into their societies and never marry at the story’s end. In effect, like the gods, they are permanent outsiders to the human community...These stories show that, when confronted with genuine evil, democratic institutions and the due process of law always fail. In the face of such a threat, democracy can be saved only by someone with courage and strength enough to transcend the legal order so that the source of evil can be destroyed...the

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<sup>398</sup> Chrétien de Troyes.

<sup>399</sup> ‘The system of discipline which had prevailed in the Church before 1050 appeared, to an age with a new self-awareness, to be in urgent need of reform...[old] attitudes persisted into the twelfth century and afterwards, but they were being challenged by a new emphasis upon self-examination.’ Morris, pp. 70-71. In the same chapter Morris cites Guibert of Nogent as one of those early figures to be obsessed with inner intention. It was very important to consider the intentions of the crusaders if they were to be declared martyrs or be said to have earned their penance. Crusades chroniclers, and those listening to crusader confessions and accounts, might have seen the issue of inner psychological drives and motives as being very important when considering theological interpretations and spiritual outcomes of events. This was all part of a process going on at the time, and the First Crusade may even have been an expression of it. It is not chicken and egg; rather, crusade and interest in knowing oneself were both a part of the zeitgeist.

superhero...couples transcendent moral perfection with an extraordinary capability for effective acts<sup>400</sup>

It is this aspect of the superhero (rather than surface similarities such as Batman's) that, I contend, argues for their being modern successors to crusaders and chivalric knights. The surface similarities are revealing, but they are secondary—the key is that the morality of superheroes, and that the way they solve problems is similar to that of the chivalric heroes of the romances, who themselves were idealised crusaders, as understood by lay people, writ large. Of comics, to further quote Jewett and Lawrence:

Viewed as part of our religious history, these stories reveal themselves as secularized dramas of redemption in which innocent communities are saved by Everyman figures possessing superpowers. The redemptive storylines evoke those in the Bible, but the media for their conveyance has been so entertainingly transformed that the sources and implications of the Captain America complex — employing nondemocratic means to achieve democratic ends — initially seem opaque.<sup>401</sup>

Let us return to my definition of the crusader, which fits the chivalric knight so well, and see how the classic American superhero, personified by Superman, Batman and DC's Justice League of America, those heroes of DC's so called Golden and Silver ages of comics, shape up. The elements in the following table are the same as those used earlier in my discussion of the crusader and chivalric knight.

### *The Superhero of American Comic Books*

<i>Character Trait</i>	<i>Central Idea</i>
He is willing to die for the greater good, for his brothers and indeed for the sake of the entire [law abiding] world and those back home. To die is preferable to breaching the oaths he has made. Upholding these oaths will not grant him access to heaven, but to break them is unthinkable.	The Death of a Superhero. Superhero deaths are always full of pathos because they are always moments of supreme self sacrifice. Superheroes martyr themselves for their friends. Like Christ, they are usually resurrected.

<sup>400</sup> Robert Jewett and John Shelton Lawrence, *Captain America and the Crusade Against Evil: The Dilemma of Zealous Nationalism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), p. 29.

<sup>401</sup> Jewett and Lawrence, p. 28.

<p>He has a moral code, based on public oaths, which comes from on high and transcends all else, and it is enacted on the world through individual violence. It takes precedence over local laws and calls men from many nations.</p>	<p>The Comics Code. The oath of not killing is on the surface a key difference to the world of chivalry and the crusader. However, this oath is an enabler: it allows the hero to commit violence while still being morally sound. This loophole is in some ways similar to how the theory of Just War allowed Christians to go on crusade. This higher idea of superhero justice often begins with an oath, such as that of Green Lantern, or Batman's vow to fight crime for the sake of his parents. Importantly, superhero morality is certainly not democratic. It gleefully bypasses the institutions of democracy to allow for individualistic, and some might say Fascistic, justice, regardless of local or international law.</p>
<p>He wears a symbol representing his special status, his willingness to suffer, and his oaths.</p>	<p>The Logo. Batman's bat, Superman's S (which some see, like a photographic negative, as two fish, almost like the Christian symbol), Wonder Woman's eagle, Green Lantern's lantern emblem. All of these appear on the chest. Superman also has an S on his back.</p>

<p>He acts also for personal spiritual reasons, often related to guilt, and is happy to suffer for this publicly and to be seen to be doing public acts of violence or self-abnegation to overcome this shame.</p>	<p>With Great Power Comes Great Responsibility. While Batman fights to make up for being unable to stop his parents' death, and Spider-Man carries guilt over being unable to stop his uncle's murder, it is to be noted that many undertake a lifetime crime-fighting with little apparent justification, but are willing to struggle and suffer simply because it is the right thing to do. On the surface this seems to distance them from crusaders. However, it is their very abilities that set them apart from other people. Like the X-Men, they are 'mutants', a species alone. Their powers transgress social norms. This obliges them to redeem their transgression and do penance by fighting for the common people.</p>
<p>His true self is realised only through an act of narrative, in which secrets relating to personal identity are laid bare, but the revelation itself must be paid for by suffering before the self can be fully actualised.</p>	<p>The Origin Story. This is always something of a 'confession', known only to a few (and a delicious secret the reader, as hearer of the confession, is let in on). The origin is always a story, usually of an accident over which the hero had no control: 'bitten by a spider', 'parents shot', 'sent away from Krypton before it exploded', 'had a ring bestowed on him by a dying alien', 'was drenched in chemicals'. As noted above, heroes must still redeem themselves due to how this story alienates them from society (as does sin). The mission of the superhero suggests they must constantly battle and constantly suffer to actualise their senses of self.</p>

<p>His spiritual redemption can only be accomplished by leaving his family and going on a great journey to an object imbued with special spiritual significance, but in essence the object represents a transcendent journey to the centre of the self.</p>	<p>That which can never be regained. Batman will turn to a painting of his parents, those who can never be brought back, in times of stress. Superman will think of his father and lost Krypton. Green Lantern might think of the Lantern who died and granted him his power. Heroes tend to fight for the lost, just as some crusaders went not only to ease their own but also their family members' time in purgatory. To restore the unreachable they fight in the names of these lost ones. Superheroes rarely have living or large families, but most have these losses they can reflect on. They also have magical places, but these are their fortresses, each representing an inner self—Batman's cave, Superman's fortress, Wonder Woman's secret island. They do not quest for these, but rather are allowed to return to these places of self-realisation and respite after a successful mission, as if the conclusion of every story allows them back to Jerusalem. Batman and Superman can only enjoy their fortresses once they have fought crimes in the world.</p>
<p>His enemies are those who oppose God's law, though they fight well, and even admire him, and this proves his righteousness. His enemies exist only in opposition to him, and their purpose is a test from on high.</p>	<p>The Rogue's Gallery. Villains are tied mostly to one hero and often seem to represent their opposite or an aspect of their psyche. The Joker, fun and chaos and death, opposes Batman, grimness and order and life, and suggests the next step in madness beyond dressing as a giant bat. In theory (though not always in practise), such a villain would not be much of a match for Superman, should he and Batman decide to trade for a day.</p>
<p>His motive is of primary importance, and if he lies or strays from purity in his motive, he will be justifiably punished.</p>	<p>Truth, Justice, and the American Way. For their violence to be justified and acceptable for the audience it must always be moral. The hero must have true intent to allow him to violate democracy for the sake of democracy.</p>

<p>Though a man of family, and for whom name, title, and the production of future sons is often vitally important, he goes through a period of enforced, priest-like celibacy while family is left behind or postponed in favour of his mission. If he does think of a woman, it is the unreachable and unknowable Virgin Mary.</p>	<p>My Enemies Must Never Know. Here is Lois Lane's eternal courtship of Superman, Batman's bachelorhood, and Spider-Man's fears his enemies will hurt his loved ones through knowledge of his real identity. Few heroes are married with families for they must always voyage into the wilderness of the modern city to fight.</p>
<p>He has been made pure, but he must not sin again, though he might be tempted, or his mission will fail because he will be judged unworthy.</p>	<p>Batman Wouldn't Do That. Put simply, were superheroes to violate the pure state of their oaths, they would instantly cease being superheroes in the eyes of most readers. Batman does not kill, and that is what makes his violence acceptable. If he kills he becomes no different from the criminals he hates.</p>

Crusaders in medieval histories, chivalric knights of Arthurian romance, and superheroes from American comic books: were they images, they might share a recognisable silhouette. They each walk in the same boot-print. We perhaps see why the West, in a complex, post 9/11 world, might find such simplistic ideas of reality alluring. These ideas are rooted in a neoconservative, neomedieval 'golden age' with fewer voices to challenge that which is culturally dominant. We have seen, arguably, narrative grow increasingly complex throughout this study, and superhero comic books take us right back to simplicity. Perhaps moral simplicity can be reassuring in times of cultural stress.

This is one of the less obvious places in which the fictional crusader has ended up today. This is where he survives. 'Kyrie Eleison' does not deal directly with superheroes, but it traces the paths leading to them and includes characters obsessed by the superhero forerunners of medieval times. As 'Kyrie Eleison' unwraps the layers of storytelling that surround the crusader, and shows them for what they are, perhaps readers will be wary not of just crusader knights in knightly garb, but the outdated ideals and cultural baggage they drag with them as they take on other disguises today.

'Kyrie Eleison' resists simplistic understandings of the crusader role, reassuring though such simplicity has been throughout the ages. As we have seen with 'golden ages', simplification can be dangerous and can allow questionable

and anachronistic values to be championed. The trilogy's crusaders are not simply strongmen or detectives or valiant fighters or doomed lovers. They are complex figures influenced by the biases of the stories and the heroes of their time, such as Roland, and are then made into storytelling figures themselves as the Crusade progresses. By elaborating on these processes, a reader might be inclined to think of the biases of the stories and the heroes of their own time, and think about how real people are made larger-than-life.

By undermining the fictional crusader we might take one more step beyond the 'Scott era' of the understanding of the crusades, and strike another blow in the battle that Cervantes started centuries ago. We might begin to break the centuries-long spell storytelling has cast over our understanding of the crusades.

### **Superhero Fiction and Superhero Reality**

There are webpages in the US collecting 'real life' costumed heroes, people who supposedly actually dress up in home-made costumes and wander their localities looking for crimes to fight.<sup>402</sup> The website of the Real Life Superheroes says, 'Life has indeed imitated art as conscientious citizens in superhero attire have descended upon their communities, intent on making a difference.' It further claims:

We are using the iconicism of comic book superheroes to make a difference, inspire others, spread a positive message, and call attention to issues in our communities. The Real Life Superheroes work to make the world a better place by doing civic activities, charity work, public safety patrols, hospital visits, school talks, distributing wanted and missing person fliers, helping the homeless, community clean-ups, and more. From crime fighting to charity work real life superheroes seek to help make a positive difference in their communities.

The gallery depicts heroes in costume such as Angle-Grinder Man, New York's Dark Guardian, New Jersey's Phantom Zero, Mexico City's Captain Gay, Shadow Hare, Florida's Superhero and Viper. Some list various kinds of Kevlar protection in their gear and claim they go on regular neighbourhood patrols. Some are more low-key—Florida's Superhero helps with roadside safety. In a website

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<sup>402</sup> 'Real Life Superheroes.org Homepage' (Real Life Superheroes.org 2010) <<http://reallifesuperheroes.org/>> [Accessed 2 September 2010].

editorial, 'Crusading's Downsides', Captain Black laments the problems faced by such figures:

Actual real life super villains often don't have gimmicks like costumes or code names to warn the public. Lurking behind respectable masks like chamber of commerce; community leader or the titles doctor; officer; mayor; father; mother, etc. is a rogues gallery to make fiction's top worst green with envy. Once you cross the line and become a known dissident get ready for the hatin' to begin...America and Earth desperately need many, many more crusaders. It's only fair to be up front about crusading's downsides as well.<sup>403</sup>

Of course, he means crusading in the more modern and general sense of crusading against injustice. But art has clearly influenced life. There are contemporary Don Quixotes wandering the world.

Almost every hero published by DC lives in an interconnected world. Batman and Superman know each other and their stories impact upon each other. It is the same for characters published by Marvel. Roz Kaveney argues that:

by now, these two continuities [are] the largest narrative constructions in human culture (exceeding, for example, the vast body of myth, legend and story that underlies Latin and Greek literature) and that learning to navigate them [is] a skill-set all of its own.<sup>404</sup>

We have made entire knightly courts, entire self-contained galaxies to safely harbour our Caped Crusaders. One thinks of Superman gazing at the shrunken and bottled city of Kandor.

Allah in the Koran is described as being closer to you than the vein in your neck, and so are comic book heroes to Western culture. Such over-the-top heroes are beloved most by children and teenagers who are in the process of forming their identities and their understanding of the world.

But does it matter if young men are growing up with the example of superheroes, individuals who enforce morality with their fists and take their cues from anachronistic narrative templates modelled on crusader knights engaged in holy war? Samuel P. Huntington's 1993 essay 'The Clash of Civilizations?' sought to outline a new era of world politics that he envisioned would appear after the end of the Cold War. In part, this new era would mean increased self-

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<sup>403</sup> Captain Black, 'Crusading's Downsides' (Real Life Superheroes.org, 2010) <<http://www.reallifesuperheroes.org/2010/08/03/crusadings-downsides/>> [Accessed 2 September 2010].

<sup>404</sup> Kaveney, p. 25.

determination among states and peoples formerly on the sidelines, at least according to Western (possibly chauvinistic) views of history.

With the end of the Cold War, international politics moves out of its Western phase, and its centerpiece becomes the interaction between the West and non-Western civilizations and among non-Western civilizations. In the politics of civilizations, the peoples and governments of non-Western civilizations no longer remain the objects of history as targets of Western colonialism but join the West as movers and shapers of history.<sup>405</sup>

But, Huntington claims, this new era also means that civilisations will become the new mass-identifiers, especially in an age of mass-communication, and so wars will not so much be fought between states or ideologies or economies, but between entire cultures, religions and traditions.

Civilization identity will be increasingly important in the future, and the world will be shaped in large measure by the interactions among seven or eight major civilizations. These include Western, Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic-Orthodox, Latin American and possibly African civilization. The most important conflicts of the future will occur along the cultural fault lines separating these civilizations from one another.<sup>406</sup>

Since 1993, Huntington's argument has proven most applicable in reference to the conflicts and increased tensions between what Huntington would term Western and Islamic civilisations. In fact, part of the reason his essay has remained so relevant is the apparent prescience he showed in this regard. His is only one voice, and many might argue against him, but there may be a hint of truth in this idea of cultural exports. We think of the gun sights—is the West entirely conscious of what it is bundling up and projecting to the world through its culture? Could others see these thinly disguised crusaders? In recent years, when the US government led by George W. Bush took it upon itself to ride out and enforce its idea of morality in the world through violence, which narrative was it unconsciously following? That of the superhero? That of the cowboy? Or that of the chivalric knight, born in the fires of crusade? As Jewett and Lawrence write,

One of the puzzles about the American civil religion is that biblical images of peacemaking through holy war reappear during times of crisis....Confronting the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, President George W. Bush often framed the conflict with Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda and the pursuit of peace in religious terms. "We're fighting evil" (or "the evil ones"), he pronounced on several occasions. Initially drawing on rhetoric of theological absolutes, Bush presided over "Operation Infinite Justice" as a

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<sup>405</sup> Huntington, location 76-79.

<sup>406</sup> Huntington, location 103-6.

“crusade against terrorism.” In his remarks at the Washington National Cathedral service on September 14, he stood in the pulpit to announce a world-scale purgation of evil, maintaining that America was called “to answer these attacks and rid the world of evil.”<sup>407</sup>

This is not just the language of the Bible and of Holy War—this is the language of comic books. Are we still Don Quixotes, influenced by narratives full of crusader ideals? Kishore Mahbubani says, in ‘The Dangers of Decadence’:

Paradoxically, the benign nature of Western domination may be the source of many problems. Today most Western policymakers, who are children of this era, cannot conceive of the possibility that their own words and deeds could lead to evil, not good. The Western media aggravate this genuine blindness. Most Western journalists travel overseas with Western assumptions. They cannot understand how the West could be seen as anything but benevolent.<sup>408</sup>

In the aftermath of 9/11 iconic Batman writer Frank Miller planned to pen a Batman graphic novel and ‘piece of propaganda’ where the hero goes to Afghanistan and kicks ‘al-Qa’eda’s ass’. Miller went on to say:

Superman punched out Hitler. So did Captain America. That’s one of the things they’re there for. It’s an explosion from my gut reaction of what’s happening now, a reminder to people who seem to have forgotten who we’re up against.<sup>409</sup>

He claims that Batman’s traditional villains become silly in light of modern Middle East/West clashes. In the event, the comic abandoned Batman completely, using a new hero ‘The Fixer’, and was published as *Holy Terror* by Legendary Comics in September 2011. Batman’s squire Robin was soon breaking up terrorist training camps in the fictional nation of Qurac, complete with super-terrorists. Captain America was soon revamped as a terrorist hunter, and covers blared such statements as ‘Fight Terror’, ‘Never Give Up’ and ‘Honor Them’.<sup>410</sup> The lines between fiction and reality again become blurred. Superheroes, with their crusading influence, have slowly become so embedded in US culture that their voices come through without the speakers always realising.

<sup>407</sup> Jewett and Lawrence, pp. 1-2.

<sup>408</sup> Kishore Mahbubani, ‘The Dangers of Decadence’, in *The Clash of Civilizations: The Debate*, ed. by James F. Hoge, Jr., location 701-86 (location 721-24).

<sup>409</sup> Harry Mount, ‘Holy Propaganda! Batman Is Tackling Osama Bin Laden’ (Telegraph.co.uk, 2006) <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/northamerica/usa/1510556/Holy-propaganda-Batman-is-tackling-Osama-bin-Laden.html>> [Accessed 2 September 2010].

<sup>410</sup> Greame McMillan, ‘How Marvel Learned to Stop Worrying About 9/11 and Love Slaughter’ (io9.com, 2009) <<http://io9.com/5420126/how-marvel-learned-to-stop-worrying-about-911-and-love-slaughter>> [Accessed 7 September 2010].

The story of superheroes who must bypass the restraints of law to redeem the nation and the world has become dominant in the past sixty years, and it should now be recognized as a major source of the crusading idealism that marks the American civil religion.<sup>411</sup>

What is the need for the superhero? The scream at the heart of superhero comics is the same as the scream at the heart of the biblical Book of Job: why must suffering be allowed in the world?<sup>412</sup> The collective allows evil to happen, and one man shouts out against it. But should one man be allowed to decide the nature of justice?

The crusader, or his narrative ideal personified by the chivalric knight of romance, may not be so distant a figure for the people of the modern West. Kaiser Wilhelm II dressed up rather obviously, but some policy-makers in the West, raised on superheroes, may be wearing knightly garb and not even know it. Huntington also wrote, when replying to opponents in his essay, ‘If Not Civilizations, What?’:

In Europe, European Community President Jacques Delors explicitly endorsed its argument that “future conflicts will be sparked by cultural factors rather than economics or ideology” and warned, “The West needs to develop a deeper understanding of the religious and philosophical assumptions underlying other civilizations, and the way other nations see their interests, to identify what we have in common.”<sup>413</sup>

The level of influence is certainly arguable, but, large or small, echoes of the crusaders have passed down to us more through fictional narrative than according to the facts of history. Any fiction that helps us to look at ourselves, and to reflect upon these hidden values, and to remind us of these threads of influential narrative, whether it uses satire or funhouse mirrors, is a potential step towards awareness, should it be embraced by the popular consciousness. Any text that encourages the Western reader to develop a deeper understanding of the religious

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<sup>411</sup> Jewett and Lawrence, p. 35.

<sup>412</sup> I think it is actually summed up best in an underrated superhero parody of recent years, the film *Super*, directed by James Gunn. In it, Rainn Wilson’s character utters the line, at the climax of the film and the height of his spree of crude, zero tolerance violence: ‘You don’t butt in line! You don’t sell drugs! You don’t molest little children! You don’t profit off the misery of others! The rules were set a long time ago! They don’t change!’ Rainn Wilson’s character spends the movie beating people’s skulls in with a pipe wrench, sometimes for petty social inconveniences, believing his own brain to have been touched (literally) by God. The line above gets very seriously to the heart of what makes superhero comics work. There is a basic kind of motivation here, a powerful sentiment, something a child might shout when they first learn that there is unfairness in the world. These rules are old. It should be obvious some things are right and some things are wrong. Don’t profit off the misery of others. See *Super*, directed by James Gunn (StudioCanal, 2010).

<sup>413</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, ‘If Not Civilizations, What?’, in *The Clash of Civilizations: The Debate*, ed. by James F. Hoge, Jr., location 1055-266 (location 1250-53).

and philosophical assumptions underlying their own civilisation might be a good thing, helping us to untangle the mass of fictional narratives reaching out to us from the crusades.

‘Kyrie Eleison’ does try to think its way back into the mindset of the crusaders as they first began the fictionalisation of the crusades, but it also frequently reminds the reader that it is a story. Esther, the storyteller within the book, leaves her own stories unfinished and disappears after elaborating on various threads of crusader fiction. This seems to ask a question: is the story of the fictionalisation of the crusades unfinished? The figure of Paul, living timelessly, dressed as a crusader, apparently able to walk everywhere and everywhen at the trilogy’s conclusion, also suggests the fictionalising of the crusades is unfinished. The crusader keeps crusading, just as Kundera’s terrifying image of Robespierre keeps cutting off French heads. Mine is another entry into this fictionalisation of the crusades, but it seeks to draw attention to its own artifice.

Esther starts as a gossip, and the tale is apparently a straightforward one, until at the end of Book One she begins to branch out with fictional stories and fictional crusaders of her own, and then by the end of Book Three her stories have grown so elaborate that they seem to collide and undermine the ‘reality’ of the main text. The act of leaving her tale unfinished draws attention to the artifice. As I have said, it is Picasso’s ‘lie that makes us realize the truth.’ Beneath the story of ‘Kyrie Eleison’, which starts normally but ends so artificially, what is the ‘truth’ of the crusader? We cannot know. All we have read are stories, layers and layers of them, stories from different eras. The characters themselves build their identities from storytelling and mimic the actions of such figures like automatons. The crusades as many know them are a fiction. Having survived the challenge of Cervantes and historians’ angry comments about Scott, fictional crusaders have evolved into Caped Crusaders, and their enemies into bin Laden’s Saladin, and they continue to try and influence us the way Scott’s Richard and Saladin called to Kaiser Wilhelm. The fiction of ‘Kyrie Eleison’ hopes to draw attention to all these fictions, and so leave the reader seeking truth.

The crusader has been created by story and has adapted through story, surviving in different forms throughout the centuries, carrying anachronistic and often Orientalist values with him. We live in a world where these values are

inappropriate and can increase tensions and prejudices. 'Kyrie Eleison' uses storytelling, and stories-within-stories, to unravel the threads of stories that have accrued over the centuries and influenced our understanding of the crusades, so that we can see the crusades for what they are: an event, in the past, with little actual direct influence, link or importance to the culture and the politics of today.

## Conclusion

To write the First Crusade trilogy ‘Kyrie Eleison’ I had to attempt to represent the thought-world of the crusaders as plausibly as I could, and to do that I turned to the narratives that influenced their histories and even their military strategies, and so, it is likely, their personal sense of selves. They used storytelling techniques when representing themselves, and so it is likely that stories from the era influenced their own self-understanding. Further, I used the motif of stories-within-the-story to reflect upon how the crusader himself was idealised in later narrative, and how this narrative was passed down, challenged, and reinvented down the ages. I looked at representations of the crusader in fiction at key moments of reinvention and adaptation, moments I deemed to be key because they were particularly illuminating, but also because they were most particularly useful in shaping my creative piece. In doing this, I saw narrative fiction again and again influencing those who would shape the facts of history. It seems worthwhile that a modern book about the crusades would, in the vein of *Don Quixote*, attempt to highlight how narratives can shape our views of history and of ourselves.

We are left wondering: are storytelling techniques, sent down from the crusades, still shaping the way we think of ourselves? They especially seem to crop up when we are forced to think trans-nationally. After the so-called Dark Ages, Europe began to think again beyond its borders. Was this outward-looking tendency prompted by conflict with Islam, by the Moors raiding into southern France, by the Reconquista? The First Crusade appears just a little after the close of the Dark Ages. And so we fall back on these same tropes, stereotypes and clichés that emerged as a consequence of that First Crusade when we think trans-nationally again now. It is like we are always just poking our heads out from the Dark Ages, only to draw our heads back in like snails as we prefer to see everyone else as ‘Others’—subjective reflections of ourselves and the perversities we would like to keep hidden. In a connected world where New York, London, Sydney, Hong Kong, Kuala Lumpur, Singapore and Tokyo all seem a quick hop away, the Middle East is still ‘over there’, somewhere across the borders, even as we fly over that very terrain to reach our familiar haunts. Despite the multicultural interactions of everyday people both within and between nations, the media and

popular culture would have us believe that an immense psychological wall exists between the fallaciously 'average' Westerner, who exists within all the West's diversity, and the fallaciously 'average' people of the equally diverse Middle East, even in this age of migration and interconnectedness. In this context it is perhaps not too much to say that we need to move beyond the Middle Ages.

How are stories inspired by the crusades influencing our self-understanding? Are narrative fictions of ideal crusaders still with us, reinvented and adapted for our age? Perhaps something as innocuous as superheroes is keeping crusader morality and methods alive, to an extent, and in a post 9/11 world it is good to look closely at our narrative idols to make sure they are not helping to lead us into conflict or influencing our military strategy.

'Kyrie Eleison' is about Western-centric views, and calling those to account. It hopes to hold up a slightly hyper-real, slightly distorted-for-effect mirror to the culturally influential stories with which Western readers are familiar on some level.

To engage with and attempt to represent the crusaders requires, as a Westerner, not simply looking at a moment in time, but confronting an entire thread of both history and narrative, and especially the places where the two meet. Like *The Arabian Nights*, it has been a complex tale of stories-within-stories, voices-within-voices, boxes within boxes, big fish eating little fish, history within fiction and fiction within history.<sup>414</sup>

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<sup>414</sup> "Big fish eat little fish" is a Dutch proverb quoted by A. S. Byatt, 'Introduction', in *Arabian Nights: Tales from a Thousand and One Nights* (New York: The Modern Library, 2004), pp. xiii-xxii (p. xiii).

### **Part III: A Representation of the Crusade**

#### **Narrative, Story-tellers and Holy War in ‘Kyrie Eleison’**

*The fact that the crusades were, very largely, a tragic episode in interfaith relations reinforces the need to grasp as fully as possible the thought world of the protagonists, avoiding the stereotyping that they all too often imposed on their enemies.*

Norman Housley, *Contesting the Crusades*<sup>415</sup>

*Collections of tales talk to each other and borrow from each other, motifs glide from culture to culture, century to century.*

A. S. Byatt, introduction to *Arabian Nights: Tales from a Thousand and One Nights*<sup>416</sup>

The third part of my argument is my novel. It addresses the storytelling techniques that influenced the crusaders self representation and self-understanding directly, and it engages with key moments from the long history of literature that have adapted and reinvented the crusades. It hopes to use references to these fictions to hold a mirror up to the Western reader, so that they can see where some of their cultural ideas about the crusades come from. It also hopes to give a portrayal of crusaders and crusader motivations that appropriately fits with the latest scholarly opinion. I try to present the crusaders as they plausibly were, on the one hand, aiming for a plausibly true depiction of the crusades, and to that I mix in, at signposted locations, elements of various narrative fictions about the crusades that have been written since, so that the currently understood historical facts and the narrative fantasy of crusades are laid side by side.

Even more fundamental to the book than these narratives was simply the question, ‘Why? Why did the crusader pilgrims undertake that journey for those reasons? How did it make moral sense to them?’ I believe by the end of the epic I manage to answer that in my own way, but that is beyond the scope of this thesis. I am also indebted to the work of Walter J. Ong for my depiction of Paul, and to Hannah Arendt for my elaboration of how moral men were led to kill. I pilfered

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<sup>415</sup> Housley, *Contesting the Crusades*, p. 166.

<sup>416</sup> Byatt, pp. xiii-xxii (p. xviii).

many ideas from the novels of Dostoevsky. However, there is no space to acknowledge all those debts here.

‘Kyrie Eleison’ is a lengthy trilogy, and what follows is a little under the first third of Book One. It begins to set up the characters and the themes. At the beginning Esther is not a storyteller; she reports gossip (or the facts of history), and we know that she uses some of this gossip to create her later fanciful stories in which crusaders and crusading ideas begin to be mythologised through narrative fiction. It begins by being intertextual, and ends by being metatextual, tracing the thread of the development of the fictional crusader in microcosm. Because Esther telling stories throughout books two and three is so crucial to the concept of the book, I have also included her first proper ‘story-within-the-story’, ‘The Story of the Serjeant’, which appears in the last third of Book One. In the novel it is broken up into pieces because Esther tells it over days, Scheherazade-like, but it is presented here in one continuous narrative.

‘Kyrie Eleison’ begins as a straightforward, if inward-looking, story of four characters on a journey, and becomes more complex once Esther’s stories-within-the-story begin to play a big role in books two and three. However, it is always tricky to choose what to place in an excerpt, and it seems best to begin at the beginning, where all the foundations are laid, and where some of these later complexities are just hinted at here and there for those who know what is coming. A brief rundown of the entire plot, including the stories-within-the-story, can be found in the Appendix II of this thesis.

I take my cues for intertextuality from the medieval histories, and metatextuality from *Don Quixote*, and then I choose texts to weave into my own from key moments of the development of the fictional crusader.

Fiction is not history, but fiction has a truth of its own. The creative piece attempts to present such facts as featured in the thesis not in the light of detached and scholarly ‘historical truth’ or ‘academic truth’ but through the intimate ‘human truths’ that are the strength of ‘the art of fiction’, as we saw in the introduction. One could argue that ‘human truths’ are timeless and immediate, and they relate to the self; ‘human truths’ can influence us at any time, and are just as dangerous now as they once were. Fiction, though it might be written in the past tense, always happens in the present. ‘Historical truths’, as far as we can

be sure of them, are located safely in the past, and are more distant to us emotionally. The lure on identity is not as strong.

As we have seen, art shaped crusader thought in the past, and that art shapes our thoughts about the crusades in the present. I have synthesised art in my creative piece to suggest, through timeless human truths, how the lures of crusader thought continue to call to us in the present.

We have encountered several texts which used storytelling to create a certain idea of the crusades. My creative piece attempts to lay this bare. It uses storytelling to undermine the storytelling techniques to which we have become accustomed in crusades history, similar to what Cervantes did with the chivalric knight in *Don Quixote*. Though it presents crusaders in an immediate fashion, it paradoxically attempts to prevent crusaders from becoming Kundera's terrifying Robespierre, 'eternally chopping off French heads'. To recall the quotation used earlier, my fiction is an attempt at Picasso's 'lie that makes us realize the truth'. As bin Laden's supposed kinship to Saladin and the West's obsession with Caped Crusaders suggest, deconstructing the fictional crusader is an aim that has great relevance for our contemporary world.

## **Excerpt from 'Kyrie Eleison'**

*Abraham said, "God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt offering, my son."*

*So the two of them walked on together.*

Genesis 22:8

# Europe

In the camp Esther had heard many speak of their lives. The details had been misheard, a few stories she had perhaps mixed together, but she told some of the things she had learned to the aristocrat as she tended to him in his tent. The aristocrat was her patron but Esther used her comb to pick lice from the hair of others as well, both because it needed to be done and because she could expect a small extra reward every now and again for the service. And as she did it she liked to talk, to confess, even, and so it was in this way, as Esther told again some of the things she had heard, but with her own flair and indulgences, that the aristocrat learned something of the men who travelled under him on the pilgrimage across Europe, Asia Minor and the Holy Land to liberate Jerusalem from the Saracens.

### **The Story of the Knight, as told by Esther**

*And anyone who does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.*

Luke 14:27

The boar had nearly killed him. He had been hunting when he was young and not yet a man. The forest was dark; mushrooms leered up at him like the eyes of great snails. The master of the hunt had gone ahead. The dogs were barking and he, a young man on horseback with his short and fresh and new spear could see the hairy hillock of the boar's back above the leafy forest fronds, those plants that only grew in dark places. In Rome the great men had built huge archways, empty gaping doorways to nothing, decorated maws hanging above the countryside to celebrate victories. Why the boar's horny back made him think of that he did not know. It was a victory arch built in a swamp. And yet the inscrutability of its eyes, half closed to protect the filmy blackness from the mud, leant it a strange, disarming kind of grandeur.

He dismounted. It wasn't his practice, and he had gone on the hunt expressly to improve his horsemanship, but for some reason the boar fascinated him, and he wanted to see it close, he wanted to get close to its level so he could see it as he speared it. The dogs were excited. He could see their cavernous bellies expanding and contracting beneath the roof of their ribs like an ox heart when someone blows into it with a reed. The dog man could no longer hold his charges

and they ran loose with tongues hanging. Someone blew hollowly on a horn. It was a sound as vacant as the dead animal it had once been a part of. The dogs moved beyond the boar. What were they chasing? Then he saw the babies scattering, tiny versions of that ancient looking thing that had snuffled with such intrigue in the secrets of the earth.

They had not expected babies. The male boars were usually solitary and avoided the large groups of females and young. It was the wrong season.

With an excited trembling he threw and the spear arced through the air, bouncing harmlessly off the bristly hide on the upmost reaches of the beast's arched back.

He only saw all of him when he burst from the brush. The tusks were like the relic bones of some saint, upturned sharply. The bones of an ancestor. Its skittering legs kicked up mud. In his memory the eyes were completely black. He didn't have time to reach for his boar spear, on which he was supposed to let the beast impale itself. There was no pain at first. That came later. At first there was a strange calm and a disbelief. Only when he tried to stand did he realise that something was seriously wrong, and only later did he sense the fear, see the blood and slip into that state of semi-consciousness where only certain random images seeped into his mind and stayed with such outlandish clarity. He could only stare in fascination at the wound and marvel at the clean cut and the red gore where so shortly before there had been totality.

The rest of the men finished off the boar and put an end to it in squealing misery. In the confusion and as men tended to his wound, the dogs were left unattended, and they mauled to death all of the babies. One dog was killed by an enraged female defending her young and the hands were forced to kill her before they could move on. They didn't have time to dress the animals and they had to leave the boars there. They all said they'd never seen the full grown males in the presence of females and young at that time of the year.

He saw the sow lying in a rut in the torn earth, its flanks marked with gaping spear holes, its babies lying inert beside it, looking fresh and fluffy next to that old barked skin. He could smell its hide. Its womb would bear no more.

He was slung across a horse. They were crying out when they got back to the manor. 'So much blood!' he remembered they said. He felt his chest pressed against the barrel of the horse. He could feel throughout his body when it

breathed. Up and down. Up and down. His own blood ran down the flank of the horse. It left dark and wet matted hair.

They were calling for the bonesetter to see what he could do for that torn flesh. He found himself wondering in moments with all the pain, when he was almost too lightheaded to think, if he would die. Around him they prayed to Jesus, the man who had died. Up to that point he had only seen a dead body once. The peasants were still moving around a lot even in those days after the upheavals. Some would trek for unheard-of distances for the promise of a new life. A servant boy found one such fellow in a far field one morning. He was a boy then too and he had run to see it, out in the cold with the frost on the ground and the lightly ploughed field which ran in long, thin strips.

The man was swollen and his fingers were black and curled. One lip was pulled back and his eyes were open. The gums had receded from the teeth, which looked dirtier than they could ever have in life. They were with the man for a little before anyone arrived, he and the servant boy, just watching in silence as birds looked for loose pickings amongst the furrows. When the adults eventually tried to move him it was as if moving a sheaf of hay. A priest had come and watched as they did so. He attended to the living family with all their concerns, and also to this, which was so unrelated to those living and spiritual issues. The man's limbs stayed in place like arrows sticking from a target. It wasn't even a man. Even as a boy then he knew why the word 'dead' existed—it was because it wasn't even the same thing as a man in life, it was something completely different; it needed a completely new word.

And would he die? he wondered. The bonesetter could do nothing. His wounds became vile and leg swelled up and the open wound smelled like death. And so around him, his family and the household prayed. And naturally he thought of the one dead body he had seen, the one reference.

He tried to imagine Christ like that, in that impossible state. Dead like that with his fingers curled up. And yet Christ had overcome it. The most amazing man ever to be born, even he had to die. And the reality of death was not like he had thought the priests preached. But Christ had overcome it. It became awesome to pray to God in the wake of that. If Christ had been that, if he had been this bloated thing with the pointing out limbs, this impossible scarecrow, if all his thoughts, teachings and greatness had been reduced to that, and he had

recovered... That was something wondrous. Looking at the corpse on the frosty field the boy had imagined some tiny part of the man was still alive in there somewhere, waiting to come out, to come back, but no-one could find it.

So they all prayed to the dead god with the curled black hands. And so he recovered when all said he must die. And when all said he would lose the leg, it healed. And when all said he would limp forever, and his training to be a *miles*, a mounted soldier, was finished, he overcame it. Overcame was the wrong word, he thought. He simply got better. It was a miracle. And he was touched by it most of all—should he become a monk? He recalled the simple tonsure, how degrading it was to have that hole in his hair peeking up at the sky, when he had been schooled by the monks in their black clothing, talking about skeletons and decay. His family were certainly grateful enough; they granted money to their local church in thanks and might have paid his entrance gift again. Some of the women who had watched over his bedside in particular thought he should now give his life to God.

His father had vacillated. The knight had an older brother. His father wanted a boy in the church. And so, when it looked as if his father might have no more children, the knight-as-a-boy, it was announced, as second child, would be a priest. His father liked to send all his children for at least basic learning with the black monks; there was a growing enthusiasm for it in the region, and his father even paid to send some local boys along too, boys of men who had sworn oaths to him. But then the knight-as-a-boy would be taken back again, to train further as a knight. And then his father would have a sudden change of heart, and the knight-as-a-boy was sent again to the monks.

His father had another son, years after he thought he wouldn't. He had been blessed with three boys. The knight-as-a-boy had a younger brother. Should the youngest be a priest? But his father had already invested so much in his middle child. In training to do two things, as his father's mind swayed this way and that, the knight-as-a-boy was only falling behind in both vocations. But then his wound seemed to seal it. They all felt humbled. Perhaps the women were right. Perhaps he should be a priest. And then his older brother died.

His older brother had trained to be a warrior and nothing else. The knight could remember him now: handsome, always taller than the knight-as-a-boy, always stronger. He had a casual ease. They never learned the full details of what happened. Some kind of skirmish at a bridge. He had been on the other side of the

country. It took many days for him to be brought back home. He travelled over roads and floated downstream on river barges, the water flowing calmly beneath. Finally he arrived. Saints do not corrupt after death. They stay whole and untouched. The family could not open the box his brother was in because of the smell.

His heart came in a separate box. They had kept it in salt. The knight remembered the small container being opened up. The heart was a little shrivelled by the salt but it glistened. The knight-as-a-boy reached out a small hand to touch it. He remembered then wrestling with his brother, struggling in vain against those strong muscles.

Truly great men and houses might have tombs or mausoleums or stone vaults inside a monastery for their dead. His brother was buried in the ground at the back of the local monastery. The knight had walked past the place a dozen times before when he had gone to his lessons with the monks.

With his brother dead, he was to be a knight. He carried the family name now. He was the eldest. That decided it all. Some of the money his father got from selling what remained of his dead brother's equipment covered the lofty expenses of changing the youngest brother's life mid-stream and sending him, still young, as a novice to the monks, a virtual child oblate. The knight-as-a-boy watched his younger brother go.

So he became a knight. But he remembered the miracle God had given him. 'It's not a holy life,' a priest had said. So be it. But it had been the life he had when God had chosen to save him. He had since known men who had died of much lesser things. Their parents paid priests to say mass for them, week after week, year after year, until there had been no more to donate. And so life as a knight was the life he had now.

A cousin had gone to a faraway island and had come back with a token made of real red silk, which the knight had acquired, and which he had torn up and now wore as a cross on his right shoulder. It was as soft as a mouse's belly. He wore a purse around his neck which was a sign of his pilgrim's status, and in which he could keep tokens from famous places he visited, all the places which had relics and bodyparts of saints, or where holy people had trod. He also had a pilgrim's staff but it was purely ceremonial. He wore a brooch around his neck of St Michel

the Archangel, captain of the heavenly hosts. St Michel battled the forces of darkness and he had a burnished shield.

When he was fourteen he had been hunched over on the ground.

‘Hit him again!’ his trainer had commanded. One of his fellows slapped him across the back with a wooden sword. He shivered.

‘Hit him harder!’ said his trainer.

The fellow obliged. He seemed to use all his strength.

‘Hit him again!’

The knight-as-a-boy was shivering and he couldn’t help but put his arm up. The blow rebounded off his wrist. His hand was instantly numbed. He felt like it could fall off.

‘What are you doing?’

He didn’t answer.

‘You’ll break your wrist! Take the blows, son. You’re wearing a *cuirie*. Take the blows. The pain is your enemy. It’s better to know it now, then you will have nothing to fear. Nothing will be unknown. Hit him again! And boy! Keep your arms down!’

He was sobbing, his arms wrapped around him in agony, snot running from his nose. He could only see the grass and his trainer’s feet. The *cuir-bouilli* he wore for protection was only hardened leather, smelling faintly of urine. It was not enough. To him, every blow seemed to be on his bare skin.

‘Now, you, on horseback. Ride up! Charge! Hit him!’

It was three weeks before he was able to walk or sit in a chair.

The knight sat with his younger brother at a roadside shrine. Wax from candles hung in frozen rivers from the stone. His younger brother was only thirteen. He had been taken out of training and brought back home to say goodbye to the knight. The boy had the top of his head shaved and he wore simple robes.

The knight must have once learned some of the things the boy was learning now. Both of them crouched forward, looking at the ground and at their hands.

‘What are they teaching you?’ he asked.

‘Oh ...’ said his younger brother.

Thunder rumbled from swollen clouds moving quickly in a grey sky, but the sound was not ominous. Some regions had endured years of bad harvest and here finally was an early rain. Sun lit the edges of those clouds even as the shadows spread over the brothers. The bad times were finally changing to good. People had been seeing positive things in the sky.

The horses were not accustomed to the boats and it was problematic even getting some aboard. They stood nervously in the shallows, salt water rushing around their fetlocks, stinging their wounds from briars and walking. The knight stood in a boat and helped pull one of his beasts up onto the ramp they had thrown over the edge as the colourful longship sat in the water sideways to the beach. The horse was so unyielding and then, in a moment, all of its mighty muscles sprang into power, and it was aboard. He was reminded once again how much of a marvel it was that anyone could control those beasts. Miraculously there were no accidents or losses. He had taken off his *chauses*, his hose; his legs were bare, as were those of most of the knights when loading boats.

The *Oceanus Britannicus* was as calm as the breathing chest of an infant. At times it seemed to swallow all sound, leaving only creaking wood and men's uncertain thoughts. The silence was expectant. For some men, it was judgemental. Were they supposed to pray as they crossed the waters? We are separated from our land, the knight thought, the place where we were born. When they would try to cross back there could be a storm or a terrible tide. Now going back was not assured. Water stood between him as an unknown quantity. His assurances of homecoming seemed as shifting and liquid as the sea. What man will I be when I cross back over? he wondered. What will I have seen?

His father, like many, had lands on both sides of the *Oceanus Britannicus*, but those here he infrequently visited. It wasn't always the way, but now every season that passed seemed to make the stretch of water a little wider. He had not crossed the sea for years.

The break in the winds did not last long. Soon the huge sail swelled above them like the breast of a swan. Long slender oars were deployed to correct their course. Tight rigging ropes strained as men moved around him and the other passengers and the horses, gingerly avoiding the pit in which the cargo had been laid as their footsteps echoed amidst the sound of lapping water. Beyond the

prow, which tapered into the carved head of a sea beast, he could see the haze of the far shore growing in detail. A little more than a generation before the *Mora* had come the opposite way, and his grandfather had been in the massive fleet it led by lantern-light.

Their ships went right into the bay by the port proper. At the shore the knight again took off his shoes and hose and jumped into the shallows. He tugged on his warhorse's reins. Men pulled on halyards supporting the mast until the ship tipped on its gunwales and the horses leapt out.

It was only two days' ride to his father's land across the water, the knight's last familiar resting place. It was not his father's land for long, however; he had given it all away so that his son and the other boys he had taken upon himself like nephews could go on this great journey. The church he gifted it to stripped gold off their altar in counter-gift.

The place seemed quite different to a boy who had only seen it when he stood many inches shorter. He remembered what the black monks taught him about inches: 'three good-sized barleycorns placed end to end'. Soon the musty place was full of activity and guests took to every room as animals bellowed and stamped outside.

The pilgrims passed gently rolling fields of different colours depending on what was sown, houses appearing at the crests of hills. Sometimes huts would shrink before a massive bank of tall trees with foliage as thick and puffy as the clouds. In a low valley amidst the motley pastures three cows stretched their heads down to drink from a stream as poplar trees stalked the bank.

When the pilgrims travelled he saw that the people of the fields moved away at the sight of them. The pilgrims were armed men, after all. The people did their best to hide their animals and their harvests. A boy, half in a hut, stared longingly at a plough, its wood and straps repaired many times, lying discarded in the field. He seemed trapped between the hut and the field and could not choose either. He could only gaze at the plough, forgotten in the rush to hide, and he must have known that all his future relied on it. The pilgrims laughed as they walked by with their horses, ignoring the tawdry item.

The knight remembered his family hall. The fire burned. The most loyal animals slept in the corner. The smells were his family's smells. The woman smells he knew, the man smells he knew. His father's smell seemed locked together with the wood of the tables and the stone of the walls and the straw on the floor.

He remembered touching the short hair on a dog's head, seeing its wanting eyes, seeing its ears bent flat back across its head. He remembered the warm feeling of its skull and marvelling at how thin the skin was there. If he flicked it with his finger it would sound just like wood. When he pushed his fingers into the scruff of its neck the hair was warm and deep and his hand came away covered in the dog's scent. Every day man and animal were one, he thought. Even as he ate the beasts of the field, man and animal were one. As a family, they ate the same beasts. He touched the dog with one hand as he ate in the hall with the other.

He remembered being a child and hiding under the table, running and crawling, seeing his mother's legs and hiding beneath her dress and seeing up his grandmother's skirts. He remembered the shoes of people as they ate. He remembered running suddenly into a room to see a father with his head in his hands, elbows on the table, staring at the floor in utter defeat.

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*

John 1:1

The first time he had seen a real Bible came back to him. All his life he had heard the Bible spoken about by priests; he had sat through sermons, listened to quotations and heard as priests elaborated on Bible episodes, while perhaps one small prayer book made do for the entire congregation in the wooden dark of the church with its straw-covered floor. But then, to see a Bible himself ... The monks had left it unattended and it was chained to the lectern. It was so big and heavy and each vellum page was embossed with gold. It smelled a little like leather, reminding him that it had once been an animal. It was so big that it was daunting to look at and hard for his boyhood body to lift, and yet it was short when it came to the number of pages, far too short, to think that all the wisdom of God and religion was within. This was all that had been recorded of God's message, all the

words that would ever be written about Jesus and have real weight. It wasn't enough.

He went through the pages and tried to read aloud to himself, what little reading he knew, tracing his fingers across the beautifully inscribed words. More care had been taken with one page of that Bible than with a dozen psalm sheets or scrolls about taxes or decrees. It was the first book he had ever seen.

Reading it, he was surprised when he came upon a phrase he recognised and realised that a priest had made a whole sermon on that one phrase, elaborating and embellishing. On the one hand he felt stupid for rushing over the phrase, for not pausing, for not immediately grasping its full power and possibility. On the other hand he felt strangely angry with the priest. The priest had simply made it up, hadn't he? He couldn't do that, thought the boy. It was the official word of God. He saw that many stories were repeated, told by different prophets, and yet he knew more of those stories than were written, because the priest had told him of the details. The priest had told them of the bleating of the lambs by Jesus' cradle. He had told them of the moonlight on the Virgin's face. He had told them of the smell of the clothes of the Magi, and Joseph's greeting to them, and his thankful words at their gifts. But none of that was in there. The priest had made that up. The priest didn't know what the Magi smelled like. He had just imagined it. He had told of the hardships of Jesus in the desert, being tempted, and the pain of hunger, and the thoughts of food. Then Jesus had resisted temptation by saying, 'Man does not live by bread alone.' And yet such hardships were not elaborated there. He loved to hear of the hardships, but now he felt as if he had been cheated. Men could not imagine themselves in the place of Jesus. The boy himself had done it, imagined himself suffering on the cross, women weeping, centurions dividing up his clothes and from the mist of his pain and the depths of his tortured body, forgiving them. He had imagined that until his soul soared. But he didn't think priests should put such imagination in the things they said. These were sacred stories and they should not be elaborated upon, he thought. They were more than stories: they were a history, they were a state of being.

To have the word of God written down and physically present was something magical and incomprehensible. He wondered if an original Bible might exist somewhere. The monks were not there and so he could thumb through the book, picking his own verses, investigating for himself. He read and read, his

small, quiet voice echoing haltingly in the church, seeing how the book was arranged, how the stories were mixed, how tales referred back to one another. That night his sleep was full of vivid dreams which shook his body awake. Something new vibrated within him because he had opened the book himself and seen the mystery traced out before him like a map to an unknown land.

He had been on pilgrimage once before. After his leg had finally healed, and it took a long time to heal, before it had closed up as if the wound had never been there, just a scar to show and a tightness in the muscles in certain weather, or when he moved a certain way, he had walked three weeks, with no weapons, to pay thanks at the shrine of a saint. His mother had prayed to the saint, she had said, and he had recovered. He had to go. Saints could even be vengeful if people did not undertake the promised pilgrimages, he knew. His mother had prayed to Saint Etheldreda. He did not know why. Etheldreda was famed for maintaining her virginity. She was renowned for curing ailments of the throat. What had drawn his mother to the saint? he wondered. Where did his mother's veneration come from? Perhaps it was simply Etheldreda's incorruptibility that attracted her.

For three weeks in the spring he walked with retainers and fellows and his mother, slowly gathering together with other pilgrims in the pilgrim season, and they came to the abbey and the shrine, which looked too small for the mass of people the popular saint attracted. He remembered grass worn away by tramping feet, cold stone, the smell of wax, glittering pennies, some bent in half by biting, and the petals of flowers. When he finally got inside, past all the faces that showed desperation, respect, awe, pain, or the affliction of some disease, he saw more than a hundred small candles burning in the gloom. The shrine was covered by a purple cloth worked with gold and jewels. He had never seen purple cloth before. He stood, in hesitation, waiting for a moment, waiting to feel that invisible presence. And she was there, before him, beneath that stone, beneath those candles and that cloth. An actual saint. And he was that close to her. A sensation came up to him through his innards, up into his head, enough to make him weak in the knees. He had undertaken the journey, feeling genuinely grateful but expecting little. But here he was. And here was an actual saint. Here was the tomb that could heal. Here was holiness pushed into the material world. He fell to his knees and pushed his face against the ground, spreading out his hands. He put a

candle and some coins on her tomb and then he put his face to the ground once more, whispering to her, as others around him whispered their own prayers or gave thanks, pressing their own faces where many others had pressed theirs before. He wanted to thank her for caring for him. For caring for his mother. It was overwhelming that a saint might be mindful of him, him who was nothing to her. Someone incorruptible could have spared a thought for him, when he had been entirely corruptible, and even welcomed corruption at times, if he had even been considerate of such things. He put his arms in holes at the base of the shrine, apertures made so that he could get close to those sacred bones. Somewhere, inches away from him, just beyond that stone, was Etheldreda, the incorruptible virgin, who had spared a thought for him, he who had never much heeded her, even as she sat at the side of God.

He emerged from the shrine, sniffing as much for the chill as for anything else, but the feeling was coiling back down inside him. His mother did not say much to him. She seemed to recognise, or even to be approving of, his reaction. Was she proud or gratified? His private communion. She must have recognised that it was private and she did not ask him about it or make any comment. They had shared it, but his experience had been private, and she could not touch it, any more than he could touch the reason why she had prayed to that particular saint, and why that particular saint watched over her.

# Asia

A knight had crossed from Constantinople over the strait known as the Arm of St George and was going to his first siege. He had never been on the Asian continent and he looked about for difference and for enemies. He and his fellows searched for the city where they would begin their attack in Asia Minor and which would set them once and for all on the road to Jerusalem.

### **The Knight, as he Lives his own Life, at the Siege of Nicaea**

The pilgrims marched and rode with snow-capped mountains in the distance. Each day was growing warmer and seeing less of that driving sea rain. The road beneath their feet wound up the hillsides, its cobbles broken and half buried; they had to be careful for the horses. Freshly cut weeds and growth lay at either side. Bare stumps were still oozing sap. In place of roadside trees a forest of crosses had been set up. Each hill had half a dozen crucifixes, and crosses stood beside the road at regular intervals to mark the way.

‘Every hill has become a Golgotha,’ said the knight’s captain.

The captain watched one of his knights walk from beside an animal to relieve himself. He said, ‘See this soldier! We’re on infidel land now. Follow this fine example!’

All the men walked from the animals they had been leading and stood beside the road. Laughing, they watered the ground with hints of their own essence.

Coming from the north the red walls of the first enemy city loomed in the distance. Each wall was protected by many towers, more than twenty cubits tall, higher than any nearby trees. A cubit, the knight knew, he measured by his forearm. On one side of the city lay a great, clear lake, reflecting the patches of weak spring light that showed through the clouds. When the lake was still it was as if there were two heavens, one above and one below. The lake was so large it was like a sea and the hills on its far horizon became a bank of mist. Pine trees grew close to the water, lichen covering their branches. On the way to the city new arrivals had passed olive plantations, and even now pilgrims spat out pips from stored fruit they had raided. They joined the armed men already encamped outside the walls.

There were no skirmishes. No-one came out to trouble them. A group of pilgrims had been here before, months earlier, and attacked, but the Turks had killed almost all of them. There were traces from that former attack in the burned ruins of buildings, the dilapidated crops, and the small number of people working in the fields. Newcomers looked about as if that great army that had killed the first pilgrims was waiting, but of it there was no sign, just the city itself, squashed small behind its walls, and the hills all around with their covering trees, hills from which anyone could be watching.

One of the few survivors of the former attack was a leader called Peter, a hermit, a mystic, a man who rode a mule, wore sandals and ate only fish. The knight had seen him, preaching before *villeins* as if lost in his own lonely sadness, his smile touching others but never himself. He wore clothes like a beggar and was not a warrior. He had only survived because he had been in Constantinople at the time of the disaster. He was with them again now, and some asked him and the other handful of survivors for advice as they looked about with undisguised terror.

With no immediate opposition they were free to begin the siege, which initially was a matter of setting up a camp and fortifying it. They had all been drilled about what huge undertakings sieges were, the organisation, dedication, craftsmanship and muscle power involved. But only the most mad and inexperienced longed for a quick and decisive battle. Cavalry during a siege was good for raiding and scouting, but cavalrymen would find themselves contributing mostly the muscle work that had to be done. Few of the *milites* would be on horseback over the next few days, unless the army they watched for, that had killed those before them, appeared in the valley or over a hilltop.

The dirt was a rusty red. When the knight went to set up a place to sleep a speckled brown lizard scurried away. Hills surrounded the city, at a distance, on all sides, but a valley stretched away to the east, opposite the lake. In that valley he could see a lone, short, incongruous hill that would no doubt give a good view of the position. An aqueduct also emerged from the city on that side. Quarries had been cut into some of the slopes, perhaps to help construct the place, but the stone pits looked ancient, weathered by time.

Waves lapped against the gravelly lake shore. Gulls bobbed on that water which seemed to swallow all sound. Weedy water plants were washed up, along

with some flotsam from inside the city. The knight looked at the rubbish that had been thrown away. He could see hints of the lives of the people in those discarded pieces of cloth and wood.

There were three gates on the land, each protected by a pair of huge towers. Great grey foundation stones mixed with smaller red bricks in places. The walls were set out roughly like a great hexagon with one side against the water.

In some places the ground beneath the knight's feet was like dry clay. Mosquitoes bred in thick beds of reed and harassed all the pilgrims as soon as they arrived.

The knight looked up, stretching his neck, hoping to see his first true enemy. He could make out only shapes on the wall, moving beneath fluttering banners. A mostly dry double ditch moat traced its way around the walls. All gates were closed. Men on the fortifications did not trouble the men outside who were already raising tents and organising their perimeter. They just watched from above, wearing down the battlement stones with their own weight. The walls were not so high that faces were completely lost, but the knight did not want to get close, and he squinted to try and see the features he knew were there.

Local Christians traded with the pilgrims, and some pleaded for village houses that had been destroyed. Shortly after arriving the knight heard wooden bells sound behind the walls. It was a call to Christian prayer. The knight also heard, for the first time, the musical call of the Ishmaelite, as someone perched high and called for his brethren to venerate that which is beyond the visible. The knight could only hear snatches of the voice and could not see the man singing. He watched the shadow of one of the Turks on the wall turn back and look into the city, as if longing to give his soul rest though his body must patrol the fortress.

The first evening the knight looked out to see the setting sun. It dropped between the distant hills that met, like a pair of embracing arms, at the far end of the lake, holding the water in their great grasp. The flaming pinks and purples in the sky were again doubled by the water. The earth itself became an indistinct part of those changing colours.

Even as more pilgrims arrived and encircled the city, they had to watch as enemy boats moved, unmolested, back and forth onto the far stretching lake, each boat sliding gracefully like a smoothing hand across a sheet. Some fired arrows at the boats but it was a feeble gesture.

There were some Greek troops too, from Constantinople, come to win back this city that had formerly been a part of their empire. They dressed differently, wore different styles of armour and clothing with no crosses, and were quickly being outnumbered by the pilgrims coming in from across Europe. The Greeks were led by a man they said spoke Turkish, and whom others said was a Turk. There were rumours he played polo with the Emperor.

Men with common languages arranged themselves into camps. Among the ranks from all different places a sort of order began to establish itself, but directives could still be given and contradicted from all manner of sources. Scouting patrols frightened each other far from the city and those scavenging for food squabbled over who was entitled to the pickings from an area when there was no-one nearby to settle who had rights to what, and had they dragged two captains there, the captains would simply have argued with each other. Already people were wandering far from the city in search of food, and squires had to drag back bags of cut grass over miles for the horses. Some feed for the animals was still coming in but it had to be supplemented if mounts were to stay in top condition.

There was a lot of work to be done. Trenches had to be dug to stop any potential cavalry charges, and wood chopped to make logs for protective walls and spikes to stop horses. Engineers began digging into the earth. They would approach the no-man's land leading up to the walls from beneath the rust-coloured ground. Others worked on building sheds that could move. They built the basic frames and covered the outside with freshly-cut animal hides and stinking vinegar. There was even talk that a tower might be built and oxen were brought in specifically in anticipation of dragging such a thing. Patrols had to constantly scour the countryside, both in search of food and any potential enemies. Days were spent in exhausting and mind-numbing work.

If the knight wasn't patrolling he was chopping wood with the rest of them. After one day the knight fell asleep on top of some scattered logs and rocks. He slept like the severed wood, within far arrow shot of the walls, but no-one made an attempt against him. None of them could consider or reflect upon anything in such conditions. They could barely even pray or exchange rumours. When initial preparations were made and some of the tasks could be delegated, things became a little easier.

The besiegers could see wooden terraces being constructed, or brought up almost intact, to be placed atop walls and towers. The platforms would hold enemy siege engines. Roofed hoardings overhung the walls and gave the defenders a base from which to pelt attackers. In places the hoardings already existed and had been rotted by the weather and were repaired. Sometimes they were taken up in parts and hung over key points where they had not been before. The structures would have been stored somewhere away from the rain, kept for times of siege, men said, some of them being familiar with similar works in Europe. The pilgrims could just see all this activity from hills nearby. The knight even glimpsed carpenters preparing the frames a little back from the walls.

Soon the pilgrims settled into waiting. There were rumours that they had already gobbled up their initial supplies of food, and indeed, rations began to run low. All the horses quickly devoured every shoot in sight, making a kind of wasteland of the sticky spring mud. Despite the muck men would still hurry forward in their moveable sheds, cowering beneath arrow fire, dumping dirt and logs into the double ditches which surrounded the walls. The first such structure, built on an ambitious scale and nicknamed ‘the Fox’, collapsed near the walls as rocks rained down upon it and all twenty of the men inside died. The men who had commissioned it looked on in horror.

The knight wondered what it would be like to be inside such a thing, hearing the arrows and rocks bouncing off the top, hoping that the vinegar and the still-wet cut flesh of animals was enough to stop any flaming oil they might toss over at any moment. What would it be like on the walls, watching those sheds rush up like armoured insects? Inside the shed the engineers could not even glance up to see what was coming down at them, for they would not see through the protective branches and hides. They would just hear each other’s terrified breathing and the clatter of dirt and rocks and wood as they threw them down into the ditch. How close to death were those men? What a thing that would be.

### **Esther, at the Siege of Nicaea**

*And baptism, which is prefigured, now saves you—not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience through the resurrection of Jesus Christ*

## 1 Peter 3:21

Esther moved quickly from the lake. She glanced to the side where arrows were being fired down from the walls. It was a just a few stray shots, the kind of harassment they had come to expect. Men were answering with a few shots of their own but it was much more difficult shooting up at the high fortifications and those great, round towers.

She found a tent where the priest waited. He smiled at her and took the water. The two of them hurried to another tent from which groans of agony were coming. The sounds were almost animal.

Inside, the woman was stretched on linen blankets, her legs wide apart, a midwife speaking calmly to her. The woman was covered in sweat and had become very pale. Blood had soaked into the linen. She had a precious stone, an eaglestone, on a cord on her thigh.

‘It will come soon,’ the midwife said.

‘This good woman has summoned me,’ said the priest, warmly, ‘and I am ready to perform the baptismal service should, God forbid, anything bad happen to the child.’

It was important that still-living infants be baptised if there was any danger that they might die. Esther knew that if a child died before it had a chance to be baptised, that meant it was in hell. She clutched the mother’s hand.

This was to be the first pilgrim baby. This was to be the first conceived and born on the pilgrimage. It was a child of God. Esther whispered words of encouragement to the woman, fiercely, saying prayers into her ears as she gasped. In that way, it was as if she could bring another frozen child back to life.

The priest said, in Latin, but it was a common enough prayer that Esther knew what it meant: ‘Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the Catholic faith. Which faith except every one do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly. And the Catholic faith is this: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity.’

He also said: ‘O infant, whether living or dead, come forth because Christ calls you to the light.’

The first gasps of the baby were healthy, even tumultuous, and it gave a mighty cry from its tiny body as its blue wrinkled form gasped for air. As it was

handed to its mother, Esther reached out slowly, not sure whether to dare. The mother, exhausted, her eyes swimming with love, did not seem to mind and, smiling, Esther touched the baby's tiny eyebrow. There were hairs there. She rubbed across the skin, which was quickly becoming bright red, and came away with a yellowish flaky, pasty substance in which the baby had been coated. The tiny fingers moved as the baby struggled through the confusion of its first moments in the bright, cold world. The fingers looked too small to live and move but there they were. It had a tiny toothless mouth. It was a boy, to be named after its father, a peasant. The priest was smiling too and he set forth on his duties. He renounced the devil three times and blew on the baby's face, making the sign of the cross.

'I command you, unclean spirit, to leave and depart from this servant of God!' he intoned above the wrinkled infant as the baptism was completed.

A new soul had crossed into the gateway of the world. A brand new soul, to which everything was shining and original and every possibility waited. Overcome with emotion, Esther had to leave the confines of the tent, with all its sweat, blood and love. In the cool air she wiped away tears. Over the next few days both child and mother would become healthier. Esther prayed to thank God for the new life.

# Europe

Esther had her own memories of Europe, and her own story, which she did not share with the aristocrat.

### **Esther, as she began in Europe**

*There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.*

Galatians 3:28

A woman had been walking in the market in Caen, thinking to herself, looking at the sunset light when rich men, armed and splendid passed her, all bearing their crosses on their arms, a sign of glory, a sign of tragedy. She stopped and stared. She had a basket of eels in her arms, bought cheap because they were already dead, which she had been taking to her sister's family. Her sister's husband was a merchant and his wealth had saved all of them from starvation. She was providentially standing in front of one of the most prestigious churches of the town. She put the basket on a nearby wall and, on a whim, followed them inside.

She saw the men, these men accustomed to armour and with weapons, prostrate themselves before the altar in total surrender. One man was in tears. They were praising God, praying for safety, glorifying Him, swearing that they would come to His aid. Sitting in the back, Esther put her arms to her side, elbows bent, palms upwards, and prayed too.

It was very dark when they left, and the streets would not be safe were it not for all those holy pilgrims, illuminated by torchlight. Esther stood at the periphery, unsure of where to go, wanting to stay attached. In the church a certain feeling had come over her, seeing all those men debasing themselves before the infinite, hearing all the prayers, and she wanted to hold onto it.

They began to spread out into the nearby neighbourhoods. Esther made to walk home. Some were going into wealthy houses where they were being shown hospitality. But Esther saw some heading into the *Abbaye-aux-Hommes*, the men's abbey, and the church of St-Étienne. St Étienne had three stones and the palm of a martyr. They had killed him with rocks. His feast is the day after Christmas. Esther recalled it the way she had learned it in childhood. They could enter his church because they, like monks and priests, were now soldiers of God.

No-one had ever seen such a thing before: soldiers of God bearing actual arms. Inside the building was said to be the great black piece of marble that served as tombstone for Guillaume the Conqueror. She remembered when he had died and what a hubbub there had been; she had been distracted because that was the same week the shock of the monthly blood had come to her for the first time. It was said men had stripped Guillaume bare and then fled, leaving the body for some time, because of the threat of looming chaos. Esther stood and stared as the pilgrims went into the building and monks helped take their horses and their gear. They took things even from the servants of the knights, as if those servants were to be venerated.

One of the nobles was still in armour even though he hardly needed it in the town and to visit a church or to stay in an abbey. It was a presence that would usually be terrifying but was somehow noble and magnificent in light of the times. He noticed Esther's clear face and her eyes which must have been brighter than usual as she stood in the semi-darkness and her sister's dress that was not as ragged and torn as many had been earlier in the marketplace. Perhaps he took her for a serving girl to nobles, or perhaps the festival atmosphere had become such a saturnalia that veil of class distinctions had been momentarily parted.

'Would you like to come in, my lady?'

He said it so sincerely, almost too sincerely. He was naïve or joking or incredibly polite and it was impossible to know which. It was a men's abbey and women were prohibited except under certain circumstances. There monks sought God alone, solitary even in the midst of the busy city. She didn't see the noble's face so much as the armour he wore needlessly and the fine animal being led away by his servants. No-one had called her 'lady' before, except one boy, in a well-meaning jest, in a boyish earnestness, but he had no authority. When he called someone a lady the word was a sign of his heart but socially empty. Did this man glance around as if he had been seen, as if he was doing something surreptitious? Or was he merely looking at the beautiful square? The glow of the torches carried by boys lit faces but hid all the seamier parts of the city in shadow.

It wasn't the word 'lady' that lured her. That was like a key to a doorway. It jarred her senses. The men, the crosses; the great pilgrimage was something she had heard of but didn't really believe, though odd men showed up in town from time to time, as if entertainers or refugees from another reality. And then, it was

all here. It had arrived. There were these men; this piece of history. The pilgrimage was happening, and she had wanted to grab it—it was ephemeral! She had wanted to pull it to herself, but she hadn't even known that until she stood before the church, because it had seemed impossible she could be a part of it all. That world was as unreachable to her as the world of the dead. Now this man had said 'my lady' and invited her beyond the gate. She followed them all inside. She was hesitant, and a monk gave her a look, but he did not seem to want to overturn an invitation from the nobleman. She took steps further, as if uncertain, as people moved past her, and as those in the street thinned out, leaving dark and empty alleys, with only dogs barking and the sounds of conversations and arguments and family life from within closed buildings shuttered against the world, people pressed together.

She did not want to return to that forbidding street, that darkness with its paths of shadow. So she hurried with the last of them leading animals to the stables. Some mistook her for a servant and the man who had spoken seemed to have forgotten her. She had lost him in the crowd. She spent some time with the squires, standing by as they cared for the horses. She felt utterly out of place, as she had not often even seen a horse up close for any length of time, but then found she could step beyond the stable and was not stopped. She could go to the light of an open doorway, move into that stony calm, hear the echoing voices down a passage. It was so unlike the calm of a monastery as she had imagined. She could go beyond. It was the men's abbey, for men who had been sanctified, who had the keys to bind and unbind, to intercede on behalf of the dead, to fight demons, and yet she could move about with perfect freedom. No-one knew her and so no-one stopped her. She walked about where the men were eating and no-one questioned it. She spoke about important things and she interrupted, just to try it, her head spinning, and they answered her. They joked and laughed! She walked to where lesser monks and servants served things, to kitchens where they prepared things, and back again, to the eating hall with its smells and its light and its laughter, as if the two worlds were not dissimilar. She felt like a supremely different person. She did things she would never have done. She dared to speak to the nobles and the knights, who were not so foreign—most spoke her language and even had accents from nearby. All night was a kind of Feast of Fools. She picked food off the table when a man gestured and smiled, and no-one chided her.

She drank wine. She was told it was good wine, but she couldn't tell. To say she felt like one of them ... she could only have declared that in her joy, because she was not at one with them, she was not truly together; there were differences she could not fathom, a whole upbringing, a whole understanding ... but she was not completely apart. She was not rejected. They treated her as if she was meant to be there, or at least like she was an exciting curiosity. Perhaps they were fond of her because of the novelty of the woman who had come into the men's abbey, though they had taken some serving women of their own with them, even if many had since gone off to the nearby woman's abbey where Guillaume's queen lay. It was as if she complemented them as they overwhelmed her. Or was it like that? she wondered. Had she broken through somehow, became an integral part of their evening, their group, their ritual there? Was she simply overwhelmed because she had become a part of something bigger than herself, something unexpected? In her mother's and her grandmother's time great men had walked in this city and helped rebuild it in local stone, stone that always kept those great men from the eyes of others.

Esther even became drunk and chatted to a young knight, both of them lolling against a wall outside. Light came from the doorway but the other world of darkness threatened to envelop them. Bells rang telling monks to awake and pray. Night was the time devils were abroad. Esther was giddy and happy, yet with a hint of wine's sorrow at her core. The two of them spoke but Esther didn't always hear.

‘And where are you going?’

‘To the Holy Land!’ said the young knight. ‘To the Holy City!’

‘Why?’

‘To free it. To free it from heathens, for God, and for the honest pilgrims. For the glory of our souls.’

As he spoke there was a look on his face that was delighted with his own surprising eloquence.

‘Why are you doing it? The Holy Land is so far away. You couldn't count the miles.’

The young knight seemed not to have even thought of it. His eyes wandered the ground and he steadied himself. ‘Not so far. All of us are far from God and we must do things to make ourselves closer. To walk in the place where

the Messiah walked... to see where he prayed and was betrayed... To see his tomb. That world, that always was so far away, like a dream—to make it real! Those stories... those histories... to touch them, and to walk in His steps.’

He had all the emotion of a drunk man finding a spring of passion within himself. ‘To do that,’ he said, ‘It would be like I was resurrected. Like I was born again. I would be guaranteed a place in heaven ... far from the world of sin and flesh ... far from the world of ... mortal ... sickness and frailty. I would rise above it. Perhaps I would be worthy when my time comes then, worthy to greet the angels, to walk with the disciples of old in heaven after the day of judgement, worthy of that eternal life.’

Esther only heard parts, and the young knight had perhaps only believed parts. He was looking at her, she knew, and she could feel his eyes on her body, as the darkness loomed around them and as the monks within the stone prayed. Esther was struck by the picture of the Holy Sepulchre itself as she had always imagined it in her girlhood. Hadn't it been destroyed once by vandals? A dark cave of dead rock. Inside, a platform on the cold stone where Christ's body was laid and the rock rolled forth to lock him in the dark. Silence, emptiness, death, and then, on the third day, life again. Life anew from the darkness and in the rock. Life from the cold stone. Light as the rock was rolled away. The Lord stepping out on the dust of the earth, His brief return before the ascension, to greet Mary Magdalene who wept at the gate. For the Lord forgot no-one.

After that speech, that bare hint of connection, she left him, and she strolled once more in the corridors of stone, in that building she had seen every day of her life but never before entered, and she wandered the halls till morning. She spoke to whoever she found. She did not sleep at all. In the morning she rushed out the gate. At the last moment she remembered the eels sitting in their basket the next neighbourhood over. Some had been stolen by dirty fingers or pecked at by birds. Newly awoken flies were crawling on others. The dead eyes gazed at the sky, and the decay there showed the fish's lack of freshness more than any other part of their slick, black, wormlike bodies. She knew what to do when food fell on the floor, and that was to make the sign of the cross over it so that it might be pure again. She did the same with the eels and she rushed through the early morning streets to the cacophony of animals waking up.

# Asia

### **The Aristocrat, at the Siege of Nicaea**

*He leans on his web, but it gives way; he clings to it, but it does not hold.*

Job 8:15

Esther used her comb—and sometimes her quick fingers—to pick lice and fleas from the aristocrat’s hair as he sat in his undershirt in his tent.

‘I’ll never get them all if you keep this filthy sheepskin rug in here. That’s where they all live,’ she said.

They were alone. The aristocrat was not often alone with anyone, only those intimate body servants. He had heard that even in the Greek courts the body servants had the most prized positions. He wasn’t surprised. A casual intimacy had built up between he and Esther. They didn’t speak much but when they did he had grown to appreciate it. It was always simple. She did not seem to want anything from him except to perform the duties of her livelihood and he wanted nothing from her except the same. She was not asking for favours, hoping to improve her standing, or looking to make herself appear better by being in his presence. When he explained things to her she seemed genuinely interested and she kept her opinions to herself. Knowing none of his equals, she did not share her knowledge of him or, if she did, it had not come back to him. Perhaps the things she was interested were so mundane that, if she told people, the aristocrat would not have cared. He did not tell her secrets, just facts about his life that were different from hers.

‘I took that rug from home,’ he said. ‘It is a reminder. It will return home with me and one will look at it and at myself and know we are the same: well travelled.’

Esther went patiently about her work. He glanced to the side. He saw she had found a louse that had evaded the comb and trapped it beneath her fingernail. There was a black mark on her pink skin in the half light. She pushed it onto her opposite nail and squeezed it to death.

‘What is it like ... living as you do?’ she asked.

She so rarely asked questions that he was flattered when she did. Despite her feigning uninterest, he knew that that was what fascinated her most: a life that

to her seemed so mysterious and different. Didn't he see her walking amongst fine people and fine things with a certain pride?

'What is it like?' he asked. He was teasing her by repeating her question with surprise. He dragged the teasing out. 'Well ...'

He felt her fingers on his neck. They were a relief after the pinpricks of tiny mouths and the desperate scratching of his own calloused fingertips.

'I'll tell you a story,' he said, 'if you like.'

It was exactly what she wanted, he thought: the life of wealth and power, told as a story.

'As long as it is true,' she said. 'I want to know what it is like, I don't want to be spared details.'

'Oh no,' he said.

He liked her accent. It was so similar to the local women he knew from near his estates on the continent. Those estates were always his favourites, though as time passed he could visit them less and less. 'I'll tell you what it is like.'

He breathed deeply and considered for a moment. She would not have known whether he was building up for effect or genuinely searching. Sometimes, in flashes, he recognised that the cold language he used with his advisers and lackeys had disappeared, as if all those creeping vines of words had been cut away. He spoke to her like a human being.

'This happened ... Nine years ago now.'

She would have been able to feel his pulse on his neck, and she would have been able to tell that it was pumping faster.

'How many times have we been each other's guests?' asked the lord. He was aging, with white hair and long eyebrows and a growing paunch that had meant that his armour had to have its straps lengthened to accommodate him as he rode out to lead campaigns.

'Too many to count,' said the aristocrat.

He sat with his legs spread, not deeming to cross his legs as a display of his own lordship now that this man was his guest. He would sit with him as an equal.

‘What do you think ... when we drank together and feasted ... was it more frequent to do so on your estate or mine?’ asked the lord, smiling, his voice cracking to show that he was not lost entirely in the past.

‘I cannot say. It has been too often for me to recollect.’

‘For myself too. I always accommodated you well ... But your feasts! They were always something special. You always had that extra element of ... imagination. It was your friendships, I suppose. I remember one year for the Easter feast you had an archbishop himself, eating fish and bread at the table. He was beside you!’

‘Not quite beside me, your memory makes me far too ostentatious.’

‘Not beside you! Everyone wanted to sit beside you. My memory was no doubt affected by all that food and drink!’

‘No doubt.’

The older man’s cheeks were red. They showed the emotion, the genuine quality of his smile. The light was soft on the furnishings, each piece carved and crafted, some hauled back from another property the aristocrat had raided the summer before.

‘How long did our fathers know each other ... It was built up because they both had hands in selling men, was it not?’

‘The monks frown upon it here on the island now. But land is never enough ... One has to make one’s fortune where one can ...’

‘There is still a business to be had on this island, and one can always go to Ireland if one can pay for the shipping ...’

The aristocrat waved his hand. ‘I must confess, despite the circumstances, it has been good seeing you again.’

‘You’re flattering me.’

‘I have no need.’

‘I hope not! I hope it is not conscience forcing you to be kind!’ the old man chuckled, his voice cracking again.

‘You are my guest. I am my own man. I am host to you and your men. I have no reason to be nagged by conscience. If anything, you should be repenting! Bringing your men against me ... Forcing me into a corner ...’

‘I honestly did not think it would be you.’

‘I would only ever have fallen one way. And you knew whose regions you were crossing. Whose villages you were burning.’

The old man smiled, forcefully, and stared at the floor with sadness.

The aristocrat recalled the battle and his heart leapt into his throat. Open warfare: he always hoped to avoid it. Leading his men into a siege, chasing the enemy down, raiding his food supplies, forcing another’s hand ... These things he knew and trusted. A fight in the open field, bloody and wasteful ... He had come so close to losing. So close. In the end it was only the vicissitudes of mob courage that plucked advantage from the sinkhole of chaos.

‘Did your conscience sting you when you were wasting my land as if I were some Capetian count? What if things had been reversed, and I was your hostage now, and you had two hundred of my men locked away? What would you be saying to me?’

‘We only wanted Robert to have what was rightfully his. We had sworn our oaths to him first and foremost, you yourself understand with so many of your lands on his side of the sea ...’

‘Robert hasn’t come yet, has he? I don’t know how you got to be so old,’ said the aristocrat. The old man winced.

‘Why does the word sting you? I mean to say that wise men get to be old. Smart men. My father said that you should beware of old men, because they are the strongest, the canniest and the most ruthless. He said kind and stupid men don’t get to be old. But perhaps age is stealing your senses, because you’ve played the wrong side this time.’

‘We don’t know that for certain yet ...’ the lord murmured, peering spitefully at the wall, refusing to match the aristocrat’s gaze.

The aristocrat grew tired of staring at the blank side of the old man’s head. He wondered why the old man was insulting him so.

The aristocrat stood. ‘You are still my friend,’ he said, sighing, having for a moment a flash of the old man’s fear. ‘I don’t say that out of conscience.’

The aristocrat left the room and had the jailer bar the door again. Another rebel lord, younger and unfamiliar, waited in a room next door and the aristocrat did not bother to speak with him.

‘What shall we do?’ asked the adviser.

‘Has the King’s messenger arrived?’

‘Not yet.’

‘Then we shall do nothing. Treat them well.’

The aristocrat again had flashes of that blood and muck. He could not sleep because of the memory of how close stray arrows had fallen to his horse, how blows could have shifted a few inches and changed everything. He remembered how the seething mass of flesh, pulverising each other desperately, melting, ready to flee, had at once looked like it was breaking, routing, and then suddenly rose victorious. He could not fathom why chance had favoured him. He prayed, for he did not know what else to do.

Finally the King’s messenger arrived. The King’s brother Robert had not yet deigned to sail across the channel and personally lead his revolt. The aristocrat met the messenger with all of his advisors present.

The messenger gave a flourish and said in a clear voice, ‘The King sends his greetings and congratulates you upon your capture of two rebels and on taking such worthy hostages. The King is particularly impressed that you have overcome the elder lord, on account of his having such a strong retinue of knights from his wealthy northern estates in the island.’

Soon the messenger had left. The aristocrat had grown stern and pale.

‘What do you command?’ asked one of the advisors.

‘Blind the old man,’ said the aristocrat. ‘Ransom the other one off. Send a message to the King that we give his lordship, as his rightful spoil, the old man’s northern estates. We applaud the King’s clever waging of this war and his martial abilities and remain as always his loyal servant.’

‘Perhaps we should remind the King that our lord has a young daughter who has not yet been betrothed, and the King has a particularly fine heir in his wardship,’ suggested another noble.

‘It isn’t becoming to be obsequious,’ said the aristocrat. ‘We shall do what is required of us.’

‘My lord ... If we are to blind an esteemed nobleman and send him alone as an example into the wilderness, it may make us seem unnecessarily spiteful and wanton.’

The aristocrat thought for a moment. He said, with a weak voice, ‘Of course you’re right. It would appear untoward. Select fifty of his followers and

blind them too. Take forty from the lower ranks but choose at least ten knights who might otherwise be ransomed.'

'Very good, my lord. You are egalitarian in all matters, and all will know that you act in the King's good grace and are not to be opposed.'

After they left the room the aristocrat collapsed into his chair, sinking down bodily, thinking again of how close he had come to losing that battle, and how many men of his had been left hacked in the mud.

### **Esther, at the Siege of Nicaea**

The aristocrat brooded for a moment. Without speaking he lifted his undershirt, so that she could hunt down fleas across his broad back and chest, and under his arms. She saw the line of his body where the flesh joined, and the clumps of hair that protected his most vulnerable areas. Beneath his arms she could feel the arteries pumping, smell the almost too masculine odour of him. Sometimes she would take a wet cloth and wash a wounded red spot or a scab. She would check him for any more vicious parasites, or hidden infections. She felt like a vital, dutiful part of his life force. She was linked to him.

Esther wondered at those tiny red stings and those itchy scabs that were hidden in those dark and hairy places, at how they must have pained him, such tiny things. All men could be brought down by the tiniest stings. No men were immune. They were all just flesh. They were all dust. God had chosen some to die and He chose others to live.

The aristocrat gave a strange chuckle, as men sometimes do when they retell moments of great emotion. It would have seemed out of place except for his expression.

After a period of silence he seemed to remember his shirt. He reached for it, smelled it, and put it over his head once more.

'It's silly of me to talk. I can't tell you these things. I can't put them into words. How can anyone describe those things, without being foolish?'

He looked at her and she at him. She had expected him to say, 'I can't tell you these things because you are a woman,' but he didn't. He didn't seem to think that women needed to be protected from those words, or that they wouldn't understand them.

‘I must begin the day’s tasks. That is all for today.’

‘Thank you for the story, my lord,’ said Esther, bowing as was appropriate.

‘Oh,’ said the aristocrat, ‘it is not over. Not at all. Tomorrow when you return for your duties I will tell you more ... if it is not too terrible for your ears. But you will forgive me ... I am only answering your question.’

‘My lord never need ask for forgiveness,’ said Esther.

He smiled at her hollowly, and pale, as if something had been emptied from within him and he were an echoing jug.

‘Tomorrow then.’

# Europe

There was another who travelled with them who could not have communicated his own story to them even if he had wanted to, for they did not understand him.

### **Paul, as he Wanders from Europe**

*Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life.*

Genesis 3:17

No-one knew where he was from. He wasn't German and he spoke a language with some of the words of the Northern Franks, but not with an accent anyone could recognise. He seemed to indicate he came from the north of somewhere but north of what no-one was sure. One day he just wandered into the group in nothing but a tattered shirt, dirty hose and with filthy, dirt-encrusted hands. He was short and thin and he had lost several teeth in fights and accidents throughout his life. He wasn't a violent man but he had led a brutal life. He was not a soldier. Everything about him said that he was a serf. He was unaccompanied and no-one knew why he had come. He spoke to some people, and in fact often sought people out at night and sat around fires, but he spoke so confusingly, and about such random topics, that most were put off and tried to ignore him. Even for someone speaking in dialect his general speech and grammar were terrible. He didn't seem to be an alcoholic and he only drank as much beer as he needed with his morning and evening meal to stay healthy. When he was offered a drink, he drank greedily, with eyes darting about lest it be taken away from him, but he ate greedily too. It was not the alcohol that he longed for, because he did this with any kind of food. It was sustenance. He had black hair cut badly and a dented scar across his skull where the hair didn't grow. He said a rope from an ox had dragged across his head there when he was young. There was a small patch of hair on the front of his head that always grew back white no matter how much he cut it. His face was cleanly shaved. A razor was one of his few possessions. He told people his name was Paul, but it could have been something similar-sounding, as no-one could quite understand him.

Paul had already walked a long way and discovered them by pure luck. He had travelled with some companions but his group had been fluid and ultimately it

had disintegrated, leaving only him and his own determination. In truth he had no concept of how big the world was. One monk had showed him a very crude map when he stopped at a monastery to ask for aid, a map of the world with Jerusalem at its centre, but mostly he just asked for directions. He had already backtracked several times and taken a zig zag route, relying on what local townspeople knew about the next villages over. Most of them had never seen a wanderer, especially one so low class, and they reacted with the sort of suspicion he might have had in his earlier life. He had heard of the pilgrimage and he had had a vision. He didn't know whether he was sleeping or awake when he had it, but it was clear in his mind, and the memory of it was strong and personal, and so he was here. It seemed that God had guided him in the most dire straits of his ignorance.

Paul remembers his life because no-one else will remember it for him. He does not need to speak it to anybody because they will not understand.

A child. Hanging close to the mother-who-died, her breasts like apples. The sun. Calm Sundays. Father always working. Eating, all the family, from the stew pot. He is a child. He has the little rabbit in his hands. He catches the little rabbit himself. It has a coat of fur. It cries just like a baby. He holds it and strokes it. His sister-who-got-the-sickness strokes it too. He is quick! He catches the rabbit. He feels it warm and squirming. Under the hair it is so warm and soft. He feels its chest moving in and out. He carries it inside. Festivals are the best. People dance! His sister-who-got-the-sickness loves the dancing. Make the rabbit dance! He does. He holds the rabbit by the scruff. It is over the lid of the stew pot. When its long feet touch the lid it kicks and spins in his hand. They laugh. It's dancing! His sister who is sick later touches the rabbit gently. The rabbit's nose moves fast and its whiskers tickle. It has whiskers like father who went away. Make it dance again, she says. He does. It cries just like a baby. It will be my baby, says the healthy sister who will get sick. It's my baby now, he says. I am the father. He stands taller. He holds the crying rabbit. Sister who gets sick and dies with blue lips and spit on the bed and blue legs sticking out of the blankets laughs. The way she looks at him is like he is the father now. When sister who gets the sickness dies the straw smells like the water sister makes outside. It is the last thing she does. He thinks it is good for her to do before she goes to where she is going. She gets everything done. Sister is always smart even though she is

small. She loves him. He has the rabbit just like a baby. He dances, spinning the rabbit. Its legs are so long it almost touches the floor! It wriggles loose and tries to run. He throws a blanket over it and catches it again. The pig in the corner of the kitchen makes a noise and goes back to sleeping. Nearly lost baby! He and the sister-who-got-the-sickness are looking at the baby. Our baby, he says. I am the father! What do fathers do with rabbits and hares? Fathers take them home and put them in the stew pot! He lifts the lid and puts the baby rabbit into the steaming stew. He is holding its back and putting the face in first. He laughs to see the ears go under. It isn't crying now. Long ears in the stew. His sister is watching with wonder on her face. She looks to her brother who is being the father. She has big eyes. Is she worried now? Afraid. He puts the rabbit deeper. The stew is very hot near his hands. He thinks that if he can hold it for longer he is strong like father who went away. Never mind the pain!

Mother-who-died is yelling. Not like that! Don't put it in like that! Not with the fur coat on! They are running. Mother is hitting him. She is big and faster. They carry the rabbit outside. It is not moving. Its eyes aren't black now, just white. Its face is wet. He is crying. I naren't give it to mother now, he says. I caught a nice rabbit but I won't give it. She wants the fur coat off and the gibbles out. I won't give it. He takes the rabbit back to where he found it. There are a few wide holes in the hill. He sits the rabbit on the edge of the hole. It is lying down. A little bed, he says. It isn't moving. He pushes it but it doesn't move. Baby is sleeping, sister who gets the sickness says. She sounds sad. He says baby is sleeping even though he thinks it might not be true. It's a good thing to say to sister who gets the sickness. He pushes the rabbit again and it rolls down the hole, legs and arms flopping. It rests half in the dark. The earth is cool and close. He can smell the worm air. Baby rabbit is back with the mother, he says. We go home now. He takes sister by the hand. Sister is careful to brush the dirt off the knees of her skirt. She always is the smartest. She gets her water all out too before she has to go.

Little babies get to sleep curled up next to mother-who-died. Little babies get to put their arms around her like she is the whole world. But big boys don't. He sleeps on the other side of the floor with the brothers soon. In the cold the pig sleeps on the floor with them instead of in his corner. The pig has bristles too like a father. The wind sings outside when it's very cold and the ground is white.

Sometimes when it is coldest they sleep together again. They take all the warm things from the house, wrap themselves in them, wrap themselves in each other and sleep near the stew pot. When it's hot they sleep in hardly anything at all, all about the floor. Mother dies because a sister kills her. The sister is trying to get out but the sister is already dead. The sister gets in mother because God puts it there, and then the sister dies and kills mother. He doesn't understand it. Mother is gone and father has gone away. Now he and his brothers are the fathers. They keep working. All day they work. Sometimes they are awake because they are very hungry. Sometimes even when they are so tired after work they are awake. Our brother is very fat and yellow because he is hungry, he says. A devil is in him. They all give him some of their food each day and he gets better. Does food get the devils out? We fill ourselves up so the devil has no place to hide. He remembers playing with sister-who-got-the-sickness just before she is sick. He is putting his mouth to her belly. His lips are closed on her skin and he says words to her. She laughs because it tickles. What are the words? he asks, taking his lips away. She has to guess. He puts his lips back and says another word. She wriggles and laughs. He uses his lips to make a noise on her belly like a rude thing. Someone says sister dies because she got the evil eye from a woman who passes through the village. He knows it is because he is eating an icicle from the eaves of the house. It is bad luck to eat the first one of winter. He feels the cold on his lips. The clear ice twists his sister's face as she looks up at him. He is laughing, taking the ice from his eye and eating it.

On Sundays he sits with his family and he rests and he sits in the fields and he speaks to his neighbours. It's the Lord's day and he loves the Lord even though the Lord says they work every other day.

He is having a fight with tall Michael. Paul is trying to use the killer ox. He knows it's not his day but he needs it. Tall Michael is hitting him. Paul is on the ground. The blows are thudding into his sides and his arms. He is covering his head. He is crying and has dirt in his mouth. He is angry and ashamed. Because he does this the men come and kill all the brothers. The ox can't speak because God didn't give it the breath of life and because the devil isn't in it even though it's a killer.

Margaret falls over and the ox steps on her. For three days she is lying awake with the flat chest and the blood on her lips. She can't speak. She is just

looking at the ceiling. Take her out, someone says. No-one does. He is looking into the black eyes of the ox. They are alone on the field. You are a killer, he says. The ox grunts and does ox things. The ox is a killer. It has a cloven hoof like the devil. It has black eyes like river stones. They all want the ox. The ox rests on Sundays too.

In church it is calm and they hear many stories. The church is so big. The priest is talking about Jesus. Paul is remembering all the phrases and saying them at home later. Someone said the priest knows everything. Now Paul knows everything because he has the same phrases. You can be our priest! they say. Paul says even the things that are God's mystery. Some of them are God's mystery because they say things only God can know. Adam and Eve eat an apple and now everyone is cursed. The snake is speaking because it has the devil in it. It makes them eat the apple. We are all cursed for ever and ever and ever. God can love us again and he can let us into New Jerusalem where there is milk and honey. But his mother is in hell. She missed church. Margaret is in hell because she didn't speak to the priest. They are saying she is speaking but she isn't, it is just air coming out, she can't speak cause the killer ox broke her inside. Margaret is in hell because she's cursed. He asked the priest where sister-who-got-the-sickness is. The priest says God loves children and so sister might be in New Jerusalem. She is in the ground too because they put her there. But she is in New Jerusalem too. Where is New Jerusalem? Paul is asking. New Jerusalem is real. You can walk its streets. It is as real as Africa. Where is Africa? Paul is asking. It is real too. It is full of beasts. Paul is walking three villages away, more than any of his brothers. Africa is further. New Jerusalem is even further.

The priest is saying the things that make us go into hell. Some of the things Paul has done. He knows he is going to hell. He wants God to love him and he prays and prays but he knows he is going because all people are cursed because Adam and Eve are eating the apple.

The priest says God is going to break all the world. He is going to smash it like a plate. He will kick it like a pile of straw and it will be no more. All the sky will be blood and the ground will split and a whore and a beast will be there. All the villages will burn. Mother-who-died was the whole world and she went away. The village was the whole world and it is ash. So the world too will go away. It might happen tomorrow or the day after. It will be soon. Before then we have to

try to make God love us and forgive us. We have to try and try and he probably won't, but we have to do it before then. We ate an apple and the devil went inside. He prays and prays for his sister in New Jerusalem. When the world is smashed, he prays that it won't hurt too bad. When tall Michael hits him it hurts for days. The people in the village are laughing. He is looking at the sky to see if there is blood. When the storm is there he is wondering if the world will be gone tomorrow. All the birds will die and the rabbits will be burned out of their holes.

The men are in the town and they are cutting people. There are many of them and they wear thick skins of armour. The houses are burning. They take the pig. Paul's brother is lying with a cut throat and looking up with dead eyes. He is in hell because he wasn't baptised before he died. That is the way. The men are dying. Some of the strange men are being with the women even though they are not married and God says it is wrong. The women are crying like the little rabbits. They are running. The village is burning and smoke is going to the stars. The night is cold. He is looking to see if the sky has blood in it. He sees a shooting star but nothing is falling yet.

The family is gone. He is in the city. It is a strange place, smelly, with high buildings and windows like drying boards and streets so tight Paul can barely move. Outside the walls the thick-skinned men are waiting. Everyone in the town is crying, then laughing, then praying. There are a lot of men waiting outside. It is more than the stars, remembers Paul. It is all the men of the world. Paul is a strong hero. He never fights anyone. Is he a strong hero? He'd like to remember he was. The men go away.

Paul is working for a butcher. Paul cuts the meat and gets small scraps of fat. The master gives him coins. It is the first time he sees them. They have a face on one side. If his sister was there he would say, look, it's another baby! But his sister has the sickness and she is dying. She dies before the men can lie on her and she can scream like a rabbit.

The church man here is different. Paul sleeps in a room with two rooms above and windows sagging towards the dirt. He sleeps with many other men. It is very cold in winter and it always smells. They bury things in the street but the dogs dig them up. The only animal they have in the house is a cat. It keeps mice away. One day Paul comes home very hungry and the cat is gone. They say they're not eating it but Paul thinks they are lying because they don't want to give

him any meat. Later he finds cat bones in the street. He eats some meat from the shop as well and doesn't tell his master. All men are cursed. If his master sees him he will get chopped up like the pigs. He does it anyway.

The church man says Jesus loves the meek. The meek are them. The church man talks to them like they are not his friends. He says they are all dirty and evil. Paul had never thought he was dirty and evil but now he supposes he is. He would need to ask someone else to know. The church man says they will all die with sins on them. He says none of them will go to New Jerusalem and Jesus will come back soon, and when he does he will strike them down. Strike them down means kill. Paul wakes up in the night and thinks Jesus might have come. It will happen soon, the priest says. They must love and confess. The priest says they are all cursed and Paul is cheered. He knows this from the village church. He has said those words himself and his family has listened. It is good to know they are the same. Maybe they are friends after all. Paul is home and repeating all the words. He knows about all the plagues and all the horsemen and all the bad things that will happen to bad people when Jesus comes back. Jesus coming back is good. Father never comes back after he goes away. When Eve eats the apple God says she is cursed and having babies will always be pain. That is why God put the baby in mother and mother died.

He is back in his village. Most of the houses are gone. His house is gone. Things have been taken. The bodies are gone. Gone to hell mostly, he is thinking, because they are cursed. It doesn't smell like the village any more. He is taking the only thing he finds which he knows is his family's. It is his farming fork with the sharp wooden fingers. It belongs to all of them. His clothes belong to all of them too and all of them have worn the clothes and now all the brothers and sisters are gone. The stew pot is gone. No-one wants to stay in the village so he goes back to the town with the others. The master hits him and he falls and the men say Paul is asleep for three days but he can't remember. If he is asleep for three days he must be asleep for three days.

All the men he lives with are praying. He would like to have a wife but he knows you have to put food in a wife's belly or the devil gets in. He can't put food in a wife's belly. When he sees girls sometimes he has thoughts and he knows the priest says they are bad but some men joke about them and some men pray when they have them. Being married is better than burning. He wonders

again why God put the baby in mother-who-died. The men are talking about the biggest priest of all who said that men are going to New Jerusalem. He said and now they said. Paul is amazed. He never knew it was possible to walk to New Jerusalem. Perhaps his sister is there. Perhaps he can see her before God smashes the world. The men say that God will love people if they go to New Jerusalem. Maybe if he goes there God will love him too, even though he is cursed. New Jerusalem is the land of milk and honey. He is walking. He stops at a house where the woman is afraid of him. She is breathing hard and he is eating food. He has asked for it nicely. His brother says the cow breathes fastest before the bull mounts it. He approaches the woman. 'We are not married!' he says. 'God sees us! I'm going to New Jerusalem,' and he puts the bowl down and leaves. They say the world is big and it is. There are villages and forests and villages and he always asks the way. Some are confused. Some are afraid. Some tell him. He is walking with men. He has to trade his farming fork for food. Some of the men wander away. One man is stealing a lamb and people are chasing him. Men are beating him. Paul is running away with other men. Two of the other men are yelling. They are fighting each other over a chicken. Paul is watching. One man leaves. Paul comes to a place where people can't even speak. They're people but their voices have been stolen. He knows that holy people speak in other voices and maybe these people are holy. Holy is what puts the babies in and sometimes they live and sometimes they die. Holy put the baby in Mary. Holy put the baby in mother-who-died. Holy put Paul in mother-who-died and made him cursed. Each morning he is happy. The world is not smashed apart. Every night he is anxious.

And he sees men with horses. More horses than he has ever known. There are seven horses when the world is smashed and also a man on a white horse with a bow. He only saw one horse in his village and only ever four in the town. Now there are dozens. Horses like rabbits! He imagines nailing horseshoes to a rabbit's long foot and laughs. What will his sister say!

Paul hasn't seen rabbits since his childhood, just hares. Rabbits are kept by some of the monasteries and they are very good at getting out. If Paul can dig like a rabbit he can get out from anywhere too.

The men have iron all over them. They wear iron like skirts. Paul has never seen so much. They have beautiful weapons, not like the thick-skinned men

who killed his brothers. There are men like those there too, of course. These men have voices. And they are going to New Jerusalem. He sees women amongst them and he has thoughts because he is cursed. But he joins them. How far? He asks. They seem to know the way. They tell him it is far. There are priests. He asks them if Jesus will come before they reach New Jerusalem. The priest says Jesus will love them and they will all be allowed into New Jerusalem. He is glad. He wishes his sister got to be a woman. She only ever had the little apples blooming. Perhaps she is a woman in New Jerusalem and she has babies and a husband she is married to. She wouldn't be making the sister water because in New Jerusalem people don't need to do that. What will he do if he needs to make water there? He will have to decide later. He is wondering how much of Africa they will have to walk through. Devils tied him down but now he is on his way. He is with men. Perhaps they are angels. Together they will be in New Jerusalem as soon as they can.

Later that night a young man did try to engage Paul in conversation and he fought through enough of his dialect that he could understand some of what Paul said.

‘You’ve come a long way? That’s very good of you.’

‘Ground cursed because of man,’ Paul seemed to mutter. He said other things too but in that dialect that the young man could not understand. Some of his words ran out clearly though amidst all the vernacular. ‘Enmity between all men.’

Some of the others nearby turned away. The young man was surprised but he persisted. ‘Yes, but the gift of divine grace shall be given to us, and we shall persevere for that.’

‘Just for the few.’

‘All men are sinners, yes ...’

‘Kings and serfs the same in sins. Will of man corrupt.’

As Paul said these things he did not appear at all disturbed. He said it with complete calm and no hint of darkness.

‘Seven bowls of God’s wrath ... Tomorrow maybe. Pour a bowl into the sea and it turns to blood. Weeping and moaning. People cry out. Tomorrow or the day after.’

‘You speak of the last judgement?’

‘Tomorrow ... or the day after.’

The young man cleared his throat and looked at the fire. He wanted to leave this peasant. There was unwholesome air from his clothes and his very form.

‘Outside the city are the dogs,’ said Paul. ‘The magicians. The sexually immoral. The murderers.’

The man stood up. ‘I must go to sleep now. God be with you on your journey.’

‘I am on my way to New Jerusalem,’ said the peasant Paul.

The young man walked away but by the log he was sitting on he had, in his haste, left a wooden spoon and a bowl. The peasant Paul calmly picked them up and put them in his pouch. These men were his family now so he shared his things with them. If they asked for his clothes he would give them to the people.

# Asia

## **Paul, at the Siege of Nicaea**

*He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.*

Revelation 21:4

Paul watched as they lowered the skinny little girl into the ground. She had no food. None of them had food. People had been eating grass and bark. It was near Easter time, and Easter time was always the same. Always you couldn't eat. But this was worse. And usually at Easter there was the big feast. People eat and eat and eat until they cannot move. That was Easter: hunger for days and days, not allowed to eat, the end of the hard times, and then the big feast, and months of saving every morsel before the harvest. Every crumb and every acorn must be hidden from others. They eat the food the pigs nuzzle at in the forest. Easter is always the best holy feast. Easter is when Jesus dies and comes back again. It's the greatest miracle of all.

How long have they been here, at the city with the big walls and the blue lake? Only a week maybe. People search in the lake for food. Some go too close to the walls. Two are hit by arrows. They cry. One is dead soon afterwards. The other floats in the water and cries. The water is red around him as all his life goes away.

Before that they are walking down the old road with the stones and the weeds and the crosses on every side. Are they supposed to pray at every one? Before that they are at the Greek town. Before that they are by the sea. Before that they are across the sea, outside the city with the walls like mountains. When Paul sees it he thinks it must be New Jerusalem. It is not New Jerusalem. It is just a town, like all towns, full of people and smells and places for making leather and glass and all kinds of things. It is the biggest in the world, though, he thinks. Only New Jerusalem could be bigger.

He finds a priest at a church and asks when the world will end, whether it will be soon and whether he will reach New Jerusalem in time. The priest does not understand him. He speaks with no tongue. None of the priests in the city behind the mountain, the city on the water, can understand him. The city behind the mountain and on the water has a thousand churches they say, churches like

stars, but none of the men there have a tongue. And the churches look different. Inside faces stare back from the walls with big, flat, stone eyes. The roofs curve away like apples.

When Paul is a boy there is just a cross in the town. All the saints have candles burning, when they can, and for a time there is a candle burning in Paul's house to St Margaret, who killed a dragon. There are many places for saints in the village and everyone knows about the saints. But the most holy place is the cross. Once a month everyone goes out there to hear the preacher speak when he arrives. Sometimes it is raining and people are holding a blanket over the preacher's head. Fleas are jumping onto him from the blanket. He doesn't even open his special book. He speaks for a shorter time on those days and everyone is glad. Later they build the wooden church and they can all go inside even when it is raining. The wooden church is nothing like these churches in the city behind the mountain, the city on the sea.

Paul is going to a service on the Holy Day outside the city behind the mountain, the city on the sea. The priest speaks, but with no tongue. Where are the holy words? Where are the magic words? Paul can repeat them to himself. He can remember. 'Have mercy on me, O God, according to your great mercy.' 'Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.' 'As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.' Why can this man not remember? And he looks different, with his beard. The priest with no tongue gives the body. Paul knows the body is like bread. But this priest gives actual bread. It is like normal bread, everyday bread. It is not holy. It is not the body. The body is not like normal bread, the body is holy! This is just bread.

And the priest with no tongue gives the blood. The blood! Paul only gets the blood at special times, at Easter and Christmas. The blood is for very special times and they must be careful not to spill it otherwise mother-who-died will hit us and the priest will frown. The blood tastes sharp. It is like beer. It is not actual blood; Jesus used his power to make the blood holy and that is why it is called the blood.

But it is not a very special day. Paul knows all the very special days. He knows all the Saint's days. This is just an ordinary Sunday. And he is getting the blood! Paul leaves. It is not right, he says to the priest with no tongue, standing in

the church. It is not right. He leaves. He does not want God to be angry with him. Then God might end the world sooner.

There is some hunger as they wait outside the mountain city, the city on the water, but there is also more than Paul has ever seen. A special man, a man from their own places, a holy man called Peter with the mule gives things to Paul and to others. Peter with the mule starts with the poorest and the sickest and he goes from there. He gets his gifts from inside the city behind the mountain, the city on the water.

Peter with the mule has a mule with no hair. Peter with the mule is from across the water. He loved many people and he wanted to take them to New Jerusalem but they are all dead now and Peter with the mule is sad. People pull hairs from Peter with the mule. They take his fingernails and his toenails after he has cut them. He is like a saint. Paul sees the finger bones of saints and the teeth of saints and the hair of saints in churches when he walks. But those Saints are dead. Peter with the mule is a living saint. So people take their holy relics from him. He is giving his body up to them. They are even pulling hairs from his crying mule. He is giving all of himself away.

Peter with the mule has many things, not just food and drink. He is giving clothes to the people, and toys, and saints painted on wood, and even coins. He is getting them from inside the city behind the mountain and on the water. Paul thinks he has a friend there who gives them to him because he does not need them. There must be many people in a city so big who do not need things anymore.

He is giving people clothes that shine, clothes that are like fish skin and sunlight, smooth and soft and glowing. Paul is moving his fingertip across someone's shirt. He can barely feel the cloth at all. It is like air. Peter with the mule is giving whole pieces of silver to the women. He is asking husbands, who are angry with their wives because their wives are laying with men, to take them back, and he is giving the husbands shining metal and treasure so they will say yes.

Markets open. Many in the market cannot speak to them. They have no tongues. They speak with their hands, moving their arms like beetles on their backs, screeching like magpies. The men who sell don't want regular things in return. They won't take Paul's cloak or half a loaf of bread. They especially want

the metal coins. You can't eat the metal, even though people bite it. Paul knows that the metal has a power and people in the towns prefer it, and this is the biggest town of all. The metal has a face on it. Is it the face of a God or a saint? Is that what gives it its power? Is it a king?

When people in Paul's village trade, they swap eggs for milk or chickens for lambs. They find the things they don't have. Paul wonders at these men selling because these men do not seem to need anything, and yet they are wanting to trade. Why do they trade when they need nothing? They already are trading everything there could be and more, and Paul cannot tell them to take things that men with tongues take all the time. The men don't seem to know how it works. The men who sell are giving the food for only a few coins or a small glove or a piece of cloth, but other things will only be given for a lot of coins and piles of clothes. One man who sells, one of the only ones who can speak, tells them that he is being generous. Generosity is not taking your brother's shoes to work that day because the sun is shining and you do not need them.

Paul is remembering the good times from the village. The boy who fills the wagon with wood is sick. Paul gets the job instead and he gets a whole log of his own to take home. The log burns longer than all the others. His whole family is proud of him. He remembers one day when it is a holy week and Paul can collect all the dung from the ox for himself and take it home. The dung goes into the fire and he is using it to fix the hole in the wall where the wind always comes in. Simon with the one eye dies and everyone can take one piece of his clothing. Paul gets a glove. Paul is cutting down the grain in the hot sun. At the end of the day, after cutting many, many sheaves, he is given one to take back to the family. Those are the good days. Those are the days of plenty.

This is like nothing Paul has seen. Men don't just have food and logs and grain and dung; they have things they have never seen before, and they have things they do not need. And there is more and more and more. None of the people know what to do with it. They are thinking they are going to have their hands cut off or be hanged from a tree in a rope. But no-one comes. People have more than they have ever had and they don't know what to do.

Babies have shining bonnets while the mothers feed them at the breast and hold their other young ones with the dirty faces back from the crowd. Men are taking the metal coins from the old ones and the sick ones, and the lame ones who

got them first from Peter and the mule. Sometimes they are knocking the old men down, and the old men are tugging hard to keep their new blankets or their treasure as the others pull it away, and sometimes they say they will swap things for the sick, but they keep most of what they swap for themselves and their friends and just give the sick some. Women who had rags wear jewels. Paul asks a woman if he can have them and she says no. Men have metal figures of animals and painted saints. People buy new tools, axes and slings and picks. People have everything. Some people are arguing with a man who sells. They are pushing over his table, and his things fall into the mud. The crowd is pecking at the things like chickens. Men are yelling. The crowd is pushing all the tables aside, they are screaming, they are grabbing this and that and tearing the clothes from the men who sell. The men who sell are crawling through the streets like hairless lambs. Soldiers in metal and thick skin are there. Peter with the mule is shouting for people to stop. Some people are praying around him, their foreheads in the mud, praying, praying, giving themselves to him as he gives himself to them.

That time of plenty is over now. Now there is hunger again. It is always the way. Some are sick, and some have been hungry for longer, or perhaps they don't know about Easter. They are put into the ground. Even the men in the metal are groaning. The men on the walls are looking down. Paul is trying not to move. He knows that makes the hunger worse. He has his feet in the water, besides many others all across the shore, and he is hoping that a fish might swim by. When the men who sell had their tables turned over Paul gets a little wooden bird. He takes it from his pouch and looks at it. It is almost like a real bird. He thinks it is better if he takes a fishing net. But he doesn't, and now he can't.

He is sitting with a girl who is sick. She is not strong like Paul. Paul has had no food for many days but he knows it, he can live in the pain and the calm and the fog. She is not strong. She is sick. It is too much for her. She knows some of what Paul says. She is speaking because she knows all the ghost will go out of her soon. She wants to speak to somebody.

Paul is stroking her hair. She is thin and warm. Her bones stick out. She never had much to eat. She coughs. Now it is too hard for her to stand.

'I just wanted to feel special,' she is saying. 'I wanted someone to love me. I wanted to feel like I was special.'

Paul is stroking her hair as the tears come out. They run across her face like the spirits of angels, at the same time as Paul runs his fingers through her hair, which is falling out.

‘Always had to work so hard. Always no time. One year the ox died. I had to pull the plough myself. Had to work so hard the blood stopped coming. No-one else could do it.’

Paul makes calming noises, quiet noises like the wind, the way mother-who-died did when he was a baby. The girl is like a baby now. Sometimes the hunger makes people like ghosts. They don’t speak. They just stand and stare, with yellow skin and watery eyes that are like pig eyes, not people eyes. They walk about and they can be pushed over with a hand. She is not like that now though, she has woken up from it, the way people sometimes do. It is the last spark of energy. Paul has seen it before.

‘I wanted to come ... They said God was calling us. I wanted to get away, from all that work ... From all that ... No-one ever showed me any kindness, except my mother. I wanted something new. They said God was calling us. I wanted to go to the holy city. I wanted it all new. I wanted to feel special, to see special things. I wanted someone to love me. I wanted God to love me. I don’t know if I will ever see Jerusalem now.’

Paul is making the wind noise again with his lips, and he is squatting and moving about, brushing her hair with his fingers. It must be the right thing to do because it is what big girls do to smaller girls. It always makes the big girls and the small girls happy.

‘You will go,’ Paul is saying. ‘God does love you. You will see New Jerusalem! And there you will be all new again. Everybody will love you there. You will not be sick or tired again. You won’t need to work. And I’ll see you there one day! And there will be a garden and a lamb. And we will all be together, at the hand of God. Angels will be with us, beautiful angels with wings. And Jesus will love you. He loves you now. He loves me now. He is not angry at you. He is not sad. He knows you are not going to feel bad any more. You are not going to see anything bad ever again. You are going to be with him. And he will be happy to see you. And you can see your mother there, and my mother. And you can say hello to my mother for me, and my sister. Can you do that? And tell them I am coming soon?’

She tried to nod.

‘Will He love me?’

‘We are all cursed. All of us. But He loves everyone.’

‘I just wanted to feel special. To be special to someone. To feel special to myself.’

‘You are special. You are never alone. You never need to feel lonely.’

She is crying.

‘You are lucky. You will see New Jerusalem before any of us. And you tried. You tried so hard. God will love you for that. He is not angry with you.’

‘But I’ve sinned, I know I have, I’ve sinned ...’

‘We all have. But He is not angry with you now. He loves you. Even the woman who takes the body and sprinkles it on her plants so the caterpillars will stay away, they say He even loves her when she asks him. And you will see Him soon. You will feel so warm and safe. It will be like being loved by everyone, being wrapped inside love. You will walk through the white streets and inside the walls of the perfect clean city. There will be clean blue water and flowers. And always you will feel God. You will be happy and laughing and He will take away all your tears.’

‘In New Jerusalem,’ she is saying, crying.

The look with the eyes of the pig is coming back. All the life is going from her face. She is becoming like the yellow-skinned person again, just looking, not seeing. Just waiting. The bit of her that thinks is locked deep inside now. Her face is hanging like a mask. Her skin is like a porridge you could push and leave a dent. She waits, shivering. Paul strokes her hair and makes a noise like the wind.

She wakes up again for a moment and her hand wraps tight around Paul’s wrist.

‘Wait with me,’ she says. ‘Just til morning.’

Outside it is night and even the men in iron have gone very quiet. All the world is asleep. Paul knows all the world is black for her because when people are very hungry they can’t see in the dark anymore.

Paul waits with her. The next day she is dead.

### **Esther, at the Siege of Nicaea**

*Then Samson prayed to the LORD, "O Sovereign LORD, remember me. O God, please strengthen me just once more, and let me with one blow get revenge on the Philistines for my two eyes."*

Judges 16:28

Esther returned to the aristocrat's tent the next morning. He looked different that day. His shoulders had sunk and he let his head hang lower than usual. It could have been the lack of food; even the leaders were being affected now. Esther still managed a scrap here and there because she was associated with the nobles. But he glanced at her darkly, so that Esther wondered whether he was angry with her, and she knew that it was not hunger that had him looking so out of sorts.

'I didn't scratch at all last night,' he said. 'I think you got all of them.'

'Best to check,' she said.

He sat for a few moments, sighing, as she combed through his hair, arranging it in her hands.

'I suppose you want to hear the rest of that story?' he said accusingly.

'No,' she said. 'Only if you want to tell.'

He nodded, looking at the rug beneath him, which was stretched out across the cloth laid at the bottom of the tent. Esther saw a centipede crawling across the rug, its many legs moving as if eyelashes blown by breath.

'Are you afraid of insects?' he asked.

'I'm not bothered by small ones,' she said. 'I hate the rest.'

It was the biggest centipede Esther had ever seen. Its shell looked soft. It searched blindly with its long tendril antennae and its groping mandibles. She watched as the aristocrat considered squashing it but decided, as his foot was hovering, to let it live. He set his foot back and watched the insect crawl, not knowing that Esther behind him was watching too. It moved curiously towards his feet, unperturbed by his movements. Esther wondered if it would crawl right past him and to her at his back.

'I woke up to see a spider beside me on my pillow this morning. What creatures they have here! I've heard pilgrims say that it is worse in the desert. There are lions, real lions, and spiders as big as hands.'

He waited for a response from her but she continued doing her duty.

‘Here is one,’ she said, after a time, crushing a louse and seeing a drop of blood on her fingertips, as if she had just killed a human thing. ‘He probably didn’t sting you because he is so fat already.’

‘It could have jumped on me from someone else. Have you checked yourself? Perhaps it’s yours. Who can say that that long hair of yours isn’t swarming with lice.’

She accepted his mood this morning and said nothing. She had a job to do and she would do it. She did, for a moment, picture a fat louse, leaping from one head to the next, biting, leaping again. All that blood being mixed in its belly, its blood stained stinger piercing flesh and mixing the blood of so many men, all of them together linked in vermin, mixed in the bellies of vermin.

‘You do have the other women check you before you come here?’ he asked.

She felt inexplicably weak under his blow. Christ would tell her to turn the other cheek. ‘Always,’ she said, trying not to show him that the words had knocked her soul. She could not always be responsible for the weakness of her body, but his accusations had knocked her soul. Could it have been her louse? She resolved to cut her hair much shorter, to give the beasts less space to live, so no-one could accuse her of carrying their dirt from one place to the next.

When the aristocrat finally resumed his story he did it in an apologetic tone, as if hurrying to the promised words could show his contrition at his harshness.

‘I told you about the nobleman, the old fellow, who lost his sight. You remember this?’

‘Yes.’

‘Only shortly after I had sent him away I received a message. My lands in Normandy, across the water ... I had many properties there ... They had been assaulted, by the rebels. One property in particular. I had not expected the rebels to have any allies there, not allies who would want to target me in particular, I had thought it was safe. My wife was in the house they assaulted. They took her hostage, as well as all of her staff.’

‘These were not lordly men, they were not high ranking nobles who had done this. But I heard the names and I knew they were all associated with the man I had blinded. Men like this ... They don’t know what is right ... They don’t know

their place ... They will do anything. I knew I only had a little time before they would hear what had happened to their fellow. I had to get to them, to negotiate for release or ransom before they did anything terrible.'

'The taking of hostages, it is so ... regular, it is so ordinary. It is done matter-of-factly. Fights die, noblemen escape, fall on the field or are taken hostage, a ransom is paid ... It is not a bloodthirsty business, and there are many oaths taken about it, many codes one should follow if one hopes to get along in the world. But during these times of rebellion ... Everyone expects the whole order of things to change. They picture a world with a new ruler, it is just beyond their grasp, and when their man is standing there, in his coronation habit, they foresee all things being forgiven. They are unpredictable times. The savagery of men is revealed.'

The centipede had turned away. It was moving towards the darkness of a chest covered in rugs and pillows that sat at one side of the tent. Esther listened as his shoulders rose and fell, his breathing stronger with each sentence. The words came out in a hurry, like he was rushing onward to something and then backing away, talking around it.

'I had reached the coast with some men. It takes time to organise men, even when they are all expecting battle. Just recently Robert's ships had been destroyed, he would not come to stake his claim. But it was difficult to get a ship. I heard rumours ... But one can't believe them. One pushes them out of one's head. It is amazing what one can believe or disbelieve when one needs to, when one's heart needs to.'

He swallowed. She wanted to tell him that he did not need to complete his story, but she could not find the words.

'Of course I didn't see her until much later. I saw her thanks to the King. Two weeks we waited for ships to take us across. No amount of money could find a transport. I waited, staring at the sea, knowing that just beyond was that green land. Eventually myself and a few of my men went across in a fishing boat. I arranged to have my men follow. I had a feeling that the land had all been swallowed by the rebels, and as soon as I came ashore I would be taken and held captive. Life seemed so mundane and ordinary on the other side. One wouldn't have thought there was a rebellion at all, except that the ports were all nearly empty, the only vessels there foreign, the crews hurried and quiet as they loaded

and unloaded their cargoes. People did not believe who I was at first, coming as I did. I had to convince them. But everyone there knew. These rebels, they had taken a liberty, you see. They had stepped beyond the mark. Young fools, men hoping to rise, idiots ... They're the ones who do such things, but any land is full of them, overflowing with them, and the logical man, the correct man, the man who knows the place for ruthlessness and when to avoid it ... They are few, very few. They are as rare as a panther. Their breath is as sweet ... Everyone knew because the crime was too big.'

He sat forward, as if forgetting she was working on his hair, putting his head in his hands, then raising his face to look around. The centipede was gone. He glanced guiltily back, perhaps to see if it was at her feet. But neither of them could see it. She did not understand why he suddenly looked at her, why his eyes started at her shoes and travelled up to her eyes. He turned back just as quickly. That glance he gave her was one she had never seen before.

'I could no longer choose to disbelieve it. We began to travel inland, without any kind of entourage, right into the heart of the rebel's country. I knew the way to my own estates well. Every notable we spoke to had the same story. I could not hope that it was not true any more. They told me ... They told me the rebels had cut off her ... nose and her ears ...' he said, touching those places lightly on his own body. 'They had done it to all of her serving girls, all the women servants. Have you ever seen any of the lepers that wait outside monasteries and in market squares, begging for scraps? When the nose is gone and they have just ... I saw her later. I insisted on seeing and she did not hide it. She never mentioned what it was like ... As the sharp iron approached that flesh I knew so well ...'

Esther had stopped reaching for his hair. She hardly breathed. She had tried to picture his wife but she had never imagined anything like that. She tried to reconcile all that he had told her of his life with what she had just heard.

'By the time I reached my estates the rebellion was over. The men who did that ... They were all prisoners themselves. After weeks I eventually found where my wife had been held. No-one had known what to do with them. After they captured her jailers, they left her as a prisoner. She was sick with her wounds. But she survived. She survived. Even her voice was ...'

He sat up straight. He had a resolution in his voice and he continued without any emotion.

‘I returned to the mainland. The hostages had been turned over to the responsibility of the King. By now, the King’s advisers had told him to be lenient to his enemies, that it was the best policy to avoid future trouble. You know he is remembered as being an especially merciful ruler during this rebellion? Only that powerful one, that bishop, the Conqueror’s half-brother ... Only him he stripped of everything and banished. But these heretics, these little people, these fools, these petty nobles ... they hardly counted in anyone’s great plan. I heard that the King had them now. He had his hostages and he sent a message, saying that he knew what had been done to my household and that he grieved with me. He said, as a demonstration of how much he was mourning, he would follow my advice in this matter. He would ransom them, if I wanted, and give me as a gift some of the money he gained, although I doubted anyone would be bold enough to pay money and associate their name with such criminals, or he would have them punished for treason. The fools had not bothered to formally renounce their oaths to the King before they rebelled. They fought in open violation of their word. I’m certain other higher born people had not done so either, but these men were not highly born enough. They did those things in open violation. They’re like barbarians. The King had captured their whole household, every man, woman and child.’

The aristocrat was breathing softly now and looking at his fingertips.

‘Blind them, I told the King’s man. Blind them all. But not the women. Leave the women alone, I said. But the men ... Blind them and castrate them. The King did as I asked and I heard no more about it from him, and in fact he was silent with me for a long time. The women were all freed without ransom and they could care for their pitiful husbands and fathers if they liked. For years I was dealing with the relatives of those upstarts, claiming I had wronged them, bringing all sorts of disputes against me, disputes against the King ... But I dealt with it. My wife ... she went away, to a monastery. She is still there with the nuns now, I believe. I remember shortly after we had been told one of my closest men, he’s dead now, he told me that I should apply for a marriage nullification, say that we were too close in blood, go right to the Pope if we had to ... I screamed at him. I did not want to hear it then. But later ... I married again. I still send money to support her and the sisters in her monastery. I thought for a time she would take

her own life, the thought plagued me, but she was stronger than that ... It is the right thing, to support her sisters. Some of her dowry we gave to the church but some of it still belongs to me.'

'Did you see her again?'

'She has written, but I never see her. We stopped speaking. It was too painful. She is in my thoughts ...'

'And your wife? Your wife now?'

'A very good woman. A very brave woman. You understand, a man like me ... I cannot be without a wife. I did my best to protect her, to keep her safe, to make certain she was never in danger ... And now I must leave her on the island, under the protection of the church, all my lands under its protection, while I walk half a world away. But the King asked me to go. He said that someone from the island must go. There must be a noble representative. Of course, we were supposed to travel with his brother ... But I could not disobey.'

Esther stepped forward, and without saying another word, began searching through his hair again. He silently let her do it. He did not seem to have the energy for more words.

Esther felt somehow ashamed to hear the aristocrat's secret. Was that how he felt, she wondered, when she told him the secrets and confessions of other men?

The tent was hollow, as if their spirits had left, but it was warmed by their bodies. Esther was especially tender and gentle as she searched, moving her calming fingers across his scalp.

The only thing he said was, as if thinking out loud, 'The body can so easily be shattered. It is such a weak thing. So temporary. All those places you loved and kissed ... All gone away. What shells we inhabit.'

Men are coming into the camp. They have a Turk between them. They are laughing and whistling. They drag the Turk along the ground between them and the Turk covers his face with his arms. They laugh and sneer at him as they pull his arms from his face. Other men clap. The Turk is yelling. He is probably swearing at them. Someone taunts him with a sword. Men hold his arms and his legs now. Men come in with their swords until the screaming of the Turk stops.

More princes arrived to much fanfare that day and the next, as well as many hundreds more men, women and children. One of the princes had solved the food situation, with the help of the Greeks and their emperor, and food began to flow again from the nearby port. Esther was glad to eat. She had prayed for it. One day she had been hungry, and the next her hunger was sated. She had no control over it. She watched as men worked and constructed machines. They were cutting down all the trees nearby, leaving a forest of stumps.

Later Esther was sitting amongst the women and a newly-arrived soldier was speaking to them. The women were all happy to be eating. One of the older ones, who seemed to delight in the defiance of human dignity, happily passed wind in front of the younger ones as if it were a fantastic joke.

‘Up there, by the coast, near that port ...’ the soldier said, moving his spoon about in his soaked barley. ‘It is a terrible scene. We saw one of the places where the first group of pilgrims, the ones under Peter ... It must have been where they were killed. We saw skulls scattered across the plains, right up the water. Perhaps some had been trying to escape into the sea. There were piles of bones, some still with scraps of clothing. There is no flesh, no graves, it is like they were not even people ... You could see some of the places where the pagans had hacked at them, some of the arrows that killed them. There were so many. I could look across a field of flowers and see bones out to the horizon, and the animals had played with them. It is indescribable. They were at Constantinople before us. They were the first here. Martyrs, all of them. The pagans murdered every one before we even got here.’

‘It’s disgusting,’ one of the women said. ‘But we’ll have our revenge. An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. That’s what God has taught us. And they’ll pray to their god but they’ll get only silence and tears in return.’

# Europe

Esther told more about the men they travelled with to the aristocrat, hoping to lighten his mood, embellishing as she saw fit.

### **The Story of the Knight, as told by Esther**

He awoke early in a large town after a night of drinking to bells tolling prime. Despite the pain in his head and the sickness that seemed to leech into his very skin from the air and which gave him a sense of unfocussed anxiety, he could not go back to sleep. He rose, almost throwing up, uncertain at first whether he could stand with his hangover, and then finally walked out into the cold morning air to see the city. All the other fellows were sleeping.

The horns of the watchmen were sounding as he hit the street. He could see tiny shapes filing across the castle walls in the distance, its gate opening like a hungry maw, its bricks raised like piles of teeth. Here was the biggest castle he had seen and it had only been built in recent years. It was made of stone, unlike the more simple wooden castles elsewhere. Criers from the taverns were already out, their hot breath showing in the half light, tapping sticks on bowls containing samples of wine. He caught a hint of the smell and could not stand it, even though wine would have made up a usual part of his mid-morning meal. Some oyster shells lay crushed in the street. Shop windows opened and the counters flipped out open on straps. Tired-looking men set about arranging wares to best display. A bird squawked from a rooftop where many birds were kept. Soon another joined, and within minutes bird calls were rising like the sounds from some deep forest from rooftops all across the town, where packed together domestic animals and their wild kin all called out to greet the day. The screeching made the knight wince. The birds were always loudest in the mornings and the evenings. To add to this, the screeches incited the dogs, which barked from the depths of every alley and house and manor. Dogs on the street grew excitable and chased one another. A mangy beast which could have been wild or domestic rose up against a man, its paws at his face and its teeth gnashing, until the man, his hands raised in defence, kicked at it and a merchant came out to chase it off with a stick. Teats hung from the dog and pups emerged from rubbish to join it in its flight. Pigs snuffling and cocks crowing added to the noise.

By now the merchants were shouting and they assumed that the knight had emerged to spend money. He set about looking for a church where he could have a moment of quiet. He walked into the pleasant gloom and sat on a hard bench. The light from the windows was so soft but felt like a cloud of fire reaching back into his eyes, even in the dim place of worship.

He looked about at the empty seats and he scuffed his shoe across the straw on the floor. His head was in too much pain to process much information.

He was trying to collect himself. He had a sudden rush of blood and felt faint, and hunger opened in him like a yawning mouth, and he felt an urgent need for some kind of sustenance or else he would collapse.

He looked at his soft leather shoe, trying to guess whether he could stomach any food without immediately sending it back up.

The sun illuminated him with its gentle rays, but they might as well have been needles of light to the knight, boring into his being, seeking out his body's painful weakness and his soul's hidden facets. An old woman hobbled in. She was there for the mass that would begin soon. The church would not be quiet and peaceful for long. He did not know why he had not just stayed in bed.

He spat into the straw, trying to calm his stomach. He stood with a hanging head and leant against a seat. He would have had a look of pain on his face, but it was as much from his physical discomfort as from any philosophy. He bid the woman peace when she greeted him.

He stumbled to the door of the church where the true light of the morning was now finally glowing. He ambled into the street, seeking out his fellows, as they had a pilgrimage to continue.

He followed the main southern street of the city. All other streets of the district ran from that spine. In following those dark alleys, some of which in a prosperous place with dwellings more than a storey high never saw the light, he would come upon a cul de sac or an alleyway so tight or full of rubbish that he could barely move. On the main street many of the buildings were two storeys high. A rut full of rubbish and water ran down the middle of the road, which had a few paving stones visible amongst the mud and dung. Above them, between the houses, cloths had been hung here and there to protect people from the weather. One looked as if it had been up for a year or more as it was dirty and full of water, rubbish and bird droppings. Outside the doorways of many houses were

additional ruts in the street, invariably filled with water. Piles of rotting straw lay at some corners, taken from the houses, and boys worked to clean it, and to clear some of the more offensive debris everywhere, but always despite their efforts they were losing a race against the constant swell of humanity. Smoke rose from private dwellings and cookhouses. People hung aromatic herbs to counter the smells.

Mosquitoes rose from the small sections of the castle moat, from water puddled here and there, from stagnant offshoots of the river, and the knight saw their larvae wriggling in troughs. The castle walls sat grey-white and menacing above the town. That stone as it ran along the low ridge changed colour with the progressing day and the weather. It had two large gateways, to the town and to the fields. The knight had seen the gateway to the fields coming in and it made dwarfs of all men. Several churches and abbeys of fine and modern stone construction dominated the city, made by the sponsorship of powerful men from the one or two generations previous.

Great men were buried in the cold stone of dark abbeys there, it was said. He spat in the mud and walked back into a house to rouse his companions.

*Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love.*

1 John 4:8

While the knight marched with the pilgrims or rode on horseback he thought back to a girl. He had stood beside the cold and mossy wall of the manor with Mathilda. She had pale red hair and clean white cheeks with freckles across them like the patterns on a sparrow's egg. He had his hands in hers. The callouses from his swordplay, the broken nails, the dirt of sweat under the nails, the smell of horse on his pores—these hands were in her delicate white hands. It was the closest they had ever been.

She appeared younger than her sixteen years.

He spent most of his time looking at the ground, but he noticed she was admiring his shoulders, the armour he was still wearing, his cloak. He had been practising and she had been watching. He hadn't known.

He felt the wind picking at strands of his hair, above his haircut which he knew was severe. Both of them had hair so shining, so full of life. His was a boy's body, he felt, a boy's body made huge by his rigorous training.

Her clothing was expensive and clean. She favoured purple embroidery, which went against the fashion of the time, and he admired her for it. He had said it made her like a Roman empress. The bottoms of her skirts were muddied. He had found her almost skulking behind the house and was surprised to see her. Mathilda's father had not been due to visit for another half week. The knight's own father would be upset at the earliness. He had not put out the order for extra bread to be baked, and men would be hurrying to find animals to slaughter so Mathilda's father and his retinue could be treated properly.

Mathilda looked upset, ready to cry, and though his hands trembled as he held her cold little hands, neither was now looking directly at the other. There was something so childlike about her. She was so small-looking and frail. She pointed her nose up at things the way children do and was disgusted by simple things the way children are. That was perhaps what he liked about her. The knight was like many men; he loved to feel like he could protect someone, nurture them, be their wall and foundation. It gave him a sense of identity and belonging.

The wind was cold as it rushed around the wall and escaped hens were walking through the mud behind them. No-one could see the two of them there. Perhaps they both felt a chill go through them. Everything about him felt awkward. He felt embarrassed to be seen in his soldier's things, so dirty after his riding.

He hadn't moved his hands because the contact was so precious and he didn't want to break the spell. He could feel the fine fabric of her cuff against the rough edges of his peeling-skin palm. Their hands were becoming hot, sweaty, uncomfortable, but he didn't dare move them. It was a connection through which they exchanged fire back and forth.

The knight looked at her, scanning her small nose and the tiny, transparent hairs on her skin, scanning her eyelashes, scanning the iris of her eye with its interlocking bars of colour.

'All these men willing to give themselves to Christ,' she said.

The knight let his hands fall sheepishly. He wished he had asked some of the serving girls to wash his cloak in the last few days. He was sure it smelt like animal.

They again took each other's hands, rubbing each other's fingers, staring down, experimenting with touch. He ran his coarse fingers across her smooth nails and small knuckles, like the joints of a kitten's paw. A clucking hen brushed by her skirt. The knight couldn't look at Mathilda now. He stared intently at the whorls and patterns of her hands.

The knight's throat was tight. He knew his nose and cheeks were red. His entire life's purpose had condensed into the five fingers he held, his own fingers tracing distracted patterns over her knuckles, palms, wrists. It was delicious for him even to move higher, to feel her pulse beating beneath his touch. There was her life blood. That flow led all the way to her heart, to her toes, to every part of her body, to her eyes as she looked at him. It was as if by contacting that warmth there he could fall into her, meld with her very being, their two bloods gushing together, one being.

The knight nudged her forehead. He took one of the three or four rings he always wore and slipped it over her thumb.

'For friendship,' he said. 'And so you don't forget me.'

She took a ring in reply and pushed it onto his little finger, but it would only just go past the first knuckle.

'For you too,' she said.

And then she looked up at him with hard eyes, rising out of her confusion. 'I want you to remember me when you're so far away ... I want to give you something.'

'I don't know what,' said the knight, and he looked at the ground ashamed, not knowing what to think.

Mathilda took her red hair from her back where it was plaited in a long braid and hung it across her shoulder.

'Take it,' she said. 'I want you to remember me, me as I am, not just some piece of metal.'

The knight's heart was beating so fast he couldn't reply. The chickens clucked as he took a knife he had for cutting in emergencies whatever equipment might tangle him and, unthinking, lifted it to Mathilda's shoulder, near the

smooth, white and exposed skin of her neck. She winced a little as he sawed through the plaits. His eyes met her apologetically but by then it was too late to turn back. He took the braid, surprised by the weight, and wrapped it around his wrist. She looked so altered with her hair short, like a newly cloistered nun, or like someone rising from their sick bed.

‘I can’t give you anything as good,’ said the knight quietly.

She looked about. ‘That,’ she said, quickly pointing.

On his belt he still had the sweat cloth.

‘Are you sure?’ he said, glancing at the dirty rag.

‘Something to remember you by. Something better than this ring around my thumb, which is so big I’m scared I’ll lose it.’

He handed her the cloth, feeling deeply embarrassed and yet so thrilled he might faint.

She glanced at it and put it out of sight in a fold of her dress she pulled beneath her belt.

She grabbed him hard in a hug. Those small arms, with their small bones, wrapped around him and all his kit as if they wouldn’t let go. She held him silently and he gradually realised she was sobbing, sobbing into his animal-smelling cloak. He put one arm behind her, grabbing the back of her head, feeling the warmth of her neck, smelling the aroma rising from her hair. He couldn’t speak, he couldn’t breathe. The very next day he would leave.

The knight would smell the plait now that he was across the sea. He could so clearly smell her, all her life. He would run the end across his lips when no-one was looking until it tickled him there and the sensation was too much to bear, then he would bite his lips, trying to cast the shiver away.

He would think of her, of her smell and her body, sometimes at night, and he would sin. His fellows no doubt knew of it, sleeping with him in the same tent. He knew it was a sin but he would do it anyway. He would think of her and he knew it was a kind of murder to cast his life empty upon the ground, for woman was akin to the fertile earth and the only body worthy of man. From her earth-like passivity could rise man’s own seed, in his own image and of him, and that was the way of God.

He imagined that she slept with the sweat cloth. Sometimes in the heat of his uncontrollable imaginings he pictured her sleeping with it between her legs,

pressed between her thighs so that she could be close to him. It had been such a mighty thing for her to ask for it. He loved such unexpected wantonness but where had it come from? Had a count perhaps tried her before rejecting her? He tried to cast such jealous fancies from his mind and to imagine Mathilda as she truly was. Perhaps somewhere as he was smelling her body she was smelling his.

Esther also remembered her own story but, though she might share bits and pieces with the women and the priests, she did not tell the aristocrat nor the men she tended to.

### **Esther, as she Began in Europe**

*But Lot's wife looked back, and she became a pillar of salt.*

Genesis 19:26

The morning after Esther had stayed awake all night in revelry with the knights and nobles she took the eels to her sister, who was working at the table. Her sister's hair was as dishevelled as her own, but her sister was not yet properly dressed.

‘Where have you been?’ she asked, inevitably, and the dark blotches under her eyes showed that she had been truly worrying.

‘I'm leaving, I just came to get some things.’

‘Leaving? Where?’ asked her sister, incredulously.

‘I don't have anything else for me here, after the baby ...’ said Esther, already in the curtained off portion of the lower room that was hers, her whole place in the world. While she was throwing things into a sack she stopped at a shirt. It had been her husband's. The last mark of him she had kept. It lay there, an inanimate testimony. After eight months it no longer even smelled like him.

‘Where do you think you're going?’

‘With the holy warriors. With God. I want to go to Jerusalem. I want to see the Holy Land before I die. There is a great movement of men. I want to be a part of that.’

She said it so matter-of-factly. Her sister had seen several outbursts of this type in the last eight months and must have known that when Esther's voice was matter-of-fact it was always the most dangerous.

'Holy Land?' her sister laughed. Did she try to imagine the distance? Esther herself couldn't even picture the countries in between. She had only seen a map three times in her life and the rest of her geographical knowledge had come from her husband and her sister's husband, both of whom had traded with the neighbouring lands. 'What are you ...'

Esther was already heading towards the door.

Perhaps her sister still couldn't take her seriously. Her first real protest was launched as if it was to be the start of a debate. In the early morning confusion that's no doubt what she expected it would be. Esther might as well have announced she was walking off the edge of the earth. Her sister tried a joke to calm her down.

'You have to at least say goodbye to your family!'

Esther responded with something she had learned, and memorised, without ever knowing, 'No-one who puts his hand to the plough and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.'

By saying this at such an opportune time she felt she had truly risen, truly become holy.

A bad smell emanated from the basket on the table. One of her sister's children appeared at the bottom of the stairs, his hair a mess, just woken up. The curtain to Esther's space was torn wide. On the bed was Esther's husband's shirt, left behind. It was as if the husband's body had disintegrated at just that moment. Did it make her sister think of the burial wrappings of a missing corpse too? Esther shut the door and her sister seemed unable to comprehend what was happening. Esther ran into the street and her sister ran after her, leaving the children alone in the house.

For three days Esther had to wait amongst the lesser knights encamped outside the edge of town. Not all of them could stay in the abbey or in fine dwellings and she dare not try her luck there again. She was terrified of speaking to anybody. She sat in the mud, watching the men walk about shamelessly, going about their day-to-day tasks as if the natural world were glorious and all eyes were meant for

seeing them. She watched as some of them abused their animals. She had a sensitive heart and hated to see animals abused. She had killed birds and pigs in her life but she always saw to it that it was as painless as possible. Esther had grown up in Caen. The three days were to be the longest time she had spent consecutively out of doors.

By evening her sister tracked her down and even visited with her screaming children to try and make her point. The babes looked about in terror at all those weapons and mud. Her sister's husband was away otherwise he might be there too. But Esther wouldn't return. Her sister swore and made threats but that night, two hours after nightfall, she ventured out amongst all those dark, unknown, sinister shapes after giving Esther two blankets.

Did Esther's sister wonder if a few more days might see the hysteria pass? But there wasn't time. Soon the men were willing to leave.

'What would your husband think?'

'My husband is dead. Worms are eating his eyes and his tongue. Dirt is in his belly. Ants have stripped the soft skin and warm flesh from his skeleton. Cockroaches crawl between the ribs where I once laid my hand.'

She remembered the day they buried him. She had always imagined such occasions happen on dark days, solemnly, in the rain or snow. Her husband died during terrifying heat. He died of an illness, but it was nothing spectacular. She'd heard of people across the countryside being struck with St Anthony's fire in years past and she'd seen the men and women with missing hands and other injuries as a result, but it wasn't that. It was just a normal every day illness. Twenty-three people died of it in the city that summer. Years of hunger had perhaps made people weaker. They had to trust that God had his reasons. Esther begged for them not to bury him, but they said they had to do it quickly. In the heat he would putrefy, they said. When saints died, they didn't putrefy, did they? That was one way to know whether you had found God's favour: your body wouldn't putrefy. But they had said her husband's body would putrefy.

In a matter of hours after the last breath had emptied from him they were carrying him outside of the town. The churchyard had been filled in winter and they had just consecrated new ground. It would be a site of a church in the future, they said. They marched to a bare patch of ground, just long grass and goat droppings, dried flowers waving in the wind, and they rolled his body, swathed

tightly in white cloth, into the ground. After he landed in the bottom in that terrible and undignified way she thought, oh, I should have perfumed his feet. I should have perfumed him like they did the Christ. She begged but they would not let her, and they held her to stop her going down into the grave. She watched as they pushed the dirt down over him and the last hint of white disappeared from the world, never to be uncovered. There was just black dirt, a blue sky and the dry grass. Twenty-two other graves showed themselves nearby as freshly-turned earth. So it will be for us all, a relative said.

Her child died in the week. It died within her, and that was the most terrifying of all. She had to wait till it came out of her. She had a dead thing waiting inside her, no longer her child, it was like the man wrapped in white. It was agonising to wait and she cried and rolled about. Baths and liquids would not release the child from her body. She begged them to get it out of her. Some said she may never bear children if they did it. She begged them anyway and they obliged. They said they would have to take it out in pieces, with a hook, reaching inside her. The only mercy was that the child emerged whole.

It had been locked up inside her, nowhere to go, relying on her completely, and it had died. She was its breathless tomb. Her body was a place of death. The warm muscles now across her flat belly marked a womb that had been full of life, the life of her husband and herself entwined, her whole future, and then the baby died.

She saw its tiny pathetic shape when it came out, not quite human, its eyes and mouth open, reaching out with a tiny hand and miniature fingers.

Her sister followed her for a time but stopped to go back to her children after midday.

‘I have to go because I care about my family,’ was the last thing her sister said to her.

Her sister no doubt regretted it later, Esther knew she did, and Esther forgave her, but those were the last words they exchanged. So it will be with us all. She remembered another phrase she had heard since leaving while listening to a sermon on the road. A lower priest who took care to translate the meanings for them, ‘Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple.’ They were words Jesus had spoken.

Esther wanted to speak to someone but she had no friends on the road. She did not worry that her skirts were dirty or that her feet were blistered, holes worn in her house shoes after three days. She had little food, and though it was given out to the poor, she had difficulty scrounging for it amongst all the people. She just wanted another living soul to talk to, to connect with. She saw some faces she recognised but she didn't have the courage, until she stopped a young knight, 'That's a nice brooch,' she said.

'Yes,' said the young knight, surprised. 'It's the face of Saint Michel the archangel.'

St Michel was even greater than St Étienne. He didn't seem to know what to make of the woman. Esther smiled.

She indicated an aristocrat who had one of the finest horses and the best regalia. Even his shield had barely a dint, whereas the others all looked as if they had seen many practises. Another man walked and sometimes rode beside him, sometimes with a pennant on the end of a spear.

'Is he your captain?' she asked.

The aristocrat, walking beside a horse that was led by an assistant, was yelling back to another man, a handsome youth with a bent nose. It was sexual innuendo. The speaker laughed as if it was the best joke, some of his assistants laughing with him. The boy's face reddened but he didn't look like the sort to sulk.

'Y-yes, he's ...' but the young knight looked about, anywhere but Esther. He seemed to be glancing towards the eyes of other men, to see if they were watching him and judging. But Esther remembered the Bacchus of the other night, when the world had been turned on its head, and anything was possible. The Holy Spirit was loose in the world, and it had made all things possible. As pilgrims they were all level, all equal in humbleness and holiness.

'He's your leader? He finances you?'

'Yes. Many people here, from his household and otherwise. He helps ... just food. His fighting men, they ...'

'Do you think ... would he ... is there any place? Could I work for food?'

'His wife is not with him,' said the young knight, incredulously.

Esther had seen no wives with female aides and servants, no wives powerful enough to help others besides themselves. That was the problem.

‘I don’t ... there are still things I could do. I need ... I need to be safe, I ... Do you think you could grant me an audience with the lord, perhaps?’

‘I wouldn’t dare! I—’

Esther felt everything slipping away. How would she eat? How would she survive? She had seen other women but they looked at her with stony faces, like an interloper. Perhaps they had fought for their places here. She would be stuck, she would have to walk home alone. The great dream was crumbling away. She remembered looking up at the shadow of that castle and those abbeys she would never enter. Always in the street.

There was some laughter about them.

‘Making a new friend? You took the cross barely a week ago. Surely you can wait longer until you start falling in with the camp followers.’

It was the aristocrat, yelling back to make a joke. Esther’s conversation with the young knight had attracted attention.

‘I’m not— she’s not—’

‘Find a priest, confess, don’t tell it to me.’

Men around laughed.

‘She wanted to speak to you.’

‘Me?’

The aristocrat looked at her. A silence fell that was an agony, a physical blow. Esther was alone in front of all of them.

‘Will you employ me?’ Esther asked the leader quickly, unthinking, just to fill the awful silence. The silence had given her strength. She may as well have just scaled the wall of the castle in Caen.

He looked at her, his *coiffe of maille* crumpled behind his head and a fold of *maille* hanging open beneath his chin. Most of the others were not in armour. They did not wear armour while travelling through friendly territory, with no threat of battle on the horizon. Most were content with their simple clothes, like pilgrims, with their crosses sewn onto a shoulder or a chest. Yet he wore heavy *maille* alone, unnecessarily, on this calm sunny day. It made him stand out somewhat awkwardly, as the man beside him tried to keep his pennant high in the air. Why was the leader trying to hold all that unnecessary weight when no-one else was? She wondered what he was trying to protect.

He had black hair and a black beard. Many of the young men favoured longer hair and beards and some of the townsfolk had said they looked like girls. This was the oldest man she had seen sporting this fashion.

He waved his hand, 'If you want to beg, go to the priests. I give alms to them, and they see how they are distributed.'

'I'm a pilgrim, my lord, I want to talk about the pilgrimage.'

'Come speak to me later, when we're camped. I'll hear your petition.'

Men around looked at him with surprise, as if unsure of whether or not he was joking.

She nodded and stared ahead, not varying her gaze, stepping faster than the men and their horses, walking resolutely towards her future. She did not know if they were all watching her or not. Orchards of apple trees were beginning to bloom.

She had not been the only woman there. Some were wives of lesser men, some were religious people, even an old lady had tried to follow them for a few hours, her crone's legs barely able to support her. A priest blessed her as she lay beside the road and paid two boys to carry her back to her hut. Some were sinful women. Most of the knights and footsoldiers spoke of working against sin, of keeping themselves pure for the coming challenge, but some of them weren't so virtuous. The priests told the sinners off but didn't go so far as openly evicting the women. All had a right to pilgrimage, after all. One priest who tried to speak to them got such a hurricane of curses back from the women that he left to laughter.

Some servants did not seem to have taken the same vow as their masters, though every few days there were impromptu ceremonies on the road where some did, changing their previous stance for whatever reason.

Esther approached the tent that evening. The man's servants set it up in speed. She feared as she approached that she would not be let in. It was not the same out here as at the men's abbey, she had learned. She stood further back, and hesitated, and then angrily decided to leave, before she changed her mind and skulked back again. A man looked at her and, without saying anything, and with a look on his face like he was being imposed upon, stepped aside and allowed her to enter,

announcing her as a 'pilgrim's petition'. Inside she was surprised to see that it was just like a house. He even had a little altar and crucifix beside which to pray.

The aristocrat greeted her with some surprise. Perhaps he had forgotten. Her stomach threatened to drown out her voice.

'My name is Esther, my lord' she said.

He smiled, sitting on a little chair.

She looked about, admiring all the things that he had carried with him and which had been put into the tent.

'Why are you here to see me?' he asked.

'I'm a pilgrim, I want to be a pilgrim, but I need a task. I need to do something to earn my bread,' she said, collecting herself.

'What can you do?' he asked.

'I don't have ... I can't ... I can keep a house. I want to be busy because I have nothing, no bread, nothing to trade for food. If nothing else, I ask for the kindness shown to pilgrims. Yesterday a man accused me of leading men into sin. I don't want to do that, I am not one of those women.'

She hesitated at distancing herself from 'those women'. They were some of the only people who had spoken to her at all in the last few days.

'I am a pilgrim. They say idle hands help the devil. I want to be useful. If I am useful then there is more chance that I will endure the journey and see the Sepulchre for myself.'

'So why are you here? Why have you come to me? We're all pilgrims. Pilgrims ask for kindness from the faithful of the world, not from other pilgrims.'

'You are one of the most powerful men here,' she said, simply.

An aide stood behind him, ready to answer any request. She wasn't sure who to look at. It was difficult to contend with the four eyes, especially in the silence.

'I cannot ... protect myself if I am alone,' she said, into the dulled quiet of the tent and pavilion.

Outside were the sounds of complaining mules and cursing men, but the cloth walls seemed to separate them from all of that. It was as if they were in a church sealed off from the world of work and weekdays and sin. Outside, at night, when she had been sleeping, men had come up to her, woken her, spoken to her. Some had tripped on her sleeping shape. Some had asked to sleep beside her. A

man with a lip swollen with disease had shaken her awake and kept shaking her. She had to scream until another woman pulled him away. It was probably innocent, but as long as she was alone amidst all those soldiers and all that iron and all those animals, she would be afraid to fall asleep. When she was asleep she was completely vulnerable and it would be many nights until they reached their destination. If she could attach herself to someone powerful then perhaps she could survive. If she was attached to someone and people knew it then no-one could touch her. She should not have admitted it to him, though, and she cursed inwardly. But she could not act flippantly. She wanted to face the Holy Sepulchre with clear eyes.

‘I am useful, I swear it, I have all the skills you would expect. I can sew, I can make repairs, I can kill and dress an animal, my sister taught me some better talents with the needle, though I’m not—’

‘I don’t have any women in my household. Why should I have a woman serving me? Am I woman? Do I look like a woman to you?’

‘No-o, I—’

He waved his hand.

‘I have no personal servant, no-one to look after my hair, grooming, lice, my clothing, my basic needs. My last man disappeared. He took the cross, but ... He must have found some temptation. I handed a tunic to one of the washerwomen and I don’t even know what it is I got back.’

Esther stood uncomfortably, conscious of her wretched appearance. She didn’t look like she could groom herself.

‘Will you accept?’ he asked. ‘As one of my followers you’ll have enough to feed yourself.’

‘Yes,’ she said, and she added breathlessly, ‘I don’t want to starve by the side of the road.’

She pictured the crone as she lay there, moaning at the sky.

He nodded and appeared pleased. ‘People might think it’s not proper so do not speak of this to people if they do not ask. At the same time, I have no secrets, so if they do question you, you may tell them.’

She nodded, looking at the ground. She was becoming angry. She told herself she would never report to him, never. When he wanted her to work she would simply not be there.

‘I have a wife,’ he said, and his voice hung on that word. He spoke with all the practicality and directness of a soldier, and a man who gave orders to soldiers and lived with them, and perhaps he found the obvious uncertainty in her face tiring. ‘I’m true to my wife in all things and I always will be. If she were here, you could serve her. But she’s safe. At home. I had that fellow who tended to my grooming, but before you I had a very good woman who attended me out on campaign for a long time. She’s too old now, sadly. It’s against decorum to be fussed over but I think a woman’s touch is best in such things. You’ll have many jobs in one, in a camp like this. You don’t just have to wash clothes but you’ll be cutting hair, keeping lice away. It’s not so easy a task out on the road.’

Esther watched him, not sure of what to say.

He continued, ‘You’ll find there are many washerwomen here. You’ll fit in well amongst them.’

She nodded, meeting his eyes. So she would be a thing packed up, ready to be put in the tent whenever they stopped. That was all right with her as long as he was going to Jerusalem.

She left the tent and didn’t even try to hear whether there was argument after her departure. She had not wanted to inspire argument and so she did not want to hear it.

Why had he said yes? When she spoke to the young knight, and saw how embarrassed he had grown, she had become certain in that moment there would be no chance. Even levelled and equalled by their devotion to God, there were too many rules and expectations and appearances to consider in the wandering society of their camp. And yet he had said yes, and so matter-of-factly.

She dared not question it. She needed food, and she needed the protection of someone who represented order here, if she was to survive, if her expedition to the Sepulchre was going to be possible. If he had said no then she would have had to return home, lost, to nothing, and no future. But he had said yes, so now she could walk to the very end of the world.

Her future had been so certain and then in one week it was like her whole identity had been taken from her. Since then she had been lost and nameless. It was proper, she thought, for someone lost and nameless to restlessly wander the earth. She had never wandered and had yet to imagine the earth’s size and scope.

She knew there could be hardship but she relished it. Her mind was set, more than it had ever been. She could not look back from the plough.

*But every vow of a widow or of a divorced woman, by which she has bound herself, shall be binding upon her.*

Numbers 30:9

The aristocrat had asked permission of one of his priests, and had said that as Esther was going to work for him, and as she clearly wanted to be a pilgrim, she should take the vow. Any woman needed permission from a priest. It was granted and Esther took part in the ceremony with many others who had newly joined, in a field under heaven, with insects flying about. Everything was green. The rains had been better that spring than anything Esther had seen in years.

They each confessed, privately but observed as they whispered. Many stood and watched the solemn ceremony as others went about camp business. Then they were passed the strips of cloth with which to make their cross. Esther repeated her vow.

‘I swear to travel to the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem and help my Christian brothers and sisters there, freeing its holy places. This I vow on my soul and in front of God and the world. I will wear the holy cross as a sign of my humiliation before Christ until my vow has been completed.’

She was given her cross, of brown, made from a horse’s blanket, and she walked dizzy from the assembly and sewed it to the chest of her woollen dress. A sign of her humiliation. She was a pilgrim. She had a feeling of holiness, of being almost able to touch the indescribable, but hovering mortal and beneath it. She also had a sense of being on the edge of a precipice and above a great void.

# Asia

### **The Knight, as he Lives his own Life, at the Siege of Nicaea**

The knight sat calmly as a middle-aged woman combed lice from his short hair and picked at stubborn eggs. Men walked to and fro on business for the siege, keeping to their allotted areas but barely heeding the walls nearby. The weather was a little better with every day. The woman worked carefully and the knight liked to feel her fingers on his scalp. Later he would crouch forward and lift his shirt and she would search for lice and ticks on his body. He always enjoyed these moments, they allowed for supreme contemplation, and he knew he would be less itchy afterwards. He liked to feel the woman's fingers on his skin. It was a reassuring presence.

He himself smelled mostly of smoke, and indeed the campfire smell blotted out most odours once it had impregnated clothes that were only washed when it was convenient, often less than once a month. This woman though had something of the latrine smell about her. The women were often made to dig and cover the latrines when they camped. If there were no women nearby their group, there would sometimes be no latrines, and men would just defecate in the open air and on the ground, visible to all. Some men now went to the cold water of the lake to do this, or the bank, hoping that the lapping water would do its work and the mess would be washed away. But the women also dug latrines in patches of living space that looked untended, an abandoned patch or the perimeter of the thickest group of tents.

### **Esther, at the Siege of Nicaea**

*If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.*

John 20:23

Esther left the aristocrat's tent and walked along the lake shore, where the plants were hardy, the earth loose and she could hear the reassuring sound of the slowly lapping water. Some men were riding in the water and she watched them. They were practising combat half-submerged, honing the muscles of themselves and their beasts. Her eyes also suddenly fell on a knight. Despite the cold he was

naked, up to his knees in the water, and she could see the pale skin of his back. She was struck by the image and looked away, but it stayed with her. There was something about his neck, the way he stood, which inexplicably reminded her of her husband. She did not know what it was. Her husband had never been anywhere near as muscular as that. Perhaps it was the colour of his hair when wet. Perhaps it was the way he stood. He looked as if he had surrendered himself to the world. Not many people were like that, not many people could surrender to the chaos and yet still look so self-assured, so ready. Her husband was the only other man she had known who stood that way, who looked out at the world as if he had given up, and yet was completely ready for whatever might come. There was fear in her husband, too, she knew, but it was fear that pulsed in the shadow of inevitable waves of fate that a man knew could not be avoided. In that way, it was as close to fearlessness as men could get. There was something vulnerable in that pale skin, that thin neck on the muscled back, and those square hips.

A day later a young priest sat in a field on a stool. A rank had worked itself out between the priests as well, many of them squabbling for a place. This man had been given the task, at the bottom of the hierarchy, of hearing the women's confessions. There had been another, earlier, but Esther had heard that he had made a mistake in his Latin conjugations. He had memorised them with masculine endings and had embarrassed the other priests when they discovered he had been speaking to the women with the same formula. Esther wondered from the uncertain way this new young priest stepped up to his stool if perhaps privately the man did not feel up to the task. She had rarely seen him take confession. Secretly she wondered whether God would really listen to confessions he heard, and whether the sacrament would count and the sins would be abolished. She had to believe that God would, but it was her hidden fear she hardly dare admit. Did the priest wonder? Did he hope he was not betraying the women?

He had to do this in a public place, where all could see but out of earshot, so that no-one would think the women were doing anything immoral. A line of them waited to observe the sacrament. Everyone had to confess if they were to find their way to God, and in that way they were all in a line stepping along a road towards heaven.

Esther waited for hours and finally she went forward and sat on her knees before the young priest on his stool.

The priest looked at her placidly.

‘Please, bless me father for I have sinned. It is a week since my last confession,’ Esther said hurriedly. Usually confession only took place about once a year, perhaps on Maundy Thursday, but they were all on a journey of purification.

The priest gave her time to gather her thoughts.

She looked away from his face, past his cassock, at the grass and the earth God had created.

‘I have only venial sins ...’

The young priest laughed. She looked up, ready to be offended, but her fears were dismissed by the calm of his face.

‘Well that’s good!’ he said.

‘This last week I have, while performing my duties, had unwanted thoughts. The thoughts were ... I felt desire for a man ... I cast them out as soon as I could. The adulterous thoughts came to me when I wasn’t expecting.’

The young priest asked if she was married.

‘No. My husband has worms in his belly. They are eating all his soft parts, and his eyes.’

‘I’m sorry,’ said the young priest. ‘I merely asked because when a married woman says her prayers of penance, it is best she do them out of her husband’s hearing, lest he suspect a greater sin and his suspicion grows at the devil’s bidding. I did not mean to upset you.’

‘I try to live in memory of my dead husband ... And I am a pilgrim here. But even though I don’t want ...’

The young priest stipulated that she should fast on Wednesday and on Friday until the ninth hour to earn the forgiveness she had just been granted. He also recommended that she remove herself from the situation that caused such thoughts.

‘That is impossible,’ she said. ‘My duties mean that I have to come into close contact with men. I have to touch their bodies or I will have no bread. But sometimes my own sinful body betrays me. I don’t ask it to.’

The young priest looked at her with sympathy and said that with a steadfast soul she would see herself beyond her difficulties. ‘Devote yourself to prayer, being watchful and thankful, and you shall not fall.’

‘And also, this last week I have been thinking about what has brought me here ... I am worried that I came here partly out of vanity. There was a moment when I saw knights and wealthy men who seemed to have no cares ... And they spoke to me as if I was one of them. I worry that, even though I go to the Holy Sepulchre to glorify the lord, I may have acted out of pride ...’

She recalled that night, drunken and brazen, speaking to a knight whose shape was the only thing she could remember, knowing that for a moment she could have thrown everything away for him, not out of lust, not out of greed, but just to give everything away. To throw everything on the wind. To say the past no longer mattered any more.

‘I know that on a pilgrimage like this I must give up all worldly things if I am going to humiliate myself before Christ, and to merit the grace of God. If I’m to find peace. I am ready to give up worldly things.’

‘You are truly sorry of your sins?’ he asked. He knew she was, he could see it, but he asked her so that his ministrations were unassailable.

‘Yes.’

‘And it is your firm intention never to commit such sins again?’

‘Yes, father.’

‘God sees your conviction and your love. He knows of your dedication. And you keep the sacraments. Trust in his strength and your own and do not worry.’

She looked up with closed eyes and her elbows to her side, palms up, in prayer. She seemed to have surrendered herself absolutely to him. The priest spoke in Latin, a language Esther had never heard a woman speak.

‘*Dominus noster Jesus Christus te absolvat; et ego auctoritate ipsius te absolvo ab omni vinculo excommunicationis et interdicti in quantum possum et tu indiges,*’ said the young priest, and he made the sign of the cross over her waiting forehead, above which her hair hung and swept away from that smooth, white edifice that was the seat of her mind and soul. ‘*Deinde, ego te absolvo a peccatis tuis in nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti. Amen.*’

She let the words surge through her, and she prayed that they would give her strength for the coming week. She wanted to walk away feeling clean and pure and new.

She asked if he could say a prayer for her husband's and her baby's souls and he said he would.

She would sometimes look straight at him. Had the priest too been seeking eye contact, and, if so, was he aware of that himself? Was there something strange in Esther's own look, something accusing? Did he realise she was wondering if he was too inexperienced, if he was doing the wrong thing?

Esther stood and walked away and the young priest smiled to bid the next woman in the line to come forward.

Other women had been waiting for hours, watching women confess, watching them step ahead out of hearing and kneel on the grass, the young priest on his stool, often trying to look as if he was not seeing them, as if he was an ear alone. One had waited all morning and then when the woman in front of her stepped forward a mood seemed to grip her. Her shoulders shook and she walked away, avoiding the glances of the others. And on and on the priest would smile and bid the next woman in the line to come forward. Esther wondered about the woman who had left the line. Why did she not want to confess? Why was she on pilgrimage if she did not want to confess? Or was she not ready yet? Was there some private pain that she wanted to keep her own, keep powerful and special, until she gave it up to God at the holiest of places?

Everywhere priests were hearing the confessions of men and women. What if God wasn't listening to this priest, mused Esther? What if all the priests had failings and He wasn't listening to most of them except the pure few? She had feared God's silence due to the young priest's inexperience and shortcomings. If that was the case, then these priests alone would be the stoppers on half of humanity's sins, dreams and thwarted desires. All those secrets and all those human failings, all that pain, they would be the receivers of it. They alone, in their silence and the whispered words of the other, which they absorbed, would be the transmuters. It was a process which relied both on speaking and silence, each of the priests being a full stop at the end, a lid on the top of human feeling. The people gave up their souls to these men and stood naked in spirit, every man and woman, and the priests sat in silence before an ever watching God. If God only

heard the best of them then it was the priests alone, their miracle that they transformed earthly wine into the actual blood of Christ. It was their miracle that they transmuted evil into good and clear conscience and it was all locked only in their own heads, both the power to do such things, provided by the ritual, and the knowledge of humanity's flaws. Such idle thoughts were blasphemy, and Esther dismissed them.

# Europe

The aristocrat liked to hear of military things and of the fine kit of the fighting man, and so Esther indulged him.

### **The Story of the Knight, as told by Esther**

*With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one.*

Ephesians 6:16

They were approaching a stream in the wilderness. It seemed that there was so little wilderness, and here was a stream far from a city or a town, with little rubbish, no human waste. They hurried towards its purity. Together, in the warm spring air, they took off their kits, to wash themselves.

The knight's horse was magnificent and he rode through the men and towards the stream as if on the prow of a mighty ship. All had to look up at him as he rode. The mules and oxen and various other pack animals and domestic beasts that found their way into the herd were made even uglier by the beauty of his horse and its finely-made tack. He could feel it breathing beneath him.

Its legs were particularly fine, rising into its well-muscled haunches and wide croup. It had a high backbone and a tail and mane like black silk. It was chestnut in colour, tending toward red in a certain light and over particular muscles, but a streak of white like sunlight through a cloud ran between its ready eyes.

It was a warhorse. He had seen the warhorses fight each other, their teeth bared like a cat extends its claws, because a fool had allowed a mare to pass a field where two stallions were being trained. One stallion had bulging eyes and blood streaking down its neck where the veins swelled beneath fine, shining hair. The smallest of the warhorses was half a hand taller than the riding horse they called a palfrey and to see them standing on their back legs, biting and kicking ... It was like the giants from myth had come alive. It would have made even Perseus flee. Perhaps it was the horses standing there on their back legs for extended moments like a human, their mighty croups sticking out jauntily like the hips of a woman, their black tails swishing and flashing like a hunted animal in its death throes, their forelegs slapping out the same way very young boys in fights swat at

their opponents in a blind rage ... Perhaps it was the air of humanity about them during their moment of supreme violence that lent them such an aura of terror. While the riding horses had nothing but flightiness and placidity about them as they grouped in the field, huddled in community for safety, the warhorses were something else. The knight had giant pricks on his spurs in order to break the will of the creature and it was not rare that gleaming drops of blood would appear on the most sensitive parts of its flanks, or that the iron would drive again into unhealed wounds due to lessons soon forgotten. An unfamiliar man walking too close could be half scalped by the teeth and the knight had been drilled with stories of it having happened, to heighten the sense of respect and danger, no doubt. A trainer had said, poetically, 'The demons come often in the guise of horses, and this is their most cunning disguise'. Often the stallion warhorses would cavort and play and whinny just like their more free-spirited lessers. Sometimes one observing would glance and see a beautiful, powerful animal, nature incarnate, and forget that this was also the most primal sort of brute. They could charge and stop suddenly, turning before a man could adapt. Despite the weight of them, which was enough to induce terror as they pounded toward a foe, they were lighter on their feet than most men.

At twelve hands high the knight's feet were not far from the ground as he rode long in the saddle, but still his elevation above his fellows was unmistakable. Riding into a village everyone had to look up at him. Everyone also knew how valuable his mount was, and how quickly it could take him from danger, how swiftly he could bring more like himself. The horses adapted to only one rider. They learned to obey only one master, to tolerate some squires and grooms and to lash out at all else. Those who could break them in for their new masters were rare and highly paid.

The knight remembered a day when a stallion had wandered into their land, knocking down a fence, blood streaming from two open wounds where its eyes should have been, cut and dirty all over from running in its terror.

'Why did they do that?' the young knight-to-be asked his father.

'Horse thieves,' his father said. 'They did it so it would not recognise its master.'

The warhorse was eight times as expensive as a riding palfrey. A palfrey itself was valued at more than he as a young man had ever been given to spend in

a whole year. His *maille* hauberk, brand new and heavy when it hung upon him, was worth more than any worker of the land could earn in a year, and probably more than a combination would earn in several. His spear was made of ash wood that otherwise would only make its way into an aristocrat's furniture. It was polished to perfection and the leaf-like iron tip gave him satisfaction. No-one else but he and his fellows were so outfitted. Most of the pilgrims had far less costly attire.

His most prized possession, however, was his sword.

'Knives killed Caesar: what might a sword do?' the man who sold the sword had said. His trainer had told him always to favour his spear, to hold it tight, to never let go as the horse flesh moved beneath him and the ground seemed to fly. His sword was thirty-odd inches and weighed five and a half pounds. To kill a man he had to be within sword or spear length, which was a few feet at most. He would see their faces as they surrendered their lives. He rubbed the sword with oils and sharpened it constantly, carefully. The first time he had his sword proper he dared not sharpen it himself; he had asked a servant to do it, thinking he might nick or mar the blade. The veterans and older men all seemed to have thinner blades than the newcomers. It was the constant sharpening, wearing away that width, and many younger men sharpened their swords excessively, trying to give the impression of experience and knowledge of the world. The knight knew his blade would grow lean as his own will became sharpened and his experiences were honed. On one side of the blade was an inscription, *Gicelin Me Fecit* or 'Gicelin made me', and on the other was *In Nomini Domini*, or 'In the name of the Lord', and crosses were engraved as bookmarks of the inscription. The pommel was a metallic nut, like a semi-circle with tapering edges, and the cross guard to protect his hands was decorated at either ends of the cross with beautifully detailed beast heads. They were lions, though the knight had never seen a lion. The scabbard too was fine, made from olive-wood imported from afar, covered in rose coloured leather and with three embossed panels depicting St Michel. The scabbard was tipped with metal in a u-shape. When the scabbard was idle the sword belt would wrap around it, his belt's embroidery showing. When he wore it, it hung perfectly at his side, almost invisible beneath his tunic and *maille* hauberk, but easily accessible. The knight had been told that a man never dresses for training, he dresses for war. Every time

must be perfect for their can be no errors when the confusion of battle comes upon him. Usually there were assistants to check that everything was in place.

The knight washed in the stream, standing naked amongst his fellows as washerwomen took the opportunity to clean blackened clothes, clouds of dirt washing away from them. The washerwomen for the lesser men had skin dyed dark all the way up to their elbows from the cheap, dark-coloured soap they used. Those who served more wealthy masters used a better soap, and their arms and hands showed only the marks of their labours, with perhaps a few more blisters because the soap was so strong and harsh.

The cool water moved over the curves and ridges of his body, washing across his ready limbs and his scar.

‘Looks like a nasty one,’ said a fellow.

He smiled, letting the fellow think it was from a combat.

He dipped his head in and washed his hair, feeling the water trickle down his shoulders and back, shivering at the touch. Soon he returned to his beast and his clothes, feeling too clean to get on his horse. His squire handed him his things.

First he pulled a linen shirt over his head. That would absorb his sweat and it was those fibres he would feel pressed against him under the weight of all that came pushing down after. Baggy breeches or *braies* went down to his ankle and each morning he tied them around his waist with a girdle, under his shirt. Despite being constantly active and almost always outside, he and his fellows were remarkably pale. Almost their entire bodies were protected and so kept from the light. Their hands and faces might appear brown in the summer, and with a youthful glow, but beneath, across those well-honed muscles, was skin so white as if to give the illusion of being almost transparent, with the fine hairs of youth growing like moss in the dark of a hollow tree. In some places they had fish skin, not man skin. Woollen stockings or *chauses* went over his breeches, up past his knee, tied to his *braies* and held tight to his legs by fine garters. He wrapped leg bandages in a spiral from his foot up to his knee. He had practised it so many times he could do it without thinking. Somehow these bandages made their legs the most human and even masculine part of them, because they revealed the shape of their actual flesh, their living bodies, and their vulnerability. The bandages

invariably smelled of horse even after washing as they pressed against the horse's flanks when the spurs bit.

The way of wrapping the leg bandages was another thing that could get the ignorant or naive into trouble. Peasants gartered their legs in a similar way, and it no doubt spread from the same practice, but there were important differences. Some young men tried to wrap their bandages the knight's way, but not far away from the knight's father's fortified manor with its small tower keep and its muddy yard and its high wall a knight had nearly beaten and killed a footsoldier for the insult. The case even went before the local sheriff. You were a landed man if you wore your bandages that way. You were a man of property. You were a cavalryman. The knight had not been allowed to wrap his in that style until a certain age. On his feet the knight wore soft leather shoes, which he tightened by passing a thong through slits. The shoe was made from two pieces sewn together and, though the sole was made from harder stuff, it was still pliant, so the whole shoe was as flexible as a glove. The serfs wore heavier shoes that rose above their ankles and sometimes had wooden soles, but his smaller shoes were of a finer cut and leather. He tied his spurs over them.

His tunic proper went over his linen shirt. He pulled it over his head and fastened the neck slit at the front with a brooch. The tunic was much more decorated than the plain linen shirt, which was essentially underwear, and it had embroidered strips at the neck, at the cuffs, and where the arms joined the tunic proper. The sleeves went down to his wrists and the tunic hung to his knees. It had the slit at either side for his sword. A fine belt kept it close to his body. The knight's tunic was white, and the embroidered strips darker green and black with patches of colour. He hid a purse beneath his tunic, hanging it from a loop at his neck. Other lesser pilgrims wore sandals like the apostles and carried simple staves. He had received the staff but it was on the pack of one of his many baggage horses. He was a pilgrim too, but armed. He was a soldier of God and dressed that way.

If he was expecting battle, his *maille* coat was also pulled over his head. He had been made himself to wash it in sand and vinegar, to develop a respect for it as he staved off rust, and he knew how to replace the rings which inevitably came loose. The knight hated the fiddly task and always felt that it degraded him, but his trainer insisted that he know and not be forced to leave it to an assistant.

‘You’ll be glad of a lost ring when that ring has stopped a spear,’ he said.

The coat reached to his knees and his elbows. The slits at the front and back were not just an aid to running, they meant that it was easier to get on horseback and that the coat hung over his upper legs in any position. The horse knew the feel of those metal rings against its side too. A hood of metal went over his head, with a flap open at the front called a *ventaille* that he had learned to tie quickly under his chin. He always felt the *maille* then against his Adam’s apple, and wondered if he would be able to properly swallow or breathe. The armour itself had cloth padding beneath, a quilted coat called a *gamboison*, usually slipped on before the hauberk rather than with it, but with an open neck, that protection did not extend to the throat.

A conical helmet went over the hood and his head. A nose guard pressed down in front of his face. When first putting it on, every boy felt it restricted his vision, but they were trained to ignore that. The nasal guard was something he was told to grab when capturing an enemy knight, to have his fist right there in the enemy’s face, humiliating and subjugating him. Turning his head was marginally more difficult with the *maille* hood, called a *coiffe*. Inside the helmet was a leather lining. Because it so rarely touched his living head, the leather smelled only of iron and not of his body. He tied it in place beneath his head. Thus, even without readying the horse, he and any assistants had constant work binding, tying and fastening before anything could be done. Sometimes the knight felt he was strapped into his equipment, not that it was strapped to him.

His great linden-wood shield was in the curved shape of a kite and reinforced with metal and rawhide on the edges. It was lined with parchment on the back and leather on the front. He had recently painted a cross on the face, making it look new despite the scars beneath the fresh paint, erasing the rhinoceros it had borne before. He had argued with a fellow about whether or not a rhinoceros actually existed or was simply a creature of myth. The rhinoceros was a beast with a stag’s head, an elephant’s feet, a horse’s body, a boar’s tail and a black horn growing from its forehead, which it used to split open the bellies of elephants. The shield strapped to his arm with a whole series of bands called *enarmes*; he would wedge his forearm beneath some and grasp others in his fist. Sometimes he also had the long *guige* strap around his neck, and so once the shield was on it could be difficult to get off. Falling from a horse, the shield could

twist an arm away and break it. He was taught to be conscious of the shield while falling so that this did not happen. On horseback, the shield hugged the very shape of the animal. The bottom of the kite shape protected his leg. There was a decorative cone of metal on the front of his shield, in the middle, with its own dents from practise.

‘Your shield is a weapon too,’ he was told. ‘You can beat a man with it, menace him, overwhelm him. And don’t allow your enemy to use it against you.’

As a young man, his older brother had once pushed him down and trapped him beneath the shield. He felt so vulnerable, his arm twisted against his body, the crushing weight above, all that equipment meant to help him now, with its weight, locking him to the ground, and he was able only to squirm as his brother mocked stabbing him in the throat. Not slashing, but stabbing.

‘I got you all the way to the back of the skull, that time,’ his older brother said, grinning, and the knight still remembered the relief and the tears in his own eyes when his brother lifted his weight from that shield.

He wore three rings in total on his fingers, each with a semi-precious stone, his most prized bearing a red *balas* ruby, or *spinel*, finely cut. If not in armour he might wear a cloak which hung back behind his arms and was fastened in front with another brooch. On the horse, his saddle had rising wood in front and behind, to keep him in place despite the rigours of combat and the shock of blows.

Whenever he saw his own reflection in a clear stream or a blurred mirror he was surprised by it. It always seemed a different man, never the same, and it fascinated him. *In Nomini Domini*, with the crosses for bookmarks.

The footsoldiers had waited for the knights and then they rushed down into the stream. A local man appeared on the other bank. He blundered in as if to use the river, like it was part of his daily routine. Seeing all the soldiers he gave a start and rushed back into the brush as the men laughed. Soon the pilgrims gathered up and continued.

The money they carried came in many different forms. For most, there had not been enough ready coin available before they left. They needed coins for minor transactions and buying small amounts of food, but the coins were only a fraction of their wealth, and indeed, amongst them, there were not many coins. More often they were exchanging other objects for local currency. On average they had

needed four times or more their annual income to plan for the expedition, and that meant selling land, giving up rights and giving gifts. Gifts of lands to churches were technically not sales, but the generosity was usually rewarded with some form of moveable wealth. It meant that many of them carried, in chests and sacks and on two-wheeled and four-wheeled wagons, church paraphernalia such as chalices, plates, crucifixes and gold and gemstones from altars. Others carried silver ingots. Many different currencies could be found in every purse now, but the coins from back home on the island were the most highly prized. It was not for nostalgia—the silver content was higher than in most other pennies. Those pennies were saved.

Money and valuable metals made up only a small part of the wealth the pilgrims carried. Gemstones and bolts of precious cloth retained their value. They were also much lighter and easier to transport, and thus were treasured.

Many told that their entire families had become nearly broke sending them on their way for God. Extended households had to all pool their resources and expect hardships after years which for many on the continent had already been marred by bad harvests and ill-fortune. They knew they were probably sending family members away for years and that perhaps some might never return. But they did it all for God.

Thinking of Europe of course made Esther remember more of her own past, and she recalled to herself how she had settled into her role as washerwoman in the camp.

### **Esther, as she Began in Europe**

*The glory of youths is their strength,*

*but the beauty of the aged is their grey hair.*

Proverbs 20:29

Esther's hands moved across the aristocrat's hair. It was long and lush for a man his age, following the style of the younger generation, and yet it didn't quite have that youthful lustre. There were split ends and weak follicles and a general decline evident. It reassured her. She had hated seeing her dead husband's hair. It was still

so youthful and lustrous even on his dead body, it still looked so healthy and young on his corpse. To her, hair decaying was more a sign of health. It spoke of a body that had had the strength to last into middle age and survive disease. She wondered what diseases had assailed this man's body and what he had overcome. She wondered if his wife had cared for him while he was sick. She often wondered what his wife looked like.

The aristocrat was usually silent during these morning and evening meetings of theirs, but sometimes he spoke. She would trim his beard and see his eyes glinting beneath their lids. It was strange, she thought: from afar he was a reasonably handsome man, strong and tall as he was, with a look that he would see through life's troubles regardless of what the world thought of him. And yet, to see those eyelids up close, they were cratered, and lumped, and she might see fluff or some hint of the previous night's sleep clinging to his lashes. Close up so much was ugly. It was like when she remembered looking closely at her mother's bare feet as she moved around the house. Her mother had veins leading from her soles and up her ankles, fine veins that looked like little tracing wounds. All day she stood and all day she worked hard. She was always cooking, repairing and tending fabric. Her mother's hands had similar veins. Esther remembered those hands working with strands of cloth ... Strands of cloth, strands of hair, strands of veins, strands of life, all weaving together, all bodies and the world. Esther remembered the shock of seeing her mother naked when she was a child and seeing the strands of thick black hair where she herself had none. To have come into the world from such a dark and hairy place! It made Esther think of being birthed from a head. A head was just as warm and the skin beneath the interlocking hair was just as soft. The mother's hands had caressed Esther when they were young but had quickly withered from work. The veins appeared. It looked as if no blood could move through such tiny, dried-up looking channels and indeed, one day, the blood did stop flowing. How many people had she known who had died? She didn't want to count; she dismissed the thought quickly.

The aristocrat's neck, up close, was not ugly. He always dressed decently when they met but she could see that pillar for his head rising white from his white shirt. The skin was soft and babyish and so unlike him. She felt she saw some secret part of him there. Perhaps that was what he tried to hide with his hair.

Her husband had never grown a full beard: he had not seemed old enough. Some men were so smooth-shaven that when she had been young she thought some men could grow beards and others couldn't. On different days she would prefer the idea of a different one: men that could, and men that stayed eternal youths. And now her husband had become an eternal youth. Was that because she had wished for that once? She took to her task of trimming a beard quite well. She was very slow and careful but the lord did not seem to mind the delay. She was careful always to address him properly because she did not want to endanger her precarious position.

It was wonderful to hear him speaking to various aides as if she wasn't there because she was able to be vicariously involved in a world she thought she would never touch and had only imagined. The best of all were those rare times when he spoke to her directly, though. She might be cutting his hair and beneath her hands was the warmth of his head and the place from which all his thoughts sprang. And when he expressed his thoughts, men listened.

Esther had seen strange armed men, their clothes and armour in an unfamiliar style, riding up in the morning mist. They spoke a different language. They looked over the group of pilgrims suspiciously. Usually there weren't many of the riders, perhaps thirty at most, and they quickly realised they had encountered a force far larger than themselves.

Men asked about local politics, because their journey was causing concern amongst lords whose king was not at all friendly with St Peter. They were passing through the Empire of the Romans. Every lord, of every highway, was cautious, feeling out their loyalties, and yet proud of their independence as if they had no king.

Esther had heard of King Henry of the Romans. Everyone had. She first heard the story when she was a little girl. And now, to think, she was in the land where King Henry still walked. The man had been excommunicated by the Pope for presuming to do God's work in his kingdom, and had journeyed like a pilgrim for weeks to beg for forgiveness. In rags, he approached the bishop of the apostolic see, who was ensconced in a manor in the wild. For three days he waited barefoot in the snow, begging forgiveness, while the Pope himself had been caught en route to Henry's Empire to install a replacement king. Eventually, the Pope relented, and forgave the King, bringing him back into his flock. But a year

later the King reneged and attacked the Pope. His whole kingdom was torn by the dispute. At least, that was how Esther imagined the story, and how she had been told. Everyone had heard of it and it had been imagined in a thousand different ways. She didn't know what the original dispute was, or exactly why the Pope had excommunicated the King. As far as she knew, both men were appointed by God. But the passion of the King, as he waited, a king in rags in the snow, a king begging for forgiveness, his shoulders accustomed to the weight of all those men and cares ... All that fate ... And even he begged. Even he had to repent. She found the image beautiful, and she particularly liked to imagine the whiteness of the snow. But the King had gathered his lords and even some of his church men and attacked. What had he been thinking, then, as he begged? It had never occurred to her before. Had he truly been genuine? Had he rebelled later on a new idea or for some other reason? Had he been kneeling in the snow day and night in his bare feet, looking up at the window where he knew the Pope to be, and all the while, harboured in his heart, the thought, 'I shall have revenge. Forgive me, and I shall have revenge.' Did he find even the act of forgiveness ... insulting? Could forgiveness be insulting? she wondered. Wasn't that kind of surrender also pure? Had he attacked because he had been forgiven, or because he had been asked to beg? Forgiving could be a weakness. But she knew the story. Every time she heard it, or a variation of it, or heard it referred to, it had an electric quality. Now, that she was living it, that she was in those very lands, she had almost forgotten how incredible the thing was. Being beside the aristocrat, hearing of politics and great names and places every day, it was all becoming mundane. She had to catch herself. She was a part of that world now!

She overheard the aristocrat mentioning his wife, who was now looking after his estates alone. He said he was preparing a letter for her. Letters might make it back after weeks or months or they might not, and replies were even more uncertain.

Esther was behind him, as she often was, and she did not join in the conversation, usually allowing it to float over her, listening with interest to some, ignoring the rest. Now she was interested. She wanted to ask, 'Is she lonely, do you think, my lord?' but she didn't dare. She pictured her alone on the island, nursing an idea of the aristocrat, as the man himself trudged physically across the length of God's earth. He wondered what a woman like that did, how she lived,

and what interested her. That side of the aristocrat's life, the non-military side, the emotional side not related to the functions of the body or the affairs of a leader, was still a complete mystery to her.

Esther liked sometimes to hear the aristocrat because he dressed like a nobleman and tried to speak like his educated advisors, most of whom had trained as priests, but sometimes, something he said, an expression, or even a vernacular turn of phrase, gave away that he knew how to speak like the knights and mercenaries with whom he had spent his life. He was a place where two worlds met. Like the seam running down his body, between his ribs and across his belly, he was two halves of creation joined. She remembered her husband had that seam even in his most private places, and she had asked in innocence whether it wasn't the scar from some knife. And from the warmth of the aristocrat's thoughtful head, made both high and low, his aging hair sprung. Some of the men who had sworn oaths to him spoke of and to him like a father or an uncle.

The men cleared from the tent, leaving Esther alone with the aristocrat.

'What is it?' he asked, noticing that she had stopped very close to his face and was peering at his cheek. He would have been able to smell what she had eaten.

'A white one,' she said, selecting the individual hair.

He looked at her wryly. 'Pluck it out.'

Esther went away questioning herself for finding the intimacy so comfortable. It was a professional arrangement and it shouldn't be different from grooming a horse or cutting up a pig. When she ate she ate with the others, alone, in the grass. Her companions were stable boys and washerwomen. She had begun to make friends with some of the women there. She had met peasant's wives and older widows who came along to help wash the clothes of strangers and comb lice from their hair. They all had a job on this pilgrimage and they were all working their way to the Lord.

Esther had never lived a particularly private life but still she was shocked by the lack of privacy here. Everything was public. She would often squat under her dress in the morning to pass water in front of the bored eyes of dozens of sleepy armed men. Everyone was accustomed to it and seemed indifferent to every function the body could accomplish. She would hastily wash her feet, legs

and face in the river, running her wet hands up her legs under her dress, while men waded completely naked into the water right beside her. If she had protested they would have been surprised. In general, women had been accepted into the camp. Older women especially, beyond marriage age but still hale, were useful everywhere washing clothes, repairing things, doing occasional cooking and sometimes combing and picking lice from hair and body hair. They spoke in a very worldly way. The men waited patiently under their ministrations. They were almost like mothers and the men accepted their role as a substitute for the comfort of simple contact they would get back home. Esther noticed that while some men wrestled and loved horseplay, others could go weeks without touching a single other living person. It must have been reassuring to have that motherly figure move her comb and her dextrous fingers through one's hair in search of tiny, painful insects. Already many of the men were shaving off that lovely long hair of theirs and they had a Spartan look about them. They were like stunned naked sheep in a field, complete with the occasional congealing cut on their scalp. If one man had a cold, then within a few days a dozen men would be ill. In light of all this, performing the daily grooming of one man hardly seemed inappropriate, and in fact she had an elevated status by being the groomer of one of the leaders of their tribe. People stood aside in food lines and let her come in as if she had been chosen by God. Usually she might have thought a man like the aristocrat vain but she had grown to appreciate his position. As a leader he had to always appear his best. He was in charge of dozens of rowdy young men. He had to appear as strong and vital as them at all times, and yet always neater, wealthier and beyond them. It was essential not just to his leadership but for the morale and unity of the entire group. In helping him appear his best she was in fact helping the whole expedition. In selecting her, the aristocrat had symbolically shown his approval of the other women, who, it quickly became obvious, were needed. Because the aristocrat's life was so completely and unavoidably public, there was no question of any impropriety. If the aristocrat had bedded any woman then everyone would have known about it. The way he behaved was an example for all. The things he did demonstrated what was allowed for everyone else.

Esther's own position and purity were unquestionable. Though the women in general were perhaps not proper in the sense of the way the wives of noblemen should behave, as they broke wind and ate messily and spoke of pains and babies

and bodily functions and even told bawdy gossip and stories from their past, everyone knew the proper way to treat them and, in general, relations with them were proper and without sin. They seemed to have been chosen in particular for their age as if to discourage sin, but that was itself a broad generalization as each of them was unique.

Esther was among the youngest of the women of general employ, but there were other women present. Some were wives, some were even wives of the few peasants who had joined seeking religion or employment or distraction or escape, some were holy women of their own sort, with their own private religion, not the regular nuns, but there were one or two that could only be described as wandering ascetics, and some were less reputable women, who discreetly as possible tended to men's other needs in a landscape where every act was possible. Those women were often chastised but never completely shaken from the group. Some, indeed, seemed to be the wives of the regular men.

She wondered why the older women went along but each had their own story. Some were widows whose children had grown up, some were spinsters for one reason or another, some were women who had lost everything. Some were married but only in name. They hated their husbands and sought escape. Some wanted to alleviate some sin from their past. Some had become used to following armies and had done it for many years. They had found they were good at this sort of job. They were often the women the men liked the best, for their attitude to the men was most maternal, they babied them the most and spoke sweetly to them, and they acted as surrogate and confessor for whatever the men wanted to discuss and express. They could also be brutally hard and stern when needed, like lightning from a clear sky. They had many loyal friends throughout the camp, men who would have done anything for them. Some had been prostitutes in the past and now had either given it up or practised it irregularly. They found their duties now a short step from their previous task, or skills practised in the meantime now saw more use. They lived in a man's world and sometimes acted manly and yet it seemed to increase their sense of womanhood. They were the women, the only women for these men, and they knew their world and understood it the way the wives and mothers of the men didn't. Many were even proud of their place. Many wouldn't have given it up despite the disease and the discomfort and the bad food because it gave them a sense of belonging. The

women were usually safe as there was a general taboo against misconduct. Some might sometimes hear a lewd comment or feel a lewd touch but they took it in their stride the way a nurse might from a patient, who needed to reassert his manhood in the face of injury, and they even ‘tsked’ or clucked in disapproval. Some men did such things just to be told off, because they liked to be mothered in that way and put in their place. It was half a flirt, half a reminder of the natural order for the world, of safer times, of the proper roles of men and women in society, an order which sometimes seemed could disappear far from home. The men liked to be reminded.

Esther thought the women might dislike her for being different, or for being from the city, or for being young, and while some did, many liked her for those reasons. It could have been her elevated status, but Esther seemed to remind the women of their own younger days, and they could joke with her about beauty or men or childbirth. Esther let these last jokes wash over her as if they were about a different act than the one that had seen her own baby’s dead form expelled from her living body. She had to keep that memory behind an emotional wall to function, and sometimes she even laughed along with the women. She was dear to some of them, like a daughter, like an alter ego. They wanted to live vicariously through her and while at first their advice frustrated her and made her feel stupid, she soon realised how much it meant to them, and what a glow they got from giving advice, for transferring a part of themselves to her, by living through her, and she generally smiled and allowed it, until they became too domineering and aggressive. She had some enemies and some friends among the women, but as she behaved properly and tried to show a general respect, she soon had more friends. Women would always form factions but, because she was different, she could float between at least some of the factional disputes and even help to settle arguments.

Sometimes she yearned for home. She thought of it and something would break inside her. She would have a desperate sense that she was falling, lost, and that she should go back at once. She was in a mindset where she would not have feared the dangers of setting back alone on all those strange and dark trails, but she didn’t know the way, and some invisible hand always forced her back to the group. She was part of it all now and that was final. She thought of her sister but there was no way she could see her again without completing her journey. She

could speak of her sister with the women when they spoke of lost relatives and it soothed her a little. She had day-to-day tasks and she buried the emotions. She told herself, always, to just get on with things. She already knew that sometimes you could never go back so it wasn't difficult for her to adjust her thinking.

# Asia

### **The Knight, as he Lives his own Life, at the Siege of Nicaea**

*Go, my people, enter your rooms and shut the doors behind you; hide yourselves for a little while until his wrath has passed by.*

Isaiah 26:20

There would be an attack. Two spies were found; one was killed and the other taken. The spy told that Turks were waiting in the hills. They were commanded by the ruler of the city. It was the same man who had led the army which had destroyed the group of pilgrims months before. He had been campaigning but he was back. The spy begged for his life as he was threatened with torture and, when he promised to convert to Christianity, they spared him.

Not all the pilgrims had arrived. The city was not surrounded for the siege. Message was sent to the Provençals, still en route, who travelled under the aging prince with an eye-patch. They would have to march through the night.

The Provençals arrived in pre-dawn darkness. Before they could arrange themselves into a camp at the south of the city, the Turks came streaming down the hills. The Turks had archers on horseback and some less well-equipped locals who had been corralled in for the attack. Horns and instruments and shouts rose. The knight awoke to people saying the Turks were at the south of the city. Coming from the city? Coming from somewhere else? All of them were nervous as they mounted their beasts. Squires hurried and fumbled in the dark and horses snorted in groggy confusion.

The rest of the camps were slow to move. An attack could come from the city or elsewhere. This could be a feint; they had to watch their sections of the walls. The Provençals took the brunt of the charge as dawn broke. Soon other forces were moving in.

The grooms and squires and servants took up their arms. Bows were strung as men rushed to the front. Each stuck to their own group. They stayed with the men they knew, with the prince closest to their own allegiance barking orders, or else they obeyed one of the captains lower down whom they knew better, barely paying any heed to higher commands.

The knight and the men he travelled with were only told to move after noon, when the Turks were already beginning to break. The pagans could not reinforce the city.

By late in the day the battle seemed won. The Turks had hoped to strike quickly, cause disarray, and break the newly arriving Provençal troops who had no camp or defences. The Turks had failed. Once the battle was joined by the overwhelming numbers of pilgrims they found themselves trapped in the field with the lake blocking one flank and a hill behind. The Turks began to retreat.

There was still mopping up to do, and the Turks had come so suddenly it was thought there may still be scouts or even an entire force waiting amongst the gnarled trees of that slope. Pilgrims, many of whom had never been in a battle, moved in horror through fields of dead and mutilated bodies as they chased after the enemy, shouting in their own terror. Exhausted Provençal fighters retired to begin the arduous work—which still remained—of setting up a camp for the night. Some of the pioneers had disappeared during the day. As the sun fell lower in the sky the knight and his tired fellows were told to scout the hill and come back by dark. Was it a judgement, wondered the knight, because their group had not closed with the enemy? No Turks had fallen to their weapons. The men who had fought all day snorted at them derisively as they passed.

The knight and his fellows heaved and sweated across the undulating paths. One moment there would be scrub and brush and they could see the horizon past the gnarled and knobby plants, and other times pines and other trees would restrict their view beyond more than a few feet. Sometimes they saw the city, now so small in the valley beside the lake that was still so huge and stretched towards the distant sky. The camps of the besiegers were visible outside and the city peeked at the riders from within its walls. The path was only wide enough for them to travel in single file and their line stretched out with the exertion of the rising and falling path, with the smell of horse sweat and the flies which alighted on every damp surface.

The knight too was sweating, having dismounted and now leading his riding horse by the halter as low branches had constantly threatened to dismount him. Besides, as at any time on their long journey, if he rode a beast too long

rather than leading it by hand it would quickly become exhausted. His shield was on his warhorse, which his squire led, further back.

They were moving through lower hills. The trees grew at several levels, and they would pass by the canopies of pines growing up from gentle valleys below, as other roots grew at the level of their shoulders. The path, such as it was, wound up the hill.

As the sun began to let loose its myriad colours, and the clouds above glowed with orange and purple light, the knights all agreed that the enemy had escaped and that they had run too far in search of them. Their emotions had cooled with all the strenuous work.

But as they spoke one of the fellows pointed. Ahead on the path was a lone horseman. He sat there atop his beast with his round shield across his back, a mace hanging from the saddle of his henna-dyed horse. He was armoured in a *maille* shirt with a vest made of strips of leather over the top. He had a black beard and plaited hair beneath an egg shaped iron helmet. His horse had lowered its neck and he leaned out along it, his chin level with the mane. He had in his hands a composite bow of wood and horn and fish gut and sinew, held horizontally. Two halves of the short bow curved outwards from its central point and two 'ears' held the string in place. He released the arrow.

A horse behind the knight jumped. Its rider was still mounted, and he was almost thrown from the saddle as the beast made a terrible sound.

Knights were leaping clumsily to the side in their long *maille* skirts and grabbing their equipment as other men jumped, hollering, from the brush. The enemy had been hiding where the hill rose above them and they burst in amongst their group. The men wore animal skins and boiled leather for protection, with plain clothes, and they had long dark moustaches and beards. Some had shaved heads. One had an axe in his hand but another had a blunt-tipped sword of cold black iron. There were at least a dozen of them.

They were yelling in a language none of the knights could understand. They swung their weapons menacingly at those around them. The pilgrims had been completely stunned by their sudden appearance but the Turkish attackers themselves had seemed uncertain during that initial moment, interested more in yelling and display, and it had given the knights and their assistants time to gather their wits. People dodged and ducked.

The knight was only a few steps from them when they burst from the brush and leapt down onto the rooty, uneven hill trail. Their shouts were so strange, their tongue so unusual, the knight's heart leapt in his chest. He was exposed and alone. His horse whinnied at his side. The knight's first reaction was not to fight, but to rush to the side of the embankment and try to make it down into the valley. He did not want to fight; he did not want those swords and axes cutting into him, into his vulnerable body. They wanted to hit him with those swords. They wanted to hit his flesh! It all felt desperately unfair. He couldn't think. He was not even aware of fear. He just made it to the embankment, where he quickly lost his balance and skidded all the way down the hillside, knocking up dirt and leaves and lying dazed at the bottom, staring up at the wind moving gently between the shifting leaves far above. Twigs, leaves and grit had ridden up inside his armour, which he had kept on despite the sweat. He lay for some moments. The shouts and screams and sounds of battle seemed distant, and he let them remain that way. He thought that the longer he remained there, the longer he could tell himself he was still dazed, the more of the battle he could miss, the less responsibility he would have. It was calm there next to the cool earth. The pines creaked.

He heard the sound of skidding footsteps. He glanced up to see someone skittering down the hillside, leaping like an acrobat, adept and sure. A man was running down into the valley. It was a Turk with a brown shirt.

The knight rolled over. He stood up, the action being terribly slower than he liked because of the weight of all those chain links which seemed to be pulling him to the earth. Probably it only took him a few seconds more but it felt like forever. He stood and leaves and dirt tumbled from underneath his armour and his clothes. He reached around for his sword, and he found the reassuring hilt. He tried to draw it out but the hilt had become tangled in the slit of his linen shirt. He tugged violently, a motion more useful for venting his frustration than losing the weapon. The Turk was running towards him, moving between those calmly-watching bushes and the silent dignity of the trees. The knight glanced away just for a moment to look at his hilt. He pushed aside a string from his clothing and pulled the long blade free from the scabbard. Finally that scabbard was empty, and that weight was no longer hanging from his belt but was planted firmly in his hand. Instinctively he felt around for a shield, hoping crazily that it was at his

back, but he helplessly recalled that it was far up the hillside on his horse. The Turk was closing with his black iron sword raised above his head. His eyes were wide, showing the whites, his brown pupils, his living body. The growth beneath his moustache indicated that he hadn't shaved today. He must have been camping in the wilderness. The hairs there had peeked through. The Turk's adam's apple moved up and down, and he opened his mouth to shout again.

The knight only just moved his own weapon up in time to counter the first blow of that chopping blade. *Please don't*, he was thinking, *please don't hit me, please*. His eyes were locked on his enemy's edge. The man swung the sword around and then tried a cutting stroke upwards, towards the knight's leg. The knight stepped aside, knocking the blade away with a chop of his own. It was all instinct. *This is possible*, the knight thought. *I can do it*. All that training, it was there inside him, he did remember it. But still the knight wasn't fighting back. He was simply defending. That was no way to win fights, his father had told him, towering over all the fellows. You are training for years because those few, flashing moments of violence are decisive.

The knight tried to say something, to ask him to stop, but he only got half the words out and the Turk would not have understood anyway.

The Turk flashed his blade from a stroke to the knight's right to a stroke to his left so quickly that the knight's eyes could hardly follow it. *No!* he thought, his sword arm so slow, trying to drag the blade through the air, trying desperately to put it between himself and the swinging metal. He could not be fast enough. It was not possible. He had left himself open.

The Turk's blade struck his side. The knight's soul seemed to leap from his body. He wondered at the wound, waited for the streak of pain, asked if this was what it was like to be dead. The Turk had sacrificed strength for speed. The knight felt only a quick dull impact, quickly erased by adrenalin. The blade had glanced off the knight's *maille* shirt.

The knight moved his own sword to strike. He felt his anger swell. He wanted to cut down his opponent, not to watch him bleed, but just to get him away, to make the Turk leave him alone. He raised his sword high and swung. The Turk parried by bringing his own weapon right at the crossbar of the knight's sword. The heavy blade struck the hilt and the knight's sword was wrenched from his hand. Spinning through the air, the expensive blade came to lay in the leaves

and dirt with a dull sound. As it fell, the knight's thoughts were not ones of terror, but rather, of self-chastisement and disbelief. *Oh no*, he was thinking. *Not like this. How could I have been so stupid.* The knight was weaponless. He should have been using two hands but he had been fighting as if he had a shield, out of habit, out of training, not paying any heed to the reality of the situation. Now he was unarmed. He couldn't run because he had no time to turn. The Turk swung his blade right back. He did not need to worry about advertising his intentions now, as the knight could do nothing to stop it. This was a blow that no armour could stop.

The knight rushed forward, yelling. It was his only choice. He was not yelling like he imagined a warrior would. It was that desperate, staccato, breaking yell that boys made as they struck each other for mortal insults during breaks in their tutoring. It was like a boy's half-womanly scream. He struck the Turk across the chest, feeling his own heart close to the other man's living body, and they both fell, winded, onto the dirt. The Turk held the blade still in his hand but his arm was outstretched under the knight's weight. The Turk had only his wrist for leverage and the sword angled up and down feebly like the feelers of a millipede.

The knight tried to grab at the Turk's throat and the Turk pushed his own free hand to the knight's face. The Turk pushed his chin hard against his chest and the knight's dirty fingers could get no grip on his neck. The knight moved his hands up to the man's face. One finger was pushed into the man's cheek, inside his lip, the flesh of the lip tight around his thumb, and other across the sockets of his eyes. He scratched and clawed. He could feel his nails tearing at the soft flesh inside the cheek. He tried desperately to push his fingers into the man's eyes, to crush out that jelly, but he only succeeded in scratching around the eye sockets. The Turk sniffed and gargled, digging his nails into the hand that attacked him, trying to pull the wrist away. His other hand now was gripping the collar of the knight's armour, trying to wrench his body away. That hand moved to the knight's face where he dug at the soft skin on the knight's jaw but the knight rode through the pain. The Turk had let go of his sword to grab at the knight's frame, to try to pull him away, and now he moved his hands from the hand that was assaulting him. The knight's own eyes were half closed, out of instinct, as the Turk's fingers scraped about near his face. The Turk's fist pounded at the knight's back but flesh and bone were useless against the knight's iron armour. The Turk

wore only a shirt and hose. The knight felt rather than saw most of what he was doing. He was clawing unthinkingly at the other man's face, just trying to cut, tear, and gouge, paying no attention to where his grasp was leading, thinking vaguely of the eyes.

His heart beat quickly in his chest. Bare inches away the Turk's heart beat in the same way. They could feel the weight and the warmth of each other's bodies. The knight could feel the warmth of the man's skin as his hands clutched now again at the knight's hands, fingernails digging, trying to push the knight's hands away, trying to twist his fingers out of their sockets. Their breath mingled. They could smell each other's skin and hair. He could smell the animal grease the man used on his moustache.

The knight dug the fingers he could into one of the man's nostrils and began to pull and twist, hoping to rip off the nose. His thumb was wet from scratching against the inside of the cheek. He scratched around hoping to find ears to tear at but the man was clutching the knight's own fingers now and twisting.

The knight rolled away and he could still feel the ghost of that living warmth on his hands, just as he could still feel the throbs of pain from the scratches on his jaw and his twisted fingers. He rolled across the cold dirt. His hauberk dragged him down, tried to stop him moving, tried to return the weight of that iron to the inert earth.

The knight scabbled for his sword as the Turk scabbled for his. The knight found the hilt in the dust. He grabbed it together with a handful of leaves and pine needles and dirt and spun, still on the ground, thinking to block the Turk, to block the blow he knew was coming, that he could feel at the back of his neck. But the Turk was crouched with the sword in one hand, the other hand at his face, as if to check whether his eye was still in place.

The dirt and leaves meant that the knight's grip was not certain; such debris was a lubricant that stopped the sure grip of the leather coiled around the metal, the dead animal hide that melded and stuck to the sweat of his hand, keeping it in place. With that muck his grip was feeble. He moved his other hand up to make the grasp certain and opened his palm just a little to let the dirt fall. The pine needles and dirt scattered across his chest. The Turk stood, seeing the knight ready. It took the knight longer to raise into a crouch. The Turk chopped downward at the knight. He was screaming. He looked genuinely enraged. The

knight's instinct was to raise his arm to stop the blow. He only just guarded against the impulse and instead used the sword as an extension of his arm. One arm stretched out, to rest the naked blade across the palm, and the other held the hilt. The fragile blade stretched right back towards the knight's face, looking ready to break, but somehow it held and sprung back again. The knight's own blade had dug into his palm with the force of the blow, which he felt in his elbows, and which themselves were tingling after his clumsy roll away from his adversary.

The knight was screaming in his head, *this has to finish! This has to finish! Get this man away from me!* He wasn't praying and he wouldn't have known who he was demanding this of. The Turk swung down at him again. He defended by raising his own sword high, and as it blocked the chopping blade it slid, due to the force of both blades, up his enemy's weapon, which did not have a handguard. He caught the Turk's fingers, not hard, but enough to cause a natural, unthinking reaction, and the Turk dropped the blade, shaking his fingers and glancing at them with one eye to see that nothing was severed.

The knight felt the urgency, standing from his crouch. The heavy sword had fallen between them and the knight put his foot down on the blade as the Turk reached for the hilt again. The Turk could not yank the weapon out from under him. He looked up and the two of them matched eyes. The knight was raising his sword.

The Turk quite naturally lifted his left arm to ward off the blow. A chop downwards. The knight screamed as he swung. Half of the Turk's left hand was neatly severed. He bent forward in pain.

The knight chopped at him again, desperately trying to take advantage of every second, just to get his enemy away from him. But they were useless, desperate flurries, just quick pushes; he put no force into them. His blows fell uselessly against the man's clothes. His every thought was screaming to finish it as quickly as possible. The Turk looked up at him. The knight saw clearly his face and his eyes. The knight had the sword raised, not disguising at all what his attempt was.

The Turk yelled at him, loud, guttural, masculine, and yet desperate and terrible. The knight was yelling back at him. His own sound was so strange. Such a low yell, like swearing but with no words, full of aggression, annihilation and

that awful anxious fear. He moved his sword like he would stab. The man yelled back. It was too much for the knight's ears. Such a terrible sound. Not human.

Was someone watching him? Could someone see him now? What if he did something, would someone know what he had done? He couldn't really be all alone with the man down here, could he? Wouldn't someone see, and know?

The Turk was still yelling, his voice undulating, like an animal roar. Both of them roaring at each other. The forest was full of their sound. The Turk looked at the knight and looked at the blade.

With a vicious stabbing motion, the knight thrust downwards. He felt the resistance of the flesh, not as strong as he had expected, and then the jar of the bone beneath. He felt it in his wrists. He remembered the feeling, and seeing the Turk's feet twisting in the leaves and kicking up dirt, but not much else. He may have stabbed again or he may have just stabbed the ground, he couldn't remember. He had done the movement one more time to be certain because he wanted it all to be over.

The forest was spinning and vibrating around him. His hands were shaking. His breath was quick and shallow. He checked himself quickly all over. He looked at his hands. There was blood and skin beneath the nails, and marks of the other man's fingernails still fresh in the flesh. He could still feel the jar of the blade hitting the bone in his wrists. He could still remember what it felt like in his shoulders as the sword cleaved flesh.

He fell to the ground and listened. He could just hear some yelling and fighting in the distance up above. He should be looking for other Turks, in case his friends were coming, in case they were coming for the knight, but he stared ahead, thinking that if he didn't look nothing bad would be there. He scabbled in the leaves and dirt for a few seconds, trying to cover the marks on his hands, to scrape them off with dirt. He remembered gradually that he had some pieces of linen in his purse for treating wounds. He reached for his purse but was barely able to open the string. He pulled the bandages out and wrapped them around his shaking hands. The loop kept coming undone so he started again from the beginning several times. The bandages were far too much for his scratches. He felt himself many times for wounds. He lifted under his armour and checked. He tried standing but felt dizzy. *What about the wounds of the Turk? What if someone saw? What if someone saw what he did?*

On all fours he went to where they had fought. On all fours he went to the Turk. He had thought he didn't want to look at the man again but here he was staring at him. He carefully put a hand near the man's face as if the man was going to bite him. He drew it away expecting movement. He put his palm over the man's mouth.

Was the man breathing a little? He wasn't sure. He put his palm closer. *Was he or not?* He couldn't tell, his hands were shaking and he felt his body was flushed with blood. He looked at the Turk's face and his open eyes. There were small scratches all over his skin and especially around his eyes. The knight felt a flush of remorse as he saw it. He pulled some of the bandages off his hand and lay them across the wounds. As if suddenly remembering something he looked around at the rest of the Turk's body.

He said the name of a fellow knight and began to speak to him. Why was he speaking to a fellow? he wondered. He knew that fellow wasn't there. He glanced around at the suddenly empty forest. He was sure he had sensed an intelligence. Hadn't one been just beside him? Isn't that why he spoke? But there were just trees. He scratched his face, which was beginning to hurt, and felt the pain there. He ran his fingertips gingerly over the scratches, which were salty with sweat and stinging. He looked back and forth as if he couldn't decide what to do or where to go. Letting out a deep sigh, but still breathing fast and shallow, his heart refusing to slow down, he looked over the scene of scabbled earth again.

He searched in the dirt for blood, or some sign. He could see no blood, just dirt and leaves and pine needles, all scuffed up and thrown about. There must be some trace of what he had done on the earth itself. He glanced urgently about the Turk. The site looked so ordinary. He couldn't make his eyes focus on one place for any length of time.

He saw the wound on the Turk's chest and the brown shirt stained with blood. He lifted the shirt quickly and saw, in that warm darkness, a horrible open wound and cut open skin, puckered up like a whispering mouth. He didn't want to see it so he let the shirt fall. He looked around for the bandages. *Where were the bandages?* he wondered. *Where did he leave them?* He saw them on the Turk's face and so he lifted them from there and wrapped them around the Turk's chest. The Turk was warm as he lifted that weight. He wrapped again and again, the length of the linen strip, but it was a clumsy job. He tried to tighten it. He tried to

fold the shirt over it. It was too obvious. Sniffing, dripping sweat onto the man, he began to lift him as if to take the shirt off, but only got halfway, and haphazardly arranged the bandages again, half over the shirt, half under. Having moved the bandages so much as he rearranged, there were blood marks in several places. He folded the shirt over those.

What if someone saw what the knight had done? What if the Turk's friends saw? What if the knight's friends saw?

He noticed the hand then. He felt the blood on his knee; it had soaked through his hose as he knelt in the dirt. He searched for each finger. He tried to put the fingers back in place. They won't heal if they're not back in place, he told himself. The feel of those small warm pieces of flesh, so light, almost independent, was horrific against his own fingertips. There was blood in the whorls of the severed fingertips. He found the bandage on his other hand, hanging for a while now from his sleeve, and wrapped it around the fingers. They hung loosely, like coins in a purse, against that mutilated hand, but the bandages hid the mutilation from view. He had run out of bandages. He tore a strip from the bottom of his undershirt to finish the job and bandage the hand up in a fist of linen. Letting out a deep sigh, but still breathing fast and shallow, his heart refusing to slow down, he looked over the man again. His face, he thought, there were still wounds on his face. There were scratches all over the Turk's face and around his eyes. Was that some of the Turk's cheeks under his own fingernails? He shook his hands with disgust. He looked around for leaves. He lay leaves carefully on each scratch mark. He then arranged leaves around the head in a desperate, quick, bunching motion and, frustrated, pushed them again away.

The Turk's sword was there. He picked it up and looked at the alien object. It was more like a tool than a sword. He had seen peasants using something similar, in their case a piece of wood with an iron edge for cutting, but this was more expensive, the whole blade being iron. He put the sword down. He threw dirt over it, and then carefully placed leaves over it one by one, until the sword could not be seen. He shook his hand in the air angrily. He could still feel the Turk's face in his hands. Hadn't he been trying to push out the man's eyeballs? He had always imagined it would be easy to do such a thing, but it wasn't. He shivered. He sniffed. Feeling ready he stood, and then almost fell down again. He stepped away. He thought his leg had been badly injured, perhaps

severed, and his heart leapt, how had he forgotten? Hadn't the Turk stabbed him? Cut him? Broken him somehow? But it was just numb from having squatted in an odd position.

As he looked he saw the bloodstained patch on his hose. He grabbed fistfuls of dirt and rubbed it across, trying to obliterate the blood.

He fell behind a tree and tried to vomit. He felt like vomiting. He spat and hissed. None would come. Dazed, he didn't even look back at the site again. It was as if he had forgotten. He did remember his sword, and before shakily scaling the hillside he ran back and found it, putting it thoughtlessly in the scabbard, almost tripping on the hanging scabbard as he made his way up the hill. His long tunic was so inconvenient off horseback and crawling up hills. It always caught on his knees and tangled in things, along with the split high skirt of the *maille*.

He marched, breathing heavily, barely feeling his body, back up the hill. Weren't there nests in the trees? Little birds growing, eggs pulsing with life, so warm, beneath a living presence? Or was it the wrong season? The branches whirled above him like the spokes of a wheel.

His first thought was that people might see how dirty he was or what bits of clothing had been torn in the fall or the stinging scratches and swollen bruises on his face. He had forgotten about the fighting above and he crawled towards it as if there were no danger. As he mounted the embankment he looked up at the trees. The leaves were so green. He had never seen such a green before, he felt. The wind! He could feel it, he could hear it moving across the bark, he could sense it coming to him from across the world. He could feel it move across the shape of his body. He blocked it, it moved around him, and it carried some part of him on to the rest of the world. It was as if all of nature was pulsing, trembling in rhythm with him. The whole of creation was pure life. He felt it now. The veil of normalcy of the world had been lifted. Each breath he took was an ecstasy. The air went deep into him. When men approached him he marvelled at the complex mechanisms of their bodies and at the life leaping forth right up to the borders of their skin. Every animal and bird was so alive. He could hear every insect crawling. He could not remember having ever felt so anchored and so whole in all his days. The sunlight on the clouds was so bright and he could feel patches of it on his skin, if he lifted his hand, warm against the darkening air. He held his hand

up to that warmth and watched the patterns of the shadows of the leaves on his palm. He moved each fingertip into that dying warmth. His scratched and bloodied hands played in the light.

The Turks up on the road seemed to have fled. An axe lay in the dirt. A fellow had blood coming from his head but it was a light wound and someone else was tending to it. *Blood*, thought the knight. *Look at all that life*. If the other Turks had been killed, they had been killed elsewhere.

‘Look who it is,’ a fellow said, but he stopped as he said it.

Were they all looking at him differently, the knight wondered? He was sure they were.

‘Did you get one down there?’

The knight shook his head and mumbled.

They were all looking at the knight. And there was something different in their eyes. They knew what he had done. There would always be something different in their eyes, forever, he was sure. They would never speak to him quite the same way again. They knew what he had done and what he had not done. Had they seen?

The knight stepped past them all and sat on the opposite embankment, the very place where the Turks had sprung forth. He ran his hands across his face.

A fellow had made his way up.

‘What happened?’ he asked, seeing the knight so pale, and shivering now despite the heat. The knight kept spitting, and trying to spit, compulsively.

‘I don’t know what happened. You tell me what happened. I don’t know anything. I don’t know anything,’ said the knight quickly.

‘Are you all right?’ asked the fellow. He was approaching slowly and carefully.

‘And what are ... what are those people?’ asked the knight, angrily running his hands up and down his face. ‘What are they? Pagans? What are they doing here? Heathens? What? Is that what you said? Where are they now? Sorry, can you say again? I wasn’t listening, I was thinking about something else.’

The fellow was looking at him. What was that terrible look? Had one of their cavalry fellows died? The knight tried to see, look down the twisting path, but he could not remember faces, he could not remember who had been there and who hadn’t.

‘There’s someone hurt down there. We need to help him,’ the knight said, his voice rising.

‘Who? Who is down there?’

The knight tried to focus his thoughts and the effort showed on his face.

‘I don’t know. No-one. No-one’s down there.’

‘What?’

‘I was joking,’ and he laughed.

None of them could get a straight answer from the knight and they sent men down to check. He didn’t want them to see. He felt a creeping horror in his gut. But maybe they wouldn’t see. Maybe it was gone. Maybe it didn’t happen. Maybe he was who he thought he was.

At the edge of the embankment he was able to see down to where two knights were standing over the Turk and peasants were tearing off his clothes.

‘Leave him alone! He’s my friend! He’s coming with us!’

The knight put a hand on his own chest. Even through a layer of chain links and padding he could feel the heart beating quickly, like one feels on the naked skin beneath the warm stiff feathers of a little bird.

‘Stay there,’ someone told him.

The knight pushed past and fell down the hillside, scratching his knee, to where, limping, he yelled at one of the knights, his voice high pitched and barely intelligible, his words choked. ‘Leave him alone! Leave him alone! He’s got to get better. He’s sick! Leave him alone!’

The Turks attempt to relieve the city had failed, and now the city would just have to wait out the siege.

Priests were picking their way across the field, offering last rites to men who could not endure much longer, and some of them baptising dying Turks.

‘Beautiful, isn’t it? What those priests are doing? So selfless. That’s real love.’

‘They don’t deserve it,’ said another.

The knights had lost many friends that day, even though there was a general mood of victory. One knight had been knocked to the ground and hit with blunt maces so many times his leg had come off his body at the bone.

## **Esther, at the Siege of Nicaea**

*Divide the booty into two parts, between the warriors who went out to battle and all the congregation.*

Numbers 31:27

After the great battle outside the walled city there were many men to bury. She saw them laid in shrouds and then lowered into the ground. Men killed at the bottom of the wall were drawn up with hooks by the Turks looking over from the top. They stripped the men of their armour and threw the bodies back down. They left the armour hanging from the walls. It looked like blankets from far away, or the bales of cotton they hung to protect against stones and machines.

A man sat as his wounds were tended to. He had an arrow sticking right through his hand, the fingers bent oddly. He saw Esther staring.

‘A wound, just like Christ,’ he said, his face pale, trying to smile.

Esther saw a knight riding back into camp and she recognised him as the man she had spotted in the lake, with the naked and vulnerable back. He saw her staring. He was pale but in an excited state, having just survived a battle. He invited her into the field, saying he had something to show her, and that he had gifts.

The sun set, dropping back into Europe, as the knight Esther had watched and Esther herself picked their way across the battlefield with many other scattered soldiers and pilgrims. Many knights lay dead and wounded and some were searching for survivors or dragging them from the field. Esther found herself staring at some sights in fascination and looking away from others with a weak feeling in her legs and stomach. The knight Esther had watched was looking for trophies.

He picked through the belongings of a Turk who lay half under his dead horse.

‘Look at this,’ said the man, lifting a decorated scabbard from the Turk’s sword belt. The Turk stared at the sky.

The inside of the man’s open mouth was still wet. She had seen an ant crawling into that open space on another man.

‘Nice,’ the man Esther had watched said, drawing the blade to glimpse it. ‘Look inside the scabbard. Fur! Greased fur! Who did he steal this from? Don’t know if it’s any good for hitting anyone. But he has another down there on his saddle.’

The man Esther had watched picked through other pieces. ‘You should get a bow! Everyone is getting a bow,’ he said.

He handed a short, wicked-looking thing of maple wood, horn, fish gut and sinew to Esther, who toyed with it, stretching back the string a little. The bow curved outwards either side from the central grip in a shape reminiscent of breasts. Two little ears lifted from those arms to hold the string in place.

‘What about this?’ said the man, lifting the dead man’s hand.

The dead man had a kind of open glove on with a leather cover over his thumb. It would have been his bow-drawing thumb. He also had many rings on his fingers. The man Esther had watched knelt down and lifted a mace that hung from the Turk’s saddle. The head was shaped like the head of a lion.

‘Look how short some of these arrows are!’ he said, emptying the man’s saddle quiver onto the ground. There were arrows of different lengths, some remarkably small. ‘Useless! Do they use them for shooting flies?’

Esther looked over it all, still holding the bow she had forgotten was in her hand, but not taking anything else.

‘That’s nice, isn’t it?’ said the man Esther had watched. He also looked at the round shield on the Turk’s back. He had to lift the Turk to see that. He said, ‘Excuse me,’ before he did it, and then laughed.

‘And this,’ he said, ‘What have we here?’

A hint of rope hung over the horn of the Turk’s saddle and ran under the man. The man Esther had watched drew it out. The rope was long, with a wide loop on the other end.

‘Look at this!’ he said in a moment, with awe in his voice. ‘This must have been the rope they hoped to drag us back in, as prisoners, to Khorosan! We were going to be slaves in this rope!’

Esther touched the dead man’s helmet. It was hard and smooth. Just beneath his hair ran out in braids. She ran her finger across the cold iron. She dared, then, to touch that different texture and let her skin touch that braided hair. It had animal grease on it to make it shiny. Had he put it on there this morning?

She took her fingers away with sudden revulsion and wiped her hand impulsively on her dress. Even when she couldn't feel the grease any more she could feel the hair.

'It's not just leather!' said the fellow, lifting the Turk by the armour that seemed to be straps of leather glued together, with felt covering his upper arms. 'Look underneath!'

There was a *maille* shirt under there. The links were about the same size as the links on the armour of the man Esther had watched.

'Two layers! Didn't do him any good, though. What do you think? Was he a captain of some sort? Would be good if we got a captain.'

The man took the Turk's arm and, as it hung in his grip, used it to point at the Esther.

'You, there,' he said, putting on a voice. 'Go and get me my spare horse! This one's misbehaving!'

Esther glanced around for a horse and looked back at him, saying nothing.

'Some coins,' he said in a moment. 'Don't know where these were minted. I can't read the writing. Want some?' He dropped a few in the Esther's palm.

They were copper. Some were clipped at the edges. On one she saw a man on horseback. On another were elephants.

'Would make a good souvenir,' the man added. 'Something to show people back home. Elephants on the money! I've never even seen an elephant, not a real one.'

'And what's this?' the man said, after opening up the Turk's saddle bags and going through them. He pulled out a large white sheet. 'What is it? Does he carry a table cloth so he can eat all his meals nice in the wilderness?'

Esther looked at that patch of white space. It was a shroud. The Turk carried his own shroud.

Nearby the horse of a dead knight had mounted the henna-decorated mount of a dead or escaped Turk. The Turks rode mares. The mare bellowed as the act was completed. The sun dipped below the horizon.

'Do you want anything?' the man asked. 'Just say, and you can have it. I don't mind.'

Esther dropped the bow, said goodbye and headed back to camp. She felt that the man she had watched was staring after her. She could feel his eyes on her,

as if waiting for her to turn back, waiting for some acknowledgement, some connection, desperate for it. Esther kept walking.

### **Paul, at the Siege of Nicaea**

Paul is walking through the field with other men. There are lots of men lying around. There is blood. Men are dying. Men are crying. Some men are like little babies. Paul is supposed to find alive ones. Some men on horses try to fight them. He is to find those. He finds one. The man can't move. He is speaking with no tongue. He looks very weak. Paul needs to give him love. Paul is looking at him, very tenderly, like a mother. Paul is taking off the man's metal hat. Paul is stroking his hair. Paul takes the rock he brings for this.

'This is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Happy are those who are called to his supper,' Paul says, in the same voice as the priests. Paul uses the rock to split open the head, just like a melon. No more pain. Sometimes it takes two or three tries. Paul is getting better each time, but his arms are getting tired. He looks to find another. One tries to fight Paul. He grabs Paul's arms and tries to hit and punch. The man finds a long knife on himself. He tries to hurt Paul. Paul has to leave that one in pain. He goes to find another. Some can't even see Paul. He speaks and they give a look like they have touched a hot pot by mistake. He strokes their hair and makes them calm. It is all over for them soon anyway. Paul speeds their journey to New Jerusalem. They are calm there now on golden streets. Or they are in hell. Paul doesn't know. Same as the sick animals, don't let them suffer. It all makes him think of when he worked for the butcher who hit him. Pagans are in hell they say but only God knows for sure.

Paul sees men in iron there too with the crosses. Sometimes men and women cry beside them. The men in iron are chopped too. Their heads don't bob on ropes like the heads of the other men. Paul sees one all alone, Paul finds him among some trees and bushes. He has crawled there like cats do when they know they are going to die. He has crawled to the quiet to hide. He is in New Jerusalem now. Or in hell. He has a nice long, white shirt, down to the knees with a slit in the side and the sign of the God who cursed us all and loves us on the front. It is only a little dirty. And their robes will be made white in the blood. He doesn't need it and he has lain here like a present for Paul, like Paul is supposed to find

him. Paul thanks him. Paul is kissing him on the head like he has seen people do. Like they did to Margaret who got the flat chest and blood on her lips. Paul has the long brown *gonne* with the hood. He puts the nice long white shirt over it. Now Paul has the sign of God. God can find him more easily. Paul is cursed. The man who dies alone in the iron is cursed. May the lord Jesus protect you and lead you to eternal life. It is a day of hard work and Paul's arms are tired but he is happy. The man also has nice hose and an undershirt. Paul gets to work taking them off.

### **The Knight, as he Lives his own Life, at the Siege of Nicaea**

*Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble.*

1 John 2:10

Men grabbed at him. Some cuffed his head or rubbed his hair. The older knights smiled at him savagely, as if they were ready to tear his organs out. They shook him.

‘Look at him! He’s a knight!’

‘He’s a real knight now!’

The knight smiled and tried to push them away.

‘No, I didn’t do anything.’

‘You’re a real knight now! You’ve earned the right to wear that sword and to ride that animal.’

The knight shook his head. ‘No, I’m the same as before.’

‘No son, you’re a killer!’ said one of the older ones proudly, giving him a skin of wine.

The various knights began showing off their scars.

He looked around the campfire at his companions in arms. None of them were looking at him the same way. His squire didn’t look at him the same way.

The older knights swore and danced as they got drunker. Each insisted that the knight drink too. The knight did, and danced with them, and watched as the fire spun. Some of the men took their shirts off. People sang.

‘He’s used one sword now, but the other’s just a little dagger, couldn’t hurt anyone!’ they laughed, and they made other rude jokes.

The older knights seemed to be remembering their boyhood through him, and they told tales they had never said in his earshot before. They told mostly of time in tents and with women and companions who were not present. One spoke of Sicily and his time there, and the heat and the sun. He said he and five friends had been tattooed on their chests. They knew the church did not approve of such things so they got crosses, hoping that no-one would complain. He said he was the only one here with a cross now, and one friend was elsewhere, and the rest had died. The way he spoke it did not sound like they had died in battle. He spoke of ships and drinking and dealing with pirates. He complained about the lords who led them. The knight listened and absorbed it all.

Finally later in the night, too drunk to stand, he sat on a log and saw a fellow there behind him, quiet in the semi darkness.

‘What is it like?’ asked the fellow, younger and fresher even than him, yet to be knighted. ‘What is it like to kill someone?’

The knight waved his hand at him and drank some more from the skin, stopping mid gulp to join in a rousing chorus of a peasant’s song with the older knights. It was a song about love between a peasant woman and the knight who liberates her, but the words had been changed to make it cruder.

# Europe

Esther told stories to the aristocrat.

### **The Story of the Knight, as told by Esther**

*For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it.*

Romans 7:18

Sometimes, his body was an empty shell. Every step moved him forward. With every breath he lived. He ate. He drank, sometimes, to feel. The drink was following a path from long ago. He wasn't a man anymore. He knew he wasn't a man. It wasn't something he was emotional about. If someone said to him, '*You are a horrible person,*' he wouldn't have reacted so much. He wasn't trying to be a good person. He knew he was a bad person. He didn't think of himself as good, or of anyone as being good, and he didn't expect any better from anybody. Things had their certain facts.

He remembered a woman trying to talk to him. She leaned against his cheek where stubble grew while they looked at a burning hut.

'Those poor people,' she said.

'They built that house, and for what?' he had said. 'The tree grew because someone planted it long ago, and that man is now dead. They chopped the wood and they wasted their strength doing it. They chopped the wood, they built the hut, they reinforced the walls, they packed in mud and sod. They went to the mud by the stream and they gathered thatch. Amongst the thatch frogs grew and tadpoles wriggled. They stomped on the tadpoles, bursting their black little stomachs. They dried the thatch. They lived in the house amongst the mud. They worked all day. They rested under that roof, all the family. They probably treated the roof so it wouldn't burn. It didn't help though. When it burns it burns. A family inside or not. And they all die eventually. They die in a fire or they watch their house burn and they die later. They sleep in the cold. Either way they work and work for nothing. They build a house and it doesn't leave a mark. They build a hut and what difference does it make. A few years later the hut is gone and they are gone and everything is gone.'

‘I can’t build a hut. I don’t even know how to do that. Do you know how to do that? To work with my hands like that. To change things ... How did we learn to build houses? Don’t you think that’s wonderful? All the imagination that goes into building a house, and a fortress, and they get bigger and bigger. Maybe once we built nests like birds and now this. And yet it still burns away.’

The light illuminated both their faces. The flames reflected in their eyes. It reflected in hers as she looked at him.

‘Are you sick?’ she asked.

He smiled at her and pushed her gently away from his shoulder. He would see her again. She wasn’t the one he hurt though. One he hit once, on the arms. The woman was raging and hitting him and trying to drag him into the mud but he hit her on the arms. They went green. He remembered a child he had hurt. He hadn’t hit it, but he’d spoken and spoken, to see what would happen, until the flames went out of its own little eyes and it cried and stomped the ground in fury. ‘Why are you stupid?’ he had asked it after that. ‘Why are you stupid so deep down? Do your parents know you’re stupid? Have you told them? Where are your parents right now? Are they all right? How do you know they’re not dead?’

He had started drinking just to feel something. He walked through the world so often and everything was so real to him. All the buildings of the village were real. He always went to the village to walk silently amongst the people. People looked at him sometimes but said nothing. Everything was so apart from him. But it vibrated with life. He had stared at the thatch of that house before. He had been watching a horse and the horse moved. He was still and his eyes relaxed and he saw meaningful patterns. Perhaps there was meaning all around us, vibrating, if we can see it, he thought. And the house burned later. But all things burn in their own way, some fast, some slow, he thought.

When he walked he felt like a shell. Inside was so dead and completely calm. His throat was heavy in his neck, his tongue like a weight. He was sensitive to everything and so he felt his clothes shift across his body as he moved. He would do everything more slowly and intentionally so as to appreciate it. It would rain on him and he wouldn’t move. He was challenging his body to get sick. He was challenging it to feel the sensation of cold, to start to shiver. He waited for that first shiver. He was warm in the rain, drops running down his face, behind his ear. Drops worked into his clothes, which became wet, and drops ran down his

back. Quickly his temperature was plummeting. He waited. Still no shiver. But there was an expectant feeling in his body as he sniffed. He was retreated in his head, waiting for his body to react. His hands were cold and numb. The cold of the puddle reached into his shoes, his toes were wet, the cold crept up his ankles. It was like waiting for a sneeze you know is coming. Then the shiver, the first one. He was alive. He would wait until he couldn't stand the shivering. It usually wasn't long. Then his body revived him and he would move again, his teeth would chatter, he would walk somewhere. Teeth chattering, the inert skeleton chattering within the soft muscles of his body. The wine revived him in the same way. It made him a man again. It made him do things ...

He thought of some of the things he had done. His father had chastised him many times for spending time in the towns and villages. He spoke to women. He drank with the peasants. He had told some girls he had loved them and perhaps he had believed it, as those cold words echoed out of the cold cave of his body. Yet the feeling never lasted. Somehow the words were like an experiment, a chain he was throwing out to see what he could catch and bring to him. The feeling never lasted. It was like a shiver in his soul.

But when he thought of the bad things he had done, they lasted. They were his own special weight. In the lightness of his body they had some mass. Everything else floated like motes of dust in the emptiness inside him. Not those acts. They lived within him and gave him real feeling.

'I'm not like you ...' he said to one of his fellows once.

'What do you mean?'

'I'm not ... good like you.'

But they never listened.

He thought of those things and the feelings were as fresh as when they happened. The memories of those events still made him flinch and scowl. They still gave him the emotional shiver as well as the physical, visceral quake. Sometimes he would even murmur to himself under his breath.

'You would do that, of course,' he would say, emphasising the 'you', but no-one else would hear him. It was the same way a drunk man, and indeed himself when he was drunk, would rant to himself. And he was drunk more and more now. It enabled him to reach out to the world. So often he was ensnared inside himself. That distance to that vibrating world was like the sap a fly could

get trapped in. But with the wine he could reach through it somehow. He could connect with others. He could take the thin skin of himself that surrounded the empty casing and mould it into something that could reach out and touch. That could react. That could breathe. That could speak. Often, words seemed even too much. They were breathed and gone. No-one heard, people heard the wrong thing. Sometimes he didn't say what he wanted to say. They were a product of his mouth, which was external. Sometimes what people said was just noise.

The wine had given him the strength to go to the Holy Land. And the shame inside himself. If he could exorcise that ... Even if one day he would only fall down into the emptiness inside himself, fall down, down, down, it was worth exorcising that shame, even just for himself. A ritual was important because it might have meaning for him, and not just for anything else it might signify. And yet if he worked through the only thing that made him shiver, if it flew away like a bird, what would he have? Would he be pure and clean or would he be vanished? The wine helped him through those paradoxes. With the wine all things were joined and one and all things were jolly. Sometimes with the wine he hated himself but then he truly hated, there was nothing held back, the silliness of his emotion was gone from him, he was blind to it, and what he felt was raw and real. He would bang his head against a tree and he would really feel it. He would see a pattern in the bark and perhaps feel pure joy. And the ridiculousness of pure joy, the puerile quality of it, would not occur to him. And perhaps then he would hate again, and it would all be a single, vibrating colour flowing through him, moving in waves like coloured patterns move across a bee as it walks with tiny legs over bright, sweet smelling, soft skinned flowers. When they stopped anywhere he would buy more wine and put it in the bags on his mule and he wouldn't feel anything, good or bad, no matter who looked at him. It was automatic. Soon again would be the pure rays of the sun and no clouds to show how temporary those rays were. He would lie in the grass and feel every blade and sleep ... An ant would walk across his hand and he would look at its tiny body and know the glory of the universe. And it would be so away from him and yet touching him and its soulless body would be so incomprehensible to him, long and hard with legs like bones, eyes that were not soft but black and almost invisible. It would crawl across his hand and then return to its secret world.

The knight sat by the side of the road. It was damp and all his padding was damp and his wool tunic was damp and he knew that at times everything could be damp for days. He detected the faint odour of vinegar, which he had become used to, because it was a treatment meant to deter lice. He sat feeling miserable on the wet grass with his soft shoes in the mud. He'd put on his helmet just to protect himself from the rain, taking it from the squire with half a word, and now he heard the little tinny steps of scattered raindrops on the metal. Drops would fall from the nasal and one hit his thigh, protected only by his exposed *braies* as he sat with his knees up and his *maille* hanging back from the split down the front. The drop immediately soaked through the coarse linen and he felt the sting of cold on his leg, then the slithering drop down his thigh. He shifted, trying to cover his legs with the *maille* as if those open links could shield him from the weather.

He was young, and he had started young. Some said that one should only be girded with the belt of a knight at twenty-one, but each locality kept to its own traditions on the matter, and it was hardly a written law. He knew that a sixteen-year-old son of a nobleman had taken the vow and was travelling with them as an armed pilgrim. He saw the other knights, the older ones, who seemed to scoff at him with their looks, at least he felt they did, and he had to look away. It needled at something inside him. He wanted them to know that he had served as a knight. He hadn't faced anyone, with wide eyes, a step between them, weapons drawn ... He'd never known the clash of man against man, not in anger, only in play. He hadn't been tested like that, he'd never had the chance to prove himself. And perhaps looking at him they knew. It would be different to training, it would be different to his previous duties as a knight, he was sure. It was the inexplicable time, he knew, the unexplainable moment, the threshold. A man would live or die. He would be sent beyond or would remain in the world. A blow could come with such finality and a man might have to retire to a monastery for the rest of his life. It thrilled him to think of it. It was like riding full pelt at the face of a mountain ... If God approved of you, and if you were truly worthy of what you were doing, He would take the mountain away, or you would succeed somehow, and you would know. The priests reminded him not to put God his Lord to the test, but, this was his whole life's function, everything he had been trained for and been building up to all his life. He could forget the domestic details of his eventual inheritance—he had been training to be a knight. And he could only know, one way or another, if

he was a good knight, by surviving that ultimate test. A carpenter could make something and know where he stood. But the knight would have to get down into the elemental field of live or die, yes or no, before he could know whether or not all those years were worthwhile, whether he was on the right path, and whether God approved and what he was doing was virtuous. He had of course imagined it a hundred times and in a hundred different moods, from glorious to harrowing to fatal. The man and him. Eyes in anger from beneath a helmet. Weapon raised with intent to kill, intent to kill him. Only their muscles and their reactions to tell it. He longed to know as much as he hoped the moment might never come.

He ground his teeth for a moment to dispel his rising flash of frustration and he glanced at his squire, tending the horse in the drizzle. Earlier he had a squire who was a man, much older than him, but he had gradually grown to resent the age difference. He told his father he wanted someone else. He hated the hint of condescension he saw in the man's eyes. The man was an old soldier, a freeman with a field, from a family who had helped their grandfather. The knight had insisted. He had been given a new man, someone who was destined to gird his own belt one day, a man just a little younger than him. At first he had tried out the new relationship, saying something here and there, attempting conversation. But soon things were the same as they had been between himself and the man. He had known his new squire a little before he was appointed; he knew all the fighting men in the estate and the next few villages, naturally, but that past between them was erased. Now there were quick words. A kind of strangled difference. The young man did mostly good work. Now that young man was coming with the knight to Jerusalem and the older man was at home with his wife.

The knight himself wasn't yet twenty. He felt cheated that he had been called but never been tested, that the work he had had to do had been so different from what he had hoped, from his intent, from what he had expected. Something had been taken from him. Perhaps he could rush into that opponent's blade and then it would all be dark and everything would be final and solved. And heaven or hell... He would know. And yet such sullen thoughts, such pleasant self-loathing and longing for destruction, was always shaken from him the instant there was some danger, and he had a fall from his horse or something went wrong on

practise. Always there would be that leap to live, that insistent feeling. Was it guilty conscience? Shouldn't he be unafraid of death?

Worst of all, what if he faced his moment and ran away? And what if people saw? Every fighting man on the estate and the villages around knew him.

He remembered being girded with the belt of a knight. He stood before his father, his hands together in front of him. His father took his hands in his own and held them there for a moment. His mother had embroidered the belt especially, attaching strips of her own design to the leather. Those embroidered patches were vibrant and soft to the touch.

His very first trip outdoors after the ceremony was directly afterwards. He went with his father and some armed men and retainers to the edge of his father's property to meet a neighbouring lord with whom his father had been having a dispute. They met in a strip of neutral territory running just between them. As a newly-made knight he thought that this might be the time he was called to fight. The other lord had men of his own. The knight had seen his father arrive in his best clothes, flanked by men, looking like a king. The knight pricked the horse with his spurs and made it jump. He wanted to keep it edgy. He looked over the armed men the other lord had brought.

But there was to be no fight. His father took the other man's hands and they kissed, all of them standing beneath the huge sky. The men rode back to the manor in peace. The knight couldn't help but feel that an opportunity had been lost and his ambition thwarted. It seemed like a very auspicious day to fight. His father and the men were smiling.

If he went to a certain part of his father's estate there was always the powerful smell of new bread in the morning. Every day they baked hundreds of loaves there for all his father's soldiers and retainers, and some of those who belonged to his father but had earned the right for bread, some of the loaves going out amongst the villages and freeholds. Every day someone would come to collect the bread and take it out into the world.

His father had more experienced knights than his own son, as some were older than him, some had trained with him, and many spoke of his father as they would to an uncle. He recalled the first time, the day after being knighted, he rode in a cavalcade around his father's properties and villages. He rode with all the men who owed allegiance to his father, the entire company. He had picked up

enough of a smattering of Latin in painful lessons to know that company came from *cum-panis*, with bread. The conjugations came to him with a twang of glossed over failure. *Cum-panis*, company, it came from the loaves they shared, that basic renewal of life. Leaving the manor on horseback he passed those peasants coming in to serve in the household of his father, their *seigneur*, for the day, and those who were leaving from the night before. They would cook and wash and plant and perform all kinds of tasks. Some were very poor and were coming for the crumbs of the lord's table from the night before.

The company rode through the villages on their cavalcade. Pennants hung from their spears and the men watched the people they saw from the height of their horses. *Villeins* passed them with bowed heads. Mud splattered and hooves clattered, buckles and armour rattled, antagonistic horses shook out spite in their cries and they moved on to the next village. Their task was simply to be seen. Then it was back through the wooden walls and to the manor.

He remembered shortly after he had been knighted, his father first asked his advice. The knight had trained with the men, he knew them, he was their fellow man-at-arms but would one day be their master, and grant them land or take tribute from what they had, and he would be a presence at all the great moments, celebrations and turning points of their natural lives.

His father was speaking about a specific man they both knew. 'He needs a woman. Any suggestions?'

The knight thought for a moment but shook his head. He had no ideas.

And yet, his father had asked him.

Now, nothing around him belonged to his father, and the knight's relation with the other men, now that they were all pilgrims, was uncertain. At home he had been the son of the lord of the local domain and it had given him a certain status amongst the men he knew. Now they were all sworn to other men, to leaders higher than himself and having nothing to do with his father or his blood, and suddenly he was nobody, and the men he travelled with from back home could sense it too, and his father's mistakes from the past were murmured about. The men took more liberties than they ever had before. He was just one of them and there was no pretence of looking up to him at all, not on the road, not out in the world.

He ground his teeth again and drops of rain soaked even through his woollen hose and trickled down damply into his shoes.

*Just as you do not know how the breath comes to the bones in the mother's womb, so you do not know the work of God, who makes everything.*

Ecclesiastes 11:5

They had absorbed into their number a few townsfolk, who usually, though they had been pillars of the community at home, were bullied by military men and pushed to the exterior, alone, shocked and broken. They also had gained a few mercenaries of questionable character on the island and the moment they set foot on the mainland. Many of these mercenaries had taken to banditry when there was no war and they introduced a definite criminal element into the group. They had grown up often in cities or in places ravaged by war. They had learned to survive by themselves. Many were without morals and were exceedingly vicious. Insults did not affect them and they had a brutal craftiness about everything they did. As yet, their number was too small to make a big difference on the politics of the group. They had to try to absorb themselves into other minor groups. And the nobles were keeping a wary eye on their men while they were in friendly territory. They had loyalties to maintain and they were looking more and more like a small army. A man who had run grinning with a sheep from a peasant's farm was immediately made to pay a fine.

The violence itself was not too pronounced. It was limited mostly to some individual fist fights, to bumping and shoving, to pushing people over when they were vulnerable and laughing with a group as they sprawled. The men were armed but they used only their claws to fight with. One man had been awoken in the night with a flurry of anonymous blows. One man had been served horse dung, and awoken to find human waste smeared across his blanket. There were waves and undercurrents of power games and threats as people tried to climb to the top of the pack, to establish where they were in the hierarchy. One man fought three men in a row and lost each time, trying to prove something by the awe of his own destruction. Some were left blasted by the side of the road, the army moving on, themselves lost, memories of their families and their homes duller by the light punches they had received, the gnashing teeth they had seen, the hatred they had

heard spilled out upon them. They had seen a different world and it had annihilated them and they had not yet reached the enemy. But if they could not survive their own companions, some men argued, what business did they have continuing? Those arguments were perhaps internal. No-one spoke as the lonely man stood sobbing, staring at the mud in disbelief, no idea of how to get home, no knowledge of where it was, the group pulling away. Knives were brandished but none was used. Clearly different groups were beginning to be displayed even in their microcosm—the criminals, the peasants and camp followers, and the professional soldiers. The criminals had the advantage that no-one would expect acts so craven. The peasants were always at the bottom of the heap and could say nothing when people did literally steal the shirts from their backs. Stealing was common, and those at the bottom could expect to lose anything valuable, regardless of sentimental attachments. The professional soldiers had the advantage of military training since childhood. That didn't matter if someone put a bag over your head and his friends struck your body from a dozen places, but generally they were well organised and had their own rituals of pain, learned in war, which they somehow inflicted on newcomers in a perverted and stylised way. The nobles floated above the subterranean world on golden sails. A new noble from Francia might raise questions of who outranked whom, but it was settled in a more cunning and subtle way, though with its own trademark viciousness. Again, it was those with the barest shades of difference who suffered most. Those low down or very high up and with positions that were clearly defined could try to ignore it.

The worst incident was when a gang of three criminals were involved in a fistfight with a group of four soldiers. A knife was drawn but no-one was seriously hurt. The nobles intervened, but they were outnumbered by the footsoldiers, and they didn't want to scare men away with severe punishments. Not all of the men were being paid. The nobles fined both parties. The criminals could not pay more than a token amount between them and they weren't on the nobles' payroll. Those that couldn't pay would theoretically have the fine taken out of future earnings of future shares of spoils, but this last condition was virtually unenforceable.

The priests would have large men looming over them, trying to make their souls tremble down inside themselves one day, and next those men would be

confessing or asking for theological advice, wrestling with their own unknowable beings as they walked through the fields. One of the higher ranking priests felt it was time for a sermon.

The priests were called to do sermons not just on Sundays or on Holy Days but at many times, as there was a heightened sense of religion and men were concerned about their own souls. The priest stood before a tree while they were resting. Men were sprawled about on the grass and on the mud and beside the freshly-dropping dung of their animals. A bee buzzed between them like a curious child. Above them, God's creation wheeled. The stars were invisible behind the perfect blue of the sky but clouds snaked across in the same pattern wind makes as it feels its way through a field of flowers. It wasn't just the footsoldiers and baggage men who listened to the priests at times such as these. Some nobles sat on mats. All men were questing with their own souls in mind. At these moments and in these matters the priests became princes.

The knight sat beneath a nearby tree, behind the priest, listening. It was a chilly day and he crouched in his cloak, folding his arms across his knees and around his body, trying to keep warm.

The priest began by speaking of the return of Christ, which he said could happen at any day, and they could all be judged. His audience were all physically bigger than him, many with weapons, some wearing odd bits and pieces of fighting gear even on the beautiful spring day.

'Christ ... Christ was suffering, he was on the cross, but did he hate those thieves who suffered beside him, even though they mocked him? No, he didn't. Even though they were thieves, the lowest of the low. Did Christ hate the soldiers, who nailed his flesh to the wood? No. He didn't. He loved them. He begged his father to forgive them. He loved them. Can you imagine that? Imagine the sufferings of Christ. He was beaten in the temple, struck across the face. He did not hate those who assaulted him, even as he warned them that their temple would be cast down. The crowd wanted his blood. They would rather release the murderer Barabbas than he. But he didn't hate the crowd. He didn't even hate Barabbas, who had taken the lives of others. He recognised that there are devils waiting to tempt us all. He recognised that there is always hope for forgiveness. Imagine being flogged, as Pilate ordered. Wouldn't you hate those who cast the singing whip against your naked flesh? Wouldn't you hate those who tear your

skin wide and bathe you in your own blood? Wouldn't you hate Pilate, who sent you to this fate? Christ didn't. He loved them. He loved them all. That is truly divine. Who could love his oppressors but the Christ? Can we sample even a bit of that love in this mortal world? I hope we can.

'They made him wear a crown of thorns. His brow was pierced and the blood ran into his eyes. They made him carry his cross, mount that wood on his torn and bloodied back where the flies buzzed. His raw, open wounds. Can you imagine those? Can you imagine the pain? The weight of the wood on skin open and red, on the slithering, moving muscles beneath! And yet he felt pity for those who heckled him, for those who spat on him! He felt love! Imagine being laid out on the cross. You know now what your fate is. You cannot fight it. Who can picture that in their heads? Who can imagine that sturdy wood beneath their frail arms, the centurions lifting their long iron nails. It would seem so improbable that those nails would be tied to our dying breath. And yet, they place the nail on our naked skin. Our pulse beats beneath that cold iron. The fingers of the centurions are warm as they hold the nail by the head. The dust is beneath us, the flies buzz around us, hungry for our sweat, hungry for our blood. Everything seems to want to take from us today. Everything. The centurion raises his mallet. It is simply a tool of wood. We have seen mallets every day. And yet men could use them for this? They could use them for such a purpose as to pierce the body of the living God, to fix his living miracle to the dead wood from a tree, to steal his immortal, God breathed breath away? How could we help but hate them for their pettiness? The wax that seals the scroll of our fate ... It is a tool. A common labourer's tool. And yet they do it. We watch, our head pierced with thorns, we watch as he holds the nail above our pulse and then uses the living bands of his own muscles to swing the mallet and push the nail down into our flesh, between our bone, perhaps even through the bone of our wrist, shattering it. We can never hold a pen again ... We can never use those fingers again to play games with dice or to craft a chair from freshly-cut wood or to lift a spoon to our lips ... Those fingers are dead. And as we watch the mallet fall there in disbelief, as the nail penetrates all the way through the gore of our own living body, as it goes through and into the dry wood on the other side, then, on the other hand, we feel the same thing! What could be coiling inside our own souls then, but despair, desperation? We would want to beg to the centurions, remind them of their own wives, their own families, their

own tender thoughts. But we don't. We lay there as they do it. As they send one long piece of iron searing through our ankles. Our toes will never curl again. We will never feel the dust of the earth beneath the soles of our feet. We will never step from the cool shadow of a house and feel the sun warmed dirt beneath our five splayed toes and our living heel ... Never again.

‘And the soldiers lift us. They raise that cross! All our weight is suddenly on those three great nails. It is like the chair we may have crafted in our youth, but now all the weight is held by living flesh, as if the wood of the chair was still alive, still feeling, as we sat down upon it. Of course we cry out from our coarse and ruined bodies. The only relief is that our torn back is not now pressed against the dry wood, but as we swing forward we feel that the blood has caked against the cross and now our wounds are torn open afresh. All the weight of our frail body hangs from those ruined wrists and those ruined ankles. We see the sunny, distant ground only through a mist and a haze of tears, blood, bright sunshine and pain. The centurions are beneath us grinning. They have done this, it is them! But do we hate them? No, that would be natural. But we don't. We love them. We love them! That is why God is glorious. The body can be broken down and it can scream at us to hate. God didn't understand that, not as humans did, until he gave us his son. His son knew all the frailties of the body. He knew, and God knew, and he loved us. He loved us from the searing, open wounds of that frailty. He loved us all the more. And he gave us eternal life.’

The knight listened and shivered in his cloak. Always the priests spoke of suffering. Always they spoke of suffering as leading to love. But the knight had known suffering. He knew it didn't lead to love. It was just suffering. Priests always spoke of transformation through violence. It always made the knight sad to speak of religion so. Violence did transform, it was true. By its very nature it transformed people, situations, politics and matter. And no-one who endured suffering was left unchanged. The sermon was powerful because Christ had maintained love throughout suffering, whereas when the knight was threatened by a bigger man he instinctively felt fear, and then hate and anger, and regretted it later. To feel love despite intense suffering and while being subjected to violence was an incredible thing. The knight felt bad for doubting the word of his better, but he felt that, as far as he knew, the balance was off. The sermon was not the way the knight wanted. It saddened him. It reminded him of dark times, and not

of the light, not of the transformation that did occur at the end of his own suffering. The knight wondered: did his mind turn frequently to higher things out of revelation, because his life had been miraculously spared? And if so was it out of love or out of a sense of debt? Or was it fear? Was he afraid to face what lay at the other side of violence? Was it his injury, with his one leg always just a little worse than the other now, did he know he could never be a good knight, never be the man some of his fellows were? Violence and suffering transformed in so many ways but it was hard to unravel what it changed and why. The knight always felt the key of the message was love. But if love was wrapped in violence, how were men to see the difference? Yes, the story of Christ touched him too, but he wondered if the preacher could shift his emphasis. The knight wondered how he would do it differently himself. Every one of the wounds described made the knight think of his own wounds and memories of pain. They were so faded from the agonising reality of what had been and yet still, after all these years, so sharp. Suffering was bad smell and ranting and tears and torture. Suffering was feeling pathetic and cowed by the world. Suffering was being made to know how little men differed from the dirt and how bodies were meat, and knowing what one would become when all dignity was stripped away. The knight didn't think it should be romanticised. If love is the message, and mystery, then say love and mystery. Suffering was just suffering. It was the nadir. Only once a person recovers or gets some perspective on it do they have choices. Suffering is animal and inherent in the human condition. It is our choices around suffering, what we do when we are suffering, how we react to those who are suffering, that defines us. Christ's choices were the key. But, as someone who had suffered, the knight felt lost under waves of pain listening to the sermon. He didn't feel uplifted but crushed. He felt dizzy the way animals might when a terrible smell is in the air.

‘As we wait on that cross, in the sun, with the flies buzzing over our wounds, their small feet crawling across open muscle, picking at our sweat, crawling by our eyes and nose, as the thieves beside us mock us, they mock us like madmen from the madness of their own pain and despair, they know now they must die, like all of us they do not want to die; as all of that happens—beneath us, the soldiers have our clothes. Earlier, they have stripped us naked, stolen the clothes from our body, left us naked and humiliated in front of everyone. Taking our life was not enough, they had to take the last thread we had,

and they had to take our very dignity. And beneath us, before our very eyes ... squatting on the ground, on that earth that is so distant now, that we will never touch again, only when all life has been taken from us ... they divide up our clothes. They throw dice. They cast lots. Who will get what? They ask. Who will get our scraps of dignity? They cast lots before our eyes. And they laugh. Perhaps they glance up at us. See our very eyes. Lock eyes as they roll dice. They are the ones who have sentenced us to death, they have been ordered, but they have acted themselves, they have done it to us. Now we see their very eyes. We see their very souls. The dice tumbles. Will it be hatred? That would be natural. No. It isn't. We instead turn our barely seeing eyes to heaven, lift that head torn by the crown of thorns. Perhaps the thorns catch against the wood. Perhaps, in lifting our head, the thorns rip yet deeper. And yet we do it. We lift our head. And we say to our father, father of us all: please, forgive these men. Please. Forgive them. I am begging you, not them. I am in this state and I am begging you. Forgive them. They know not what they do. They know not what they do.'

The knight listened with tears threatening his eyes. He was thinking back to the baby boars, slaughtered, lying dead on the forest floor as he, a young man, hung across a stallion, lost in pain, moving in and out of consciousness. He thought of the light moving across his sick room slowly. He would go in and out of sleep, that light always moving, sometimes moonlight, sometimes sunlight. Would he ever feel that sunlight again? That patch of light seemed so impossibly far away. He couldn't move out of bed to reach that warm spot on the floor. He wanted to beg his family to take him there but the words wouldn't come out of his lips right. He felt his death approaching. It had never struck him before that how truly beautiful sunlight was, and warmth. It was God's true face. And he loved God for that and for the brief times he had been able to walk in that sun before, even though God was sentencing him to death.

'All that is left is to wait. The pain, it comes in waves. Sometimes it is unbearable and we cry out. Sometimes we hardly feel it, and it is bliss. We hear snatches of conversation from below but don't really understand. Sometimes we recognise the faces around us. Sometimes we don't. Is that our mother there? Are we sure? The shapes move about as if through darkness, and yet the sunlight falls on all. The darkness is descending. Tomorrow is a Holy Day. We are not to be left on a cross. A shape hovers in front of us. What is it? Something comes to our lips.

It is water! It is oil! The barest of relief! We move our lips to it hungrily. We can barely move our dry, ruined tongue. The pain has been too much. But the water, that coolness, that oil on our lips, it is just enough. It takes us out of our torpor but makes the pain all the more acute. To be awake now is the worst. We can articulate again, for just a moment, but do we scream hatred at the world? No! Though fury should burn inside us with those last throbbings of life, we don't scream for revenge. We don't scream obscenities. It is the face of friends beneath us, perhaps we can see. They have given us this greatest gift, this last succour, as the sun burns us, this simple relief which really just awakens us to our pain. But to be awake again! To feel the wreck of our mortal body! Beside us we hear a scream as a thief's legs are broken with a sledgehammer. It is an inhuman scream. Though the thief had mocked us, he was a brother, and we hear the bones of his legs shatter. We hear his breath rattle from him. Surely that must be us soon. As we know that our poor body can take no more we do not cry out for revenge. Instead, we think of all we have done in our lives. Even the most holy thinks of the sins he has committed, for all living men are sinners. All of us have sinned against our brothers. And we use the last of our strength to cry: my father, why? Why? Why have you forsaken me? Why this pain? Why this life I had planned, taken away? Even though I knew this was part of your pact with me, even though I was given the gift of life knowing that death must come, why? Why this pain now? Why such suffering? Why have you forsaken me and let me suffer so? Why have you forsaken me by leaving me here in pain?

‘And with that, with that thought of agonising love for the Lord, only loving, only love, wanting to be close to Him, we give up the ghost. Our wretched mortal body sags. The centurion finishes, breaking the legs of the thieves, and comes to us, but bones are not to be broken. He pierces our side with a spear. It is the final insult to be committed upon us, the final test. And blood and water spews out.’

The knight remembered the surgeon, holding him down in his agony, holding down his swollen leg, all awful pain and a terrible smell. ‘We must bleed you!’ he was insisting. ‘We must!’

And his knife pierced. The knight thought he could not endure any more pain, he did not think his waking mind could cope, and yet he remained awake. And his blood poured forth. Too much blood! And pus, and a clear liquid, not like

blood or pus, something else that had been weeping out of his wound. They were like the tears of his mother as she watched him suffer. It all spewed down into a pail and across the bedclothes. The knight thrashed with a new-found strength. He remembered the blood that had been lost when the boar tore him. ‘Too much!’ he cried. ‘Too much blood! It’s too much for me!’

All night the blackness of sleep didn’t come, even in his exhaustion, even with his wrecked leg hanging like a puppet beneath him. All night he was awake, staring at the ceiling, staring at the window, seeing the shape of his sleepless mother moving about.

‘But God can give us back! God can give us life again! When all is gone we can walk beneath the sun once more! And the sun, instead of harshly burning down on our open wounds and exposing our sins to the light, it can stream down fresh and warm, like this fine spring weather, which shows God’s perfect love! Christ was born again. We can have eternal life! We can have it if we are fresh of sin. Christ came to tell the world this good news, and then we crucified him, and he came back to us briefly, and then he left, only to return on the day of reckoning! But I tell you we can have a new life in this mortal world too. We can feel the sun afresh. We can be given a second chance. And it is by giving up sin. It is by giving up sin and embracing love. All those little wickednesses can be shed from us. We can find perfect love. I know this. I can tell you. I can offer it to you. The church has granted some men power to forgive you. God has granted some of us that power. It is not a power. It is a duty. It is a weight we carry. It is a gift. We can ferry your sins to God where he can look them over and forgive you. If you confess. If you renounce your sins. If you swear to stop sinning. Not empty vows now! Empty vows bring shame to God. But with proper vows. And we must feel love! The love of God. The suffering of Christ, we call this the passion. From passion we get compassion. We feel sympathy for suffering. We feel love. From suffering comes love. From the depths of despair and pain, through all the evils man does to man, comes love.

‘All men are brothers. All of us. We are sheep in a flock. Sheep belonging to Christ, that great lamb. All men are brothers. All of us are blessed. All of us walk in God’s love, in his forgiveness, in his reprieve. You can see God’s love and brotherhood reflected in the smallest of creatures. You can see God’s majesty reflected in the smallest of things.’

The priest didn't seem to be heeding anyone else as he spoke, but he stepped back and forth as if he was living his own memory of being on the cross, even though no man could claim to know Christ's experiences and they could only hope to reach that perfection. The spirit must have been moving within him! All the men were listening now, heeding his every word. But what cross was he on? What cross had he known, except the cross of his own certitude, which held him flailing above the earth and disconnected him from his fellow thieves?

The knight tried to think of what gave him faith. He tried to think of how he knew the love of God.

After his injury the knight had felt open to many things. He recovered and everyone had said it was a miracle. They had wanted to cut off his leg but it was too late. And yet he recovered. He was weak for many months and carried around in the garden by the women. He disappeared from the world of men for a while. Everything was womanly presences and womanly smells. It was like being a newborn again but with the senses and the mind to appreciate it. He came to know the lives of the household servants as he never had. He saw all sorts of secret things. People would put him down somewhere and forget about him and he would watch life unfold and the world go on. He would sometimes watch birds in the trees carrying twigs for their nests and wonder what was going on in their hearts. Had they seen a miracle as he just had? Did they all feel it too? He became friends with some of the girls around the house. Some were rough in everything they did but from some he felt a real tenderness. It had flowed to him like soothing water. It was just what he needed. Sometimes he felt he had recovered on the smell of women's skin and hair alone.

Some were overprotective and they didn't leave him alone for an instant. They once took him to where the cows were milked and he saw, in a dark corner, as the servant girl's hands worked on the teats of a cow, a dog giving birth. Who knows that mystery that lets creatures form inside their mother's womb? Who knows how that blood crystallises and grows, how those vines of life reach out and coalesce and how we get shining eyes and finely shaped fingers and the strong backs of animals and men? Truly, that is the most wonderful, thought the knight. Who even knows how every day milk forms beneath the soft skin of cows? Every day we see miracles but we forget. He was reminded by watching this dog give birth, in the warm darkness of the animal's shed. Slowly her belly

had grown and grown. Within, life squirmed. Now, that mysterious time had come. He saw the mother shivering. He saw the glow in her eyes, almost like the eyes of a person. He saw her strain on her four legs, her pain no less than that of a human being for having those four feet to stand on. He saw the first pup emerge slowly. The servant girl came back with her bucket and, hearing the low, unusual howling and the groans, she came and watched too. As the knight-as-a-boy sat in his portable chair she watched, her head beside his, her eyes sparkling, the warm pail of milk at their feet. They saw the puppy curled and in a clear skin. Its eyes were closed. That was the first time it felt the bare air of the world. It fell into the straw and the mother, legs shaking and running with blood, licked and licked, she looked almost fierce in her love and devotion, and he could see it, even in the animal, he could see the love in her eyes. She licked away that thin transparent skin, like a halo from heaven, and the small creature breathed its first breath. Its nostrils flared. Its miniature jaws opened wide. It had teeth too tiny to hurt anything. It sucked the air into its pink mouth. It was alive. New life from nothing, from nothing at all. The knight wondered if this gave any rising feeling of wonder in the womb of the young girl beside him, her heart beating faster as she watched the mystery of the dog's ordeal. We think so much about death but it is life that is most incredible, thought the knight. And life springs from love. The love of a man and a woman. Love can truly create anything. It is the greatest gift of all. If we could love our fellow man a fraction as much as God loves us and the world, a fraction as much we love God, then we could create the most magnificent of worlds, he thought. Love creates life itself! What other force has that kind of power? Nothing! We were created from pure love. Even violence does not have that power. Violence can only subtract and take away. Violence can decide borders but it takes love to fill a kingdom, the knight was sure.

Even in those puppies was a hint of love, he thought, the later love they would one day express. It was a tiny spark waiting to blaze. Soon the puppies could walk on their own trembling legs. They did it minutes after being born, to reach the life giving milk with their snuffling noses! But soon they could play. Their eyes finally opened, allowing the light of the world to their souls for the first time. They would run and play in the green grass.

There were four pups in all. One day, a week later, the knight had requested to be put outside to watch the world. No-one in the household liked the

idea, as a cold breeze was blowing, but the knight insisted and people feared arguing with him in his weakened state more than anything else, as the surgeon had intimated that too much spleen might kill him. As he sat the puppies inevitably came to him. They wanted to feel the warm loving touch of his hand. That should be a religious activity, thought the knight, touching an animal, giving love unconditionally to a creature that demands nothing in return. The pups ran about his chair. They played like pups do.

The knight didn't see the danger, but one of the pups went into a bush where a sleepy adder was lazing and the puppy was bitten. The adder fled and was not harmed by the mother, except for her sharp barking echoing in its hollow head. The bitten pup lay on the ground. The mother carried it tenderly in her jaws. She lay it down in a soft place a few yards from the knight-as-a-boy, a place of peace. She knew, even with her animal mind, with her instinct, that there was nothing she could do to help it. The puppy lay on its side, breathing quickly, its little soft exposed belly rising and falling. It looked to the blue sky with the eye on the side of its head. It saw no escape. The knight-as-a-boy watched all this alone. The servant girl charged with his care was not a sensitive type and had fled as soon as he was settled. He watched the drama unaccompanied as it unfolded before his eyes. The mother licked her baby several times and then she stepped away, to the other puppies, as if to keep watch from afar, to give it a realm of silent peace, or to keep the other puppies from harm. Most of the puppies also kept watch from afar. But they didn't stop playing from time to time, nipping and biting. They were too new to recognise the seriousness of the situation.

But one puppy, the knight remembered ... One puppy stayed by its wounded sister. As its sister lay panting silently, communing with the grass and the sky, locked in a battle she couldn't possibly understand, a battle for which there was no hope, the puppy stood watch. She smelled. She licked. She didn't know herself what was happening. She couldn't. But she understood that her sister was in agony. She stood by her and watched. Until, finally, that little puppy, it ... The knight remembered it so clearly, it gave its last breath. Its ribs stopped rising and falling. Its whole body seemed to deflate and crumple as it lay on its side. In one moment it was living, in the next moment it was not. Who can say why, thought the knight. Who can say how such changes happen. But he watched. He saw that last breath leave it. And so did her sister. Though she was so tiny, she

stayed right to the end, and even afterwards, she licked its little face with its open eye, as if to anoint it. As if to send it on its journey.

The knight moved a hand across his face. Now a tear had come, as if out of nowhere.

Why did you give me that, God? Wondered the knight. Why did you bring those two scenes to me? To the knight, it was one of the most sad and one of the most beautiful things he had experienced. It was more beautiful to him than his own miracle. He thought he had been spared just to see that. Perhaps he was too impressionable after his illness, he reasoned ... But he had seen the glory of God in those two instances. That, for him, was religion. Again, he caught himself, it was a memory of suffering, of violence, and of death. But more than the violence it was the choices that were made that struck him. It wasn't the violence, it was the loyalty from one too small to know. The violence was short. The suffering was quick. But the sister who licked and comforted, that stayed in his soul forever.

But that belonged just to him, he knew it. He could never say something like that to the men. They might laugh at him. Puppies? They would say that animals don't have any souls.

The priest was continuing his sermon and he was quoting from one of the knight's favourite passages of the Bible, appearing amongst all the assurances that life was meaningless.

'If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who has no-one to help him up! Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken. If you forsake your friend now, thinking you can tackle the world alone, then you may reap your judgement earlier than you think. To die alone would be a tragedy. Yes, we all must die alone, but how much worse without a comforter. We would want at the very least that faithful one watching over us.'

He remembered his mother's uncertain form, her distant tears.

The knight rocked back and forth, trying to warm himself in his damp cloak.

He thought of all the miles between them and the Holy Land. His fellows would listen to him more closely than all the other priests walking with them, regardless of their rank, because he was a fighting man, one of them. He was the

son of their lord, their uncle by oath. He had a squire and servants with him. He'd spent a little time with the monks. He owed his fellows something, he thought. He had to find the right words for them. If he could find the right words for them, if he could inspire them enough, if he could give them the knowledge that would allow each of their steps to be preceded by the angel of wisdom ... It was up to him. But he had to find the right words. Please Lord, he prayed. I am the worst sinner of them all. But when the time comes, just let me find the right words.

*Esther's first true story-within-the-story, starting in Book One, page 380.*

'I have something,' she said. 'A story you might like.'

She had been preparing for this. She took money and food to delouse other men from time to time, and she sat and heard stories going around the camp. She had a story, of a man who may have been a real pilgrim on the journey in someone's group, but everything had been embellished more and more with each telling, and mixed with what the poets said, and perhaps she had blended three or four stories of three or four men along the way, getting confused herself. But the story had in it all of what the aristocrat wanted: blood, and fighting, and faraway places. The man had become something of a legend in the camp as his tale grew more to resemble myth each day. Perhaps as she told it she told something of the men's accumulated yearnings, the folklore they had picked up, the facts they loved to tell each other, always about military things or the customs of some place or the correct way to do something or the history of somewhere, true because a reliable man had told them, snuck in.

Esther had also been gathering her arsenal. She had been listening to stories the whole journey and repeating what she heard since they had waited outside Constantinople. She had reported a lot, telling other people's accounts, adding minor details or some flair here or there. She had given the aristocrat a sense of men's characters. She had shown him telling episodes from the lives of the men under him. But now she wanted to take the best part of a legend and make it her own. She would build on it with what she felt it needed. She felt she was ready to tell real stories rather than simply recite. She would use some of the facts supplied by others but the overall tale would come from herself. She would say what she wanted to say. She had spent time preparing her forces and now she was ready to attack.

She began to tell the story of the Serjeant, who worked for five brother knights who also had in their family a young priest.

### **The Story of the Serjeant**

He was their Odysseus. Whether he was ordering boys to clean the stable, checking deliveries or making sure the hens were safe from foxes, he was all that

the brothers hoped to be. He had been in war. He had survived and come back. Therefore, they said, he must be the most skilled warrior alive. Years, the campaign had taken, years! And he even had trophies. A ring. Some clothing, strange items. Most mercenaries would have sold such things the first chance they got. Most were not sentimental. The boys discussed how he must have got such treasures and they came up with the most fantastic stories. He had been descending from the window of a princess, when ... He had sliced the hand off a Saracen warrior when ... He had been cast from a ship in a storm when ... They all agreed that he never would have taken them off a body or from a house like a common criminal. He wasn't the regular type of criminal soldier to loot and rape and pillage. He was theirs. There was some mystery surrounding why he had returned. It was his choice, to spend his money, he wanted to see the land of the warriors he had fought alongside and befriended during the campaign, but there were rumours that he had been sent back following some scandal. What it was they could not guess. Probably he refused to give up his honour in the face of a foolish nobleman, the second eldest brother posited. And yet he showed no signs of such behaviour here. Indeed he seemed to love taking orders. He relished giving up his body to someone else's purpose. It was the way nuns surrendered themselves to God.

He spoke with an accent because he was from somewhere near Champagne. One of the boys swore he had heard him say something to a horse once in another language.

'Not German or Italian either.'

'Horse language!'

'Animals would understand,' said the elder sagaciously. 'They weren't scattered after the Tower of Babel like the kingdoms of men were.'

They loved his thin head, so much like a skull that he had to be a warrior. They loved his severe hair, so different from anything they had seen amongst the local people always trying to be fashionable. 'It's because the men all get infested with vermin when they're in the field,' one of them said, claiming that the Serjeant himself had told him so. Being infested with vermin didn't lessen him in their eyes. It made him more powerful and amazing. So that's the secret to overcome being infested with vermin. All their mother's remedies seemed so ill thought out now. He rarely raised his voice and hardly ever yelled to his lessers,

they said. They ignored the yelling he had done yesterday and the brutal beating he once gave to a stable boy with a horse shoe in front of the others. Military men did such things with their underlings. The boys themselves were destined to be military commanders, of a sort, low ranking but still leading men. They would be expected to do such things with horseshoes. The lines on his face were like an artist's initial drafting sketches before he marks out the face with the most perfect smile. Never mind that those lines fitted a face that was always scowling as well. His blue grey eyes had not faded, he was born with steel there. Even as a baby he had looked out at the world through a winter and metallic spectrum. Was he old? No, worn from battle, one brother said. The Sicilian sun had done that to him. He was like a trusty old bridle, the leather worn but still full of lustre, more comfortable and more useful than a new bridle with the leather yet to be broken in. Was that grey at his temples? If so, it was from the petrified thoughts of the horrors he had seen in war. Horrors, the boys thought, wishing to know what they were.

When he took the second eldest brother's saddle from a squire and chastised the squire for not doing his job correctly, he was not demonstrating, as he moved his practised hands across the leather. He was doing it himself, because he trusted no hands but his own for such an important task, the boys told themselves. Today there would be a tournament, a demonstration of melee, and so he was setting up the small pennants so carefully on the green field because he wanted to do his job perfectly, because he was so proud and exacting, not because their father would have his head if one thing went wrong. He was leaving their father's service to join them all on their journey, join the masses of men in their passage east, not because he was looking for mercenary opportunities later on, because he had tired of menial service, not because he had tired of their father and his growing imperiousness, not because he wanted to be his own man to take his own things from the world, but because of the far away look in his eyes. Because of honour and duty. Because he wanted to be a free knight like them on a holy journey.

He had strange weapons. He had strange clothing that he sometimes wore in summer and on Holy Days. He spoke to men in a way that no-one else around them would dare. He followed orders without question even when the question flashed across his eyes. He had more leeway in all things because he had been on

campaign, because distant friends from the battlefields of Sicily had recommended him, because he knew the world. He had more leeway because the boys needed to absorb his experience, his essence. He would be leaving their father's service and going on the quest on his own not because their father had refused to pay for it, finances already being smashed to silver dust, but because his experience and independence had asserted itself. Because he knew such quests and though the goal would be new, the process was familiar. And because, one of the boys claimed, he had once spoken of a woman with green eyes. And perhaps black hair, bunched up around the warmth of her neck. But the boys may have added that last detail.

Their manor sat in the rolling earth, the island earth. No-one had realised at first that even the small strait to the continent would create a sense of heightened authority. You could not escape the King, people said. The manor here was the King's fist, stamped into the earth, his stone hand grasping all the island. They were sure the Serjeant had seen more formidable fortifications.

Today they were more bold than ever. They would all be leaving soon. He would not be their elder, their teacher, their servant, he would be their brother-in-arms! They asked him questions they would not have asked anybody since they were children and knew no rules.

'In Sicily, did you fight heathens?'

'Yes,' he said, driving a pennant into the ground.

'Did you kill them all?'

'If we killed them all there would have been no-one to help us.'

'You fought alongside heathens?'

'Yes.'

'Are they as wicked men as they say?'

'All men are wicked,' said the Serjeant, straightening the pennant until it fluttered just right against the green of the field.

The boys were silent because they didn't know where to go after their questions had been answered.

'Do you have any scars?' Guibert asked, being the second youngest, and one of his brothers promptly slapped the back of his head for his impudence.

The Serjeant stopped what he was doing just long enough to glance at them with an indecipherable squint.

‘Not from fighting.’

‘Not from fighting!’

‘If you get hit you might not be good for fighting no more.’

They stared at him, all of them in their familial bunch. Their faces were like a row of identical flowers, stalks of different heights.

‘Better to be giving scars than getting.’

This answer was perfect for them. They went off ecstatic. The Serjeant looked over the final preparations for the field. And no-one could deny that, despite his military gaze with its attention to detail, he did have a distant and inward look in his eyes.

The Serjeant was on a ship. It was the largest ship he had ever seen with full and mighty sails flapping in the wind. He looked up at those sails where the wood and the rope creaked and saw the sun burning. He looked about the deck and saw that he was completely alone. No-one tended the sails. No-one watched the passage of the boat but him. The sea was almost calm. The wood was clean and new. The only sound was the flap-flap of the gentle wind in the sails and the straining sound of the wood and the rope. The deck moved gently back and forth. It was like a cradle. He walked towards the port side. No land was in sight and the brilliance of the sun came back to him off the water so intensely that he had to shade his eyes. He walked along the deck towards the prow. His eyes were slowly adjusting to the lustre of the ocean. There was a salt smell in the air.

He noticed that the calm ocean, gently rolling, was a lighter blue further out from the ship. He crossed to the other side and it was the same there. He looked forward and the shade of the water was identical. It was as if a great shadow was following the ship. Even running back across the lonely deck, looking to the water where an infinity of water met the pale blue sky, he saw a long shadow, and then the clear blue of the natural ocean. He marched across the wood, his shoes sounding sharply on the hollow deck and the hollow belly underneath. He stared at another shape he could see in that watery blackness. What was it? It was bright, and round, like a shield reflecting up from the water. The shadow was so black and yet there was a glowing shield there. Was that an emblem in the centre?

He realised all at once that he was looking at an eye. It was an eye as big as he was tall. It was submerged just under the glittering surface. It was golden and terrible with a pupil like a deep black pit. He ran to the other side of the ship. There was another eye, looking up at him from the depths. He ran all across the planks, seeing the pitch shape following just below the boat. It was a great fish, larger than any he had imagined. It must have been as big as a city. It was following him, or he was being led by it, or was it waiting to strike? Those two dreadful eyes looked up at him and up at heaven. What was it? He wanted to scream, but there was no-one to hear. Where were they going? He was so alone as the sails flapped and the wood creaked.

The Serjeant woke with a start from his dream. The stars above were magnificent and plentiful. Everyone else was silent. The night was especially cold and he had thrown off his blanket. Iciness seemed to creep up out of the land, through his thin blanket and into his very bones. He could not see any other man or animal, though there were hundreds about. They were just shapes breathing in the darkness. The moon could not be seen. Only the stars gave light.

As they sat down to rest another night the Serjeant watched the young priest, whose name was Diggory. Diggory had pulled out a book, a psalter he carried with him. His books were so heavy he carried them in a special kid skin bag on a mule. He opened the psalter on his knees and peered at the pages. The Serjeant himself could not read. At first he thought Diggory was doing the same thing the Serjeant himself had done the few times in his life he had been confronted with books and scrolls—that is, looking at the beautiful pictures and embellishments, the shapes of the finely-painted letters as they ran together without a break along the page, full of mystery. Gradually, as he ate his hard bread, the Serjeant realised that Diggory was reading. He shivered as if someone had pushed him backwards into his own tomb and then sealed the lid. The Serjeant had never seen that before. Whenever people had read in his presence they had always done it aloud. They had at least spoken quietly to themselves in a low voice. Diggory's lips weren't even moving. The Serjeant's body tensed like a cat, the muscles in his stomach knotting. He wanted to fight something or else run into the night. There was Diggory, completely cut off from the world around him. He was lost in secrets. He wasn't even using most of his senses, his hearing was stilled, his

mouth was inert. With his eyes he bored into the page. No-one else knew what he was reading from the book. But the Bible belonged to everyone. It was the word of God.

Adam was brought to life by God's breath, wasn't that right? thought the Serjeant. The breath is the life. But this boy was denying it. In his ignorance. In his youthful stupidity. He was sucking the life out of everything, drawing the life out of that most holy of books, making it secret and hidden. It was like he had made it shameful. Like he alone possessed the word when it belonged to everyone. Did he think he was God? What was in the closed off book of his head?

'What are you doing?' asked the Serjeant.

Diggory looked up, his eyes wet from reading in the failing light. 'Reading,' he said.

'Without a voice? Where did you learn to do that? I've never seen that before.'

'I taught myself,' said Diggory.

The Serjeant cut the tip of his shoe through the mud and raised a partially gloved hand to Diggory, pointing.

'Don't let me see you doing that again, you hear me? Never when I can see you. Or I swear it, you'll get a smack.'

Diggory was silent and rigid. The Serjeant knew how to cow men and he stayed looking at him for a long time. Then he left and marched back to his spot. He pulled his blanket over him, shivering. He felt like there were small bubbles bursting all through his blood and they were making him light-headed.

One madman preaching on the road and witchcraft and devils squirm in amongst us, he thought.

Months later and they were marching through the Kingdom of Hungary. It was high summer and the peasants used anything to protect their heads from the sun. Priests worried that the women were becoming indecent, but everyone was sweating, and everyone was wearing as little as they could. There were rumours that there had been trouble. They constantly heard talk that a group of armed pilgrims before them had argued with the locals and even attacked a town. Someone claimed the invaders had driven a stake through a living Hungarian boy. The travellers saw none of this. They slipped into the kingdom unnoticed and

travelled along a river bank where the foundations of the ancient frontier of Rome the Great lay beneath their feet. Animals watched them from crumbling and dangerous Roman ruins.

The Hungarians spoke a language that was impenetrable to all the visitors. They had to get by with local translators who spoke German. Talk then had to be translated into *Langue d'oil*. Local churchmen spoke Latin, the universal and arcane language of the church, and speaking to them was easier. Pilgrims piled themselves around churches, in fields and graveyards and out to the roads to listen to local priests give them sermons in Latin, a language which most of those present, no matter what their kingdom, did not understand.

Latin always sounded especially mystical to the Serjeant. Barter and trade were based on expansive hand gestures and fingers held up to indicate amounts. They were shadowed at times by the King's riders but given no trouble. There was talk that hostages may be demanded but their group was too small to warrant such actions. Some pilgrims wanted to travel down the river by boat but as there were not enough boats, and not enough could be purchased, and the animals were always difficult on the water, it was decided that all of them would continue walking. Their group had become a symbol of the tower of Babel. Some brave and virtuous locals were drawn to the cause and the crucifixes on people's shoulders and shields and they came along too. A man could begin speaking to another and find not only that he didn't know the other's language, but that he could not even identify the language the other person spoke. Some men drew into themselves, some stayed with their national groups, and some formed guileless friendships based on body language, smiling and nodding.

They saw further proof that all the world was united under Christendom. Every valley they passed through, and after each dense forest, they saw a church rising from the huddling huts of the villages. There seemed to be as many churches on the earth as there were stars in the sky. Never mind that some of the less educated among them had heard a strange tongue and seen unusual dress and fashions in hair, moustaches and beards and assumed that finally they had come to the land of the Saracens: they prayed with the Hungarians, and their 'oriental' aspect was entirely unoriental and in fact just another shade of the Europe and the world they knew.

Once the Hungarians had ridden wild across the lands where the Empire now stood, and even into the lands of the Franks, enslaving, sowing fear, raining arrows and swearing oaths to pagan gods. But once, the men of the Empire had done the same. Once, the Franks had done the same. They had been bloodthirsty barbarians and they had ripped apart all the decadence and sterility of Rome the Great. Normans had been wild barbarians from across the sea, from lands where the sky was black in winter for six months at a time. Now, they were all united under God. Many used this pilgrim road, Hungarians included. In Hungary they met another pious people like themselves. All of them loved and feared the God who might destroy them at any time, save them at any time.

The nobles did their best to curb the predations of their band. Men came and went as the group progressed. One or two even became quite ill and had to wait behind in a village somewhere, probably to die amongst strangers. Their group was fluid and difficult to control. Any armed groups they saw watched them very cautiously. The Hungarian Kingdom had known sporadic battles with the Empire, and now the word that pilgrims had committed grave offences was known to everyone. The story was that the pilgrims had been punished severely. They said few had survived. No-one wanted any trouble though, on either side, and the Serjeant found himself growing hoarse from yelling at men carrying off chickens or threatening serfs. If he yelled loud enough, his warnings were sometimes given weight by the nobles.

When the attack came, the second youngest of the five brothers, Guibert, wasn't even there to see it. He heard the cries ahead, along the path and through the trees. They were walking on a winding trail through a thick and hilly forest. Villagers had earlier told them that there was a monastery hidden somewhere in these woods but they could not see it through the swaying branches and the thick mossy boughs. All along the line ahead the donkeys were upset, boys clasped the reins of pack animals, men looked left and right. The cries could have been simple horseplay but they were louder, more desperate. Guibert slipped his hauberk over his head, threw on his padded bonnet and his helmet, mounted his horse and wanted to charge ahead but there was hardly any room. A boy ahead, trying to control his donkey, pulled it in circles, Guibert's horse waiting anxiously. He had been leading the horse right into a tree. Hurrey, the youngest brother, Guibert's squire, caught up with him. He loosened Guibert's spear from

his array of saddles and packs and put it in Guibert's hand. He patted Guibert's leg to let him know he was stepping out of the way and to safety. The Serjeant was sprinting past on the other side. He had even drawn a weapon. It was a crossbow, a fearsome device he claimed he had learned to use in Sicily, and it had strange characters burned into the wood. Guibert yelled at the boy. Finally the donkey was pulled back into the centre of the path and Guibert's stallion, whinnying, was able to trot forward. A branch caught Guibert's helmet with a dull sound and nearly pushed him backwards off his saddle. The branch snapped before his neck did. His world reeled; he had a terror of falling backwards onto the roots and mud. Disconcerted, he struggled to right himself in his saddle and ready his spear. His shield was not in his hand. He had grown lax and put it on another horse. He would need help to unpack it and get his arm into the straps of the wide and heavy thing, firmly enough that it would deflect any blow. He would have to go in without that defence.

The path narrowed even more. There was a small footbridge over a creek and another animal, a colt, good for carrying feed but no use yet for fighting, stood on the bridge, blocking the way. A squire was pulling on the rope tied to its head but it barely budged. Steadying himself, his helmet at a diagonal angle across his face, blocking his vision, his nose guard pressing hard and cold into his cheek, he saw a terrible sight. A tall, muscular horse, thinner but more lithe and high than his own, stood at a gap in the trees. He could only see the boots of the man riding it, long leather riding boots. He had leather on his legs, armour over the grey cloth hose he wore. He was controlling the beast with his knees and doing it expertly, subtly. This man was trained at least as well as them. Before him and his horse, the train was scattering. He had charged into a weak point, mostly serfs and baggage men, spread thin in the thick wood. To his left he saw the Serjeant kneeling. The Serjeant lifted his crossbow. It was a strange mechanical thing, a maze of smoothed wood and taut ropes. He put it up to his eye like it had weight, like an expert. He only took a moment and there was a sharp wooden crack as he fired it, and the string, made of animal tendon, snapped forward, vibrating. The bolt lodged in a tree, passing just between the horse's legs. The bolt travelled faster than Guibert's eye could follow. The Serjeant stood and strode across the smooth loose stones in the brook, unheeding of the water splashing around his knees.

Guibert had a hand free so he could put it to the helmet, often warm as the sun but cool under the shadow of the trees and the forest's heavy, moist air. It was kept separate from the heat of his own skull by a layer of cloth padding. The nose guard sat back in place across the bridge of his nose. The guard seemed cool with condensation, perhaps from his breathing, his sweat, or the forest air. He was breathing hard and his horse was complaining beneath him, bucking a little. He saw the face of the man ahead. He had a long blonde moustache and wild eyes. He cried out, a barbarian cry. He wore a *maille* hauberk tightened with a sash. He had bird feathers decorating his cloak. On the pack behind his saddle were the antlers of a deer. His skin seemed dark in the shadows, but it was the darkness of a life entirely outdoors. His nose was sharp. He was not tall but squat and compact. His armour did not seem to fit him, it was as if he had plundered it from somewhere and taken it for his own. He rode his horse effortlessly. Who was he, Guibert wondered? It was too much, an actual enemy in front of him. Guibert had not expected the enemy to be so unknowable. The man had appeared, and Guibert did not know his skills, his capabilities, nor what he wanted. And yet there he was. If Guibert approached him, he would probably try to kill Guibert. In that moment, Guibert froze.

The horse reared up and the man turned and disappeared into the trees. The Serjeant charged after him, trembling leaves the only sign of the man after his body flashed into the forest.

At that moment there was a hiss and Guibert saw an object land on the rocks in front of him and bounce end over end before landing in the undergrowth. It was an arrow. He turned to his left and looked up at the raised ridge. He could see nobody. They were being ambushed on both sides.

Henry, the middle brother, had heard the commotion and seeing that the road was blocked he took to a game trail between the trees and circled around. Some of the baggage men followed him. He stumbled into a clearing where the Serjeant stood before a horseman on a tall horse. Henry too was struck by the rider's monstrous appearance: all feathers and antlers and bulging white eyes. So this was a pagan. Henry's body was hyper-alert, his senses rushed at him with every piece of information. It was too much, he could not make sense of all of it at once, he could not make a decision. The Serjeant had drawn a hatchet. The man on the

horse swung at him with a crude mace. The Serjeant ducked. The horse turned on the spot and whinnied. The man was an instinctive horseman. An actual opponent, and capable of killing a man! Henry was stunned.

He was affected by an overwhelming image. He pictured the girl who waited for him at home, Motte, sitting on the chair in his father's manor. Her little knees were together as she sat, shorter than him, full in all her young womanliness. He knew suddenly and finally that if he were to die now or be terribly injured, he would never see her again. I owe it to her, he thought. I owe it to her not to put myself in unnecessary danger. Not to put her through that.

The Serjeant swung at the rider's foot but the rider moved aside. He had a round shield that he held menacingly. It had an image on it like nothing Henry had seen. Perhaps it was a rune.

Behind him, he saw some of the baggage boys coming up in his wake, their mouths open. He turned to them.

'Don't come up,' he yelled. 'It's dangerous.'

Yes, he told himself. I must protect the baggage boys. It's better this way.

Alone, the Serjeant barely ducked another blow. The horse was energetic enough that it bared its teeth at him, as if ready to snap. Its teeth were very white in the shadows of the trees. The horseman, with the gentlest pressure of his knees, never touching the creature's neck or bit and bridle, spun the beast around. It kicked out in the direction of the Serjeant, causing him to step back so quickly he stumbled, almost falling. The kick marked the start of the horse's charge. It moved off at great speed, following the game trail. The path was thin but the man seemed accustomed to such conditions. He had lowered himself as the branches whipped above him. He was disappearing into the shadows. The horse's tail flared with the speed, merging with the shade.

The Serjeant glared at Henry as if to say, after him!

Henry glanced back at the baggage boys. 'Stay back, that's right. Don't panic, it's all right.'

'I'll get back to the team, see that everybody is all right,' said the Serjeant. Bobbing under branches, sweat on his neck, he began picking his way back to the main group.

'I was protecting the baggage men,' said Henry.

The two boys and their donkeys looked around at the forest with wide eyes.

The Serjeant's name was Johannes. Sixteen years earlier he had left his native home in Flanders with the diplomat whom he served. He found himself in Spain en route to the interior. Men dressed differently, some with cloth drawn tightly over their heads. Men smelled different. Meanwhile, they heard stories that in Sicily men were fighting the Muslims. They even had the Pope's approval in their struggle.

Moving through the mountains and across dry, sunbaked lands they finally came to that capital of a Taifa kingdom they were seeking. It wasn't really all that far from the Christian outposts and the warrior kings who sought to oppose these men, Johannes thought. One look at the fortresses of either and he knew who had the better chance if a battle were to flare.

When they arrived they were greeted by the Sheikh's men. The city had spewed beyond its walls. In its labyrinthine streets men of all nations walked. He even saw Christian monks, and the town had a Christian church. They were cheerfully told that there were more than a thousand mosques in the city. Later he heard the calls to prayer, echoing eerily over the rooftops, competing with each other, all those deep and musical voices. Some of the men going to prayer in the huge mosques looked like Franks, with blonde hair and blue eyes. The Sheikh's men, smiling, animal grease in their beards and their hair to give it lustre, perfume on their bodies, told them that all Christians were made to pay a tax, and as visitors to the city they were not exempt. The diplomat, Johannes, and the other members of the entourage knew that this was simply the Sheikh making his point, toying with them, but they had little option. The Sheikh's men said that in the kingdom 'infidels were tolerated, even welcomed' but that those who did not submit to the true faith, and he used that word, *submit*, were obliged to pay a tax to help support the King and the faith that supported them, and to build mosques for those who did become believers. They were given gifts of mules, as they had been told even before reaching the city that Christians were denied horses. The Sheikh's men explained to them the proper way of doing things. After settling in a sun-bleached building, with cushions of real silk and a fresco on the wall that the diplomat explained was in the Greek style, they were made to ride their mules

side saddle, like women, through the town and to the Sheikh's tax house. Once there, they had to be sure to pay their tax in a hand that was held lower than the Saracen tax collector. It was a small dent in the diplomat's resources. They knew that, as men from a small and distant province, the Sheikh was having his little joke with them. The diplomat claimed it was because the Sheikh was trying to present an image of the city's past, when it represented the heart of a kingdom and was much more powerful.

It was not until later that Johannes would see these men pray, en masse, pushing their heads down into the dust in utter prostration. They surrendered themselves to their God like nuns.

After a long wait, the smells of fruits and spices from across the world filtering in from windows that never seemed to need to be closed against the weather, they were summoned. The Sheikh's palace was like nothing Johannes had ever seen. It seemed to stretch for miles and armoured guards, not all of them Saracens, waited at every doorway, in every alcove. Within the palace eunuchs strolled, doing their duty, all of them slaves. They passed a room with more books than Johannes had ever seen. Each one would have been worth as much as a horse. There was a zoo with many bizarre animals. In a garden, a close inspection revealed that some of the flowers grew out of human skulls. They passed great ponds and were told that it took twelve thousand loaves of bread to feed the palace fish, although the ponds looked untended. A slight air of decrepitude was creeping in to the mighty palace, as if the Sheikh could not quite muster the resources to maintain it as he should like. Some of the flowers were too tall and wild. Some of the animals were sickly. Slave musicians who played for them looked left and right, as if expecting that they might escape. It was glorious, but it was also a decaying glory. Just as some of the buildings in the town were empty and bore the marks of battle, so too the palace seemed to have been ransacked once, and it had too many empty rooms. They were led into a chamber where there was a dish with a perfect mirror in it. Johannes looked down and saw his own young face reflected back clearly. Above the dish a great pearl hung. Guards waited nearby but they did not seem to think anything of the men strolling by the pool and the pearl. Such was the Sheikh's wealth. Johannes wondered what magic this was that gave such a perfect reflection. One of the Sheikh's men touched it

with a metallic needle and the entire pool moved, shimmered. It looked like melted metal. The Sheikh's man explained that it was mercury.

Carpets were everywhere. The greatest one led into the Sheikh's chamber. On a sculpted metal dish was money. It was as if it had been left absent minded, but it was doubtless there to make an impression. The coins were of actual gold. Nowhere in Flanders were such coins minted.

Despite his silks, his men, and his palace, the Sheikh himself, clad in clothing softer than a woman, was not impressive. He was short and a little fat. Their business with him was brief. He concluded that he did not need any of the trading goods Flanders had to offer, as he had more of such luxuries here already than they could ever provide. They prepared to go home. Walking by the sea later, having to pick their route carefully as there were many opposed kingdoms, he saw busy harbours where men sold all ranges of things. In one port he saw three corsair ships. They were unloading at least a thousand Christian slaves, by his count, taken in raids on Italy and the islands.

Before the diplomatic party had left Spain, Johannes had deserted them. He used all of his meagre possessions and some money he pilfered from the diplomat's store to buy passage on a ship to Sicily. He was not a skilled fighter but he would learn, he swore to himself. The waves beneath rolled him to an unknown future.

Ten years later Johannes was on the march. Great mountains watched in the distance. All the land beneath them seemed to be sharp stones and olive pits. Flies hung over the men and crawled at their wounds. Johannes sipped from his water-skin.

'I long for the baths of the towns!' said Yuszuf, one of his mercenary companions. He walked alongside Normans and men from across Christendom, but also Muslim mercenaries recruited locally and from across the Muslim world. Yuszuf had been born somewhere in Africa.

'I long for more than that,' said the Norman, wearing a turban against the sun. He answered in *Langue d'oil* but he, like Johannes, understood the Arabic Yuszuf had spoken.

As if the words had been a spell the men lifted their heads. A smell had come to them on the breeze. It broke through the pains of the stones in their shoes

and their tired legs from walking over the rough and undulating terrain. It was a perfume, but more than that, underneath it all, they could smell the sweat of a woman. All of them sensed it and they looked at each other. It had been weeks since they had seen a woman, and those were haggard old women in a village that seemed ancient enough to remember the days when the Greeks had wandered the island.

They were coming over a crest on the hill and below a bay was revealed to them, the sun glittering on the water. It was an image fit for a tapestry.

‘Noto soon,’ the Norman said. ‘Then it will be all over.’

‘They best give us what they promised,’ said Yuszhuif. ‘I want my land. I’ve seen many men lowered into the ground on this island, and I want a piece of it for myself, while I live!’

They had all fought long and hard and it was their land, whether they recognised it or not. It was theirs because they had bled into it and sweated into it and passed all their youthful years on it.

‘There’ll be plunder for us all. I hope they have nice pickings there,’ said the Norman.

‘You smell that, old man?’ Yuszhuif asked Johannes, noticing that he was looking about like an excitable dog. ‘It makes my hairs stand up too. Makes the skin on me come alive.’

They could see far in the rear a group of men approaching. They were not the usual exhausted soldiers that reached back into infinity, clothes and bodies so different but eyes all the same. They were slaves, hurrying, dainty. There was the sound of ringing bells.

‘Well what’s this?’

It was the most incongruous sight that had ever greeted them on their years on the island. A litter of green silk was being carried amidst loads of baggage. None of it was borne on animals, all of it was carried on the shoulders of sweaty human beings. The smell grew stronger. It was perfume most of all, that was the strongest and most intended scent, but their nostrils instantly dismissed that fake and floral smell. They could scent the woman inside, they knew her flesh was locked within that womb of luxury like a wolf knows where to find a terrified chicken. They stood astonished as the slaves hurried by. None of them could see inside the litter.

‘Someone has plundered something particularly tasty,’ said the Norman. ‘And he wants the comforts on the line.’

It had to belong to someone high ranking. No-one else would have had the right to such a fine plunder as all those pounds of silk. No-one else would have had the audacity to bring a woman to his tent at the front. No-one else would have had enough servants or manpower to keep a woman and move her with him when everyone else was marching on bloody feet. No-one else would have been able to expect to protect her amongst all those men. The soldiers watched the litter and its invisible prize hungrily as it descended towards the bay. The lightly ringing bells and the smell of woman skin bid them onwards.

The ambushers had fled. They had escaped with a mule which turned out to have a substantial sum of coins belonging to one of the nobles. It was supposed to help with the costs of their later expeditions. Two baggage men were dead and one of the raiders had died, hacked to pieces, and every shred of his clothing was stolen by angry and needy peasants. The forest had forced them into a thin extended line and nobles chastised the people for growing complacent after months of marching and presenting an easy target.

Speaking in Latin to the monks at the local monastery, and translating the words of local villagers into German and then into the languages of the Franks, they learned that the bandits were most likely Cumans. The Cumans were a tribe from the east who had been defeated by the Hungarians in a great battle only a few years ago. Some of them had since been subjugated and they now protected the Kingdom’s eastern frontier against their own people. They were pagans and it was said they prayed to the first animal they saw in the morning. Of the native Cuman it was said they lived in no house. Information seemed to indicate that some of the villagers had been feeding them and giving them shelter so as not to be ransacked themselves, and have their women and children dragged away with the Cumans back into their own lands. Small raiding parties were common but they spoke especially of a tribe who had taken refuge in mountains far to the south.

Fears of the Cumans had inspired stories in the peasants. They hated Christ who had fought with the Hungarians against them, they moved like ghosts, they were devils or more spirits than people. They named themselves after

animals. The animals themselves were sacred and had taboo names, but they used the names in the vernacular. They were named after crows and wild pigs and eagles. A great leader of theirs was said to be called 'the faun' or, in a closer translation, 'the calf' or 'the deer calf'. The Serjeant was not surprised by the rumours as all bandits were said to light campfires with the devil and all enemies were given terrible attributes. The nobles wanted their money back and the fact that the bandits had sought refuge with villagers from time to time meant that their movements could be tracked to an extent, and the locals could be bribed.

Many expected the bandits to vanish, as it was said they lived on horseback and could cover many miles in a day, so all were surprised when they attacked again. Neither the Serjeant nor Guibert and his brothers were close enough to see the attack as they walked through Hungarian plains where the grass was as high as a man's shoulder.

The money should have been enough that they would not have needed to attack again, but the Serjeant theorised that maybe they saw no value in money. All indications were that it was a small band and probably the same one that had attacked them before. The Cumans were lightly armed and outnumbered by an armed and armoured foe. Perhaps they wanted revenge for their fallen friend. Perhaps they saw them as a war band, coming to seek them, and they wanted to weaken them through sporadic attacks. Perhaps they liked the sport. Perhaps they hated the crucifix, borne on the shoulders and shields of many men, that had subjected and converted the Cumans' kin. Perhaps they did value silver, and after years of raiding poor villages, their easy victory had given them a taste for more wealth, and they saw even attacking a small army as a valid risk if there should be more silver locked within its clutches.

The Serjeant knew infidels. He had known Saracens and Jews and men who followed different ideals of God. He knew men that died for God. He could understand that because he had seen it. If these men believed in animals then that was the same to him as believing in nothing. What was an animal but a soulless beast? And their attack, when they came a third time, it seemed so illogical. None of the reasons men posited seemed enough to the Serjeant, who had given so many years of his life to military campaigns, and the hints of logic behind illogical orders and the chaos of military life. Could the pagans be simply crazed by their lack of belief? Were they possessed by devils, that they would do such

illogical things? The Serjeant willingly surrendered himself to orders and even took a certain glee in it, even if he felt the orders were mistaken. But what did these men submit to? The vicissitudes of the wind? The glint in the eyes of a wild beast? Two more of the raiders had died in their attacks. Always they were small in number and after each attack the Franks were better organised, a harder target. What did they want? Could they throw away lives like that? Perhaps they did not even believe in souls. Perhaps they were animals themselves, he wondered.

The Serjeant soon found himself unable to sleep. He wanted to ask the wind and the sky they worshipped, the wind and the sky from God, the God the Cumans could not understand, the wind and the sky under whose vagaries and implacable callousness they all laboured, why? He wanted to go to the body of the Cuman that they left hanging by its feet from a tree, blood draining from its nose and mouth, and ask, why? What is in your heart, if you have one? What is in your soul? Or are you a blank, filled with empty shadow? He wished they could have taken prisoners.

It was a dance with the raiders. They tracked the raiders and the raiders tracked them. Plans were suggested and changed after each attack. They were moving further from civilisation, further from the fat of the land, tracking them to their lair, hoping to draw them out. As the weeks passed, a grey-blue haze appeared on the horizon at sunset, it could be seen from horseback, and within days they were mountaintops, looming on the horizon, looking like the waves of the sea though they were locked in land from all sides.

Men were thirsty. They had strayed far from the safety of the river. They were on the very borders of the Hungarian kingdom. Mountains rose from thick gnarled roots and dominated the southern sky. The flat plain seemed merely a playground for the future wanderings of these giants of stone. The pilgrims were many miles from their planned route now but they comforted themselves with the thought that they might find a pass through the mountains and so make their overall journey shorter. The group camped on a low, jagged hill, looking out over a flat plain like a sea and then those walls of stone in the distance. A ruined fortress was on the hill and with it, an old well, its water still cool and pure. It was not deep enough, and men had to drink sparingly, but it was just enough for their men and their animals. Who was leading whom? Who was tricking who into hardship? Were they exposing the Cumans to the elements, hoping to trap them in

the open, away from the safety of the villages they extorted, or were the Cumans wearing them down, laughing at them, exhausting them? The walls of the wooden fortress lay in rotting heaps, alive with moss and insects. Perhaps the Cumans themselves had destroyed it, or some other wandering tribe.

The squires gathering wood had cried out first. The Serjeant ran to the foot of the hill, past the scattered trees, to where the open plain lay ahead. The horseman stood there, animal and rider looking inscrutably at the Serjeant. A squire lay on the ground, sobbing, an arrow in his ankle, bleeding profusely.

The Serjeant raised his crossbow. As he had spent the long seconds cocking it that morning, cranking back the taught animal tendon string with the mixed force of machine and his own tendons and muscles, he had been thinking of them, these riders. He had been musing on them, and the blank images of light, of their bodies, they had left him with, no language, no interior.

An arrow hissed by his head. He ducked, instinctively, but it was probably not the action that had saved him. Had the arrow been aimed well enough he probably would not have had time to react. The arrow lodged in a tree trunk, vibrating. The Serjeant glanced to his side. Another man was there, riding out from a thicket. The Serjeant put the crossbow to his cheek. After years of battle he knew how to tame the mixed feelings, the rush of strength, the desire to flee, the desire to do everything at once and deal with every target. He was not as young as he once had been and it was years since his last campaign but his instinct was honed more than his body ever was. It came back to him through the years. He followed the moving horseman with his eye and his weapon. The same instant he let the bolt free it was wedged in the upper thigh of the fleeing rider. The rider fell off his mount in agony. The way he fell, how firmly the bolt stayed despite his movements, his rolling over in pain, all told the Serjeant that the bolt had probably lodged in his thigh bone. He noted with satisfaction that the man would most likely be dead before morning. He was, however, mildly disappointed the bolt had not passed through the muscle and pinned him to his horse.

The other rider's wraithlike stillness in the dying sun became a surge of action. With the orange sky behind him he raised a bow, his shield now secured to a pack on his horse. The Serjeant scrambled to make a more difficult target of himself. Surely a man on a charging horse could not hope to fire with any degree of accuracy? The arrow travelled slowly enough that the Serjeant could watch it

arcing towards him but it was far too swift to give him time to react with any usefulness.

‘It’s zero, it’s nothing,’ said Yuszuf.

‘I see no use to it,’ said Johannes, sitting before the fire, eating frumenty. ‘I’m not going to go and buy zero loaves of bread. I either have bread or I don’t. No need to count how much I don’t have.’

‘No, you don’t understand. It is the nothing that is. It is a mystical number. It is nothing and everything. In its emptiness is infinity. Written, it is a perfect circle. Expressed, it quantifies absence. It makes not is. It cannot be divided or multiplied. It is perfectly complete in its absence. Sit with it and think a while, and you will see it too. I learnt of it in Cairo. Zero! It opens the mind.’

‘Why a number for nothing? What relation does nothing have to numbers? You don’t need a number. You just need to say nothing.’

Yuszuf shook his head. ‘Nothing and everything, they are the same. Zero is like a gateway. By contemplating nothingness one can come to a most beatific awareness of all things. One can get the tiniest glimpse into God’s plan.’

Yuszuf was holding his finger and thumb in the shape of a zero. Johannes shook his head, finishing his frumenty. He wiped down his bowl.

‘You better pay me! I got that pouch of sugar from a dead vizier’s kitchen,’ said Yuszuf, indicating the finished bowl that Johannes had just enjoyed.

‘I’ll pay you exactly zero. It cannot be divided and it cannot be multiplied. It is more than no money, it is a glimpse into the infinite,’ said Johannes, doing his best to imitate Yuszuf’s accent.

‘We all come from nothing. God made us,’ said Yuszuf, looking at the zero he was making with his fingers as if for the first time. ‘I know whose zero I would like to touch my lips to.’

The men around the fire laughed.

‘The marshal keeps her all to himself, locked up in his tent under guard, but this siege will soon be over and then who can say what will happen to his newly-plundered wife in the chaos,’ Yuszuf laughed, staring into the abyss between his fingers.

‘There’ll be wives for us all when we take this city,’ said a Norman.

Johannes smiled. None of them knew how well he knew that woman. He had especially asked for work in the Marshal's guard. The Marshal was a Seljuk Turk, a mercenary who had abandoned his people in search of wealth, pillage and glory. He had grabbed the woman from one of the citadels they had ransacked, and now he took her everywhere. It was said she had him bewitched.

He waited at the back of the tent. He could hear her humming within.

'It is clear,' she said in Arabic. He pushed up the cloth wall and slipped in. He was on silk cushions and in an incense scented room. Inside it was like a palace and not a tent. There was a shrine pointing in the direction of Mecca.

'Good evening,' he said politely.

'I am always surprised by how good your Arabic is.'

'Ten years I've been on this island. I started off fighting the Saracens, now I fight alongside many of them. It was natural to learn.'

'Ten years is a long time.'

'I have seen a lot of men buried.'

She was perhaps sixteen. She had green eyes and light brown skin, she may have been of mixed stock. He had heard a lot of erotic Arabic poetry since being on the island, and it seemed to him that they all had been speaking of her arrival. She was slender with dark black hair and newly pointing breasts. Her wet lips were the colour of the flesh of a fruit. She blinked at him with long lashes. They spoke in very low voices in case any of the guards could hear.

'Since we first spoke through the walls of the tent I have been glad I learned your tongue,' said Johannes. 'And since I first glimpsed you I knew I had to creep inside.'

'You must stop sneaking inside here. It is dangerous. Twice our luck has been tested and twice it has held. You and I... It is not our place. You are not supposed to be here. Allah the almighty ... He has chosen differently for me.'

'He just took you like you were a wild beast. I can't do without you,' said Johannes.

He looked at her with his cold metallic eyes. They would have been so alien to her. Whenever he looked at her he had a rush of mixed feelings. He wanted to steal her away and conquer her for himself. He wanted to own every part of her, to touch and kiss her soft palms and every finger, to find all the

indents on her perfect body. He wanted her to be truly his. He wanted her to bow to his will, he wanted to crush the infidel faith out of her until she accepted him, until she knew all that he was, until even her soul reached up into the light he provided. But also, he wanted to bow to her, to submit in complete surrender. That was what religion meant for her, he had learned: submission.

He wanted to let her alien tongue and her infidel god wash over him, with its smell of harsh distant deserts and its music and its devotion. It was a wicked and guilty temptation for him, these moments when he wanted to take her utterly and be taken utterly. The guilt of those flashes when he knew he could give everything to her raised his ire more strongly, made him want to reach right into that chest of hers, into the rising and falling ribcage and the intoxicating smell of her body, reach in and twist her soul until she saw only him, until he was her sun and moon and sky, until she lived on his word, was slave to his will, saw the world as he did. He wanted to be loved and worshipped, he risked losing himself in her and so he had to build a bulwark against that and make her transformed in his presence. If he had an empire he would give it up for her, staking his claim instead on the demesne of her forearm, the curve of her hip, the place where her eyebrow turned down towards her temple, all the wonderful little places, that would be his world, the place he would call his own. The seas would crash around her limbs and he would not notice. He would be immune from all weather in her embrace.

‘You must come with me: we must escape from here,’ Johannes said.

‘You know I cannot do that. If they found you, they would do terrible things to you before they killed you. If they found me, they would take out my eyes, my nose, my tongue... my lips...’

‘I would give up my eyes, my nose, my tongue and my lips if I could live forever with the memory of you once on them,’ he declared. He felt a panic and a despair that she hadn’t automatically said the same. He caught himself afterwards. There he was, surrendering to her. Submitting his entirety. Ready, on the brink, to submit even his soul.

‘Allow me... just... to...’ and he touched the tips of her fingers with his hands. He moved the whorls of his identity over hers, and then he took her hand in his. She always wore perfume but always he smelt the natural perfume of her body underneath it all, just as he had when she first went invisibly past in her

silken chrysalis. It was the first time he had ever touched her. She did not pull her hand away. He did not say anything, it was safer not to speak with the other guards close by. He simply stared into her eyes.

After perhaps half an hour of that pulsing touch, of that careful silence, sprawled on silk cushions, feet passing by outside, glancing at each other and glancing away, she said:

‘My husband will return from meeting with his master and your Count Robert soon. You should depart.’

He looked at her meaningfully with those eyes that would be so strange for her and he moved towards the side of the tent he had entered by. He was conscious of how outlandish the smells of his unwashed and unperfumed body must have been for her.

‘You should not return,’ she added. She did not turn to him; he could just see her silken black hair hanging down like a curtain. ‘Almighty Allah protect you.’

‘God will protect us both,’ he replied, with some anger, as he squirmed beneath the cloth wall of the tent and out into the warm night.

The arrow was loosed from the bow and came flying towards the Serjeant. It was a deadly inevitability as it sailed beneath his arm and passed through his cloak. Thinking he had been hit, and his cloak pushed back behind him, the Serjeant turned on his heel and lost his balance, catching himself on the grass. It was a painless fall. The cries of the squire were mixed with the agonised moans of the wounded rider. He could hear the shouts and whinnies of knights from the camp but he knew that they would not reach him in time. The decisive moments were now. The rider was charging close. He stopped his horse right beside the wounded pagan. His wrathful horse made anguished sounds.

The Serjeant knew he would not have time to load his crossbow again. He drew his hatchet and stood up. The horseman, on his tall beast, with his wild eyes and the deer antlers on his horse’s pack, was a few bare cubits away. On the horse he seemed to soar above the Serjeant.

If he could have articulated his thoughts, he would have wanted to scream, why? Why do you associate yourselves in name and spirit with the animals, and thereby crush your identities and your souls down into nothing and non-

existence? Why do you have no homes, as they say, why do you renounce all that is civilised and good in the world? Why do you cling to this fanatical emptiness? Why are you deaf to the world? Are you truly devils? Are you just darkness and emptiness? It would have been useless. There was no language through which they could share an understanding.

The rider had lifted his wounded companion onto his horse. The wounded man had given an elongated scream as the bolt protruding from his leg had caught against the horse's belly, and the horse started. The Serjeant, in desperation, threw his hatchet. It spun through the air and the handle hit the rider on the arm. He yelped as the weapon bounced off him. Turning his horse with his knees, he readied his bow and arrow again. The Serjeant ran towards him and the pagan began to charge. The Serjeant reached out with all his strength and grabbed the antler on the pack. The horse's legs were kicking beneath him, he lost his own foothold. The man he had wounded was moaning just beside his hand. The pagan struck his hand with a clatter of his bow. The world spun and the Serjeant found himself on the ground. His hand was stinging, the horse's hoof had struck his chest but only enough to wind him. The grass pressing against his neck, he looked on, to see, upside down, the pagan riding into the distance, towards the mountain, as fast as his terrified beast would allow him.

Beasts, you're beasts, the Serjeant wanted to spit, rolling over. He yelled out after the pagan, swearing oaths. Saracens he had seen, but godless pagans never. He had thought the bodies of the world were like jugs filled with the wine of faith, but what was this being? He knew they weren't devils. They were human beings and human beings could be understood. He was just missing the key to understanding them.

The Serjeant led a party into the mountains. I must know you, he thought. He had told them he would send a small team up between the peaks to try and get the money back in a quick raid, to test the strength of the enemy. They had seen a few blasted villages nearby whose people spoke of constant harassment from bandits in the heavily forested mountains. Transylvania, they called it, which hearkened back to the Latin he had always heard in church. No matter that they were now more than a hundred leagues from their intended course to Constantinople; they would get what had been lost, the Serjeant told them, and he would come to

understand this soulless enemy who acted with all the sense of a forest fire. It had come to be known that he had served under the great Roger of Sicily, and many of the nobles gave him respect. He had more power than a man of his birth might otherwise be expected to have because he had heard the living breath of one of their heroes. He had chosen Lambard, the eldest brother, and a few members of his *conrois* to accompany him. As soon as they were at the feet of the mountains they were swallowed by a thick cover of trees. The Serjeant told them to be careful of bears.

Looking up they could see that in some places crucifixes had been erected on the highest points of the peaks. God's love spread even here, in the heartlands pagans chose to hide their sinful activities. They walked between a narrow gorge of naked stone, a blue stream watering in a valley beside them. Every man was looking all about him with wide eyes, wary of sudden attack from any direction, from any hidden precipice or bush.

'A little further. We'll have them soon,' said the Serjeant.

An hour later he stopped them with a gesture. The young knights could not initially see anything, but with his hand the Serjeant traced a hint of black smoke rising from one of the lower summits.

He felt like the wolf who finally scents the rabbit's warren.

When the litter was being carried into Noto, Johannes pretended to drop an apple and he rushed forward to pick it up, bumping the men. He hastily whispered between the closed green curtains, 'Leave your window open tonight.'

Johannes had been elevated to a trusted position and he himself had scouted the best location for the Marshall's new billets. He had chosen a place where he knew he could infiltrate, and so, waiting for guards to pass in the shadows, he crept up a wall, onto a balcony and rushed into her room. When he smelled her he couldn't contain himself; he burst in without checking. Had she not been alone he would have been discovered. She had sent the servants out on errands and with excuses. She knew that if she didn't she might be found out as well. She had no choice but to oblige the man nearly twice her age who wanted to come crashing through her doorway as soon as it got dark.

He smiled at her and then walked about the room, saying nothing. He felt proud that he had scouted the building before her. He knew the room before she did. It was his. He saw red silk spread across the bed.

‘Is this yours?’ was the first thing he said.

She shook her head placidly. She had no expression. Hers was the look of one who knew that protests were useless.

‘A man’s cloak? I see. Your husband has been here already?’

His sense of ownership of the room was slipping away. Again, he had that frantic feeling that he must scramble to the top of the mountain, stop all the stones from falling, gather them up before he was buried under an avalanche.

‘Just briefly,’ she said.

He took the red silk cloak, wrapped it up and bundled it under his arm. He smiled, showing his tooth, his heart pounding.

‘I hope he does not notice it missing.’

‘There are guards in the corridors,’ she said quietly.

She had no freedom within or without.

He fell to his knees, ready to sob. ‘I’m sorry. I’m sorry for everything.’

He put his face on her knees. He wanted her to stroke his hair. He wanted her to be like a mother to him. She did nothing.

‘Do you forgive me?’ he said, and he started kissing the tips of her fingers when she finally did reach for his face and his cheeks, wet with tears. He began suckling them like a piglet sucks on its mother’s teats. She took her hand away.

‘You do what you must. You have lost control of yourself.’

He looked up at her, matching his eyes, suddenly angry. He grabbed her knees with his hands. He was a little rough, digging his fingertips in.

‘Lost control of myself?’ he parroted. ‘I don’t know what you mean. I have control of myself. You are the one who must walk covered. You are the one who cannot speak even in the temple of God. You are the one who must submit. I have total control of myself. What do you have?’

He was breathing hard, fighting back an emotion he didn’t understand. He didn’t know whether he wanted to cry, cough, strike her or collapse at her feet.

‘Is it the way of men, to want mastership over everything their eyes see? Only God has mastership over all things. Only God is in all things.’

‘God is in you,’ he said. ‘In every little bit of you. In every little toe...’

He took her bare feet in his hands. He looked at her small toes with the clean and dyed nails. Her feet were so much smaller than they should have been, so small in his rough hands weathered by ten years of war. He was struck into silence by the sight of them. He felt that all the world and all the mysteries of the universe were somehow there, waiting to be glimpsed in that image of her feet.

‘You will get yourself killed if you come back here again. If you harm me here, I swear I will cry out. I swear it.’

He grabbed her shoulders. He stood above her. He was over her with his steely eyes. Beneath his gaze were her eyes and her beauty and the crumpled foreign cloths of the bed. He wanted to pull her to him and merge their very beings. He could take all that was mysterious about her into himself, and he felt he could finally make her understand him. They would know each other on the level of the soul.

He wanted to kiss her face. He had never dared. He wanted to fall down onto the bed with her. He wanted to fold her body close to his. He had only ever touched her hands and her feet and now her shoulders. The touch was somehow too much, and she had that accusing look in her face. This wasn’t what he wanted. He wanted her to look up at him with love and admiration, for him to be her king. This wasn’t what he wanted at all.

When he let her go she appeared small and defeated. She put her hands on her lap as if no-one else was in the room. She was at an age that was a cusp between woman and girl, and for a moment she was a small and lonely child. He could not comprehend the world she had known, passed from one master to the next, treated as the spoils of war. How did she submit to them? he wondered. Did she follow their ideas because of her parents, her nation, or because those were in the soul of her masters? Were those men, one dead, the other now living, were those her real masters? Did they know her more than he ever could? But he would give everything for her, while they just wanted her as a prize. No, he thought. That was a dangerous road to lead his soul down. He could not give everything to her. Not everything.

He put his face in his hands, calming his expression, rubbing away the tears. He smiled at her. Surprised, she smiled back. He didn’t know where the look came from but suddenly it was as if the sun had illuminated them both. They were separated by the length of the room.

‘Please don’t speak too loudly,’ she said. ‘You know I have always liked to hear from you, you know I have always liked to speak with you and know your strange world, but what you want... It cannot be.’

‘What do you want?’ he asked.

She looked at him as if she didn’t understand. He wondered if he had said something to her in bad Arabic. Sometimes when he was excited he found himself speaking *Langue d’oil* to her and she had to stop him and make him repeat what he had said.

‘It cannot be,’ she said.

Her heart was there, trembling in her chest. It all seemed so clear to him now. It was or it wasn’t, they were the only options. Those were the two poles of the world. It was or it wasn’t. It all came into focus so clearly. He would have her or he wouldn’t.

‘I want you. I must have you,’ and he repeated the possessive, ‘you must be mine. I must be yours. We must be, I must have you.’

He paced back and forth. He heard a noise from the corridor and both of them stooped. He leant against the wall behind where the door would swing open. They stared at each other. A shadow moved by but no-one came. He knew their time was running out. He ran to her ear and whispered, ‘Tomorrow they will take you to the city baths. I know, because I am part of the security. They will vacate them so it will be just you in the women’s baths. But I will get inside beforehand. I will be waiting there for you.’

She began to speak. He stopped her, and continued. ‘No, you don’t understand. They are taking you there and you have no choice. I will be waiting there. When you see me, you can meet me, and love me, as I love you. As I have since I first smelled the scent of you. You can be with me as we are supposed to be. And if you don’t want this... I will be there and I may take you for myself anyway. If you resist your people will know then. I am sure you know how to...’

An anger was rising. He pictured her pleasing men. He contained his anger. He loved her, he did not want to hurt her, and in his mind his proposal was perfectly appropriate.

‘I will make you mine, don’t you see? We will be together.’

He was terrified of the next day. In the struggle between them, who would win? Would she wash over him or would he wash over her? Who would be destroyed? Or would they somehow flow together? Could it be possible?

‘I love you,’ and he almost added, ‘In a way that I would destroy my God for you,’ but he did not dare admit that to himself, and if he had said it to her she would have lost all respect for him.

He breathed the smell of her hair. Her perfume smelled of jasmine. He didn’t dare to kiss her cheek. He fled to the balcony and descended from the window. He had taken her husband’s silk cloak with him.

He had ordered them to stay together but he picked his way up the mountainside faster than them in his enthusiasm. They had to go around and around the mountain to ascend. The other men had all been on horseback and they had to dismount, walking their horses slowly across the shifting pebbles and through the pines. Wildflowers grew all around the base of the slopes. Soon they saw those wildflowers as dots of colour far beneath them. The Serjeant checked carefully before each major turn in the makeshift path but still he charged forward. His crossbow was cocked and ready. He thought of the arrow that the pagan had fired, the arrow that had barely missed him. He thought of all the times in his life that there had been near misses, that an inch either way could have meant him being maimed or killed. And yet he had always survived. His luck had held. It was the providence of God.

They came to a pair of boulders, covered in snaking roots from the pines above. A man could scramble over but a horse had no choice by this route.

‘I expect there is another way up for the horses,’ the Serjeant whispered to Lambard. ‘We will find it. But you wait here. I will sneak up a short distance, see if I can get a glimpse of them, see if I can spot how many there are.’

Lambard tried to protest but the Serjeant scabbled up the boulders like a cat. The Serjeant didn’t even glance back. Lambard looked up and he was gone. Lambard’s horse made a low noise beside him. He glanced back along the sunny path to see if any other men were approaching, but none of the others had made it this far. He had hurried, endangering his valuable horse, out of loyalty to the Serjeant. He felt that without the Serjeant’s help in the last few years he would

never have learned the tricks that made him as capable a warrior as he was. And it had been the Serjeant who always told him to reign himself in.

The Serjeant moved carefully between the pines. He was covered in sweat and breathing heavily from the exertion of going up the hill. The mountain flattened off a little up here, on its table-like top. He sniffed the air for hints of the smoke they had seen.

He saw the shadow of a crucifix that had been erected by some intrepid traveller against the blue sky. It was visible for miles around. And then he saw him. The pagan, perhaps the one they called the calf, sitting atop his horse, in that eternal image. In this most difficult of places he was astride his horse as if the terrains of the earth meant nothing to him, as if he really was a spirit. The Serjeant moved his crossbow to his eye. He took aim above the rider so that the bolt would strike the central mass of his body. He hesitated. Did he want to kill him? He wanted to speak to him, to ask him why. Perhaps they could find a translator.

An arrow thudded into the Serjeant's chest and he fell backwards, his crossbow firing with the reflex of his hand. The bolt sailed into the blue of the sky and must have landed somewhere amongst the blanket of wildflowers below.

The Serjeant moved a stunned and trembling hand to the shaft of the arrow. He saw the strange feathers on the end from an unknown bird. He saw the boughs and branches of the pines gently waving. He thought, so that's what it feels like, to be struck by an arrow. And yet it did not feel terrible. It was like someone had tapped him hard and in his shock he had fell. He plucked the arrow free and threw it away. It had struck the leather of his armour above his heart. It had not penetrated. He threw the arrow aside. Braving all the stray roots and pine branches the pagan was charging towards him on his horse. Struggling to his feet, the Serjeant glanced around for the unknown bowman. He could not see him. The man was approaching, screaming in an unholy voice. The Serjeant readied his hatchet. The horseman changed course and swung by him. The horse was so big, tongue hanging, eyes bulging, it was all he could do not to cower on the ground in fear. The pagan swung a mace. The Serjeant ducked. He swung out with his hatchet but it was too low.

The horse stepped away from him, then turned. Horse and rider looked at the Serjeant. And they came back.

The Serjeant waited. The terrain was hemming in his enemies. The horse could not charge this time, only canter. The Serjeant waited till the time was right and leapt forward, swinging his hatchet with all his might. The man on horseback caught it with his shield. The wood split right down the middle of the strange rune. The hatchet blade was locked beside the pagan's fingers. Another inch and it would have severed them. The pagan's shield was strapped to his arm. He yanked it away and the Serjeant's hatchet was pulled away with it.

The Serjeant stood, facing him and the horse, heart racing, wondering what to do next. He dimly saw shapes moving in the trees. Dozens of them.

The pagan bared his teeth and said something in his own language. He leapt down from his horse. The Serjeant ran forward, he knew that his only chance was to lock in close with him so he couldn't use his mace, so that men couldn't shoot at him, but the pagan was quicker. He swung the mace out wide. The Serjeant just managed to duck, but he had to step back. He almost tripped on a root. There was still distance between the two of them. One of the pagan's arms hung low, the splitting shield weighed down by the hatchet lodged in it. The terrified horse began to canter away. The pagan swung again. The weight of the shield and the axe seemed to slow him down, revealing his intentions, giving the Serjeant just enough time to dodge. He reached out for the arm as it passed but missed. He was stepping back again. The pagan swung upwards fiercely, wildly. He seemed to be losing his nerve. The Serjeant evaded easily but he had to step back again. He knew the ground was uneven and that somewhere behind him was probably a steep incline, but he didn't dare take a moment to look.

Without taking his eyes from his opponent the Serjeant searched his own person. He knew he had a knife somewhere for cutting ropes and slicing meat and doing all the day-to-day tasks that a man on the road was inclined to do. His eyes locked on the form of the Cuman, who was hissing as he breathed, as if terrified, his blue eyes wide, his blonde beard trembling with the breaths, and found his knife. He drew it out and held it in his hand before him.

He yelled, but inarticulately. He wasn't sure whether he should yell to warn the men down below or to ask for their help. He swung the knife out threateningly, but nowhere near his foe. He wanted him to back off. He yelled inarticulately again. Daring to glance down to check the tangle of roots, he stepped forward, brandishing the knife. The Cuman swung out at him with the

shield. The handle of the hatchet hit the Serjeant lightly across the arm, but the hatchet itself cracked loose and spun down into the dirt. The Serjeant glanced at it, only taking his eyes off his opponent for a moment. Should I reach for it? Should I not? He screamed at himself.

The pagan suddenly jumped back a few steps, shouting. It increased the distance between them. Should he grab the axe? Suddenly the Serjeant realised what the Cuman was doing. He was tempting him, trying to get him to grab the axe as the pagan cleared enough distance between them so that the bowmen could fire. The Serjeant screamed and charged forward. The pagan swung the mace again. The Serjeant's natural instinct was to put his hand and weapon up to defend the blow. The knife flew from his hand. Three of his fingers were shattered by the mace. The knife fell on the ground. He held his hand, screaming.

The pagan kept moving back but the Serjeant could hardly see through the agony. Must move forward! Must close the distance! He told himself. He felt an awful pain and looked down to see the incongruous sight of an arrow shaft sticking from his chest. It was just the end. The black and white feathers to aid in flight went right up to his leather armour. They were quickly becoming red with blood.

'It's enough,' the Serjeant tried to say, putting his hand out to stop them. 'It's enough.' He couldn't speak properly. His voice felt full of water. His throat had a rasp and gurgle. It hurt to breathe. The breeze moved gently through the spinning forest.

'It's enough, don't worry,' he told them, not able to look at any one in particular. 'I'm sorry. I'll go. It's enough.'

The pagan, wide eyed, ran forward with a scream of rage and swung his mace at the Serjeant's head.

As his jaw shattered he blacked out for a moment. He was aware that he was tumbling down a hill but he only saw moments of it. Then Lambard was above him. He wanted to say to Lambard, 'Lambard, it's enough, it's all right,' but the words wouldn't come. Everything was wet and pain. His whole body was pain and haze. He felt like he was in a great damp sack. He could just speak if he could struggle out.

'It's enough,' he wanted to say. He was crying but a part of him wanted to laugh. Lambard was pale and terrified above him.

He had a sudden urge to tell Lambard something, something important. Then he forgot it again! What was it? Ah yes. The Serjeant wasn't sure where he was. He saw trees... and a man above him. He had to tell him something important. It gurgled out of his throat, barely discernible.

'Green eyes,' he was trying to say. 'Jasmine.'

Lambard looked like he understood despite all the difficulty the Serjeant was having speaking.

Johannes watched as the waves rolled by beneath him. He knew he was leaving Sicily forever. The wind had filled the sails as if to tell him it was his only choice. Ten years he had spent there; his entire adult life. He felt as if it was all he knew. But he was certain in his heart that he would never see it again. For a time he could smell its shore still. Eventually, all sight of it was swallowed up by the sea.

He wasn't sure where he would turn now. Later he would hear that count Roger, a man he admired and who he had even once had a fantasy could be his friend had, after Noto, made it all the way to Malta and had freed hundreds of Christian prisoners there. Johannes would have liked to have been there. All the hundreds of prisoners had shouted to Roger the Christian prayer, '*Kyrie eleison...* Lord, have mercy.' Roger had torn off a part of his flag and given it to them, giving them a part of his identity.

He would feel a deep satisfaction inside himself knowing that.

For now he looked out at the churning blue sea in every direction, listening to calm creaking of the wooden deck and the flapping of the sails. About him, men moved and worked. The sea was a mysterious place, almost not meant for man, and yet here they were. This was God's world. He thought that all he had lost, and yet, in his despair, he breathed a sigh of simple satisfaction with the smell of the sea air.

Will I ever find you again? he wondered. Some day, on some far forgotten shore? He looked back but he could not hope to either see or smell the island. There was just water.

Lambard and the few men of his partial *conrois* led their beasts slowly back into camp. Even from far away all could see he bore a man across his horse.

‘There were hundreds of them,’ said Lambard. ‘All through the mountains. We were lucky we got away. I don’t even know how we did it...’

One of the other knights had two arrows in his hauberk. In his hurry he had not even noticed they were there.

His brothers looked at Lambard with concern, but they could not comprehend the broken thing he carried.

A shroud was found and the Serjeant was laid down in it. His grave was not too deep but all the boys said a prayer around it. They had to move on. They were many miles off course and they would have to go back west now to go around the mountains, the way they had originally planned to go before the bandits. There was no time to be sentimental.

The priest finished his short prayer and the boys walked away, trying not to cry, the ruined fortress above, the great flat plain in every direction, bound only by the mountains. The Serjeant had been their world, the guiding hand of their swords, and now he was gone. They had thought he was untouchable. Shattered, they didn’t know what to think now. The priest went to fetch the squire who was to fill in the grave.

## APPENDIX I: A Brief Definition of the First Crusade

As it has so much bearing on the thesis, I will describe the events of the First Crusade as briefly as possible.

The Crusade was a war of ideas.<sup>417</sup> Perhaps, emerging from the shadow of the Cold War, we are closer to understanding such ideological warfare than some the generations between the age of the crusades and our own time. The preaching of the First Crusade, which occurred in 1095 and led to events culminating in the taking of Jerusalem in 1099, had its roots in several possible social phenomena, including the Peace of God movement, in which the Church tried to limit secular violence but in all likelihood never had much success; papal rewards for battles against Muslims in Spain; and the Just War theories of fifth-century major Catholic theologian St Augustine. However, the First Crusade was, in key details, entirely new to Western thought. The pope declared that the difficulties of the struggle to liberate Jerusalem and combat against the infidel itself would be a penitential act, clearing the participant of sin. The Crusade itself was a kind of self-punishment.<sup>418</sup> It was an armed pilgrimage, and the First Crusaders referred to themselves as pilgrims or as Knights of Christ, a similar term ‘soldiers of Christ’ having been generally used metaphorically before this for priests.<sup>419</sup> Because it was a pilgrimage, the Church could not entirely turn away the elderly, the sick and women, all traditionally the sort of non-combatants who went on such pilgrimages.

The First Crusade came in the wake of several radical and dynamic reformist popes who hoped to standardise Catholic practice, stop simony and priestly marriage, and assert ecclesiastical control over European monarchs, particularly in the realm of the investiture of bishops. Earlier Pope Gregory VII had, with the Donation of Constantine as his proof, managed to briefly strip Emperor Henry IV of the Holy Roman Empire, now Germany, of his title, though Henry restored his position and promptly chased the pope from Rome, installing his own ‘anti-pope’. This began what became known as ‘the Investiture Contest’,

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<sup>417</sup> Riley-Smith, *What Were the Crusades?*, p. xvi.

<sup>418</sup> Riley-Smith, p. 7.

<sup>419</sup> Riley-Smith, *The First Crusade and the Idea of Crusading*, p. 16.

causing decades of strife and civil war that some historians argue knocked the Holy Roman Empire from primacy of place in Europe and meant that it would remain a mass of bickering principalities right up until nineteenth century German unification.<sup>420</sup> Indeed, when the First Crusade was preached, there were two popes, and the pope legitimised by the greater church, Urban II, only gained possession of the Lateran Palace in Rome from the antipope in 1094, six years after Urban was elected.<sup>421</sup> The Investiture Contest was important because the Pope made the revolutionary claim that his spiritual position enabled him to depose a thoroughly secular ruler.<sup>422</sup> The Church had crossed a new line. Rising from this background, the First Crusade would become a daring show of the Catholic Church's ability to flex its muscles and proof of its power and sway over the people of Europe, and it was perhaps partly calculated to produce this effect during such a time of difficulty and when the moral right and position of the Church was constantly called into question. The pope wore a crown as he went on his preaching tour of France.<sup>423</sup>

The call to crusade was probably brought about by Byzantine requests for military aid against the Turks who, since the disaster of the Battle of Manzikert in 1071, had rampaged across the Byzantine heartland of Anatolia and had a capital on the Asian side of what is now Turkey, within a few days' march of the Bosphorus and Constantinople. The Byzantines had no doubt been hoping for the kind of mercenary help they had received from the West for generations, and some armed, trained men they could easily control. What they got was quite different.

The call from Pope Urban asked armed pilgrims to aid the Byzantines but primarily to liberate Jerusalem and the Holy Sepulchre. Jerusalem had been in Muslim hands for four hundred and fifty years after a prior three hundred years of Christian rule (if one dates by the construction of the church of the Holy Sepulchre). Other cities taken by the crusaders in the event, such as Antioch, had

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<sup>420</sup> 'Gregory's attack on the institutional basis of Salian power came at a crucial time in the development of the empire; it precipitated a fifty-year struggle that, in the opinion of many German historians, decided the fate of Germany,' in Cantor, p. 265. Later Cantor describes the event as a 'cultural disaster', saying 'Culturally as well as politically the Germans fell behind during the investiture conflict and never quite caught up during the Middle Ages,' Cantor, p. 276.

<sup>421</sup> Asbridge, p. 14.

<sup>422</sup> Riley-Smith, *What Were the Crusades?*, p. 32.

<sup>423</sup> Riley-Smith, p. 13.

been part of the Orthodox Christian Byzantine Empire much more recently. In preaching the Crusade there may have been lurid tales of Muslim abuses of Christian holy sites and pilgrims—one hundred years earlier the Holy Sepulchre had been demolished by an increasingly mad ruler, Fatimid caliph Hakim, who thought himself a god and became a key figure in the Druze religious sect.<sup>424</sup> The church of the Sepulchre was later rebuilt with help from the Byzantine Empire.

The rising power of the Turks, the reason for Byzantine losses in Anatolia, had in fact caused chaos throughout the Muslim world. The Turks had been an Asiatic steppe people who swept into the Middle East and quickly adopted at least a token form of Islam, and by the First Crusade they held the Abbasid Caliph in Baghdad (conquered 1055) as their puppet, with a Turk taking the title of Sultan and ruling over a loose confederation of Turkish states. A series of deaths among key Turkish powerbrokers meant that the Middle East was broken up into feuding city states and rife with internecine warfare just before the First Crusade began. The Turks themselves represented Sunni Islam which was at odds with Shi'ite majority of the Syrian peasants, their neighbours the heretical Fatimids of Egypt, and the many local Christian sects.<sup>425</sup> As one historian put it, the crusaders charged 'through a gate which was already off its hinges'.<sup>426</sup>

Crusaders were instructed to wear a cross on their shoulders or chests to prove that they were bound to their vow, among many other specific instructions and prohibitions. The first to answer the call (and to defy the instructions on when to begin) were a group who became known later as peasants but which was probably comprised of disorganised knights and lower order footsoldiers, the so-called 'People's Crusade'. They were led by various groups but Peter the Hermit, a wandering ascetic and eccentric preacher, became the leader popular history remembers. Many crusaders in this early expedition and others committed what became known as 'The First Holocaust' in Europe, attacking Jews throughout the Holy Roman Empire, and extorting money, justifying their violence by the claim that they were attacking pagans closer to home. None of this violence was sanctioned by the Church or states.

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<sup>424</sup> Runciman, p. 35.

<sup>425</sup> Tyerman, *God's War: A New History of the Crusades*, p. 127.

<sup>426</sup> Riley-Smith, pp. 14-15.

The People's Crusade made a nuisance of itself at Constantinople and was shipped across the Bosphorus, where they were promptly destroyed by the Turks. Various other small movements ran into trouble and dispersed along the way but by May 1097 many groups of armed soldiers had congregated at Constantinople, led by various individual 'princes' but with no clear overall leader besides the papal legate, Adhemar le Puy. They spoke many different languages and had come from across Europe, with Northern France making the best showing; indeed, it had been at the heart of Champagne-born Pope Urban's preaching tour. Urban came from a family of knights and had earlier been an archdeacon at Rheims and prior of the famous French monastery of Cluny.<sup>427</sup>

The princes were obliged to swear an oath to Byzantine Emperor Alexius at Constantinople, who probably provided them with logistical support (barely mentioned by Western chroniclers) throughout most of the journey, and without which the Western pilgrims would likely not have been able to undertake the task at all. The Anatolian Turkish capital and former Byzantine city of Nicaea was besieged and captured with Byzantine help in June 1097. The crusaders made a journey full of suffering and agony across Anatolia, taking horrendous losses due to starvation, combat and disease, eventually losing most of their horses (one of the fundamental symbols of knighthood) and pack animals. They endured a lengthy siege at the city of Antioch when a misunderstanding led to the Byzantine army holding back reinforcements, causing lasting resentment against the Byzantine Greeks amongst the pilgrims. Relations with the Byzantines had been generally good early on but in light of later tensions most chroniclers were to cast the Greeks in a particularly bad light. The Byzantine chronicler and daughter of the emperor Anna Komnene returned the favour in her biography of her father, calling the crusaders *barbaroi*, or 'barbarians'.<sup>428</sup> The Byzantines also followed Orthodox instead of Latin Christianity. Culturally they saw war as a necessary evil, a last resort best avoided, and in all cases bad for the soul, which did not agree with the crusaders' cause.

In the throes of hardship and starvation religious fervour amongst the crusaders grew and visionaries began to be taken more seriously. Antioch finally

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<sup>427</sup> Jonathan Riley-Smith, *The First Crusaders 1095–1131*, p. 54.

<sup>428</sup> See for example the translated versions of Books X and XI in Anna Komnene, *The Alexiad*, trans. E. R. A. Sewter, ed. by Peter Frankopan (London: Penguin Books, 2009).

fell due to treachery among the guards on the walls, possibly because Christians of various sects still lived throughout the area (and so many Christians also suffered at the hands of the crusaders), but almost immediately after the taking of Antioch the crusaders were themselves besieged by a large army that had come to relieve the city.

One visionary uncovered what he claimed was a relic of the holy lance that had pierced the side of Christ, though such a relic already existed at Constantinople, and the find was immediately controversial. Some later accounts highlighted the lance's importance in light of subsequent successes. The visionary, Peter Bartholomew, reported several more encounters with saints, Jesus Christ and deceased crusaders and later died of the wounds received while walking through fire to prove to his detractors that he was telling the truth. The crusaders had no choice but to face their numerically superior foes in the field, despite their own sorry and half-starved condition. Religious ritual was used to raise morale. The Western pilgrims were victorious due to divisions within the Muslim army, most of whom quit the field without a fight, and poor generalship on behalf of the Muslim leader Kerbogha of Mosul, whose tactics allowed his army to be engaged piecemeal. Crusader eyewitness accounts described saintly, supernatural warriors taking to the field alongside them.

The ownership over Antioch (and whether an oath to return it to the Byzantine Emperor should be honoured) caused rifts among the crusader princes, none of whom had any real primacy over any others since the papal legate had died shortly after the siege, and the crusade stalled for several months. The army also needed time to restore its strength, though pilgrims began to desert in disgust at their mission having been abandoned. Difficult siege conditions at cities in the distant vicinity of Antioch saw outbreaks of cannibalism among the crusaders. Eventually, revolt amongst the lower ranks forced the princes' hands. A few sieges and battles followed but overall it was an incredibly hasty march down the Syrian coast. The crusaders had gained a reputation for merciless butchery which made their Muslim neighbours eager to come to terms. Jerusalem was not in the hands of the Turks; Fatimid Egyptians had taken the opportunity provided by the chaos of the crusaders' presence at Antioch to capture the Holy City for themselves. They had sent envoys to the crusaders, hoping to create an amicable understanding with forces they presumed to be a part of the Byzantine war effort.

The Byzantines were also using the chaos created by the crusaders to recapture the Anatolian coast. The crusaders attacked Jerusalem and butchered a large percentage of the population once it was taken in July 1099, though this infamous act may have been exaggerated somewhat over time, because, at least in the brutal world of medieval warfare, such treatment of a population who had resisted by siege was, while bloodthirsty, not altogether uncommon. Jews were burned in the chief synagogue to which they had fled. The crusaders were giving vent to years of trial, terror and loss. Eyewitness accounts describe them as being covered in blood while praying at the Holy Sepulchre. Those citizens who were promised amnesty by one crusader faction were massacred by another. After another final struggle against the Fatimid army at Ascalon, Jerusalem was now secure, and the Latins would hold a precarious place in the Levant for the next two hundred years. Their triumph meant they were justified in the eyes of God, and indeed, victory in this first endeavour meant that crusading was to become a regular event, though later efforts never again came close to the success of the First Crusade.<sup>429</sup> A later group of pilgrims, many of whom had stayed at home or fled shamefully from the crusade, left Europe two years after the capture of Jerusalem on what is known as 'The Crusade of 1101'. The contingent of pilgrims and soldiers was very large, but the Turks had become organised, and this army was all but destroyed in Anatolia.

A final note: the crusade was not a war of conversion, though there are stories of priests baptising dying Muslims on the field as an act of mercy. Forced conversion was forbidden. Crusading was not a missionary act. The idea of Just War allowed that the Holy Land, as former property of the Church, could be fought for but 'a war of conversion was illegitimate.'<sup>430</sup>

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<sup>429</sup> Famously, even legal matters turned on whether or not someone was favoured by God. He in the right was he who healed quickly from a trial by a fire or won a trial by combat.

<sup>430</sup> Riley-Smith, *What Were the Crusades?*, p. 11.

## APPENDIX II: Synopsis of ‘Kyrie Eleison’

‘Kyrie Eleison’, about pilgrims on the First Crusade of 1096-1099, is part historical epic and adventure story, part meta-fictional commentary on how crusading has been mythologised through various works of fiction down the ages, and part exploration of crusader motivation and medieval spirituality.

The story begins just after the crusaders have crossed the Bosphorus from European Constantinople and entered the Asian continent. They seek to capture Jerusalem from the Muslims. Participants of the armed pilgrimage would earn forgiveness for their sins.

In enemy territory for the first time, and having already walked the length of Europe, they face the Turks at the siege of Nicaea.

Esther is a washerwoman and lice-picker. She has heard many stories while tending the men of the camp and she repeats these to the aristocrat she serves. Esther’s husband and baby have died, and as a result she lost her place and her identity in medieval society. Because she is a woman, she is encouraged by the church to blame herself and her sins for her misfortune. She was named for the Biblical figure after her mother proudly embroidered a tapestry of Esther for the newly founded women’s abbey at Caen, and she unconsciously tries to live up to this character.

The aristocrat she serves is on crusade because the English king suggested he should go. Many years before, the aristocrat’s wife had been mutilated by some rebels. When he punished the perpetrators very harshly, he caused problems for the king. He hopes to make up for his mistakes, in diplomacy and in life, and to improve his standing with his betters. He worries about his thinning hair, which Esther tends, and his approaching old age, which he suspects is causing his men to lose respect for him.

A knight hopes to prove himself through adventure. He had been wounded by a boar as a child; his recovery considered a miracle. He leaves a longed-for girl behind and carries her braid as a talisman. Some undisclosed sin lurks in his past.

A peasant believes he is literally walking towards New Jerusalem, or heaven, where he will be re-united with his dead mother and sister. Paul is

illiterate, and his views are idiosyncratic and fatalistic. God has cursed all human beings but Paul does not resent the fact; he simply accepts it. He repeats Latin phrases from memory, because he believes them to be ‘words of power’, but it is made clear at the end of the book that he has no idea what these phrases mean, and his Latin murmurings, though sometimes ominous, have been repeated completely devoid of context.

In part one, the pilgrims journey across Asia Minor, or what is now modern Turkey. They risk starvation, thirst and death by the sword as they cross deserts and gruelling mountain ranges while being dogged by the enemy. Various flashbacks tell of characters’ lives in Europe and round out their personalities. As the pilgrims near Antioch, Esther’s stories begin to change. She stops repeating camp gossip and begins to tell her own fully-formed, cautionary tale about a Serjeant. The Orientalist themes of this story reflect one powerful thread of thought running through much of the West’s mythologising of the crusades. Part one ends after a battle at Iron Bridge and as the pilgrims first lay eyes on the walls of the great city of Antioch. They must take this city to open up the way to Jerusalem, but it seems unconquerable.

In part two, Esther begins a series of tales about six brothers. She is learning to become an historical novelist, but is also reflecting *The Thousand Nights and One Night*, which filtered down to the *Decameron*, which in turn influenced *The Canterbury Tales*. Each of her brother characters has a trait, such as ‘innocence’, ‘boldness’, ‘amorousness’, or ‘guilt’, and they all reflect a part of the knight’s personality. We know Esther has stolen some details from the knight’s life. As Esther kills off each of the brothers, it is as if she is killing off parts of the knight. The knight is like Everyman, the morality play character who cannot take Strength or Beauty or Friends with him to heaven, only his Good Deeds. The knight is being stripped to his core.

Thrilling and bold, with ‘goodies’ and ‘baddies’, Esther’s stories bring to mind various tropes from crusading fiction over the next nine hundred years, starting with the Chivalric Romances of Chrétien De Troyes and going through Sir Walter Scott and down to modern cinema. We see how the truth of the crusades has been obscured in the West by fiction, and how fiction may have

altered history. Each story-within-the-story is connected, and framed within the larger 'real' crusade. The stories reveal the First Crusade in all its complexity, cast light on medieval spirituality, and hint at and debunk various motives for engaging in holy war. Her brother characters have names that reflect the real and the fantastic Middle Ages.

The narrative voice in Esther's stories and the rest of the novels remains the same, as it does in the *Nights*, the *Decameron* and *The Canterbury Tales*. This signals that outside of Esther's 'fictions', we are still within fiction. The narrative voice of the trilogy only changes for Paul, the man who is so far from any form of civilised thought and interactive language that he exists in an ever-changing now, with no points of reference beyond his own mind and his own body, and who reminds us of that 'experiential' aspect of history that we can mimic, and which is so different to our standard, neatly formed storytelling ideals, but which we can never genuinely recapture.

Esther's stories all contrast with the 'real' crusade, which is presented with fewer extravagant events and in a more internalised and literary manner, to best evoke the guilt that weighed on the pilgrims and caused them undertake penance. Indeed, confession is an escape, and the characters, though they confess to priests, do not, via the structure of the novel, 'confess' their crimes to the reader for some time, and most dialogue on the level of the 'real' crusade is stilted. This enhances the sense of inner guilt and the burden of sin that the characters feel.

Meanwhile, the 'real' pilgrims suffer and starve outside Antioch during a long siege. The knight is brought to the very edge of his being. Trying to find a reason for why God is punishing them, the pilgrims label the women as 'sinners' and 'tempters' and expel them from the camp and into enemy territory. Esther is banished. The aristocrat she serves watches, but does nothing to help. Esther recalls the full story of her marriage to her husband in a touching vignette reminiscent of the *Song of Solomon*, but we also learn that Esther was once, when starving and not in her right mind, unfaithful. She blames herself. Meanwhile, fleeing Antioch, Esther is alone in a dangerous world. She disappears from the rest of part two.

The crusaders take Antioch by cunning, but immediately afterwards an enemy relief army arrives. The pilgrims are now themselves under siege, and

there is not enough food in the long-suffering city to sustain them. Worse, the Turks still hold the citadel in the walls atop one of Antioch's mountains. From there, Turks can pour down into the city. The knight must fight to survive in terrifying and exhausting conditions. He pictures himself as a character in *The Song of Roland*, holding off Turks on a mountain track into Antioch, the city where the term 'Christian' was coined, just as Charlemagne's troops defended against Muslims in a mountain pass protecting Europe. Most of the knight's friends die, and some because they too hoped to live up to the fictional martyr Roland.

The knight recalls the real reason he is on crusade—his first duty as a knight saw him burn, on orders, a church in which rebelling peasants had taken refuge. Later, other peasants tried to ambush him and his friends on the road, but the knight talked his way out of it by reminding the peasants of the guilt they would feel if they killed. In Antioch pilgrims are surrounded; weakened, they know their only option is to fight their way out of the city. On this cliff-hanger, part two ends.

Part three begins with Esther returning from Cyprus, where she had taken refuge, to a depopulated and damaged city. The crusaders have seized Antioch finally but suffered since then. They should now be rushing towards Jerusalem, their ultimate goal, but squabbles and internal politics have caused them to flounder.

Esther learns of the Battle of Antioch from the knight. She finds the aristocrat and tells him a tale. Now she is much harsher to the man who wronged her. Her stories begin to undermine him, exposing the hypocrisies of the aristocrat and those like him. Giving an accurate account of the recent battle to save the city, in which a Holy Lance was borne by princes and spirits supposedly fought alongside men, Esther makes the aristocrat uneasy. He wonders if Esther was watching over his shoulder all along.

Paul gets held up at the town of Ma'arra. Princely leaders say they are going to Jerusalem, but stop and try to capture Antioch's satellite towns as pawns in the game for overall ownership of Antioch. Paul is starving at the desolate location; perhaps like his fellow soldiers he is reduced to cannibalism. He is part of a rebellion by the poor, who tear down the walls of the Ma'arra. The common

people will not be held up. They want to go to Jerusalem. They want to be freed from their sins once and for all.

The pilgrims begin their final rush down the Mediterranean coast towards the Holy City. Some question whether the dead are martyrs. A visionary making mad claims dies in a trial by fire. Receiving advice from an uncertain priest after the Crusade's key spiritual advisers are dead, the knight worries his penance will be complete and his spiritual punishment remitted only if he stands within Jerusalem's walls. Otherwise, he, and all those souls relying on him to have their passages to the afterlife eased, will remain unworthy and will suffer in the world beyond.

Esther's tales and the themes of the book begin to converge. Esther gives disconcerting reminders that the heavenly Jerusalem can be reached by ascetics in cells back in Europe without all the killing and suffering. As crusaders desperately try to interpret God's word, and look for signs of God's approval everywhere, Esther's stories increasingly ring of *Ecclesiastes* and *Job*, the two books of the Bible that claim God is unknowable and that, from a mortal point of view, life is largely meaningless. *Job*'s leviathan dogs the characters in her stories and appears in some form before each brother dies. Esther's tales also suggest that there is a choice between the leviathan of *Job*, which is a plaything to God but an unstoppable force of death for humanity once unleashed, and the whale of *Jonah*, which brought a messenger to unbelievers who were then forgiven by God, regardless of how much the reluctant messenger was hoping the unbelievers would be punished.

The knight buries the braid of the girl he longs for at Bethlehem, finally recognising her as having a spirituality independent of the body he fetishizes. He hopes to bring her back some dirt from such a holy place, but must give it up along with most of his few remaining possessions for a dirty skin of water at the siege of Jerusalem.

At the final battle of Jerusalem everything reaches its climax. The knight is killed by a stray arrow just outside the walls. He is comforted in death by a horse that stands by silently and watches. This recalls the knight's truest experience of faith—watching a puppy stand guard over another puppy that had been bitten by a snake, and waiting as it expired. It also recalls scattered references to the Koran idea that animals are united with God, as well as echoing

Everyman's encounter with Death, which is personified as a horseman in the book of Revelation.

The city is taken and bloody soldiers pray and weep at the tomb of Christ. The aristocrat seeks out Esther. He wants to find a place for her, to offer her a spot in his household. She is gone, and she has left her last tale unfinished, reminding us that the crusades as represented here are all a story. The aristocrat learns that the king sent him on crusade to get him out of the way. The aristocrat's land has been stolen by the king to be given as a gift to appease the aristocrat's enemies, and the aristocrat will be returning to nothing. He plans to come home like Samson, pulling the pillars of the world down on his head to take as many enemies as he can with him. And Paul, in knightly garb, becomes a defender of Jerusalem. After serving for a year or two he leaves, only to join the next wave of crusaders in the doomed Crusade of 1101. He walks once again to a Jerusalem he knows is not New Jerusalem; with his present tense speech, and mad from thirst as he sees every featureless horizon as the same, Paul comes finally to represent the West's eternal obsession with crusading—enduring regardless of changes in time and space—always, like Paul, in the now. He is a peasant in knight's clothing, a Sancho Panza made Don Quixote, chasing those mirages created by stories.

In total, 'Kyrie Eleison' is 519,000 words, or approximately 1,500 pages, long. It would be presented as a trilogy if it were to appear in marketplace.

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