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Failures of Chivalry and Love in Chretien de Troyes

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**Failures of Chivalry and Love
in Chrétien de Troyes**

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Honors Thesis

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Introduction: Chrétien's Chivalry and Courtly Love

Although there are many authors to consider in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, Chrétien de Troyes stands out as a forerunner in early romances. It is commonly accepted that he wrote his stories between 1160 and 1191, which was a time period marked by a new movement of romantic literature. Society was developing in all aspects, different social roles and structures were established, and questions were raised about emotions, relationships, and duties within the tumultuous society. Nobles and lords began to requisition works to be written that concerned these relevant ideas. One of the first was a trilogy of books called *De Amore*, written sometime after 1184 by a man named Andreus Capellanus. In his books he outlined a definition of love and described how it should work within systems of different classes. One hundred and fifty years later a knight named Geoffroi de Charny wrote *The Book of Chivalry* to describe the duties and values of a chivalric knight, and in between there were countless stories, poems, books, and tales told on these topics. Chrétien's romances and these other pieces of literature that have survived from this time period show a common interest in the inner-working of society. More specifically, literature from the Middle Ages focuses heavily on the constantly developing world of relationships between men and women.

As love and chivalry became prominent topics in literature, the genre of romance began to develop. Romance was "intended for public reading" (Krueger 4) and reflected ideals of the courts concerning social interactions. It became popular for nobles and the upper class to commission works to be written to

reflect their own ideals, and for this elite minority “romances were a vehicle for the construction of a social code” (Krueger 4). This social code concerned chivalry as well as “a mode of sentimental refinement – which some have called ‘courtly love’” (Krueger 5). The idea of courtly love defines more than simply emotions and “emphasizes a link between love, its social setting (the court), and its ways (courtliness): the set of social qualities and skills required for distinction at court” (Kay 85). Instead of using courtly love for just entertainment or amusement in their stories, early romances were set up in such a way that they allowed for critique and evaluation of the topic. Since the author serves as a link between the public and the story, medieval romances often feature an “author and narrator who can’t be fully separated” (Bruckner 14). At the same time, to allow for irony and commentary the narrators “remain uninvolved from the story” (Bruckner 16). Other techniques linked with these early romances involve chronological plots, stages of love, and episodic organization (Bruckner 20-24), which all help demonstrate the tensions underlying chivalry and courtly love and “stem from the environment in which courtly literature was produced” (Kay 85). Through the voice and perspective of the author, the genre of romance in the early years of the middle ages offers critiques of the elite courtly society that it reflected.

In France, Chrétien’s native country, courts were developing and “a new aristocratic and secular culture began to express itself through a new form of literature” (Harf-Lancner 26). Romance was born as a new genre to be interested in, and the author began to play an even bigger role in these texts as “the speaker

is also the author, who justifies the value of his work as a writer” (Harf-Lancner 28). Chrétien, for example, begins each of his five romances by explaining that he did not create these stories, but instead took them from the past and is simply retelling them. And since romance did develop “from the recasting of Latin material in French” (Harf-Lancner 31), it was common to take “inspiration from classical literature” (28). Many of Chrétien’s stories do indeed use characters, themes, and settings from stories told before him, but he was one of the first to use this “fictional universe” as a place “to meditate both on the mysteries of literary creation and on the complex relations that humankind entertains with love and with society” (Harf-Lancner 42). Although Chrétien refers back to pre-existing material at the beginning of each of his romances, he ultimately connected these ancient themes and topics with the current society that he was reflecting in his stories. As a result, Chrétien used these common symbols and themes to provide an authoritative commentary to his audience about the society that they lived in.

Chrétien’s book of romances, his most prominent work, is made up of five different stories. These stories contain similar setting and themes, but they each stand on their own. The first story, *Erec and Enide*, features two lovers who fall in love and then must figure out a balance between their love and the rest of their obligations to the court. In *Cliges* a young knight follows his father’s footsteps and travels to the court of King Arthur in order to improve his status as a knight. Sir Lancelot stars in *The Knight of the Cart*, and the plot surrounds his journey to rescue Queen Guenevere. *The Knight with the Lion* is about a knight named Yvain

who seeks to improve his prowess and loses his lover in the process because of his skewed priorities. Finally, in *The Story of the Grail*, Perceval yearns to become a knight and embarks on a journey to learn the values and skills that will allow him to succeed in Arthur's court. Although each of these stories features various central characters and the plots follow different adventures, they all represent a different stage in Chrétien's portrayal of the conflicts surrounding love and chivalry. In combination with each other, the five romances create a cautionary message about the dangers of attempting to pursue love beyond its function of promoting knighthood.

Of the themes, characters, and ideas that surface in Arthurian literature, love and chivalry are two topics that play a central role. It is clear that neither love nor chivalry had a "codified system" at this time; there was "no strict set of rules prescribing the appropriate behaviour for the lover at the time when Chrétien was writing" (Noble 4). However, both topics were prominent, and "a distinction must be made between the established doctrine, a rigid system of rules of behaviour, which did not exist, and a mode of thought, expressed in literary conventions, which can be traced through so much medieval literature" (Noble 4). While this new genre of romance, "concentrates above all on love" and makes "little pretense of being realistic" (Noble 6), there is no doubt that it was reflecting contemporary ideas, desires, or ideals. Chrétien became a critic of a society that was attempting to define itself through literary representations of King Arthur's court.

From a basic definition, a knight—the highest model of chivalric display—was defined as someone who performed “hardy deeds in a fight with edged weapons” (Kaeuper 97). However, the importance of chivalry as a “force doing major social work” (Kaeuper 99) should not be overlooked. Beyond simply looking the part and fighting battles, a knight represented ideals and played a role in the framework of how the people of the courts should live. “It was by chivalric ideas and through chivalric practices that elite lay folk organized their thoughts and directed action in basic categories of life” (de Charny 2), and so it was not only important for a knight to follow the rules of chivalry for himself, but his success was also critical on a much larger scale. As chivalry played such an important role in society, it was in the constant process of being developed and defined. In order to gain some control over the evolving society, authors like Chrétien used their narratives to provide working definitions of the functions and responsibilities within these settings. Once the standards of behavior have been set the authors are able to critique the system that they have portrayed.

Chrétien de Troyes began his definitions of chivalry and courtly love through his setting, and the court became a basic projection of what was expected and admired of individuals in interacting with these societies. More specifically the court of King Arthur was often used, which became a widely accepted vision of an ideal court. Described as attracting the most valued knights, the most beautiful women, and ruled by a king who held a perfect grasp of the importance of balancing love and chivalry, this court represented the ideals that elite courts of the eleventh century strove to model themselves after. Through this court setting

Chrétien set up the introduction to his definitions of chivalry, which began with a superficial description. Audiences first saw a court from a superficial view, but this perspective allowed assumptions of prowess and fame to be made. Posture, dress, equipment, and physical features all became methods to judge the worth of people by; as a result it was critical to know the expectations. For example, the thriving courts within these stories are generally full of handsome, youthful men. Their beauty is both admired and expected, and their clothes and equipment should promote their beauty even further. Superficial beauty is undoubtedly important, and others can simply look at a man and “decide he is an amazing knight based on what they can see” (Chrétien 295). Handsome dress and the right posture convey an image about the prowess of a knight before any other information about them is known.

Although the first impression of a knight comes from his appearance, lineage and family also help set the framework for success. Just like appearance, heritage was a way to judge a knight’s worth before knowing him. Worthy family bloodlines allow the assumption that a son will inherit not only his father’s name, but also his father’s skills and sense of chivalry. Coming from a noble family also permits a man to take more risks and enjoy more privileges. Erec, for example, shares the name of his “rich and powerful” father and can request not only lodging for the night but also asks for arms and other favors from the families that host him (Chrétien 9). This is because a noble name not only suggests at the worthiness of a knight, but it also suggests success in the future. Similarly, although on first impression Perceval is “silly and foolish, he may yet be of noble

birth” (Chrétien 352) and as such is warranted polite treatment regardless of his actions. A respected family name and a worthy physical appearance work together to lay the foundation for a renowned knight.

An impressive lineage and physical attributes are one aspect of being a successful knight, but beyond these superficial qualities there is also a standard of how a proper knight should act in all different types of situations. The right personality and manners—speaking well, being respectful and polite, and showing bravery and wisdom—are all important qualities that a knight should have. Knights of prowess and renown help promote this system and are “closely observed as examples of good manners and behavior” (de Cherny 60) because they have already gained success through their actions. The standards of action are set by the most venerated knights within Arthur’s court, and unless given a reason for mistrust, the words and actions of others are an honest and valuable resource. While giving advice to her son about how to be a knight, Perceval’s mother tells him to “speak with worthy men, travel with worthy men, for worthy men do not give their companions misleading advice” (Chrétien 346). Expecting noble actions and having a good opinion of others is just as important as acting worthy as an individual, because it shows faith in the system of ideals that governs the courts.

Chrétien’s characters are performing their chivalric roles without previously laid out rules or expectations, and so they must depend on each other to promote the standards that have come to be appreciated within their elite court setting. Essentially the courts are based on a gift economy, and the more success

that a knight has is equivalent to the generosity and manners that he is expected to return to the public. Those who make these efforts to “be generous in giving where the gift will be best used” (de Charny 70) are “so noble, so well born, and so courteous” (Chrétien 321). Although such aggressive generosity could be difficult to afford, “you should never regret any generosity you may show and any gifts well bestowed, for the above-mentioned men of worth tell you that a man of worth should not remember what he has given except when the recipient brings the gift back to mind for the good return he makes for it” (de Charny 71). Those who are treated with courtesy and generosity will act the same way in return. After helping another knight, a bond of gratefulness and brotherhood is formed and it is best to express endless gratitude. For example, in return for John’s help, Cliges told him, “Friend John, I grant you and all your heirs freedom. My devotion to you is boundless” (Chrétien 155). Maintaining a reputation of selflessness will incite others to repay the favor, and the system of generosity continues.

Generosity between knights does not only apply to physical objects and commodities. A knight should be “humble among their friends, proud and bold against their foes ... pleasant and amiable with all others” (de Cherny 70), and treat each person with respect to their rank and worth. Relationships between knights are critical and natural to the foundation of chivalry; specifically interactions with successful knights is favorable because of the expectation that they will pass on their techniques and advice to others seeking success. Since a knight is humble, even when a high level of success is gained they should still

seek others of equal or greater prowess in order to keep improving their resources. Perceval and Sir Gawain, upon meeting for the first time “rushed to each other and embraced” (Chrétien 394). Because of the fame and renown that precedes both of them, Gawain is “certainly pleased no less than you, but rather more” and Perceval admits, “I shall now have higher regard for myself because I am your companion” (Chrétien 394). Mutual respect aids in the progress and continuation of the constantly developing system.

Friendship was one method of benefiting from the experiences of other knights, and challenges offered a way to measure a knight’s advancement and successes in chivalric society. Tournaments were an important opportunity to win fame, validate prowess, and attract the hand of a woman. Individual fights between knights were also a way to gain notoriety or to defend principles, women, or other people in distress. No matter what the prize at the end however, each test a knight faced ultimately served to promote his chivalric success. As a result it was important to maintain good character and manners; winning should endorse the entire image of the knight and not just his physical skills. When engaging in a fight with an unmounted knight, Lancelot assured him “knight, be trusting and mount your horse. I promise you in full faith not to flee or escape” (Chrétien 180). Attacking an unprepared knight or fighting an uneven battle is looked down upon. In both of these cases the knight’s reputation would be at risk, which is the initial reason for fighting. Meleagaunt’s father offers this advice to his son when he says, “Reconcile yourselves ... You will never profit from fighting him, though you could suffer badly. Now let yourself be wise and

courteous” (209). Generally the goal of a fight is to prove prowess, gain something into possession, or stand up for honor; if this goal is acquired then killing is not necessary. In fact, if the other knight can offer some type of benefit, he should exchange favors for mercy instead of killing him. When Perceval beat Anguigerron he was told, “you are a very fine knight, but not so fine that people who knew us both and had not witnessed this would believe that you had killed me single-handedly in armed combat. If I bear witness for you ... your honor will thereby increase” (Chrétien 367). In this case Perceval had much more to gain from letting his opponent live. A fight that happens between two knights is symbolic and based on defending principles of chivalry; death is not important in the outcome of the fight.

Although respected knights gain their fame through a combination of family name, worthy actions, and good manners, a knight must always proactively seek to improve their renown and prowess. Actions in battle and abilities in war contribute to a knight’s identity; without these actions he would not be a knight. They should always want to challenge themselves, and they should proactively seek out tests and trials for this purpose. Understanding that he could not wait for challenges to come to him, Perceval “declared that never, his whole life long, would he stay in the same lodging two successive nights, nor, hearing of any perilous passage, fail to cross it, nor fail to go and fight in combat any knight superior in valor to any other, or any two knights together” (Chrétien 154). Lancelot would rather “die than turn back” from his adventure to the other side of the sword bridge, and Erec “shall never be so cowardly as to renounce anything I

have undertaken unless I have done all I can before fleeing the field” (Chrétien 70). As with Erec and his need to take part in any challenge that he hears of, it is not enough for a knight to simply have prowess. To maintain prestige it is equally as important to seek out new ways to test the knight’s ability, and a willingness to take on tasks and challenges is a trait of a proper chivalric knight.

Beyond seeking ways to increase honor and fame, a knight must defend anyone in need of help. More specifically, when encountering a female in trouble, “near or far, ladies in need of aid or maidens in distress, be ready to give them aid if they request it of you. This is the basis of all honor ... serve ladies and maidens, and you will be honored everywhere” (Chrétien 346). The priority of a knight to defend women helps demonstrate the role that these women play within Chrétien’s court society. Since it was expected that the most beautiful, well-bred, and well-mannered women would be attracted to the best knights, these elite women play the role of an accessory to the men. Men are expected to protect and honor women as a way to prove their own worth, and the women exist simply as an object to affirm and promote the value of the knights that win them over.

This system involving relationships, sexual affairs, marriage, and romance within Chrétien’s reflection of Arthur’s court was known as “courtly love,” and played a role equally as important as chivalry in forming a foundation of social structure. Courtly love can be separated from chivalric relationships by how the power dynamic between males and females functions. Chivalrous action focuses centrally on how a male should act toward both males and females to display chivalry. Courtly love, on the other hand, “emphasizes a link between love, its

social setting (the court), and its ways (courtliness)” (Kay 85), and involves a code of manners for both males and females. Instead of primarily pertaining to the “male lover-hero” and their actions, both sides of the relationship are considered.

Courtly love consists of both a physical passion and the ability of both lovers to play the right part within the court. Courtly love exists for a public purpose, and involved “the set of social qualities and skills required for distinction at court, and which include refined speech, elegance of manner and dress, cheerfulness and deference” (Kay 85). For the man, this means that he must win over the female with his “polished exterior.” He must not only fight for the honor of attracting a beautiful maiden, but he must also speak well and act politely to an extent that he stands out in the court. When Erec fights the vassal at a festival to defend the beauty of a maiden, the two knights mutually agree to take a rest because “our exchanges are too weak. We should be dealing better blows since it is almost evening ... For our ladies’ sake we should be struggling harder with our steel blades” (Chrétien 12). Defending maidens was important because they did not have the ability to support themselves, but defending them *well* was an opportunity to prove a knight’s worthiness. It was not enough for knights to present themselves physically; they must be able to eloquently express their love. Cliges demonstrates the elegance expected in declarations of love when quoted saying, “like bark without timber, my body is without heart in Britain. Since I left Germany, I have not known what became of my heart, except that it followed you” (Chrétien 150). In a sense the lovers had to convince each other that they

could benefit each other well because love had a function within the chivalric system; it was not just pursued for pleasure.

Love was an important part of succeeding as a chivalric knight. The system of chivalry presented by Chrétien defines the role of women simply as an accessory for her male counterpart, and so a good wife or lover helps promote her man's worthiness with her own actions. A proper lady in love will gracefully display her investment in the relationship; this meant obeying her husband's commands, assuming his opinions, and staying out of the way of knightly duties. Although it pained her to not know what adventure her husband was undertaking, Enide still understood that "she had to stay behind, however, for she could not follow him farther. Filled with sadness and grief, she remained there" (Chrétien 73). As a tool for validating prowess, women were only a part of a man's quest to be the ultimate chivalric knight, and so the battlefield was definitively a male sphere. Perhaps not always agreeable for a woman to stay behind while her knight performed his duties, nevertheless remaining in the shadow of her knight to maintain the balance of power between genders was an expected part of the conduct for a lady involved in courtly love.

A woman's mind and will was acceded to her lover, and she should also understand that her knight owns her body. When Alexander first became attached to Soredamor, the young woman knew that "her will, her heart, her body she would place entirely at the disposal of the queen to do all that pleased her." The queen then "embraced them both and presented each to the other," saying to him that she gave him "the body of your beloved" (Chrétien 115). By giving her body

first to the queen instead of to her lover, Soredamor is not only showing that she exists to serve men, but also that her role in society is ultimately constructed to serve the needs of the system; a proper female will sacrifice themselves to support the chivalric system in the best way that they are able. According to the formalities of courtly love, in both a physical and mental sense Alexander has control over his lady. She must obey his commands, but since her job is to serve his needs she also must give up her authority over her own body in the relationship.

Finally, courtly love demands that a woman show her emotions concerning her lover in an extreme physical sense. Love in the court system was a very public affair because it was pursued for greater purpose than simply feelings, and a proper woman showed the effects that love had on her in order to keep the relationship valid from a public point of view. If a knight is injured, for instance, his lover is expected to show physical sadness and pain. When Erec appears to be dead after a fight, Enide “rushed toward him, not concealing her pain. She cried out at the top of her voice, wringing her hands and tearing away every thread of the dress at her breast. She began to pull her hair and claw her delicate face” (Chrétien 58), successfully conveying the grief that she felt at the loss of her lover. These displays of emotion, although dramatic, are valued as sensible actions for a woman mourning for her lover. Although the men would be respected for showing a masculine version of this emotion, a woman was relying solely on her man to carry her status and worth in the court, and so it was much more necessary for them to lament the loss of their link to society.

Beyond the actions that lovers perform while in the court, Chrétien cautions against an epic pursuit of true passion. It was possible to be in a relationship or be married without being considered courtly love, and many marriages were based on conquest, a need to move up in social class, or political alliances. Not all couples were originally joined on account of emotions or interest, but some level of emotional display was necessary in order to gain the social benefits associated with these relationships. A successful romance requires an element of physical passion. However, true love involves episodes of love sickness, which Capellanus describes as lovers who “turn pale in the presence of his beloved,” “have sight of his beloved and his heart beats wildly,” and “eats little and seldom sleeps” (Capellanus 5). When apart from a lover this passion should cause negative bodily effects. They may become pale, shaky, or even sick. Even the thought of being in love, for example, left Soredamor with a “deep anxiety that prevented her sleep or rest all the night ... and beset her with such torment that she lamented and wept the whole night long.” (Chrétien 98). Similarly, Alexander “felt such severe pain” (Chrétien 94) and felt his “sickness too severe ever to be healed by medicine or potion, herb or root” (Chrétien 95). This passionate physical response is detrimental to the social goals of courtly love. Some amount of emotional display validates the political potential of a relationship, and without this physical side a relationship would simply be a formal, appropriate public relationship, and based on function. Courtly love assumes the coexistence of both the formal public displays of love as well as the private physical reactions of the body. However Chrétien’s stories are cautionary

tales to the couples pursuing this flawless junction of emotion and function, because the physical effects of true passion do not fit with the goals of a courtly relationship built to promote the individuals involved. Essentially love is necessary as a social function in the courts that Chrétien has created to offer critique on the dramatic social developments in the eleventh and twelfth century. At the same time, each of his stories tells about a journey in which love can ultimately only exist as an idea and contributes to the structure of society. Notions of true love and romance are not only useless but also unrealistic.

Chrétien wrote his romance stories during a time in which chivalry and courtly love were large topics because of their prominent yet developing roles in society. Specifically Chrétien was interested in the tensions between chivalry and courtly love— two systems that worked in conjunction and supported each other. Although aspects of chivalry are used for obtaining love, and love is a method of validating practices of chivalry, each of Chrétien's five romances exposes relationships in which love and chivalry are unable to be balanced successfully. Through his literary works Chrétien not only begins a long tradition of romantic writings, but he also displays the inevitable failures of the new ideals developing within the court systems. Although these rules should stimulate predictable social order, just as authors must adapt and expand to new genres, society cannot successfully be contained within one strictly organized structure. Chrétien is not using the ideals of chivalry and love as a way to further define them like Capellanus and de Charny, but instead his stories provide a warning that these developing ideals should not be treated as reality. Chrétien's fictional world

destroys the perfect visions of true love and chivalry working in harmony, and instead suggests that these unrealistic systems must be treated simply as ideas to pursue success as an individual.

Chrétien's five romance stories offer a cautionary message to his audience. By beginning with the tale of *Erec and Enide*, Chrétien immediately exposes the flaws in the previously perfect vision of love within the courts, and he forces his audience to question the norms that they have come to believe. The next story, *Cliges*, shows that love is directly connected with the public sphere, and that its links with war and public image forces a man to lose his morals. *The Knight in the Cart* provides an example of a knight who prioritizes love over everything else and becomes a fool as a result. A man who gives himself entirely to love will lose his public image and become a puppet to both his lover as well as society. In a contrasting point of view, the protagonist in *The Knight with the Lion* tries to rebel against the system by leaving the court and leaving his lady, and goes crazy as a result. He eventually returns to the system again and accepts that he cannot completely prioritize chivalry and renounce love in every form. Finally, *The Story of the Grail* shows the importance of love simply as a necessary part of courtly life. Love in this story functions as a way to fit into society's vision of the perfect court. Each of the five stories offers experiences for knights to learn from and hopefully return to realistic notions of their role in society. The developing ideas of love and chivalry have been combined unrealistically within ideal settings based on Arthur's perfect court, but in reality women never become anything more than an accessory while the men embark on their never-ending

quest for prowess. The true emotion of love should be avoided at all costs because it fails in every form of combination with the chivalric duties of knights. Although chivalry and courtly love have been imposed upon society as a framework for social interaction, Chrétien's five stories ultimately promote the idea that the individual is top priority, and when involved in courtly love and chivalry each person should remember that they are using these ideals simply as a way to promote themselves.

Chapter One: *Eric and Enide*

Eric and Enide, the first tale in Chrétien's series of Arthurian romances, shows the realities of trying to balance love and chivalry within the system of the court. Not only have ideals been created about love and chivalry individually, but there is also an expectation that both topics will work in harmony. Chrétien exposes the harsh realities of the ideal vision of relationships within the chivalric court setting through the journey of the two lovers. As a result, the audience is forced to rethink the "perfect" vision of love that society has been promoting. The first few pages of Chrétien's romances question the beliefs held by the elite courts, and the stage is set to critique the tensions between chivalry and love as well as the role of the individual within this structure.

The story begins in the center of Arthur's court. The court was filled with "many fine knights," "bold and proud warriors," and "elegant ladies and beautiful and charming maidens who were the daughters of kings" (Chrétien 1). The family names of the people present, as well as their physical superiority, suggested that chivalric code would be exhibited and enforced by those in attendance. In a quickly evolving world, Arthur himself had to "fulfill his political, social and moral obligations as feudal monarch: he must ensure right and justice for all alike, but also maintain the customs and protocol of his regal heritage" (Maddox 107). Chrétien used Arthur's court as a shining example of social expectations, relationships, and chivalry; it became a place where emerging customs and codes had the potential to clash with existing customs and codes.

The façade of chivalric perfection is brought into contention by the end of page one of Chrétien's story, and conflict between the role of a knight and the role a lovers surfaces. Wishing "to revive the custom of the hunt for the white stag" (Chrétien 1) and test the knights as well as honor the ladies of the court, Arthur announces that the winner of the hunt will kiss the most beautiful lady. Although intending to offer a harmless and fun tournament, the king has inadvertently placed the knights in a difficult social position. The code of chivalry requires a knight to seek new challenges and constantly seek to prove their prowess. In this sense, not taking part in the king's tournament would be a foolish decision to make. At the same time, an honored knight strives to never insult or harm a lady, especially if that lady is noble. As Sir Gawain points out to his ruler, "great peril could come from this [game], for there are five hundred young ladies of noble birth here ... there is none who does not have a bold and valiant knight for her lover, and each lover would gladly affirm, whether right or wrong, that his beloved is the most charming and the most beautiful" (Chrétien 2). The chivalric code pertains to so many aspects of society that in this situation the requirements for manners, tournaments, and relationships are not always possible to display at the same time. If King Arthur—the epitome of chivalric virtue—cannot avoid conflict then certainly it can be assumed that problems relating to the image of a perfect knight are prevalent and no one, perfect example of success exists.

Although Erec solves Arthur's problem by winning the hand of Enide and bestowing his kiss upon her with the approval of the court, the challenges facing chivalry continue. In an ideal world Erec would live happily ever after with his

new wife, and they would represent a beautiful, honorable, and formidable couple. “Everyone welcomed him and his maiden, whose great beauty was the object of their praise and esteem” (Chrétien 20), and befitted a knight known for his own beauty and brilliance. Perfect as individuals, they complimented each other together; by chivalric ideals they were the complete couple. “The story of this beautiful young couple, now happily married and on the threshold of sovereignty, could logically end at this juncture” (Maddox 108), but something in the system has gone wrong. Erec and Enide were so infatuated and in love with each other, and their love had progressed to the extent that chivalry was no longer a priority or even a thought for the knight. Enide was forced to realize that her husband was no longer seeking challenges and trying to prove his worth, and her “knight, the best, the boldest, and the braves of all, the most loyal and most courteous who ever was count or king, has utterly abandoned all deeds of chivalry for [her] sake” (Chrétien 32). Not only did this bring shame on Erec, but because his abandonment of his knightly duties was on account of his attention to his wife, the shame reflected on her as well. The role of women was to support the success of their lover, but the marriage between Erec and Enide had the opposite effect over time.

In order to combat his diminishing courtly status, Erec brings Enide with him on a journey without accompaniment or protection in order to prove himself again and correct his shameful behavior. By seeking out challenges and trials to reaffirm his prowess, Erec should be able to elevate his tarnished reputation. However, even the drastic actions that Erec must take to reclaim his status as a

knight force him to contradict basic chivalric values, and he places Enide in danger for his own benefit. Another problem is created by the conflicting components of the chivalric code. “As the couple venture forth, Enide’s beauty and conspicuous elegance create optimal conditions for the testing of Erec’s prowess” (Maddox 109); these situations still revolve around Enide. Enide must play a proactive role for Erec to succeed, and the attention directed at her suggests “that competition occasioned by feminine beauty can have devastating effects on chivalrous solidarity” (Maddox 110). Both characters are forced to choose between devotion to their love and devotion to the knightly code. Having promised to remain silent, Enide struggles internally to decide if she should speak and warn her husband of incoming danger or remain silent and obey his will. She laments, “he says he will punish me if I speak to him. But if my lord met his death I would have no consolation” (Chrétien 38), and decides to save his life. As a result, Erec is undeniably angry and rebukes her; “I expressly forbade you to do that. And yet I realized how little respect you have for me. This zeal of yours has been put to bad use, for I feel no gratitude to you” (Chrétien 38). The two characters were placed in this position initially because of their inability to balance love and duty, and they continue to fight and contradict each other for the same reason. Enide is too beautiful and attracts too much attention, loves Erec too much to obey his commands, and yet fell in love with him in the first place because of his prowess as a knight. On the other side, Erec is such a valiant knight that he is able to attract the most beautiful maiden, but when he tries to separate

himself from her to redeem his honor he is forced by the knight's code to defend her.

Throughout the story Enide is both praised and rebuked for the effect that she has on her husband. A beautiful and devout woman can function to raise a knight's value, because it is expected that the best women will be won by the best knights. It is understood that females will not impede the role of a male, but instead validate his masculinity through praise and love. However, Enide proves to be a danger to Erec's court standing because she is so perfect that it causes him to forget about other aspects of his life. The wife is supposed to be an accessory, not a priority. In an effort to solve this problem he attempts to gain control over their relationship as well as seek exploits and trials to prove himself. But because these trials all involve either the threat or the participation of Enide, the couple is once again put in a situation where their relationship contradicts the ideals that they are expected to obey. Finally, as Erec is in danger of being defeated in a fight against Guivret the Small, his wife whom he had previously threatened to be silent became "an eloquent advocate for chivalric values" (Chrétien 112). Realizing that her husband had been attacked unfairly, she "emerges propitiously from her refuge and, seizing the bridle of Guivret's horse, upbraids him for ignobly attacking a grievously wounded man" (Chrétien 112). In one instant she has overstepped her boundaries and disobeyed the rules that her husband had placed on her, but she had also vocally defended the rules of chivalry. As narrator, Chrétien presented these actions in a positive light, which suggests that women's contributions are more important on a greater societal scale. Although Enide

misbehaved according to the rules of her personal relationship, as an accessory to the promotion of male chivalry her priorities should ultimately benefit this structure.

The end of Chrétien's first story returns the reader to a court setting in which displays of chivalry and love suggest a perfect and harmonious world. The day of Erec's coronation featured a feast, singing, beautiful clothes, and immeasurable joy. Throughout the entire festival his beautiful wife Enide sat next him. "The food was so plentiful that the people needed no restraint. With great joy and in great abundance they were served according to their desires" (Chrétien 86), and they also were not left wanting for anything in the display of their two new rulers. Seemingly returned to a perfect state of chivalry and love, Erec and Enide have provided a happy ending for the story. However, just because a balance of duty and love seem to have been reached, it does not mean that the contradicting problems have been solved indefinitely. In fact, based on the pattern of Chrétien's story, it can be assumed that difficulties will rise again in the future. Erec's coronation day is a parallel celebration to his wedding day earlier in the tale, when "anything that might contribute to the joy and put happiness in men's hearts occurred that day at the wedding ... anything making a request received his entire wish" (Chrétien 26). Before too long though, this paradise is corrupted by Erec's loss of balance in his life. The rest of the story continues in the same pattern; Erec and Enide's love and chivalric duties are challenged and pitted against each other. Although the story finishes during a moment when the couple has found a balance, there is no evidence to suggest that this cycle has been broken and that

the same battle will not be fought over and over again. If the problems facing courtly love and chivalry are universal and recurring, as Erec and Enide's story suggest, then the pursuit of the perfect balance is set up to fail and should be rejected.

Erec and Enide are two characters who represent ultimate and ideal perfection. They both have the right physical characteristics as well as manners. Erec is the best of all the knights, which is made apparent right from the beginning at his conquest of the white stag tournament. And beyond prowess he is also courteous and is a champion for all of the rules of chivalry. Enide likewise is at the top of her social sphere and outshines everyone in beauty and grace. The ideal world that Chrétien writes places these two people in an equally as ideal relationship; however, the two systems are unable to work side by side and love inevitably takes over everything else between the two. Although their relationship is seemingly ideal, Chrétien quickly proves that the outcome of a "perfect" relationship is not necessarily what society sets it up to be. By opening the audience's eyes to this critique and simultaneously suggesting that it cannot be solved, Chrétien is providing an opportunity to reject the ideal that society has come to value. The following four stories demonstrate different sides of the tensions between courtly love and chivalry, and these tensions are more likely to be valued after the initial disruption of the previously accepted ideal image of relationships within the elite courts.

Chapter Two: *Cliges*

Chrétien portrays love and chivalry together in each of his stories, and in each story he shows a different side of the battle between the two. In the tale of *Cliges* he addresses the conflict that arises between the public and private aspects of courtly love. Since love is a tool for improving chivalric value, it is inextricably linked with the public perspective. Courtly love is a social creation linked to various motives, and as such it is only possible to foster these relationships within a social setting. Pursuing true love separate from chivalry and knighthood would not only fail, but it also detracts from these other social pursuits.

In the tale of *Cliges*, Chrétien initially links love with knighthood by showing the similarities that it has with war and battles. With use of metaphors, character interactions, and diction in the text, Chrétien shows the audience that love and war are two areas of a knight's life that are treated in the same way. The court society may have had visions of love as an emotion inspiring only greatness and happiness, and likewise they linked prowess in battle with success and fame. Love and war both provoke a knight to fight more honorably and to live up to his name as a chivalric knight, but they also involve suffering and unending crisis.

In the beginning of the story, the hero Alexander falls in love with the fair maiden Soredamor. However, the two lovers do not know how to communicate with each other and share their emotions. Unlike the other stories, the couple does not meet in a court setting where tournaments and games present an opportunity to find lovers. Instead they meet while crossing the ocean on a ship, but "to them

equally, Love dispensed the gifts that were their due ... Had they known each other's desires, this love would have been unhampered and true, but Alexander did not know her desire, and she did not know the cause of his pain" (Chrétien 93). However, the queen is present on the ship, and represents an embodiment of the court system that allows courtly love to flourish. Without an opportunity for Alexander to show his love through the usual methods of a chivalric knight—through fighting, combat, or heroic deeds—his love would have gone unspoken without the intervention of the queen, which speaks to the necessity of a court setting for love to transpire.

Even the narrator has trouble describing the feelings plaguing Alexander and Soredamor without the framework of fighting and knightly actions. Soredamor did not fall in love, instead "Love had aimed well: his arrow he pierced her to the heart" (Chrétien 92). And when Alexander realizes the gravity of his feelings he describes, "being wounded by an arrow in the heart, debates how the arrow entered (through the eyes) accuses his eyes and heart of betraying him, and then says that he will describe the arrow of which he now has charge" (Mckracken 7). The only units of measurement that the characters know are related to terms of war and fighting. Instead of just describing the object of his love, "he rhetorically transforms the arrow into a body, a figure of love becomes the figure of a woman" (Mckracken 7), and these descriptions give the reader a sense that love and war are inseparable. Through use of language Chrétien creates a connection between how love and how fighting function, and it becomes clear

that without the framework of the court setting which involves knights and chivalric exploits, love is not only unavailable but also useless.

Although *Erec and Enide* demonstrated the negative effects that love can have on a knight's career, *Cliges* reminds the audience that chivalry and courtly love must remain connected. Love is dangerous to a knight, but it is only attainable with the framework of chivalry. Alexander does not become so overcome with emotion "to the extent that he abandons chivalry, nor does he become *recreant*, like Erec" (Mckracken 8). Instead, the use of the themes, language, and framework of war "allows him to pursue love actively" (Mckracken 8). After meeting each other "the two lamented, concealing their feelings from each other" (Chrétien 100) and lived in agony. It was only after Alexander was praised and honored for his skill in battle that the queen "realized that Soredamor might have no finer lover" (Chrétien 114) and allowed them to be together by "presenting you each with the other" (115). Finally realizing their feelings for each other allowed them to live happily, however until that point "neither of the lovers is able to communicate with the other, they continue to suffer from love, and the lovers' state of suffering seems bound to continue without resolution until it is interrupted by war" (Mckracken 8). Since chivalry is an integral part of successful love, these lovers are not able to get together until war allows them to play the correct roles in society.

Alexander and Soredamor seem to have come to a happy ending after their marriage, but just as war is never completely finished, the battle involving public aspects of love versus private aspects of love is never finished. Alexander "had all

the honor and joy he desired” (Chrétien 115), and yet “She who is called Death spares no man, weak or strong, slaying and killing all” (Chrétien 118). On his death bed Alexander told his son Cliges to make sure that he travel to the court of King Arthur in order to become a proper knight. This command suggested that success outside of Arthur’s perfect court was not valid, and that location is important because of the role that the public plays in confirming success. The link between public, war, and love was also inadvertently continued; just as Alexander had fallen for Soredamor upon his arrival, Cliges and Fenice immediately “cast tender looks” upon each other (121). Fenice continues to fall for Cliges on account of his impressive feats in battle, and each problem that ensues between the characters in the story is resolved through a physical combat. “The intercalated stories of love and war suggest not just that love is like war, but that the stories of love and war are necessary to each other,” (Mckracken 17), and that the two systems are more deeply connected than “just in the conventional courtly equation of fighting well with loving well” (Mckracken). More importantly, by linking war and love together so finitely, Chrétien is pointing “not only to adversity in love, but also to love in adversity” (Chrétien 17). The chivalric code mandates that a knight must win over a female through prowess, but *Cliges* suggests that this knight must always continue to fight for love and that love is only possible with the presence of hardship.

Since love is a metaphorical war and contingent on public perspective, it means that lovers must put themselves in constant danger in order to maintain their relationship. For Cliges, fighting no longer was an opportunity to gain

prowess and improve his title as a knight, instead “he considered himself fortunate to have occasion to display chivalry and courage in open view of the one who was his intoxication” (Chrétien 132). He threw caution to the wind and fought “like a ravenous and famished wolf leaping on its prey,” and he did not give any thought to danger because he would rather die than not live up to his lady’s expectations. Fenice “was, in two ways, a fine beloved: she feared his death, and she desired his honor” (Chrétien 133). Although she did not want to see her lover killed, her love was based upon his heroic display and she would have loved him less had he held back or opted for a safer option. These emotions show the internal battle of private versus public love. Although the lovers would not want to risk losing each other, they are also caught by the fact that love is dependent on the public viewpoint.

Fenice’s priorities regarding Cliges’ public image shows her concern with the ideal version of love versus the actual emotion. While Alexander and Soredamor seem to struggle with the process of love, “none of these failings afflicts his son or Fenice” (Lacy 20). Fenice and Cliges “are, thus, thoroughly at home with love, thoroughly competent in social skills, and when faced with obstacles to that love, they systematically set about finding a solution” (Lacy 20). However, these solutions only concern the rules of knighthood and the public of chivalry, and they lack any emphasis on morality. Fenice, who often makes reference to the famous love story of Tristan and Isolde, “thus measures herself not against real standards of morality, but against literary or legendary ones” (Lacy 20). While Erec and Enide lose themselves in the world of emotion and

love, and Sir Lancelot is unable to see anything but passion, Cliges and Fenice are trying to live up to the iconic model of love. They are trying to do what Chrétien's other characters fail at; they strive to publicize a love that fits in with society's view of what courtly love should be.

Although Cliges and Fenice both strive to fit with the public image of what is acceptable, it is ultimately Fenice who takes the lead in planning and scheming. This is the moment where chivalry begins to fail, because Fenice becomes too wrapped up her public image of love that she forgets her role. Arthur's court—the symbol of courtly love and chivalric duty—was made up of young ladies who “had one common wish: each yearned to have the knight for herself. Each was jealous of the other as if she were already his wife” (Chrétien 243). Needing an honorable knight as a husband in order to validate their social standing, the women of the court's main purpose was to find a husband that could elevate them. But because the female lover was expected to remain an accessory to her husband's success, it was not enough for a woman like Fenice to simply fall in love with a knight of prowess. Instead she must fall in love in the proper way and follow the rules of courtly love. Against all social codes Fenice becomes “the active and resourceful character” (Lacy 21) because she became so committed to the idea of public courtly love that she forgot the original purpose of these relationships. Although a knight is the master within a relationship, Cliges is placed into the role of the passive male because the priorities within their relationship failed as they tried to fit all of the requirements of the public.

As Fenice and Cliges begin to fail in the aspects of chivalry, they also began to withdraw from society. In order to be together they came up with a fantastical plan involving sleeping potions and hiding the supposedly dead body of Fenice in a tower to which Cliges can escape. Cliges, as a knight whose success depends on the opinion of the public, and as the brother of Fenice's husband, accepts the plan in order to salvage the reputation of the couple. In the process of prioritizing the public viewpoint over their emotions, Fenice "acts and proposes solutions; he, for the most part, simply follows directions" (Lacy 21). Cliges knows how to perform in war, and he knows how to respond in situations that require him to follow his knightly duties. And as someone who is only able to communicate and act upon efforts of war, it would have made more sense for him to deal with these problems straight on. In a sense, a true knight would have attacked the situation, but instead Cliges lets his lover take control and choose a more deceptive route. Although they originally orchestrated their relationship with public priorities, their priorities became too consuming and destroyed their chivalric success.

The plan made by Fenice and agreed to by Cliges was meant to allow the lovers to live happily ever after without tainting their public image. However, "the response of Cliges and Fenice to their dilemma may thus have been an effective and practical solution *for them*, but by any other standards it was a short-sighted, foolish, and disastrous act" (Lacy 20). Although the duo managed to avoid scandal involving Fenice's previous marriage, they still ultimately extricated themselves from society and lived together in secret. When Cliges wanted to see

his beloved he “stole away from all the people at the court, not a knight or man-at-arms knowing what had become of him” (Chrétien 162). Although their intentions had been correct, their relationship eventually became private. Maintaining the proper public, private, and chivalric roles within a relationship is almost impossible and eventually courtly love undoes itself. Love from the courtly viewpoint is a way to promote and validate the worth of both the male and the female within the relationship. A valued knight should attract an honorable female through his prowess and chivalry, and a worthy female should inspire those knights to even greater displays of skill. If Fenice and Cliges were so concerned with maintaining their high profiles in public, then moving their relationship to a private seclusion goes against all courtly reasons for love. Although Fenice and Cliges both comment on their happiness and bliss in finally being together, “the conclusion is the most ironic and equivocal portion of a highly ironic romance, and it necessarily throws into doubt everything that precedes it” (Lacy 20). Fenice was so worried about marring her reputation by falling into a relationship with an off-limit man, but “by her choice she gains precisely the reputation she has so devoutly wished to avoid” (Lacy 20). Although the lovers defend their drastic actions with the standards that courtly love hold them too, they simultaneously end in a position in which their love does not benefit them in society in any way.

The story of *Cliges* shows characters who proactively pursue the ideal vision of love and chivalry more than any of Chrétien’s other characters. The initial language in the narrative links love indefinitely with war and battle, and

demonstrates that love and chivalry are things to obtain simultaneously. However, the ideal relationship cannot be reached naturally or organically, which becomes apparent with the schemes and plots that the characters get involved in. Through the planning that is involved in getting to the ideal public relationship, Fenice and Cliges ultimately lose sight of the original intentions. Not only do they end up in a love that denies them all the benefits of chivalry, but to get there they had to sacrifice the vision of the perfect loving and chivalric couple that they had been intending. The message of this story relates the importance of remembering the functional motivations behind relationships. Attempting to involve true emotions wages a battle between the public and private aspects of the relationship, which puts chivalric success at risk. Since a lover in the private sector puts values of chivalry in danger, Chrétien advises his reader to simply pursue courtly love as a practical way to benefit the individual, and that becoming too invested in the relationship beyond the public viewpoint is unnecessary and will ultimately fail.

Chapter Three: *The Knight of the Cart*

If *Erec and Enide* exposes the difficult realities facing love and chivalry, and *Cliges* highlights the importance of keeping a relationship public and functional, then *The Knight of the Cart* makes an even deeper argument for the dangers of private love versus the benefits that it can inspire. In his journey to rescue the queen Lancelot is fueled by his desire and love for her. He is successful in the trials he encounters along the way, and the story can be read as a promotion of love as a powerful inspiration to knights. However Lancelot technically succeeds in each battle, but chivalry is also lost along the way. Love is a powerful inspiration but it inspires a knight as a lover and not as a chivalric knight.

The drama in Lancelot's story begins immediately when a rift is created between courtly love and chivalry in the very opening scenes of the book. Yet again the story begins with a large feast in Arthur's court, and "there were many barons in the great hall, and also the queen and, I believe, many courteous and beautiful ladies conversing in elegant French" (Chrétien 170). The pleasant atmosphere is disrupted by the entrance of a knight in armor, who offers King Arthur a challenge in order to gain back the captives that this knight has taken and held prisoner. Chivalric duty requires Arthur to accept the challenge in an effort to rescue his people, but this particular challenge requires that he entrust his wife with another knight on a journey through the forest. Forced to

choose, Arthur neglects his duties to protect his wife and sends her off with another knight. Both the queen and the people of the court were surprised at his decision and “all the men and women present assumed that she would never return alive, and they grieved as deeply as though she lay dead on her bier” (Chrétien 172). Not only did Arthur not think about how his wife would feel with this decision,

...but in Arthur’s haste to meet certain traditional demands of chivalric society he actually fails to meet two prior demands, both of which are far more serious: the need to be the actual as well as nominal head of his court, and the need to be his lady’s lord and protector (Condren 439).

Unable to find a balance between his public and personal duties in the court, the king inevitably fails on both sides.

Although Arthur hesitated and neglected his duties to love, Sir Lancelot (at this point an unnamed knight) did not need any encouragement and immediately followed his heart to go save the queen. Although any knight would be expected to rescue a woman in trouble, Lancelot’s pursuit is based on love, which is apparent because of the fact that he neglected chivalric honor by entering in a relationship with the lady of his lord. Entering the affair required breaking rules of chivalric code, and his pursuit of the queen showed the same neglect for society. In fact, he was in such a hurry that he rode his horse into the ground and had

to ask a fellow knight to lend him one of his own. Again, “he did not waste time distinguishing which [horse] was better in beauty or in size” (Chrétien 173), but quickly galloped off and left his dead horse behind. Pretty soon his second horse met the same fate and he was forced to continue on foot. Although these drastic measures to pursue his love show the extreme inspiration that love inspires in this knight, at the same time it also demonstrates a loss of priorities concerning his role as a knight. In fact, his frantic methods are unique, and “Chrétien is calling specific attention to the deaths of Lancelot’s two horses not from any need to satisfy the demands of plot, but for what the deaths themselves say about Lancelot” (Condren 444). A knight’s image is incredibly important, and part of what makes a good knight his dress, appearance, and accessories. A knight without a horse is not a promising knight, and though Lancelot “looks every bit a knight—fully armed, purposeful, courteous and dedicated to his lady—he is actually quite ineffectual. He did not arrive in time to save Guenevere; he cannot keep a horse beneath him” (Condren 445), and he takes drastic and desperate measures to continue his quest. Although his love for his lady is admirable, it also detracts from his adherence to the knightly image, which is an important part of the chivalric code.

Soon after Lancelot kills his second horse he is offered a ride in a cart driven by a dwarf. Just as a knight without a horse is a negative image, a knight who takes a ride in a cart also symbolizes shame and

dishonor. Dwarves, as figures who did not fit into the mold of ideal court societies, also often symbolized mischief and nonconformity. Carts were the mode of transportation used to transport criminals as a spectacle for the townspeople, so Lancelot “for just two steps, hesitated a little before getting in” (Chrétien 174). However, his momentary thought for his reputation as a knight passes quickly and “the quest for his Lady is a stronger influence” (Condren 440). Although “on the surface this scene appears to be a strong testimony to the intensity of Lancelot’s love for his lady,” his blind passion “hardly mitigates the disgrace incurred by a knight who allows himself to take orders from a dwarf and to be led by him in a cart” (Condren 440). In these scenes Lancelot is a contradictory figure; on one hand he is upholding his duties to his lady, but on the other hand he is taking these duties to such an extreme that he has completely lost touch with his duties to knighthood.

Although Lancelot continues his quest and faces many challenges that only a successful knight would be able to pass, there is still evidence to show that he has completely lost touch with chivalry and is solely acting upon love. He asks for lodging from a fine young lady, and was shown to a room with two beds. She offered him the lesser of the two beds, explaining that in the other one “no one undeserving has ever slept,” and that he “would pay dearly even for holding such an idea” (Chrétien 176) to try it. Of course a brave and courageous knight would take the risk involved in the off-limit and beautiful bed, but “at midnight from the

rafters like lightning came a lance, head first, which almost pinned the knight's thighs to the quilt" (Chrétien 176). Lancelot only receives a small nick from the lance on his thigh and returns to sleep; "that Lancelot escapes serious injury from the descent of the flaming lance is surely to be taken as an indication of his real worth, especially since he does not try to avoid the lance by ducking aside at the last moment" (Condren 447). The fact that Lancelot does not move suggests that this is not a test of skill, but is instead a measurement of the knight's internal qualities. Only an honorable and worthy knight would be able to sleep in this bed without coming to harm. At the same time, the fact that this test of Lancelot's character happens in a bed and not in combat or tournament has implications about the manner of the trial. Invoking images of a bed as well as a pointed javelin and the knight's thighs, "the judgment of the sword in this scene seems to pertain exclusively to Lancelot as a courtly lover" (Condren 447). Extending themselves to difficult situations and proving skill and prowess during different trials is an important part of being a knight. However, even though Lancelot is pushing himself to take the more difficult options as a chivalric knight would, the challenges that he faced only proved his superiority in things concerning love and romance. Chrétien framed the exploits of the famed knight by love in order to show that although he completed each challenge he faced, he was consumed solely by love and would sacrifice his reputation and honor

as a result. Since love is supposed to be an accessory to chivalry, love in this manner has no societal benefit.

Although the story of *The Knight of the Cart* includes scenes in which Lancelot proves himself as a skilled and valuable knight, the instances in which love causes him to act foolishly outnumber the former examples. A good knight is always alert and must make quick decisions about when to fight and when to offer counsel and friendship. Lancelot is neither alert nor able to judge his environment because he is so caught up in his daydreams about the woman that he loves:

Like one powerless and defenseless against Love's control, the knight of the cart fell into such thoughts that he lost thoughts of himself. He did not know if he was alive or dead, did not remember his own name, did not know whether he was armed or not, did not know where he was going or whence he was coming. He remembered nothing except one person, and for her he put everyone else out of mind. He thought so much about her alone that he heard, saw, understood nothing (Chrétien 178-9).

Because he is so consumed with his thoughts of the queen, the knight does not even notice that he is approaching a river and a guard. The guard shouts out a warning that forbids Lancelot from crossing, and when the approaching knight did not acknowledge him in any way he shouted again

to warn him that he would strike him. Although he had fair warning, “so rapt in his thoughts was the knight that he did not hear him” (Chrétien 179) and his horse quickly got in the water to begin drinking. Although Lancelot is renowned as a knight with prowess and skill, the guard “struck [him] and laid him flat in the center of the ford he had forbidden him to cross, making the lance fly from his hand and the shield from his neck” (Chrétien 179). Not only is Lancelot defeated immediately, but his lack of attention causes him to lose all of his equipment and his seat on his horse and he is defeated not even in a chivalric context. His wandering thoughts about his love put his life at risk in a situation that could have been easily avoided, but he also lost his dignity when the physical pieces of being a knight were stripped from him.

Just as thoughts of the queen were a distraction to the knight, he also had a hard time remembering his duties when she was present. On one occasion he was so wrapped up in catching a glimpse of her, and “he did not cease to gaze on her most attentively, happy to do this as long as possible. When he could not see her, he wished to hurl himself out onto the ground below” (Chrétien 177). Not only did he not have a regard for his own personal safety, but the affect that his lover had on him actually caused him to proactively put himself in danger. This is in contrast to the character of Alexander, who suffered the physical pangs of love but still proactively sought to promote himself as a knight even though it meant leaving the attention of his love. Although knights were praised for being

courageous, there was a difference between fearlessness and stupidity. Fearlessness could help a knight achieve great things, but crossing the line to stupidity meant that the knight had forgotten the ultimate goal of chivalric prowess as a knight. In a one-on-one fight, Lancelot—having already been injured and weakened from his journey—“was getting the worse of it and Meleagant the better” (Chrétien 214). An onlooker realized that “he would recover his strength and boldness if he knew the queen was at the window, looking out and watching him” (Chrétien 214), and she was right that love had the potential to inspire the knight. However, love inspired as well as distracted, and although Lancelot forgot about his wounds, he also forgot about his opponent. “From the moment he caught sight of her, he did not turn or take his eyes or his face from her, but defended himself from the back” (Chrétien 215), even though it was folly. Although it was impressive that he defended himself from the back, he began to receive the worst of the fight and would not have been able to withstand the attack forever in that way. It took the insults from a maiden who accused him of acting “so foolishly,” and reminded him “you once were the epitome of all valor and excellence. I do not think or believe God ever made a knight equal to you in courage and renown. Now we see you at such a loss” (Chrétien 215). Realizing that he had risked losing the battle because he had allowed himself to become so distracted, Lancelot “was so ashamed and disgusted that he despised himself” (Chrétien 215). However, to correct the problem he did not take his eyes off of the queen,

but instead turned himself so that he was facing her while fighting. His actions embody a paradoxical situation; he needs the courage that the queen inspires in him, but at the same time he is so overcome with emotion for her that he risks losing sight of his present needs and duties. Chivalry requires love as a method of validation, but once love surpasses simply function and involves deep emotions it can become a distraction.

Since the type of love that Lancelot suffers from is so obvious and publicized, it is something that others can use and take advantage of. Some of this is positive, like when the maiden in the tower with the queen called out to Lancelot in order to show him the queen and inspire him to fight harder and better in the name of love. Some of the manipulation of his public love is negative though, and used with the intention to take advantage of the knight. Since love can act as a powerful stimulant, it also means that it can be seen as a weakness; a lack of love can be synonymous with a lack of inspiration, or love could be used to inspire him into harmful situations. First, Lancelot is at mercy of his lover. Although “when Lancelot entered combat he alone was worth twenty of the best” (Chrétien 238), as soon as the queen asked him to do his worst, “from that moment until evening he did his worst, following the queen’s pleasure” (Chrétien 238). It didn’t matter that she had asked him to do something that went against the codes of chivalry and knighthood, he happily “made him[self] the butt of their jokes and laughter” (Chrétien 239) just to please the queen. By placing himself at the mercy of his love, he was at the

mercy of his lover as well as anyone else who recognized the power of his attachment. Meleagant's father, for example, understood the leverage that he could gain from Lancelot's powerful feelings for the queen. Since "a lover is obedient; when he is completely in love, he performs his beloved's pleasure eagerly and promptly" (Chrétien 216), and Meleagant and his father are able to go through the object of Lancelot's love to force him to obey their wishes.

The character of Lancelot that Chrétien presents in his story *The Knight of the Cart* is a contradictory figure. He is completely in love with the queen, which is a sentiment that breaks the code of chivalry before the plot of the story even begins. His emotions are powerful and act as a stimulant to his prowess as a knight, but he is often distracted and overcome to the extreme that he places himself in danger. He is manipulated through his love, and this manipulation causes him to perform honorable deeds as well as cowardly deeds. Even his public image as a knight is presented in a contradictory light; in one moment that audience at the tournament "slandered him with their malicious stories" (Chrétien) for his cowardice, and in another moment the queen's maiden acknowledges she has "never seen a knight with such a noble disposition" because he "is most anxious to do all you command" (Chrétien 242). His public reputation suffers because of his private concerns. He succeeds in the trials that he encounters, just as a good knight would, but the emphasis in many of these trials is placed on his ability to be a lover and negates his

role involving chivalry. Chrétien presents the positive personal effects that love can have on a knight, but he also cautions that love can inspire to dangerous levels. Powerful love will cause a knight to focus solely on the object of his love, and forget the other aspects of his knightly duties.

Sir Lancelot is often recognized as one of the most valuable knights of the court. He is a formidable fighter and treats the ladies well. With the inspiration of love he has the potential to improve his worth even more. In the ideal notion of love and knighthood, love is able to propel a knight even further into notoriety, and the vision of inspirational love could be alluring to a knight. Chrétien uses the character of Lancelot to show the more realistic effect that love can have; the inspiration that it provides is one-sided and only works in situations concerning the love itself. In fact, Lancelot's abuse of the system inevitably brings down the court. Lancelot is honored for his chivalric pursuit of love because it is expected that he will perform better as a result, but in reality the vision of a powerful and well-balanced Lancelot becomes a man consumed by only one thought. Anything not related to his love for the queen is neglected. Chrétien's deconstruction of a venerated knight's reputation speaks to his audience about the dangers of pursuing the emotion of love beyond using it as a tool. An individual should prioritize himself, and if love causes him to place someone else as a higher priority then he risks losing touch with everything required for success.

Chapter Four: *The Knight with the Lion*

After exposing the realities behind the vision of courtly love and chivalry, Chrétien argued for the necessity of pursuing love simply as a public tool. He also cautioned against the involvement in love as an emotion and provided stories of lost chivalry on account of private love. However in *The Knight with the Lion* Chrétien introduces the opposite perspective, and through the character of Yvain he demonstrates the need to have love on a functional level. As dangerous as love has the potential to be to a knight, it is worthless to entirely rebel against the system. Love is necessary as a superficial accessory towards fame.

While the previous stories in Chrétien's series of romances began with actions that call the structure of chivalry into question, the opening scene of *The Knight with the Lion* praises chivalric displays. Instead the initial argument within the plot raises questions about the role of women within the court, and as a result the role of love within the courts is placed in doubt instead of chivalry. The first example of this conflict occurs during a feast and tournament held by King Arthur, when "many were surprised to see the king rise so soon and take his leave" (Chrétien 257). This was because "on this day the queen happened to detain him, and he stayed beside her so long that he forgot himself and fell asleep" (Chrétien 258). The knights voiced dissent that the king would choose to spend his time, especially on such a social and important night, with his wife. This humorous moment allowed Chrétien to mock the King for his inability to resist love and the display of weakness that this suggests. Although King Arthur

chose to leave the feast himself, from the comments of his men it is apparent that they blame his wife for luring him away. The tone of *The Knight with the Lion* immediately places suspicion about the morals and intent of women, and the lack of resistance that the men have in concern to this imbalance. For the chivalric system in the courts to work, women must remain as accessories to the men.

At the same time that the danger of females is suggested, Chrétien also makes a point to show the extreme pride and ambition of the male knights. When an opportunity for a challenge arises and Arthur announces his plan to go avenge Calogrenant, Yvain was “disappointed because he was expecting to go there all alone” (Chrétien 265). He knew that Gawain or Kay would “be granted, without fail, the right to combat first,” and he was yearning to increase his own fame. Impatient for adventure and looking forward to new challenges to test himself, Yvain made plans to leave on his own before the rest of the court. Just as the opening scene demonstrates the importance of not letting a female get in between male relationships, Yvain also promotes the idea that seeking prowess as an individual is the most important concept of all.

Before too long Yvain’s search for prowess also brought him in contact with love. After meeting a maiden and proving he was “a worthy man since [he is] not too much afraid,” she agreed to “honor and serve” him (Chrétien 269). She hid him from his enemies, fed him, and cared for his wounds. But his real wound was love, “from which he could never recover, for Love had devoted itself wholly to him” (Chrétien 273). Although his quest was originally intended for the purpose of proving himself in battle and seeing new wonders, prowess also

attracts honorable women. A woman, “incapable of carrying a shield or striking with a lance” can “improve and strengthen her position” (Chrétien 282) by marrying a fine lord. And because a female looks for the most successful knight to raise her status, a female’s love also has the affect of validating the accomplishment of a knight. Relationships in the court are attained by those who display the best sense of chivalry, but they are also necessary to confirm the level of chivalric value that a man has reached. Although Yvain had left the court of King Arthur as a way to escape the system and rebel in an effort to focus only on his own achievements, finding love in another court suggests that the system of courtly love and chivalry were inescapable. It was inevitable that in the search for prowess he would attract attention from women, especially in a community that valued knights who sought to continuously prove themselves and face trials.

If courtly love was as simple as the idea that both women and men need a significant other that can contribute to their fame and honor, the story of *The Knight with the Lion* would have ended after winning the hand of Laudine. However, unlike Erec, Cliges, and Lancelot, Yvain did his best to escape constraints of love and focus solely on his successes as a knight not trapped by love. Within a week of their marriage Sir Gawain re-sparks Yvain’s need for adventure by insulting the knights who marry and forget their other duties:

Holy Mary damn the man who marries and regresses! When a man has a beautiful lady as his beloved or his wife, he should lead a better life. It is not right for her to love him after his honor and renown cease. Certainly you would be angry too if you grew

soft from her love. A woman quickly withdraws her love—and has every right to do so—and despises the man, in the realm where he is lord, who regresses because of her (Chrétien 287).

Gawain, a knight renowned for his adherence to chivalric duty, gives Yvain several reasons why it is important for him to leave his wife and go seek adventures. First, he says “love cannot prosper if the worth or renown of one of the partners declines,” second, “the esteem one enjoys and one’s own inner worth are enhanced by active participation in tournaments and in the life of the court” (Kelly 453). Guilt-tripping his friend on a personal level, he allows that “if Yvain is willing to accompany Gauvain himself to the tournaments, their companionship will be maintained in spite of the marriage” (Kelly 453). Finally, he appeals to the relationships itself by reminding Yvain “the joy of love is greater when there are impediments to its realization” (Kelly 453). In this scene Gawain has essentially taken on the voice of the narrator, and he echoes Chrétien’s sentiments that love should always rank below chivalry, which is the ultimate goal. With his pride and commitment to his friends, honor, and profession in danger, Yvain has no choice but to take leave of Laudine and travel for a year.

As accessories to his success, both his wife and his fellow knights embrace Yvain’s decision to continue his quest for skill and honor. However, they only assent while his quest simultaneously remains within the confines of his love relationships. His wife understood his need to leave, but she placed a time stamp of one year on his journey to make sure

that he maintained a balance and did not completely forget about love. When Yvain lost track of time Laudine sent “a maiden to reproach her husband publicly for his lack of fidelity” (Kelly 454). This strike on his relationship and failure to remember his duties in all aspects of his life shames him terribly, and “he hated himself above all, and knew no one to console him in the death he had brought on himself ... so violent a whirlwind broke loose in Yvain’s head that he went mad” (Chrétien 290). Yvain attempted to forgo the distractions of love in his path for success, but when he lost all touch with aspects of courtly love he lost all touch with society. Courtly love is necessary for a knight to remain grounded in his other pursuits. As a result of focusing too much on his knightly and chivalric duties Yvain lacked balance and he lost total control over himself.

To look at where Yvain went wrong, it is important to look at the figure of Gawain. Sir Gawain was the man to suggest Yvain’s danger of becoming a lesser knight through his marriage, and Yvain listened to him simply because of his reputation. Gawain’s “perfect courtesy elicits the friendship and admiration of all the outstanding knights in Chrétien’s poems” (Kelly 455). Gawain is often seen as someone to go to for advice because his own success hints at a solid foundation of ideals. Arthur often looks to Gawain for help, for example in *Erec and Enide* he listens to his nephew to combat arguments and problems that arose from his hunt for the White Stag. And throughout all of the stories Gawain “provides

striking contrast to the excessive self-assurance and discourtesy characteristic of knight like Keu and Sagremor” (Kelly 455). However, at the same time he would “hardly serve as an example of the faithful courtly love Chrétien presents for our admiration elsewhere in his poems” (Kelly 455). In the stories Gawain is rarely seen in an amorous relationship with a lady, and “when Gauvain is pitted against a knight particularly prominent because of his love, he comes off second best” (Kelly 455). Gawain may be a venerated knight, but he can also be found lacking in aspects of romanticism and love and does not face the same challenges as someone who was a knight and a lover.

Although the beginning of *The Knight with the Lion* explicitly warns about the dangers of being overly consumed with love and women, the story progresses to display love as a driving factor of promising knights. Yvain was happy and respected, but after being “deprived of his love, he was no longer courtly or chivalrous, he was not even human” (Kelly 456). Gawain too suffered the effects of lack of love; “Gauvain represents ideal knighthood and serves as counselor in matters of custom, chivalry, and love. But on the last subject, neither his conduct nor his success is as exemplary as is the case in his other field of competence” (Kelly 457). Both the knights’ mental states as well as their fame—which validates their success within the ideal image of knighthood—are in danger of being negatively influenced by their love lives. In fact, near the end of the story the two knights come to combat to defend different

maidens; the fight can be seen as a metaphorical clash of different priorities. In this scene Chrétien literally pits the knight who scorns love against the knight defending the necessity of a lover. The “long-term effects of [Gauvain’s] advice to Yvain—madness and separation from his wife” (Kelly 457), are put to rest after Yvain defeats Gawain and returns home to Laudine, who pardons him. Defeating Gawain presents a literal representation of a knight’s reputation being negatively affected on account of a lack of a lover. The conclusion of the fight presents love on top of chivalry without love, and the lesson of Yvain’s story teaches of the importance of amorous pursuits in every chivalric knight’s life.

From only looking at *The Knight with the Lion*, it seems as though courtly love triumphs over everything. Yvain, signifying “the superiority of courtly love over mere chivalry in Chrétien’s Arthurian world” (Kelly 459) beats the man who symbolized only the everyday rules of chivalry. Although the fear that the things “love would preclude if carried to an extreme: knightly prowess and chivalric glory” (Kelly 459) is present, we also “find in Gauvain’s failures and shortcomings” evidence for “the qualitative supremacy of love—courtly love—over knighthood or courtliness alone” (458). With the happy ending of this story, the reader is left believing that courtly love is not only compatible with the rules of knighthood and chivalry, but it also necessary to promote and validate a knight’s fame even further. Rebelling against the system is not

recommended, and escape from the system will only result in loss of control for the individual.

The lessons projected from *The Knight with the Lion*, however, must be considered as one part of a series of stories. The five stories work together to present an overall critique. *Erec and Enide*, for example, “would seem to contradict this interpretation of Chrétien’s scale of values” (Kelly 458). Erec’s most successful trials come from the quest that he goes on after Enide accuses him of ignoring his duties because of his love for her. It is not love that inspires his prowess, but the “alleged degeneration that comes from too much love” (Kelly 458). After suffering the consequences of allowing his chivalric duties to overtake his duties to love, Yvain seems to find a balance through trial and error. But Erec is confronted with the consequences of choosing love over chivalry, and he too must continuously fight to regain balance. Two knights of renown and prowess fall prey to the incongruous nature between the ideals of the society they live in and the realities that result; as such these ideals that are being developed are set up to fail before they can progress.

The Knight with the Lion provides a counterpoint to Chrétien’s previous lessons. The first three stories all caution knights against the dangers of getting involved in love, and it would be easy to assume that the better tactic would be to avoid love entirely. The story of Yvain functions as a reminder that love is a necessary part of becoming a successful knight. The power of love to validate the prowess of a knight is

important, as long as the knight remains emotionally detached and safely in control of the hold that love can have over a man's priorities. Love is vital for success as long as it is treated solely as a method for individual success.

Chapter Five: *The Story of the Grail*

The Story of the Grail is the last of Chrétien's five romances, and it offers yet another viewpoint of the trials facing chivalry. The story features the adventures of Perceval, who is descended from a line of knights and yet grew up outside of the courts. He begins his journey inspired by an obsession to become a knight and to learn all the rules of chivalry. At the same time, Perceval often tries too hard to follow social codes and inevitably ends up misbehaving. He also never finds one true love before the story breaks off with Chrétien's incomplete ending. The ironic treatment of Perceval's search for chivalry and his lack of romance send the same message as the other four stories; that picturesque love and chivalry cannot successfully exist in the same spheres. However this story, above any of the others, treats love as a social construction and not as an emotion. The balance between Erec and Lancelot's chivalric failures and Yvain's failures at love can be found in the character of Perceval, who accepts love only when it can help him move towards his goal to become a chivalric knight and moves forward as an individual when the opportunity arises. Seen from this viewpoint, love would not be able to act as an inspiration or a detriment as it does in the previous stories, and instead it is presented simply as a helpful obligation within the livelihood of knights.

Although Perceval grew up sheltered from the world of knights, in the opening pages of the story he meets a knight and immediately makes it his goal to become one of these beautiful men who are "so sparkling and so formed"

(Chrétien 341). His mother, who had lost her husband to the cruel world of knights, had “expected to protect [him] so carefully from the world of chivalry” (341). Once losing her lover, she could only see the realm of knights as a place where “the good are destined to fall on bad times” and where “misfortunes befall worthy men who uphold high honor and valor” (Chrétien 345). Exposing a dark side of chivalry, Perceval’s mother acknowledges the individualistic nature of knighthood. Since a successful knight must continuously test himself and seek to further his prowess, the dangers that he faces are constant and unavoidable. A knight must put himself first and think of others only for the purpose of following rules of chivalry. Being aware of this fact projects Perceval’s mother as one of the few characters who has gained a realistic awareness of what the ideas of love and chivalry truly result in. However love and chivalry have been projected by society as idealistic images, and she could not convey these realities to her son. Even with this jaded and negative description of chivalry Perceval was not immune to the powerful and picturesque views that he received of the courts, and he left home driven by the sole desire to become a knight.

Right from the beginning Perceval’s mother offers a prophecy about the dangers of trying to connect love and knighthood. From knowing the rules of the court and having seen “the father killed in a tournament given in celebration of the birth of his son,” she is aware that “this incident augurs the future of the boy” (Woods 533). Not only does she know that her son is fated to step into his father’s shoes and become a knight, but he is also “to avenge the death of his father. She infers also that he may possibly be slain in the process” (Woods 533). Her lover

was destroyed by his career in the courts, and there is evidence to support the continuation of this cycle. After seeing the conflict between the realm of knighthood and private love in *Erec and Enide*, *The Knight with the Lion*, *the Knight of the Cart*, and *Cliges*, Perceval's mother reiterates this knowledge with her prophecy of the fate of her son.

Perceval is a figure characterized by his obedience and his foolishness. He is narrow-mindedly pursuing a career as a knight, and "although Sir Perceval is thus strictly obedient to the point of folly, and also gluttonous ... he nevertheless is not idle" (Woods 545). He is so set on learning the rules of chivalry that he is apt to carry them too far and in the process make a fool of himself. After being counseled by his mother that "he who wins a maiden's kiss had a great deal," and to "consider it fine and fitting that you wear her ring" (Chrétien 346) if she offers it, Perceval comes across a fine lady sleeping in a tent. Taking his mother's words much too literally, the youth refused to leave unless "I kiss you first, for that is what my mother taught me" (Chrétien 348). Frightening the female he "stretched her out beneath him and ... whether she wished or not, the youth, according to the tale, kissed her twenty times without pause" (348). He also "stretched out her finger by force, then took the ring from her finger and slipped it on his own" (348) even though it meant that she was left to be punished by her lover for her sins of allowing another man to have his way with her. These actions show a literal display of women as an accessory to knighthood, and although Perceval foolishly forces these interactions he is also showing an awareness of the proper priorities of women in a knight's life. Not only did he misinterpret the advising

words from his mother, but he also destroyed the female's own love life and displayed horrible ethics of chivalry. However Perceval is portrayed as one of the most successful knights out of all of Chrétien's protagonists, which leads to a commentary on the morals of knights. Although Perceval did not follow normal protocol, he did use the female he encountered as a tool to further his own success, which is exactly what a knight is supposed to do. Essentially in order to balance love and chivalry successfully it is important to keep individual interests and needs a priority, and chivalric actions are not inspired by emotion but by a need to fit into the framework supporting public ideals.

Perceval continued on his journey, successfully becoming a knight after his first victory, and gaining some knowledge of how to use equipment. When he finally stopped for lodging he was introduced to a beautiful maiden, and "all the knights began to whisper among them themselves" (Chrétien 363) about the two young people. Since both Perceval and the maiden were so beautiful, "from their appearance it seem[ed] that God created them for each other that He might unite them" (Chrétien 363). Although the people of the court saw the pair as a perfect match based on how their looks fit into the idea of a handsome couple, Perceval did not have any of the skills required to make this match happen. He failed to show her courteous speech and "the maiden kept waiting for the young man to say something to her" until she finally "understood that he would never address a word to her unless she first spoke to him" (Chrétien 363). His lack of knowledge of court protocol not only keeps him from playing his role, but it forces others to step into roles that would not normally be theirs. Blancheflor should not have had

to speak first, nor should she have left her bed in the middle of the knight to kneel by his side and weep because “she did not have the courage to be more forward with him” (Chrétien 364). The system of love and chivalry requires adherence to ideal actions expected of each person; if one person does not play their part then others do not know how to act in response. All of elite society is shaped in order to achieve a similar status to Arthur’s court, and dependence on courtly love and chivalry aid in framing protocol and interactions. Perceval is a flawed character because his ignorance of court traditions causes those around him to question their own performance within society. Within Chrétien’s story, Perceval’s character flaw helps demonstrate the extreme social dependence on these systems.

After spending the night chastely and side by side with the fair maiden, Perceval offered to challenge her enemies for her. Although the proper course of action would be to win a lover through battle, Perceval only set forth on this quest because he was tricked into it by Blancheflor’s cunning. Since Perceval did not know the proper course of actions, just like Fenice with Cliges, his lady was forced to inspire him by provoking his male pride. Knowing that “on seeing a man intent on doing one’s will, one hides one’s wishes in order to make him more eager to carry it out” (Chrétien 366), she questioned his abilities and voiced discontent with the risks he took. Although Perceval eventually takes the right steps in order to officially win the love of Blancheflor, “he is not aware of love, however” (Noble 86) and abruptly leaves without realizing the expectations of the role that he had just taken on. After being defended by a handsome knight, Blancheflor responds in the manner expected of a rescued damsel and “falls in

love with her rescuer” (Noble 86). After seeing the courage and skills that he exhibited she becomes aware of the court status that he could help her achieve, and as a maiden who has been a recipient of his chivalric actions she is in the position to best validate his prowess. Based on the ideal actions of a knight winning the hand of a lady, “it is very probably psychologically” that Blanchefflor was led to feel these emotions and “is deeply hurt by his abrupt departure” (Noble 86); socially a relationship would be the most beneficial course of action for her. Yet again Perceval is unaware of the effect that his actions have. His ignorance leads to disruptive behavior within the court society, and stems from the fact that without previous knowledge of the ideal characters’ roles of a knight and of a lover he cannot act in the manner expected of him. Ignorance leads him to avoid a relationship with Blanchefflor, but nevertheless he was able to succeed to a greater extent as an individual as a result. In only extending effort towards love when he is aware of the social benefits, Perceval remains on the proper chivalric course and does not risk getting sidetracked by love as the protagonists before him did.

Although Perceval takes on several quests seemingly for the sake of love, throughout the story chivalry remains his only inspiration. He is uneducated in the emotion of love, and “at no point does love for Blanchefflor seem to be his sole motive” (Noble 87). Although he attacked her captors for her—a response which would allow him to pursue a role as her lover—he did not remain to take part in any of the expected responses of a victor. His defense of her “seems to be undertaken as much from pity as from love,” and his interest in Blanchefflor diminished “the moment her usefulness has ended” (Noble 87). Blanchefflor

simply represented an opportunity for Perceval to develop his own character, and as soon as he is offered an opportunity to return to the world of King Arthur and the chivalric knights that he aspires to be he pushes any interest in Blancheflor aside.

In contrast to Perceval and Blancheflor's relationship, Chrétien uses the character of Gawain to show a successful looking relationship. Gawain is not only handsome but also shows "himself to be a truly courtly knight, defending the cause of an unjustly oppressed lady" (Noble 87). The lady follows court protocol in return and treats him well and offers him her love. Gawain, unlike Perceval, is aware of the figure that society expects a chivalric knight to play, and "the contrast is made with the unsophisticated behaviour of Perceval, who behaved so boorishly to Blancheflor" (Noble 88). Gawain behaves in a manner suited to a knight of his renown, and in return those people interacting with him return the proper treatment. The women offer themselves to him because they know that their shows of love will be reciprocated, and the men praise him for his valiant behavior.

Although Gawain performs the right actions and plays the proper role within society, there is no evidence to show that he actually feels any true emotions with his newest conquest. There aren't any displays of chivalric passion, and the couple is simply reacting to the expectations that the court holds of how each person should act in their situation. In fact, after Gawain defends the maiden, her original admiration of him is expressed because "the lady is instructed by her brother's messenger to treat Gawain honourably" (Noble 87). The socially correct

actions of Gawain lack any true feeling or emotions, and as a result they serve to expose the “hollowness and vanity of the type of behaviour associated with the Arthurian court” (Noble 88). Although the knights make a show of pursuing courtly love, they are in fact only going through the motions that are expected of them from a chivalric standpoint. Although Perceval is criticized for leaving Blanche-flor and not reciprocating love, Gawain is essentially acting with the same intent but putting on a better display. Gawain may be following the ideal actions that are expected of a chivalric knight, but “the nature of the love is barely analysed and the beloved remains a very minor character” (Noble 91). At first glance Gawain seems to be present for the sake of showing Perceval’s faults, but there is no difference in motivation and individual priorities between the two knights. Gawain is able to better act the part of the ideal vision that the court expects of a knight of his status, but that is simply because he grew up with more knowledge of the courts than Perceval did. Both knights are acting for the sake of promoting themselves as a knight, they both lack emotional attachment or investment, and they both represent success.

Love is treated differently in the final story of Chrétien’s romances. Instead of being presented as an inspiration or a distraction, love simply exists because it is a “necessary part of courtly life” (Noble 91). The two predominant male figures in the text—Gawain and Perceval—represent the consuming priority of becoming a chivalric knight. Although Perceval does not have the knowledge or the cultural capital of knowing how to properly act to fill this role, each action that he takes throughout the story has the correct intention. Love becomes a

method for him to learn and develop, and he takes part whenever he sees a benefit toward his attainment of knighthood. Gawain illustrates that love is an important part of the knight code, but he still only takes part on account of his reputation and the preconceived role that he must play in order to maintain this reputation. Love exists for these men only because it is a part of the ideal characters that they are trying to become within the society they live in. Although the story cuts off before it reaches the conclusion, at the finish of the work the reader is left with the idea that these two knights have succeeded and are still on the path for success. The fact that the attainment of true love or the grail are not necessary parts of this success shows that ideal visions created by society are only detrimental in the overall journey of a knight. Perceval and Gawain are not the most dedicated or inspired knights, nor do they rebel against the systems placed before them. Instead they are able to use these systems as tools without becoming emotionally invested or losing focus on their original motivation— individual success as a chivalric knight.

Conclusion

Chrétien wrote his stories during a time of social renewal and growth. Other literature of the time, such as de Charny's book of knight practices and Capellanus' definitions of love show that society was in the process of defining itself. Within these developing definitions, two of the most prominent topics were chivalry and love, and they played a role in much of literature being produced. However, these two topics were presented to readers as ideal roles to fill, and clear definitions did not exist. Instead, love and chivalry became a socially constructed path that involved actions, heritage, dress, and above all a knowledge of how to interact in different situations.

Chrétien's five romances all offer different perspectives of failures between the two systems of love and chivalry. In *Erec and Enide* the balance of knighthood and love is destroyed and passion consumes all other aspects of the couple's lives. The cyclical journey of conflict and resolution in relation to their relationship suggests that love and chivalry will never balance equally. The audience's unflawed vision of the elite courts is called into question, and they are set up to accept the further critiques of knighthood in the following stories. *Cliges* featured a couple who initially prioritized the public aspect of their relationship. Although they had true feelings for each other, they were only able to pursue them through correct protocol in the social sphere first. In trying to gain all of the social benefits of being involved in an ideal relationship, Cliges and Fenice were forced to go against their morals, scheme, and manipulate their roles in the court.

By the time they were able to successfully be together they had been so concerned with society's rules for love that they had lost touch on the realities of their relationship and of their basic emotions. Public and private notions of love clash within this story, and in trying to find balance courtly love eventually leads to its own downfall. Lancelot rejected all public concerns of love, and as a result was at risk of destroying his own reputation for the sake of the queen. Although love was an emotion capable of inspiring him to greater levels of skill, it inevitably caused him to act foolishly and irrationally. Love had the potential to bring Lancelot's reputation even higher, but he could not control himself and the effect that the emotion had on him, which caused him to lose interest in anything besides his lover. Chrétien's story about *The Knight with the Lion* presents the opposite side of the dilemma to show that although dangerous, love is necessary to a knight in some aspects. Yvain destroys his relationship and thus himself when he became overly consumed in his journey to promote himself as a chivalric knight. Although he attempted to break out of the confines of courtly love and succeed only as a knight, he was inevitably forced to return to love as a way to ground his identity within the courts. Finally, *The Story of the Grail* presents love as a social obligation that is necessary to succeed in other aspects of knighthood. Instead of grappling with priorities and difficulties involving relationships, Perceval and Gawain only involve themselves on an artificial level for the sake of maintaining public perceptions of their characters. Their successes suggest that Chrétien believes love must be treated this way and remain solely as an accessory to knighthood.

Chrétien used his five stories to show the failures of love and chivalry. However, beyond the conflicts that exist within the developing definitions of these social constructions, he also dispels the fantasy world of the court system. Not only do chivalry and love contradict each other, but Chrétien showed five different angles that destroyed the ideal world based on these two systems. Morally, physically, and emotionally, the structure that society is attempting to impose upon themselves can not exist. Each character within these developing court societies acts with the single priority of fulfilling their expected role, but these roles are set up to fail.

Although both courtly love and chivalry function as ways to structure interactions and relationships within society, Chrétien's cautionary tales suggest that those knights able to place themselves as top priority in all situations will come out on top. Deeds of love are necessary in an effort to project the image of a knight and in order to gain the benefits that a female of honor can provide a knight. However if emotional attachment and love for any purpose other than function is involved, the knight risks losing touch with other more important parts of their chivalric image. The eleventh and twelfth century progressed based on an ideal image of a perfectly balanced society, but the knights who were able to see the unrealistic nature of this balance were the only ones able to succeed. In the end, success within the gift economy of elite courts was only obtained by those able to selfishly prioritize their own needs. Arthur's court and other visions of a new ideal society existed as a tool, and those who were able to take advantage of the opportunities and remain grounded on the realities of the tension between

chivalry and love succeeded. The source of success was based on pursuing the needs of the individual. Although the invented ideals of chivalry and love involved the notion of a perfect society working in harmony and towards the same beliefs and goals, Chrétien's five romances shatter this image and prove the foundation of this developing society to be entirely egocentric.

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