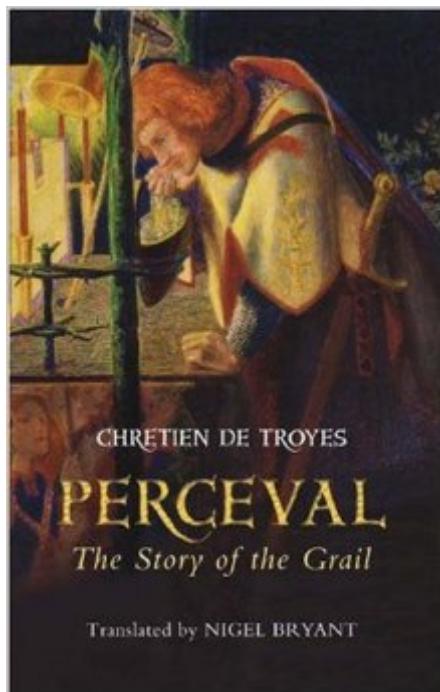


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Perceval (Arthurian Studies)



Synopsis

ChrÃ©tien de Troyes' *Perceval* is the most important single Arthurian romance. It contains the very first mention of the mysterious grail, later to become the Holy Grail and the focal point of the spiritual quest of the knights of Arthur's court. ChrÃ©tien left the poem unfinished, but the extraordinary and intriguing theme of the Grail was too good to leave, and other poets continued and eventually completed it. This is the only English translation to include selections from the three continuations and from the work of Gerbert de Montreuil, making the romance a coherent whole, and following through ChrÃ©tien's essential theme of the making of a knight, in both worldly and spiritual terms. It is thus the most complete account available in English of the essential Arthurian romance, the origin of the Grail legend.

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Customer Reviews

It's sad to think that Chretien de Troyes introduced his most enduring invention in a work he did not live to finish. We never learn what, precisely, the Grail is--though Chretien never actually names it "Holy"--or where it came from. Almost like the Fisher King or the Grail itself, the Grail's inventor gave us a symbol and disappeared. *Perceval* is the last of Chretien's five surviving romances. The Grail and the poem's naive central character proved enormously popular in medieval Europe, spawning several continuations of the unfinished story (all summarized at the end of this edition) and many imitators, from Wolfram von Eschenbach to Richard Wagner. The story is both easy and difficult to

summarize--easy because, being unfinished, it is short and fairly straightforward, and difficult because, for the same reasons, it has no ending and the reader has no way of knowing how the plot would finally interconnect and resolve. The title character begins the poem as a young man, living in the forest with his overprotective mother who, for fear of his life, has shielded him from knowledge of chivalry and even his own name. Nevertheless, Perceval shows knightly instinct and when he encounters a group of knights by chance, he determines to travel to King Arthur and become a knight. This he does in short order, though not after a series of Quixotic adventures caused by his literal interpretation of his mother's bits of parting advice. Upon reaching Arthur's court, the acerbic Sir Kay tells Perceval that Arthur has knighted him and that the red armor of a rebellious knight is his to take. Perceval misses the joke and kills the red knight, then sets off on another series of adventures, vowing not to return to court until he has avenged Sir Kay's slapping of a girl.

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