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Parzival: A Romance Of The Middle Ages (Vintage Classics)



Synopsis

Parzival, an Arthurian romance completed by Wolfram von Eschenbach in the first years of the thirteenth century, is one of the foremost works of German literature and a classic that can stand with the great masterpieces of the world. The most important aspects of human existence, worldly and spiritual, are presented in strikingly modern terms against the panorama of battles and tournaments and Parzival's long search for the Grail. The world of knighthood, of love and loyalty and human endeavor despite the cruelty and suffering of life, is constantly mingling with the world of the Grail, affirming the inherent unity between man's temporal condition and his quest for something beyond human existence.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

There seem to be currently available three complete English translations of Wolfram von Eschenbach's Middle High German "Parzival," an early, and slightly eccentric, version of the Grail Quest. Wolfram, both a knight and a (slightly eccentric) poet from thirteenth-century southern Germany, is the author of this long Arthurian romance, of a long Carolingian epic, "Willehalm," and some shorter works. His complaints about rival poets, and their replies to him, have turned out to be clues to relative dating of their works. On this and external evidence, Wolfram's poetic career has been dated between about 1195 and 1225; with the almost 25,000 lines of "Parzival" being composed between about 1200 and 1210.[Additional Note, March 2015; Jessie L. Weston's nineteenth-century verse translation, "Parzival: A Knightly Epic," is another alternative, although I

hesitate to recommend it. Nabu Press has issued it in paperback, as well as out-of-copyright German text editions and modern German translations. Many of these, and others, can be also be found at archive.org (the Library of Congress website), although the two volumes of Weston's translation must be searched for as "Parzival," and not under the translator's name. (Archive.org also makes available the 1891 fifth edition of Karl Lachmann's enduring edition of Wolfram's works; Edwards, and, I think, the other modern translators, mainly used the 1926 sixth edition.) There are also Project Gutenberg editions of a number of Weston's works, including "Parzival," some of them available in Kindle format, among other versions.

Note--I originally published this review on Jan 25, 2011, and somewhere along the way, saw fit to move the review from this edition, translated by Mustard and Passage, to an edition translated by A T Hatto. I am resubmitting it here, as this edition has no reviews, in the hope that it may be helpful to those considering different editions. This translation, by Mustard and Passage, IS the edition that I own, and I have NOT read the Hatto translation, other than some short passages for comparison. Wolfram von Eschenbach's early 13th century poem (rendered here from the Middle High German into modern English prose) chronicles the events of the title character's life from childhood to knighthood, and of his quest for and attainment of the Grail. Along with two chapters devoted to Parzival's father Gahmuret, and several throughout the middle of the story concerning Gawan, the book is a celebration of knighthood, most likely written from the point of view of one of its practitioners. More abstractly, it also approaches Jungian archetype territory and Joseph Campbell's ideas about Hero mythology; wrongs committed in ignorance block Parzival from obtaining the Grail when it is first revealed to him, and only after the quest's hardships have purged him of ignorance and sin is he rewarded with the earthly and spiritual sublimity of achieving his goal. The Grail of this version is interesting in and of itself: Wolfram writes before the object had become wholly associated with either the last supper or Christ's crucifixion, and long before Mallory and Tennyson (or Terry Gilliam) stamped it into the culture's consciousness as a holy cup.

Note: This review is from the 1961 Vintage paperback with a translation by Helen Mustard and Charles Passage. Wolfram von Eschenbach's early 13th century poem (rendered here from the Middle High German into modern English prose) chronicles the events of the title character's life from childhood to knighthood, and of his quest for and attainment of the Grail. Along with two chapters devoted to Parzival's father Gahmuret, and several throughout the middle of the story concerning Gawan, the book is a celebration of knighthood, most likely written from the point of view

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