In the first years of the thirteenth century, the poet Walther von der Vogelweide composed a poem that articulated one of the most important issues for knights and members of courtly society: how to integrate social norms with Christian responsibilities. Speaking in the first person, the poet stages a scene in which he sits upon a stone and ponders the question of how one ought to live in the world:

Ich saz üf eime steine  
Dô dahte ich bein mit beine,  
Dar üf satzt ich mín ellenbogen;  
Ich hete in míne hant gesmogen  
Daz kinne und ein mín wange.  
Dô dâhte ich mír vil ange,  
Wie man zer welte solte leben.  
Deheinen rât kond ich gegeben,  
Wie man driu dinc erwurbe,  
Der keines niht verdurbe.  
Diu zwei sint êre und varnde guot,  
Daz dicke ein ander schaden tuot.  
Daz dritte ist gotes hulde,  
Der zweier übergulde.

(2 I, 1–14, L. 8, 4)¹

(I sat upon a stone and placed one leg over the other, and rested my elbow upon them. In my hand I nestled my chin and one of my cheeks. I then pondered with great concern how one ought to live in the world. I could find no answer to the problem of how one should maintain three things without spoiling any one of them. Two of them are honor and wealth, which often do harm to each other. The third is God’s favor, more valuable than the other two.)

Walther sits thinking about how to successfully harmonize the worldly aspects of a knight’s existence, honor and wealth, with the demands placed on one as a Christian seeking God’s favor and grace. As his poem suggests, many perceived this as a difficult dilemma, and indeed, seeking to integrate the demands of the courtly here and now with the Christian hereafter became a serious topic for many courtly poets.

Many of Walther’s literary contemporaries deal with questions of how to lead a well-integrated life as a knight. In medieval German Arthurian romance, one of the most famous examples is in Hartmann’s *Erec*. In this story, the hero falls into disfavor with his knightly peers as well as with God because he has lived a decidedly un-integrated life: he has succumbed to the pleasures of marriage and failed to perform his duties as a knight. He must then undertake a series of adventures in order to restore harmony and balance to his life, and to reintegrate himself into courtly society. Similarly, in his romance *Iwein*, Hartmann thematizes the question of integration once again. This time, Gawein chides the hero Iwein for having become too soft since marrying Laudine, and even compares him to Erec (vv. 2767–2798);2 Gawein then convinces Iwein to seek out further adventures (vv. 2899–2912). Laudine grants her husband a one-year leave (vv. 2913–2934), but Iwein becomes too engrossed in his knightly exploits, forgets about his deadline, and fails to return home to resume his responsibilities as a husband (vv. 3082–3087). Laudine’s maidservant Lunette then comes to King Arthur’s court, publicly excoriates Iwein for his neglect, and Iwein must seek the path back to his wife and to a more harmonious, integrated life (vv. 3111–3200).

Integration is also one of the most important themes in Wolfram’s *Parzival*, whose hero undergoes many arduous adventures before he ultimately reconciles knighthood with Christian ideals. At the conclusion of *Parzival*, Wolfram reminds his audience:

swes lebn sich só verendet,
daz got niht wirt gepfendet
der sêle durch des libes schulde,
und der doch der werlde hulde
behalten kan mit werdekeit,
daz ist ein nütziu arbeit.

(xvi, 827, 19–24)3

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