The Vulgar Cycle: An Epic Tapestry of Chivalry and Vulgarity

The Vulgar Cycle of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table by O. Thomas Gift

★★★★☆ 4.3 out of 5

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Screen Reader	: Supported
Enhanced typesetting	: Enabled
Word Wise	: Enabled
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The Vulgar Cycle, a sprawling collection of medieval French prose romances, offers a captivating and often controversial retelling of the legendary tale of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table. While the Arthurian legends have been told countless times, the Vulgar Cycle distinguishes itself with its unique blend of epic adventure, chivalric ideals, and an unabashed embrace of the vulgar and the grotesque.

The Origins and Composition of the Vulgar Cycle

The Vulgar Cycle, also known as the Lancelot-Grail Cycle, emerged in France during the 13th and 14th centuries. It is composed of a series of interconnected romances, each focusing on a different hero or event in the Arthurian mythos. These romances include the Estoire del Saint Graal, the Merlin, the Lancelot, the Queste del Saint Graal, and the Mort Artu.

Unlike the earlier Arthurian works in verse, such as Chrétien de Troyes' Yvain or Perceval, the Vulgar Cycle was written in prose, making it more accessible to a wider audience. This allowed the cycle to become extremely popular, and it had a significant influence on subsequent Arthurian literature.

The Epic Adventures of King Arthur and His Knights

The Vulgar Cycle is brimming with epic adventures, chronicling the legendary deeds of King Arthur and his knights as they seek to establish and defend their kingdom of Camelot. From the quest for the Holy Grail to the battles against invading forces, these knights embark on extraordinary journeys that test their courage, loyalty, and faith.

The cycle's heroes are not always paragons of virtue. Lancelot, one of the most prominent knights, is torn between his love for Guinevere and his duty to the king. His tragic affair, along with other instances of infidelity and betrayal, adds a complex and humanizing element to the story.

Chivalry and the Code of Honor

Despite the presence of vulgarity and immorality, the Vulgar Cycle also upholds the ideals of chivalry and the code of honor. The knights of the

Round Table are expected to behave with bravery, loyalty, and courtesy, even in the face of adversity.

The cycle explores the tensions between the chivalric ideals and the harsh realities of medieval life. The knights often struggle to live up to their lofty principles, and their failures serve as cautionary tales about the pitfalls of pride and arrogance.

The Vulgar and the Grotesque

One of the most striking features of the Vulgar Cycle is its embrace of the vulgar and the grotesque. These elements, often absent from more polished and refined Arthurian tales, add a raw and earthy dimension to the cycle.

The cycle contains scenes of violence, sexual encounters, and crude humor that would have been considered inappropriate in earlier Arthurian literature. By incorporating these elements, the Vulgar Cycle offers a more realistic and comprehensive portrayal of medieval life.

The Influence and Legacy of the Vulgar Cycle

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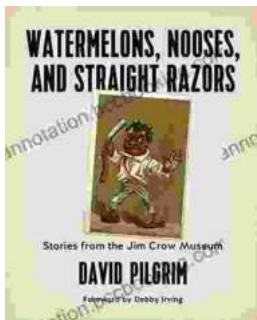|	
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