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vierten König* and Henry van Dyke's *The Story of  
the Other Wise Man***

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## The First Temptation of the Last Magus: a Comparison of Michel Tournier's 'Taor, prince de Mangalore', Edzard Schaper's *Die Legende vom vierten König* and Henry van Dyke's *The Story of the Other Wise Man*<sup>1</sup>

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### **Abstract:**

Given Tournier's own indication that the story of Taor in the last part of *Gaspard, Mechior & Balthazar* came to him from Edzard Schaper's *Die Legende vom vierten König* and Henry van Dyke's *The Story of the Other Wise Man*, this article compares the three texts in order to determine their respective theological perspectives. It is argued that Schaper's and van Dyke's respective tales constitute meditations on the Sheep and the Goats pericope from Matthew 24. Tournier's tale, on the other hand, involves a different theological focus: the First Temptation of Christ from Matthew 4:14 as this pericope relates to Deuteronomy 8:2-3. This shift in focus makes food central to the spiritual journey of Tournier's protagonist: the gluttonous Taor makes a symbolic transition from "living on bread alone" to living by "every word that comes out of the mouth of God" (the bread of the Eucharist). It is argued that because Taor begins his journey from the spiritually immature (from a Christian perspective) position of the Israelites in Exodus 16, his starting point is pre-Christological and, therefore, his journey is far greater than those of Schaper's and van Dyke's respective protagonists. The latter possess rudimentary Christological knowledge right from the start and therefore undergo less extensive spiritual metamorphosis than does Taor.

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<sup>1</sup> Published article here: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1600-0730.1997.tb00031.x/abstract>

Michel Tournier is an avid reader of the Bible (Milne 1993a: 7), and his preoccupation with biblical and theological questions dominates much of his fiction (M. Roberts 15-16). The Bible as hypotext is most prominent in Tournier's own literary apocrypha *Gaspard, Melchior & Balthazar* (1980). Here the author takes the very brief, but famous, pericope about the three Magi from Matthew 2 and transforms it into a long narrative which gives life to the hazy silhouettes of the enigmatic wise men from the East. However, in the last chapter, Tournier goes beyond the biblical hypotext when he introduces Taor, the fourth wise man who never makes it to the Nativity. According to Tournier himself, the inspiration for the last part of *Gaspard, Melchior & Balthazar* entitled "Taor, prince de Mangalore" came from Edzard Schaper's *Die Legende vom vierten König* (1961) and Henry van Dyke's *The Story of the Other Wise Man* (1896) (Lapouge 32). Although this intertextual connection has been mentioned by a few critics (e.g., cf. M. Roberts 114), to the best of my knowledge, no detailed comparison of Tournier's hypertext and his two sources has been undertaken. My goal is to examine the relationship between "Taor, prince de Mangalore" and the other two texts in the context of their respective theological points of reference. I intend to demonstrate that Tournier, having taken the basic story-line from his two predecessors, fundamentally altered the theology that informs Schaper's and van Dyke's respective stories.

Van Dyke was a preacher, and his tale is the most sermon-like of the three works in question. His fourth magus, called Artaban, is not a king but rather a Zoroastrian priest from Persia. This Zoroastrian connection has been recently explored in great detail by P. W. Roberts in his *Journey of the Magi* (cf. notably 57-60). Artaban and the other three magi determine that a messiah is about to come and resolve the eternal Zoroastrian conflict between the powers of darkness and light. They intend to follow a star that will lead them to this messiah, and Artaban sets out to join his three companions in order to begin the quest. He carries three precious stones meant as gifts for the messiah. But he is detained on the way by various people who need his help. Artaban never

manages to join the other three magi and does not reach Bethlehem in time. He keeps trying to catch up to the messiah but fails and eventually uses up all his gifts on those who are suffering.

Artaban regrets what he has done because he has exhausted the offerings intended for Jesus and because this charity has prevented him from reaching the messiah: "He had given away the last remnant of his tribute to the king. He had parted with the last hope of finding Him. The quest was over, and it had failed" (80). At the end he is even late for the crucifixion. The earthquake which follows Christ's death causes a roof tile to strike Artaban on the head. As he lies there bleeding (and dying), the voice of God quotes from the not-yet-written Gospel of Matthew (24:40): "Verily I say unto thee, inasmuch as thou hast done it unto one of these my brethren, thou hast done it unto me" (82). The point of this quotation is to make Artaban understand that his quest has not been a failure, and that, just like the other three Magi, he too reached Christ. This passage is taken from the Goats and the Sheep pericope in Matthew and constitutes the moral nucleus of van Dyke's message:

Come you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat ... I was a stranger and you invited me in. I needed clothes and you clothed me ... Then the righteous will answer him. "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you ... ?" The King will reply, "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it for me" (25: 34-40).

Thus, Artaban's path constitutes the dramatization of this pericope which culminates in enlightenment. The result is a straightforward allegory that one would expect to hear from the pulpit on Sunday morning.

Schaper's story was published as a separate work, but originally it had appeared as an embedded narrative in a novel about World War II entitled *Der vierte Konig*. In this novel the legend of the latecomer king is told by one of the

characters. Its function is to place the war carnage into a moral context that transcends the time and place of the events. As I. Sonderegger-Kummer argues, "die Legende wird in der Begegnung mit der heutigen Welt des Krieges und der Schrecken zum verpflichtenden Anruf an diese Welt, die dadurch ihre Deutung erfährt, obwohl die beiden Welten — äußerlich gesehen — einander ausschließen" (262). Schaper's fourth king is Russian: a point of connection between the war context (the Russian front is the setting of the novel) and the timeless biblical dimension provided by the legend.

Schaper's story-line is similar to van Dyke's, and it follows the same moral and ideological pattern. The Russian king becomes aware of the star seen by the other three kings. He leaves Russia alone with various gifts for Jesus and tries to follow the star. Like Artaban, he is late because various sufferers require his assistance, and his stock of gifts keeps dwindling. At one point he sees a little boy about to be made a galley slave for his father's debts. He offers himself instead of the boy and spends thirty years rowing in the Mediterranean. This echoes a similar, although less heroic, action by Artaban who gives up his last precious stone to free a woman from imminent slavery for her father's debts. When the Russian king is freed, he is barely alive. Like Artaban, the Russian king regrets his charity, views his quest as a failure but is enlightened at the end: a beggarwoman, who turns out to be one of those who benefited from his charity, helps him to understand that he has not failed at all. Thirty years earlier the king cared for her infant after she had given birth all alone and helpless. This was the first of the many similar charitable acts that detained the king and prevented him from reaching the nativity. But the beggarwoman tells him that what he did for her child has transformed her life entirely. The symbol of this transformation is the gift of one's heart. The beggarwoman says that, having nothing material to give him, she gave the king her heart and has never forgotten this:

Seitdem bin ich sehr glücklich in dem Gefühl, daß es ein sehr guter und barmherziger Mensch war, der mein Herz besitzt, und Tag für Tag genieße ich von diesem Glück und habe ihm dreißig Jahre lang mit Jubel im Herzen meine Treue hinzugeschenkt. So also ... Nichts geht verloren ... (80-81).

The last sentence acts as the king's epiphany, and his enlightenment is marked by a symbolic act: he takes up the beggarwoman's heart-giving concept and offers his heart to the dying Christ on Golgotha.

Like *The Story of the Other Wise Men*, *Die Legende vom vierten König* is a meditation on the Sheep and the Goats pericope. And in this respect, both tales are linked by a central episode that suggests very strongly the notion of helping Christ by helping others. As they attempt to reach the infant Jesus, both protagonists encounter a surrogate infant Jesus. In Artaban's case this connection is very obvious: when he reaches Bethlehem and discovers that he has missed the Holy Family, he witnesses the massacre of the innocents. A young mother begs Artaban to save her baby, and he ransoms the life of the child with one of the jewels intended for the divine infant. Schaper's Russian king accomplishes the same kind of symbolic homage by proxy when he tends to the needs of the beggarwoman's child (see above). This involves using some of the fine linen intended for the infant Jesus to diaper Christ's surrogate. In both cases, although neither protagonist realizes this at the time, they end up doing the very thing they intended, *i.e.*, their gifts do reach the Infant after all.

Finally, the two tales serve to dramatize another important part of Matthew's Gospel: Jesus's encounter with the rich young man in 19:16-24. The rich young man wants to become a disciple of Jesus and is willing to do everything except for parting with his wealth. This attachment to earthly riches disqualifies the young man from becoming Jesus's follower, which leads to the famous statement about the camel and the eye of the needle. Unlike the rich young man, Schaper's Russian king and van Dyke's Artaban end up giving away all they possess: the Russian king gives away even his very person when he

voluntarily becomes a galley slave. Thus, even though they arrive too late to experience Jesus's ministry on earth — unlike the rich young man — they do become followers of Christ in the end.

Tournier incorporated into "Taor, prince de Mangalore" the essential events from the stories of his two predecessors. We have a man from the East who sets out toward Bethlehem with a rich cargo. He is late for the Nativity, he loses all his wealth and finally offers to make a great sacrifice in order to rescue a person who is about to be enslaved for debts. At the end, he learns the meaning of his suffering and joins Christ in spite of his lateness. However, beyond this bare syntagmatic skeleton, *Taor, prince du Mangalore* differs in a fundamental way from *Die Legende vom vierten König* and *The Story of the Other Wise Man*. All three texts are about a spiritual transformation. But the transformation that takes place in Schaper's and van Dyke's tales is quantitative, whereas Tournier's tale is about a *qualitative* change: a strikingly dramatic spiritual metamorphosis. In other words, the Russian king and Artaban are not like the centurion at the foot of the cross who suddenly comes to believe in Christ (Matthew 15:39). They are not complete outsiders to the Judeo-Christian system. On the other hand, Taor, a prince from the Malabar Coast, is as foreign to this system as anyone can be. Therefore, as I will be arguing below, in theological terms Taor's experience is substantially different.

Admittedly, the Russian king and Artaban are not yet Christians in the full ideological sense of the term, which is only natural, given the time of the events. Their charitable actions are in line with the most fundamental Christian tenets, but they fail to grasp the spiritual meaning of what they do. Schaper's Russian king is even more imperfectly Christian than van Dyke's. When the former gives his own freedom away to liberate the debtor's son, it is made explicit that, however Christ-like the Russian king is in his self-sacrifice, his motivation falls short of the model. He admits to himself that he did not do it for the boy's welfare: "Er hatte sich längst klargernacht, dass es nicht

geschehen war, um das Los des Knaben zu lindern, sondern um der Frau, der Mutter, ein Zeichen jäh erwachten Liebe zu geben" (58-60). However, Schaper's and van Dyke's respective latecomers are intuitive Christians from the very beginning for two fundamental reasons: they know the meaning of the star and understand that Jesus is the Christ.

In the New Testament the issue of understanding Jesus's divine identity, known as Christology, is arguably the most important element. The main conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees has to do with this question: the traditional Jews fail to understand who Jesus is, e.g., Matthew 21:23-27. Christ's main goal and his main source of frustration is the attempt to make his disciples grasp his messianic role. Peter becomes the rock of the new church because he comes closer than any other disciple to understanding the identity of Jesus (Matthew 16:13-19). And so, in spite of all their imperfections and in spite of the change they undergo, the Russian king and Artaban start their quest infinitely farther ahead of Taor. Taor has no notion of messianic expectations and does not even know what a messiah is. His motivation for travelling toward Bethlehem is the desire to find the recipe for *rahat loukoum* or Turkish delight, since food is the central preoccupation of Taor's life: "Certes, l'expédition avait des perspectives pâtisseries, *et aucune autre*" (185, emphasis mine).

The fundamental way in which Tournier's story differs from those of his two predecessors can be illustrated by a consideration of a key element from all three tales: the relationship between the latecomer and the three punctual travellers. Van Dyke's Artaban is a Zoroastrian priest, just like the other three Magi, and so his Christology is identical to theirs. He explains his reasons for travelling in the following manner: "[The meaning of the mystical numbers] has been shown to me and my three companions among the Magi - Caspar, Melchior, and Balthazar. We have searched the ancient tablets of Chaldea and computed the time. It falls in this year" (25-26). Therefore, no ideological



distance seems to separate Artaban from the other three: they are on the same spiritual level. Schaper's Russian king, on the other hand, is by no means an equal of the other three kings. He encounters them by chance and is awed by the magnificence of their caravans, concentrating more on the material appearance than the spiritual substance of the three kings. He then behaves arrogantly, trying to compensate for his sole horse and lack of servants or tents by bragging about Russia's wealth and splendor. None of this, however, hides the distance between the Russian king and the other three:

Aber ihm war gar nicht so keck zumute, wie er tat, und mit jeder Meile, die sie noch ritten, hatte er immer mehr das Gefühl, die drei Herren glaubten ihm gar nicht, dass er zu dem gleichen Ziel unterwegs sei wie sie, oder sie hielten ihn für ganz und gar unwürdig, dieses neuen, größten Königs Vasall zu sein. Die wenige Zeit, die er noch mit ihnen zusammen war, führten die drei so gebildete Gespräche miteinander, dass er ihnen gar nicht zu folgen vermochte (20).

And yet, however hazy the vision of Schaper's protagonist may be, it is still Christological. No matter how much less he understands than his enlightened counterparts, his main premise is the same as theirs, which is evident from the Russian king's concerns that precede the encounter with the three other kings: "Was ihn allein zog, war sein eigenes Verlangen, dem größten Herrscher aller Zeiten und Zonen huldigen zu dürfen" (12).

The Russian king's inability to follow the discussion of the other three kings is echoed in Tournier's novel. During Taor's encounter with Gaspard, Melchior and Balthazar, the Indian prince is given extended and sophisticated explanations of the spiritual and intellectual transformation that each king has undergone through Christ. Taor's reaction is superficially similar to that of Schaper's Russian king: "Amis Balthazar, Melchior et Gaspard, dit Taor, je vous avoue très humblement que j'ai fort peu retenu de vos déclarations. L'art, la politique et l'amour, tels que vous entendez les pratiquer désormais, m'apparaissent comme des clefs sans serrures aussi bien que comme des serrures sans clefs" (221). However, Taor's lack of understanding is fundamentally different from

that of the Russian king. Taor's vision is a caricature of Christology, for he seeks not the greatest "Herrscher aller Zeiten" but a "Divin Confiseur" (182). And, since he does not understand the identity of this being, Taor's intention has nothing to do with paying homage to the "Divin Confiseur." This is evident from the fact that Taor carries no gifts: the abundant sweets that he takes along are referred to as "provisions" (185). The Russian king, on the other hand, is just like the other three in his intention to pay homage to Christ through gifts. What he takes along is "eine geziemende *Huldigungsgabe*" (9 10; emphasis mine).

Among the Russian king's gifts is honey which is paralleled by Taor's sweet "provisions." M. Roberts points out a link between the two works established by this honey: "An episode in *Die Legende vom vierten König*, in which the king and his horse are attacked by a swarm of bees on account of a jar of honey he is carrying (39-42), seems to have inspired a similar one in *Gaspard, Melchior et Balthazar*, in which an elephant is attacked and killed by wasps after becoming coated with sugar (223-24)" (114). However, it is important to stress that the sweet food carried by the Russian king is, in spiritual terms, fundamentally different from Taor's sweet cargo. All this indicates that, compared to the status of the Russian king and Artaban in connection to their respective punctual counterparts, Taor is separated by an ideological wall from Gaspard, Melchior and Balthazar at the moment of their encounter.

The difference between Taor's spiritual status and that of the other two latecomers can account for the difference between the *theological focus* of Tournier's tale and those of his two predecessors. As I argued earlier, Schaper's and van Dyke's stories take as their main point of theological reference the Sheep and the Goats pericope from Matthew. This is appropriate with respect to Artaban's and the Russian king's intuitive Christology because the Sheep and the Goats pericope assumes some basic Christological understanding on the part of the audience. This pericope appears at the very

end of Christ's ministry on earth: just before the betrayal by Judas. By this time all the Christological points have been established, and Jesus's followers, however imperfect their Christology is, are concentrating on the person of Jesus as the Christ. This ideological foundation makes it possible to proceed to the next step in the christianization of the disciples: channelling one's devotion to the messiah into a prosocial direction. This explains why Jesus insists that one can show devotion to Christ by devoting oneself to other human beings. Such a moral argument would not work before it is shown why one should be devoted to Christ in the first place, *i.e.*, it would not work before the acquisition of the basic Christological understanding that Schaper's and van Dyke's respective protagonists possess.

This is why the theological focus of "Taor, prince de Mangalore" is not the Sheep and the Goats pericope. Although Tournier did borrow Schaper's enslavement episode, we do not see in initial stages of Taor's quest the repeated acts of charity that are so prominent in *Die Legende vorn vierten König* and in *The Story of the Other Wise Man*. The extent to which the beginning of Taor's journey lags spiritually behind the respective quests of the Russian king and Artaban is illustrated by the "honey locusts" episode. Before Taor sets out in search of *rahat loukoum*, his scouts bring him a Middle Eastern delicacy: grasshoppers in honey. And they tell him that this food is eaten by prophets who wear clothes of camel hair (181-182). This allusion to John the Baptist (Matthew 3:4) is used to situate Taor within the Judeo-Christian theological system.

As J. P. Meier argues, John the Baptist is a carry-over figure from the Old Testament and is therefore fundamentally removed from Jesus (76). To be sure, John is the greatest man of the old age - the age of the Mosaic law. But, although he sees Jesus as the Christ, he does not understand Jesus's true nature. John views the messiah in earthly (political) terms: as an agent of God who will physically subjugate the enemies of Israel. This reflects traditional

Jewish apocalypticism where the expected savior would empower the Jews *on earth, i.e.,* in their relationships with their neighbors. Jesus's refusal to be "king of the Jews" and his promise of otherworldly glory would have been unsatisfactory to orthodox Jews and a key point of confrontation between Jewish Christian reformers and traditional followers of Judaism in the first century. This is why Jesus says the following about John: "I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he" (Matthew 11:11). In other words, in the new age - the age of the kingdom of heaven - those who understand and accept the real role of the Christ are greater than even the greatest figures of the old age. The same hierarchy is suggested in Mark by a comparison of John's and Jesus's respective followers. John's disciples hold on to Mosaic dietary laws, which is why they fast, while Jesus's disciples do not (2:18). However, these laws are valid only in the old age: Jesus's very person replaces these laws almost entirely in the new age: "How can the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them?" (Mark 2: 19). So the superior Christological understanding of Jesus's disciples places them above John's followers.

Along with John the Baptist's honey locusts given to Taor, the prince receives a basic outline of John's message: the upcoming end of the world, baptism as a means of moral cleansing and the coming of the messiah (182-183). In other words, Taor is presented with the background to Christianity and the essentials of Jewish apocalypticism. It is as if he were being given the chance to catch up with the most advanced form of Judaism (the Baptist's) which would make it possible to take the next step: toward new age Christology. If Taor were to do this, he would put himself in the same initial position as that of Schaper's and van Dyke's respective protagonists. But, at least on the conscious level, Taor misses the hint: "C'était trop de discours et de conjectures, il exigeait des preuves concrètes, des pièces à conviction, quelque chose enfin qui se voit, se touche, ou de préférence se mange" (182). This emphasizes symbolically the

enormous distance from which Taor begins his journey toward Christ: he is not even at the level of John the Baptist's pre-Christological understanding. Unable to follow John, Taor can follow only his stomach.

Thus, Tournier's protagonist is not concerned with spiritual matters and lives by food alone. It is this eating obsession that determines the theological focus of "Taor, prince de Mangalore." *Living by bread alone* is a metaphor that plays an important role in both the Old and New Testaments:

Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that *man does not live on bread alone* but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord (Deuteronomy 8:2-3; emphasis mine).

This is a reference to an episode from Exodus 16 where the Israelites, while wandering through the desert, rebel against the God that delivered them from Egypt. When they are hungry and demand food, God sends them manna from which they make bread. But that is all they need from God: seeing nothing beyond this food, the Jews live "on bread alone." They fail to live by "every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord," which is why they betray their faith and begin to worship idols. In Matthew's Gospel Jesus (the new Israel) succeeds where the old Israel failed:

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. After fasting for forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." Jesus answered, "It is written: *Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God*" (Matthew 4:1-4 ; emphasis mine)

This is the first of the three temptations experienced by Jesus in the desert, and it occupies a special place. As J. Dupont points out, the first temptation

acts as a launching mechanism for the entire temptation pericope since Jesus has been fasting and is naturally expected to be hungry (182). So the temptation by food in a way epitomizes the very *concept of temptation* in Matthew, illustrating a basic moral point: "Primary concerns for human beings must have a spiritual as well as a physical dimension" (Frye 7).

Because Taor "lives by bread alone," he starts, symbolically, from a point that is far behind the pious Judaism of John the Baptist, i.e., in the position of old Israel from *Exodus* 16. His path then takes him from this spiritual desert toward the desert of Christ's first temptation: from a point where the "bread alone" statement reflects spiritual failure (Deuteronomy 8:2-3) to a point where that same statement constitutes spiritual triumph (Matthew 4:4). In fact Taor's journey can be viewed in terms of pure syntax, i.e., he moves from living "on bread alone" to living "on every word that comes from the mouth of God" (from left to right):

Taor in Mangalore → Taor in Jerusalem

*Living on bread alone* → *Living on every word that comes from the mouth  
of God*

When Taor meets Rabbi Rizza, the latter offers him a meal which can be viewed as a hint of the "bread alone" concept and all its theological connotations. Rizza serves Taor literally *bread done*, which greatly astonishes the Indian gourmet (193). What is more, the bread served by Rizza is unleavened. So it is the kind of pita that the Jews would have made from God's manna in *Exodus* 16, i.e., the very bread that is evoked metaphorically in the "bread alone" statement from Deuteronomy 8:2-3. After this very symbolic meal, Rizza goes on to explain that there was a time when one did not have to choose between living "on bread alone" and "every word that comes from the mouth of God." Rizza describes prelapsarian food as something which nourished the body and the spirit simultaneously:

La bouche servait de temple vivant ... à la parole qui nourrit et à la nourriture qui enseigne, à la vérité qui se mange et se boit, et aux fruits qui fondent en idées, préceptes et évidences ... La chute de l'homme a cassé la vérité en deux morceaux: une parole vide, creuse, mensongère, sans valeur nutritive. Et une nourriture compacte, pesante, opaque et grasse qui obscurcit l'esprit et tourne en bajoues et en bedaines! (195)

But now that food for the body and food for the spirit have been separated, all humans are constantly faced with Christ's first temptation. However, since Christ's coming is meant to be our second chance to attain prelapsarian equilibrium, the savior offers something that symbolically reunites the two qualities of food so missed by Rizza. I am referring to the bread of the Eucharist: the last thing eaten by Taor at the end of his (syntactic) journey. The bread of the Eucharist does away with the opposition in Christ's "bread alone" statement.

Taor's metaphoric path is accompanied by the gradual disappearance of his food. Once he arrives in Bethlehem, Taor gives vast quantities of his provisions to the children of the town, symbolically parting with the "bread alone" aspect of his life. By the time he reaches the salt mines of Sodom, he has no more "bread" left. From this point on, deprived of food almost entirely, Taor begins to move into the second part of the "bread alone" statement (cf. J.F. Krell 98). When enslaved, he finds himself in the position of Christ from Matthew 4:14 and the Jews from Exodus 16 — the salt mines are a *desert* where physical hunger and thirst reign. This is an ideal place to be tempted into concentrating all of one's thoughts on "bread alone." But instead of following the example of old Israel, Taor becomes a truly spiritual being in this situation. Thus, by the time Demas conveys Christ's message to Taor, the latter fully understands and accepts "every word that comes out of the mouth of God." Taor still concentrates on food:

"Par la bouche du pauvre Demas, Jesus lui contait des histoires de banquet de noces, de pains multiplies, de pêches miraculeuses, de festins offerts à des pauvres" (267).

But now Taor perceives all these references to food in spiritual terms, i.e., he yearns to “ingest” Jesus:

“Jésus ne se contentait pas de nourrir les hommes, il se faisait immoler pour les nourrir de sa propre chair et de son propre sang” (267).

At this point Taor has completed his syntactic migration: he has gone all the way from the non-spiritual position of old Israel “living on bread alone,” past John the Baptist’s partial understanding of God’s word and all the way to consuming the divine Logos, i.e., the “word that comes out of the mouth of God.” After Taor is freed from the mines, it is Christ’s person rather than bread that sustains and nourishes the former glutton. This quintessentially Christological notion is illustrated by Taor’s movement toward Jerusalem:

“Taor se remit en route, mais au sortir du village il eut une faiblesse, *il avait cessé de se nourrir*. Pourtant au bout d’un moment, soulevé par une force mystérieuse, il repartit” (271; emphasis mine)<sup>2</sup>

Now Taor is kept alive quite literally by God’s word. In Schaper’s tale, the Russian king also feels extremely weak during his trip from the galley to Jerusalem: “Er stutzte, er schwankte — aber dann schritt er gebeugt und keuchend den Abhang hinauf. Wie seine Füße ihn noch trugen, wußte er nicht” (95). But in Tournier, this physical weakness acquires a new dimension. Because it is connected with eating, and because there is an explicit reference to a “force mystérieuse” that supports Taor, it all fits into the complex food theme at the heart of the theological focus in this work.

For all of the above-mentioned reasons the episode of Taor’s enlightenment is different theologically from the epiphany of van Dyke’s and Schaper’s respective heroes. As I have pointed out, Artaban and the Russian king are right from the beginning aware of basic Christology. So when God explains to Artaban the meaning of his quest and when the beggarwoman does the same



for the Russian king, the focus of this epiphany is not Christ's identity, which is a given, but the implications of Christ's moral teachings, i.e., the Sheep and the Goats pericope. Taor, on the other hand, has completed an enormous journey from a completely non-spiritual existence toward grasping and accepting Christ's identity. So, when Demas enlightens Taor on the significance of this experience, most of what Taor learns is of a specifically Christological nature. Thus, Demas begins by telling Taor about a "prédicateur qu'il avait entendu au bord du lac de Tibériade" (265) and then quotes a key Christological statement that sums up Taor's alimentary journey:

C'est moi qui suis le pain vivant descendu du ciel. Si vous ne mangez la chair du Fils de l'homme et ne buvez son sang, vous n'aurez pas la vie en vous. Celui qui mange ma chair et boit mon sang demeure en moi et moi en lui" (267).

Thus, while Artaban and the Russian king learn what one must do, Taor learns *whom* one must eat.

Because Tournier borrowed from Schaper the slavery episode, it makes sense to consider the effect of this enslavement on the two respective protagonists in light of the above discussion. At the moment of enslavement, the Russian king is ideologically far ahead of Taor. While Taor is still feeling his way toward the Christological meaning of his quest, Schaper's protagonist is shattered by the thought that now his chances of reaching Christ are even slimmer. As he rows in the galleys, the Russian king never forgets what brought him there in the first place (57). The two heroes seem to go through what J. Campbell refers to as the monomyth — a pattern of events in a hero's quest that recurs in many mythologies: "The standard path of the mythological adventure of the hero is a magnification of the formula represented in the rites of passage: *separation-initiation-return*: which might be named the nuclear unit of the monomyth" (30; Cf. L. Milne, 1993a: 3). Campbell argues that during the initiation stage, i.e., the slavery period in the case of Taor and the Russian king, the hero often

undergoes a symbolic death. Having died to the world, he then enters the return stage of the monomyth as a spiritually transformed human being (Campbell 15). Christ's passion is a classic example of the monomyth, and it appears to be enacted by the two protagonists in question.<sup>3</sup> They both look like corpses as a result of the privations that they experience. Taor is described as a "mannequin de peau et de tendons, squelette ambulante" (270), and the Russian king is equally corpse-like (60-61). In Schaper's writing, this kind of symbolic death, according to J. Jenson, fits into a recurring pattern of "Untergang und Verwandlung ... [whereby] destruction is a necessary prerequisite of metamorphosis and renewal" (324).

All this would imply that at the end of the slavery period, both heroes must reemerge from their respective underworlds as entirely changed individuals. However, here Taor's path fits into Campbell's monomyth scheme much more closely than does the experience of the Russian king. Schaper's protagonist comes out of the symbolic death in the galleys as a bitter, broken old man. He has not been transformed spiritually, regrets everything and looks forward to nothing (57-58). The Russian king's transformation takes place through the mediation of the old beggarwoman (see above) *after* his thirty years in the galleys, i.e., the actual slavery period does not change the hero. In fact, his predecessor Artaban is not enslaved but receives the same form of enlightenment (the Goats and the Sheep) at the end. Taor, on the other hand, is transformed by the actual ritual death in the salt mines. Even before the encounter with his enlightener Demas, Taor instinctively feels that a major change has occurred in his person. Thus, after learning the recipe for *rahat loukoum* from Cleophante, Taor understands "à quel point cette histoire de rahat loukoum lui paraissait lointaine à présent: la cosse infime et légère d'une petite graine qui avait bouleversé sa vie en y enfonçant des racines formidables, mais dont la floraison permettait de remplir le ciel" (258). So when Taor does encounter Demas, he is completely prepared to receive the Good News and, unlike Schaper's Russian king, Taor regrets nothing.

The above-cited passage about the role of *rahat loukoum* in Taor's life can be correlated to another food-related pericope in the New Testament – the Parable of the Mustard Seed: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches" (Matthew 13:31-32). Like the evolution of the mustard seed, the growth of Taor's "cosse infime et légère d'une petite graine" represents the development of faith. The stress on the tiny size of the seed underscores the enormity of the spiritual transformation that takes place. Given the alimentary basis of the Taor section, this transformation proceeds from one kind of food (*rahat loukoum*) to another (the bread of the Eucharist). And these two seemingly opposite poles are as closely linked as the seed is with the giant plant (cf. E Merllié 197). However, this metaphoric nature of food in Taor's life becomes apparent to him only retrospectively. Initially, as far as he is concerned, food is food and eating is eating. The path toward food as metaphor is as gradual as plant growth. As W. Cloonan puts it, "progressivement sa faim, sans qu'il en prenne vraiment conscience, assume une dimension métaphorique, éveillant en lui un désir d'assouvissement qui sera sans fin" (373).

The progression from surface reality toward deep structure, *ie.*, metaphor, is a general tendency in Tournier's writing, according to A. Purdy (56). But this process is particularly appropriate for an apocryphal text such as "Taor, prince de Mangalore" because metaphor is the basis of religious discourse (cf. Soskice 54). Thus, the movement toward metaphor in Taor's case can be viewed as a key mechanism of gradual desecularization. To quote M. Roberts,

The frivolous *rahat loukoum* is profane food par excellence (a sort of *degré zero du sacré*) and the consumption of it has no religious significance. The Eucharist, by contrast, is food consecrated by Christ himself. and Taor's consumption of it is a communion with him which culminates in his being carried up to heaven by two angels. Taor's is a journey ... from profane to sacred, an initiation to the sacred ( 119).

As Taor symbolically overcomes Christ's first temptation by moving from the first (secular) part of the "bread alone" statement to the second (sacred), he dramatizes the alimentary metaphor at the centre of Christ's response to the devil. The rhetorical force of presenting faith as eating can be best understood in the context of M. Black's discussion of metaphor. The key point of Black's argument is the "interaction view" (44) which amounts to the idea that *both* of the terms within a metaphoric relationship acquire new meanings (cf. 25-47). As D. E. Cooper argues, this implies that metaphor is more than just one figure of speech among others, since it actually increases our cognition through "a transfer of a system of implications" from one domain to another (18; also cf. Soskice 57-8 and Wall 53). Thus, in the "bread alone" statement and within Taor's quest, eating is faith but faith is also eating. In other words, faith is presented as something absolutely essential to life. It is not optional, just as eating is not optional. At the same time food is not just nourishment for the body in Christianity: it can acquire spiritual value through the bread of the Eucharist. Transubstantiation (the transformation of the Eucharist into the body and blood of Christ) acts as the sublime link that joins the two elements of the eating metaphor. This is why Taor does not have to give up his eating obsession: he merely has to change the way he eats.

S. Petit suggests that *Gaspard, Melchior & Balthazar* is an attempt to rehabilitate the flesh as a concept within a catholic Christianity that has otherwise viewed the bodily realm in highly negative terms (53). It could be argued that in Taor's case this idea does not work: he gradually loses all his food, his body melts in the salt mines until he looks like a skeleton, he stops seeking the *rahat loukoum* and finally embraces true spirituality. But the fact that eating never ceases to be Taor's central preoccupation, as is evident from his conversation with Demas and his last act on earth, suggests that Petit is right. The flesh is not rejected but rather reassessed.<sup>4</sup>

As D. Bevan points out, "there can be no doubt about the importance of food in Tournier's world" ( 108). This observation applies especially to "Taor, prince de Mangalore" where food constitutes the esthetic and theological/metaphysical focus of the work. Tournier's choice of the food metaphor is very appropriate because, as B. Mack argues, Christianity begins as a fellowship of the table, i.e., Jesus meets with his followers around meals. It is in this alimentary context that his ideas are communicated and "digested." This would account for the Last Supper and the notion of the Eucharist, as well as for the general importance of all the food metaphors in the New Testament (Mack 80-81). Tournier's food metaphor constitutes the key difference between his tale of the fourth king and those of his two hypotexts.

In this connection the relationship between Tournier's hypertext and Schaper's and van Dyke's respective tales is an example of *transposition* within G. Genette's system (237).<sup>5</sup> Genette lists various kinds of *transposition*, but the most important for a comparison of Tournier's text with those of his two predecessors is *transmotivation* (315). This is a process whereby the hypertext takes an action from the hypotext (e.g., the journey toward Bethlehem) but introduces an entirely different reason for this action. This is what Tournier did by making food Taor's central preoccupation and the reason for his journey toward Christ. The consequences of this transmotivation are considerable from a literary and theological perspective. Going beyond a consideration of one element of Christianity, as is the case with Schaper and van Dyke, Tournier ends up reconsidering Christianity as a whole: from Exodus to the Last Supper.

## NOTES

1. I'd like to thank Anthony Purdy and Larissa Tumanov for their helpful suggestions.
2. According to G. C. Morgan, Christ's triumph in the first temptation implies that God can make physical hunger actually strengthen the spirit and the individual (170- 171).
3. This is in line with a key premise of Christian thought, namely, that each follower must imitate the tribulation of Jesus (Thompson 189). This is not necessarily done through literal martyrdom, but in the case of Taor's and the Russian king's period of slavery, the connection with Christ's path is almost literal (cf. Milne 1993a : 114-116 and Merllié 197). Both characters act as sacrificial victims meant to save another, and they both endure suffering that is almost beyond any human scale.
4. L. Milne argues that there are some elements in Tournier's writing that counteract his tendency to rehabilitate the flesh within Christianity: "Of course it would be impossible to deny that there is an element of 'flesh-loving' in the Christianity exemplified in Tournier's work ... However, as we have discovered, Tournier is quite capable of allowing this hallowed respect for the physical, sexual body to focus on the Crucifixion ..." (1993b: 125-126). However, with respect to my argument, S. Petit's point still works as she intends.
5. M. Roberts argues that *Gaspard, Melchior & Balthazar* fits into Genette's notion of *amplification* — a process involving a combination of *expansion*, whereby elements of the hypotext are expanded or stretched out, and *extension*, whereby major foreign elements are added to what the hypotext has to offer (M. Roberts 106; Genette 309). However, as I argue above, "Taor, prince de Mangalore," given its origins, fits under a different category within Genette's system.

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