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Female Agency in the Age of Chivalry:

Charting a Tradition of Mutual Chivalry in Chrétien de Troyes

by

Brendan Anderson

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Introduction: “Opening the Door”

A KNYGHT ther was, and that a worthy man,
that fro the tyme that he first bigan
to riden out, he loved chivalrie,
trouthe and honour, fredom and curtesisie.

-Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*

Chivalry is a term that has become so commonplace we have forgotten what it means. A simple Google search of “chivalry” will yield hits providing helpful definitions from Wikipedia and Dictionary.com, information on a video game where players can hack each other to bloody pieces as knights in armor, and, as early as the fourth entry¹, a link entitled “Why Chivalry is Dead, From a Man’s Perspective.” This article by John Picciuto and published by Elite Daily in 2013 is in no way different from other pieces dominating the internet with their weighty claims and lack of evidence, for instance: linking the decline of chivalry with changing standards of communication which lead to people not taking the time to get to know each other. Apparently, “that’s why you see relationships and marriages failing at a 50 percent clip.” Picciuto mourns the loss of an old world order where men used to pay for dinner and drinks, pull out chairs and hold doors, all gestures he believes hopelessly lost to new technology. However, he also believes: “the real problem here is that women, for one reason or another, have become complacent and allowed men to get away with adhering to the bare minimum.” This is why men, according to him, no longer have to buy flowers or chocolates, so if, in his words: “I take you out to a nice dinner, it’s because I’m a nice guy, and I am looking forward to spending time with you

¹ At least, according to my search as of February 2nd, 2015.

somewhere other than the bedroom.” As a nice guy, he kindly concludes his essay: “It’s pretty obvious that women own the cards, and when they start acting like it, they’ll finally start getting dinner from places that don’t deliver.” The brilliance of this should not be understated: it takes a particular kind of mind to shift the weight of responsibility from the men who are not behaving “chivalrously” to the women who want more of their men but do nothing about it.

It may seem odd that I begin my senior thesis by extensively citing someone whose profile on Elite Daily boldly claims that his “Italian household taught John a lot about women” and that he is “the proud author of www.datingsagame.com,” but it is exactly this perception of chivalry which my thesis wants to engage with and discredit. Chivalry is not about offering flowers, holding doors, or even buying dinner. These actions historically contribute to men asserting dominance in a relationship, thus justly earning the criticism of many feminist theorists, and perpetuating popular understandings of chivalry that place power in the hands of one (traditionally male) person. However, there are older, medieval models of chivalry which will allow us to redefine our modern understanding, unearthing a code of behavior that does not depend on masculine dominance, but shares power between men and women.

However, it is not just John Picciuto I wish to address. Misunderstandings of chivalry are rampant throughout society and many of them begin with holding doors. In 1993, the *National Review* published an article by Linda Lichter explaining why chivalry perished with the *Titanic*, beginning with the following anecdote: “On April 15th, 1993, a healthy young man entering a suburban Washington library slammed the door on a woman laden with books” (58). An article on forbes.com entitled “Is Chivalry Sexist?” by Jenna Goudreau likewise begins: “Pop quiz. A professional man holds the door open for a female colleague. Is that sexist?” Most prominent,

however, in the question of sexism and holding doors is the feminist philosopher Marilyn Frye who wrote in *The Politics of Reality* in 1983:

The door-opening pretends to be a helpful service, but the helpfulness is false... The act is not determined by convenience or grace. Furthermore, these very numerous acts of unneeded or even noisome “help” occur in counterpoint to a pattern of men not being helpful in many practical ways in which women might welcome help. What *women* experience is a world in which gallant princes charming commonly make a fuss about being helpful and providing small services when help and services are of little or no use, but in which there are rarely ingenious and adroit princes at hand when substantial assistance is really wanted either in mundane affairs or in situations of threat, assault or terror... There is nothing but advice that women should stay indoors after dark, be chaperoned by a man, or when it comes down to it, “lie back and enjoy it” (5-6).

Although Frye never directly uses the word “chivalry” here, it is clearly implied, not only in the act of holding doors, but in the mention of “charming princes” and “exchange of services” where men provide small favors in return for sex. The mere fact that we can so readily recognize chivalry without the term itself appearing probably leads us to believe we know what it is and to accept Frye’s assertion (and that of many other feminists) that chivalry inherently, and in all circumstances, contributes to the perception of women as helpless objects without innate agency. After all, chivalry is a left-over from the Middle Ages, and we all know how backward those crazy knights, ladies, and serfs were way back during the Dark Ages between the Good Ol’ Days of Antiquity and the Progressive Interrogations of Enlightenment Philosophy into Modernity, right?

However, anyone who was ever required to read selections of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* (or who, strange though it may sound, decided to read it for fun!) should question the assertion that chivalry deprives women of power. The Wife of Bath tells of a knight who, as punishment for raping a woman, is sentenced by Guinevere to discover what women desire most. If after a year and a day he is unable to provide an answer that will satisfy all the women in Arthur's court, his life is forfeit. However, in traditional questing fashion, an old crone offers to give him the answer if he agrees to do the next thing she requires. He readily agrees and, when they return to the queen, he testifies that all women desire "sovereynete," a claim no one contradicts. At this point, the old woman eagerly speaks up and asks, before all those assembled, to marry the knight who desperately tries to escape his promise, but finds himself unable to do so. A wedding soon takes place without much ceremony and the newlyweds find themselves in bed, at which point the old woman cheerfully launches into a one hundred twenty line lecture in which she invites the knight to choose whether she shall be a true, humble wife (and ugly) or young and fair so that he will always fear being cuckolded. The knight, either because he learned his lesson or out of a desperate desire to end the conversation, says:

My lady and my love, and wyf so deere,
I put me in youre wise governance;
Cheseth youreself which may be moost plesance
And most honour to yow and me also (1230-1233).

As it should happen, in giving her sovereignty, he achieves the best of both worlds: winning a wife who is both true and beautiful for that is what *she* desires.

Already, Chaucer offers us ways to question Frye. If chivalry expects women should “lie back and enjoy it” why is a knight punished for rape, however fleetingly? Also, far from limiting her freedom, the knight grants her sovereignty, at the very least over this central choice that will determine the rest of their marriage. Chaucer was not the first to use the “Loathly Lady” trope. The Explanatory Notes to *The Canterbury Tales* mention “two brief Middle English romances, The Marriage of Sir Gawain and The Weddyng of Sir Gawen and Dame Ragnell” (399), as well as “The Tale of Florent” in John Gower’s *Confessio amantis* which Chaucer definitely knew, demonstrating that Chaucer, a brilliant poet with insight into the inner minds of people regardless of their class or gender, was not alone in advocating female agency during the Middle Ages².

But how much can we make of this? Clearly, “The Wife of Bath’s Tale” means we cannot continue to blindly believe that all medieval men placed women on pedestals, perceiving them more as delicate porcelain than real people as the common myth would have us imagine. Instead, we should interrogate the practices of courtesy, cited by Chaucer in describing his Knight, and wonder how those have carried through to today. To put the question another way, what practices might have been lost between our time and the long ago before even Chaucer? When we think in such a light, perhaps the stories we heard growing up about men who fought to defend women, wore their tokens into battle, and boldly declared their beloved superior to all others begin to take on a different nature as we realize that women were not entirely absent from combat: they played a very real role in the domain of men. Also worth considering, particularly

² At the very least, this is true of Chaucer’s literature. The historical record shows that Chaucer was cleared of responsibility for the “raptus” of Cecilia Champaigne in May of 1380, but the exact details of this case are missing. This may mean that Chaucer’s actions did not match the matter that he wrote, but it is impossible to know for certain. Regardless, it is clear the Wife of Bath speaks loudly on behalf of female agency and should be heard, even if her author did not fully acknowledge the voices of women himself.

in response to Frye, is the place of “damsels in distress” in the romances. Knights do not extend “small services” when help is of little use or unwanted: they help people, not just women, who are in dire need of assistance or rescue. One thing is definite, however: no matter what tale you read, you will never find a prominent mention of a knight holding a door for a woman.

This project will touch upon various medieval narratives centered around Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. These include *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the *Mabinogion*, Malory’s *Le Morte d’Arthur*, Marie de France’s *Lanval*, and *The Canterbury Tales*. However, the romances of Chrétien de Troyes hold special prominence as each of the five stories grapple with questions of chivalry that go right to the heart of the actions expected of knights and women. In his work, the voices of women ring just as loud and clear as those of the men from battlefield to bedroom and in the solace of their own minds and hearts. Chrétien systematically questions chivalry, examining how men and women act within the demands placed on them in various relationships: as strangers, friends, and lovers, both in and out of marriage. It is through a close reading of these romances that we will learn chivalry was not always about subjugation, but encouraged men to consider female agency and work with women in a world dominated by the patriarchy.

I will never attempt to argue that medieval women were not oppressed: they clearly were. The few women writers we know from the time, like Marie de France and Christine de Pisan, are proof of the exception to the rule, but not its complete dissolution. Moreover, women in the romances function within constrained portions of society, all of them privileged (handmaidens and ladies-in-waiting are still noble), all of them confined to domestic affairs and forbidden to engage in fighting. *Le Roman de Silence* by Heldris de Cornuälle from the late thirteenth-

century does tell of a female knight, but since her parents raised her from infancy to be a boy so that she would receive her proper inheritance, even she is confused about her gender. These are facts that make it impossible to argue the romances offer insights into an all-around enlightened society. However, in the work of Chrétien de Troyes and certain others, especially Chaucer, we may see chivalry not as a tool of society to subdue women, but, at its best, as a bridge between the sexes allowing men and women to work together as equals. It is this perspective which we can carry forward into the twenty-first century: not a definition which requires holding doors for the "gentler sex."

Chapter One: Mutual Chivalry and Female Agency

Before we try to understand Chrétien de Troyes, we must first undertake the task of finding out what chivalry is and comparing its demands to those of "courtly love." These are core concepts in most studies of Arthurian literature and are frequently considered to be in conflict; however, a careful study of their respective histories reveals they can, in fact, work together towards a mutual understanding of power. People have been writing accounts attempting to make sense of the customs surrounding love and chivalry since the Middle Ages (and talking about them for far longer), allowing us to trace certain qualities throughout history, particularly customs related to courtesy, from which we can glean a system of behaviors which empowered both men and women, creating a shared bond between them, a kind of "mutual chivalry."

However, in order for an argument of shared power to work, it must also be demonstrated that women in medieval literature had agency of their own and ability to direct their own actions. Again, we must look beyond Chrétien de Troyes for the moment to show that he was not unique in giving women voices, but could be seen as part of a larger tradition which was left behind by later writers like Sir Thomas Malory.

I. Mutual Chivalry: Defined

"Mutual chivalry" is the term I will use to describe the obligations certain medieval models of chivalry placed on men and women. This concept is heavily influenced by the writers of northern France from the twelfth century, (including Chrétien de Troyes, Marie de France, and Andreas Capellanus), and requires a brief history of chivalry as a concept in order to show how

and why the term changed, as well as offering answers why this conception of chivalry dwindled because of how it threatened the male-dominated model of society.

Maurice Keen begins his book (aptly entitled *Chivalry*) with the various images the word conjures to mind: “of the knight fully armed, perhaps with the crusaders’ red cross sewn upon his surcoat; of martial adventures in strange lands; of castles with tall towers and of the fair women who dwell in them” (1). However, given how readily we now associate chivalry with the propping open of portals from one room into another, I cannot help but wonder if Keen’s images no longer resonate in popular imagination, with the possible exception of women in towers. Yet in these images lie the origin and source of the word: an abstraction of the French *chevalier*, meaning “knight,” but ultimately derived from the Latin *caballerius*³, meaning “rider” or “horseman” according to the Oxford English Dictionary.

However, knowing the root of the word does not mean we are ready to define it. Keen cites some of the various usages as follows:

Sometimes, especially in early texts, it means no more than a body of heavily armed horsemen, a collective of *chevaliers*. Sometimes chivalry is spoken of as an order, as if knighthood ought to be compared to an order of religion: sometimes it is spoken of as an estate, a social class – the warrior whose martial function, according to medieval writers, was to defend the *patria* and the Church. Sometimes it is used to encapsulate a code of values apposite to this order or estate (2).

Clearly, even medieval literature was unsure what chivalry was, showing this is a concept which has changed and evolved over time. Therefore, chivalry could be almost anything, ranging from

³ This Latin root is also the source of the more recent English word “cavalry.”

a collective of chevaliers to holding doors. Uncertainty is unhelpful, however, and, despite the long history and multitude of meanings, it is possible to identify an attribute which links the ancient to the modern. Chivalry, as we have come to understand it, is more closely associated with the code of values Keen mentioned at the conclusion of his paragraph. This is why Chaucer's Knight in the *General Prologue* is said to be a man of chivalrie, trouthe, honour, fredom, and curteisie (44-45) where the qualities following chivalry are considered components of the code, rather than additions. Nowadays, we only associate chivalry with courtesy.

Popular imagination speaks of “*the Code of Chivalry*” as if it were at some point carved down in stone by some very progressive thinking knights. This is not actually true. Many, many people have written accounts of chivalry and most of them were in the Middle Ages as various intellectuals of the day (who might have been called “philosophers” if they lived in any other time) attempted to make sense of the practices they saw around them and explain their source or else to reform current practices to match an imagined ideal. Keen observes: “chivalry never had a defined rule, in the sense that the monastic orders or the Templars did” (71). If we therefore attempt to discuss the codes of honor binding men (and by extension women) to what are we referring?

Fortunately, Sidney Painter wrote a little book on chivalry which *The Arthurian Encyclopedia* still thinks one of the best analyzes of chivalry as of the 1980s. Painter's book traces the history and evolution of chivalry from the bloody battlefields of war-worshipping Germanic culture, to the peace-preaching Catholic Church, to the exchange of tokens and politics of the bedroom now known as "courtly love." His insights hint at the role of women in chivalry, but do not consider their behaviors "chivalrous," although I argue the rules which define the

actions of women within chivalry are just as important to consider as those binding the men. However, the three categories Painter creates in order to define the various (often conflicting) components of chivalry are essential to beginning a study of the subject: Feudal Chivalry, Religious Chivalry, and Courtly Love.

Religious Chivalry, as expressed by Painter, is less important to my thesis. This aspect draws similarities between priests and knights and how they serve God, saying they both carried swords: the spiritual and the temporal. “The former had been given to clerks to excommunicate the wicked; the latter had been given to knights so they might cut off the feet or hands of malefactors” (73). Religion is an important influence on knightly behavior, particularly when it comes to love, but Painter is largely concerned with how it affects men in combat, making these observations less useful to my project. His thoughts on Feudal Chivalry and Courtly Love, on the other hand, are relevant.

Feudal Chivalry details aspects of masculine honor on the battlefield, which is particularly useful for understanding the male side of mutual chivalry. The way knights fight and the codes they follow in Chrétien’s stories are essential to understanding how they represent women. “The ideal knight of feudal chivalry,” according to Painter, “was the lineal descendent of the heroes of Germanic legend and the ancestor of the modern gentleman” (28). The qualities of this perfect knight can be easily broken down still further to include: prowess, loyalty, generosity, courtesy, and prestige. Prowess, of course, was a knight’s skill in combat and of the foremost importance in chivalry. After all, “the knight who lacked prowess, who was not a competent warrior, was of little use to his lord, the church, or a lady” (29). Courtesy and prestige are of particular interest to our case. Courtesy, in this instance, is still limited to interactions

between men, mercy, for instance. Painter makes reference to Chrétien de Troyes, observing that “when the hero of a tale overthrows a villainous knight, he practically always spares his life and releases him on parole” (34). It is worth pointing out that the times the knight does not spare his opponent are due to outside motivations: sometimes because the knight’s death is requested by some other person (frequently a woman) or because the defeated knight has run out of chances after previous losses. Prestige becomes closely linked to courtesy as an “ethical rationalization which seemed to endow their endless turbulence and violence with an elevated motive” (34). The desire to win renown is very old, but with the rise of courtesy as a core value of chivalry, the ways a knight could gain glory changed. Where once knights fought for survival, by the twelfth century the nature of warfare had shifted. “As war became more and more a contest between feudal princes rather than between local lords, the knight found it more difficult to believe that he fought to protect his fief and its inhabitants” (35). Knights, therefore, decided to win renown by showing mercy and behaving courteously to other nobles.

Now to the aspect most central to this thesis: that which Painter calls "Courtly Love" in reference to the obligations between men and women. Interestingly, Painter attributes the development of this tradition to women themselves: “few ladies could write, but all could dispense good dinners, fine clothes, and rich gifts to the wandering minstrels who supplied the feudal caste with its literary entertainment” (95). His argument runs that women shaped the tales of courtly love by rewarding minstrels who played what they wanted to hear, or, in some cases, (like that of Marie de Champagne and Chrétien de Troyes), providing the material for the poem. The twelfth-century epic poems known as the *chansons de geste* (or “songs of heroic deeds”) which predated the romances were clearly written for men, mostly recounting war and intrigue.

Whenever a woman did enter the story, she was either a virtuous wife and mother, a Christian maiden eager to get in bed, or a Muslim princess eager to be converted, baptized, and then get in bed (103). Often, the wives who spoke out of turn in these stories were brutally beaten by their husbands until their noses bled. Clearly, the whole “not hitting women” aspect of chivalry had not yet been introduced.

There then emerge two types of "Courtly Love" poetry: that of the troubadour poets who advocated unreciprocated love; and the works of writers in northern France (such as Chrétien de Troyes) who advocated mutual, sexual love. Nowadays, it is mostly the troubadour poets' style of chivalry we think of: chaste women on pedestals loved from afar without any agency of their own. According to this model, a man loved a woman distantly (whether the ladies wished to be loved or not) and little responsibility was placed on him to behave like an acceptable lover. “While it is true that the knight was expected to serve his adored one, this service consisted merely of fidelity and continuous worship” (114). Although this served to elevate women's position in society somewhat by asserting a knight who loved a woman was a better fighter, the troubadours left a great deal to be desired according to modern standards.

Enter Andreas Capellanus, contemporary of Chrétien de Troyes, whose treatises in *De Amore* bring “us closer to the actual life of the time than does Chrétien” (Parry 3). Capellanus begins his book on love by offering a definition: “Love is a certain inborn suffering derived from the sight of and excessive meditation upon the beauty of the opposite sex, which causes each one to wish above all things the embraces of the other and by common desire to carry out all of love's precepts in the other's embrace” (28). His definition hinges upon common, mutual desire in which love cannot exist without consent from both parties, indeed: “nothing which a lover gets

from his beloved is pleasing unless she gives it of her own free will” (31). Love, then, inspires the knight to the point that “no man could do good deeds unless the persuasion of love impelled him” (40). Andreas makes love essential to chivalry, an idea with which Chrétien disagrees.

However, most interesting, and a theme which we shall return to in the fourth section relating to Chrétien de Troyes, is Andreas’ belief that: “if the parties concerned marry, love is violently put to flight, as is clearly shown by the teaching of certain lovers” (156). In fact, the first item on his “rules of love” is: “Marriage is no real excuse for not loving” (184). To Andreas, love is antithetical to the idea of marriage because women are not allowed choice in the matter. In this same section, he asserts that love “comes to an end also after it has been openly revealed and made known to men” (156), meaning love can only exist in secret. He goes so far to give women agency in love and choosing their lovers, he makes adultery into a virtue.

Unsurprisingly, men of the time recognized the danger of allowing this kind of courtly love to become reality. The extent to which it may have been practiced in actuality is of course hard to determine since both the act and the consequences would have been kept secret. However, Painter argues “the knights were willing to accept the desire to honor a lady as a plausible and honorable motive for fighting” (142), and this, in turn elevated woman from a child-bearer or object of lust to an inspirer of prowess (143). This explains how our troubadour inspired perception was handed down to the modern day.

Painter provides an excellent basis for understanding chivalry, but there is more that needs to be said. To begin with, “courtly love” is a misleading term which was first used by Gaston Paris in 1883 to describe Chrétien’s *Knight of the Cart*, but since then has come to represent both the distant love of the troubadours and the sexual love described by Andreas

Capellanus and Chrétien (“Courtly Love” 122). This is not only confusing, implying that there was a fixed code when there was not, but in some ways anachronistic as it is frequently used to describe customs which may have been intended ironically. Not only is this the case with Andreas, but many arguments have been leveled at *The Knight of the Cart* itself, making very convincing cases that Lancelot’s all-consuming love for Guinevere, which frequently drives him to act foolishly (like looking away from the man he is fighting to gaze on her), should not be considered the model of the perfect knight, but rather a critique of “courtly love.” Furthermore, knights and ladies do not only interact when they are in love. Chivalry calls on knights to serve and respect *all* women, not just their lovers. “Courtly love” does not address this idea at all.

For these reasons, I will not use the vague term “courtly love,” but rather a phrase more suitable to the kind of relationship I will describe in this project. Unfortunately, I cannot find pre-existing terminology to describe what I want to address, probably because it has frequently been consumed as part of the overly large mantle of “courtly love.” I shall therefore create my own term to define the ways in which men and women interact with one another according to the codes of honor of society and compassion which drive them to serve and support one another in their respective journeys, especially when the road becomes difficult. I call this concept: “mutual chivalry.”

II. Agency in Name

Female agency is a foundational aspect of feminism which presupposes women to have innate freedom of individual choice (Meyers) and it is primarily this definition which I shall use to defend claims that women demonstrate their own agency in medieval texts. However, it would be wrong to dismiss the 20th century feminist philosopher Judith Butler from a discussion

on female agency. In her 1990 book *Gender Trouble*, Butler defines “agency” as a variation on the repetition of signification through which an individual asserts her identity (359). This is her response to the prior idea that individuals claim identity by asserting themselves as an “I,” and only then are able to exercise individual agency (357). This idea works within the field she intends to question, namely to overturn the way discourses and significations construct gender and force women into particular roles, but if the goal is not to topple hierarchical conceptions of gender, we may interpret Butler a little more freely.

Some works of medieval literature do “parody” the world around them. Andreas and Chrétien are rife with irony while many of Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* are satires, arguably including “The Wife of Bath.” However, to what extent can we apply a postmodern critique of the modern world to the medieval? Certainly, there are ways we can apply the thinking of Butler, but to reduce our search for female agency to a search for parodies of gender roles in medieval romances seems overly limited, even flawed. To do this would imply that agency can only exist if the person subscribes to one way of being: to parody. Butler’s definition of agency dismisses those people who choose to affirm or claim their signification, their “I,” by learning who they are.

In speaking of the real world, Butler is absolutely right to say that “language is not an *exterior medium or instrument* into which I pour a self and from which I glean a reflection of that self” (358). Our names, however carefully chosen by our parents (or even ourselves in certain cases), do not represent who we *are*, that inexpressible quality of the self we always struggle to define. However, in the medieval tradition, names mean a great deal and *can* represent that inner self. They can be lost in times of disgrace and re-earned through mighty deeds, or, in some

cases, *earned*. The self does not exist until the subject has a name which is created through the performance of deeds. Butler herself says: “my argument is that there need not be a ‘doer behind the deed,’ but that the ‘doer’ is variably constructed in and through the deed” (357). This search for and claiming of the self is the aim of the Quest.

For Chrétien, names are not transient monikers. Two of the tales take their titles from the signifiers the heroes give themselves because they have fallen into such dishonor they no longer have the right to true names. *The Knight of the Cart* begins with an unnamed knight whose prior history is entirely unknown to us. He gains his title because he disgraces himself at the beginning of the tale by leaping into a cart in order to follow the captive Guinevere, a disgrace which is symbolic of the wrong he has already committed. The allegory is made clear as Chrétien describes how Reason and Love warred within him, until he decided to obey Love and jumped in (212). Later, he undergoes his first test by sleeping in a bed he is told is too grand for him and a fiery sword nearly impales him. One does not have to be Freud to understand the metaphor with each encounter. Finally, after many grueling quests, including crawling across the edge of a giant sword bridge, the knight's name is returned to him by Guinevere more than three thousand lines into the original poem and nearly fifty pages into William W. Kibler's translation. Before she identifies him, Lancelot is struggling in his duel with Meleagant, but after reclaiming his name (and maneuvering his opponent so he can fight and stare at Gwen), he easily overpowers his opponent.

In *The Knight of the Lion*, Yvain surrenders his name after forgetting to return to his wife. For a time, he wanders in madness and does not begin to recover his identity until he gains a loyal lion companion, from whom he gains his new title. Although Chrétien continues to use

Yvain's name in narrating the story, Yvain only refers to himself as "the knight of the lion" until he finally reveals his name during the final duel with Gawain, at which point both knights refuse to fight any further and each surrenders to the other. Even Erec attempts to hide his name when he encounters Arthur's court unexpectedly and it is only through Gawain's cleverness that he is found out (88). This is while Erec is attempting to prove to Enide that he can still fight, although I will later propose another reason why he is unable to claim his name at first.

However, it is the model given by Perceval that is at times most useful in considering when Chrétien chooses to reveal the names of his characters. For most of *The Story of the Grail*, Perceval, himself, is unaware of his name. It is not until after his failure with the Fisher King that he discovers his name, again well over three thousand lines into the original poem. He meets a maiden weeping over the body of her lover and she asks him the question no one yet had inquired: "what is your name, friend?" And the youth, who did not know his name, guessed and said he was called Perceval the Welshman. But although he did not know if that were true or not, he spoke the truth without knowing it" (425). This latter line clearly proves the power of true names in Chrétien, showing that this name is not an idly chosen moniker, but a true one that belongs to him and no one else. However, it is also important to note that Perceval, unlike Lancelot, Yvain, or Erec, did not lose his name through acting dishonorably or creating disgrace. He began a naïve youth who did not even know what a knight was, believing armor was like skin (384). Only after meeting the Fisher King and unintentionally sinning by not asking who drinks from the Grail because he was clinging to his instructor's words of wisdom, does he achieve a level of experience that allows him to claim his true name.

When considering the women in Chrétien's romances, names remain important. Most of the ladies and damsels we encounter do not have names. We frequently discover entire castles filled with hundreds of maidens and none of them are named. Often, they appear to speak in chorus. Therefore, when a woman is named, she is a remarkable individual who deserves greater attention. In *Cligés*, the names of the key women describe them. The name of Cligés' mother, Soredamors, translates to "gilded by love," while Cligés' wife is named Fenice because she, like a phoenix, rises from "death." Lunete in *The Knight of the Lion* is said to be the moon to Gawain's sun (325). There are also women who earn their names, much as Perceval did, as they grow from naïveté to experience. For this reason, we do not learn Enide's name until shortly before she marries, even though her name is in the title. In this respect, therefore, it would be dangerous to apply a postmodern critique which separates the value of claiming a name from knowledge of the true self. One vital way to find empowered women in Chrétien, is to look for women with names.

Before we look for examples of mutual chivalry, it would be useful to examine some instances where medieval women gain dominance over men, clearly demonstrating their own independent agency with only limited concessions to the desires of a partner. The Loathly Lady in "The Wife of Bath's Tale" already provides an excellent example since she clearly holds the power in that relationship. The knight's "decision" to give her sovereignty (at least in that conversation) merely confirms her power, rather than establishing it, but the idea that men must do as women desire is not unique to Chaucer.

Sir Bertilak's wife in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, for example, represents a tradition which may be familiar to anyone who was required to read this poem in a medieval

literature class. The central conflict in this story arises from Gawain's conundrum of either refusing to obey the desires of a woman or betraying the hospitality of his host. This takes place during the third part of the poem where, each of three mornings, the host's wife slips into bed with Gawain and asks him to kiss her while her husband is out hunting. Gawain agrees to kiss her, refuses to go further, and, at the end of each day, as they had agreed, Gawain and his host give each other what they won that day: the host gives him whatever animal he killed and Gawain gives the exact number of kisses he received.

On the surface, it appears Gawain does as the woman wishes, bending to her agency, but refusing to submit all the way, even though she offers. For example, Simon Armitage translates the lady's opening invitation: "You're free to have my all,/do with me what you will" (1237-38), a generous offer Gawain humbly refuses, insisting he is not so noble as she claims. However, he also promises to serve her faithfully (1246-47) and, when she demands a kiss, he replies: "I schal kysse at your comaundement" (1303). This represents a model of chivalry in which men must honor and obey *all* women.

It is not clear, however, that the woman's actions over these three days actually are her desire. At the end of the poem, Gawain's host reveals he sent his wife to the knight's bed: "Now know I wel thy cosses and thy costes als,/And the wowyng of my wyf; I wroght hit myselven" (2360-2371). Thus we know her reasons for being there were not her own: whether she actually desired Gawain or not is a mystery that is impossible to answer. This only leaves us with the idea that a knight will obey the desires of a woman under most circumstances and will sometimes find himself in peril as she actively tries to seduce him into straying. In the right context, this could be a sign of genuine female agency, but probably not in this case.

Fortunately, Chrétien provides a very similar instance in which the Lady Blancheflor convinces a still very naive and unnamed Perceval to work her will. He arrives at her besieged castle looking for shelter which she readily gives him. Then, in the middle of the night, distraught with fears for her safety, she slips into Perceval's room and weeps over him until he wakes. She then informs him of her plan to kill herself if her castle cannot be defended, saying: "Clamadeu, who hopes to have me, will not possess my body until it's devoid of life and soul for I keep in one of my jewellery boxes a knife of flawless steel that I intend to plunge into my body" (406). This, Chrétien tells us, is not exactly the truth because: "she had come to shed tears over his face for no other reason, in spite of what she pretended, than to inspire in him the desire to undertake the battle" (406). Perceval then invites her to share his bed and it is said: "he placed her gently and comfortably beneath the coverlet, and she let him kiss her, and I do not believe it displeased her" (407). The scene is not dissimilar from the lady who attempts to seduce Gawain, but, in this case, Blancheflor truly does act in her own interest. She even has ulterior motives and is not ruled by lust like the women of the *chansons de geste*.

Sure enough, her efforts work and Perceval agrees to fight for her. However, when he requests that she become his sweetheart, Blancheflor replies:

...don't declare that you would go forth to die for me on condition that I become your sweetheart, as that would be most unfortunate: you are not strong or old enough, I assure you, ever to hold your own in skirmish or battle against a knight so strong and tall, and so strengthened by combat, as the one awaiting you out there (407).

Despite her apparent misgivings, one can easily imagine how her doubts would drive Perceval to fight harder, and, in fact, this is her goal. "She pretended to discourage him by her words,

though in fact she wished him to fight; but it often happens that one hides one's true desires when one sees someone keen to enact them, in order to increase his desire to fulfill them. And thus she acted cleverly" (407).

Blancheflor manipulates Perceval from the beginning to the end of his time with her. Even when he wants to leave to see if his mother is alive, she uses all her wiles to make him stay, even commanding her people to beg him (417). Although he leaves, and thus encounters the Fisher King, Blancheflor provides an excellent foundation for strong women in the romances and shows how Chrétien attempts to balance questions of male dominance in battle with female agency.

Finally, Marie de France, a medieval female poet who wrote her lays (roughly) between 1150 and 1165 (Burgess and Busby 13), presents the example of a woman who holds most of the power in the relationship, but requires active involvement from her partner. *Lanval* is a very simple story, but its implications for us are huge. First of all, unlike most other stories about knights, the titular character is largely unloved. As we shall see in the works of Chrétien, the central knights of the stories are considered the best in the world and are frequently recognized as such by their brethren; but Lanval is envied by the other knights for "his valour, generosity, beauty and prowess" and because he is the son of a king about to earn his inheritance (73). King Arthur does not even remember he exists most of the time (73). Then, one day, he encounters a beautiful maiden clad in white ermine and Alexandrian purple. "Her side, though, was uncovered, as well as her face, neck and breast; she was whiter than a hawthorn blossom" (74). When she tells Lanval she has loved him for a long time and come in search of him, he eagerly agrees to love her and do anything she bids, which, as it turns out, is the condition that he never

tell anyone about her: “you would lose me forever if this love were to become known” (75). Lanval agrees and they lie together all the rest of the day.

Sometime later, Lanval and some knights go to visit the queen (this is Guinevere, although she is not directly named). Before long, she attempts to seduce Lanval, saying: “I grant you my love and you should be glad to have me” (76). When Lanval refuses, insisting he could not betray his king in such a way, she flies into a rage and accuses him of being gay: “I have been told often enough that you have no desire for women. You have well-trained young men and enjoy yourself with them” (76). Lanval, like many other men since then, rises to the bait and responds to the assault on his masculinity by confessing that he loves a woman whose lowliest servant is more beautiful than the queen, belatedly realizing he has betrayed his promise. Sure enough, when he returns to his rooms, he finds her gone, and is then arrested by knights sent by the queen who now accuses him of trying to seduce her. The court decides, since the queen is the only one pressing charges, that if the woman Lanval loves will appear and allow them to decide if Lanval spoke the truth, then all will be forgiven and he will not be put to death, and he, of course, despairs since he has broken his promise and knows she will not come to save him.

However, on the day the court is to make its decision, two beautiful maidens appear and ask Arthur for rooms in which to house their lady. Gawain eagerly asks Lanval if one of them is his love and Lanval says he does not know them (79). Soon, two even more beautiful maidens appear and this time Ywain asks Lanval if his beloved is among them: Lanval again says he does not recognize them. Finally, the maiden herself appears, the most beautiful woman in the whole world, and thereby Lanval is acquitted, hops on the back of her horse, and they ride off to Avalon.

Clearly, the power in this story lies with the maiden who seeks out Lanval and places on him the command never to speak of their love. However, Lanval also carries responsibilities. When he betrays the one thing she asks him to do, she proceeds to test his love by sending her servants ahead. If Lanval identified any of them as his love in order to vindicate himself for the court, then she would consider him unfaithful. However, he waits until she herself appears to identify his beloved, thus affirming his love, in a standard series of three found in many Arthurian tales. Not only does she show herself perfectly in control of herself and aware of her desires, demonstrating her capacity for agency, but the demands she places on her lover and the way she tests him shows that she, in some way, *needs* him to be more than a pretty face: he must have agency as well. They are both bound by rules in which their relationship must flourish or perish, hinting at mutual chivalry. However, Marie de France does not explore this in great detail. For a thorough examination of the ways people act in relationships according to chivalry, we must turn to Chrétien de Troyes.

Chapter Two: The Romances of Chrétien de Troyes

Chrétien de Troyes, widely considered the creator of Arthurian romances, was a masterful court poet who lived and wrote during the latter-half of the twelfth century for Marie de Champagne, daughter to Eleanor of Aquitaine. His stories are fully capable of standing on their own merit, but he is also of particular interest to scholars for being "the first to speak of Queen Guinevere's affair with Lancelot of the Lake, the first to mention Camelot, and the first to write of the adventures of the Grail" (Kibler 1). Of particular interest to this thesis, however, is the way in which Chrétien systematically examines chivalry. The conflict in each of his stories arises from the way the characters are challenged to balance personal honor and love of another, questioning whether chivalry is contradictory to love. Chrétien acknowledges that love can threaten chivalry, sometimes leading knights to forsake honor (like Lancelot and Erec); but more essential to chivalry is the idea of respecting, acknowledging, and working with women as lovers, friends, and acquaintances. There is a balance which must be struck and Chrétien offers solutions which involve men and women balancing their needs to work towards a common good.

The following sections will closely examine Chrétien's tales in order to reveal his thoughts on mutual chivalry and the ways it manifests in different relationships. We begin with Perceval in *The Story of the Grail* as the young knight learns what it means to be chivalrous, and that a key aspect is respecting women. From this framework of chivalrous behavior, we turn to chivalry in friendship. In *The Knight with the Lion* and *The Knight of the Cart*, Yvain and Lancelot develop close relationships with women they meet on the road and befriend. As friends, they exchange acts of kindness throughout the tales and help one another out of difficult situations. Chivalry in marriage picks up on this idea of helping one another as Erec and Enide

set out on an adventure to learn what it takes to be married and trust one another, discovering an idealized perspective of love by the time the journey ends. Finally, chivalry in adultery looks at the examples offered by *Cligés* and *The Knight of the Cart*, the way these stories focus on female agency, and the problems that emerge.

Before we begin, however, an episode from *The Knight of the Cart* deserves contemplation as it establishes the codes of behavior which bind men and women throughout the tales. It also serves as an example of how certain customs in Chrétien may at first horrify us until we think of them in a different light. The episode in question begins with a woman who, after tricking Lancelot into saving her from "rapists" (the men were actually guards she made attack her) and forcing him to share her bed (until she realized he did not intend to have sex with her), declares she will follow him on the road if he "dare[s] to escort her according to the customs and usages" (223). Chrétien then describes these customs in more detail. The fact that he feels the need to do so suggests that these were not widely known by his audience, therefore that they were not observed in reality, which is a relief. However, these customs fit within the rules and structure of a romance and place the essential choice in the hands of women.

The first of these customs requires "that if a knight encountered a damsel or girl alone – be she lady or maidservant – he would as soon cut his own throat as treat her dishonourably, if he prized his good name. And should he assault her, he would be for ever disgraced at every court" (223). Here, we clearly see established the part of the romance we are already familiar with: how a good knight treats a lady and the punishment exacted on a knight who fails to act properly. The rapist knight from Chaucer's "The Wife of Bath's Tale" is clearly punished for

breaking these customs while Gawain in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* proves his nobility by serving his host's lady as best he is able without bringing disgrace upon himself.

However, it is the second tenet of these customs that (at first) proves problematic for readers who want to believe in a system that defends women at all costs. It reads: "if she were escorted by another, and the knight chose to do battle with her defender and defeated him at arms, then he might do with her as he pleased without incurring dishonour or disgrace" (223). In other words, the victorious knight in a duel can have his way with the defeated knight's lady without dishonor. If this were a rule recognized in the real court of which Chrétien was a part, rape would become a way of life and eventually would cease to be a meaningful crime. However, this is clearly not the case as proven by the very existence of these customs which seek to preserve the virtue of women by guaranteeing guardians. In the romances, this second tenet furthers many of the poet's goals. First, it increases the risk represented by each encounter between knights since defeat will not only mean loss of honor and harm for our hero but far worse consequences for his lady. Second, it further ennobles our heroes who do not ravish the women of the knights they defeat. It is the same principle of mercy shown by all of Chrétien's heroes who prefer to spare the lives of the knights they defeat, when possible, instead of beheading them.

Even with these plot-driven motivations, we may still be shocked to find a code which appears to be a threat to the safety of women, even if it is purely fictional. The romances makes clear there are many evil knights in Arthur's world and many of them are strong enough to challenge seemingly the entire Round Table until the knight at the center of the current romance (who is therefore the greatest knight in all the world, or one of them) rides forth to challenge the

adversary and defeat him. If these evil men can overcome so many of the noble knights, how can any woman escape undamaged? How, indeed, can anyone write a defense of Arthur's court and claim that women have agency when the very customs that define interactions between men and women mean that a woman surrenders herself to those who mean her harm the instant she takes a protector?

The answer is surprisingly simple and is demonstrated in this passage in the order of consent. It is the woman who proposes this arrangement to Lancelot and asks if he will dare defend her. She even cites the customs and usages in her offer, demonstrating her understanding of them and showing she knows the risks if Lancelot is defeated. Lancelot, then, assures her: "no one will ever trouble you unless he has first defeated me" (224). Note, his reply answers her previous request to show that he dares do what *she wants*: at this point, she is not bound to go with him. She can still choose to remain behind. The deal is not sealed until she replies to Lancelot's promise: "I wish to accompany you" (224). The import of this order cannot be understated. In this fictional custom, it is the woman who chooses her champion. He can choose to accept or decline, but the first and final choice regarding this arrangement lies with her alone. In fact, the lady later chooses to leave Lancelot and ends his obligation to her. The knight she chooses is an outward manifestation of herself, an agent of her will, even as the sword, lance, and shield are the agents of the knight's determination. She can even leave whenever she chooses and she does!

The central conflict in *The Knight of the Cart* is due to breaking with this custom. Arthur hastily agreed to grant Kay anything he desired, which turned out to be taking Guinevere and going to answer the challenge of a knight who held many of Arthur's people captive. No one

thought this was a good idea (209), particularly since Kay in Chrétien's romances is always the most inferior of knights, representing everything Gawain is not. Kay boasts too much, mocks those who are able to win renown, and loses every fight he undertakes, including this joust with the knight who takes Guinevere and forces Lancelot and Gawain to pursue her. However, perhaps Kay's greatest failing is he does not honestly come by Guinevere's consent. He threatens to leave Arthur's service and cannot be persuaded to stay until both Arthur and Guinevere agree to grant his desire (209). He is not the knight Guinevere chooses and so he fails. Only her chosen knight is able to succeed on the quest. Even Gawain, the knight against whom all of Chrétien's other heroes match their strength and prove their might through fighting him to a stalemate, is not able to rescue Arthur's wife. Her consent is essential to both victory and defeat.

I. Chivalry Confused

The Story of the Grail is the earliest recorded version of the Grail Quest and is unfortunately unfinished, abruptly breaking off before Perceval discovers who drinks from the golden cup he beheld in the court of the Fisher King. Indeed, most of the tale we have tells of Gawain, Chrétien's favorite knight, whose exploits are told only briefly in the other romances, although he appears in all five. However, Perceval's quest to knighthood and the glimpses we have of his later journey toward God give significant insight into how Chrétien balances the demands of chivalry.

The unnamed youth, soon to be Sir Perceval, begins his journey of self-discovery after meeting knights for the first time, a chance meeting his mother spent most of her life trying to prevent. However, when her son announces he wants to leave home, she gives him the best

advice she knows. After lamenting that he will not know how to use the weapons the king will give him, she says:

Should you encounter, near or far, a lady in need of aid, or a maiden in distress, make yourself ready to assist them if they ask for your help, for it is the most honourable thing to do. He who fails to honour ladies finds his own honour dead inside him. Serve ladies and maidens and you will be honoured everywhere. And if you ask any for her love, be careful not to annoy her by doing anything to displease her. He who kisses a maiden gains much; but if she grants you a kiss, I forbid you to go any further, if you'll refrain for my sake (387-388).

For her, feats of martial strength are to be feared, so her only mention of arms is confined to concern that her son will not know how to defend himself. The fear is not surprising since she lost two sons to combat already. She therefore speaks of what she knows: how knights should honor women, taking great care to emphasize he should do as the woman wants, only giving help when she asks and only kissing her if she grants it. These instructions are very specifically stated and yet the unnamed-Perceval somehow manages to misconstrue them, as we shall shortly see. She concludes her advice (after telling him to ask the name of strangers “for by the name one knows the man” [388]) thus: “Above all I want to beg you to pray to our Lord in chapel and church to give you honour in this world and grant that your deeds may ensure that you come to a good end” (388).

This last instruction, at first, does not seem at all unusual for the time period, particularly for a mother giving her blessing to the son who is about to leave her; but when he asks what chapels and churches are, he is revealed to truly be as innocent as a newborn and, in many ways,

more unfamiliar with his world and time than the modern reader. She even has to explain some of the basic concepts of Christianity to him, as if this is his first time hearing of the Crucifixion (she does not mention the Resurrection at all) (388).

Perceval does not go far before he encounters a tent which he assumes to be a church because it is so beautiful, inside of which he finds a lone woman. He greets her as his mother told him to do and then insists he will kiss her, also as his mother told him to do, over her objections. Remember, this is *not* what his mother said at all: she was very clear to say he should only kiss women with consent and he should never do anything to displease them. Instead, this happens:

The boy had strong arms and embraced her clumsily because he knew no other way: he stretched her out beneath himself, but she resisted mightily and squirmed away as best she could. Yet her resistance was in vain, for the boy kissed her repeatedly, twenty times as the story says, regardless of whether she liked it or not (389-390).

Although Perceval's assault remains limited to kisses which, in other more consenting circumstances, could be considered a sign of his innocence "because he knew no other way," his final parting action makes the metaphorical rape clear. He takes the defenseless girl's ring, again claiming to do as his mother told him. She begs him not to take it, weeping and saying piteously: "Young man, don't carry away my ring, for I'll be ill-treated for it and sooner or later you'll lose your life" (390). In her language, one can easily see direct parallels to her maidenhead.

After Perceval leaves her, the story lingers with the distressed damsel until her lover returns and asks her why she is crying. He does not mind the loss of his ring, but when she says

the boy kissed her against her will, he flies into a rage, yelling: “No, you liked it and were pleased by it! You never tried to stop him” (391). In this way, Chrétien recognizes the injustices of victim shaming which were just as alive then as they (unfortunately) are now. He sentences her to walk behind him naked and on foot until he finds and beheads the boy who wronged him (391). When Perceval encounters this couple again, we learn that the punishment inflicted by this haughty knight on his lover is *not* according to chivalry, but first we must see what the unnamed youth learns between encounters.

Perceval’s second mentor in chivalry, after his mother, is a gentleman named Gornemont of Gohort⁴ who teaches him how to fight with lance and sword and replaces the clothes his mother made with fine linen worthy of a knight. Finally, he bestows this advice upon the youth:

Young man, remember that if you are ever compelled to go into combat with any knight, I want to beg one thing of you: if you gain the upper hand and he is no longer able to defend himself or hold out against you, you must grant him mercy rather than killing him outright. And be careful not to be too talkative or prone to gossip. Anyone who is too talkative soon discovers he has said something that brings him reproach; and the wise man says and declares: “He who talks too much commits a sin.” Therefore, young man, I warn you not to talk too much. And I beseech you, if you find a maiden or woman – be she damsel or lady – who is disconsolate in any way, to do right by consoling her if you know how to console her and are able to do so. And do not scorn another lesson I would teach you, for it must not be scorned: go gladly to church and pray to Him who made all things to have mercy on your soul and keep you a true Christian in this earthly life (402).

⁴ All the manuscripts contain a different version of this mentor’s name (518). This is the name Kibler chooses for his translation.

Although when they first met, Gornemont's asked Perceval to "believe your mother's advice as well as mine" (399), when they part he replaces the mother's parting words with this commandment, telling the boy he should no longer boast of what his mother taught him, but tell those he meets he was instructed by the vavasour who attached his spur (402).

The commandments of these first two mentors share certain similarities, but the differences are what change Perceval. It must be admitted that one significant difference between Perceval's mother and the gentleman is gender, making his mother not as trustworthy a source for learning knighthood, particularly to Chrétien's audience. However, this is not the deciding distinction between the two. In truth, the gentleman is a better instructor because he teaches Perceval to fight, making him a capable knight, and one who is starting to learn humility. He also teaches Perceval mercy, which begins and ends his farewell speech. Where his mother feared Perceval would not be able to defend himself (which proved to be an idle fear for someone who can kill a fully armored knight with a javelin through the visor), the vavasour teaches the youth prowess, thereby allowing the boy to focus on the virtues which follow under feudal chivalry, such as courtesy. Both vavasour and mother tell Perceval to honor and defend women (although the vavasour does not place conditions on whether the woman wants help or not) and to attend church regularly. The order of their commandments is even similar: they both begin by recognizing the need for fighting, then talk about how to treat women, and conclude with God and the Church. Clearly, fighting and religion are necessary to their understandings of chivalry, but far more important are the ways a knight *behaves*, particularly with women.

However, Perceval still is not able to follow the vavasour's commandments perfectly. The most important part (and the longest) of Gornemont's speech is the one Perceval follows

too closely because he comes to believe that “not talking too much” means he should hardly speak at all. This is what causes him trouble later in the castle of the Fisher King where he chooses not to ask about the white spear dripping blood or the golden chalice, at which point, Chrétien, the narrator, reflects: “I fear this may be to his misfortune, for I have heard it said that at times it is just as wrong to keep too silent as to talk too much” (421). Once again, Perceval so takes a message to heart, he fails to understand the larger message entirely.

After leaving the Fisher King, the youth meets a woman cradling the corpse of her lover. She tells him his mistake, that his mother is dead, and curses him for his failures, as a result of which, Perceval discovers his name. He then sets out on the road again, sobered from the reckless youth of before, and encounters the woman he met at the beginning of the adventure. Her lover has been true to his word and his punishment has left her in a sorry state.

...there was not a palm's breadth of good material in the dress she wore, and her breasts fell out through the rips... her skin looked lacerated as if it had been torn by lancets, and it was pocked and burned by heat and wind and frost. Her hair was loose and she wore no hood so that her face showed, with many an ugly trace left by tears rolling ceaseless down her cheeks; they flowed across her breasts and out over her dress down to her knees (427).

Her distressed appearance is compounded by the lamentations Perceval hears as he rides toward her, in which she begs God to send someone capable of delivering her if He will not free her Himself (427). Of her lover, she says:

In him I find no mercy, yet I cannot escape him alive and he refuses to kill me. I don't understand why he desires my company in this state, unless he just enjoys my disgrace

and misfortune. Even if he had absolute proof that I deserved this misery, still he should have pity on me now that I have suffered so long – if I were at all pleasing to him. But surely I don't please him when he forces me to follow after him in such misery and shows no concern (427).

In this speech, there are three ideas which particularly stand out: first, the desire to escape because she is blameless; second, the closely related premise that her lover is merciless; and third, but most surprising, the desire to please him. Twice she laments that she does not please him which, although seemingly connected to his lack of mercy, shows that she seems to believe part of the predicament is her fault: that she possesses some power to change his mind if she could please him. At the very least, she does not hate him and desires to be with him, even after everything he has done. It is as if her spirit has been eroded away the same as her clothes. Her reflections also reveal Chrétien's condemnations of the punishment exacted by this knight, proving her to be truly blameless in the eyes of the medieval audience.

The maiden immediately recognizes Perceval, although he does not remember her, and counsels him to flee, which he does not do. Her lover, the Haughty Knight of the Heath, soon descends upon them and recounts the story she told him of the man who kissed her:

A woman who lets herself be kissed easily gives the rest if someone insists upon it; and even if she resists, it's a well-known fact that a woman wants to win every battle but this one: though she may grab a man's throat, and scratch him and bite him until he's nearly dead, still she wants to be conquered (428).

He goes on like this for even longer, even going so far as to say all women want to be taken by force and never show their gratitude.

After hearing this frightening monologue, Perceval finally begins to show his knightly character: “Friend, rest assured that she has done her penance: I am he who kissed her against her will, and she was upset by it. And it was I who took the ring from her finger, but I did no more than that” (429). Finally, he recognizes that she was upset and his actions were wrong, at which point he seeks to rectify them the best way knights know how: dueling. Fortunately, fighting in the romances generally proves more effective than the real world: in romance, the defeated knight becomes perfectly willing to realize his mistakes and even begins to make reparations according to the victor’s will. This is what happens in the case of the Haughty Knight of the Heath. Following Perceval’s orders, he brings his lady to a castle where she is properly treated until her beauty begins to return and then goes with her to Arthur’s court in the bloody armor he wore in the duel, his wounds still untreated, to deliver Perceval’s messages and confess his crimes to Guinevere. Unfortunately, the couple disappear from the story after Arthur tells the Haughty Knight to disarm, but Chrétien does not pretend their road to recovery will be easy. His lack of words on their fate after the vivid descriptions of the Haughty Knight’s view of women show the knight still has a long way to go, although his defeat offers hope for reformation.

Perceval's attempts to understand chivalry reveal Chrétien's own perspective. Chrétien's chivalry is not only about one's ability to win battles. If this were true, the Haughty Knight of the Heath would be a model of chivalry since he defeated many warriors before he encountered Perceval. However, even Perceval is unworthy of calling himself a knight until he learns to recognize his failures and change his behavior. His skills with javelin, sword, and shield were irrelevant until he learned how to treat women, especially how to honor their wishes.

II. Chivalry in Friendship

We are used, perhaps, to thinking of chivalry existing only between lovers or, at the very least, as inherently flirtatious.⁵ This is largely due to how courtly love and chivalry have become entwined, but the limits of this understanding are revealed in Perceval's story where both of the youth's mentors urge him to help *all* women. Yvain and Lunete in *The Knight with the Lion* show how both men and women can offer each other assistance when it is needed, selflessly helping one another and then repaying the aid at some later point. Indeed, Yvain's friendship with Lunete appears stronger than his love for his wife which could well speak to Chrétien's concept of an ideal chivalry free of couple's attempts to assert dominance, an almost inevitable consequence of sexuality. Lancelot's story also contains a valuable instance of a woman who rescues the world's most valiant knight.

All of Chrétien's romances begin with an address to the reader. In *The Knight with the Lion*, Chrétien compares the courts of his day to those of Arthur. In Arthur's time, he says, people shared stories of love, love "which in those days was sweet and flourishing. But today very few serve love: nearly everyone has abandoned it; and love is greatly abased, because those who loved in bygone days were known to be courtly and valiant and generous and honourable" (295). The passion in Chrétien's critique cannot be missed, but there is reason, following a close reading of the subsequent tale, to interpret Chrétien ironically.

The introduction continues with a passionate outcry against "love reduced to empty pleasantries, since those who know nothing about it claim that they love, but they lie, and those who boast of loving and have no right to do so make a lie and a mockery of it" (295). Certainly,

⁵ Note the behavior of Gawain and Bertilak's wife.

the strength of the language in this sentence compels the audience to take its narrator seriously, but he then undercuts the sincerity of his message, as if it does not matter to him as he continues: “But let us look beyond those who are present among us and speak now of those who were, for to my mind a courteous man, though dead, is more worthy than a living knave” (295). This sudden change of topic suggests he is trying to draw his audience’s attention away from the true object of his tale. After all, one would think that the clear pain in his denunciation of those who lie and twist love was for the purpose of showing that he was embarking on a tale meant to reveal the nobility of love, but such is not the case: instead, he is going to write about courteous men. Again, irony is heavy in this sentence since it begins by claiming to look beyond those presently assembled and then returns at the end to “living knaves.” Clearly, Chrétien cannot overlook the present, whether he actually wishes to or not.

For the purposes of this project, I will consider how *The Knight with the Lion* balances the demands of chivalry when it comes to matters of love. Given Chrétien’s introduction, I will consider the extent to which irony operates in Yvain’s story and whether we should understand the romance as an example of perfect love or an example of the love for show Chrétien despises. In order to do this, I will make comparisons to Chrétien’s earlier romance, *Cligés*, and the version of this story which appears in the *Mabinogion*: “The Lady of the Fountain.”

There are many women in *The Knight with the Lion*. They are quest givers and healers, but also rescuers almost as often as they are the rescued. Of these, the two most important women in the tale are those who are most intimately connected to the tale’s main character, Yvain. One of these is the woman he marries, a woman he loves and who claims to love him, but remains suspiciously unnamed. The other maiden saves his life, serves as an intermediary

between him and her lady, has some uncertain connection with Gawain, provides the means for Yvain's redemption, and is named Lunete. It is through comparing their roles in the tale that we may examine the connections Chrétien wants to explore between men and women through chivalry in *The Knight with the Lion*.

Yvain first beholds his future wife as she walks, weeping, to her husband's funeral, whom Yvain had just killed. Immediately, he falls madly in love with her and thus, Chrétien tells us, "the lady, although she does not know it, has fully avenged the death of her husband: she has taken greater vengeance than she could ever have thought possible had Love herself not avenged her by striking Yvain such a gentle blow through the eyes into the heart" (311). This is a very different love from that described in Chrétien's other romances, for although love is frequently compared to agony, it is never violently likened with vengeance. Whichever reading we use to approach Lancelot's love for Guinevere, it is clear that love brings them both pleasure and pain and they are able to forgive each other when they stray. Although love overwhelms Lancelot, love is never a punishment exacted on the knight for his trespasses. Love is either the means of his redemption or the force by which he is blindly dragged down despite his best accomplishments. It is never "vengeance."

We may also refer back to Chrétien's introduction to *The Knight with the Lion*, where he described how love is abused. Is "love as vengeance" a "lie and mockery" of something that should be "sweet and flourishing?" Immediately after describing how the lady has avenged herself on Yvain, Chrétien returns to the dichotomy presented in the introduction: love and men of honor.

Lady Love has removed herself from all those diverse places where her concerns were scattered: she wants no host or lodging except him, and indeed she behaves nobly by withdrawing from base places in order to give herself entirely to him. I don't believe that even a small hint of love remained elsewhere: she had ransacked all those lowly lodgings. It's a great shame that Love behaves like that and acts so badly by accepting lodging in the lowliest places she can find just as willingly as she would in the best. Now, however, she is housed well; here she will be held in honour and here it is good for her to stay. This is the way Love should behave, being such a noble thing; it's a wonder she dared shame herself by descending to such base places (312).

On the surface, it appears Chrétien is referring to the divide between classes by accusing Love of sinking into the "low places" when she is so "noble;" however, the introduction asserted that Love was abused by the people of the court who claim to love and do not. If it is true that nobles may be false to the nobility of Love, where then can Love find comfort? For this reason, it may be said that Chrétien's assertion that men of honor and courtesy defend Love is less of a digression than it first appeared. Only men who are truly noble and possess the qualities that make them noble are fit places for love to reside. This, Chrétien assures us, is Yvain, and yet, like in the introduction, he goes to such great lengths to prove it, while repeatedly making reference to Love's willingness to reside in base places, we may well doubt that this love which exacts vengeance on Yvain is as true and noble as the narrator tells us.

The plot of the story supports this irony because, although Love supposedly abandoned all other places to reside in Yvain, Yvain's love proves insufficient to make him return to the

arms of his wife upon the day she decreed while he is touring tournaments with Gawain. Should we believe that Yvain and his unnamed wife are actually in love?

A comparison between *The Knight of the Lion* and episodes from *Cligés* shed some light on this question. Like *The Knight with the Lion*, *Cligés* shows young couples falling in love and reveals their inner dramatic monologues as each person struggles to untangle the various threads wrapping them in a web of doubt: *do I speak? how can I speak? am I loved? of course I'm not loved! but I think I'm loved? I am loved! I am not loved.* In *The Knight with the Lion*, this monologue is complicated by the characters' recognition that hatred should stand between them.

This recognition does not greatly concern Yvain. After watching the queen's despair at her husband's funeral, he thinks: "Right now she hates me more than anything, and rightly so. I was correct to speak of 'right now', for a woman has more than a hundred moods. This mood she is now in will yet change, perhaps; in fact there is no 'perhaps': it will change" (312). If this is the only romance one has read by Chrétien, one might not be surprised at Yvain's blasé perception of the queen's anguish, believing the knight's assertion that women have a hundred moods to represent the author's own beliefs and his time. However, in *Cligés*, Alexander is greatly concerned about his love's feelings. Although his first monologue about love is more concerned with creating metaphors about a lantern (132) and arrows (132-133) than contemplating Soredamors' desire, it is clear that he does not wish to force himself upon her. When Arthur promises to deliver anything Alexander requests, he does not dare request Soredamors' hand because "he was so afraid of displeasing her (who would have been overjoyed) that he preferred to suffer without her than have her against her will" (150). When he pledges himself to Soredamors, he states: "even if she refuses to give me any part of herself, I

still give myself to her” (151). Alexander does not appear to believe Soredamors’ emotions can change easily. He never directly says so one way or the other, but it appears he is prepared to offer himself to her without any promise she may come to love him eventually. He, unlike Yvain, is prepared to accept the idea that she does not and will not ever love him.

However, it is with the women in *Cligés* and *The Knight of the Lion* where Chrétien shows his true skill. Soredamors’ monologues in *Cligés* are fraught with painful, earnest emotion from the first lines: “Fool! What is it to me if this young man is well-born, clever, courteous, and brave? All this is to his honour and credit. And why should I care if he is handsome? Let his good looks stay with him! And they surely will, for I have no intention of depriving him of anything” (133-134). She continues in this vein, concluding that she loves him because she would never harm him and then contemplating what Love demands of her, as Alexander also did (133). In contemplating the meaning of her name, she reveals signs of her vanity (“I consider my name the best, since it begins with the colour with which gold is most in harmony” [134]) which serves to expand her character rather than limiting her as it follows immediately after her humility in serving Love by treating everyone courteously. Then we come to the part that should make modern readers wince:

What does it matter, since he will never know it unless I tell him myself? What shall I do if I don’t beg his love? Whoever wants anything must petition and request it. What? Shall I beg him then? No. Why not? Because no one has ever seen a woman behave so wrongly as to ask a man to love her, unless she were more deranged than the next person. I would be a proven fool if ever I spoke a word that would bring me reproach. If he wants to learn it from my mouth, I think he would lose esteem for me and lastingly

reproach me for having spoken first. May love never stoop so low that I beseech him first since he would then esteem me less (135).

Although Soredamors herself cannot overcome the rule of society, Chrétien has her question the commandment that keeps her silent when she wonders why she should not beg. Her answer, that no woman has ever behaved so “wrongly,” is inherently unsatisfactory since if everyone acted as custom dictated, civilization would lose all sense of ingenuity. She herself seems to realize this because her main fear is not the reproach of *society* but what *he* will think if she speaks first. Fortunately, Guinevere leaves no doubts about this rule when she preaches to Alexander and Soredamors about love: “I wish to teach you about love , for I am quite aware that love is driving you crazy... you are both behaving very foolishly in not revealing your thoughts, for by concealing them you will each be the death of the other, and murderers of Love” (150). Guinevere’s speech leaves little room for doubt that Chrétien himself is speaking through her at this moment, using the weight of a monarch proclaiming law to her subjects to lend his argument weight.

It is important to note that Chrétien does not believe women should be silent, but more important than that: the women of his romances are complex characters. Soredamors and Alexander grapple with the same emotions and their monologues closely parallel each other, from calling themselves fools to deciding to love the other even if they remain unloved. Guinevere even tells them that they should not seek to dominate each other or merely satisfy desires but instead love one another as equals in marriage (150). The women of Chrétien possess feelings as complicated and constant as the men.

Why, then, does the Lady of the Fountain change her mind about hating the man who killed her husband? She does not even have an inner monologue showing the progression of her thoughts: Chrétien paves over that with narration after Lunete attempts to persuade her to marry Yvain:

All night long the lady struggled within herself, for she was very worried about how to protect her spring.⁶ So she began to feel sorry for having reproached the girl and for having insulted and mistrusted her, because now she was totally convinced that the damsel had not brought up the knight's name in hope of payment or reward, or out of any affection for him. And she fully realized the damsel loved her more than him and would never give her advice that would bring her shame or trouble, for she was too loyal a friend to her. You can see how the lady has changed already: she now feared that the girl to whom she had spoken harshly would never again love her in her heart; and the knight whom she had condemned, she now truly pardoned as a matter of right by force of argument, since he had never done her any wrong (316).

When she questions Yvain a few lines later, she asks if he killed her husband because he hated her and when he answers no, she pardons him. "In this manner she herself found good cause and reason for not hating him. She spoke in a manner confirming her desires and by her own efforts kindled her love, like the log that smokes until the flame catches, without anyone blowing or fanning it" (317).

⁶ The spring is located just outside her kingdom. Any passing person who is curious enough to take water from the spring and splash it on a rock (like Yvain and his cousin) conjures up a storm capable of killing all plants and people of the kingdom standing out of doors. For this reason, the spring is constantly in need of a guardian.

Not done her any wrong? Is this the same woman who wept over her husband's grave: "My dear husband, no knight ever equalled you in honour or in companionship; generosity was your friend and boldness your companion. May your soul join the company of the saints, dear good husband" then tore her clothes and remained by the mound all alone, wringing her hands and reading psalms (310-312)? Regardless of Yvain's intentions, he has surely done her harm. Her shift is a simply incredible change to have been worked in such a short time and for such feeble reasons. It is also very unlike Chrétien who rejoices in painting complicated, emotional, and, above all, believable characters. And what about the Love Chrétien is trying to honor? Amazing though it is that the Lady can will herself to love, is that doing Love service? Is that valiant, generous, and honorable? Or is it the type of abasement of love Chrétien said he hated in the introduction?

If this story were original to Chrétien, we might be left in more doubt. However, "The Lady of the Fountain" from the *Mabinogion*, another version of the same tale, offers insights into Chrétien's thinking. Although the stories of the *Mabinogion* were not written down until the 14th century, the tales are far older, surviving in the oral tradition for time immemorial. As a result, there has been great debate between scholars over the years as to whether the Continental stories (particularly those of Chrétien) influenced the Welsh or vice versa. Gwyn Jones and Thomas Jones believe "there seems little room for doubt that the argument is now swinging to the 'Welsh' side, and that Chrétien's sources, little though we know of them, were derived from Welsh originals" (*Mabinogion* xxix). For the purposes of this argument, however, it does not matter which source is older or who was inspired by whom. The significance of the *Mabinogion* is that the Lady's decision does not necessarily depend on love but on logic: the fountain needs to be

protected, or else any passing fool could kill her entire kingdom by carelessly splashing the water. Therefore she asks Luned to summon a knight from Arthur's court. When she arrives with Owein⁷ (who was of course there all along), the Lady says: "no man reft my lord's life from his body save this man" (169). Luned replies that is all for the best because Owein is clearly stronger than the previous lord and therefore better to defend the fountain. The Lady then summons her people and tells them "her earldom is voided and might not be defended save by horse and arms and main strength. 'And I lay this choice before you: either do one of you take me, or let me take a husband from elsewhere who will defend it'" (169). They allow her to make the decision and so she and Owein are married. Love does not appear anywhere in this exchange. The Lady's decision to marry is purely practical as marriage so often was.

Although Chrétien praises Yvain's ability to love, the fact remains Yvain does not return to the Lady, despite being inhabited by Lady Love to the exclusion of all other "less noble" places. In fact, the bonds of Love and Chivalry seen in all other of Chrétien's romances are entirely lacking in this tale, at least between Yvain and his nameless wife. Instead, Yvain is bound to Lunete, the maidservant to the Queen who saves his life at the beginning of the adventure, introduces him to her lady, and is later saved by him. Although no romantic bond exists between them, their friendship drives the story and serves to redeem the both of them on various occasions.

Yvain first encounters Lunete in the story after becoming trapped in the castle of the Lady, and she offers to help him for two reasons. First, she says: "a man is not brave if he is too easily frightened; but since you've not been too frightened, I believe you are a brave man" (307).

⁷ The Welsh version of "Yvain."

Second, she explains that she was once sent as a messenger to Arthur's court where she acted less prudently, courteously, and correctly than a maiden should, so no one would speak to her except Yvain. "You, to your great credit, honoured and served me there; for the honour that you paid me then I'll now give you the recompense" (307). Not only is she impressed by the courage she sees in the moment, but she offers to repay a debt to a man who comforted her when she needed a friend. Therefore, she gives him a ring to make him invisible and by that power he is saved. She also pleads his case to the queen and helps him win his love. Later, Yvain saves her life from enemies who sentenced her to death and returns her to the queen's graces. Their completely platonic connection is in fact stronger even than Lunete's ties to Gawain, who is said to be the sun to her moon (325).

Another important friendship in Chrétien's romances is between Lancelot and a girl who rides a mule. The girl suddenly appears after Lancelot has won a duel to demand the head of the defeated knight. She even promises to help him later because she believes "a time will come when you will need my assistance" (242). Lancelot, out of mercy, offers the exhausted knight he has already defeated once before another chance, wins easily, and then gives the man's head to the girl. Sometime later in the tale, she learns that Lancelot is missing and rides all over the kingdom in search of him before finally finding him locked in a tower.

Then, the maiden on the mule rescues Lancelot the knight from the tower.

In one of the earliest romances and the first recorded tale featuring Lancelot as the main character, a woman frees a knight from the tower which has become an iconic understanding of phallic dominance over the captive woman, and she does so out of friendship! Nothing Guinevere does in the tale compares in any way to the actions of this girl. Technically, this

episode was written by Godefroy de Lagny who finished writing the tale after Chrétien abandoned it. However, since the girl was introduced in an earlier part of the story with the stated intention of returning to help Lancelot, it seems likely Chrétien intended her to rescue Lancelot from the tower.

Clearly, Chrétien has misgivings about the role of romantic love in chivalry. In fact, Yvain's desperate claims to love the Lady have notable parallels to the troubadour model where love is a fine and excellent thing so long as it is never realized. Once the relationship is consummated, however, Yvain forgets her until he realizes what he has lost. One thing remains constant: the bond between Yvain and Lunete. No matter the circumstance, these two rise to help one another, just as the maiden in *The Knight of the Cart* rides all over the kingdom in search of Lancelot. Chivalry encourages them to help one another, regardless of sexual rewards, but for the honor of giving assistance.

III. Chivalry in Marriage

Erec and Enide is unique in the Chrétien romances since the title includes both the man and woman, signaling immediately that this is not the story of a knight alone, as *Cligés*, *The Knight of the Cart*, and *The Knight with the Lion* all insist, but the tale of two people who cannot succeed without the other. Enide, however, is a very difficult character for a modern audience in many ways: she does not speak at the first meeting, does not vocally consent to marry Erec, and, later, accepts her husband's imposition of silence while following his mad desire for adventure. However, she, like the heroes of the other tales, evolves on the quest along with her husband. In order to prove her love, she breaks the commandments of silence forced upon her, rejecting patriarchal conceptions of power and dominance in order to share in her husband's experience.

We do not learn Enide's name until her wedding, about 2000 lines into the poem: "when Erec received his wife, she had to be named by her proper name, for unless a woman is called by her proper name she is not married. People did not yet know her name, but now they learned it for the first time: Enide was the name given her at baptism" (62). Only at this point, after being deemed the most beautiful woman in Arthur's realm and helping Erec gain victory over another knight, has Enide transcended into a level of experience that allows her name to be known. The mention of her baptism further shows how far she has come since her birth. As for their wedding night, Chrétien describes their first time having sex as an ordeal, an ordeal endured by Enide alone: "the love between the two of them made the maiden more bold: she was not afraid of anything; she endured all, whatever the cost. Before she arose again, she had lost the name of maiden; in the morning she was a new lady" (63). Here, Chrétien sheds Enide of the last remnants of the maiden we first met. She loses the name she had then and becomes a new lady more prepared to face what lies ahead. After this ordeal, we hear her speak many times throughout the tale. In Chrétien, there are few characters who undergo an ordeal more rigorous than this: an ordeal that unmakes them and allows them to arise anew. The closest comparison is another woman, Fenice, who feigned death, was tormented, and finally healed and restored to vigorous life with her love, Cligés. Lancelot crossing the sword bridge, a trial which causes his hands and feet to bleed profusely, just before he reaches Guinevere and reclaims his name is close, but not quite the same level of unmaking and restoration shown by Enide.

This brings us to the part of the story that has thoroughly divided commentary. After their marriage, Erec stops participating in tournaments and spends most of his time in bed with Enide. Eventually, people start to talk about how shameful it is that such a good knight has

fallen from the call of honor. Enide takes their words to heart and laments one morning over her husband, blaming herself for shaming him and causing the greatest of knights to abandon all chivalry (68). Erec hears these words and asks her three times to tell him why she was weeping. Twice, Enide tries to deny she called Erec unfortunate, claiming she weeps because of a dream, before she finally reveals the rumors others have been spreading about him. Erec then tells her to prepare to travel with him and instructs her not to speak as they ride.

Many believe, as Kurtis B. Haas states in "Erec's Ascent: The Politics of Wisdom in Chretien's *Erec et Enide*," that "Erec is educating Enide or that these experiences help her grow up." Haas, however, believes Enide should be read as an allegorical figure representing Wisdom. Although his argument makes sense in regards to Erec's obsessive worship of Enide (which Haas argues represents a contemplative life) it rather falls apart at this point in the text where he claims the quest is focused only on Erec. "The epiphany belongs to him, not her, because she already possesses a knowledgeable viewpoint. His acceptance of her counsel moves him a step forward in development." To read Enide only as an abstract, allegorical figure is to do her a great injustice. Most of the lines in this section come from Enide as she debates with herself whether to tell Erec there is a knight coming and risk his wrath, or remain silent and possibly allow him to die. If she is Wisdom, why would she argue with herself? Why would she be torn between love and duty? To take specific argument with Haas' statement that Enide already "possesses a knowledgeable viewpoint," there is no evidence to support Haas' assertion that Enide already has a knowledgeable viewpoint unless she is read as an allegory for Wisdom. Before her marriage, she was a meek maiden unable to speak for herself. The first time we hear her speak, she is despairing for her husband, repeating slanders she has heard from others. At no point does she

reveal hidden depths of knowledge or wisdom essential to Erec becoming a good king. Instead, we can apply the principles of Occam's Razor to deduce that the simplest explanation makes more sense: Erec's obsession with Enide is largely sexual.

If we accept this, then we can also conclude that Enide is a developing person and this stage of the quest is her own trial. When read from such a perspective, a great deal begins to make sense. As has already been mentioned, most of the lines in this section belong to Enide, which includes her despair when Erec instructs her to get ready to ride ("Now I am to be exiled! But it grieves me even more that I shall see my lord no more" [69]), when they begin on their journey ("Fortune, who had beckoned me, has speedily withdrawn her hand. I should not care about this, alas! if I dared to speak to my lord; but I am utterly undone and betrayed, for my lord has developed a hatred of me" [71]), when the first robbers appear ("God! Am I to be such a coward that I will not dare warn him? I shall not be so cowardly" [72]), when the second group attacks ("Oh, God, how will I tell him? He'll kill me. All right, let him! I shall tell him nonetheless" [73]), when she regrets what she said to begin this journey ("how I regret my pride and effrontery!" [75]), and when she placates the count to keep him from killing Erec on the spot ("Hold back until morning, when my lord will wish to rise; then you will be better able to harm him without incurring blame or reproach" [78]). These are but small excerpts from her prolonged reflections, presenting only a sampling of the torture she undergoes while warring within herself to overcome her husband's prohibition and save his life. She does not realize he is deliberately testing her: she only knows she must act when he apparently fails to notice the knights charging him. Erec rarely speaks either out loud or internally, save to briefly express his joy whenever Enide speaks and then to command her silence.

This style of quest should seem very familiar. Lancelot and Yvain both undergo such quests in order to regain their names, but perhaps the best correlation to Enide's journey may be found in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Both Enide and Gawain are tested in threes suited toward earlier transgressions. Three times Gawain is tempted by Lord Bertilak's wife and twice he resists until he falters by accepting her belt. Later, the Green Knight raises his axe three times, lowers it twice without harm, and then strikes Gawain a shallow cut to the back of his neck. Similarly, Erec questions Enide three times why she was weeping and twice she denies the truth. In response to her silence, Erec subjects her *to* silence, imposing upon her an exterior mirror to her interior choice. This is the same silence which allowed her father to decide her fate and which she must overcome in order to redeem herself to Erec. Her decision to speak when they encounter two groups of bandits on the road compensates for her silence in the bedroom, but her success with the count thoroughly redeems her in Erec's eyes. In this instance, she deceives the count, making him believe she will go with him if he waits until morning to attack Erec. When she wakes her husband and explains the situation, then it is said: "now Erec could see clear proof of his wife's loyalty to him" (80). Finally, she is redeemed.

Why, then, does Erec continue his order of silence? When the count and his army come up behind them, Enide warns Erec and he replies: "you have little esteem for me, since you despise my instructions" (81). Later, when Givret challenges Erec, Enide again has to struggle with herself to speak and finally: "she spoke to him; he threatened her, but had no wish to harm her, for he perceived and knew full well that she loved him above all else, and he loved her with all his might" (83). The quest is over, Erec has clearly learned what he needed, and Enide has proved herself, but he cannot stop testing her. At this point, the silence is no longer part of the

quest, a mirror of her own interior coyness, but a larger representation of society. Erec has become a husband who enjoys having dominance over his wife and appears to find her disobedience cute and flattering. At this point, the focus of the quest shifts back to Erec and he must now suffer for treating his wife in such a way.

After an encounter with the mighty knight Guivret, Erec refuses his new friend's offer to treat his wounds and vehemently insists he must continue on his way, despite having nowhere to be and nothing that needs doing. Erec's pride drives him to refuse hospitality and he continues on, even though, the story tells us, he "was badly in need of dressing to care for his wounds" (85). These wounds are not treated until he encounters Arthur, only a short time later. Kay and Gawain both encounter Erec and inquire his name, which he is reluctant to give. At this point, there are two main reasons for Erec to have lost the right to his name: his earlier obsession with his bride which robbed him of honor on the field; and the pride which makes him resist accepting help and compels Enide's silence beyond the call of justice. He has already proven his martial prowess several times, so it is therefore his pride which needs to be humbled when he encounters Arthur. Gawain accomplishes this by tricking Erec, stalling the knight long enough for Arthur to move camp in front of Erec's path. Only then, forced to accept help and forego his pride, does Erec reveal his name.

However, the treatment is only temporary. Erec and Enide soon encounter a maiden who begs him to rescue her lover from two giants. Erec leaves Enide alone, slays the giants, and rescues the knight, but the exertion causes his wounds to reopen so that he collapses within sight of Enide and lies as if dead. Enide falls across his swooning body and laments at great length, blaming herself, even crying out in her distress: "A good silence never harmed anyone, but

speaking often causes harm! I have truly found this out by experience in many ways” (94). Clearly, her quest is not yet fulfilled since she has not yet learned her lesson. Erec, on the other hand, lying unconscious, presumed dead, is suffering the results of his pride, conquered by the wounds he did not allow to heal.

While they are there, along comes a count with many knights who prevent Enide from killing herself and brings her with Erec’s body back to his castle. There, the count forces her to marry him and sit beside him at dinner, but he cannot understand why she insists on weeping over her meal while her former husband lies “dead” on a table in the middle of the hall. Abruptly, he slaps her, at which point his barons rise from their seats and say: “you have committed a very great villainy. If this lady laments for her lord whom she sees dead, no one should say she is wrong” (96). The count, however, cannot be persuaded by his chivalrous barons. Angrily, he claims: “this lady is mine and I am hers, and I shall do with her as I will” (96). The inherent irony in this sentence does not require elaboration, except to observe the connections between the evil count’s belief and noble Erec’s. The count does not recognize the balance between his and hers, a balance which Erec at first recognized, but lost along the way. Surely, allowing Enide to warn him of danger was an indication of the necessary camaraderie between them, a sign that neither could succeed without the other. However, he lost sight of this after the encounter with the count who tried to take her from him, at which point he performed deeds for his own glory and left Enide behind, although he never before worried about leading her into danger.

Now, however, Enide reaches the height of her power:

Then she could keep silent no more, but swore that she would never be his; the count raised his hand and struck again and she cried out loudly. ‘Ha!’ said she, ‘I don’t care what you say or do to me. I fear neither your blows nor your threats. Beat me, strike me, go ahead! I’ll never find you so fearsome that I’ll do any more or less for you, even if right now with your own hands you were to tear out my eyes or skin me alive’ (96)!

It is at this moment, and not a moment sooner, that Erec regains consciousness while she is speaking, arises from the table where he was lying, and, without a word, slices through the count’s head so the brains spill out. Only after Enide has spoken is Erec able to take action, enacting Enide's own intention. Finally, she defies the man abusing her, breaking her silence for good. When they leave, they leave as equals: Erec carries his shield and Enide carries out the lance. Erec is her defense, but the strength of the blow that killed the count came from her. However, more significantly, they now recognize that any endeavor requires the two of them working together: both lance and shield.

In the castle of Guivret, all is finally made well between Erec and Enide. After the trials of their journey, they return to bed in a section where it is made clear that the quest has altered them both and all that was once wrong is now made right:

Now Erec was completely healthy and strong; now he was cured and well. Now Enide was very happy; now she had her joy and pleasure: they lay together through the night. Now she had all that she desired; now her great beauty returned to her, for she had been very pale and wan, so affected had she been by her great sorrow. Now she was embraced and kissed; now she had everything she wished; now she had her joy and her delight. They lay together in one bed, and embraced and kissed each other; nothing else pleased

them as much. They had endured so much pain and trouble, he for her and she for him, that now they had done their penance (101).

The difference between this section and the sex after their marriage is striking. There, sex was an ordeal for Enide, one she bravely bore as she was unmade and forged anew. Now, sex is the final act of the quest by which they are restored and the sorrows they had suffered are hardly remembered in their joy. Their marriage and love is confirmed and we can finally recognize them as the greatest of married couples, even as the deeds done by other knights in other stories mark them as the greatest of knights. Of particular note, of course, is the fact that neither strives for dominance in this scene: they are both subjects of the act. Previously, Enide was acted upon, but now she is as much an agent as Erec himself. Their love is made whole because neither strives for dominance: their newfound mutual chivalry reaches even into the bedroom.

One thing only is lacking in this happy conclusion and that is a foil for the happy pair. After all, Gawain, the greatest of knights in Chrétien, has his shadow in Kay. Therefore, the couple embark on one final quest before the tale concludes in which they encounter an unhappy couple. On their way home, they stay in a castle and hear tell of an adventure called the “Joy of the Court,” or, simply, the “Joy.” When Erec hears the name, he immediately replies: “in joy there is nothing but good” (104) and he will allow nothing to dissuade him from undertaking the adventure, although many repeatedly tell him at great length and with gruesome detail that he will die. Finally, they lead him to the garden where the Joy is located, where Erec delights “in the singing of the birds therein, emblematic of that Joy to which he most aspired” (108). Enide grieves to see Erec undertake a quest no one believes he can accomplish, but she does not speak because she believes “sorrow to which one gives voice is worth nothing if it does not touch the

heart” (108). This is a more mature silence than her earlier naïveté. Now she does not fear Erec, but recognizes that this is a challenge he must undertake or not be himself. She therefore keeps her peace knowing she cannot change his mind. Erec is also more aware of his wife. Before he begins the task, he turns to her and tells her at length not to mourn before she sees him defeated. “I assure you that if the only bravery in me was that inspired by your love, yet I would not fear to do battle, hand to hand, with any man alive” (109).

The Joy, as it turns out, is a vow foolishly taken by a knight named Maboagrain who swore to obey his love’s command without first knowing what she desired. After he was knighted, she revealed that he was to guard her in the garden against all comers and never leave until he was defeated in combat. He comes to regret this decision, saying he wishes he had never sworn his oath, but will not break his word for fear that his lover would withdraw her love (111). Now that he has been vanquished, joy can come to the court. He also states that few people remember his name for he never spoke his name outside his native land while he was young (112).

The example of Maboagrain and his lover clearly shows what could have happened to Erec and Enide. The oath they swore in marriage almost caused Erec to abandon his knighthood and all the affairs that were important to him before. Although they were happy for a time with each other, the story makes clear a happy marriage cannot endure like that. Maboagrain gives up everything he could have been for his lover and comes to resent her for it, referring to the garden she keeps him in as a prison multiple times during his conversation with Erec. The entire court mourns for Maboagrain’s fate, just as Erec’s people mourned for him while he remained with Enide.

However, the quest is not concluded until Enide consoles Maboagrains lover. Enide notices the maiden sitting dejectedly after her knight has left the garden and goes to talk with her. The maiden is openly weeping because she believes that she will now lose Maboagrains (113). When she describes the arrangement to Enide, she makes it sound as if Maboagrains understood the oath he was swearing when he agreed to stay with her in the garden. "I never wanted anything that he did not want, and at length he began to love me and swore and promised me that he would always be my lover and that he would bring me here" (114). It is not surprising that her story is different from Maboagrains, but it is of great concern that she does not recognize her lover's unhappiness. There is no indication in her speech that she realized what a burden it was on Maboagrains or that he disliked the arrangement in the first place.

Erec and Enide's example of the happy, successful marriage accomplished through the quest and their newfound understanding of each other stands in stark contrast to the relationship between this knight and lady living in the "Joy of the Court." Although the singing birds and the beauty of the garden stand as an exterior mark of their happiness, as does the title of the Joy, their independent remarks reveal their own sorrows and secrets kept from each other. These are the same secrets Erec and Enide realized must be shared in order to maintain a healthy relationship. Through their example, Maboagrains and his lady are happily reunited and they begin trying to patch their relationship.

Erec and Enide's marriage is only possible through mutual chivalry. The conflicts in the tale arise from Erec's desire for dominance, but are only solved when Enide is able to assert herself enough to speak and become an equal partner to Erec. The quest for Enide's agency

brings them together and reveals Chrétien's model of the perfect marriage: one founded on mutual respect, communication, and power.

IV. Chivalry in Adultery

Two of Chrétien de Troyes' stories embrace the idea of adultery, offering a secondary solution to what happens when a husband and wife do not love each other. In the case of Erec and Enide, they met, Erec fell in love with her, they were married, and they worked out the rest as they went along. However, frequently marriages between nobles were decided for political reasons, as in the case of Arthur and Guinevere, or Fenice and Cligés' uncle. In these instances, Chrétien de Troyes and Andreas Capellanus, both of whom wrote for Marie de Champagne, advocated adultery as a valid solution to the confines of marriage. Both believed love should be mutual, requiring female agency and involvement, which required moving beyond the social customs. Andreas absolutely enacts Judith Butler's solution to agency by subverting the very foundation of gender roles, transforming love into not only a mutual experience but a secret one which is put to flight by marriage (Capellanus 156). Butler says true agency arises out of parody, from the active subversion of the qualities which define gender. These injunctions include: "to be a good mother, to be a heterosexually desirable object, to be a fit worker, in sum, to signify a multiplicity of guarantees in response to a variety of different demands all at once" (359). Andreas Capellanus spins a parody which rejects what it means to be a virtuous woman: no longer is she a chaste, loyal object, but an agent freely capable of choosing her lover. However, this concept seems to have particularly troubled Chrétien de Troyes who clearly did not believe love and marriage were contradictory when he wrote *Erec and Enide*. Chrétien de Troyes' moral concerns in writing the adulterous tale of Lancelot of Guinevere led to the creation of a story in

which it is unclear whether Lancelot is heroic or even if his love for Guinevere is grounded in chivalry. It seems likely Chrétien decided to abandon writing the tale because of his issues with the material.

Scholarship has spent centuries attempting to make sense of this tale. In 1883, Gaston Paris created the term “amour courtois,” or “courtly love,” describing Lancelot as the model knight because of how he is able to balance the conflicting demands of chivalry in various situations (“Courtly Love”). This perspective, however, has been questioned by later scholars, beginning with D.W. Robertson, who argue *The Knight of the Cart* should be read ironically and would have been interpreted as such by Chrétien’s audience. This gets even more complicated because Pamela Raabe argues the tale cannot be read as ironic or sincere, but instead blends the two almost seamlessly. In her essay, “Chrétien’s ‘Lancelot’ and the Sublimity of Adultery,” she shows that the poem contains moments that are ironic, such as the sentence: “the most delightful and choicest pleasure is that which is hinted at, but never told” (Troyes 265), and moments that demand to be taken seriously, like Lancelot crossing the Sword Bridge or lifting the cover of the sepulcher. Raabe cites Peter Haidu’s study of irony in *Cligés* for which he created the term “aesthetic distance” “to describe a tone that at times verges on irony but always retains a genial detachment from the poem’s events and sympathy for the characters” (261). This is seen in the moments where Chrétien inserts himself into the narration of the story and either claims responsibility or shifts it onto another source. However, while Raabe's reading of Haidu offers a useful framework for reading some sections ironically and interpreting others seriously, it is still more than possible to disagree with her assessment of which moments are serious and which are ironic. Raabe’s argument asserts Lancelot’s adulterous love is meant to symbolize a love which

cannot be realized and is therefore a metaphor for "holy love" (263-264), and this is why Lancelot alone of Chrétien's heroes is able to prevail over Gawain, who represents Reason (265). Clearly, this is problematic on many levels, beginning with a debate about whether Lancelot's love is realized when he and Guinevere have sex and ranging to Raabe's claim that adultery, one of the sins listed in the Ten Commandments, should be read as a metaphor for a love which leads one closer to God. She also believes we should not read the moments where Lancelot's love for Guinevere is compared to a fixation on a saint ironically, whereas David Lyle Jeffrey argues that such idolatry can only be read ironically (516).

These various readings look for larger clues to untangling the story and demanding it to make sense, but it seems Chrétien was confused himself. At the beginning of the tale, he says "the subject matter and meaning are furnished by the countess, and he strives carefully to add nothing but his effort and careful attention" (207), meaning the roots of the first recorded story about Lancelot and Guinevere are embedded in female agency: the material chosen by a woman and given to her court poet. This being the case, it is little surprise that Chrétien would have difficulty reconciling his views on marriage (a necessary sacrament in the lives of medieval Christians) with the conception of love offered by his patroness that her other court writer, Andreas Capellanus, wrote into his treatise on love. Chrétien's difficulty in grappling with this advocacy of adultery may well have led him to conclude that chivalry is incompatible with this form of love. Lancelot, in that case, is not the perfect knight when he acts out of love for Guinevere, a love which causes them both pain at various points.

The confusion in *The Knight of the Cart* arises from one of the oldest conflicts in human experience: does love make a hero brave or stupid? In the case of Lancelot, this is a very

difficult question to answer. There are many times in the story where he acts as the model of the perfect knight, but some of these are stronger because he acts without inspiration from Guinevere. One example is when he balances compassion and generosity and gives a defeated knight begging for mercy another chance to fight, even as the girl on the mule asks Lancelot to give her the man's head (242-243). He finds a solution between conflicting demands of honor in this case, but is unable to do so with his love for Guinevere. Many times in the poem, his love leads him astray. After parting from Gawain, it is said: "The Knight of the Cart was lost in thought, a man with no strength or defence against love, which torments him. His thoughts were so deep that he forgot who he was; he was uncertain whether or not he truly existed; he was unable to recall his own name... he remembered nothing at all save one creature" (216). It is in this state of delirium that he fails to hear the warnings of a knight telling him not to enter the ford on pain of death until he is knocked into the water. Is this the reflection of a noble lover if it "torments" him? Should the model knight and lover be constantly distracted by his love or should it ground him in the moment? This becomes apparent later on when Lancelot arrives where Guinevere is being held captive and challenges the knight who kidnapped her. In the middle of the battle, Guinevere reveals Lancelot's name and he turns to look on her, completely forgetting the fight to stare at his beloved. "From that moment he beheld her, he began to defend himself from behind his back so he would not have to turn or divert his face or eyes from her" (252). His opponent takes advantage of Lancelot's vulnerability until a girl shouts: "Ah! Lancelot! What could make you behave so foolishly?" (253) prompting him to recover himself enough to drive his opponent away and around so that Lancelot can fight and look at Guinevere. However, does his ability to recover redeem his earlier distraction for which he is called

"foolish?" When we think of their larger relationship: Is Lancelot able to reliably draw strength from Guinevere as the other knights have been able to do? And does Guinevere gain anything from Lancelot in the ways we have already discussed, fitting with ideas of mutual chivalry? If the answer to both of these questions is "no:" can their relationship be called "chivalrous?"

Again, the answer is complicated. Lancelot is clearly able to draw strength from Guinevere on various occasions even though it frequently costs him, blending pleasure and pain. He crosses the Sword Bride "in great pain and distress, wounding his hands, knees, and feet. But Love, who guided him, comforted and healed him at once and turned his suffering to pleasure" (246). He wins a tournament for her, even though she requires him "to do his worst" on the first day, causing the entire audience to call him the most disgraceful of knights (277-280). He tears the bars from Guinevere's window with his bare hands and enters her room to make love without noticing that his fingers are cut (264). He is able to defeat Meleagant three times by drawing inspiration from her, but suffers unnecessary wounds in the process because he is distracted. The tumultuous nature of Lancelot and Guinevere's relationship means that he is frequently uncertain and in peril in situations where Erec could prevail by trusting to his love for Enide. Erec overcomes a knight early in the poem by looking at Enide's tears (48), but he only notices them during an interlude in the fight: he is not distracted from the fight by thoughts of her. Also Erec is never distracted while Enide is in danger, unlike Lancelot who stares at Guinevere while she is held captive. Then, even after he has completed great acts in her service, Guinevere will occasionally spurn Lancelot, as she does after he defeats Meleagant the first time. It is only later (after Lancelot has nearly died of grief) that she reveals her reason: because Lancelot hesitated two steps before leaping in the cart to follow her (262). In fact, Lancelot

frequently places himself and by extension Guinevere in unnecessary danger through his actions, which is the opposite of chivalry.

But what of Guinevere's side of the relationship? Clearly, she can rely on the ever constant Lancelot since he is determined to prove in everything he does that he is devoted to her, even if that involves suffering unnecessary injuries or leaving bloodstains in her bed from cuts to his fingers which place her in danger when Meleagant discovers them. If Lancelot is not the perfect lover, it is not from lack of trying. However, we have already discussed various ways women can maintain their side of mutual chivalry and Guinevere lacks many of these. She does not perform kind acts for Lancelot of any kind, regardless of motivation. She does not save Lancelot from peril (other women do that) or do anything to thank him for his efforts and pain on her behalf (in fact, she initially rejects him), unless you count having sex. However, this does not fit Chrétien's concept of love where sex is never payment for services rendered but, in its best and most pure form (as in *Erec and Enide*), a physical realization of the love they already felt. The scene of their union is very brief:

Now Lancelot had his every wish: the queen willingly sought his company and affection, as he held her in his arms and she held him in hers. Her love-play seemed so gentle and good to him, both her kisses and caresses, that in truth the two of them felt a joy and wonder the equal of which has never been heard or known (264-265).

Guinevere is clearly present in this scene, but it is Lancelot's pleasure which is emphasized. The experience is shared, but it is Lancelot who gains his every wish and Lancelot's sensations which are described. It is as though she is repaying him for his efforts, as if sex is the only way Lancelot's endeavors can be honored, as if their love is not enough to move them together. Since

this tale was used as the model for "courtly love," it is no wonder women have long been perceived as passive objects according to the term. This model means the only way women can honor the knights who fight on their behalf is to yield their bodies to masculine passion, which is not part of mutual chivalry.

In fact, Guinevere rarely has a chance to express her own agency throughout the tale. She is deprived of all choice at the beginning of the story when Kay tricks her and Arthur into allowing her to accompany him (209) and then she is held as a prisoner. She can only exercise her agency by giving Lancelot strange commands, like instructing him to do his worst in the tournament at Noauz. However, these demands frequently bring him disgrace, whereas the demands made by other lovers are intended to elevate the lover. Erec's injunction of silence is meant to be disobeyed; the lady's command to Lanval not to reveal their love is meant to redeem him; even the Lady of the Fountain's ultimatum to Yvain is a reasonable test of his love to see if he loves her enough to return from fighting after a year. Even if Guinevere allows Lancelot to win the tournament, she also faulted him for not immediately leaping in the cart, as if she enjoys seeing him disgraced. Ultimately, Guinevere's main act asserting her agency is her decision to love Lancelot while remaining married to Arthur, a theme which is hinted at in the text but never properly explored as their love is so complicated, even unhealthy, probably because Chrétien was unsure how to write a story praising a love which went against the ideals of marriage. Certainly, he abandoned the tale while Lancelot was still imprisoned in the tower, leaving Godefroy de Lagny to finish it (294), as the afterword attests.

However, this is not the only adulterous tale Chrétien wrote. *Cligés* is clearly inspired by the story of Tristan and Isolde, following the illicit love of Cligés for his uncle's wife. However,

unlike Tristan or Lancelot, Cligés' story has a happy ending, embracing Chrétien's mutual conception of love in order to conquer all obstacles, with a little magical assistance. Fenice, the reluctant wife of Cligés' uncle, loves Cligés in return and uses the potions of her maidservant to drug her husband every night so he only dreams of having sex with her. Thus she protects her chastity for the day when she and Cligés can finally be together. After that, it is a simple matter of faking her death (with the unintended consequence of being tortured by visiting doctors seeking to prove she still lives) and hiding away in the secret rooms in their private castle until her former husband dies. In this story, it is clear that their mutual love excuses their sin. Chrétien is clearly troubled by breaking the sanctity of marriage and goes to great lengths to circumvent those difficulties, but ultimately succeeds because the fact that Fenice chooses Cligés is more important to chivalry than living in marriage without love. It is only through working together, and some help from their friends and servants, that they are able to live happily ever after.

While mutual chivalry is missing from Lancelot and Guinevere's relationship in *The Knight of the Cart*, *Cligés* shows the lengths Chrétien took to make adultery "work." Female agency in love and chivalry is essential to the model he refined throughout his romances, but he could not realistically find a way to maintain both chivalry and love in adultery, resorting to magic. However, the other stories we have studied show that love itself is *not* contradictory to the ideals of chivalry, as is sometimes maintained, only love in adultery. For Chrétien, this is a low form of love which ultimately causes more pain than pleasure.

Conclusion

So what is mutual chivalry? Chrétien de Troyes has demonstrated that chivalry depends upon the agency of women: Percival's most egregious error was failing to understand this fact when he first left home. Not only must women consent to sex, but they must also choose the knights who will defend them. Any knight who fails to honor this arrangement, like the Haughty Knight of the Heath who forces his love to suffer for crimes that were not her fault or Kay with Guinevere, is left devoid of honor and unable to defend himself. In short, his ability to honor the agency of women in Chrétien's romances directly affects his prowess. The central knights of the stories who honor women are able to win seemingly impossible battles while those who do not are defeated and forced to make amends.

Mutual chivalry is not limited to romantic relationships: it begins with acts of courtesy extended without desire for reward. Yvain gives his friendship to the lonely Lunete when she first arrives at Arthur's court without ulterior motive and she later repays him by saving his life and introducing him to his wife. The initial act is selfless, and Lunete's return would leave Yvain forever in her debt if it were not extended out of friendship. When he saves her at the end of the tale, that does not make them "even," but renews the balance of their friendship. If the story continued, no doubt we would continue to see them work together. Most importantly, sex is never demanded as payment by these knights, nor is it desired. Chivalry does not depend on love or sexuality: it thrives on kindness.

This is not to say chivalry cannot exist in love. Rather, chivalry is how loving couples relate and come to understand one another. Erec and Enide's quest leads them to realize that they must both be active members of the relationship, willing and able to speak their minds. Chivalry

first teaches Enide how to assert herself then Erec how to forego his pride. They learn on the road how to relate to one another on a level deeper than the physical, following and challenging codes of behavior in order to reach a place where they each support the other in times of peril. The mutual chivalry they finally achieve places the lance with Enide and the shield with Erec: offense and defense, incomplete without the other.

Finally, Chrétien's attempts to write about adultery highlight two themes throughout his work: the necessity of female agency in love for which he undertakes the task of describing adultery; and the incompatibility of chivalry and adultery. Lancelot and Guinevere's relationship was not only a betrayal of Arthur according to feudal models of chivalry, but made attempts at a mutual chivalry impossible. The very necessity of keeping their love secret means they can never attain the level of communication which is essential to Erec and Enide, nor is Guinevere able to help Lancelot or be a true partner to him.

In the course of this project, I have alluded to many Arthurian sources, but there is one name I have mentioned only in passing: Sir Thomas Malory. It may seem strange to leave one of the most foundational voices in the Arthurian tradition until the end, but the reason is very simple: Malory largely does not embody the ideas of mutual chivalry. Chrétien's model appealed to his courtly audiences, the crowds of men and women listening to his tales, but Malory wrote for an audience he had no need to impress. His consolidation of the Arthurian tales largely eliminate the model of female choice as essential to chivalry. In "The Tale of Sir Launcelot du Lake," for example, Launcelot wins many battles and defeats many foes without notable assistance from women or even Gwynevere. A unnamed woman helps him to escape the dungeons of Morgan le Fay, but then disappears from the story. Launcelot tells a woman on the

road he will not marry lest he be forced to remain at home, nor will he "take a paramour, both for the fear of God and in the belief that those who do so are always unfortunate when they meet a knight who is purer of heart" (127). He concludes by saying a true knight is neither adulterous nor lecherous. Perhaps he is simply trying to put off direct questions about his Gwynevere, but these words still represent the very opposite of Chrétien's chivalry. Why should he always stay at home if he were married? Why should taking a paramour necessarily make him lecherous? If Malory followed the example of Erec and Enide (or had included it in *Le Morte d'Arthur*), Launcelot's claims about marriage would ring hollow; whereas Chrétien's Percival and Blancheflor provide an example of a couple who sleep together out of wedlock but where the knight can still prevail in battle.

"The Tale of Sir Launcelot" also reveals women who struggle to act as their own agents. Morgan le Fay and her queens kidnap Launcelot then force him to choose between them, ironically returning the power to their prisoner (120); Launcelot is tricked into climbing a tree by a woman so her husband can ambush him (134); and the wife of Sir Pedivere who allegedly slept with her cousin is killed unjustly (134-135). She insists she is innocent of the accusations until the moment her husband beheads her in front of Launcelot, an act he is not only allowed to survive but atone for, living to become "a very holy man" as a hermit (135). However, perhaps the worst example is a sorceress known as the Lady Hallews who attempts to trick Launcelot into falling under her spell. After he refuses to kiss her, she tells him: "I have loved you for seven years now; and knowing that nothing could shake your love for Queen Gwynevere, I planned to kill you so I could at least embalm your corpse and kiss it every day to spite the queen" (133).

After Launcelot spurns her and walks away completely unharmed, she dies "two weeks later of a broken heart" (133). Even a supposedly powerful sorceress has no power.

This trend continues throughout Malory. Elaine is among the strongest of female characters, being "young, beautiful, and clever" (338), but she is only able to seduce and keep Launcelot through sorcery and trickery, making their case useless to mutual chivalry. In fact, it can easily be seen how the modern conception of chivalry descended from Malory: passive women in towers waiting to be rescued or loved, a category which includes Elaine. Women in Malory are largely damsels in distress, powerless enchantresses barely surviving on guile, and nameless quest givers and helpers who disappear as quickly as they arrive. None of them are overly complex.

This, of course, is the popular conception of medieval women and chivalry Chrétien allows us to combat. According to his older model of chivalry, female agency is essential to any type of relationship between men and women: romantic or friendly. In order for any relationship to work, both people must have a voice that is respected and heard; favors must be extended out of kindness and repaid out of kindness without force; and love must be understood as a process of finding equality, not asserting dominance. Our modern times even allow a solution to the medieval quandary over adultery now that most marriages require the woman's freely-given consent. Chrétien even alludes to the possibility that the gender roles we see in chivalry are not static: men do not always have to carry the lance, to be the strong, confident defenders; women can bear the burden just as easily.

To conclude, I would like to turn to a more recent perspective of chivalry, this time the call of a feminist seeking to redefine what it means to be a knight. However, with our new

knowledge, we may see that Laurie Penny's article, "Retro misogynists may scoff, but white knights and beta males are my heroes," is actually hoping to resurrect an older chivalry lost to the popular memory. For instance, she claims that chivalry "was only ever a way to codify and explain away the impulse to treat women and girls with respect without thinking of them as human beings" (21), however, we now know that this was not always true. She goes on to say she would love to see "more men standing up for women, more men speaking out about their own experience of living in a patriarchal society that imposes damaging stereotypes on men and boys" because that's what real courage is (21). Courage, she says, is not shouting down the men who take a stand; real courage "– the kind of courage you rarely hear about in fairy tales – is questioning your own assumptions and encouraging others to question theirs" (21). This is exactly what the best of Chrétien's romances are about. Percival must realize the first woman he encountered did not want to kiss him; Yvain must realize he was wrong to leave his wife; and Erec must realize he was wrong to impose silence on Enide. True heroism is *exactly* the kind you find in fairy-story: the courage to hold up the mirror, examine yourself, find yourself, and realize the world is a better place when we fight for what is right, not what is easy. Chivalry allows men and women to work together for change, a task neither can accomplish alone. The model of Chrétien de Troyes charts a way to ride bravely forward with lance and shield to found a new age of chivalry built on mutual agency.

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