5-2016

Parables of Love: Reading the Romances of Chrétien de Troyes through Bernard of Clairvaux

Carrie D. Pagels
University of Tennessee - Knoxville, cpagels@saintmarys.edu

To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Carrie D. Pagels entitled "Parables of Love: Reading the Romances of Chrétien de Troyes through Bernard of Clairvaux." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in French.

Mary McAlpin, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

John Romeiser, Anne-Helene Miller, Mary Dzon

Accepted for the Council:

Carolyn R. Hodges

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

Parables of Love:
Reading the Romances of Chrétien de Troyes through Bernard of Clairvaux

A Dissertation Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Carrie D. Pagels
May 2016

Abstract

In three romances *Yvain*, *Lancelot*, and *Perceval*, Chrétien de Troyes utilizes the intimate relationships of his courtly knights and their lady loves to explore and present the Christian ideology of Bernard of Clairvaux as expressed by his four degrees of love in the treatise, *On Loving God.* Previous scholarly works have only examined the Christian ideology and symbolism in Chrétien's romances as isolated occurrences specific to a single text. In contrast, I argue Chrétien's romances form a progression mirroring the Bernardian steps (or degrees) man must make in order to draw closer to and deepen his relationship with God. In order to achieve his progression, Chrétien utilizes the tenets of courtly love to explain and explore how loving and being loved advances man both secularly and spiritually towards the goal of union with the Beloved. Courtly love in Chrétien's romances explores the relationship between the secular and the divine to become a love which transcends the secular and connects man to God.

Table of Contents

Introduction

In the twelfth century, Chrétien de Troyes created a series of romances exploring the Arthurian world and its values, mannerisms, and ideology. Other than his last name (de Troyes) indicating perhaps from whence he hailed or was born, and the little he reveals in his prologues and romances, not much else is known about him.[1] For example, in the prologue to *Cligès',* Chrétien reveals himself to be a translator and author, stating that he translated both Ovid's *Commandments* and *L'Art d'aimer*, as well as writing *Erec et Enide* and *La Morsure de l'épaule*, a piece about King Marc and Isolde. In other prologues, those of as *Lancelot* and *Perceval*, Chrétien identifies his patrons, Marie de Champagne and Philip of Flanders, thus initiating scholarly speculation about who Chrétien was: a courtier, a clerk, an ecclesiastic? However, most scholars agree that Chrétien was at least a clerk working and writing first at the prestigious literary court of Marie de Champagne and then at that of Philip of Flanders.

Chrétien, the man and author, is a complete contrast to his regional compatriot and predecessor, St. Bernard of Clairvaux, who was a prolific writer as well as a well-known public figure. Bernard, a Cistercian Abbot, had the ears of prominent laymen, aristocrats, ecclesiastics, popes and kings, to such an extent that he could preach about going on a Crusade and actually have it endorsed by kings and nobles as well as the Pope. Hailing from an aristocratic background, Bernard could relate to all members of the nobility, encouraging or discouraging them, by using vernacular and secular themes with which they were familiar to discuss spiritual issues. Bernard was not afraid to use the tenets of chivalry or courtly love in his sermons and

[1] Jean Frappier, *Chrétien de Troyes: The Man and His Work*, trans. Raymond. J. Cormier (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1982) 3.

writings.[2] The Bernardian scholar, Jean Leclercq, describes Bernard's use of courtly literature in his writings as:

> a genuine language of human love made familiar to his monks through courtly literature...By using biblical language to express the human impulses and emotions [Bernard] transports human love to a higher plane, where the figures in the human drama become transformed into symbols of God and His beloved people or of the human Soul beloved by God.[3]

Bernard's use of human language, or as I will demonstrate, the language of courtly love, to explain and express how Divine love functions is one of the hallmarks of his teachings. This hallmark made Bernard's texts or sermons easily comprehensible to the secular aristocracy, from which many Cistercians and other religious ecclesiastics were drawn.

Bernard's capacity for utilizing language, specifically the language of courtly love, to instruct, must have had an impact upon his regional compatriot, Chrétien. Leclercq notes that it is most likely the Chrétien de Troyes did read Bernard.[4] Considering how prolific and how charismatic Bernard was, I think this connection is more than a possibility. In fact, I perceive it to be so probable that I argue in this dissertation that three of Chrétien's romances present a specific series of steps described by Bernard in his treatise *On Loving God*. Additionally, like Bernard, Chrétien elevates secular love to a "higher plane." Thus, Chrétien's romances seek to instruct both secularly and spiritually.

Lynette Muir, in *Literature and Society in Medieval France*, discusses how the didactic quality of medieval literature provides modern scholars with a "picture of medieval society in France as it saw itself, mirrored in its own literature."[5] This "mirroring of life in literature" provides modern scholars with pertinent information regarding life in twelfth-century France.

---

[2] Jean Leclercq, *Monks and Love in Twelfth-Century France* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1979) 21.
[3] Leclercq 103.
[4] Leclercq 121.
[5] Lynette Muir, *Literature and Society in Medieval France* (Basingstoke: MacMillan Publishers Ltd., 1985) 1.

Ruth Mazo Karras follows a similar line of thought about medieval literature's ability to be both entertaining and didactic, enabling medieval authors to influence and provoke their audiences to change their values or their ideology.[6] For Karras, medieval literature affected "the ideals, interests, mentalities, and aspirations, if not the actual behavior, of the knightly classes… [and i]t worked to reconcile several sets of competing ideals: romantic love, gentility, knightly prowess and piety."[7]

Peter Allen disagrees with both Karras and Muir, as he sees "courtly romance – particularly Arthurian romance … [as being] clearly set apart from reality."[8] Allen's point is valid to a certain extent. Chrétien's romances are works of fiction, but that does not discount the realities present, such as the descriptions of battles or clothing, which provide a realistic frame of reference for his medieval audience. Allen does emphasize a point that is worthy of attention: that the Arthurian world is fictional and should not be held up as an example of what the medieval world really was. That being said, Chrétien's romances do contain elements which connect their Arthurian settings with the medieval world of the twelfth century and do provide information on that particular era. It is this connection between reality and fiction that makes Chrétien's ingenious didacticism work.[9]

---

[6] C. Stephen Jaeger, *Envy of Angels: Cathedral Schools and Social Ideals in Medieval Europe, 950-1200* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994) 15. In discussing the Cathedral Schools, Jaeger notes that in the twelfth century texts replaced teachers as the primary pedagogical tool. Whereas in the eleventh century, imitating the teacher was epitome of the pedagogical model, in the twelfth century texts became the teachers, thus it was the text that was to provoke imitation.

[7] Ruth Mazo Karras, *From Boys to Men: Formations of Masculinity in Late Medieval Europe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003) 26.

[8] Peter Allen, *The Art of Love* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1992) 43.

[9] A.H. Diverres, "Chivalry and *fin'amor* in *Le chevalier au Lion*" in *Studies in Medieval Literature and Languages: In Memory of Frederick Whitehead*, eds. William Rothwell, W.R.J. Barron, David Blamires, and Lewis Thorpe. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1973) 107-108. In reference to one of Yvain's adventures in which, he rescues several maidens forced to work in the textile industry under appalling conditions, while the lord, his wife and daughter all enjoy the life of idleness and luxury, Diverres questions whether or not Chrétien was referring to the disgraceful working conditions of which slave girls of gentle birth were forced to work, in the silk factories in the Moslem world. Diverres speculates that Chrétien was using this adventure to symbolize a crusade, something that all knights should embark upon once in their lifetime. Yvain's rescue adventure reveals one of the links

The models for Chrétien's didactic knights and their love stories are found in the troubadour poetry of the south of France, which wound its way through France and beyond during the twelfth century. Eventually, as it became synonymous with the aristocracy, the type of love relationship between a knight and his lady was called courtly. However, it was not until the late nineteenth century that Courtly Love, as a term, was coined and used by the medieval scholar, Gaston Paris.[10] In an influential article, Paris explains the roles which the courtly knight and lady were to embody. The knight was to be the lady's servant; not literally as in his fetching her bath water or food, although it could be as simple as that, but rather in that he was to act on her behalf, accomplishing any task which she desired him to complete. Her role in turn was defined vis-à-vis her knight. It was she who selected and determined which tasks her knight would or would not undertake. His tasks were usually military in nature, designed to show off his skill at arms. His role was performative and public, her role was secretive and private. Her secretive and behind-the-scenes role illustrates one of the key principles of courtly love: that this love must remain secret at all costs and must be kept from public knowledge. However, the more men or monsters the knight defeated, the more people he rescued or assisted, the more his reputation increased, the more worthy he became in his lady's eyes and in the eyes of his peers. As her knight's reputation increased in the public eye, she drew pleasure from knowing that all he achieved was to bring her honor, glory, and make him worthy of her love; thus her love for him grew.

The exploration of courtly love is crucial to understanding the parallels that exist between Chrétien's romances and the teachings of Bernard of Clairvaux, which I discuss in succeeding

---

between fiction and reality. Diverres points out the real world circumstances which could have provided the basis for Chrétien's fictional narrative presented in Yvain's adventure. Diverres' speculation that Chrétien's fictional rescue mission invokes a real world call to arms, establishes Chrétien's works as didactic.

[10] Gaston Paris, "Études sur les romans de la Table Ronde: Lancelot du Lac, II: Conte de la Charrette" *Romania* 12 (1883) 518-519. Paris provides four identifying characteristics of what he eventually calls "l'amour *courtois.*"

chapters. These parallels demonstrate that Chrétien's romances can be read on both a secular and a spiritual level, especially the spiritual as Chrétien returns the sacred to the love-service relationship exhibited by his knights and ladies.[11] Additionally, these parallels delineate how Chrétien's knights navigate through and explore one or more of Bernard's degrees of love[12] as well as enabling each successive romance to build upon those preceding it.[13] While some scholars have examined the Christian themes, symbols, and spirituality within Chrétien's texts, they have done so by isolating them.[14] In other words, they have explored these Christian themes, elements, or symbols in each text singly within that specific text, with no attempt to relate these themes, elements, or symbols to any of Chrétien's other romances.[15] I see these themes, elements, and symbols as building upon each other in each succeeding romance, creating a progression that links each romance to the one which proceeds it or follows it.

As Chrétien's spiritual exploration is subtle, I argue that his romance narratives are actually parables. A parable is a short story that teaches a moral or spiritual lesson. As parables, then, Chrétien's romances do not overtly present Bernard of Clairvaux's degrees of love, and yet the degrees are there nonetheless. As each romance – parable progresses the knight's love relationship changes, introducing Christian themes or symbols such as sin and repentance that parallels in many aspects Bernard's degrees of love. Chrétien's knights, as they progress through

[11] C. Stephen Jaeger, *Ennobling Love* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999) 195. Jaeger states the Chrétien was not like his contemporary Andreas Capellanus, who reduced love to a social gesture and thus ridicule.
[12] Bernard's degrees of love are: the First Degree - Man loves himself for his own sake; the Second Degree - Man loves God for his own benefit; the Third Degree - Man loves God for God's sake; the Fourth Degree - Man loves himself for the sake of God.
[13] Jaeger, *Ennobling Love* 189. Jaeger describes this as the "didacticism of love... [where] love is a process of education."
[14] K. Sarah-Jane Murray, *From Plato to Lancelot: A Preface to Chrétien de Troyes* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2008). In her work, Murray does not see the religious elements of Chrétien's texts as being interconnected. She views them as isolated events but does not consider the whole narrative as an exploration of a religious theme. John Bednar, Jacques Ribard and Z. P. Zaddy do this as well in their works.
[15] Scholars have noted a progression in Chrétien's writing as regards to his knight's love relationships. For example, some note that the reason that Gauvain cannot assist his relations in *Yvain* is because he is of rescuing the Queen in *Lancelot*. However, this only denotes a secular intra-textuality, not a spiritual one, which is what I argue.

the narrative, demonstrate on a secular level how to return to or love a beloved, but also on a spiritual level how to return to or love God.

Chrétien's parables make the most sense when one reads the narratives in the following sequential order; *Yvain*, *Lancelot*, and finally *Perceval*. One can clearly see how Chrétien uses his knights to illustrate a spiritual progression, in parallel with Bernard's ideology of love presented in his four degrees. In the following chapters, I illustrate how *Yvain* explores Bernard's first and second degrees of love, how *Lancelot* reflects Bernard's third degree, and how *Perceval* moves quickly through the first three of Bernard's degrees before culminating in his fourth degree. In short I demonstrate that Bernard of Clairvaux's four degrees of love, which instruct man on how to love God, are developed across Chrétien's romances.

This dissertation grew out of a question about why Perceval disappears in the middle of Chrétien de Troyes' *Le Conte du Graal*. Many Chrétien scholars have attempted to answer this question, and in a variety of ways. Two such scholars, Jean Frappier, in *Chrétien de Troyes: The Man and His Work*, and Jean-François Lecompte, in *La Symbolique du Graal*,[16] provide a brief analysis of the structure of the text and then argue that Perceval's narrative story is juxtaposed to Gauvain's narrative story. Lecompte argues that a comparison between the secular and sacred is taking place by comparing Perceval and Gauvain as opposites of each other.

Perceval is arguably the most overt in its religious symbolism which is noted by the author himself in his introduction. It is from scholar Z. P. Zaddy's comparison, that the overt religious undertones and Chrétien's own inclusion of religious symbols, themes, and feasts in *Le Conte du Graal*, that I began to question if other of Chrétien romances contained similar

[16] Jean Frappier, *Chrétien de Troyes: The Man and His Work*, trans. Raymond J. Cormier (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1982). Jean-François Lecompte, *La Symbolique du Graal: Géométrie du Conte du Graal de Chrétien de Troyes* (Paris: Éditions Édite, 2008).

religious symbols and themes. Thus I began reading his other works with the idea in mind that religion, particularly Christianity, had a significant role to play within his texts.

With the objective in mind of hunting for religious symbols and themes, I began with *Le Chevalier au lion* or *Yvain*. I began with this particular text because I remembered two important features of this romance - the fountain and the lion. The lion is of course, one of the most common symbols of Christ, and the fountain, because of its connection with water, is the symbol of life and baptism. As I was rereading this text I began to notice other Christian themes in the narrative, such as reconciliation, death and rebirth.

Realizing that I had discovered Christian themes tucked cleverly within the narrative of a courtly love adventure story, I began to question why Chrétien's knights were married and if there was some ulterior motive for their having such an intimate bond. The married knight is one of the distinguishing features of Chrétien's romances and is a violation of the principles of courtly love. I began to ask myself why it was so important for Yvain or Erec to be married and if I could consider Chrétien's other knights as "married" as well. Did Chrétien's married knights have any connections with the religious themes beyond reconciliation, death, and rebirth? My answer was and is yes, but at that time I needed to continue searching.

Le Chevalier de la charrette or *Lancelot* was the next work that I read. This text is perhaps the one that adheres most strongly to the principles of courtly love, for it is the story of an adulterous love affair. This text seemed to derail all my suppositions that Chrétien was writing and exploring Christian themes, for how could anyone who is writing with a moral or religious purpose promote a text that violates one of the Ten Commandments: "Thou shalt not commit adultery"? This particular text was a trial, until one day I re-read the scene where Lancelot enters the Queen's bedchamber and passes the night with her. I paid close attention to

the words Chrétien chose to describe their encounter and was amazed to discover a liturgical lexicon that connoted veneration. I had found the key to *Lancelot*, as a religious story: it is the story of a monk's love for God. This revelation sent me searching for scholars who: 1) could see and provide meaning for the Christian themes and symbols contained within Chrétien's works, 2) could conceive of the idea that the courtly lady was representative of God, and 3) could see the parallels between Christian representations of love and the love relationships exhibited by Chrétien's knights.

The results turned up a few such scholars, such as John Bednar and Tom Artin. But it was not until I read C. Stephen Jaeger's work *Ennobling Love* that I began to conceive of the idea that Chrétien was doing more than just peppering his texts with Christian themes and symbols. There was at work a deeper meaning, perhaps an allegory. I began researching allegory and medieval texts. C.S. Lewis' *Allegory of Love* pointed me in the direction of the *Song of Songs* in the Bible. As I read and began to explore the scholarly works surrounding this biblical text, I encountered references to Bernard of Clairvaux and his *Sermons on the Song of Songs*.

Reading the Bernardian scholars Étienne Gilson, Michael Casey, and Jean Leclercq, I began to notice distinct parallels between Bernard and Chrétien. Both authors made similar use of the tropes and tenets of courtly love. Through the critiques and works of Bernard I discovered that he used courtly love motifs, themes and even language to express, explain and explore man's relationship to God and to divine love. As I explored Bernard's *Sermons on the Song of Songs*, I discovered another shorter work entitled, *On Loving God*. Contained within this work is a four-step process that man must go through in order to both learn to love God and to understand and engage in a more intimate relationship with Him. It became apparent to me during the course of

this exploration that Chrétien's romances, which mirrored Bernard's teachings, were also examining man's intimate relationship with God.

As I continued my research, I discovered that some scholars had looked at these religious themes and symbols but had regarded them as either isolated events unique to each romance[17] or they completely ignore anything religious in favor of exploring secular themes.[18] Some scholars do acknowledge that religious themes and symbols are present but see nothing beyond the location of the seasons, time of year, or the marking of the passage of time.[19] Others note the Christian symbols or themes but do not see them as significant features of Chrétien's works. I believe that Christian overtones, themes, and symbols are key features to unlocking the hidden meaning contained within the parable-esque nature of his narratives.

In fact, part of this dissertation will argue that the religious overtones, themes, and symbols form a progression leading from *Yvain* to *Perceval*. I believe it is paramount to understand that Chrétien would have indubitably been exposed to, influenced by, and familiar with Bernard's teachings. I also believe that Chrétien's romances use courtly love just as Bernard's does in *On Loving God* and in the *Sermons on the Song of Songs*, that is, to direct the reader or audience to search for a deeper religious meaning. For me, Chrétien's romances expose and explore different aspects of man's relationship with God, but more importantly they are parables which teach Bernard of Clairvaux's concepts of how to love and be loved by God. To this end, it is important to comprehend that I see each romance mirroring the progression established in Bernard's degrees of love in *On Loving God.*

[17] Jean Frappier, Tom Artin, and John Bednar all do this.
[18] Donald Maddox and most post 1970's scholars do this.
[19] Z. P. Zaddy does this in her structural analyses of *Erec* and *Yvain.*

I have divided this dissertation into five chapters. The first two chapters establish certain themes and concepts that come into play and are explored in greater detail in the three succeeding chapters. In the first chapter, I argue that Chrétien de Troyes' romances are didactic examples providing a guide on how to be a courtly knight. To this end, I first explain distinct tenets of courtly love and establish the roles that the male and female lovers display in Chrétien's romances. Secondly, I explore how similar or dissimilar Chrétien's fictional knights and ladies are when compared to their historical counterparts. Establishing the similarities and differences between the real and the ideal reinforces my argument as to how Chrétien's romances function as a guidebook and as a parable. Additionally, in order to see the commonalities between Chrétien's didacticism and Bernard's teachings, I delineate certain Christian themes which adhere to and parallel courtly love principles.

In chapter two, after providing a brief biography of Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, I explore three of his works – his *Sermons on the Song of Songs*, *On Humility and Pride*, and *On Loving God*. The *Sermons* and *On Humility and Pride* are included because they illuminate certain Bernardian concepts and theologies, such as the dialectic of desire (what the lover feels in the presence or absence of his beloved) and the role of pride and humility. Bernard's conception of pride becomes a key component of my arguments in chapters three and five, as pride is the basis of sin. However, *On Loving God* is the primary focus here as I detail Bernard's four degrees of love. Each degree is a step that man must take if he wishes to draw closer to and eventually achieve spiritual union with God; and each degree corresponds to the narrative stories in which Chrétien's knights find themselves. Pertinent points raised by Bernardian scholars as to whom Bernard addressed his texts and what exactly is Bernard's goal for man's love relationship,

uphold my argument that both Bernard and Chrétien provided guide books which illustrate man's relationship with God and what steps to take to deepen one's relationship with God.

In chapter three, I argue that Yvain exemplifies Bernard's first degree of love as a prideful man. It is his pride which results in the estrangement from his beloved and sends him out on a series of reconciliatory journeys to rectify and repair his relationship with his wife. The correction of his pride illustrates man's movement from the first degree to the second. Yvain's eventual ability to understand that the love for another is more important than his love of self enables this progression and facilitates his reconciliation.

In chapter four, I argue that Lancelot can be considered a "married" knight as his love story is a didactic example of a monk's love for God. Lancelot embodies the Christian and courtly love principles of humility, faithfulness, and obedience. It is both his obedience and his disobedience which forms the core of the narrative but also demonstrates the liturgical lexicon and spiritual register in which Chrétien is writing. It is also Lancelot's obedience and humility which places him firmly within Bernard's third degree of love and illustrates what Christian obedience means and what it can provide as a reward.

In my final chapter, I discuss the journey of Perceval from unknown and uneducated boy to a knight of renown and courtesy. Perceval's journey is twofold; his secular journey makes him a courtly knight, while at the same time his spiritual journey takes him through all four degrees of love. From the very beginning, Chrétien saturates *Perceval* with an abundance of Christian themes and symbols, which are never fully explained, catapulting this narrative into a spiritual and mystical sphere. The protagonist's mysterious disappearance from the text culminates in Bernard's fourth degree of love and thus concludes Chrétien's exploration of Bernard's four

degrees of love. My argument ends with Perceval's disappearance from the narrative, as I argue that the reason for this disappearance is explained in the chapter itself.

The reader will note three omissions. Firstly, the narrative of *Erec et Enide* is not discussed. My reason for not including *Erec* is that his narrative journey shares similarities with Yvain's. Both texts have episodes of death and rebirth, and the theme of reconciliation predominates in both narratives. Because of these similarities, both narratives model the same progression from Bernard's first to his second degree of love. In an effort to reduce redundancies, I selected only one of these romances for discussion in this dissertation.

Secondly, I have not included *Cligès.* There are several reasons why I choose to omit this work. Firstly, most of the action pits an Occidental court against an Oriental court and thus the narrative, for me, explores a "crusader" theme, i.e., the war theme predominates over the love theme. Secondly, as other scholars have noted, the narrative seems to be a reworking of the Tristan and Iseult story. Again, the theme of adultery is present, however, this theme, as other scholars have noted, is one which Chrétien abhorred,[20] for he has Fenice state that she does not want to be likened to Iseult. I could argue that the love relationship explored within this text is similar to Lancelot and the Queen's, however, the liturgical lexicon which abounds in *Lancelot* is missing from this narrative. Lastly, as other scholars have noted and as I am inclined to agree, this particular text shares more with Ovid's *Ars Amatoria* than with Christianity. To me, *Cligès* looks back to Ovid's work, to the contested Orient; where the dominant crusader themes of conquest and defending the faith or faithful predominate in this text.

Lastly, in chapter five, I am discussing only the episodes which contain Perceval; Gauvain's sections will not be included. I am not including Gauvain's episodes because I am in

[20] Peter S. Noble, *Love and Marriage in Chrétien de Troyes* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1982) 8.

accord with Frappier's argument that Perceval's narrative is set up in contrast with Gauvain's.[21] For me, Gauvain's narrative is strictly secular. Gauvain illustrates only a secular courtly knight. Gauvain's character, to me, is also somewhat static; in other words, he does not grow as a courtly knight, psychologically, emotionally, or spiritually, when compared to Chrétien's other knights. Perceval on the other hand, as chapter five will argue, illustrates both a spiritual and secular growth. This growth, both secular and spiritual, which Chrétien's knights embody, illustrates the finesse with which Chrétien creates a series of parables exploring divine love and man's relation to it.

[21] Jean Frappier, *Chrétien de Troyes* 129.

Chapter One: Knights, Ladies, and Courtly Love: Realities and Fiction

> The man is her servant; he has no will but hers, and he performs valorous deeds in her service. They conceal their love with great caution. It is the very model of a love beyond the body, confined to the mind, the soul and spirit, confined to desire. The man seeks only honor for both of them.[22]

The epigraph to this chapter is a modern scholarly description of Courtly Love, a term which was coined in the late nineteenth century by medieval scholar Gaston Paris.[23] Rooted in troubadour poetry, courtly love came from the south of France, winding its way northward as the poets moved from court to court, adapting their works to reflect the morals and social values of their audiences. This mobility and fluidity of both authors and their texts explains why there is no concrete definition for courtly love. Courtly romance poets and authors, like the troubadour poets, accepted or rejected certain characteristics of courtly love, all while conserving some of its core tenets. Nevertheless, it was the troubadour poetry that established the rules and the codes of conduct of courtly love and courtly behavior for the courtly lover-knights and their ladies.

For most troubadour and courtly love poetry, the relationship between the lover and his lady was a secret adultery. It consisted of the unmarried poet who was in anguish and suffering because his love was hidden from the lady, who may or may not have been aware that she was the object of his attention. The poet, however, sings of his emotional and physical desire for this distant lady. If the love was acknowledged by both parties, it always came with the mandate that it must remain secret. For the lady, the relationship had to be secret because she did not want to lose her reputation as a virtuous (i.e. chaste) woman.[24] For the male lover, the secrecy was

---

[22] C. Stephen Jaeger, *Ennobling Love* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999) 203.

[23] Gaston Paris, "Études sur les romans de la Table Ronde: Lancelot du Lac, II: Conte de la Charrette" *Romania* 12 (1883) 518-519. Paris provides four identifying characteristics of what he eventually calls "l'amour *courtois.*"

[24] Ruth Mazo Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe: Doing Unto Others*, 2nd ed (London: Routledge, 2012) 58-64. During the Middle Ages chasteness and chastity had several different meanings depending upon the person to whom

primarily to prevent the loss of his life at the hands of a jealous husband, but also perhaps served to maintain the façade that he was available for love or marriage. This is in direct contradiction with the courtly love and lovers exhibited in Chrétien's works.[25] Chrétien's romances challenge the tenets of jealousy and love existing only between unmarried lovers as his knights are married,[26] but also through the idea of mutual joy and shared glory for both lover and beloved, which becomes a goal for his knights.[27]

I argue in this and succeeding chapters that Chrétien de Troyes uses the adventures of his knights, specifically their courtly love relationships, to present Bernard of Clairvaux's four degrees of love.[28] Bernard's four degrees provide steps on how to love God, which, like the tenets of courtly love, also encompasses the themes of desire, humility, service, and devotion. The role of the knight and the lady and their relationship with each other depicts but one of the parallels between courtly love and Bernardian ideology. Because courtly love involves the development of a relationship that is intensely personal between a knight and a lady, courtly love becomes "the very model of a love beyond the body, confined to the mind, the soul and spirit."[29] In other words, courtly love constitutes a highly spiritual love. It is a love not based upon the

---

it was applied. In this case a woman could be considered chaste if she only accepted sexual relations with her husband. Additionally the modern connotation of chastity can also be applied, in which case it usually refers to virginity, virgins, or abstinence.

[25] Chrétien de Troyes, *Erec et Enide,* ed Michel Zink, trans. Jean-Marie Fritz (Paris: Lettres Gothiques, Livre de Poche, Librairie Générale Française, 1992); *Le chevalier au lion ou Yvain,* ed. Michel Zink, trans. David F. Hult (Paris: Lettres Gothiques, Livre de Poche, Librairie Générale Française, 1994); *Le chevalier de la charrette ou Lancelot,* ed. Michel Zink, trans. Charles Méla (Paris: Lettres Gothiques, Livre de Poche, Librairie Générale Française, 1996); *Le conte du Graal ou Perceval,* ed. Michel Zink, trans. Charles Méla (Paris: Lettres Gothiques, Livre de Poche, Librairie Générale Française, 1990). All translations contained here within are mine.

[26] In all but one of Chrétien's works, the troubadour concept of courtly love as an adulterous relationship is negated. However, in chapter four which discusses *Lancelot* I will argue that Lancelot is in fact married.

[27] The idea of mutual joy and shared glory is demonstrated at the end of *Erec et Enide* via the coronation ceremony that Chrétien describes in detail.

[28] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, Inc., 1995) 25-30. The first degree – Man loves himself for his own sake; The second degree – Man loves God for his own benefit; The third degree – Man loves God for God's sake; The fourth degree – Man loves himself for the sake of God.

[29] Jaeger 203.

body or terrestrial desires but one which is raised to a celestial and divine sphere.[30] Courtly love becomes a love in which the divine and the secular are intertwined and blurred together. Chrétien's parables demonstrate his own ideology of courtly love while exploring the relationship between the secular and the divine, especially the relationship between man and God. Courtly love in Chrétien's romances becomes a love that is more than just a part of a story. In Chrétien, courtly love reveals relationships that transcend the secular and seek to connect man to God.

My first task in this chapter will be to explore and elaborate upon some characteristics of courtly love, thus establishing some commonalities which enable the exploration of the parallels between Chrétien's romances and Bernard of Clairvaux's teachings. This first chapter is not intended to be an entire catalogue of all the complex aspects of courtly love as that is beyond the scope of this project. While courtly love has no set definition, due to its myriad variations based upon who penned the texts, it does have several core principles to which most authors adhere. In this chapter, I focus on relevant common concepts such as the respective roles assigned to the male and female lover as well as some specific characteristics such as – desire, humility, service, and devotion.

The second goal of this chapter is to explore the fiction and realities surrounding courtly life and love. Exploring the confluence between fiction and reality is critical to understanding how Chrétien's romances work as didactic texts, specifically parables.[31] Like the parables[32] of

[30] Courtly love for the troubadour's was also about physical desire, and thus the body was important to them. This differed from *fin'amors*, which attempted to go beyond the physical.
[31] A parable is a short story that teaches a moral or spiritual lesson.
[32] Tom Artin, *The Allegory of Adventure: Reading Chrétien's Erec and Yvain* (London: Associated University Presses, 1974) 34 & 38. Artin defines parables as stories that "hide the truth only to reveal it" (34). He goes on to say that "the story of adventure is, after all, the apparently worthless thing that turns out to be of great value" (38).

Christ, Chrétien's texts present a secular model of behavior for courtly knights who wished to know how to enter the court and then maintain their status. However, they also provide a religious model for every man who wishes to learn how to love and draw closer to God. Tom Artin argues that Chrétien is entirely serious about the existing links between a secular adventure story and a spiritual Christian journey. Artin states that:

> The implication that success for the lover is 'heaven' is a common metaphor. The real bite of Chrétien's little joke, however, is that he was perfectly serious in the first place. Love is not, after all, being contrasted with spirituality, but rather imbued with its meaning.[33]

Love, in Chrétien's romances, is elevated to a spiritual realm where it is infused with a Christian model of spiritual behavior. By writing courtly adventure stories as parables, Chrétien requires his readers to search for the hidden Christian symbols, themes, theology, and ideology within his texts.[34]

Chrétien's secular courtly models would in fact have been easily recognizable or understood by the aristocratic audience to which his works were destined. Ruth Mazo Karras' *From Boys to Men*[35] and *Sexuality in Medieval Europe*, uses both literary and historical sources and figures to discuss sexuality, the sexes, sexual relations, the role of masculinity and sexual institutions, such as chastity and marriage, and thus helps to conceptualize the links that exist between Chrétien's fictional world and the real world of the twelfth century. Understanding the real knights upon which Chrétien's idealized knights are based, is essential to comprehending how courtly love functions within the romance genre as well as how it functioned within twelfth-

[33] Artin 45
[34] Artin 41. Artin also argues that "a scriptural text is true on the literal level also, but the literal sense contains within it a spiritual sense of higher, mystical truth, which it is the function of exegesis to reveal."
[35] Ruth Mazo Karras, *From Boys to Men: Formations of Masculinity in Late Medieval Europe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003).

century society. This is important because it demonstrates how Chrétien's romances can function as didactic manuals or parables directed towards his aristocratic audience.

Andreas Capellanus' twelfth-century work, *The Art of Courtly Love*,[36] also facilitates the exploration between fictional works and reality in two ways. Like troubadour poetry, Capellanus' text establishes codes of courtly conduct for the lover and his lady through a series of dialogues. Capellanus' work is constructed in such a way as to encourage the reader to read the dialogues as didactic texts, even though they are placed within a fictional framework. The reader, then, has only two ways to view Capellanus' work: either it is a manual to follow or the dialogues are fictions, exposing the contradictory and paradoxical nature of courtly love through its discrepancies in the rules, codifications, and values of courtly love during the twelfth century.[37]

Peter Allen problematizes texts similar to Capellanus' work, which teach a type of love and appear to be able "to be taken outside the [literary] frame and used to manipulate real people with consequences no more painful than those the reader encounters in the fantasy of the literary text."[38] For Allen, this type of "educational" writing has the inherent danger of having the reader comprehend the text as didactic, but not recognize the fictional framework within which the characters and morals are placed. In other words, a text which exposes characteristics of courtly love and provides fictional models of lovers, is not meant to be taken as a genuine guide for one's

[36] Andreas Capellanus, *The Art of Courtly Love*, trans. John Jay Perry (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960). Capellanus, *De Amore* or *The Art of Courtly Love* was written between 1186 and 1190. Both Capellanus and Chrétien de Troyes worked for Marie de Champagne. Capellanus' text is divided into three sections. In the first section Capellanus defines courtly love through a series of dialogues between male and female lovers of differing social ranks. In the second section, he continues categorizing the tenets of courtly love. In the third and final section, he rejects the instructions he has provided in the previous two sections.

[37] Jaeger 114. These contradictions and paradoxes make it hard to seriously consider the text a guidebook. Jaeger notes that not only is the text "shot through with contradictions" but that the first two books, which serve as an instruction manual for a young man entering court, are contradicted by the material in Capellanus' third book, which tells the young man to reject the instructions of the first two, spurn women, and remain chaste.

[38] Peter Allen, *The Art of Love* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1992) 4.

real-life experiences. In contrast to Capenallus' text which is narratively framed as a "how to" manual, Chrétien's romances do not claim or address themselves as being didactic thus eschewing and avoiding the danger of being read as such.[39] Chrétien subtly presents his models of behavior through the veil of fiction, via a parable, and leaves it up to the reader to discover the hidden meanings in the models he offers.

This confluence between fiction and reality addresses and questions the use of secular works to present and inform religious ideology. Since Chrétien's romances have some basis in and similarities with the twelfth-century world[40] in which he was writing, it should not take any great leap of imagination to perceive that there are clear parallels between Chrétien's version of courtly love and the Christian themes and ideology presented therein.[41] The fictional framework of courtly love in Chrétien's parables presents and explores real religious concerns and ideology. Before I examine how Chrétien's romances present these religious concerns and ideology, an examination of some of the key principles of courtly love is necessary. These key principles are important for succeeding discussions on the relationship parallels existing between the secular and divine.

---

[39] Maurice Keen, *Nobles, Knights and Men-at-Arms in the Middle Ages* (London: The Hambledon Press, 1996) 26. The historian Keen claims that "many of the stories of Arthur and his court were recorded as if they were history... Whether they were factual or not, they could serve a principal purpose of history in medieval eyes, that of furnishing from the past's store of experience *didactic examples - models of good living* relevant to the present and historical foils to contemporary history, illustrating the qualities and failings of the contemporary world. There is no doubt that people expected the Arthurian stories to be read this way." (Italics for emphasis mine). It is important to realize the role in which Arthurian stories played in the mindset of the audience. If Chrétien's stories were viewed as "didactic examples - models of good living", even if he did not overtly claim them as such, it becomes clear then that Chrétien's romances do indeed have some instruction to impart, be it secular or spiritual.

[40] Keen, *Nobles, Knights and Men-at-Arms* 64. "We nowadays discuss these works as fictions, but their authors assumed at least some substructure of truth underlying them, and seldom made any effort to distinguish the fact from the fantasies that were blended in their poems." Even though Keen is referring to the *chansons de geste* and early Arthurian romances, the blurring between facts and fantasy can still be noted in Chrétien's own works. For example his descriptions of medieval clothing and knightly armor as well as a few other places mentioned later in this chapter.

[41] Keen, *Chivalry* 16. Keen notes that chivalry fused aristocratic values, martial skill and Christianity together.

Characteristics of Courtly Love

Moshé Lazar in his work, *L'Amour courtois et Fin'amor*,[42] provides an in-depth categorization and classification of the complex and sometimes paradoxical aspects of courtly love established by the troubadour poets and other courtly romance authors, such as Marie de France. Lazar's description of courtly love is intriguing in that he views it not necessarily as being an adulterous love but instead as something almost mythically pure and spiritual: "Ce n'est pas le désir qui est à la base de l'amour courtois mais l'idée d'ennoblissement spirituel" ("It is not desire that is the basis of courtly love but the idea of spiritual ennoblement").[43] This is highly unusual as most other scholars, such as Étienne Gilson, dismiss the idea that courtly love was anything other than a secular code of conduct for condoning adultery.[44]

Chrétien's *ennoblissement* of man is not just secular but also spiritual. The idea that courtly love could be used to show how man could improve himself on a secular level is essential for understanding how Chrétien's knights and ladies both conform to and diverge from the established troubadour models of courtly love. It is also important for realizing that Chrétien's version of courtly love is one that is also meant to be ennobling in terms of man's spiritual relationship to God. Chrétien's knights are not only elevated to a higher standing by improving themselves through their adventures and feats of strength but also by psychologically and spiritually elevating themselves through their relationships with their ladies. It is my hope that by exploring Chrétien's conception and depiction of courtly love, which is different from the

[42] Moshé Lazar, *L'Amour courtois et Fin'amor* (Paris: Librairie C. Klincksieck, 1964).
[43] Lazar, *L'Amour courtois et Fin'amor* 74. C. Stephen Jaeger, *Ennobling Love* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999) 203. Jaeger's view of courtly love parallels Lazar's.
[44] Étienne Gilson, *The Mystical Theology of St. Bernard*, trans. A.H.C. Downes (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1990) 190-191 & 197.

courtly love codified by the troubadours,[45] that the parallels between courtly love and Christian ideology disclosed in Bernard's writings will become clearer especially in regards to Chrétien's didacticism.

Courtly love as established in troubadour poetry is between a young man and a lady of a higher or slightly higher social standing[46] who is usually married; thus, their love must be kept secret for fear of discovery by the lady's husband. The lady is generally a member of the aristocracy; however the young man, as shown by some of the troubadour poets, may or may not belong to this same class. Jaeger has described the relationship between them as modeling the feudal lord-servant relationship.[47] Courtly love attempts to follow this same model with the young man taking the role of the servant and the lady occupying the role of the lord. In addition to the master-servant relationship, courtly love is in general a relationship that is secretive and adulterous.

Chrétien avoids the adulterous aspect of courtly love by exploring love within the relationship of marriage. Two of Chrétien's knights were married men,[48] which becomes one of the distinguishing features of his works and a new rubric for courtly love. A married couple significantly changes the nature of the courtly love relationship between the knight and his lady. For example, there is no longer a need for jealousy or secrecy. This freedom from one of the major principles of courtly love enabled Chrétien to exploit and explore the internal emotions portrayed within a stable relationship and use them to present Christian ideology on how to love

[45] Chrétien's knights are not engaged in an adulterous love, with one exception - Lancelot's relationship with the Queen. Their relationship can be viewed as adulterous. However, in chapter four, I will explain and explore how Lancelot and the Queen's relationship can be read as not being an adulterous love affair.
[46] To the troubadours the Lady is known as the Donna.
[47] C. Stepehn Jaeger, *Ennobling Love* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999) 67. The servant owes the lord his loyalty and service, because the lord provides him with protection or some sort of financial reward.
[48] Erec and Yvain are married within the first quarter of their romances. Perceval is interested in Blanchefleur but it is not clear if he is considering marriage to her. In *Cligès* which is not discussed here, both of Chrétien's knightly protagonists are married. Lancelot is generally considered to be the exception.

and have a fruitful rapport with God. Jaeger argues that "one of the most powerful attractions and moving forces of sublime (or ennobling) love" is:

> the higher return to innocence, sexuality transformed into strength and spirit, shedding the body but retaining all its tensions and dynamics. Sublime love allows the staging of relationships in what appears a prelapsarian world of passion unencumbered by sexuality, or rather, including a sexuality 'purified' of the physical by some act of moral conquest that creates complete freedom, openness and frankness in the realm of desire - as conquest in battle creates peace - eliminates guilt, humiliation, degradation, all the dangers of earthly passion.[49]

Sublime love, the type of love aspired to by Chrétien's knights, then has a transformative power. It transforms the body, sexuality, and sexual desire (i.e. the secular or vulgar), into something spiritual and unearthly. Ennobling love or sublime love and those who engage in it, are thus propelled into the realm of the divine. In Chrétien's romances, the trials and the journeys that each of his knights undertake as a result of their own individual flaws or faults transforms them and changes how they love their women. Each knight's journey[50] begins due to a need to repair or re-establish his love or reputation. The recognition of their faults is also the discovery of how they have sinned. The journeys to rectify the damage caused to their relationships enables the movement of the knights' love beyond an earthly realm and into the spiritual[51] or in Jaeger's terms into the sublime. Love relationships in Chrétien's romances are based less on the body and sexuality and more on emotional and spiritual journeys. In others words, his knights' adventures are a movement away from the secular and towards the divine.

Lancelot is perhaps one work which comes immediately to mind and refutes the idea that Chrétien's romances deal primarily with emotions and spirituality. I wish however to touch briefly upon a couple of facts, which I return to in chapter four. First it is important to keep in

---

[49] Jaeger 118.
[50] With the exception of Lancelot, whose journey begins due to the Queen's abduction. However, once his fault is revealed to him, his journey corresponds to the journeys of Chrétien's other knights.
[51] Subsequent chapters will explore this further.

mind that Chrétien did not select the subject material for this romance himself. Instead he was requested on behalf of his patroness, Marie de Champagne, to write an adulterous love story. This Chrétien tells us in his prologue, "[m]atiere et san li done et livre / La contesse."[52] Since Chrétien did not choose the type of courtly love portrayed, the departure from his usual courtly narrative of a married knight can be understood as the narrative was thrust upon him. The reason for the countess' choice of story can perhaps be explain in a letter "written" to settle an argument between two potential lovers, found in Capenallus' work, she supposedly writes:

> We declare and we hold as firmly established that love cannot exert its powers between two people who are married to each other. For lovers give each other everything freely, under no compulsion of necessity, but married people are in duty bound to give into each other's desires and deny themselves to each other in nothing. Besides, how does it increase a husband's honor if after the manner of lovers he enjoys the embraces of his wife, since the worth of character of neither can be increased thereby, and they seem to have nothing more than they already had a right to?[53]

The countess is clear. To her, "courtly love" cannot exist between a married man and woman. However, Chrétien's romances refute the Countess' idea and explore the possibility of love between married couples.[54] Chrétien states in his prologue to *Lancelot* that to please his patroness and confirm her views, he wrote with the idea of supporting her conception of courtly love.[55] Another two of Chrétien's romances, *Erec* and *Yvain*, however, argue and demonstrate that courtly love can exist within the bounds of marriage. Chrétien subverts both his patroness' and the troubadour's conception of courtly love by separating love from the carnal (i.e. sexual

[52] *Lancelot* 501 verses 26-27. "The subject and meaning were given to him by the countess."
[53] Capellanus 106-07.
[54] Jean Frappier, *Chrétien de Troyes: The Man and His Work,* trans. Raymond J. Cormier (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1982) 47.
[55] Chrétien states as much in his introduction to *Lancelot* that he wrote the narrative under the direction of the Countess. However I will argue in chapter four that while the plot may have come from the Countess, Chrétien still creates a love story that elevates from the carnal to the spiritual and infuses the story with Christian ideology.

and thus vulgar), transforming it into something spiritual.[56] Love, in all of Chrétien's romances, is now no longer bound to the earthly sphere, but raised to the spiritual plane.

Through the use of religious language, Chrétien invites his readers to avoid the tawdriness of the sexualized body, so that the supposed episode of adultery, the "night of love" in *Lancelot,* becomes a representation of the love and mutual joy which exists between man and God. It is this transformation from the vulgar to the spiritual that I wish to stress. Jaeger argues that once a vulgar love has been elevated to the sublime it becomes ennobled, because love loses its attachment to earthly concepts, such as the body, and instead becomes ethereal and spiritual.[57] Jaeger's argument illustrates one of my key points as to how Chrétien's courtly romances make use of the love-adventure story to illustrate Bernard's steps to loving God. The body and earthly elements contained in the courtly adventure-romance provide the locus for the exploration of being in a loving relationship with the divine. Quite simply, Chrétien's romances are parables for exploring spiritual love.

Unlike *Lancelot,* Chrétien's other romances, *Yvain,* and *Perceval,* do not incorporate the theme of adultery, rendering the troubadour concepts of secrecy and jealousy useless. Chrétien's works can still be considered courtly, because they do uphold a majority of other courtly love principles. In Chrétien's romances, which were written for an aristocratic audience,[58] there is a certain amount of concern for two components of courtly love, *mezura* and *jovens*[59] (measure and youth). *Jovens* is simply youthfulness. Courtly love then is something in which only

[56] Jaeger 137. "the more sensual the gesture, the purer the intent and the greater the innocence [where the] debasing power of illicit sexuality is held in check."
[57] Jaeger 118.
[58] In the prologues of *Lancelot* and *Perceval,* Chrétien makes direct reference to his aristocratic patrons, Marie de Champagne and Count Philip of Flanders,
[59] Both of these are Occitan words, the language of troubadour composition and not the language in which Chrétien wrote. Lazar uses these and other Occitan words in his analysis of courtly love and its role in Chrétien's romances. For Lazar, *mezura* and *jovens* are key components of courtly love.

youthful people engage. In the descriptions of Chrétien's knights and Arthur's court, the reader notices that everyone is young and beautiful.

The idea that love is only for the youthful is something that Capellanus in his love "manual" remarks upon by stating that "[a]ge is a bar... after the sixtieth year in a man and the fiftieth year in a woman... passion cannot develop into love... a girl under the age of twelve and a boy before the fourteenth year do not serve [yet] in love's army."[60] While Capellanus gives quite a broad range of when courtly love is acceptable, Chrétien's knights appear to be in the prime of their life. Only Perceval, who is coming out of adolescence, seems younger than all the rest of his knights. Yvain and Lancelot are at least in their twenties for they have strong, established military and courtly reputations. This would be consistent with what Karras notes as a developing stage of masculinity for men:

> the primary way by which a boy established his adult masculinity was by testing himself and proving himself against other men....Violence was the fundamental measure of a man because it was a way of exerting dominance over men of one's own social stratum as well as over women and other social inferiors...it was not political but military activity that defined social identity and the masculine ideal for young men of the aristocracy.[61]

Once the young man had proved his prowess, he would then be available and viable as a marriage candidate because his ability to dominate other men[62] proved his worth. In discussing the steps of knighthood, Karras states that "young men...were typically knighted around the age of twenty-one and married somewhat later."[63] Although she does not indicate when this marriage would take place, what is more significant for this discussion is the age when the young man was knighted. Apparently the age of twenty-one was not "a hard and fast rule" and that

---

[60] Capellanus 32.
[61] Karras, *From Boys to Men* 11 & 21. According to Karras, a man's "youth" ends between the ages of twenty-five to thirty (13) as this was the age when he would marry (16).
[62] i.e. his martial skill
[63] Karras, *Boys to Men* 23.

some leniency was allowed.[64] However, the age mark of around twenty-one is important for Chrétien's knights as it implies that, with the exception of Perceval, their youthfulness is tempered with maturity and experience. Chrétien's knights, while young, do not lack in experience.[65]

Linked to the idea of *jovens*, is the concept of *mezura*. Frappier defines *mezura* as being something that:

> signifie savoir-vivre, modestie, contrôle de soi, équilibre des sentiments et de la raison... aussi conformité au code amoureux des troubadours... la *mezura* implique la discipline intérieure de l'amant courtois, une attitude raisonnable envers la dame aimée, la modération des désirs, la patience, et l'humilité. [66]

Throughout Chrétien's romances, his knights embrace and display the different aspects of *mezura* outlined in the above citation. Chrétien's knights, for the most part, keep the tenets of *mezura*; trouble, however, tends to arise when they stop abiding by them. For example in *Erec*, Erec forgets how to balance his emotional desires with those of his societal responsibilities, resulting in his being ridiculed by his peers as being too feminine.

This concept of *mezura* is also one that is repeated and reiterated in different ways over the course of Capellanus' dialogues in his text. Each reiteration carries with it some new rule for how to love, thus creating its own concept of *mezura*. In contrast to Capellanus' occasional confusing and contradictory codification of the rules of love and *mezura*, Chrétien's codifications of the rules of love are a bit more straightforward and are invariable from text to text. This invariability of *mezura* in Chrétien's romances allows his narratives to illustrate and explore one

---

[64] Karras, *Boys to Men* 23.

[65] The aristocratic medieval audience would have comprehended Chrétien's knights' social positions at Arthur's court as well as the situations in which they find themselves requiring their martial skills.

[66] Jean Frappier, *Amour Courtois et la table ronde* (Genève: Librairie Droz, 1973) 7. "signifies how to live, modesty, self-control, a balancing of emotions and reason... also conformity to the troubadour code of love... measure implies an interior discipline in the courtly lover, a reasonable attitude towards the beloved lady, moderation of desire, patience, and humility."

or more of Bernard's four degrees of love. Because of his knights' consistency, a progression from *Yvain* to *Lancelot* to *Perceval,* can be established, mirroring the steps of Bernard's four degrees which man must take in order to draw closer to God.

In order to comprehend the parallels between Chrétien's romances and Bernard's four degrees of love, I will examine the roles which the knight-lover and the lady embody within a courtly love relationship. Understanding the fundamentals of each lover's role will facilitate the discussion in succeeding chapters as to how Chrétien's knights illustrate Bernard's teachings in regards to man's relationship with God.

Male and Female Courtly Lovers: What is Required of Each

One of the primary locales in which the codification of courtly love takes place is within the roles of the male and female lovers and the characteristics each brings to the courtly relationship. Due to the way troubadour poets created their works, the courtly female lover's role is perhaps on the surface a bit more simplistic. Aside from being of the aristocracy, the courtly lady, according to Lazar, is:

> une dame belle et noble est aimée par un amant... elle doit l'aimer à son tour, lui donner un baiser, et, éventuellement 'un peu plus'... elle mérite d'être appelée dame courtoise et 'mesurée', c'est-à-dire raisonnable et bien éduquée.[67]

The courtly lady is beautiful and well educated. Not only must the lady be beautiful on the outside, she must be beautiful on the inside as well, fulfilling a common medieval theme of the outer appearance being a mirror to the inner part of the soul or personality. In other words, she is still "in bloom," both physically and mentally.

[67] Lazar 30. "a beautiful and noble lady loved by a lover... she must in turn love him back, give him a kiss, and, eventually 'a little more'... she merits being called courteous and sensible lady, that is reasonable and well educated."

Returning to Lazar's catalogue of courtly role requirements, he states that: "[l]a Dame est la source de tous les biens..."[68] This is highly significant as it is the primary role and function ascribed to the courtly lady. According to troubadour poetry, she is the source of inspiration or motivation.[69] Like the troubadour's lady, the ladies of Chrétien's knights, are also the motivational or inspirational force behind their actions. For example in *Yvain*, the rejection of his lady via the demand to return her ring sparks Yvain's journey of self-rediscovery and reconciliation; in *Lancelot*, the Queen's abduction sends the entire court including Lancelot off on a quest to rescue her; in *Perceval*,[70] Perceval's mother's unique educational practices lead him to act without thinking of the consequences. In each of Chrétien's stories the Lady, while being young, well educated, and beautiful, has a much more prominent role than she does in troubadour poetry, where she is often distant and objectified. She rarely interacts with the poet, in contrast to Chrétien's ladies who are very active[71] in the lives of their lover-knights.

Another key facet of her role is to determine the worth of her lover. If she finds him worthy, she grants him her love and perhaps a token or reward to the knight for his service and devotion.[72] The reward could be sexual or not, but she must grant him some reward for his

---

[68] Lazar 35. "The Lady is the source of all good."
[69] For the troubadour poet, she is the subject about which he sings and to which he sings.
[70] In *Perceval*, it is a maternal figure and not initially an amatory one that instigates Perceval's adventures.
[71] Active here meaning vocal or performing some task. The women in Chrétien's works are given a voice to speak directly to the knight or perform some action - such as healing, chastising, or searching themselves for a knight to help them. This is not always the case in troubadour poetry. Jaufré Rudel's "Lanquan li jorn son lonc e may" (When the Days are long in May) is perhaps the best example of courtly love's idea of *l'amour de loin* (love from a far) as he wrote the poem to the Countess of Tripoli, a woman whom he had never met.
[72] E. Jane Burns, "Refashioning Courtly Love: Lancelot as Ladies' Man or Lady/Man?" in *Constructing Medieval Sexuality*, eds. Karma Lochrie, Peggy McCracken and James A. Schultz, Vol. 11 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997) 113. "she must be a woman to receive the amorous advances of her heterosexual suitor, but she plays the seemingly empowered lord to his supposedly subservient vassal." Burns notes how the courtly love relationship functions as a vassal-lord / master-servant relationship, in which the lady has all the power. Burns use of the word "seemingly" undermines the fact that indeed it was the women who had the power in courtly relationships, for she determines the reward just as a lord would determine a vassal's recompense for services rendered (typically militaristic).

service or be accused of being *desmezura* (unreasonable).[73] Capellanus, however, in his text suggests that the reward must be sexual in nature, up to and including intercourse.[74]

However, if the lady finds her lover lacking in any way, such as courtly manners or speech, she has every right to withhold her love, to impart some information regarding courtly behavior or speech, and to encourage him to go study this area better before returning and addressing her again. This reveals another key component of her role: she can be an instructor. At least, this is what Capellanus' text suggests through the dialogues that a courtly lady should be and should do when necessary. Chrétien also uses women as instructors. For example, in *Perceval*, both Perceval's mother and the Tent Maiden attempt to provide him with instruction on how to act in society; in *Lancelot*, the first time Lancelot meets the Queen, she censures him by displaying anger causing his departure to improve himself so that he might deemed worthy to return to her, which he does successfully; and in *Yvain*, Yvain repeatedly allows Lunette, his wife's maid, to instruct him so that he might earn his wife's favor and return to her.

If the knight does not merit her love, her refusal of him should push him to better himself. Here is the starting point for the knight's quest. For Capellanus the lover's quest was one of refining courtly manners and speech. For the romance genre, the knights accepted quests which showed off their courage and bravery thus proving their worth via their prowess. Chrétien's romances, however, start with the premise that all the knights at King Arthur's court already

[73] Lazar 30. "puisqu'une dame belle et noble est aimée par un amant fidèle et courtois, elle doit l'aimer à son tour, lui donner un baiser, et éventuellement 'un peu plus'. Ce faisant, elle mérite d'être appelée dame courtoise et 'mesurée', c'est-à-dire raisonnable et bien éduquée. Agir en désaccord avec le code moral et social des troubadours, c'est transgresser les normes de la bonne conduite et du bon sens, c'est une *desmezura*. / since a beautiful and noble lady is loved by a faithful and courteous lover, she must love him as well, give him a kiss and possibly 'a little more'. This done, she merits being called a 'measured' and courteous lady, that is to say reasonable and well educated. Acting in disaccord with the moral and social code of the troubadours, is to transgress the norms of good conduct and sense, that is *desmezura*."

[74] Capellanus 167.

know how to behave in a courtly manner and speak properly.[75] The quests in which Chrétien's knights are engaged are, on the surface, quests to restore their own personal *mezura* but in fact reveal they are quests of self-discovery, reconciliation and/or union.

In troubadour poetry, the lady is placed upon a pedestal and becomes an idealized figure. She maintains her distance via her rank and occasionally is physically distant from the knight, as is the case of the Queen in *Lancelot* when she is kidnapped and taken to another country. She is the object to which and for which all the lovers strive. She is the object of masculine conquest and either is conquered or not, as is the case for the troubadour poets and Capellanus.[76] In other words, she is a trophy. For the male members of the aristocracy, having a lady becomes a way to gage between themselves who has more value.[77] Or, as Chrétien's romances demonstrate, she becomes the quest, the desired object that can eventually be obtained through service, suffering, and reconciliation.[78] Through her beauty or intelligence, and most often both, the flame of love or desire takes root within the knight.[79] By having a knight commit himself to serving her, she is

[75] The exception to this is *Perceval*. However, over the course of the romance Perceval learns courtly manners and speech.

[76] Capellanus 122 & 167. Cappellanus states: "it is not right for a woman to refuse to give in to her lover's desire" (167). This means that according to Capellanus' rules of courtly love, sexual intercourse is accepted and even required between the lovers. This negates his concept of pure love versus mixed love (122). Capellanus indicates that those lovers who follow the precepts of pure love would not engage in sexual intercourse as this would debase the nobler and spiritual aspects of their love, whereas mixed love is the type of courtly love in which the body is the primary focus and the lovers do engage in sexual intercourse. Capellanus frequently urges his reader to avoid mixed love and to seek out pure love instead. However, the above quote discounts his earlier arguments.

[77] At the beginning of *Erec*, Gauvain tells Arthur that the kiss given to the fairest lady at the court is going to cause problems amongst his knights. The reason being that if having a lady to love increases a knight's value and worth in the eyes of his peers, how much more so will his worth and value increase if it is his *own* lady who earns the kiss bestowed by the King. Gauvain's warning to Arthur that this kiss will tear his court apart is a valid concern as each knight will try to outdo the others to get that kiss for his lady. For the knight whose lady wins that kiss would earn bragging rights among his peers because it was *his* lady that received the kiss.

[78] Lancelot's narrative best demonstrates this concept of lady as quest. For it her abduction which initiates Lancelot's journey to claim/ re-claim her.

[79] Yvain secretly observes his future wife, Laudine, through the window where he is hidden after he's defeated, Esclados (Laudine's now deceased husband). Yvain sees the beautiful Laudine as she mourns the death of her husband, complete with hair ripping and wailing, and he falls in love with her.

able to dictate her wishes and desires to him. If he wishes to prove himself to be her loyal servant, he will obey her desires without question or hesitation.[80]

It is hard to separate the male courtly lover's role from that of the lady's, because both are so entwined. The lover-knight cannot exist without the lady and vice versa. The concept of the mirror image, or lovers as mirror images, is crucial for understanding the entwined nature of courtly love roles. Chrétien presents these roles through a description of the Lady Enide whom he likens to a mirror in which one might see oneself.[81] As a mirror, Enide allows Erec to look "in with the proper intention and in the proper way...he will consider her perfect beauty and his own deformity in relation to it...She is there to be consulted, like a mirror, by every courtly person. She reflects our future condition."[82] Enide provides a reflection for Erec to view himself, allowing Erec to view his own shortcomings. Like Enide, the lady's perfection is both internal and external and the knight's goals and objectives cannot be comprehended without her being the perfection of both mind and body to which courtly lovers and Chrétien's knights aspire. In other words, the lady cannot be set on her pedestal as a goal, as something to work towards attaining, without the courtly lover seeing her as the embodiment of perfection and his own continuous need for self-improvement to be viewed as worthy of her in her eyes.

The knight's role, then, mirrors to a certain extent the lady's, however his role requires public display. While the lady occupies the role of hidden motivator, who privately judges and urges the knight to perform the tasks she sets for him, his role is much more performative, i.e. public. He demonstrates his masculinity and his prowess publicly and in so doing he proves his

[80] Towards the end of *Lancelot,* at a tournament, when via a handmaid the Queen tells Lancelot to do his worst, he promptly loses every joust and battle he engages in on that day, subjecting him to ridicule and humiliation from the other knights in attendance. The next day when the Queen orders him to do his best, he wins every battle and joust and earns both the respect of his fellow knights and the Queen's.
[81] *Erec* 59 verses 439-441.
[82] Artin 70-71.

love to his lady. However as the courtly lover's role is performative,[83] it is more intense and complex, simply because it is public and subject to peer critique and evaluation.

Like the lady, he too should be aristocratic, young, good looking and well educated, but there are a myriad of additional characteristics and behaviors that he must also uphold and perform. According to Capellanus, for example, he must have a good character (i.e. reputation), be a good speaker and be wealthy.[84] Capellanus notes that, "[f]or a man who seeks the love of a woman of good character [he] should be of excellent character himself and should have many good deeds to his credit."[85] While emphasizing the fact that both lovers should have good reputations, this citation also emphasizes the public aspects of the courtly lover's role. His merit and value is based on both his personality and his bravery. However, his courageousness and personality must be valued and evaluated in the eyes of others, his peers, other knights, or other nobles. He cannot prove his worth secretly. His "good deeds" and their value must be openly acknowledge and proclaimed by his social peers. In other words, as Capellanus informs us, only the lover's peers or betters can proclaim his worth, thus establishing his "good reputation among good men."[86]

Adhering to some aspects of Capellanus' model of courtly lover, Yvain, Lancelot and Perceval all seek to establish their renown amongst their peers by performing "good deeds." For Chrétien's knights these "good deeds" are military in nature. For example, Yvain spends time

---

[83]Vern L. Bullough, "On Being a Male in the Middle Ages," in *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages*, eds. Clare A. Lees, Thelma Fenster and Jo Ann McNamara, Vol. 7 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994) 34 & 41. Bullough states that for men in the medieval period: the "'superiority of the male' has to be demonstrated continually or else it will be lost" and that "it was important for a man to keep demonstrating his maleness by action and thought, especially by sexual action." Bullough touches on two of the key factors of masculinity in the medieval period demonstration by public action and sexual intercourse. In Chrétien's romances, masculine demonstration is defined through public skill at arms but also by engaging in a love relationship. Sexual intercourse is not a requisite for the definition of masculinity in Chrétien's romances.

[84] It should be noted that the lady as well is supposed to be wealthy, however not to the same extent. According to Capellanus, the lover is supposed to have more wealth than his lady. This plays into his characteristic of being known for his generosity, not only with his gifts to her but also with anyone else that requests aid.

[85] Capellanus 40.

[86] Capellanus 95.

making the circuit of tournaments, rescuing damsels and battling demons; Lancelot participates in a war which results in the captives of Gorre being set free and Perceval defeats the Red Knight and outwits a lord besieging his beloved's castle. Once the knight's or lover's deeds have been proclaimed publically as valuable and worthy, then the knight is viewed as being worthy of love. For the more renown a knight has the more worthy he is of a lady's attention and of her love.

How then does a knight attract a lady's attention? One way is by his prowess, the other is by being a good speaker. Chrétien instills both of these qualities in his knights. Chrétien's narratives are held together by the adventures each knight completes in order to be worthy of his lady-love. With each adventure the knight learns something fundamental about himself, his personality, his behavior, or his emotions, and eventually he recounts what he has learned in a refined manner to his lady, to King Arthur, or to the court. The refinement of speech becomes "[t]he height of courtesy... contained in [one's] remarks."[87] The man's way of speaking then becomes an important and essential part of his role as a courtly lover. If the knight comes to her full of courageousness and prowess, in the eyes of his peers, but is lacking in refined speech, it is the lady's job to refuse him, inform him of his lack, and send him off to correct his issue. This is what happens to Lancelot the first time he meets the Queen. The anger in her speech at seeing him in her presence when he did not merit being there, in her eyes, causes Lancelot to realize his unworthiness. Lancelot's unworthiness robs him of making any speech which would change the Queen's mind. Instead, Lancelot offers a very refined manner of leave taking.[88] Showing by

[87] Capellanus 58-59. While this remark is directed towards a lady in one of Capellanus' dialogues, it could be directed towards any lover. The lady shortly after this comment, continues by providing details of what constitutes courtly speech, saying, "no word of blasphemy...he ought never speak a word in disparagement of any man, since those who speak evil may not remain within the threshold of courtesy."

[88] *Lancelot* 614 verses 3963-3964. "Dame, certes, ce poise moi, / Ne je n'os demander por coi (Madame, do not doubt it, I am sad and I daren't even ask you the reason)." Lancelot is kindly letting the Queen known that he's noticed her anger and cannot even ask her the reason for her distain and fury. Hence the reason why he is sad, he does not yet understand why she is treating him poorly and he feels the fault must lie with him. In other words, Lancelot accepts the fact that she has deemed him unworthy of her.

words that he recognizes his unworthiness and realizes the value of maintaining polite speech, he ensures that once he has corrected his error he will be able to return. When the lady deems the man has overcome his lack, only then will she accept him as lover and grant him his reward.

This attribute of *parler noble*[89] is an essential part of *mezura* but also is one of the qualities of *l'homme courtois*.[90] Lazar describes *l'homme courtois* as someone whose character includes, "politesse, humilité, dévouement, loyauté, amour, courage, intelligence, religion, modération."[91] These courtly qualities are performative and public and the knight or lover must be capable of demonstrating them. Capellanus' text expounds upon these same characteristics, as a Lady of the higher nobility describes in detail all the qualities a good lover should possess.[92] Capellanus' lady provides detailed instruction of all the do's and don'ts by which a courtly lover should abide. His lady adds another important characteristic to *parler noble*, not only should a good lover "be truthful in everything he says,"[93] but he should also be generous.[94]

Capellanus' concept of generosity, while predominantly tied to one's financial situation, is echoed in Frappier's idea of *mezura*.[95] *Mezura* however encompasses much more that just being generous, speaking in a refined manner and possessing a good reputation among peers. The

[89] Lazar 45. "speaking nobly"
[90] The courtly man
[91] Lazar 45. "politeness, humility, devotion, loyalty, love, courage, intelligence, religion, moderation"
[92] Capellanus 59-61.
[93] Capellanus 61.
[94] Capellanus 59, 81 & 154. For Capellanus, generosity is linked specifically to money (59 & 81). A courtly lover, according to him, has a substantial financial source from which to draw and he is aware of his wealth at all times in order to make sure that he does not suffer any sudden losses (154). Financial worry is a concern for Capellanus because the sordidness of the quotidian would insert itself into the realm of pleasure, reducing the lover's attention and ardor as his focus would no longer be on his beloved or their pleasure. In contrast, wealth in Chrétien's romances does not play a key factor in the love relationships between his knights and their ladies. While wealth is indicated through Chrétien's descriptions of the court, the knights and courtiers in attendance. Chrétien uses clothes, gems, horses and armor which adorn and surround his characters to indicate his knights' affluence and their level of wealth which is appropriate to their social positions. Monetary wealth is not a significant criteria for courtly love in Chrétien's works.
[95] Lazar uses the same idea but calls it "courtois" or "courtoisie".

courtly lover is kind and generous to all, not just to members of his own social set.[96] *Mezura* also includes the idea of being noble. Nobility does not just denote one's social status as a member of a feudal hierarchy; instead the lover is noble in spirit, character, and personality.[97] Nobility of character is manifested in Frappier's words of *mezura* through "moderation des désirs, la patience, et l'humilité,"[98] and through the service and treatment he demonstrates to his lady.

As part of one's nobility, the courtly lover does not force himself on her physically, either through violence or by being an unwanted presence near her. Instead he tempers and moderates his desires, by sublimating them to the lady's desires. He demonstrates his patience by his willingness to wait, a long time if need be, until the lady determines him worthy and acquiesces to bestow upon him his reward. He is willing to suffer in silence or physically to prove his love, just as Lancelot does when crossing the Sword Bridge. The willingness to wait, to suffer, and to acquiesce to the wishes of his lady, all demonstrate the lover's humility as well as elucidating the terms of the knight's "service" to his lady.

Patience, humility and moderation of desires are all important attributes to the concept of a knight's service. There are, however, two additional attributes that need to be mentioned and further explored, suffering and devotion. As courtly love is most commonly a relationship that exists from a distance,[99] it is not uncommon for the lover or knight to describe himself as

[96] Yvain's diligence in providing fresh meat to a hermit during Yvain's 'madness' demonstrates this aspect of *mezura.*
[97] These are the characteristics that Perceval's mother seeks to instill in him during his childhood and Perceval finally understands them during his period of knightly education with Gornemant.
[98] Frappier, *Amour courtois et la table ronde* 7. "moderation of desires, patience, and humility." These are all qualities that Chrétien's knights learn how to control through their adventures.
[99] Distance here could mean physically or it could mean figuratively in the sense that both are physically present but unable to acknowledge the other or their love without publicizing their relationship and thus breaking the tenet of secrecy.

suffering. Suffering comes from the knight's continuous state of being either present or absent[100] from the object of his desire. In summarizing the interplay between Bernard's concept of love and desire, Casey describes man's state of being as follows: "[l]ove and joy are what one feels when a loved one is present; in absence this love expresses itself through yearning and desire."[101] Thus the knight is content when he is with his lady but he suffers, yearns for, and desires to be with her when he is absent or separated from her presence. The Bernardian concept regarding the '*presence-absence*' state or the dialectic of desire, experienced by man becomes even more *a propos* in regards to a knight's suffering, for the more ardently you desire something, the more keenly you experience its absence.[102] Even though Bernard is discussing man's (specifically the soul's) experience with God, it does accurately describe a courtly lover's experience when he is away from his beloved. The lover being absent from his beloved allows his desire to manifest itself as suffering. He wishes and hopes to be with her but is unable to do so, perhaps because she has sent him off on a quest as is the case of Perceval, or because he has somehow angered her and must seek adventures in order to merit returning to her as is the case for Yvain and Lancelot.

This continuous fluctuation between '*presence-absence*' for the lover-knight is one of the hallmarks of a courtly lover's experience and role. He is allowed to be with his lady for a time but the narratives and tenets of courtly love require him to improve himself and the only way to do so is by public feats of strength or "good deeds" which consequently means that he must frequently remove himself from his lady's presence.

---

[100] Michael Casey, *A Thirst for God: Spiritual Desire in Bernard of Clairvaux's Sermons on the Song of Songs* (Kalamazoo, Cistercian Publications, 1988) 59.
[101] Casey 70.
[102] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On the Song of Songs*, trans. Kilian Walsh and Irene M. Edmonds. Vol.3 (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1979) 40. "For the keener her (the soul's) joy in his (God's or Christ's) presence, the more irksome her sense of his absence. The removal of what you love spells an increase of desire for it, and what you eagerly desire you miss painfully." Parenthetical comments mine.

While distanced from his lady, another other important characteristic of a courtly lover comes into play – devotion. He must remain devoted and faithful to her. He must not allow his gaze to stray or let his love waver in any way. As a practitioner of *fin'amor* once he has attached himself to a lady and been accepted by her, he does not change from his lady to another.[103] He belongs now to that lady. His prowess at arms and good deeds are viewed as proving his love for her but also increasing his worth or value. She, in turn, through the increase of his reputation, gains as well. His honor brings her honor. Returning to the idea of Lady Enide as being a mirror: the more knights Erec defeats, the more esteem he gains in Enide's eyes (as well as those of his peers and the male aristocratic audience members), but additionally, with each set of knights Erec defeats he comes closer to Enide's perfection. Erec's honor, prowess, and movement towards perfection finally culminate in the coronation ceremony of Erec and Enide at the end of the romance.

Devotion is a crucial aspect of Chrétien's knights and occupies a significant place in their characterization. The love relationships between his knights and their ladies demonstrates and explores what a devotional relationship to God entails and should resemble. As Chrétien's romances provide examples of how man can love God via the love relationships contained within each narrative, it would go against the Christian ideology infused within Chrétien's texts to have a protagonist who cannot fulfill or maintain one of the basic principles of Christianity – that of faithfulness or being faithful. Chrétien's knights are men who remain consistent and devoted to their beloved ladies. For example, both Lancelot and Yvain at various points in their narratives are offered other women as rewards either for their battle prowess or their renown, but in every case the knights politely refuse and do not entertain any notions of having any sort of relationship with the women being offered. Perceval, too, remains faithful in his own way. He

[103] Simon Gaunt, *Troubadours and Irony* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989) 38.

is devoted initially to his mother's and then Gorenmant's teachings and later to the love he feels for Blanchefleur. The level of devotion and faithfulness demonstrated by Chrétien's knights is perhaps one of the reasons why it is easy to see how the love relationships of his knights parallel the type of relationship with God that Bernard advocates in his four degrees of love.[104]

The level of devotion which Chrétien incorporates into the characters of his knights is not, however, developed in the same way in Capellanus' text. For him, the lover's devotion and service to his lady is fleeting and he need only be devoted to her as long as their relationship endures. Writing on the merits of love, Capellanus states:

> O what a wonderful thing is love, which makes a man shine with so many virtues and teaches everyone... so many good traits of character!... it adorns a man... with the virtue of chastity, because he who shines with the light of one love can hardly think of embracing another woman.[105]

While this citation seems to offer a *courtois* account of love, the last line destroys it by implying the fleetingness of love, allowing the male lover a loop hole. He must be loyal to his currently lady, but if the opportunity arises he could and perhaps should transfer his love and devotion to another who has greater esteem or value in society. Capellanus indicates the possibility of a lover's inconsistency in two different places within his text. The first indication of a lover's inconsistency appears early in the text; when Capellanus discusses what love is, he states how the male lover "begins to plan how he may find favor with her."[106] The fact that the lover must contrive ways in which to meet or find favor with his chosen lady illustrates how unnatural this love is. For Capellanus' lover, love is a plotted, planned affair which leaves nothing to chance.

---

[104] These relationships between Chrétien's knights and their women will be further developed and examined in the succeeding chapters.
[105] Capellanus 31.
[106] Capellanus 29.

Capellanus' second inconsistency of a lover appears much later in the text. When writing about how love ends, Capellanus describes how a knight with a straying eye renders himself unworthy because he cannot love two women at the same time.[107] A knight who "has an eye to a new love affair, he renders himself wholly unworthy of his former love,"[108] because he dishonors his relationship by seeking another to replace his current lady. The inconsistency of love is revealed by descriptions of knights with roving eyes, who, while currently in a courtly relationship, are already considering their next love affair. In Capellanus' world courtly love is calculated and devotion only lasts as long as one of the lovers benefits from the relationship. Courtly love, then, is only a tool for social advancement.

Capellanus' courtly love is suitable for those who want to climb socially but not spiritually. His lover is one who is focused on the vulgarity of his love. In other words, his interest in love goes only as far as he can increase his secular social worth and standing. Since he is only beholden to a lady so long as her social standing is useful to him, his devotion is not consistent and could change depending upon her value in society. As a secular lover, he is within his right to transfer his love to another, after breaking, of course, with his former lady. In Chrétien's romances this conception of courtly love is not an option. Consistent devotion to one's lady is a key component of Chrétien's knights' characterization. Their consistent faithfulness towards their ladies and their desire to mend their damaged relationships when they have erred, illustrate how courtly love within Chrétien's narrative has become a love that is spiritual and ennobling.

Chrétien's knights cannot be fickle men, changing lovers as it suits their social advancement, and they cannot haphazardly shift their affections, because Chrétien's knights are

[107] Capellanus 156. "An old love also ends when a new one begins, because no one can love two people at the same time."
[108] Capellanus 159.

married. Yvain and Erec both marry their lady loves within the first third of their narratives. One could argue that Lancelot is not married to the Queen and neither is Perceval married to Blanchefleur, but both can in fact be read as married men. Lancelot is, in a sense, married to the Queen as she receives all his love and devotion.[109] Perceval's marriage is first to his quest for knighthood and all that is necessary to be considered a courtly knight and then to his quests to repair his errors.[110] Lancelot and Perceval, I will argue later, are representations of Christian monks who are married to God. They both are wholly devoted to their lady-loves and their quests, just as a monk is wholly devoted to the service of God.[111] The love relationships between Chrétien's knights and their ladies exemplify the ideals of devotion and service, which are also two key components of man's spiritual relationship to God. These married knights then embody, at the same time, secular ideals of a courtly lover but also spiritual ideals of twelfth century Christianity as professed by Bernard in his work.[112]

If Chrétien's romances are read as a subtle secular guide for courtly behavior and love, and they lacked the concept of devotion or service required between courtly lovers, the relationships illustrated in his texts would be called into question. It would be unnecessary for his protagonists to be married. The fact that his knights are married reflects some of the concerns surrounding marriage during the time period when Chrétien was writing. The devotion and service demonstrated by his knights emphasizes the Church's debate on marriage in the

[109] Lancelot rejects the lady who managed to get him into bed with her, by turning his back on her. This leads her to realize that his heart is already taken. Later another young lady notices how absorbed Lancelot is in finding the Queen's comb and a strand of her hair, which Lancelot places close to his breast and reveres like a relic. Leading the young lady to assume the hair belongs to the lady he loves.
[110] The first of Perceval's errors are against his mother, whose death he causes when he sets out to learn how to be a proper knight against his mother's wishes, and towards the Tent Maiden who is the first person he encounters upon leaving his boyhood home. He meets this young woman again later and sees the havoc he has cause in her relationship with her own lover. Both of these occurrences along with his failure at the Fisher King's castle send Perceval off on a quest to redeem himself and absolve his sins.
[111] In chapters four and five the idea of Lancelot and Perceval being read as married men will be explored further.
[112] Maurice Keen, *Chivalry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984) 2, 46, 48-51. Keen discusses how the ideal of knighthood becomes tied to the ideals of Christianity especially during the twelfth century.

twelfth century. At that time the Church was promoting and arguing for the indissolubility of marriage.[113] Karras notes that the Church at this time was:

> speaking of marriage in a new way, stressing its role as a sacrament and the role of love (though this was meant to be spiritual love rather than carnal passion)... it was the sacramental aspect – the fact that the marriage partners were participating in a ritual instituted by Christ himself, one sanctioned and even commanded by God – that was emphasized, not the sexual aspect.[114]

Marriage in the twelfth century was now no longer something that was to be based on either carnal passions or social advancement.[115] Instead, it was to be a sacrament and, by consequence, something spiritual and ennobling.[116] Marriage as a spiritual and sacramental endeavor provides perhaps an additional explanation for why Chrétien's knight were married. Married knights provided examples of what non-adulterous courtly love could resemble, thus elevating both marriage and love to the sacred. No longer was marriage and love to be viewed as something vulgar in which carnal passions ruled; they became a noble undertaking, one that would lead both men and women to God.

---

[113] James A. Brundage, "Sex and Canon Law" in *The Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, eds. Vern L. Bullough and James A. Brundage (New York: Garland Publishing, 1996) 38. "Churchmen felt obligated to maintain the principle that valid marriages between Christians were indissoluble, while the heads of families maintained that they must have the freedom to change their own marriage partners or those of their children, should that become necessary to optimize the interests and fortune of the family as a whole." The division between Church leaders and aristocratic or wealthy families is clearly defined. On one side the Church is arguing for an institution modeled after Christ and the Church in which the changing of partners is discouraged; here marriage is not based on reproductive ability. On the other the secular authorities seeking to guard their territorial holdings and wealth based on a partners sexuality and their reproductive abilities. If marriage became indissoluble, one's sexuality and reproductive capabilities no longer are a factor in the bonds between families. This is what scared the nobility and the wealthy, because it meant that if either partner was unable to reproduce there was no longer a way to set that partner aside and seek/ marry another more reproductively viable partner, thus endangering any inheritance. This may also be a reason why Chrétien's knights were married; providing a demonstration of indissoluble marriages or marriages not based on reproductive abilities, but on spiritual levels where sexuality and reproduction no longer hold sway.

[114] Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe* 86.

[115] Especially the acquisition of lands and territory for the aristocracy, wealth or social rank, although this still happened.

[116] Marriage becomes ennobling by being sacramentalized. It is no longer attached to the earthly or vulgar where love is solely based upon the body, but instead has entered into the divine and spiritual, where the love between the man and the woman is representative of the love between man and God.

Recalling the principal characteristics of courtly love of devotion, humility, and service, as married men Chrétien's knights are the courtly lovers par excellence. Their examples of courtly love between a married man and woman reveal the same type of love exemplified by God to his people, by Christ to his Church, by the lover to the beloved in the *Song of Songs*, or between the individual soul and God, as indicated in *On Loving God*.[117] Chrétien's knights demonstrate through a secular story the sacredness of marriage, the need for love in man's life and how that love is ennobled. Thus Chrétien's knights, unlike Capellanus' male role models, cannot put aside their lady-loves each time they encounter a new lady or damsel in need of assistance. They all have only one lady to whom they are devoted to and serve, just as man can only serve one God.[118]

As married knights, Chrétien's heroes epitomize the devotional aspects and ideals of servitude of courtly love within their relationships. Because Chrétien's texts can be read didactically as either a parable of a secular courtly love adventure or as spiritual text, instructing man how to love God, it would be detrimental to both the secular and spiritual registers within which Chrétien is writing to promote the idea of being inconsistent to one's lady or God. The Christian ideal demands that one is always humble, devoted, and loyal to God, just as courtly love demands loyalty, devotion, and humble service to the lady. This is perhaps why Chrétien's married knights wrestle with and illustrate so often these three characteristics in their narratives.

---

[117] See also Bernard's sermons on the *Song of Songs*.

[118] *The Holy Bible: New International Version* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1996) Matthew 6:24. "No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money." Christ's words in this citation provide instructions on how to live. Christ proclaims that man should have only one person, God in this case, to whom he offers all his devotion and service. Courtly love follows Christ's instructions through the male lover who is to remain faithful and serve only one lady. Marriage more than courtly love embodies Christ's instructions in regards to remaining devoted and serving only one person.

So far I have examined the roles of and expectations for the lover or knight and the lady in courtly love poetry and romance literature. In the next section, I will examine the duality which exists within Chrétien's romances between the secular and the spiritual. By examining the fictional and real roles of courtly knights and ladies, the secular register upon which Chrétien's romances are based will be made clearer. Through the investigation of what it meant to be a knight or lady in twelfth century France, the development of Chrétien's fictional characters and the close ties to their realistic counterparts can be observed. By exploring the realistic attributes of the knight and lady, the fictional characteristics and expectations of their roles, how they mirror each other, and idealize and prioritize certain aspects of their roles, will provide pertinent information regarding the secular register upon which Chrétien's narratives are based. This is necessary before exploring how Chrétien's romances use the secular to present a spiritual register, illustrating Bernard's Christian ideology and his degrees of love.

Knights and ladies: fiction and reality

> In the fictional universe of romance, the skillful mixture of marvels and realism offered the 'second feudal age' [the twelfth century] nobility both a means of escape and the possibility of recognizing their own image, that is, of seeing themselves as they fancied themselves – if not as they really were.[119]

Frappier's quotation denotes one of the primary motifs of twelfth century romance literature, the idea of the mirror.[120] Similarly to Artin's concept of Lady Enide being a reflection of Erec, showing him what perfection is, Chrétien's literature creates an idealized reflection of the reality of the twelfth century French medieval world. Adept modern scholars have utilized

[119] Frappier, *Chrétien de Troyes: The Man and His Work* 9.
[120] Lynette Muir, *Literature and Society in Medieval France* (Basingstoke: MacMillan Publishers, Ltd., 1985) 7. "The mirror was one of the commonest symbols in medieval writing."

medieval literature and historical documents to "tell us about the people themselves, their likes and dislikes, fears and joys, heroes and ideals,"[121] assisting them in comprehending what medieval life and culture were like.

Chrétien's romances while presenting an idealized courtly world, a mirror of twelfth century France, are based on reality. For example, his fictional knights and ladies belong to the same social sphere as his audience. To Chrétien's audience, perhaps more male than female, but a mixed group none-the-less, and of varying ages, the descriptions of battle scenes and fighting would be easily comprehensible, as would his descriptions of clothing and jewelry. Frappier states that Chrétien "wanted to please but also instruct"[122] his audience; what better way to do so than by fashioning a familiar frame of reference to which they could relate in the hopes that "reality would be enriched by an ideal vision."?[123]

By providing a fictionally framed narrative, one with which his audience was familiar, the subtle connection between fiction and reality allows Chrétien to explore both secular and religious themes. This clever and discreet didacticism elevates his romances from fictional narratives to parables, as it leaves it up to the reader or listener to discern and glean the important information. Chrétien provides himself with the narrative space to develop the themes of how to love God and be in a relationship with Him as well as discussing Christian ideology such as death, rebirth, repentance, reconciliation, and union. Thus, Chrétien's romances can be read on two didactic registers. On the one hand, his romances provided instructions on how to be a good or better knight at court and in the game of love, and on the other, they provide instructions on how to be a good or better Christian.

---

[121] Muir 2.
[122] Frappier, *Chrétien de Troyes* 46.
[123] Frappier, *Chrétien de Troyes* 47.

In order to comprehend how Chrétien infuses his romances with Christian ideology, let us first examine the intertwining between Chrétien's fictional knights and their realistic counterparts. Knights were men "who lived by a code of chivalry,"[124] just as Chrétien's fictional knights adhere to a code of courtly conduct in their romances. As Karras explains, besides following this code of conduct, knights came "to have a concrete social or economic meaning: a knight was someone who held enough land to finance the purchase of a war horse and armor. To be a knight also entailed being part of a fixed social group as well as accepting a particular way of life."[125] *Perceval*, Chrétien's last work and his most spiritual, is perhaps the only story in which he provides a glimpse of the steps involved in learning this code of chivalry.

Perceval's journey through knighthood allows the uninitiated reader or listener to penetrate the mystery surrounding how one becomes a courtly knight. When Perceval sees several traveling knights for the first time, he asks them questions about the armor they wear and their answers constitute Perceval's initial contact with the world of knighthood and chivalry.[126] When Perceval returns home from this encounter with these knights, he expresses, much to the chagrin of his mother, a desire to travel to Arthur's court to become a knight. Prior to Perceval's leaving, his mother provides some parting instructions on how to act as a knight. However, Perceval misunderstands her instructions and it is not until he meets Gornemant de Goort that he understands what knighthood and being a knight truly mean.[127]

---

[124] Tony Hunt, "The Emergence of the Knight in France and England 1000-1200," in *Knighthood in Medieval Liturature*, ed. W. H. Jackson. (Woodbridge, Suffolk: D.S. Brewer, 1981) 6-7.
[125] Karras, *Boys to Men* 23. Keen, *Chivalry* 1-2. Karras provides a shortened version of Maurice Keen's definition of chivalry. Keen in his work, *Chivalry*, states that a "knight, the French *chevalier*: it denotes a man of aristocratic standing and probably of noble ancestry, who is capable, if called upon, of equipping himself with a war horse and the arms of a heavy cavalry man, and who has been through certain rituals that make him what he is, who has been 'dubbed' to knighthood." Keen also notes that "from the middle of the twelfth century on it (knighthood) very frequently carries ethical or religious overtones."
[126] *Perceval* 36-48 verses 164-338.
[127] *Perceval* 58-62 verses 497-562 & 111-137 verses 1255-1660.

Perceval's maladroit entry into the world of courtly manners is revealed through his first encounter with the world outside his boyhood home. One of Perceval's first lessons after meeting the traveling knights, given to him by his mother, was to help women and stick to being friends with men of honor. She tells him:

> Se vos trovez ne pres ne loig / Dame qui d'aïe ait besoig / Ne pucele desconseilliee, / La vostre aide apareilliee / Lor soit, s'eles vos en requierent, / Car totes encors i afierent. / Qui aus dames enor ne porte, / La soe anor doit estre morte. / Dames et puceles servez, / Si seroiz par tot enorez / Et se vos aucune en avez / Aamee contre ses grez, / Ne [faites] rien qui li desplaisse… / Ja en chemin ne en ostel / N'aiez longuemant compaignon / Que vos ne damandez son non / Et lo sornon a la parsome. / Par lo sornon consoist en l'ome. / Biaux filz, as prodomes parlez / Et compaignie lor tenez. / Prodome ne forconsoille mie / Ces qui tienent sa compaignie.
>
> If you meet here or there a lady who needs help, or a young girl in trouble, be ready to help them, if they ask it of you, because all honor enhances oneself. Whomever does not honor women looses all his own honor. Put yourself in the service of ladies and young girls, and you will have the esteem of all. And if you happen to love one, watch yourself and do not become a nuisance or do anything to displease her... On the road of life, if someone journeys with you for a long time, make sure you ask his name. You must make sure to learn his name. It is by one's name that one knows the man... it is with honorable men that you should speak and keep company. A man of honor never gives bad advice to those with whom he keeps company.[128]

The advice of Perceval's mother succinctly describes the expectations of masculine duty and knightly behavior: help ladies, for in so doing one gains honor, if you love a lady do not do anything to displease her, and keep company with honorable men for only they will give you wise advice. Perceval, unfortunately, does not listen attentively to her advice and only comprehends a fraction of her instructions. He sets off immediately to implement and complete his chivalric duty, thinking that by performing feats of strength or defending women, he will be immediately elevated to the same status as the traveling knights. What he fails to understand is

[128] *Perceval* 58-60 verses 497-509 & 522-530.

that becoming a knight takes time and training, and Perceval lacks both at this stage in the narrative.[129]

Even given his complete lack of understanding of the worldly role he has chosen, Perceval is correct in assuming that part of becoming a knight is to be devoted to a lady. But while he is correct that having a lady is part of how a courtly knight defines and distinguishes himself, Perceval has the order wrong. He needs a reputation before he merits a lady. Perceval's disastrous encounter with the Tent Maiden demonstrates the extent to which he has misunderstood his mother's instructions regarding how a courtly lover should act around and towards a lady.[130] Not only does Perceval demonstrate a complete lack of courtly manners, especially in regards to speaking to the tent maiden (demanding food, a kiss, and her ring), he also ignores that she is already somebody else's lady and therefore he should not be asking her for anything.

As the Tent Maiden, is already some other knight's beloved, according to the tenets of courtly love Perceval cannot claim her. In addition, he does not merit her, as he has no knightly reputation, something the young woman is quick to point out by stating that Perceval is just a "[...] un vallet gualois i ot, / Enïeus et vilein et sot."[131] In this encounter, Perceval pays lip service to the courtly manners his mother instilled in him, but he is lacking in the knightly and courtly training which would have made him successful at obtaining the lady's love, even if she had been free to grant it. Perceval has misinterpreted the code, he is supposed to follow as

[129] Keen, Chivalry 9. According to Keen, Perceval can only be considered a squire at this stage. "A squire, riding through the forest on his way to the King's great court, where he is to be made a knight."
[130] *Perceval* 66-78 verses 595-791.
[131] *Perceval* 76 verses 751-752. "a young boy, a nuisance, a churl, a fool"

courtly lover and a knight. He is supposed to earn her kiss and ring as a reward for his service to her, not just demand them.[132]

Even though Perceval misunderstands his role during the episode of the Tent Maiden, it provides information on the tenets of courtly love. Jaeger and Karras both note that the love of a lady is a fundamental aspect of knighthood as it denotes a knight's success. Jaeger states that "the love of a queen or court lady 'raises the worth/worthiness/reputations' of the man she loves."[133] In other words, a knight's worth and value in the eyes of his peers is based not just on his skill at arms but also on his ability to gain the love of a lady. In summarizing three of Charny's works, Keen provides the link between a knight's renown and the love of his lady:

> Earthly renown is of very significant value to Charny; and so is endeavor, for no man should rest content with what he has achieved. That is why it is good for a man at arms to be in love *par amours*, says Geoffry [Charny]: he will seek even higher renown for the honour that it will do to his lady. Think what her feelings will be when the man whom she has chosen in her heart enters a room, and she sees all men, knights, lords and esquires, pressing to honour him on account of his *bonne renommée*, she knowing within herself that his love is hers.[134]

A successful knight then was one that continuously sought to improve himself, earn more and more honor, and love a lady. Being in love and proving one's skill in battle announced to the court that the knight was worthy as he conquered both men and love. The lady, in return, gained as well. As her knight increases his reputation and honor, his honor reflects back upon her, and

---

[132] *Perceval* 70-72 verses 667-684. "Mist la soz lui tote estandue / Et cele s'et bien desfandue / Et gandilla quant qu'ele pot, / Mais desfanse mestier n'i ot, / Que li vallez tot de randon / La baissa, vosist ele o non, / Vint foiz, si com li contes dit, / Tant c'un anel en son doi vit / A une esmeraude molt clere. / 'Ansin, fait il, me dit ma mere / Qu'an vostre doi l'anel presisse, / Mais que rien plus ne vos feïsse. / Or ça l'anel, jo voil avoir! / - Mon anel n'avras tu ja voir.' / Li vallez par lo poig la prant, / A force lo doi li estant, / Si a l'anel en son doi pris / Et ou sein doi meïsmes mis. // He turned her beneath him, she tried hard to defend herself from his advances, she freed herself as best she could but it wasn't worth the effort! The young man took her in hand, whether she liked it or not he kissed her twenty times, following his mother's instructions, he continued kissing her until he saw a ring on her finger, with a brilliant clear emerald.... 'The ring! I want to have it!' '- No! It's my ring! You shall not have it, said the young woman, know then you shall only have it if you take it by force!' The young man seized her fist, pulled out the finger with the ring on it by force; he tore the ring off her finger and put it on his own finger..."

[133] Jaeger 145.

[134] Keen, *Chivalry* 13. Geoffry de Charny was a fourteenth-century knight who wrote three works on chivalry.

thus, she can love and esteem him all the more. Elaborating further upon what makes a successful knight, Karras provides an important caveat of behavior:

> The successful man in the chivalric world was one who not only could fight but also knew how to behave appropriately at court, and this included behavior toward women...Success in love was an important part of knighthood...[135]

Not only was a knight to have an excellent reputation, one that he worked continuously upon, and be in love, but he was also to have knowledge of courtly comportment. It is not enough that he know how to kill or disarm his peers or woo a lady but he must also understand his role and how to act within society. This is something that Perceval learns the hard way, starting with the episode of the Tent Maiden, his first encounter with Arthur's court and especially his lack of understanding what was required of him at the Fisher King's castle.

Despite Perceval's obvious lack of manners and training, he does exhibit certain characteristics of a successful knight, like the real knights upon whom Chrétien based his fictional ones. Perceval has the means to provide himself a horse and arms.[136] He, like real twelfth-century knights, begins and continues training with another knight, Gornemant, for some time.[137] During his time with Gornemant, Perceval moves through his knightly training at a rapid speed. Keen describes becoming a knight as a process; which one moves from being a squire, to a knight in training, to full knighthood. Keen also notes that "every squire seeking knighthood should be subjected [to an examination] to ensure that he has the proper qualifications."[138] At the end of the very short period of time[139] in which Perceval learns all

---

[135] Karras, *Boys to Men* 25.

[136] *Perceval* 56 verses 463-466 & 64 verses 565 & 576-577. Verses 463-466 discuss Perceval's clothing at his departure from his mother. Verse 565 notes that his horse is already saddled and waiting for him and verses 576-77 state that Perceval mounted his horse and began whipping him.

[137] Karras, *Boys to Men* 47. "The courtly behavior a knight had to learn included not just clothing and manners, but culture generally... He has to be educated in the language of his class as well as the behavior... appropriate to a man, and the physical prowess necessary for a knight."

[138] Keen, *Chivalry* 10. Keen continues with the qualifications the examining knight would look for in a squire. "He [the squire] must be able-bodied, and of sufficient age to discharge the tasks of knighthood. He should come of

there is to be a knight, Gornemant eventually deems Perceval ready and dubs him before sending him out into the world. After receiving Gornemant's knightly training, which corrects Perceval's earlier misinterpretations of his mother's instructions, Perceval wins the love of the Lady Blanchefleur by cleverly defeating Clamadieu, the assailant of Blanchefleur's castle.[140] Through his training with Gornemant and his new found lady love, Perceval recognizes his earlier mistakes and spends the rest of the narrative attempting to correct them.

A knight was not just someone of a particular socio-economic level, nor was he simply a militaristic pawn, although he potentially could be and usually was treated as such. As noted earlier, a knight was also someone who was emotionally attached or seemed to be emotionally attached to a lady. Thus he needed to be able to understand both military strategies but also a value system based on those emotional behaviors and not just one's financial wealth or military strength. In the eyes of his peers, a knight was not successful until he conquered both the field of war and the field of love. Hence the courtly knight's role is categorized by two noticeable characteristics – one public and militaristic and the other private and emotional.

Since the knight needed a lady to establish himself in an emotional value system, women became commodities. The knight who was able to obtain the love and favor of a higher ranking lady had a higher value in the eyes of his peers. Recalling Capellanus' view of the courtly love relationship, women in medieval society provided ways for the knight to advance socially. Karras too, views this emotional value system as a "zero-sum game" where the way to gain honor was to gain women.[141] Even Jaeger notes that "[l]ove creates a scale of worth…and the

---

good lineage and must have sufficient wealth to support his rank. The knight who is examining him should also inquire into the manner of his life, looking for signs of the valour and nobility necessary to knighthood, and should ensure that he is without known 'reproach.' He should inquire also of the squire his motives for seeking knighthood: to acquire knighthood for the wrong reasons, for advantage and rank, is as bad as simony in a clerk."

[139] *Perceval* 110-136 verses 1255-1660.

[140] *Perceval* 184-204 verses 2379-2673.

[141] Karras, *Boys to Men* 60.

one who loves more stands higher on it."[142] In this world, courtly love had value only in terms of conquests. In the eyes of one's peers, one's worth was determined not just by one's courtly manners and speech but also by how much one loved. For the courtly knight, the way which his love was counted was by how many women he managed to accumulate. Women, in Karras' opinion, like those in Capellanus' text, are objects,[143] to be used to "mediate relations between men."[144]

The fact that women were tradable commodities, items used to negotiate or maintain the ties between men, has great significance in the conception of medieval marriage. For knights who wanted to enter into the brotherhood of knights:

> [a]ncestry mattered because medieval aristocrats found it hard to imagine someone having the requisite knightly qualities who was not born to them... The aptitude for knighthood was inborn, although practice and training were necessary to bring it to fruition.[145]

Like Perceval and Chrétien's other knights, knighthood was something into which one was born, preferably by belonging to the aristocracy or to the knightly class.[146] It was not through the maternal line that nobility or knightly qualities were passed but rather the paternal,[147] which makes Perceval a much more interesting character. His mother's refusal to allow her son to be trained as a knight is interesting in that she seeks to suppress what could be construed as his true nature, both along patrilineal and matrilineal lines.

---

[142] Jaeger 146.
[143] Karras, *Boys to Men* 164. "The woman serves to advertise the man's masculinity to other men. Attracting or acquiring women was an important part of becoming a man... while the physical appearance of one's beloved was important, her social standing, especially as expressed in terms of property and inheritance, was much more so.
[144] Karras, *Boys to Men* 25.
[145] Jaeger 35-36.
[146] Although there is evidence of squires and others being raised to a higher standing in the aristocratic hierarchy, this apparently was rare and one had to have a paternal tie to the knighthood for this to occur.
[147] Karras, *Boys to Men* 35. "The fact that sons were depicted as inheriting their father's knightly abilities as well as status indicates the importance of the male line in the understanding of aristocratic manhood. Female lineage was not insignificant; men inherited noble blood, lands, and titles from their mothers."

Since Perceval's father was a knight, Perceval should have inherited his father's knightly abilities and manners.[148] The fact that Perceval's mother intervened and attempted to keep Perceval from following in his father's and his brother's footsteps illustrates her fears regarding the primary components of knighthood, war and battle. Perceval's mother fears that she will lose her only remaining son in battle. Her fears would not appear unfounded to an aristocratic medieval audience in which one's lineage and warfare[149] played a significant role. Her concern is not solely based on maternal feelings but also concern for the family line.

Her concern for Perceval's life and line, and her own fears at being left both husbandless and childless, represent a real concern for aristocratic medieval women. Without a man to whom they could turn for protection, they were left vulnerable to attack. Chrétien points this out in *Yvain* and *Perceval*. In *Perceval*, when Blanchefleur's castle is besieged by a neighboring lord because she is young and husbandless. In *Yvain*, when Lunette encourages her mistress, Laudine, to marry Yvain because he is the better knight as he has defeated and killed her husband but also because she needs a defender of her lands and fountain.[150] Additionally, in *Yvain*, Yvain helps the widowed Lady Noroison repel a neighboring lord who is attacking her castle and lands.[151] This concern for protecting women, especially ones with property, meant that women, even if viewed as commodities, did have a significant role to play in feudal society.

Women in medieval aristocratic marriages played the role of providers. Their dowries brought their husbands either wealth or land, or usually both. They insured the continuation of

---

[148] *Perceval* 52 verses 388-396. "N'ot chevalier de si haut pris / Tant redoté ne tant cremu, / Biauz filz, com vostre peres fu / En totes les illes de mer. / De ce me puis je bien vanter / Que vos ne descheez de rien / De son lignaige ne do mien, / Que je sui de ceste contree, / Voir, des meillors chevaliers nee. (There is no other knight of such high valor, so respected so feared as was your father, my beloved son. You can feel proud: You have nothing to be ashamed of in your lineage neither on your father's side nor on mine. Because I am descended from knights as good as some of the best in this country.)"

[149] Such as the crusades or territorial squabbles which were settled by combat or by tournament.

[150] *Yvain* 148-150 verses 1610-1637 & 154 verses 1705-1709.

[151] *Yvain* 244-246 verses 3139-3183 & 252-254 verses 3271-3316.

their husband's lineage through childbirth and their marriages helped to strengthen the ties between families of the same social class.[152] Karras adds a further dimension to how medieval women were viewed as commodities, by linking women and their sexuality. She states that a "woman's whole being… was defined by her sexual activity or lack thereof"[153] and that the question of who controlled a woman's sexuality became important.[154] It was from this concern over who controlled the dynastic lineage as well as the lands and wealth that came with a woman upon her marriage that the Church began to place a higher value on the institution of marriage,[155] starting with the concept that marriage was indissoluble[156] as well as a sacrament.[157]

Allen notes that prior to the Church issuing its decision on the indissolubility of marriage both sexes were legally equals, but once men realized the power of controlling reproductive resources,[158] the balance between them changed in favor of men.[159] The control of resources, and especially the securing and monitoring of reproductive sources, demonstrates the control

[152] Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe* 86. "marriage politics were critical to secular lords, who wanted sons to carry on their line of succession."
[153] Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe* 42.
[154] Karras. *Sexuality in Medieval Europe* 84. "The significance of offspring, and their legitimacy, meant that husbands' control of their wives' sexual activity was very important."
[155] Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe* 77, 86 & 87. "Whereas aristocrats and presumably those on a lower social scale saw marriage as a way of linking families and acquiring children, the church understood it as a spiritual relationship as well, a sacrament instituted by Christ, and a calling"(77), (86 - see above) & "religious writing placed a higher value on marriage." (87)
[156] Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe* 78. "casting one set of women as virtuous, while at the same time emphasizing their role as vessels for childbearing." In other words, making women into figures of Mary, Christ's mother.
[157] Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe* 86. "speaking of marriage in a new way, stressing its role as a sacrament and the role of love (though this was meant to be spiritual love rather than carnal passion). The emphasis on marriage as a sacrament could outweigh the petty sin involved in the sex act...it was the sacramental aspect - the fact that the marriage partners were participating in a ritual instituted by Christ himself, one sanctioned and even commanded by God - that was emphasized, not the sexual aspect."
[158] Allen 48. "during this time clerical celibacy was affirmed as the norm... [and] marriage, formerly an association of equals became a state in which men dominated women, and as they (the men) exercised more control over their wives and the process of reproductions, they began to fear those whom they oppressed."
[159] Karras, *Boys to Men* 166. Karras notes that "the sexual economy of the Middle Ages was not predicated on a heterosexual/homosexual binary, but rather on a binary of reproductive/non-reproductive."

feudal men began to have over feudal women. The importance of women to feudal society[160] as commodities that could be traded or married is reflected in both the secular and the religious literature of the twelfth century. However, the emotional emphasis courtly love literature placed on both lovers perhaps provided a way for women to regain some of their lost equality.[161] Within the romance, the lady is responsible for providing the courtly lover's inspiration, enabling situations in which her lover could demonstrate his skill at arms, and establishing her lover-knight's recompense. It is she who ultimately determines the knight's worth, not his peers. It is in courtly love that the woman holds the power and is not valued just for her reproductive abilities or her financial or social position.[162]

Chrétien created strong, respected female characters: Enide, Laudine, Lunette, the younger sister of the Noire Épine, the Queen, Méléagant's sister, Blanchefleur, and Perceval's mother, to name a few. None of these women are afraid to speak their mind or voice their opinions.[163] These women are not the distant or disdainful women of troubadour poetry. These women, whilst conforming to the dictates of courtly love, are actively engaged in their lover's, husband's or friend's lives. For example in *Yvain*, Laudine rejects Yvain and throws him out of

---

[160] Frappier, *Chrétien de Troyes* 7. This increase in importance can be seen in the number of widows who were holding huge portions of land allowing them entry into the upper echelons of society. Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe* 81. "Across most of Europe…those women who achieved political power through landholding tended to be widow." Even Chrétien's own patroness, Marie de Champagne, and her mother Eleanor of Aquitaine are historically known for being powerful women.

[161] Jacqueline Murray, "Hiding Behind the Universal Man" in *The Handbook of Medieval Sexuality,* eds. Vern L. Bullough and James A. Brundage. (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1996) 130. "By the twelfth century women were viewed with suspicion, rendered subordinate in marriage, and relegated to the private sphere." Lazar 137-138. Lazar writes that women in troubadour poetry were more vocal is discussing their martial relations as it gave her a place to voice her unhappiness as a "mal-mariée."

[162] Burns 113. "This lady is a woman who remains sexually female while possessing the social status of an aristocratic man." The lady's role is charged both emotionally and sexually through her biological sexuality as well as imbued with authority via her position in courtly love.

[163] For example, in *Yvain*, Lunette adeptly manages Laudine and convinces her that marriage to Yvain is beneficial as he defeated Laudine's husband (*Yvain* 148-150 & 154). In *Lancelot*, when the Queen first meets with Lancelot, she expresses her distain and anger with him by saying that Lancelot's visit is not a pleasure (*Lancelot* 613-615). Blanchefleur shows her courage when she finally decides to explain her situation to Perceval (*Perceval* 152-154 verses 1903-1913) and convinces him to help her defend her castle (*Perceval* 156-158 verses 1945-1995).

her life by requesting the return of her ring after he forgets his promise to return to her within a year. The younger sister of Noire Épine, also in *Yvain*, sets off to find the *Chevalier au Lion* in order to have him help her defend and claim her inheritance from her older sister. Méléagant's sister, seeing the need for Lancelot to defend himself at court from accusations of dishonor, sets off to search for him without an escort, which is rather a shocking thing to do since earlier in the same story we had been warned that it was perfectly acceptable for a knight to claim[164] any unescorted woman as his own. In *Perceval*, Blanchefleur informs Perceval of the trouble she's been having from Clamadieu, one of her neighbors, and convinces him to take up her cause.

Chrétien's strong female characters reflect a couple of issues regarding the role of women's sexuality that developed in late twelfth century Christian motifs. One issue, which I have already mentioned, was the control of reproductive resources, hence the increasing importance placed on marriage by the Church, as "the family came to be seen as a microcosm of the divine order, and valued as such."[165] The second issue regarding women's sexuality relates directly to whether or not a woman married. The Church, seeking to establish and maintain its control over the institution and sanctity of marriage, began to recommend specific roles for women; they were either to remain virgins or to be married mothers. If a woman chose not to marry, which would have been unusual for members of the aristocracy and the rising middle class, both of which saw marriage as a way not just to continue the family line but also strengthen ties between families or trades, she had only two other options – remain a virgin, i.e. take religious orders[166] or become a prostitute.

---

[164]Claiming here has a double meaning, on one side it is sexual - the knight claims her body and its reproductive potential, on the other, "claiming her" has a legal connotation as the knight is also taking control of any potential financial assets she may possess or come to inherit.

[165] Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe* 87.

[166] Karras, *Sexuality in Europe* 42. Women could and did frequently take the veil after the death of their spouse, however they would not be considered virgins as they had been married. Instead these women would be considered chaste, in that they refused further sexual relations with men. Karras makes a distinction between being chaste and

While one choice banishes women to the secular sphere where the emphasis is placed on the body and pleasure, the other elevates women to the spiritual, where the emphasis is upon the soul and the divine. The spiritual enters into Chrétien's courtly love relationships through his female characters, who symbolize spiritual purity. It is their spiritual perfection to which his knights aspire. The love relationships between Chrétien's knights and their ladies illustrate the significant role women played in establishing a knight's value at court while also providing emotional and spiritual examples in which the reader or listener can question and reflect upon their own spiritual relationship to God.

In seeking to redefine women's sexuality and elevate it from the vulgar,[167] special emphasis was placed on purity, which grew out of a twelfth century movement called the Cult of the Virgin. Within medieval Christianity, the Virgin Mary held a place of prominence as she was able to retain both her spiritual purity and fulfill her gender role.

> To be pure and virginal, however, meant renouncing not only sex but also its purpose and result: reproduction. This is why the Virgin Mary was so specially venerated in medieval culture. She alone was able to have the reproductive result without losing virginal purity; for her alone among not only women but also men, the twin desiderata of purity and fertility were compatible.[168]

Because the Virgin Mary displayed both spiritual and secular devotion and service to God,[169] she appealed to both men and women. Due to this appeal, the Cult of the Virgin gained in strength during the twelfth century. As "the Cult of the Virgin was encouraged by many great churchmen

---

being a virgin. One could be chaste in marriage, meaning that one only had sexual relations with one's spouse. Monks and nuns who took religious orders late in life were considered chaste as they refused to engage in sexual relations upon taking their vows. However to be considered a virgin meant that one made a conscious choice not to marry and, like the modern definition, did not ever engage in sexual intercourse, which "took women out of the gender-defined roles [wife and mother] and made them honorary men" because they were able to control themselves and master their sexuality. St. Augustine and St. Jerome held the view that women could not control themselves or their lustfulness, thus a woman who could, behaved like a man.

[167] In using the term vulgar, I mean both lewd and concerned primarily with the body but also being attached to the earthly instead of the divine, spiritual, or celestial.

[168] Karras, *Sexuality in Europe* 42.

[169] Spiritual in the sense that Mary was devout and fully trusted in God (*The Holy Bible: King James Version* Luke 1:38. "And Mary said, 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word.'") and secular in the sense that she allowed the use of her body to bring forth God's only Son, Jesus Christ.

first of all, in France, by Saint Bernard of Clairvaux"[170] in spiritual texts, so too did the cult of the lady appear in secular works. Like the lady of courtly love, the Virgin Mary was a woman to whom a man could devote himself and serve. This is one of the key points about the Cult of the Virgin: Mary is the ultimate courtly lady.[171] Through her spiritual purity and her renunciation of the base sexual act, she becomes the ultimate symbol of ennobling love.

The idea of ennobling love then perhaps began with the Cult of the Virgin. Through Mary, love is no longer concerned with the body or sexuality but is instead concerned with the spiritual and divine. The purity and humility demonstrated by the Virgin Mary raises love to the celestial, and thus, 'ennobled love' becomes something refined, cherished, and desired. It is this type of ennobling love that is sought after in Chrétien's courtly love.

> The lady represents the force of love... Love awakens man to a new sense of himself, to higher aspirations... [in writings] where love is a major theme... the woman remain[s] a force for good. But she is no longer a symbol of something in man; she has become a separate entity... an intermediary between man and God. Man's goal is not union with her, but union with God through her.[172]

The ennobling love embodied by the Virgin Mary and the courtly lady results in their becoming intermediaries for man. Through his loving relationship with his lady, the courtly lover or knight can transform himself from someone who is more concerned with the terrestrial, and thus the vulgar, into someone who actively seeks out a celestial relationship. Sexual intercourse and the body are no longer at play in this love relationship, as they are linked with earthliness. Instead it is the divine and the spiritual that matter. The courtly lady, like the Virgin Mary, has become an

---

[170] Muir 155.
[171] Lazar 81. "le culte de la Vierge Marie était la source probable de l'amour courtois, le service de la Dame étant pour ainsi dire calqué sur le service de Notre-Dame/ the cult of the Virgin Mary was the probable source of courtly love, the service of the Lady so to speak was traced to the service of Our Lady." In other words, one influenced the other and vice versa.
[172] Joan M. Ferrante, *Woman as Image in Medieval Literature* (Durham: The Labyrinth Press, 1985) 2-3.

example of divine perfection.[173] She is the model by which knights and courtly lovers measure themselves.

Even with the emphasis on love and emotion in courtly love romances, knightly masculinity was not compromised by their service and devotion to women. Instead "[k]nights could and did understand knighthood as part of the service of God, in which they could fulfill religious obligations without abandoning the masculine idea of prowess."[174] By placing themselves in the service of a lady, knights and courtly lovers earned her love through their feats of strength, but more importantly, they earned the esteem of their male peers; however knighthood was not just about obtaining a lady's love or the esteem of one's male peers, it was also understood to have a religious connection. The Cult of the Virgin, while illuminating the devotional aspects a knight was to embody, also illuminated the role the courtly lady was to play. Quite simply, the lady was to represent God. She stood "for God, [and] the man for Man in the sense of 'human being' (*homo*)."[175] This is how the woman, the lady, or the Virgin Mary, becomes the intermediary for man. The knight's devotion to her was meant to signify man's devotion to God.

The use of courtly love literature to illustrate man's relationship to God exposes the connection between the secular and the spiritual. On a secular level, Chrétien's works discuss the roles a man and woman are supposed to abide by at court, however, on a spiritual level, his romances provide information on man's Christian responsibility. Man is to demonstrate his humility or service, his devotion, and, ultimately, his love for God. Chrétien's use of marriage

[173] Artin 70. Artin makes this same statement when discussing the Lady Enide serving as the mirror for Erec and showing him his short comings. By looking at his mirror image, Erec sees himself as he could be and thus he seeks to achieve the perfection embodied in and symbolized by Enide.
[174] Karras, *Boys to Men* 42.
[175] Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe* 82.

within the courtly love motif enables marriage to be "used metaphorically to structure even the lives of the unmarried (the soul as the bride of God, for example)."[176] Marriage then is no longer something between two humans but instead a relationship for all, even the unmarried, to participate in; for one can be 'married' to God. Chrétien's placement of marriage in a courtly context allows courtly love and courtly lovers to be ennobled.[177] The fact that love in Chrétien's romances becomes dignified and honorable, raises courtly relationships from the realm of the vulgar and elevates them into the realm of the spiritual. His married knights, who conform to both the characteristics of courtly lovers as well as real knights, demonstrate the capacity for man to move beyond base, vulgar, or earthly conceptions of love and to develop a more profound, sacred, and spiritual love.

The examination of the roles in which both the courtly lover and his lady were to engage presents some key characteristics of courtly love. These characteristics – devotion, service, humility, and love – are similar to the characteristics man needs in order to have a fruitful relationship with God. By presenting these Christian characteristics under the guise of a simple courtly adventure story to an aristocratic audience, Chrétien subtly illustrates the type of relationship that Bernard of Clairvaux espouses and explains in both his short treatise *On Loving God* and his longer life's work, *The Sermons on the Song of Songs*. In these works, Bernard explains how devotion, humility, and service work to bring one closer to God and His love. Bernard's works also enumerate the steps necessary for man to learn to love God and to accept His love in return. Chrétien's romances, via martial and courtly relationships, seek to illustrate Bernard's conceptions of loving and the steps necessary for man to engage in divine love, thus demonstrating how the secular can subtly illuminate the spiritual.

---

[176] Karras, *Boys to Men* 42.

[177] Lazar 248. "Seul le mariage peut couronner dignement et honorablement un amour vrai. / Only marriage can crown true love with dignity and honor."

Chapter Two: Moving Towards God: Bernard's Four Steps of Loving

In the previous chapter I explored the tenets of courtly love, the roles of the courtly lover and his lady and some of the historical realities surrounding those roles. In this chapter I will delve into some of the teachings and writings of Bernard of Clairvaux, specifically the four degrees of love presented in his short treatise *On Loving God*. I argue in succeeding chapters that Chrétien's adventure-romances are parables that cleverly and subtly reveal Bernard's ideology on how to love and draw closer to God. By examining and exploring Bernard's four degrees of love and his concern with pride in this chapter, I will illuminate the love relationships at play in Chrétien's romances, the characters and characterizations of his lover-knights and how these relationships and the knights are designed to push the reader or auditor to question and consider their own relationship with God. The biblical foundation as well as the lexicon utilized by Bernard will be further discussed in succeeding chapters, including how Chrétien subtly applies Bernard's theological teachings throughout his romance narratives.

St. Bernard of Clairvaux was one of the most prolific writers of the twelfth century. Bernard's distinct writing style involves basing his arguments on biblical texts as well as incorporating the writings of early church fathers such as St. Augustine and Origen. Bernard's writings are described as expositions of his conceptions of theology, in particular his mystical theology, by scholars such as Étienne Gilson and Michael Casey. Casey notes that by grounding his written works and arguments in biblical texts, Bernard established the Bible as a primary

citable source for religious writing in the twelfth century.[178] Bernard revolutionized how the Bible was used by treating it as a citable source and frequently used it for cross referencing to support and elaborate upon his arguments. This emphasis on the primacy of the Bible enabled Bernard to develop and explore his own conceptions of desire, devotion, love, and union with God, whilst ensuring their accord with biblical teachings. Bernard's concepts of devotion, love, desire, and even union, are present in the love relationships demonstrated by Chrétien's knights in his romances, as succeeding chapters will examine.

One of the foremost Bernardian scholars, Jean Leclercq, along with John Bednar, acknowledge that Chrétien de Troyes most likely read Bernard,[179] especially his *Sermons on the Song of Songs*.[180] According to Leclercq, both writers, Bernard and Chrétien, were influenced by similar "devices, images, themes and sometimes intrigues that we find in secular love literature: jealousy put to the test, pure love wanting no other reward than itself, conflict between honor and love."[181] What Leclercq's argument reveals is that there was a precedent from which Chrétien could draw. If Saint Bernard had no objection to using secular situations, themes, or elements to present his theology, then why not use it to do the opposite - to present spiritual themes or ideology via a secular text? Chrétien's adventure-romances are successful in so doing.

---

[178] Michael Casey, *A Thirst for God: Spiritual Desire in Bernard of Clairvaux's Sermons on the Song of Songs* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, Inc., 1988) 23-25. "The monk's book was the Bible. This was Bernard's principal source and main inspiration...The Scripture's inspired nearly everything he wrote...[i]n the sermons on the *Song of Songs*, there is one scriptural quotation for every two lines of text. Bernard's facility in bringing forth a creative analogue at a time when there was no universal system of chapter and verse division."

[179] John Bednar, *La Spiritualité et le symbolisme dans les œuvres de Chrétien de Troyes* (Paris: Librairie A.-G. Nizet, 1974) 42-43. Bednar states that Chrétien was a clerk at the court of Henri le Libéral (Henri was married to Marie de Champagne, Chrétien's patroness which he mentions in the introduction to *Lancelot*). Also at this court was a man named - Nicolas de Montieramy who was "un clerc à la cour d'Henri qui avait été le secrétaire de saint Bernard." Bednar does not state right out that Chrétien and Nicolas knew each other but the inclusion of Nicolas and the emphasis which Bednar places on both of them being 'clercs' at Henri's court leads one to believe that they certainly knew each other or knew of each other. By mentioning Nicolas and his former position, Bednar suggests ties between the Christian elements and themes in Chrétien's romances and Bernard's writings and teachings.

[180] Jean Leclercq, *Monks and Love in Twelfth -Century France* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1979) 121. Jean Frappier, *Chrétien de Troyes: The Man and His Work*, trans. Raymond J. Cormier (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1982) xviii. Chrétien did not begin writing until around 1160- 1165.

[181] Leclercq, *Monks and Love in Twelfth -Century France* 122.

Even though Bernard's twelfth-century works occasionally make use of secular elements, they do ultimately illustrate and explore Bernard's ideas of devotion, desire, love and union. In *On Loving God* (*De Diligendo Deo*) Bernard discusses the steps man must learn and follow, in order to love God. How to love God and be loved by Him in return is at the core of Bernardian theology, at the root of all Bernard's works, and is communicated in human lexicon and expressions.

Both Leclercq and Casey note that the Bernardian concepts of desire, devotion, and love occasionally parallel the syntax and language used in twelfth-century courtly love literature and poems. For Casey, the key to understanding Bernard's theology is linked to the words and language used in his writings.[182] A statement by Leclercq nicely sums up both Bernard's use of the secular to discuss his theology and Chrétien's presentation of the spiritual via his adventure-romances: "God's love for man and man's love for God must needs be expressed in human language borrowed from human images and symbols and ultimately from human experience."[183] In other words, one cannot discuss one's relationship to or with God without using one's own human language or experiences. Bernard and Chrétien are both successful at adapting secular or human experiences and themes, even if they are fictional as in Chrétien's case, to relate or explain spiritual matters, concerns, or theology. The ability to utilize the secular, the human experience, to direct one's attention to establishing a more profound spirituality with the divine, is what ties these two authors together.

While the primary focus of this and succeeding chapters will be Bernard's *On Loving God*, I think it is necessary first to briefly discuss one of Bernard's most significant works, his

[182] Casey 20.
[183] Leclercq, *Monks and Love in Twelfth -Century France* 9.

Sermons on the Song of Songs.[184] Later in this chapter I will return to the *Sermons* for another brief exploration of some key features which scholars have noted and are preeminent to my subsequent discussions of Chrétien's romances. Bernard began work on the *Sermons* in 1135 and they occupied on and off the next eighteen years of his life.[185] Unfortunately, Bernard's *Sermons* were never completed due to his death and he never explored more than the first three chapters of the *Song of Songs*.

Even though unfinished, Bernard's *Sermons* contains the fully developed exploration of his concepts of union, how God loves us, and how we are to love God. Casey describes the *Sermons* as offering "a panoramic presentation of the life of the soul with God," from which Bernard drew his "inspirations from the [biblical] text... and from his own experience."[186] For Leclercq and Tamburello, the *Sermons* provide the in-depth exploration of concepts and ideas which Bernard first introduced in his four degrees of love in *On Loving God*.[187] In a more compact form, *On Loving God* is Bernard's first iteration of his ideology of love, especially spiritual and divine love.

Before exploring his four degrees of love, I will first provide a brief biography of Bernard of Clairvaux and describe his importance and prominence during the twelfth -century. In his four degrees of love, Bernard establishes a progression, a series of steps for man to follow. Man must pass through each degree in order to achieve what Bernard perceives to be the culmination of loving God - union with Him. While exploring the four degrees, I will also touch on some

---

[184] Hereafter, *The Sermons on the Song of Songs* will just be referred to as the *Sermons*.
[185] Casey 13. Additionally, Casey notes that Bernard "was not interested in writing a commentary on the *Song of Songs*...Instead he was engaged in giving a synthetic presentation of his vision of the ascent of the soul to God" (p. 52) In other words, Bernard's *Sermons* elaborate and illustrate his theological mysticism.
[186] Casey 13.
[187] Dennis E. Tamburello, *Union with Christ: John Calvin and the Mysticism of St. Bernard* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994) 68. Tamburello states that the "insight's (in *On Loving God*) are echoed in the *Sermons on the Song of Songs.*"

critical elements related to courtly love, such as devotion, humility and desire. I will also briefly explore how Bernard's works were received by his contemporaries both within his own Cistercian order as well as by his secular audience. The reception of works such as *On Loving God* is critical to comprehending both Chrétien's and Bernard's audiences. Both authors address similar audience members,[188] and both their audiences would have been to a greater or lesser extent familiar with courtly love literature and poetry.[189] The links between *On Loving God* and Chrétien's romances are important in that both allow a progression wherein each text or degress builds upon the previous one. *On Loving God* has the most significant ties to Chrétien's romances; as each romance progresses it contains specific elements that recall one or several of Bernard's four degrees.

St. Bernard - Influential Man and Writer

In the following section I intend to provide some of the more significant details of the life of Saint Bernard of Clairvaux. While this is by no means a complete biography of Bernard's life, these details have bearing upon the connections between Bernard's and Chrétien's works.

St. Bernard was born in Fontaine-les-Dijon in 1090.[190] He was the third child of six born into a lower aristocratic Burgundian household. His father, Tescelin Sorrel, was a knight.

---

[188] Chrétien's audience was the aristocratic court, while Bernard's was monastic. However, Bernard's order drew its members from the aristocracy as well as men and women who had lived in the world for some time. Leclercq, *Monks and Love in Twelfth-Century France* 11. Leclercq writes that the Cistercian's recruited from adults, people who had lived in and experienced the world and society, most were nobles or knights, others were former students (educated in universities) or widows and widowers.

[189] Ann W. Astell, *The Song of Songs in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990) 9. "the Cistercians,...recruited their members from among adults, all of whom had lived in secular society. Many were drawn from aristocratic circles; a high percentage had been married; most were familiar with secular love literature; some - notably the trouvère Folquet [later Bishop of Toulouse]- had written secular love songs prior to their entrance."

[190] Herbert Thurston and Donald Attwater, eds., *Butler's Lives of the Saints.* Vol.III. (New York: P. J. Kenedy & Sons; 1956) 360.

Bernard's brothers were also knights and his mother, Aleth, was the daughter of a knight.[191] Bernard's family was fairly well off as he was educated at a parochial school.[192] It is here that he learned reading, writing and Latin. Leclercq suggests that Bernard was exposed to courtly troubadour poetry and song, most likely while he was at home or at other aristocratic courts.[193] Leclercq also speculates that during Bernard's childhood and adolescence he might have tried his hand at composing works based upon troubadour songs or poetry to which he had been exposed.[194] In other words, Bernard would have had some familiarity with the language and style of courtly love literature and poetry.

Supporting Leclercq's view, John J. Delaney and James Edward Tobin state that Bernard did indeed have a secular upbringing, for they mention that prior to taking his vows, Bernard had "several years of rather boisterous living."[195] Bernard's education then was both religious and secular. His experiences outside the monastic world became important later on in his life as these experiences nuanced his writing and dealings with secular leaders, as well as his more intimate writings for those of his own order. This comprehensive education might also explain Bernard's success at recruiting from his own class. Not only was he willing to use the vernacular, making his work accessible to all, not just ecclesiastics, he was also willing to include tropes and themes with which his audience was familiar.[196]

---

[191] Thurston and Attwater, eds. 360. Aleth's father was Bernard, lord of Montbard. Montbard is also fairly close to Dijon and Troyes and is a part of the region of Burgundy. Bernard's family, while part of the minor aristocracy, was still in an area dominated by the Burgundian and Champagne courts. This is very similar to the lineage of Chrétien's Perceval. In verses 392-396 & 428-434, Perceval's mother states that she was the daughter of a knight and that Perceval's father and brothers were also knights.

[192] John J. Delaney and James Edward Tobin, *Dictionary of Catholic Biography* (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1961) 132.

[193] Jean Leclercq, Introduction, *Bernard of Clairvaux Selected Works,* trans. G.R. Evans (New York: Paulist Press, 1987) 16.

[194] Leclercq, Introduction, *Bernard of Clairvaux Selected Works* 16.

[195] Bernard of Clairvaux, *Bernard of Clairvaux Selected Works* 132.

[196] Most monks entered the Cistercian Order as adults.

At the age of twenty-two, after the death of his mother in 1112, Bernard entered into the Cistercian order.[197] Once Bernard entered the monastery, he became one of the most famous men of his time and was known to all the great personages of his time.[198] Bernard was described as being physically and intellectually attractive to both men and women, even though he was of a slightly sickly nature.[199] In *Butler's Lives of the Saints* he is described as having "personal attractiveness and wit," and his "affability and sweetness of temper, endeared him to everybody."[200] Bernard's attractiveness, intelligence, and temperament made him irresistible to others but also earned him respect. Casey speculates that Bernard's charisma and intelligence enabled him to gain the position of abbot within three years of his entry into the monastic life.[201] His being named Abbot at such a young age[202] and so early in his monastic vocation could thus be attributed to the force of his personality and intellect as much as to his deftness at handling people.

Bernard's attractiveness and his social rank may not initially seem all that important but they are incredibly important for comprehending his influence and prominence during the twelfth century. These facts about Bernard not only establish his family's socio-economic standing, they also explain to whom he directed most of his teachings. Bernard wrote not just to his fellow monks but also to his fellow aristocratic peers.[203] Casey and Leclercq indicate that one of the

---

[197] *The Encyclopedia of Catholic Saints* (Philadelphia: Chilton Books, 1966) 102. There is some discrepancy about the age at which Bernard entered the monastic world. John J. Delaney, in the *Dictionary of Catholic Biography*, has Bernard entering the Abbey of Cîteaux at the age of 19. Most other scholarly works indicate twenty-two as the age at which Bernard entered the monastery.

[198] Casey 1 & 16.

[199] Casey 8 & 9. Bernard's attractiveness is commented upon by his contemporary and one of his constants correspondents, William of St. Thierry.

[200] Thurston and Attwater, eds. 360.

[201] Casey 10-12.

[202] Bernard would have been either twenty-two or twenty-five when he achieved this position.

[203] Leclercq, Introduction, *Bernard of Clairvaux Selected Works* 17. Leclercq writes in his introduction that "Bernard's message was...destined to go beyond the confines of Clairvaux and... he was consulted from all sides." Leclercq is indicating that it was not just his own order or the Church who consulted Bernard but also those outside of the ecclesiastical sphere. See also notes 12 and 13.

reasons why Bernard was able to recruit so well and attract so many members from the nobility was in part because Bernard belonged to the same social class. Bernard understood the social attitudes, mind-sets and morals of the aristocracy, but more importantly he spoke their language; the language of the court, the layman's tongue, the vernacular - French.

Upon entering the monastery, Bernard wasted no time in setting about his duties. He is credited with starting monasteries and convents all over Europe, especially in France and Germany, but also as far away as Ireland.[204] Bernard also set about preaching both publicly and through missive letters. His words made him "one of the most influential thinker[s and writers] of his time."[205] Bernard's influence, as Richard McBrien notes, enabled him to explore religious and secular issues with great impact. McBrien states that Bernard secured approval for the Knights Templar, an order that was both secularly involved in the arts of warfare and finances and monastically inclined through its strict vows, whose Rule he (Bernard) had written.[206] McBrien continues by stating that Bernard was quick to condemn "scholars such as Peter Abelard and Gilbert de la Poirée, Bishop of Poitiers, for their theological opinions,"[207] as well as criticizing other monastic institutions such as Cluny for their luxuriant ways. Bernard was also very vociferous in preaching "an exhausting campaign against the Cathari (Albigensians)"[208] as well as for a second Crusade.[209]

Even though Bernard was severely critical of some theologians and some monastic practices, he remained a staunch supporter of the Roman Church. *The Encyclopedia of Catholic*

---

[204] Leclercq, Introduction, *Bernard of Clairvaux Selected Works* 17. 290 were founded during Bernard's lifetime.
[205] John Coulson, *The Saints: A Concise Biographical Dictionary* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1958) 87.
[206] Richard P. McBrien, *Lives of the Saints* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001) 337.
[207] McBrien 337. Brian P. McGuire, *The Difficult Saint: Bernard of Clairvaux and His Tradition* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, Inc., 1991) 33-35, 84, & 90. McGuire notes that Bernard and Abelard were on differing sides of a theological debater regarding "orthodox Trinitarian theology" (33-35). McGuire also notes that Bernard drew on Augustinian tradition by referencing biblical texts (84) and considered himself a traditionalist by reasserting values and ways of living which he believed had been lost (90).
[208] McBrien 337.
[209] McGuire 33-34.

Saints notes that Bernard was closely involved in every movement within the Church - the Council of Troyes, the disputed election of Innocent II, the Councils of Etampes, Rhiems, and Pisa, the schism involving the antipope, Peter of Leon, and the Council of Sens that condemned Peter Abelard.[210] He also wrote a series of sermons on the benefits of a Crusade. Bernard argued for the policies of the presiding Pope, dealt with Church issues, and wrote encouraging letters and documents that answered questions of faith and church policy. Amongst all of this, he also found time to counsel heads of state.

In addition to condemning some of his fellow monastics or theologians, such as the monks at Cluny or Abelard, Bernard was not above reprimanding secular leaders as well as offering them advice. *The Encyclopedia of Catholic Saints* notes that "King Louis the Fat, William, Duke of Guyenne, Count Lothaire, King of Sicily, the Count of Champagne" as well as others, all felt the sting of Bernard's pen.[211] John Coulson writes that "Bernard was no respecter of persons; he held strong views and did not fear to express them, his wit could be devastating."[212] In *Butler's Lives of the Saints* Bernard is noted to be able to be "equally gentle and vigorous... he reproves to correct, never to insult."[213] Thus Bernard not only engaged in religious issues and reform but also addressed issues of secular behavior or misbehavior. McBrien states that Bernard was sought out and acted as a mediator between the Duke of Lorraine's military forces and the inhabitants of Metz.[214] So great was his reputation and ability that he was able to get both sides to "lay aside their arms and accept a treaty which he drew up."[215]

---

[210] *Encyclopedia of Catholic Saints* (Wilkes-Barre, PA: Dimension Books, Inc., 1966) 102-103.
[211] *Encyclopedia of Catholic Saints* 103.
[212] Coulson 87.
[213] Thurston and Attwater, eds. 365.
[214] McBrien 338.
[215] Thurston and Attwater, eds. 364.

The extent of Bernard's influence upon both the religious and secular worlds is demonstrated both by how often scholars and theologians refer to his impressive body of work, and by the numerous historical accounts and records that document his negotiating skills. Bernard's religious influence is illustrated by his works, treatises, sermons, responses to questions of faith, and ecclesiastical issues, written for Popes, Bishops, and the Church; whereas his secular influence is demonstrated by various historical accounts chronicling the details of Bernard's mediations, his letters of advice or criticism to Kings and Princes - especially his criticism of the King of France, his public campaigns against Peter Abelard, the public condemnation of the Abelard's teachings, and the condemnation of the Cathar movement in southern France.[216] Bernard's ties to the nobility, his use of metaphors, language and themes which parallel the metaphors, language and themes of courtly love texts,[217] enabled his works to be accepted, listened to and respected by both secular and religious audiences.

Monastic Theology: How a Text Generates a Reader's Personal Growth

As most of Bernard's works were written as he travelled around Europe, preaching and establishing other Cistercian monasteries for both monks and nuns, his writings became a way to draw people, especially the nobility, into thinking about their relationship with God. Bernard's writings reflect both secular and spiritual influences through his mastery of biblical undertones

[216] One of his most famous pieces of writing directed towards a secular audience is titled, *De Laude Novae Militia* (*In Praise of a New Knighthood*). This work was addressed to Huges de Payens, Bernard's cousin and also the first Grand Master of the Knights Templar. The result of *De Laude Novae Militia* was indeed another crusade, demonstrating both Bernard's charisma and prowess with the pen.

[217] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On the Song of Songs,* trans. Kilian Walsh, Vol. 1(Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, Inc., 1971) 39. In discussing the intimacies of the love of God in Sermon VII, Bernard writes: "No sweeter names can be found to embody that sweet interflow of affections between the Word and the Soul, that bridegroom and bride. Between these all things are equally shared, there are no selfish reservations, nothing that causes division." This is the state of love and marriage existing between Erec and Enide prior to Enide informing Erec of the damage to his reputation, and returned to just prior to the *joie de la cour* which culminates in the coronation ceremony.

and his openness to influence from the French vernacular.[218] In speaking of the type of love man exhibits towards God, Bernard writes: "This love is pleasing because it is free. It is chaste because it does not consist of spoken words but of deed and truth."[219] This citation corresponds nicely with the elements of courtly love examined in the previous chapter. Bernard sets a precedent through his description of man's love for God which could also describe a knight's love for his lady, proven by his deeds and/or actions and not necessarily just his words.[220]

This *rapprochement* of the language of the soul and courtly love is demonstrated through a concept prevalent in Bernard's texts, which Casey calls "monastic theology." According to Casey, monastic theology was:

> a form of reflection and discourse on revealed truth which was closer to art than to science...a discipline by which the mind and heart were schooled so that they might venture reverently and humbly further into faith. Its end object was not so much the discovery of new corollaries or the solution of old problems as the personal growth of its participants... It was a poetic and symbolic theology, deeply traditional in its content but often original and elegant in its form...it stimulated the mind not by advancing new conclusions but by the style and fervour with which accepted beliefs were re-expressed.[221]

Bernardian monastic theology harmonizes with critical elements in Chrétien's adventure-romances. The first critical element important in both men's writing is the theme of self-improvement. In Bernard's texts, man's betterment or self-improvement is "describe[d] at great length and with extraordinary sophistication [as] the movement of the soul toward union with the Word (God)."[222] According to Bernard, the more man loves God and the more man realizes his love for and his need for God, the easier it is for him to delve into deeper intimacy and spiritual

---

[218] Casey 20.
[219] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, Inc., 1995) 5.
[220] Étienne Gilson, *The Mystical Theology of Saint Bernard* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publication, 1990) xxvi.
[221] Gilson 33. Gilson notes that "in the generation after Bernard, the language of the soul and the language of courtly love grew closer together."
[222] Bernard of Clairvaux, *Bernard of Clairvaux Selected Works* 9.

union with God. Bernard's idea of self-improvement is directed towards the divine and is devoted to a deepening of one's love for God.

The second element mentioned is the concept that written works are "to stimulate the mind" and not to actively "solve problems." Caroline Walker Bynum states that the primary goal of Cistercian works is "concerned with monks providing an example (of how to live) to their brothers (both monastic and secular)."[223] In many of Bernard's texts which discuss how to live a Christian life, Bernard identifies where man falls short of the image of God (i.e. man sins and thus loses his likeness to God), how man can return to God's likeness, and ultimately achieve spiritual union with Him. By echoing biblical texts, a majority of Bernard's writings work to stimulate the mind by drawing man's attention to consider how he could improve himself in order to draw closer to God.[224] In *On Loving God*, Bernard writes:

> That no rational creature may ignore this fact...the same creator wills that man be disciplined by tribulations so that when man fails [sins] and God comes to his help, man, saved by God, will rend God the honor due him...In this way, man who is animal and carnal, and knows how to love only himself, yet starts loving God for his own benefit, because he learns from frequent experience that he can do everything that is good for him in God and that without God he can do nothing good.[225]

Through "tribulations" man becomes disciplined and learns to love and trust God (render honor) thus discovering his need for God in his life. This need for God pushes man to want to have God's continual presence or the "frequent experience" of doing "everything that is good...in God."[226] In other words, man desires God's presence in his life and he realizes that without God

---

[223]Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982) 68.

[224] *The Holy Bible: New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996) 2 Peter 1: 3-9 & 1 Corinthians 13: 1-12.

[225] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God* 27.

[226] The courtly lover too learns love, trust and discipline throughout the course of his relationship with his lady. She is needed in his life not just as a symbol of social standing but also because she is the impetuous for his deeds and to whom he renders honor upon each task's successful completion. She is needed because she is the reason why he continually pushes himself to be worthy of her love and attention. Without a lady, the courtly lover can do "nothing good" because there is no one to whom honor and love can be rendered.

he can achieve nothing.[227] Man's need for God is tied to the places where man "fails" because it is here that God's abiding love for mankind is demonstrated.[228] Bernard understood that the places where man "fails" would be different for each, hence his works attempt to identify the multiple areas and situations where self-improvement is needed and necessary, so that man can restore his likeness to God by rejecting sin or by recognizing that his sin and lack of love are what hold him back from truly loving and being united with God.

In Chrétien's romances, self-improvement or "personal growth" is illustrated by his knights as each passes through a period of personal self-scrutiny or discovery followed by series of adventures in which their characters develop positive courtly and spiritual traits. For example, Yvain learns humility during the course of his adventures as well as loyalty to his word as well as his lion; Perceval learns the appropriate way to treat a lady and behave at court, as well as the benefits of thinking before acting; Lancelot learns that complete obedience to his lady's will earns him all of her favors. The humility, faithfulness, contemplation, and obedience of Chrétien's knights parallels the Christian traits advocated by Bernard in his writings. As an instruction manual for how to be a proper courtly knight and as an instruction manual for how to draw closer to God, Chrétien's knights illustrate the Bernardian concept of personal growth. Read as parables, Chrétien's romances encourage the reader to delve beyond the adventure story of knightly deeds and love to discover the Bernardian theology contained therein.

---

[227] *Holy Bible: King James Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000) John 15: 5c. "for without me ye can do nothing."

[228] *Holy Bible: King James Version* John 3:16. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." God's love for man and his desire to save man meant that he was willing to sacrifice his only son so that man might re-establish his likeness to God (i.e. be free of sin). Bernard wants his audience to realize that one needs God's love and support to be able to discipline oneself to recognize and avoid the places where a failure might occur.

A Brief Examination of the Song of Songs *and Bernard's Treatise* On Humility and Pride

As I mentioned in the introduction, it is important to explore some concepts contained within two other works of Bernard before discussing *On Loving God*, the primary text which correlates with Chrétien's works. I will briefly discuss Bernard's famous *Sermons on the Song of Songs* before introducing another short treatise, *On the Steps of Humility and Pride*. The important concepts from these two works addressed in this section impinge upon my argument that Chrétien's romances are parables which reveal Bernard's ideology on loving God. These concepts will also help elucidate some of the theology and concepts Bernard mentions in *On Loving God*.

Being the Bride in the Bernard's Sermons on the Song of Songs

The *Song of Songs* in the Bible is a love story between a bride and her bridegroom, presumably written by King Solomon. Scholar Ann Astell notes that there are two problems with the allegory presented in the *Songs*.[229] The first problem lies with what the text actually says and the second with what the text leaves unstated.[230] In other words, both problems and solutions arise from how the text is read. On the one hand, the *Song of Songs* can be read as a carnal love story in which case it has no meaning beyond the erotic. On the other hand, what is left unstated and hinted at is generally equated with spiritual love. Casey writes that modern commentators on the *Song of Songs* see "the Song as an intimation of higher realities, interpreting it as an allegory of the relation of God and his people or, later, between God and the

[229] Astell 1.
[230] Astell 1.

individual soul."[231] The allegory in the *Song* and its interpretation is something the Church has struggled with for centuries and ultimately has divided commentators into two camps: those who interpret it as the relation between God and his people and those who view it as describing the relationship between God and an individual soul. In any event as each reader of the *Song* becomes engaged with their own personal struggle to comprehend the hidden meanings contained within the allegory, they deepen their spirituality as they are drawn into a deeper understanding of God and His love. Ultimately what the *Song* describes, with which Bernard aligns himself, is how God loves. Additionally it also describes a human spiritual response to this divine love.

One of the concepts raised in Bernard's *Sermons*, has to do with a shift in theological ideas regarding love, the body, the soul and the demonstrations of man's relationship to and with God[232] that occurred prior to and during the twelfth century. Scholar E. Ann Matter as well as Astell discusses how Bernard's *Sermons* were viewed by and used by other twelfth-century theologians and authors.[233] Although each has different interpretations on the impact of the *Sermons*, they both identify the changing theological and ecclesiastical perspectives that the *Sermons* prompted during the twelfth century.

Astell's exploration of the *Sermons* presents the idea that twelfth century thinkers, ecclesiastics, and educated laymen were more concerned with reclaiming the feminine aspects of

[231] Casey 40. The commentators Casey footnotes are from the twentieth-century and the latter half of the nineteenth-century.
[232] The Cult of the Virgin played a key part in the re-conceptualization of the feminine within both men and women.
[233] E. Ann Matter, *The Voice of My Beloved: The Song of Songs in Western Medieval Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990) 39. "Bernard's homilies were inspired by and intended for the devotional life of the Cistercian movement." Matter reiterates this idea of the sermons being only for the monastic elite at the start of her fifth chapter (pages 123-125) whereas I am in agreement with Leclercq, that Bernard's writings were for a wider audience not just those in the cloister.

spirituality and devotion within themselves,[234] since "the soul's mystical union with God is experienced not primarily as intellectual enlightenment, but as a loving, *personal* surrender to the will of God."[235] Feelings and emotions were generally associated with the *anima*, the female portion of one's soul.[236] The surrendering of one's will is key for Bernard as it exemplifies a feminine role. Femininity and surrendering are the hallmarks of the Bride in the *Song of Songs.* It is the Bride (the soul) who surrenders herself to the will of the Bridegroom (God).

For Bernard, the *Song* is "God's wooing, His way of stimulating humans to make a bridal self-surrender to Him."[237] The *Song* is about a personal and intimate relationship with God. It is man who must take action and actively seek and pursue God. Only then will man come to realize his true nature; his need for love, specifically God's love. In order for man to be able to comprehend and accept his need for God's love and his love for God, man needs to recognize his *anima* - the feminine part of his soul.

A feminized soul (*anima*) represented by the Bride enables man to comprehend how to make "a loving personal surrender to the will of God."[238] Bernard's idea of a personal relationship with God is noted by Bynum when she describes the emphasis that was beginning to be placed upon the individual and their relationships to others as "they move toward God or help others to do so."[239] She writes that:

> Bernard and other 'new monks' stress the discovery of self and of self-love as the first step in a long process of returning to the love of and likeness to God, a love and likeness

[234]Astell 7. The reclaiming of the feminine within would be personal for each individual as they orient/re-orient their own relationship with God.
[235] Astell 8. (italics mine for emphasis)
[236] Joan M. Ferrante, *Woman as Image in Medieval Literature* (Durham: The Labyrinth Press, 1985) 17. "Man is the *spiritus* (masc.), the higher rational soul, woman the *anima* (fem.), the lower sensible soul." Rational meaning intellectual and sensible meaning emotional. Casey 207. Casey writes that Bernard identifies the Bride in the *Song of Songs* as the *anima.*
[237] Astell 10.
[238] Astell 8.
[239] Bynum 86.

> in which the individual is not dissolved into God but rather becomes God's partner and friend. [240]

There are several key concepts mentioned here which will be explored in greater detail later in this chapter. However, one of the first concepts Bynum indicates is the discovery of the self, the understanding of one's own relationship with God and how self-love can play a hindering role in one's relationship with God, which is elaborated upon in Bernard's first degree of love. The second concept indicates that changes in one's relationship with God is a "long process." This is echoed in Bernard's second and third degrees of love, when he emphasizes the length of time one might spend moving from the second to the third and how long one might remain in the third before attaining the fourth.[241] In Sermon IV, Bernard writes:

> three stages of the soul's growth in love, three stages of its advance toward perfection...the forgiveness of sins,...the grace that follows on good deeds, and finally that contemplative gift by which a kind and beneficent Lord shows himself to the soul with as much clarity as bodily frailty can endure [i.e. union].[242]

Bernard makes a point of noting that changes in one's relationship or "the three stages of a soul's growth," will involve a series of steps and will take time.[243]

The third concept indicated is the struggle to restore one's likeness to God and Bernard's concept of union. Bernard accepts that as humans we first begin life resembling and seeking earthly things but as we develop spiritually and turn away from earthly sin and desires we identify more and more and seek more often to resemble the heavenly Creator. Bernard writes that: "[i]t is necessary that we bear first the likeness of an earthly being, then that of a heavenly being."[244] As we turn from sin we restore our likeness to God which then enables us to be ready

---

[240] Bynum 86.
[241] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God* 40-41. In section 39, Bernard sums up his four degrees of love as a progression and comments that once man has passed into the third degree: "No doubt man remains a long time in this degree, and I doubt if he ever attains the fourth degree during this life."
[242] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On the Song of Songs*, vol.1 22.
[243] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On the Song of Songs*, vol.1 23.
[244] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God* 40-41.

to accept union. Union with God does not mean that the individual personality or soul is lost but rather that it comes to rest in God: "[i]n some wondrous way he [man] forgets himself and ceasing to belong to himself, he passes entirely into God and adhering to Him, he becomes one with him in spirit."[245] Forgetting and ceasing do not mean that man's individuality or personality are obliterated. Instead they signal the state of a soul that is so wrapped up in God's love that he has left his humanity behind. True union for Bernard can only occur once man has died but spiritual union is possible (through contemplation or ecstasy) while man still has his human body. In Bernard's concept of union, man still retains his separate individuality but is involved in a very intimate relationship with God in which He is viewed as a partner or a friend.

Astell echoes Bernard in writing about the role man must assume in his relationship with God: man must connect with his *anima* and acknowledge the feminine aspects of his soul. In other words, man assumes a feminine role. In contrast, Bynum instead sees God or Christ as being feminized, with Christ or God in the role of Mother. According to Bynum the later medieval devotional tradition is engaged with "[s]eeing Christ, or God, or the Holy Spirit as female [and] is... characterized by increasing preference for analogies taken from human relationships, a growing sense of God as loving and accessible."[246] While Bernard does embrace a God who is "loving and accessible" and does use examples taken from human relationships to express man's relationship to God, he does not embrace the idea of God being feminine.[247]

Bernard's insistence that the *Song* depicts the intimate relationship between a masculine God and a feminized man, especially man's bridal soul, censures the idea that the *Song* can be

---

[245] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God* 41

[246] Bynum 129-30.

[247] *The Holy Bible: New International Version* Mark 2: 19-20. In answer to a question about fasting, Jesus replies: "How can the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? They cannot, so long as they have him with them. But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them, and on that day they will fast." Jesus is clearly identifying himself as the bridegroom in this passage and also directing his questioners to the *Song of Songs*. The guests in this passage could either be the Church or any follower of Jesus.

read as a carnal love story. It is this bridal soul - the one who comprehends his or her *anima* (i.e. the spiritual and submissive parts of the soul) and its role in the relationship with God, who has become like the Bride in the *Song*, the "soul thirsting for God."[248] The bridal "soul thirsting for God" indicates that it is man who must be the active party in seeking out and acting upon his relationship to God. According to Bernard, it is man who must take up the feminine role of the Bride and make the "personal surrender" to God. It is man that must understand and embrace his own emotional side and *anima*. For Bernard, man is the female Bride, whereas God is the unchangeably masculine Bridegroom.[249]

The roles ascribed to man and God become significant once Bernard begins to explore the differences between love and desire. The relationship displayed through man's feminized bridal role and God's masculinity is both an inversion of the courtly love roles as depicted in Chrétien's romances, and also a parallel to one aspect of the love relationship. Casey notes that the majority of the sermons discuss the theme of desire: "[t]he Song of Songs, particularly in its interplay of presence and absence, was seen by Bernard and his contemporaries as a dramatic presentation of the dialectic of desire."[250] Casey continues by providing what he views is a Bernardian definition of love and desire:

> For Bernard, love and desire appeared as complementary realities: love being more appropriate as a response to the presence of the object of one's affection; desire being especially a consequence of his being absent.[251]

---

[248] Astell 19.
[249] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On the Song of Songs*,vol.1 35& 38. In Sermon VI, Bernard writes: "it was necessary that the sinner should receive pardon for *her* sins while lying prone at God's feet of flesh." (italics mine for emphasis). Bernard has feminized the sinner. It is for *her* (the *anima*, the soul) sins that she is begging forgiveness whilst lying at the feet of God, who is masculine. In Sermon VII, Bernard writes: "The bride...she is the soul thirsting for God" and when discussing the "Word and the soul" Bernard refers to the "bridegroom" as the Word (i.e. God or Christ) and the "bride" as the soul. Bernard also writes "it is not unfitting to call the soul that loves God a bride."
[250] Casey 59.
[251] Casey 88.

Love then is the state one is in when the Beloved is present. Desire on the other hand is the state one is in when the Beloved is absent. Bernard writes: "[f]or the keener her [the soul's] joy in his [God's] presence, the more irksome her sense of his absence. The removal of what you love spells an increase of desire for it, and what you eagerly desire you miss painfully."[252] Being absent from the object of one's desire results in a deepening of love or desire for that absent item or person. However, being in the presence of one's love object allows one to experience joy. One basks in the presence of one's Beloved.

This theme of presence and absence is a key feature in Chrétien's own texts, especially between the knight and his lady. The knight is the one who comes and goes, is sometimes granted access to the lady, and sometimes is kept at a distance from her, the one he desires. The knight's desire grows and strengthens through his absence. For example, Lancelot's desire for and love of the Queen increases once she is abducted from the court and this is noted by various women as he searches for her whereabouts. In *Yvain,* once Yvain is banished from his lady, his desire to return to her and make good his marriage becomes the foundation for all his subsequent adventures. Perceval's narrative is curious in that it demonstrates only one aspect of the dialectic of desire. Perceval's narrative embodies a state of continuous absence; the absence of a father figure and comprehension of knighthood, courtly behavior, and religion. Even though Perceval eventually comes to comprehend each of these, he remains in a state of desire, of wanting, that is never fulfilled.[253] The dialectic of desire in the romance-adventures of Chrétien's knights and Bernard's writings delineates one of the parallels between the secular and spiritual linking their works.

---

[252] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On the Song of Songs*, trans. Kilian Walsh and Irene M. Edmonds vol.3 (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, Inc., 1979) 40.

[253] Perceval's state of desire is for knowledge on how to be a knight, on how to treat a lady, to understand what occurred at the Fisher King's castle. His state of wanting is constant until he encounters his uncle the hermit and is initiated into Christian mysteries (this occurs just prior to Perceval's leaving the narrative).

Another parallel which Bernard and Chrétien's works share is the idea of presenting their writings as a guide. Bernard's writings on the *Song* were meant to be read as a practical guide. Bernard writes in his first sermon: "[t]he instructions that I address to you, my brothers, will differ from those I should deliver to people in the world, at least the manner will be different."[254] Bernard is stating directly that what follows is a set of instructions meant to be followed and the only difference between what he is providing his monastic brethren and the world at large, is the way in which he is providing them. In other words the message is the same for either layman or ecclesiastic, regardless of where they are found be it court or cloister; it is the means of delivery that is distinctive.

Bernard's *Sermons* strive to unlock the allegory of the *Song* through a series of reflections. Bernard was:

> not interested in writing a commentary on the *Song of Songs*, ...he was engaged in giving a synthetic presentation of his vision of the ascent of the soul [i.e. union] to God through the medium of a series of sermons based on the biblical book which seemed to epitomize that ascent.[255]

For a soul to achieve that ascent, each of Bernard's sermons or reflections provide a guide for loving and understanding divine love. Love as understood by Bernard was: "poured out into our hearts, com[ing] from God ("Deus Charitas est") and urg[ing] our return to him..." and frequently reminded his audience that "[l]earning to love...includes a number of stages and frequent correction."[256] Bernardian love, then, is reciprocal, circular, progressive and often requires time for adjustment and alterations to the self.

[254] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On the Song of Songs*, vol.1 1.
[255] Casey 52.
[256] Astell 18-19.

How Pride Leads Man Away from His Likeness to God in On the Steps of Humility and Pride

In another short treatise, *On Humility and Pride* (*De Gradibus Humilitatis et Superbiae*),[257] Bernard provides a guide to recognizing the things and the way in which man distances himself from God as well as recognizing the paths which will lead him closer to Him. In *On Humility and Pride*, two key points are emphasized. First, the reader will notice that the work tends to deal more with pride than humility; and second that the origin of sin is pride. The Bernardian concept of pride as being the origin of sin is the foundation of my argument in succeeding chapters as the primary cause for how Chrétien's knights lose the love of their ladies. Additionally some of the steps Bernard outlines for his audience to follow, or be wary of, are ones that Chrétien's knights exhibit for good or ill. The salient points raised in this treatise and *On Loving God*, the treatise I will explore in the next section, provide key elements in comprehending how Chrétien's works can be read not just as a guide but also as an exploration of Bernard's conceptions of love.

While *On Humility and Pride* does not overtly explore Bernard's concept of love, it does so indirectly. In this treatise Bernard explains how man loses God's likeness and the steps man can take in order to restore his likeness and thus draw closer to God. For Bernard, pride is what causes man to sin and lose his likeness to God. With each descending step of pride, man draws further and further away from God (falls further into sin) and lessens his love for God but increases his love of self. Once man recognizes that pride and the love of self have led him away from God, he can begin to restore his likeness to God by following the ascending steps of

[257] Bernard of Clairvaux, *Bernard of Clairvaux Selected Works* 99. Bernard wrote this treatise within the first ten years of his foundation of the abbey at Clairvaux, c.1119 or 1120.

humility. With each step of humility that man takes he draws closer to and deepens both his love for and his relationship with God.

Pride[258]	Humility
1. Curiosity about what is not one's proper concern.	12. Containment of one's interests, which shows itself in a humble bearing and lowered eyes.
2. Light-mindedness: chatter and exclamations about things which do not matter.	11. Quiet and restrained speech.
3. Laughing about nothing: foolish merriment.	10. Reluctance to laugh.
4. Boasting and talking too much.	9. Keeping silent unless asked to speak.
5. Trying to be different: claiming special rights.	8. Regarding oneself as having no special rights in the community.
6. Thinking oneself holier than others.	7. Thinking oneself less holy than others.
7. Interfering presumptuously with the affairs of others.	6. Thinking oneself unworthy to take initiative.
8. Self-justification. Defending one's sinful actions.	5. Confessing one's sins.
9. Insincere confession.	4. Patience in the face of accusation.
10. Rebellion against superiors.	3. Submission to superiors.
11. Feeling free to sin.	2. Desiring no freedom to exercise one's will.
12. Habitual sinning.	1. Constant watchfulness against sin.

Bernard wrote at the end of his treatise that the reader[259] would notice that this treatise dealt mainly with pride and that the reason for it was that he had more practice with pride than with humility.[260] Bernard's familiarity with pride illuminates its descending steps, which he outlined at the beginning of the text, but conversely it also describes the ascending steps of humility. For Bernard, pride and humility are interconnected as they are antitheses of each other.

> There is a way down, then, as well as a way up...if you desire to return to the truth you do not need to search for the road. You know it. You came down that way. Retrace your

[258] Bernard of Clairvaux, *Bernard of Clairvaux Selected Works* 100 .
[259] Bernard of Clairvaux, *Bernard of Clairvaux Selected Works* 99. Bernard had given talks about pride and humility but it was Godfrey of Langres, abbot of Fontenay, who requested a written work from Bernard that he could use with his own monks.
[260] Bernard of Clairvaux, *Bernard of Clairvaux Selected Works* 142. "I can teach only what I have learned. I did not think I could fittingly describe the steps up (humility) when I know more about going down (pride) than going up."

> footsteps. Go up by the same steps by which you came down in your pride. Thus he who has sunk to the twelfth step of pride must climb the first step of humility.[261]

The inverse and entwined relationship of pride and humility describes man's movement toward or away from God. Thus as one moves or falls down the steps of pride, one must learn to climb up the steps of humility.

As one moves further down the steps of pride, one moves further away from humility and God's likeness. Humility, to Bernard, is not only "the virtue by which a man recognizes his own unworthiness because he really knows himself,"[262] but also that by which man also becomes an *imitatio christi.*[263] Bernard elaborates upon man's necessity of being humble by stating that Christ "offers himself as an example of humility, a model of gentleness" as Christ "'suffered for us, leaving [us] an example so that [we] might follow in his footsteps' (1 Peter 2:21), that is, so that we might imitate his obedience."[264] In other words, a humble man knows where he has fallen into sin (pride), recognizes it, corrects himself, and attempts to model his life by following Christ's example. In *On Humility and Pride*, Bernard clearly states twice that one's role model for being a humble man is Christ. Through his knights and the description of their adventures, Chrétien applies this concept of role models.

The last reason this treatise is important for my analysis of Chrétien is that one finds here a series of steps describing how to improve oneself. While *On Humility and Pride* does not address one's emotional or personal response to God, it does delineate the ways in which man has lost the likeness of God. Pride leads one away from God whereas humility restores one to God. These steps help man to recognize where he falls short of God's likeness and provides the appropriate counter to his failure.

---

[261] Bernard of Clairvaux, *Bernard of Clairvaux Selected Works* 122 - 123.
[262] Bernard of Clairvaux, *Bernard of Clairvaux Selected Works* 103.
[263] Imitation of Christ
[264] Bernard of Clairvaux, *Bernard of Clairvaux Selected Works* 107.

As I will explore in the next section, *On Loving God,* another treatise similar to *On Humility and Pride,* also contains a series of steps with the ultimate goal of drawing man into a closer and deeper relationship with God by becoming more humble and Christ-like. What is crucial to remember is that in both his *Sermons* and *On Humility and Pride*, Bernard explored conceptions of love, how to love, what keeps man from God, and how to model one's life so that one might draw closer to God.

Bernard's Four Degrees of Love and Man's Image and Likeness to God

Another small treatise written by Bernard called, *On Loving God* (*De Diligendo Deo*),[265] describes how and why God is to be loved by man. Like the *Song* and *On the Steps of Humility and Pride*, *On Loving God* was written with a larger audience in mind. Initially *On Loving God* was written in epistolary form in response to letters received from two different fellow ecclesiastics, eventually became "one of his most copied texts,"[266] although not one of his most cited or explored by students, scholars, or church ecclesiastics until the twentieth century. Further identifying Bernard's target audience, Steigman in his analytical commentary states that "[t]he Abbot (Bernard) is composing a document for a public outside the intimacy of his community"[267] and that "the four degrees describe the experience of someone of initial faith."[268] In other words this treatise is not primarily for someone who has been a Christian for some time, but is directed towards anyone who wishes to increase their faith or has just started their Christian spiritual journey. This is important as the structure of the treatise is a reworking of two

[265] *On Loving God* was written about 1124, ten years prior to his *Sermons.*
[266] Emero Stiegman, Afterward, *On Loving God*, by Bernard of Clairvaux (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, Inc., 1995) 49-50.
[267] Stiegman 123.
[268] Stiegman 109.

letters; one which Bernard wrote to the community of the Holy Brethren at Chartreuse and the other in response to Cardinal Haimeric (or Aimeric).[269] While the letters were addressed to a community of the faithful, the treatise itself was reworked for a much broader audience. In its treatise form, *On Loving God* is a manual providing a step by step progression explaining how to love God as well as how God loves us.

In *On Loving God* Bernard created "four degrees" or steps that man (or man's soul) must pass through in order to achieve union with God, which for Bernard is a Christian's ultimate goal. Bernard's four degrees of love are: "Man loves himself for his own sake, Man loves God for his own [man's] sake, Man loves God for God's sake, and lastly, Man loves himself for the sake of God.[270] The four degrees indicate how man moves from a self-centered love (the first degree) towards Bernard's concept of union with God (the fourth degree). For Tamburello, the third and fourth degrees are more significant than Bernard's first two, as it is here that "one begins to experience the kind of unity with God that is Bernard's goal."[271] However, I would argue that for Bernard all four degrees are equally important as each one builds upon the other. In order for man to reach the fourth degree, union with God, man must progress from one degree to the next, taking time and effort to achieve. In Bernard's view one could only achieve the fourth degree at the end of one's lifetime. Prior to exploring each degree individually, I wish to note that Bernard does not explain exactly how certain things come to pass; in these instances I believe Bernard is allowing for faith and the grace of God to be at work in them.

[269] Stiegman 49.
[270] Tamburello 66. In modern lexicon the four degrees of love are: "where people (1) love themselves for their own sake, (2) love God for their own sake, (3) love God for God's sake, and (4) love even themselves for God's sake."
[271] Tamburello 66.

Bernard's first degree of love begins as a narcissistic type of love. This is a prideful type of love, in which one is full of one's own self-importance and ego. There is no room at this stage in man's life to love anyone else other than himself. However, in order for man to reach the next degree and ultimately union with God, he must discover who he is and recognize the need for love and to love.

To Bernard, man is first a carnal being who then learns he is also a spiritual being. [272] According to Bernard, part of man's discovery of and understanding of his carnal and spiritual nature is tied to loving one's neighbor; the other part is linked to loving God. In order for man to attain the next degree, he must forego his egocentric love and realize that there are others around him who are deserving of his love and must care for these other beings. Bernard describes this as the "sobering of one's love" as the "carnal love becomes social when it is extended to others."[273] However, in order to love one's neighbor, "one must have regard to God." In other words, man cannot love his neighbor without first having loved God. Bernard writes: "it is impossible to love in God unless one loves God. It is necessary, therefore, to love God first; then one can love one's neighbor in God."[274] In loving God first, man learns that love is not egocentric but humble, selfless, and submissive. Man's love for God turns his love outwards away from the self and towards others, his neighbors or back towards God. By loving outside the self, man begins to see God in his fellow beings[275] ("love in God") and thus love them as God

[272] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God* 25. "St. Paul says: 'What was animal came first, then what was spiritual.'" *The Holy Bible: New International Version* I Corinthians 15:46. "The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual."
[273] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God* 26
[274] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God* 27.
[275] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God* 26-27. "[I]t is only right to share nature's gifts with him (i.e. one's neighbor) who shares that nature (i.e. carnal and spiritual) with you."

loves him. In the first degree of love, Bernard proclaims the Greatest Commandment[276] given by Christ, wherein man's love begins to move from the narcissistic to the altruistic.

By the end of the first degree, even though man understands that love is altruistic and has begun to love something other than himself and recognize love in others, his love is still self-interested. At this point that man has entered the second degree of love: "Man loves God, but for his own benefit."[277] In this degree man "realizes that he needs divine aid to escape"[278] sin and to move past his own selfish love of self.

> Man, therefore, loves God, but for his own advantage and not yet for God's sake. Nevertheless, it is a matter of prudence to know what you can do by yourself and what you can do with God's help to keep from offending Him who keeps you free from sin.[279]

Man loves God but only because God can do something for him. Only God can free him from sin and help him to be kept free from sin. As each of man's

> tribulations (sin or temptations),... grown in frequency and as a result he frequently turns to God and is frequently freed by God, must he not end,... by realizing that it is God's grace which frees him and come to love God not for his own advantage but for the sake of God.[280]

It is here that man begins to see himself as God sees him, as both a carnal (i.e. sinful and earthly) and a spiritual being. But because God is always willing to help man as he struggles with his carnal nature,[281] man begins to love God as God loves him, unconditionally.[282] Even though man sins or falls further down the steps of pride, God still loves him and is willing to free him

---

[276] *The Holy Bible: New International Version* Matthew 22:37-39. Christ says: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"
[277] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God* 27.
[278] Gilson 87.
[279] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God* 27-28.
[280] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God* 27-28.
[281] *The Holy Bible: New International Version* Hebrews 12:4 & 7. "In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood...Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father?" In God's discipline of man and the sacrifice of God's own son, Jesus, God demonstrates his love and his willingness to help man.
[282] *The Holy Bible: New International Version* I John 4:9-10. "This is how God showed his love among us: he sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins."

from sin. This is a key part of the second degree; man's discovery that even though he is carnal, he is still loved and because he is loved by God unconditionally, his love is no longer self-interested, but has become charitable.[283]

Furthering the discernment of man's nature as both a spiritual and carnal being, Bernard emphasizes the fact that man is made in both the *image* and *likeness* of God. Bernard addresses this concept of *likeness* in several of his writings, illustrating one of the relationships between man and God.

> To know ourselves is essentially, in his [Bernard's] view, to recognize that we are defaced images of God...Misery of man: to have lost the divine likeness; greatness of man: to have kept the divine image.[284]

Man, as the first chapter in the Book of Genesis states, was made in God's image.[285] Bernard makes a distinction between the image of God and the likeness of God. The image of God denotes an exteriority of being. It is based upon physical appearance.[286] Man is not God but is an image of Him, a mirrored reflection of God. Whereas the likeness of God connotes an interiority of being, where one's character, behavior, and personality are involved.[287] Bearing God's likeness means that man knows and understands the difference between Good and Evil. Knowing this difference forms part of man's struggle against sin. In order for man to maintain God's likeness, he must continuously and consistently choose to do what is good.[288]

---

[283] How this occurs is not explained by Bernard. This is an instance where faith and God's grace have intervened.
[284] Gilson 70-71.
[285] *The Holy Bible: King James Version* Genesis 1:26-27. "And God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: ...So God created man in his *own* image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them."
[286] *The Holy Bible: King James Version* Genesis 1:27.
[287] *The Holy Bible: New International Version* Genesis 3:7a & 3:22a. "Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked;....And the Lord God said: "The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil." When the eyes of Adam and Eve were opened they lost their likeness to God. They lost their innocence when they understood the difference between good and evil. However, neither lost their image of God, in whom they were created.
[288] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God* 24. "Bless the Lord, my soul, he satisfies your desires with good things. [clearly a reference to man's time in the Garden of Eden before the fall & Psalm 103:1 -5 ("He satisfies with good

Because man was made in God's image, God loves him.[289] However, because man is not divine, he sins and through sin man loses his likeness to God.[290] Gilson points out that the:

> central point in St. Bernard's doctrine is that the Image of God in us can never be lost, and that is why man remains man, after transgression as before,... but the Likeness to God in us can be lost, and that is why, when he (man) lost the virtues bestowed on him by God... man lost also his Divine likeness.[291]

The loss of the "Divine likeness" is perhaps why the first and second degrees of love are so important to Bernard. It is here that man recognizes who he is; a selfish and self-absorbed sinner who distorts his likeness to God through his pride. Bernard states that: "[i]t is pride, the greatest of sins, to use gifts as if they were one's by natural right and while receiving benefits to usurp the benefactor's glory."[292] Using God's gifts in us as if we were the ones who created them is prideful and that is what destroys our likeness to Him. We forget to give God the glory and praise that is His due for creating us in His image.[293] Once man realizes that he has tried to "usurp the benefactor's glory," i.e. recognized his pride, and realized that God does have a role or place in his life then he can begin the process of letting go of his pride.[294] It is in these first and second degrees that man realizes his need for God's love and grace to restore him to His likeness.

Man's realization of his inherent relationship to God and the recognition[295] of his need for God's love moves man into Bernard's third degree of love in which, "Man loves God for God's

---

things, he incites to good, maintains in goodness, anticipates, sustains, fulfills.")] Bernard is advocating the goodness of God and the good things God has done for man.

[289] *The Holy Bible: King James Version* John 3: 16.

[290] Stiegman 61. Steigman states that we are made in God's image "but have lost our likeness to God in sin, and that through the conformity of our will to God's will, the likeness will be restored." The taking of the apple is a sin of pride - wanting to be like God, or as Bernard puts it in the first step of pride: "Curiosity about what is not one's proper concern."

[291] Gilson 51.

[292] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God* 7.

[293] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God* 7-8.

[294] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God* 8-9.

[295] Again Bernard does not explain how this occurs so faith and God's grace must come into play.

sake."[296] In contrast to the first and second degrees, where man is still tainted by a selfish love (i.e., man is loving because there is an advantage for him), here God is loved simply because God is God.[297] There is no human selfishness in this degree to loving God. Man loves God without looking for it to be an advantage or benefit to him.

Moreover, not only is man doing the loving, God is as well. The love expressed in the third degree is the *agape* love.[298] One simply loves God and is loved in return. Bernard expresses man's love for God in this stage as "[t]asting God's sweetness [which] entices us more to pure love than does the urgency of our own needs...He (man) loves God truthfully and so loves what is God's."[299] Man's own needs are no longer of primary concern to him. It is God's will which is paramount to man in this degree. Bernard writes:

> He loves God truthfully and so loves what is God's. He loves purely and he does not find it hard to obey a pure commandment, purifying his heart,... in the obedience of love. He loves with justice and freely embraces the just commandment. [300]

Here in the third degree of love man "begins to experience the kind of unity with God that is Bernard's goal."[301] Man is no longer seeking things that are of benefit to him but instead seeks what God desires him to do. Bernard wrote that the "satisfaction of our wants, chance happiness,

---

[296] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God* 28.
[297] Gilson 144. Gilson summarizes the third degree as "the soul that rejoices in God no longer thinks of Him as of a recompense" clearly indicating that in the first and second degrees man is still looking for some sort of "recompense" or benefit to his loving God.
[298] *Agape* love is the unconditional love God or Christ has for mankind and is reciprocal in nature. *The Holy Bible: King James Version* Matthew 22:36-38. Jesus is asked what is the great commandment and He answers "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment." So love as Christ states, is directed from man to God. In contrast in 1 John 4:7-16, God's love is directed towards man: "Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and everyone that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. *Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us* (italics mine), and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins."
[299] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God* 28.
[300] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God* 28.
[301] Tamburello 66.

delights us less than to see [H]is will done in us and for us."[302] Man is no longer seeking to do his own will but instead seeks to do God's will. Man is submitting to God's will. The man who follows God's will and not his own has reached the ultimate state of humility. He is practicing *imitatio Christi*. He is following Christ's example of humility and obedience.[303]

As the third degree draws man closer to God through obedience, a deeper more profound love for God is discovered. According to Bernard this deeper more profound love is the highest that man can obtain in this lifetime (i.e., within his physical body).[304] Bernard's fourth degree in which "Man loves himself for the sake of God" delineates his concept of union and explains why his third degree is the most man can hope to obtain in his lifetime. For Bernard, the fourth degree of love can only take place once man leaves this world.

> When will this sort of affection be felt that, inebriated with divine love, the mind may forget itself and become in its own eyes like a broken dish, hastening towards God and clinging to him, becoming one with him in spirit... To lose yourself, as if you no longer existed, to cease completely to experience yourself, to reduce yourself to nothing is not a human sentiment but a divine experience... he will easily reach the highest degree of love when he will no longer be held back by any desire of the flesh or upset by troubles as he hastens with the greatest speed and desire toward the joy of the Lord.[305]

Union with God, for Bernard, requires man to "pass altogether beyond this mixture of cupidity and disinterested love and to rise to pure love of God," which would require man to "pass out of this life and to live...the life of the blessed in heaven."[306] In other words, to achieve union man must shed his physical being. Bernard's union cannot be obtained whilst man still inhabits his physical body. However, Bernard does note there are times when someone is so deep in prayer

---

[302] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God* 30.
[303] Bernard of Clairvaux, *Bernard of Clairvaux Selected Works* 107. "We have an example in our Savior. He wanted to suffer so that he should know how to suffer with us... He learned obedience from the things he suffered... Christ was made obedient to the Father unto death."
[304] Tamburello 67. Tamburello states that "Bernard is convinced that the third degree of love is the highest that one can attain in this life."
[305] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God* 29-31.
[306] Gilson 88.

or contemplation that spiritual union does occur briefly,[307] but for true union to happen man must shed his mortal coil.

Bernard's concept of union is not the end of man because "the soul does not become the substance of God, neither does it lose its own being in ecstasy."[308] Man's spiritual being is not being annihilated. Instead, Bernard's union respects both spirits. Gilson describes this as:

> integrally respect[ing the] real distinction between the Divine substance and the human substance, between the will of God and the will of man; it is neither a confusion of the two substances in general, nor a confusion of the substances of the two wills in particular; but it is their perfect accord, the coincidence of two willings... the one is a perfect image of the other.[309]

According to Gilson, Bernard sees both man and God retaining their own elements (personality, will, reason). That which makes them each unique is kept intact. Neither one is being destroyed or absorbed by the other but instead both are resting in the other's presence.[310] They are enjoying the other's company in the most intimate way. Not only is this Bernard's ideal and ultimate goal, it is also what Christian marriage is supposed to resemble: two becoming one yet remaining distinct individuals.[311] Due to Bernard's degrees of love and especially his conception of union, it is easier to understand why the topos of marriage plays such a significant role in Chrétien's adventure-romances; both authors encourage love and loving relationships. In succeeding

---

[307] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God* 29-30. "If any mortal, suddenly rapt,... for a moment is admitted to this (spiritual union)...Alas, he has to come back to himself, to descend again into his being..."
[308] Gilson 123.
[309] Gilson 123.
[310] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God* 30-31. "As a drop of water seems to disappear completely in a big quantity of wine, even assuming the wine's taste and color...so it is necessary... that all human feelings melt in a mysterious way and flow into the will of God." Bernard is describing union. Man is the water who melts into and disappears into the wine, yet he is still a drop of water.
[311] *The Holy Bible: New International Version* Genesis 2:24, Matthew 19:4-6, I Corinthians 7:4, & Ephesians 5:28-32. Genesis 2:24 states: "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh." The three other biblical references refer back in some way to Genesis. In all of them there is an insistence on two individuals becoming one in body, but there is the idea that the husband's body and care belongs to the wife and vice versa. So even if they are "one flesh" each retains their own proper individuality as each cares for the other.

chapters, I will argue that love, marriage, and union, as Bernard's conceives of it, are embraced in Chrétien's texts as worthy goals to be sought.

In his analysis of Bernard's mystical theology, Gilson makes two other important points regarding Bernard's conception of union. Gilson points out that it is vital that readers understand that Bernard's union is one that "can be effected in no other way than by and through love."[312] This is critical because union cannot occur unless the love is reciprocal and unselfish. Man cannot reach this type of union if his is still interested in loving God for his own benefit.[313] The love experienced in the union is the ultimate love, the one expressed by Christ as he died on the cross. It is the absolute willingness to place oneself into the hands of God, to obey him even unto death, and to enjoy the reward of being allowed to dwell with God.

Gilson's second point is that union restores man to his divine image.

> …St. Bernard would say that the soul empties itself of this false ego, this illusory personality of self-will, brought into it by sin. In so doing, far from annihilating itself, it restores itself to its own nature. A disfiguring mask falls away, revealing the true countenance of a soul whose nature it is to have been made to the image of God.[314]

Bernard's concept of union restores man to God because man's likeness has been restored: no longer is man disfigured by sin or pride but instead man has found his true being through obedience and humility. The more man rejects sin and obeys God's will through love, the closer man is drawn to God and the more man restores his "likeness" to God.

The restoration of man's likeness to God makes it sound like man and God are equals. However, Tamburello argues that Bernard's union was "not a union of equals… [even when]

---

[312] Gilson 126.
[313] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God* 35. "here is that sober intoxication of truth, not from overdrinking, not reeking with wine, but burning for God... when God alone is loved in the highest way, for now we do not love ourselves except for his sake, that he may be the reward of those who love him, the eternal recompense of those who love him forever."
[314] Gilson 128.

there are times when he uses language that is suggestive of a relationship of equals."[315] Tamburello notes that "God, whose majesty is absolute, condescends in an act of great humility… to share an experience of his love."[316] This distinction is important. No matter how reciprocal the relationship, God is still God, the divine creator, while man is still man, the created and after the fall a defaced image of God who must continuously seek to restore his likeness. It is important to note that even though Bernard's union is not a union of equals, it is a union of mutual love and affection.[317] This union is not destructive or harmful, because the love is reciprocal. Both parties enter into union full of joy at the prospect of being in the other's presence and joyously loving each other.

Bernard's four degrees assist man in drawing closer to God. Simply stated, this is what Bernard sees as being the fulfillment of man's life; through love, man rejects his own selfish interests, obeys God's will and in so doing comes to love both God and himself and ultimately is united with God.[318] Bernard's fourth degree of love reveals that man has reached his highest level of being. Once union has occurred, man returns to the likeness of God. Man has become the "perfect image of the other (God)"[319] and exists in a perfected state.[320]

---

[315] Tamburello 69.

[316] Tamburello 70.

[317] Tamburello 70. Tamburello's discussion of how union does not necessarily mean a union of equals is useful for comprehending the disproportionate balance of power in courtly love. Like God, the lady holds sway over her courtly lover, but not in a way that is harmful or destructive to either of them. In *Erec,* the relationship of the courtly couple during the episode of the *Joie de la cour*, is provided as an example of a courtly relationship that is destructive to both parties and is placed in contrast to the now loving relationship of Erec and Enide. The couple of the *joie* is provided as the model not to follow.

[318] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God* 29-31. "To lose yourself, as if you no longer existed, to cease completely to experience yourself, to reduce yourself to nothing is not a human sentiment but a divine experience" (29). "[H]e will easily reach the highest degree of love when he will no longer be held back by any desire of the flesh or upset by troubles as he hastens with the greatest speed and desire toward the joy of the Lord" (31).

[319] Gilson 123. Gilson further explains that "the mystical union integrally respects the real distinction between the Divine substance (God) and the human substance (Man)... it is neither a confusion of the two substances in general... it is their perfect accord." In other words Man does not loose himself or find himself subsumed by God but Man retains his own substance and will but comes to rest, live within God.

[320] Casey 165. "Bernard's prime anthropological tenet is that the human being was created for no other purpose than that of spiritual union with the Word (God/ Christ). It is only to the extent that the human being becomes one

> In Bernard's view, the basis of the human being's yearning for the Absolute is the nature with which the Creator has endowed him. It is because he has been made to God's image - with a natural affinity with his Maker - that the human being cannot be wholly engaged or satisfied by realities in his own order of existence. Thus he is driven by a natural tendency to transcend his own order and to seek the divine...For Bernard it was impossible to conceive that what was created by God could, in any way, be opposed to redemption and final glorification.[321]

Man's whole purpose then in life is to seek God, to restore himself to God's likeness and to return to a perfected or "glorified" state. In other words, man can see God within himself and love both God and himself. Bernard truly believed that man could achieve spiritual union with God because man was God's creation and within man God planted the desire to "seek the divine." In seeking God, man redeems himself, turns away from sin, and moves toward perfection.

Bernardian Courtly Love

It is here, when man fully gives himself over to obeying God's will that, Bernard's four degrees of love call to mind one of the principles of courtly love. A true courtly lover is not interested in the personal gain that loving a particular lady can bring,[322] but is rather truly interested in obeying her will. Courtly love typically places the lady in the position of power. It is she who dictates her will to her courtly lover. It is his duty to obey her. But like Bernard's conception of love, the more the courtly lover obeys his lady's wishes the more closely bound together in love they become; until the day or time in which she grants him access to her presence and they both can enjoy each other's company.

---

with God's Word that the potentiality inherent in his being created *ad imaginem* is fully realised and he becomes fully alive."

[321] Casey 131-33.

[322] In Capellanus' text love is for personal gain.

By obeying the dictates of the Beloved, as any good courtly lover would, the Bernardian courtly lover finds his own pleasure in the pleasing of another.[323] This is not a form of love for personal gain because what is at stake here is obedience to the Beloved's desires. Unlike Capellanus' principles of courtly love where obedience to the Beloved is for personal gain, the Bernardian lover who seeks union, acts altruistically. As the lover finds pleasure in doing the Beloved's will, the love between them deepens because the lover has demonstrated his or her love through his or her obedience, humility, and faithfulness.[324] The more the lover humbly submits to the Beloved's will the closer he is drawn to her or God. This is why Tamburello sees the third degree of love as being the beginning of Bernard's goal of union, whereas I perceive it, as did Bernard, with beginning in the first degree. In order to obey completely the will of the Beloved, one's love of self must first be negated. For Chrétien's knights this is a struggle which each is able to overcome, as further chapters will reveal.

As Chrétien's knights progress through a series of adventures the similarities of self-improvement between their quests and Bernard's four degrees of love with its goal of union are illuminated. Each romance explores one or several degrees of Bernard's theology of love, with *Perceval* being the culmination of Chrétien's exploration. Union in Chrétien's texts represents the courtly knight's final and ultimate reward with his lady. This union could be physical or spiritual.[325] In each case the knight once he has proven his worth,[326] he rests or stays in the

[323] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God* 28. "He loves God truthfully and so loves what is God's. He loves purely and he does not find it hard to obey a pure commandment, purifying his heart, as it is written, in the obedience of love...Whoever loves this way, loves the way he is loved, seeking in turn not what is his but what belongs to Christ."
[324] Tamburello 65. Tamburello writes "For Bernard, divine love triggers a process that makes its recipient want to love God as much as possible in return." While it is true that divine love is unconditional, Bernard's conception of man's relationship with God, requires action on man's part (see steps of humility and pride) as well as human terms and expressions to express it. It is this action (i.e. performative) and mode of expression that is present in Chrétien's romances and the knights' relationships.
[325] For Yvain and Lancelot, I will argue that union is both physical and spiritual. For Perceval I will argue that it is predominantly spiritual.

presence of his lady. The two are united physically, emotionally, or spiritually, yet both retain their own individualities,[327] thus paralleling Bernard's conception of union.

Bernardian Elements in Chrétien's Texts

As one reads Chrétien's romances, Bernard's views regarding man's relationship to God as well as Bernard's own theology regarding spiritual union with God become an important tool with which to examine the Christian themes present in Chrétien's work. The unique way in which Chrétien's adventure-romances present Bernard's concepts of pride, humility, union, love and desire, all are found there. What is unique is that both of them utilize the principles of courtly love to provide a framework with which to construct a guide for the correct way of loving spiritually. By utilizing the contrivances and structures of courtly love in each romance, Chrétien provides the space with which to illustrate and illuminate what should be man's ultimate goal, union with God and the restoration of his divine likeness.

In *A Question of Time: Romance and History,* Richard Trachsler states that Chrétien:

> does not have to deal with what went before and what comes after, with the origin and the end of chivalry...But things change as soon as Chrétien alludes to the Holy Grail. ... it necessarily suggested that the ultimate goal of chivalry might be *celestiel* and not *terrien*,

[326] For Yvain this is once he has reconciled with his lady. For Lancelot it is being physically present in the Queen's bed chamber. For Perceval it is after he has liberated his lady's castle and also during the time he falls into a trance at seeing the drops of blood on the snow.

[327] In *Lancelot*, Chrétien's writes: "Le cors s'an vet, li cuers sejorne. // The body can leave, the heart stays" (634 verse 4697). This is an apt description of Lancelot's feelings, physically he is able to leave but emotionally and spiritually his heart stays with the Queen. In *Yvain*, Yvain and his wife are united physically through marriage ("En sa fame, et ensamble gisent. // They share the same bed" verse 2169), but it is not until the very end of the romance once both have reconciled that they are aligned emotionally and spiritually ("Qu'il est amés et chiers tenus / De sa dame et ele de luy.// 'cause he is loved and cherished by his lady, and she by him" verses 6794-6795). In *Perceval*, the very last time Perceval is in the romance, Chrétien writes: "A la Pasque comenïez / Fu Percevaus molt dignement. // The day of Easter, Perceval took communion with dignity" (verses 6432-6433). The word *communia* can mean either to take communion or to be united. In the Catholic Church when taking communion one is truly eating of Christ's flesh and drinking his blood. Thus one is both spiritually and physically united with Christ during those moments of consummation. *The Holy Bible: King James Version* John 6:53-59, especially verse 56: "He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him."

> and that Arthur's court and its values are nothing more than the universe the young knight must surpass after he has entered it and conformed to its ideals.[328]

Trachsler is correct in that Chrétien's works do not deal with the beginning or ending of chivalry. His knights simply conform to the principles of courtly love in practice at the time of his writing. What is key is the fact that Trachsler only sees Perceval, as being Chrétien's only knight, to direct the reader to view the knight's journey as having a heavenly goal rather than an earthly one. What Trachsler fails to see is that these elements, *celestiel* and *terrien*, are present in all of Chrétien's romances, not just *Perceval*. Each one of Chrétien's knights demonstrate a celestial goal through their journeys of self-discovery, reconciliation, and humility.

Unlike Chrétien's adventure-romances which present the guidelines on drawing closer to God through their parable like narratives, Bernard is distinctly direct. In Bernard's *Sermons, On Humility and Pride,* and *On Loving God,* Bernard provides instructions on both the ways in which man falls away from God and the ways in which he can return to God. In *On Humility and Pride*, Bernard discusses the ways in which man through the sin of pride distances himself from God and destroys his likeness to God. However, in *On Loving God,* Bernard gives instructions on how and why God is to be loved and provides the step-by-step instructions on how through love man's likeness to God can be restored. Like Chrétien's knights who must reconcile with their ladies or correct a sin through a series of adventures, Bernard's works focus on man's self-improvement, his progression towards God, and ultimately his union with the divine. By providing a practical guide for his audience, Bernard established the quest for the divine as a worthy undertaking that could be achieved.

Besides providing a practical guide for his audience, Bernard utilized the values and attitudes which expressed or paralleled those of courtly love: devotion, humility, desire, and

[328] Richard Trachsler, "A Question of Time: Romance and History," in *A Companion to the Lancelot-Grail Cycle,* ed. Carol Dover (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2003) 27.

compunction.[329] In the next chapter, I shall explicate how Yvain illustrates a progression through Bernard's first and second degrees of love by confronting his pride, his primary problem, which distances him physically and emotionally from his wife. The rest of the narrative then becomes a quest of reconciliation and restoration. The series of quests with his lion allows Yvain to draw closer step-by-step both emotionally and spiritually to his lady. Upon the completion of each quest Yvain re-evaluates his own self-worth and discovers its relation to his relationship with his wife.

[329] Casey 120. "Compunction not only in the sense of grief for personal transgressions (Yvain's madness), but also in the sense of the pain and suffering occasioned by being separated from the object of one's love and desire" (Yvain, Lancelot, Perceval or any courtly lover).

Chapter Three: Pride and Reconciliation in *Yvain*

In my previous chapter, I examined Bernard of Clairvaux's four degrees of love, as well as two of his other works: parts of his *Sermons* and the treatise *On the Steps of Humility and Pride*. In this chapter, I will explore the theme of sin and reconciliation and the theme of death and rebirth in Chrétien's *Yvain*. I argue that pride is the root of all Yvain's troubles, for it leads him to seek personal glory to the exclusion of all else and to forget his promise to return to his wife, Laudine, within a year. In order to redeem himself and reconcile with Laudine, he engages in a series of quests to rectify his reputation as both a courtly knight and a lover. Yvain's sin of pride exemplifies how sin tarnishes man's likeness to God[330] and causes man to become distanced from God.[331] His besmirched reputation and self-image as well as the distance both emotionally and physically between him and his lady illustrates how Yvain becomes the proud sinful man described in Bernard's first degree of love.

Bernard's first degree of love provides the solution to sin and how to restore one's likeness to God; one must: "love God first, then one can love one's neighbor in God."[332] In other words, love is directed away from the self, for the love of self is the result of pride and pride is the root of sin. For Yvain this means that he must learn to love and care for another more than himself. His relationship with the highly symbolic, eponymous lion assists him in doing so. [333] Guided by Bernard's concept of love, Chrétien creates a progression from the first degree of love, one which is self-centered and self-interested, to the second degree of love, one in which the love of another takes precedence over the love of self. *Yvain* is ultimately a parable that explores how

[330] *The Holy Bible: King James Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000) Genesis 1:26-27. "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness… So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him."
[331] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, Inc., 1995) 6-7.
[332] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God* 27.
[333] Yvain's bond with his lion teaches him to care for another and put another's needs before his own.

pride distorts man's likeness to and his relationship with God but also illustrates how man can restore or reconcile his relationship with God and be deserving of His love.

One of the most interesting features of *Yvain* is that the male protagonist is married. This is significant for two reasons. On a secular level, Yvain provides a didactic example of a courtly lover, allowing for an exploration of some principles of courtly love that were in vogue during the twelfth century. While he adheres to certain general tenets of courtly love such as youthfulness, generosity, and skill-at-arms, as a married courtly lover he has the added challenge of proving that he has not lost his military prowess by his marriage. Additionally, the intimate relations in this adventure-romance explore the concept of how a wife's love can be a significant motivator for the married, courtly lover-knight.

On a spiritual level these intimate relationships accede to an exploration of Bernard's teachings, especially how one learns to love and be loved. As a symbol for God or the Divine,[334] Laudine provides the first glimpse of this representation as she embodies both a secular and a spiritual role. She enables Yvain to recognize his faults, both courtly and spiritual, and the need for love, both secular and divine, in his life. Laudine provides both physical and emotional support – physical, in the sense that she confers courtly social standing but also in the sense that she acts as a mirror[335] for Yvain. Her presence enables Yvain to examine his own personal psychological and emotional shortcomings as well as providing the locus for which he can display his emotions. It is her love Yvain seeks to return to and re-establish, just as Bernard's man seeks to return to and re-establish his relationship with God. Without her, Yvain would be

[334] Ruth Mazo Karras, *From Boys to Men: Formations of Masculinity in Late Medieval Europe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003) 42. Joan M. Ferrante, *Woman as Image in Medieval Literature* (Durham: The Labyrinth Press, 1985) 2-3.

[335] *Erec et Enide* 58 verses 438-441. "Ce fu cele por verité / Qui fu faite por esgarder, / Qu'en li se peüst on mirer / Ausi con en un mireour // She had surely been created to be contemplated, of such a sort that one could see oneself in her, as if in a mirror." Laudine as mirror will be explored later in this chapter.

as stunted as Gauvain, perfect in courtly manners and expectations, but without the deep and enriching relationship that causes psychological, spiritual, and emotional growth. Thus I will argue that Yvain's relationship with Laudine explores a prideful (i.e. sinful) man's relationship with the divine.

Both the secular and the spiritual registers presented in *Yvain* illustrate how man's love of self, caused by pride, distorts his relationship with his lady or God. These two registers meet at a critical juncture in the narrative when Yvain realizes his sin and loses his mind. In other words, he suffers a death and a rebirth; a death to his old self and a rebirth in which he demonstrates an improved self. This death and rebirth is crucial for Yvain's redemption and reconciliation with Laudine. The removal of Yvain from courtly society provides the space and time he needs to forge a new rapport with his lion and prove his worthiness to Laudine. As a result, Yvain learns to care for his lion and put the happiness of another before his own, which eventually enables him to reconstruct his love relationship. Yvain's new found ability to care for another redeems him and allows the rest of the narrative to unfold as a journey towards the restoration of his courtly relationship with his wife (on a secular level) and his likeness to God (on a spiritual level).

The challenges Yvain encounters and eventually overcomes in his relationship with Laudine depict the struggles man has with his relationship to God. Once man is aware of his sin he repents and, usually, conscientiously changes his actions by turning towards God.[336] This

[336] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God* 27-28. "and as a result he [man] frequently turns to God and is frequently freed by God, must he not end... by realizing that it is God's grace which frees him" Michael Casey, *A Thirst for God: Spiritual Desire in Bernard of Clairvaux's Sermons on the Song of Songs* (Kalamazaoo: Cistercian Publications, Inc.) 101. Casey sums up a section of Bernard's sermon on the *Song* discussing how sin holds man back. "Because of primal sinfulness, both reason and will are impaired. In the process of restoration, accordingly, it is to be expected that both cognitive and affective faculties will be subjected to progressive purification." In other words both one's emotional and logical faculties will undergo changes.

restores his divine likeness, because he has chosen in a godly way Good over Evil.[337] In recognizing his faults and realizing that his love for Laudine is more important than his own self-interested goals, Yvain demonstrates how a courtly lover-knight returns to a right relationship with his beloved or God. In addition he is more balanced, able to juggle his masculine duties with his emotional and spiritual fidelities. Yvain's rejection of sin and comprehension of the reciprocal nature of love illustrate his progression from Bernard's first degree of love into the second degree of love. Thus the parable of *Yvain* illustrates the initial steps man must make to (re)establish his relationship with God, preparing the reader for the additional instructive steps in Chrétien's last two works.

Pride in Yvain: Stuck in the First Degree...Of Love

I Think Only of Myself

Upon first encountering Chrétien's protagonist, Yvain, the reader or audience member is struck by his interest in rectifying a wrong. His initial adventures seem to be undertaken out of courtliness, i.e. the goodness of his heart, or as the fulfillment of a duty towards someone; but upon closer examination he can be seen to be actually acting on behalf of his own selfish interests. Steps five, six, and eight[338] of Bernard of Clairvaux's *On the Steps of Humility and Pride*, are demonstrated by Yvain in the course of his initial adventures until he experiences an incident which causes him to flee society.

[337] *The Holy Bible: King James Version* Genesis 3:22. "And the Lord God said, 'Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil'"

[338] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God* 100. Step 5: Trying to be different: claiming special rights. Step 6: Thinking oneself holier than others. Step 8:Self-Justification. Defending one's sinful actions.

Many scholars, such as Z. P. Zaddy, Julian Harris, and even John Bednar, who write about spiritual symbolism and meaning in Chrétien's romances[339] have focused on Yvain's initial reason for leaving the court, relegating his leave taking to secular motives rather than spiritual ones. However, none of the above scholars has examined the role of pride, or the desire for personal glory, as a primary motivator for Yvain's desertion of Arthur's court,[340] so that he can test his skill-at-arms against an unknown knight at a magic fountain.

In this section I will examine the role of Yvain's pride as it leads directly to the breaking of his relationship with Laudine. I establish Yvain as a prideful man by displaying his narcissistic and self-centered actions. Because of his pride and love of self, Yvain places himself fully in the self-interested type of love described by Bernard in his first degree of love, in which "[m]an loves himself for his own sake."[341] Additionally I shall explore how pride tarnishes Bernard's concept of man's likeness to God.

The Sin of Vainglorious Pride

When Yvain first appears in the narrative, he is at Arthur's court listening as his cousin, Calegronant, recounts his tale of adventure or misadventure. It is a humiliating story for Calegronant, as it discloses how he has failed as a knight. Yvain's response to his cousin's dishonor is vengeance. Yvain tells him, "[c]ar se je puis, et il me loist, / G'irai vostre honte

[339]Z. P. Zaddy, "The Structure of Chrétien's *Yvain*" in *The Modern Language Review* 65.3 (1970) 523-540. Julian Harris, "The Role of the Lion in Chrétien de Troyes' *Yvain*" in *PMLA* 64.5 (1949) 1143-1163. John Bednar, *La Spiritualité et le symbolisme dans les œuvres de Chrétien de Troyes* (Paris: Librairie A.-G. Nizet, 1974). Bednar mentions or hints at Christian themes although his work points out how each work is saturated with Christian theology, he fails to note the theme of pride even though he distinctly mentions the connection between Chrétien and Bernard's former secretary, as being one of the reasons for Chrétien's works to contain so many Christian themes.
[340] In his article Harris does mention pride as a reason for Yvain's acceptance of accompanying Gauvain to the tournaments but he does not establish Yvain as a proud man until after his marriage.
[341] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God* 25.

vengier."[342] Yvain seeks revenge against Esclados, the Knight of the Fountain, for bringing shame and dishonor to his (Yvain's) family.[343] However Yvain's true motivation is revealed shortly thereafter, when he decides that "[a]ins s'en yra tous seus, son veul."[344] Yvain realizes that Arthur's insistence on seeing the miraculous and marvelous fountain and its fierce defender will result in Sir Keu or Sir Gauvain being allowed to fight with Esclados, "[q]u'il savoit bien que la bataille / Aroit mesire Keus sans faille, / Ains quë il, s'i le requeroit… / Ou mesire Gavains meïsmes… / Se nus de ches .ii. la requiert."[345] If either Keu or Gauvain were to ask to fight Esclados, Arthur would allow them to do so and Yvain's request to fight Esclados would be denied. Yvain, then, would not be the recipient of glory or honor, nor would he be able to avenge his cousin. Yvain's desire for familial vengeance is sidelined when he realizes that Keu or Gauvain could claim all the honors. It appears that Yvain's subsequent actions are entirely honorable; yet a few lines later, Yvain clearly displays his deceit and cunning:

> Mais il ne s'en quiert ja vanter, / Ne ja, son veul, nus nel savra, / Juques tant quë il y ara / Grant honte ou grand honeur eüe… / Mesire Yvains de la court s'emble, / Si que nul homme n'i asamble… / [i]l vengera, s'il puet, la honte / Son cousin ains quë il retourt
>
> Not only, he does not look to boast about it but never shall anyone know of it (that is his desire) before the moment when he will have wiped the great shame or obtained a great honor... My Lord Yvain flees the court furtively, without looking for a companion.... he will avenge, if he can, the shame of his cousin before returning to the court.[346]

In the above citation, Yvain makes his intent known. He will avenge his family's shame but he is sneaking away in order to do so. He even tells one of his servants not to mentions that

[342] *Yvain* 86 verses 586-587. "If I have the opportunity, I will avenge your shame."
[343] *Yvain* 94-96 verses 746-747.
[344] *Yvain* 92 verses 690-691. " Mais il ne les attendra mie, / Qu'il soigne de lor compagnie, / Ains s'en yra tous seus, son veul, // But he will not wait for them (Keu or Gauvin), because their presence worries him (Yvain), on the contrary, he will go all alone, according to his desire."
[345] *Yvain* 92 verses 681-689. "because he well knew that the combat would be given to M. Keu rather than him… or even M. Gauvain… if one of them asked for it, they will not be refused"
[346] *Yvain* 94-96 verses 716-722 &746-747.

he is leaving.[347] Yvain's departure is not honest. Yvain has not asked leave from his liege-lord, Arthur,[348] to go and remove the taint from his family's honor. He is leaving secretly because he fears that he will not be selected as the knight to engage in combat with Esclados.

While it might seem that Yvain's intentions are honorable, i.e. the restoration of the family's honor, the above citation illustrates that they are not. This furtive, hasty, and covert departure demonstrates Yvain's preoccupation and obsession with his own glory.[349] His single-minded desire to thwart Keu, even to the extent of undermining King Arthur's own authority, does not cause Yvain to think twice about the nature of his departure. Yvain's actions demonstrate his own self-centeredness. Yvain's pride leads him to justify his actions. The feint of restoring the family honor covers his true motivation, the desire for personal glory, which includes the besting of Sir Keu and possibly all the other knights at Arthur's court.

In *On the Steps of Humility and Pride*, Bernard provides a series of steps for pride, each of which sinks one further into sin. The further one moves down the steps of pride the more one distances oneself from God.[350] He states that the eighth step of pride is: "Self-justification. Defending one's sinful actions."[351] Yvain's reasoning of "I did it to restore the family honor" demonstrates this idea of self-justification. 'It was wrong but I meant well'[352] is the key phrase for this episode in which Yvain conceals his own true reasons for leaving and attempting to defeat Esclados. If Yvain were to have acted honorably he would have asked Arthur for the

---

[347] *Yvain* 94-96 verses 737-739. "Mais garde bien, je te commant, / Que nul qui de moi te demant, / Que la nouvele ne l'en dies. // But watch yourself, I command you, from speaking about my affair from whomever asks you about what I'm doing."

[348] Tony Hunt, "Le Chevalier au Lion: Yvain Lionheart" *A Companion to Chrétien de Troyes*, eds. Norris J. Lacey and Joan Tasker Grimbert (Cambridge: D.S.Brewer, 2005) 162.

[349] A. H. Diverres, "Chivalry and *fin'amor* in *Le Chevalier au Lion*." *Studies in Medieval Literature and Languages*, eds. William Rothwell, W.R.J. Barron, David Blamires, and Lewis Thorpe (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1973) 94.

[350] Bernard also provides the counter steps of humility which lead man back (up) to God and at the same time restore man's likeness to God.

[351] Bernard of Clairvaux, *Bernard of Clairvaux Selected Works*, trans. G.R. Evans (New York: Paulist Press, 1987) 100.

[352] Bernard of Clairvaux, *Bernard of Clairvaux Selected Works* 135.

chance to fight Esclados, informing his King that his family's honor was at stake. Yvain however, chose not to do this, because all his attention was focused on claiming the glory for himself. Yvain's hidden motivation causes him to justify his actions and in so doing he demonstrates his selfishness, his own thirst for glory, and thus his pride. In short, Yvain's need for glory allows him to justify his actions and causes the sin.

Using an honorable motivation to justify one's own private desires is an illustration, for Bernard, of one's pride. Yvain's pride has led him to deceive not just the court, but also himself. His true intentions are revealed to the reader but the elucidation of Yvain's pride also shows a degree of nefariousness that blemishes his own soul. This is the first time in Yvain's narrative that we, as readers, see a darkness in man's heart borne out by Yvain's idea of concealment. This darkness in the heart or of the soul, or, in other words sin, is how man distorts his divine likeness.

In II Corinthians 3:18 St. Paul writes "[a]nd we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord." St. Paul's concept of veiled faces is in reference to sin. Sin causes a barrier, a veil, between God and ourselves. Bernard, agreeing with St. Paul, notes that if one would remove the veil or 'unveil' oneself then one is in the process of being transformed and returned to God's likeness.

> Pride in the mind is a great beam which is bloated rather than heavy, swollen rather than solid, and it blocks the mind's eye and blots out the light of truth, so that if your mind is full of it you cannot see yourself as you really are. Nor can you see what you might be. You see what you would like to be and think yourself to be, or hope that you will be. For what else is pride but, as one of the saints defines it, love of one's own excellence?[353]

[353]Bernard of Clairvaux, *Bernard of Clairvaux Selected Works* 113. The "light of truth" is God or Christ. Bernard continues with "He who wants to know the whole truth about himself must, when he has removed the beam of pride (Matt 7:5) which is cutting off his eyes from the light, cut steps in his heart (Ps 83:6) by which he can find himself in himself."

For Bernard, pride is the root cause of the veil upon man's soul, and the more man strengthens his veil, or loves his own achievement, the more he is distancing himself from God and destroying the image and likeness in which he was created. Hence Bernard's emphasis on his steps of humility as being a way of 'unveiling' and restoring man's relationship to God and thus his likeness. Each time, however, Yvain, like man, seeks to justify his actions or prove his own excellence, he veils himself and distances himself from God's likeness.

As both God and Christ are infallible, then pre-lapsarian man who is created in God's image and who began life in the Garden of Eden and lived there until the fall, is also infallible.[354] It is only after the fall that distance is placed between man and God, because man had now become fallible.[355] Sin creates a rift between man and the divine. Bernard would see this rift eliminated so that man can reclaim his divine likeness. Bernard's theology, throughout his works, is consumed with ways in which man can attempt to restore his likeness to God and reduce the gap that sin creates. The narrative of *Yvain* mirrors Bernard's theology in that he, Yvain, demonstrates one type of prideful sinning and seeks to rectify his sin throughout the rest of the romance. Yvain's initial reasoning to leave and head off to the fountain demonstrates how self-justification succeeds in tarnishing one's divine likeness. For all his exterior beauty, Yvain's interior quality is called into question as his pride, his desire for glory, for others to notice his own self perceived excellence, influences the choices he makes.

---

[354] *The Holy Bible: New International Version* Genesis Chapter 1:26-27 and Chapter 2:18-24. "God made man and woman in his image and they were content to be in the Garden of Eden, until the serpent informed the woman that she would not die if she ate of the fruit of the tree of knowledge. The woman did and gave some of the fruit to man. Then they became aware of their nakedness and were ashamed. They hid from God when they heard him walking in the garden. But God provided clothes for them before banishing them... God said, 'The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil.'" The time before Adam's fall from grace illustrates his innocence and his divine likeness to God. But once Adam eats the fruit, he tarnishes his divine likeness. He is no longer without sin because he can distinguish between Good and Evil.

[355] *The Holy Bible: New International Version* Genesis 3:22a. "And the Lord God said, "The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil."

Yvain's second prideful act in his adventure-romance occurs just after his marriage to Laudine. Upon receiving word that Arthur and his court are in the forest nearby, Yvain waits in his marital residence for one of Arthur's knights to pour water on the stone so that he can ride out and fulfill one of his marital duties, defending Laudine's fountain. But again, within this seemingly above board adventure, Yvain wishes to unhorse and defeat Sir Keu, "[s]ë or li puet .i. poi de honte / Mesire Yvains, liez en sera, / Et molt volentiers l'en fera, / Que bien le recongnoist aus armez."[356] Yvain again demonstrates his desire for glory for himself but not because he is fulfilling his duty as the fountain's defender. It is his name and reputation as a courtly knight that Yvain wants the court to acknowledge, which it does once Yvain lets them know that he has defeated Keu.[357]

After his defeat of Keu and the retelling of his adventure as to how he, Yvain, became the fountain's new defender, he invites the king and all his knights to stay: "[e]t après che le roy proia / Quë il et tuit si chevalier / Venissent o lui herbegier, / C'onnor et joie li feront / Quant o lui herbegié seront."[358] Even though Yvain is demonstrating proper courtly manners of hospitality, Yvain's pride subtly appears. Having the king and all his best knights stay in Yvain's castle gives Yvain honor. It is not the king or his new wife, but rather Yvain himself, who gains the honor and the joy of being able to boast about the king staying with him. Yvain's pride means that he desires to be considered worthy and praised in the eyes of the court. His defeat of both Esclados and Keu, in addition to Arthur's agreement to stay with Yvain, only fuels Yvain's pride and his view of his own importance.

---

[356] *Yvain* 188 verses 2242-2245. "If now M. Yvain can cause him a little bit of shame, he will be happy about it, and he will do it willingly, because he recognized perfectly Keu by his arms."

[357] *Yvain* 190 verses 2281 & 2285-2286. "– Chë est Yvain que chi veés!… / Et li autre mout lié en sont, / Qui de son duel grant joie font. // It is Yvain you see before you… the others are very happy about it." (discovering Yvain and recognizing Keu's defeat at the hands of a knight he'd been saying had fled the court).

[358] *Yvain* 192 verses 2304-2308. "And after that, he asked the king to come lodge with him, the king and all his knights, because they would bring *him* [Yvain] honor and joy in coming to stay at his castle." (italics mine for emphasis)

Yvain's pleasure in hosting Arthur's court gives rise to yet another occurrence in which Yvain demonstrates how prideful a man he is. Gauvain encourages Yvain to leave his wife in favor of attending tournaments with him. Gauvain phrases his request in such a way that Yvain has to accept Gauvain's offer or risk being accused of setting aside his masculine prowess in favor of wallowing in an emotional (or feminine) state due to his recent marriage.

> Comment? Seroiz vos or de chix, / Che disoit mesire Gavains, / Qui pour lor femmes valent mains? / Honnis soit de Sainte Marie / Qui pour empirier se marie! / Amender doit de bele dame / Qui l'a a amie ou a femme, / Ne n'est puis drois quë ele l'aint / Que ses pris et ses los remaint… / Primes en doit vostre pris croistre. / Rompés le frain et le chavestre, / S'iron tournoier avec vous, / Quë on ne vous apiaut jalous. / Or ne devés vous pas songier, / Mais les tournoiemenz ongier / Et emprendrë a fort jouster, / Quoi quë il vous doie couster.
>
> What? Will you thus be one of those (here what M. Gauvain was saying) who are worth less because of their women? By St. Mary, shame on those who marry to diminish. Those who have for a lover or a spouse a beautiful woman must improve themselves and it is not right that she continue to love him as his value and his renown dries up… Above all, your value must increase. Break the lead and the halter and we will go run the tournaments with you, so that you are not called a jealous husband. Now you must not daydream, but rather frequent the tournaments and commit yourself to vigorous jousts.[359]

Gauvain is hinting that both Yvain's renown and worth as a knight, as someone worthy of a lady's love, are in jeopardy if he cannot uphold his masculine duties. A knight's ability to uphold his performative duty, i.e. his reputation as a skilled warrior, is what makes him worthy of his lady's love.[360] If he is unable or unwilling to publicly perform feats of martial skill that assert and affirm his masculinity and worthiness, then he runs the risk of losing both the esteem of his male peers as well as his lady's. This is exactly the type of rumor which Enide relates to Erec and causes them to set off on their adventures. Assuming that his audience is already familiar with Erec's adventures, Chrétien uses Gauvain here to hint that Yvain is running the risk

[359] *Yvain* 202-204 verses 2484-92, 2499-2506.
[360] C. Stephen Jaeger, *Ennobling Love* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999) 203.

of being considered another "Erec" by staying close to his new wife and foregoing masculine pursuits.

Yvain, fearing the loss of his reputation, makes the decision to join Gauvain. Yvain's decision to attend tournaments is based upon not only Gauvain's idea that a man should not let his renown fall into obscurity just because he is married[361] but also upon his pride. Pride leads to fear.[362] His fear of being labeled a coward leads him to seek out his wife, Laudine, at which point he gets her to agree to a *don contraignant*.[363] She agrees to Yvain's idea without yet knowing what it is. Upon immediately securing her promise Yvain "[m]aintenant congié li requiert / Mesire Yvains, de convoier / Le roy et d'aller tournoier, / 'Quë on ne m'apiaut recreant.'"[364] In Yvain's case his fear of losing something that he values over any other thing, his reputation, causes Gauvain's remarks to work upon his pride as he fears the loss of his newly established reputation as the vanquisher of Keu.

Yvain's fear of being labeled *un lâche* or *un recreant*[365] pushes him to seek his wife's accord to allow him to depart. Laudine agrees, but she puts a time limit on how long Yvain can remain apart from her. He has only one year. It is during this year that Yvain's pride comes completely to the fore. As Yvain wins tournament after tournament and takes the glory, Yvain

---

[361] Which is the rumor that occurs to Erec and serves as the motivation for the second half of his narrative.
[362] John Piper, "The Pride of Being Afraid," (*Desiring God* 19 May 1981 <www.desiringgod.org/articles/the-pride-of-being-afraid>). *The Holy Bible: New International Version* I John 4:18. "There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love." In the bible fear is linked to pride, Proverbs 8:13 states "To fear the Lord is to hate evil; I hate pride and arrogance, evil behavior and perverse speech." If one is going to serve God then he must renounce pride and arrogance. Fear is man exerting his pride and pushing his own will and agenda over Gods which causes sin. Thus man lives in a state of worry about being punished for his wrong doing. In perfect love there is no fear because man is humble and obedient to God's will, there is no worry or fear of punishment.
[363] a promise to something of which she has no knowledge.
[364] *Yvain* 208 verses 2558-2561. "asks her for permission to accompany the king and to participate in tournaments, 'so that no one calls me a coward.'" Yvain's words to his wife reveal his fear of being called a coward because he has let his masculine duties lapse. This is the same rumor that Enide recounts to Erec and causes their own series of adventures.
[365] a coward

and Gauvain both begin to see themselves as better than others,[366] to the point where they set themselves up as kings:

> Et li ans passa toutes voie, / Sel fist si bien Mesire Yvains / Tout l'an que Mesire Gavains / Se penoit de lui honnerer… / Revenu d'un tournoiemant / Ou Mesire Yvain sot esté, / S'en out tout le pris aporté… / Que chil doi compagnon ensamble / Ne vaurrent en nul lieu descendres, / Ains firent lor paveillon tendre / Hors de la vilë et court tinrent. / Onques a court de roi ne vinrent, / Anchois vint li rois a la lour, / Car avec eux sont li mellour / Des chevaliers et tout li plus.
>
> the year past and M. Yvain behaved so well during all that year that M. Gauvain took pains to give him honor… they had returned from one tournament at which M. Yvain had attended and where he had taken first place… the two companions, having consulted each other on this point, did not want to stay anywhere with the locals, but put up their tent outside the city and held their court. They never came to a king's court, but rather it was the king who came to them, because the best and greatest number of knights were with them.[367]

Evidently Yvain and Gauvain have accumulated such renown that when Arthur appears at this tournament, he, the King is forced to call upon them as if he were their vassal. This is not how Yvain or Gauvain are supposed to act as courtly knights.[368] Arthur is their liege-lord, not their vassal. They should be the ones to call upon Arthur, not the other way around.[369] Yvain's pride in his martial abilities causes him to set himself above his king.

The setting of oneself above others or as Bernard puts it "thinking oneself holier than others" is the sixth step on Bernard's ladder of descent into pride and thus a movement away from God. Bernard's conception of pride is also the Bible's conception of a proud heart.

---

[366] Bernard of Clairvaux, *Bernard of Clairvaux Selected Works* 100. Step 6: Thinking oneself holier than others.
[367] *Yvain* 214-216 verses 2672-75, 2682-84, 2686-93. Yvain's pride comes from his success at the tournaments to such an extent that he and Gauvin no longer stay with the locals but set up their own tent and hold court there with the best knights. This is a direct result not only of Yvain's success but also his pride leading him to set himself up as a rival to Arthur.
[368] Bernard of Clairvaux, *Bernard of Clairvaux Selected Works* 100. Step 5: Trying to be different. Claiming special rights. Here both Gauvain and Yvain are claiming special rights as they set themselves above their liege-lord.
[369] Diverres 99. "Yvain and Gawain reveal a lack of respect towards their lord which is quite contrary to the courtesy, humility and loyalty expected of a true knight."

Proverbs states, "everyone that is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord."[370] Yvain's pride would make him an abomination to God because he is more interested in his own glory than in giving glory to God for making him skilled in warfare.[371] In James chapter 4:1-11, the nature of proud men is revealed and the solution to pride is offered.[372] According to the Bible and Bernard, a proud man is boastful and selfish.[373] Pride is not God's will but our own taking precedence. It is man's pride which separates him from the will of God and causes him to no longer be humble. Pride and anger are identified by St. Paul in his letter to the Colossians[374] as the root of man's sin and the cause of the loss of his likeness to God.

Pride is the basis for Yvain's own sin and downfall. Yvain's vainglory has led him to forget the promise he made to his wife to return to her in a year's time. His pride, his fascination

---

[370] *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (2001 Crossway Bibles ver.2011) Proverbs 16:5. In the *New International Version* it reads: "The Lord detests all the proud of heart. Be sure of this: They will not go unpunished." As we shall see Yvain models this Bible verse.

[371] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God* 7. "It is pride, the greatest of sins, to use gifts as if they were one's by natural right"

[372] *The Holy Bible: New International Version* James 4:1-11. "What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, *because you ask with wrong motives*, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures. You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. Or do you think Scripture says without reason that the spirit he caused to live in us envies intensely? But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.' Submit yourselves, then, to God…. Come near to God and he will come near to you… Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up." (italic's mine) Yvain's situation is beautifully described in this bible passage. Yvain wanted things but his motivations were wrong. Additionally Yvain's choice to go with Gauvin and pursue worldly renown demonstrates his "friendship with the world" and thus his separation from society. Once his wife requests the return of her ring, Yvain is made aware of his folly and he turns away from worldly pursuits in favor of restoring his love relationship or his likeness to God.

[373] *The Holy Bible: New International Version* I Corinthians 13:4. "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud." (see footnote 36 for Bernard's view)

[374] *The Holy Bible: New International Version* Colossians 3:5-10. "Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator." This citation describes a man who has turned to earthly endeavors and pursuits. He has lost his image of God because he has fallen into sin and/or repeatedly sins. However once he rids himself of those ways and puts on his new self (turns away from sin or constantly keeps watch over his life to avoid sin), his image in God is restored. This is the image upon which man was made prior to the Fall.

with accumulating glory and reputation, and his fear at being labeled a coward, have resulted in his not only forgetting his promise but also it seems, his wife. When he finally remembers, he is ashamed of his behavior.

> A penser, que des lors en ça / Quë a sa dame ot congié pris… / Com de chelui, quar bien savoit / Que couvant menti li avoit / Et trespassés estoit li termes. / A grant paine tenoit ses lermes, / Mais hontes li faisoit tenir
>
> Yvain began to think: from the moment when he took leave of his lady… he realized that he had violated his promise and that the end date was completely past. He had a hard time holding back his tears, but a feeling of shame restrained him.[375]

Yvain did not just forget his promise, he violated (*violé*) it. Yvain's sudden cognition of his own unworthiness brings him to the point of tears. He is no longer a worthy or courtly knight because he has broken his word. Chrétien's parable becomes didactic by illustrating Yvain's violation of one of the key tenets of courtly love: a worthy knight always obeys and fulfills his lady's commands. Yvain demonstrates his unworthiness by disobeying his lady in favor of wallowing in his own glory. By letting his pride get the better of him and seeking more and more renown for himself, Yvain becomes the example of an unworthy knight and the shame he feels is twofold. He realizes that he is now unworthy to receive a lady's love in the eyes of courtly society. In addition, he is ashamed of himself. I read Yvain's shame as having a deeper meaning. Spiritually he has illustrated just how pride and concern for earthly glories or treasures[376] can lead man astray, create distance between himself and God, and destroy his likeness to God. His pride and quest for terrestrial glory have led him to a state of forgetfulness.

---

[375] *Yvain* 217 verses 2696-97, 2699-2703.

[376] *The Holy Bible: New International Version* Matthew 6: 9-21. "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

Yvain's forgetfulness is exactly what Bernard sees in describing man's state in his first degree of love: "[t]his is carnal love by which a man loves himself above all for his own sake. *He is only aware of himself*."[377] At every turn Yvain offers the example of the proud and self-absorbed man. On the surface it seems that his actions are altruistic but underneath, Yvain is revealed to be concerned with securing his own glory and increasing his own social standing in the eyes of his peers either via marriage or winning tournaments, to the point of setting himself up as a king. He cares only for what will benefit him. Because Yvain's love of self and his pride prevent his actions from being undertaken for the benefit of someone else, he falls from grace. In forgetting his promise to his wife and beloved, Yvain descends into madness and slips from public view (i.e. the court and hence public life). Yvain must then come to terms with his sin and attempt to recover what he has lost: his beloved, his name, and his reputation as a courtly knight.

My Pride Made Me Do It

The effort to avoid being regarded as lacking prowess and not upholding or constantly confirming one's masculinity results in Yvain committing a sin. Yvain's sin is vainglory which leads him to forget his promise to return to his wife. In his effort to prove that he is nothing like "an Erec," i.e. forgetful of his masculine duties, Yvain allows his pride to revel in the glory of proving his martial skill at tournaments. Yvain's pride, seeking continuous validation of worthiness in tournament combat, ensures that Yvain will not spare a thought for his wife or his promise. Yvain's pride is successful at keeping him from fulfilling the other half of his courtly duties, being a lover, until his wife renounces him. Brought face to face with his forgetfulness

[377] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God* 25. Italics mine for emphasis.

and neglect of his wife, Yvain is shocked into silence at his own unworthiness.[378] Ashamed of his behavior, Yvain begins a journey to restore himself to his wife's good graces.

Yvain represents the warrior who is too wrapped up in the glory of battle, in contrast to Erec who represents the lover who is too wrapped up in love. In order for Yvain to become a successful courtly lover-knight he must learn to balance both his masculine attributes (martial skills) with his feminine attributes (loving lover). Yvain will learn this balance through a journey of reconciliation. This journey will eventually enable him to reconcile with Laudine, but he must first learn how to love and be loved by another. In Bernardian terms, he must stop his descent down the steps of pride and start ascending the steps of humility and in so doing he will restore his relationship with God, symbolized by his lady love. His journey of reconciliation will illustrate man's progression through Bernard's first degree of love.

Shifting into the Second Degree by Learning to Love Another

In my previous section I examined how Yvain was a prideful man and how his pride is at the heart of the problem he encounters within his love relationship. I also explained how Yvain illustrated some of Bernard's steps of pride, such as self-justification and thinking of oneself as better than others, and demonstrated how, because of pride, Yvain embodies the selfish and carnal love described in Bernard's first degree of love.

In this section I will explore how Yvain renounces his carnal love of self (his preoccupation with fighting for his own renown) in favor of a social love, a love that is extended to others.[379] In other words, Yvain rejects his prideful and narcissistic self-love and becomes an

[378] *Yvain* 220 verses 2774-2775. "Yvains respondre ne li puet, / Que sens et parole li faut // Yvain cannot reply to her because reason and speech have let him down."
[379] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God* 27-28.

altruistic social lover. In learning to care for and love another being before his own self, Yvain demonstrates the second key feature of Bernard's first degree of love:

> [i]n order to love one's neighbor with perfect justice, one must have regard to God. In other words, how can one love one's neighbor with purity, if one does not love him in God? But it is impossible to love in God unless one loves God. It is necessary, therefore, to love God first; then one can love one's neighbor in God.[380]

By placing another's welfare and love before his own, Yvain illustrates Bernard's conception of social love, loving God first and then one's neighbor.

It's Madness! ... No. It's Love!

> Love must be – by its very nature – the antithesis of reason. This is probably why it is so frequently described as a form of madness.[381]

The first change in Yvain's character that allows him to move from a self-centered lover to a social lover occurs when he is brought face to face with his disobedience to Laudine's wishes. Yvain's discovery of his disobedience, his shame and the self-hatred he feels, results in his going mad [382] and distancing himself from his peers.[383] In an effort to escape both the censure of his peers[384] and his own unworthiness, Yvain goes to the forest to live as a wild man.[385] Yvain's madness is his metaphorical death. On the one hand, his madness constitutes

---

[380] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God* 27.
[381] Frank Tallis, "Crazy for You," in *The Psychologist* 18.2 (February 2005) 73.
[382] *Yvain* 224 verses 2804-2805. "Lors li monta .i. troubeillons / El chief, si grant quë il forsenne // Then there was a whirlwind in his head, so powerful that he lost all his reason."
[383] *Yvain* 222 verses 2790-2792. "Ne het tant riens com li meïsmes, / Ne ne set a qui se confort / De lui meïsmes qu'il a mort. // He hates nothing as much as he hates himself, and he doesn't know either who could comfort him when he condemns himself."
[384] *Yvain* 222 verses 2784-2788 & 2797. "Mis se voudroit estre a la fuie / Tous seus en si sauvage terre / Quë on ne le seüst ou querre, / N'omme ne femme n'i eüst, / Ne nuls de lui riens ne seüst // He really wanted to flee alone, to a country so savage that no one would know where to find him, where neither man nor woman or anyone else would have any knowledge of him" His reason for fleeing is: "Qu'il crient entr'eux issir du sen // because he fears losing his reason amongst them (the other barons)."
[385] *Yvain* 224 verses 2807 & 2824-2828. "Et fuit par cans et par valees // and he fled to the fields and valleys" Once Yvain has fled he: "[l]es bestes par le bois aguete / Et lors ochist, et si menjue / La venoison trestoute crue. / Et

his death or break with society.[386] In other words, Yvain is no longer a courtly knight. On the other hand, his madness is also his death to sin. He dies to his old self, the one who was vainglorious and sought only what would increase his own glory and reputation. Because Yvain is dead to his old life and his old self, his madness provides the space for him to deconstruct his own humanity before resurrecting it.

Yvain's life as a wild man in the forest is like that of a wild beast, as he hunts and eats raw the prey he traps.[387] The hermit who encounters Yvain one day sees him as a savage. While acknowledging Yvain's underlying humanity, the hermit notes that Yvain has more in common with the beasts of the forest.[388] In his fear, the hermit prays to God to keep Yvain from returning to his abode.[389] The hermit's fear of Yvain illustrates the level of ignorance and savagery to which Yvain has descended, proving that Yvain has discarded his humanity. Chrétien's narrator even compares Yvain's behavior to that of a stray beast: "[m]ais n'est riens, tant poi de sens ait, / Que lau on li a le bien fait / Ne reviengne mout volentiers."[390] Yvain is no longer a man. He is a crazy animal, acting on his instincts.

In *On Loving God* Bernard provides his own description of a proud man. A proud man does not appreciate and acknowledge the gifts he has received from God. Therefore a proud man is to be compared with an animal.

---

tant conversa el boscage / Comme hom forsenés et sauvage // traps the beasts in the wood, he kills them and then he eats the meat raw. He stayed for so long in the forest like a man deprived of his sense (reason) and was wild."

[386] Donald Maddox, *The Arthurian Romances of Chrétien de Troyes: Once and Future Fictions.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) 62.

[387] *Yvain* 224 verses 2824-2826.

[388] *Yvain* 224-226 verses 2832-2840. The hermit sees a naked man approach his house and realizes that this human is not in his right mind but because the hermit is afraid, he reenters his house but he leaves some food and drink outside his house under a narrow window. In his mind, this naked wild man is something unpredictable and thus to be feared like a wolf or a bear suddenly appearing before one's house, would be feared.

[389] *Yvain* 226 verses 2861-2864. "Et li boins hom mout le doutoit; / Prie Dieu, quant aler l'en voit, / Qu'il le deffende et qu'il le gart, / Qu'il ne viengne mais chele part. // And the good man feared him (Yvain) a lot, so that when he (Yvain) left, he (the hermit) prayed to God to protect him and to keep him in His care but in such a way as to keep him (Yvain) from coming back to him (the hermit)."

[390] *Yvain* 228 verses 2865-2867. "but there is no creature with so little sense that it won't return voluntarily to the place where it was shown kindness."

> When a man promoted to a high dignity, does not appreciate the favor received, because of his ignorance he is rightly compared to the animals with whom he shares his present state of corruption and morality. It also happens when a man, not appreciating the gift of reason, starts mingling with the herds of dumb beasts to the extent that ignoring his own interior glory, he models his conduct on the object of his sense. Led on by curiosity he becomes like any other animal since he does not see he has received more than they.[391]

A proud man then is likened to the "dumb beasts" because he can only experience the world through his senses. Yvain, in his pride, models a corrupted morality. His quest for glory and renown blinded him to the greater love he could have had with Laudine if he had obeyed. Instead Yvain's pride led him to mingle with the "herds of dumb beasts," other like-minded individuals, i.e. the tournament knights who seek their own glory and ignore their own interior glory (being made in God's image and having his likeness within). His association with these beasts leads him into ignorance, and it is to this state that Yvain is reacting so violently and which fills him with shame and self-loathing. Faced with the fact that he has squandered "the favor" (of time and love) given to him by Laudine, Yvain can no longer be considered a man. He must now be considered an animal because he models his "conduct on the object of [his] sense[s]" (I must fight) and is "[l]ed on by curiosity"[392] (who is a better fighter than me?).

To the ancients, love is a form of madness[393] and scholar Marc M. Pelen echoes this theory in his description of Yvain's entire narrative as one of insanity.[394] If love is madness then what Yvain experiences as a result of forgetting his promise is the madness of grief stemming from the rejection of Laudine's love. Yvain's madness or excessive grief at his situation, his being estranged from Laudine, mirrors Laudine's own excess of grief at Esclados' death. She too

---

[391] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God* 6.
[392] Bernard of Clairvaux, *Bernard of Clairvaux Selected Works* 100. Step 1 of Pride is: Curiosity about what is not one's proper concern. Yvain's curiosity about the skills of other knights and his desire to prove he's no "Erec" is what keeps him away from Laudine and searching for tournaments to prove himself.
[393] C.S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love* (Oxford: 1936) 8. Lewis writes: "In ancient literature love seldom rises above the levels of merry sensuality or domestic comfort, except to be treated as a tragic madness, an *ath*, which plunges otherwise sane people (usually women) into crime and disgrace."
[394] Marc M. Pelen, "Madness in *Yvain* Reconsidered" *Neophilologus* 87 (2003): 361-369.

tears her hair and rips her clothing[395] and her actions are those of a disturbed person[396] whom nothing can comfort.[397] If Laudine's grief at the loss of her husband is expressed by the ripping of her hair and garments, then she is demonstrating how much she truly loved Esclados. Paralleling Laudine's grief, Yvain's own hair ripping and overwhelming sense of loss illustrate the depth of his affections and love for Laudine. Her complete rejection of him as husband and lover tells Yvain that she considers him dead.[398] Yvain's "death" initiates his own mad mourning and eventually will propel him to find a way to return to her.

If the ancients are correct and love is a form of madness in which reason is overthrown,[399] then the reader should have no problem understanding Yvain's distress and madness at losing Laudine's love. The parallels between Laudine's grief at Esclados' death and Yvain's crazy actions upon learning of Laudine's rejection can be construed as the grief one expresses at the death of a loved one. In Yvain's case, his death is three-fold: the death of his relationship with Laudine, the death of his relationship as a courtly knight, and the death of his own love of self and his vainglory. Yvain's deep shame and self-hatred at his failure as lover, knight, and husband reveal that he cares deeply; and the loss of his self-worth and the object of his love is enough to make him lose his reason and go mad.

Yvain's madness is ended when he is brought back to his senses with some healing ointment[400] and the sun's rays. In other words, Yvain's humanity is resurrected as he is brought

---

[395] *Yvain* 122 verses 1158-1160.
[396] *Yvain* 122 verse 1156.
[397] *Yvain* 122 verse 1161 & 1164.
[398] Saul N. Brody, "Reflections of Yvain's Inner Life" *Romance Philology* 54 (Spring 2001) 280. "she thus deprives him of the two things that verify chivalric worthiness and manhood: reputation as a knight and a woman's love."
[399] Tallis 72. Tallis writes: "The ancient Greeks employed the term *theia mania* (or madness from the gods) to describe the sudden overthrow of reason associated with falling in love."
[400] *The Holy Bible: New International Version* Luke 7:37 or John 12:30. Both Luke and John make reference to a woman anointing Jesus' head with ointment, oil, perfume, or nard. Yvain's anointing with healing ointment refers to this biblical event.

back to reason.[401] In the Christian tradition there is a service called unction in which a person suffering in body, mind, or spirit, is anointed with holy oil for healing, to restore that person to their rightful self.[402] It is not a coincidence that Chrétien includes this episode nor that it takes the sun's (or Son's) rays to return Yvain to sanity and reason. Nor is it a coincidence that the bread the hermit provides, "gousté" and "dur"[403] as it is, is something that Yvain desired[404] and that tasted great to him.[405] In these two instances, two symbols for Christ are given. The "sun's rays" symbolize Christ as the light[406] which has come into the world or in this case into Yvain's life. Christ is also symbolized as the bread of life,[407] the bread of the Eucharist, which initiates thought upon Christ's suffering before his crucifixion and his ultimate gift of love, his own death upon the cross.[408] Both of these episodes illustrate Yvain's nascent spirituality and mark the beginning of his turning away from sin.[409]

---

[401] *The Holy Bible: New International Version* Ephesians 4:22-24. "You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness."

[402] Unction is anointing someone with holy oil and can be done at any time and any number of times. This is not to be confused with extreme unction which is administered as a part of the last rites nor is it to be confused with the oil (chrism) which is generally used just after being baptized.

[403] *Yvain* 226 verse 2845. The bread provided is coarse and hard. In other words the bread is roughly ground and stale, and unappetizing.

[404] *Yvain* 226 verse 2842-2843. "Et chil vient la qui mout couvite / Le pain // and the other (Yvain), who desired the bread with eagerness."

[405] *Yvain* 226 verse 2853. "Tant qu'ele pout, li sout li pains // the bread tasted good to him. " Bernard of Clairvaux, *On the Song of Songs*, trans. Kilian Walsh, vol.1 (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, Inc.,1971) 1-3. In Bernard's first sermon on the *Song of Songs* he writes: "Be ready then to feed on bread...which it has been your pleasure to taste...it is the Lord you must see in the breaking of the bread."

[406] *The Holy Bible: New International Version* John 8:12. "When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

[407] *The Holy Bible: King James Version* John 6:35 & 51. "And Jesus said unto them, 'I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst... I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever: an the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."

[408] No one in their right mind would willingly give their self up to be scourged, beaten, or spat upon before having their palms pierced with nails and then hung on a cross to let gravity enlarge the holes whilst enduring the elements and the attentions of carrion birds. Yet Christ did. Christ knew what was going to happen to him and he still willingly gave himself over to it because he loved us. Love then is mad and it causes one to do strange and odd things (overthrows one's reason) that any rational person would normally avoid.

[409] *The Holy Bible: New International Version* Romans 6:7. "because anyone who has died has been freed from sin." Yvain's death frees him from his former self and once freed he can now set about constructing a new self.

Once Yvain is restored to himself, his next episode confirms Yvain's return to his reason and good senses but also demonstrates a "new" Yvain. This "new" Yvain is one that, rather than fighting for his own glory,[410] now accepts his chivalric duty by defending the Dame de Noroison and her property.[411] Yvain's successful defense of Noroison's lands restores his reputation as a knight and as someone worthy of love.[412]

The episode of the Dame de Noroison provides the space for Yvain to demonstrate a humbling of self. He puts the defense of Noroison and the correcting of the wrong done to its lady before his own vainglory. Yvain is not helping Noroison because it will increase his own reputation but because it is the right thing to do as a knight. In addition to his triumphs as a knight, the episode of Noroison provides the space for Yvain to demonstrate his faithfulness to Laudine,[413] by rejecting Lady Noroison's offer of marriage.[414] Yvain's victories at Noroison as a knight do not go to his head, as they would have before his madness, and he has not forgotten what caused his loss. The battle of Noroison re-establishes Yvain's reputation as a skilled knight and as a courtly lover. However, it is the hermit's bread and the ointment furnished by Lady Noroison that births a new Yvain, one who is spiritually awakened, recognizes his true duties, and who now seeks to become an altruistic social lover.

---

[410] Peter S. Noble, *Love and Marriage in Chrétien de Troyes* (Cardiff: University of Wales, 1982) 57. "The new Yvain will not shirk any of his responsibilities...from the moment he recovers his sanity he behaves quite consistently, always striving to improve himself as a knight, fulfilling a knight's true duties and not just seeking after glory and adventure as he had done before he became insane."

[411] Keen, *Chivalry* (Haven: Yale University Press, 1984) 9. In speaking of a knights duties, Keen writes "His first duty... is to defend the faith of Christ against unbelievers... defend his temporal lord, and protect the weak, women, widows, and orphans." The Dame de Noroison is a woman and perhaps a widow (this is not clear), but in any event she is in need of someone to defend her property.

[412] *Yvain* 248 -252 verses 3210-3263. Yvain is admired by all the people who called Noroison lands home to such an extent that they wanted him to marry their lady and become their lord as they felt that with him there to defend them it would be like being surrounded by a high thick wall of hard stone ("Que les lui sont tout aseür / Com s'I fussent enclose de mur / Haut et espés de pierre dur // Because with him at their side they feel assured as if they were surrounded by a wall of hard stone, high and thick").

[413] Brody 281. "his self-renewal will hinge upon his ability to exercise understanding and to remember and keep his vows." For Yvain this is both his vows as a husband and as a knight.

[414] *Yvain* 254 verses 3316-3322.

How Leonine Loyalty Teaches Love

In the last section I discussed how Yvain's madness allows him to deconstruct his humanity by reverting to an animalistic state where he functions for a time on instinct. It is in this maddened state that Yvain "dies" to his old prideful, narcissistic, and vainglorious self. Through the hermit's bread, the magic ointment, the sun's rays, and the battle of Noroison, Yvain, the knight, is resurrected and brought back to his reason and humanity. This new Yvain recognizes that he abused his chivalric duty and that as a knight, his true duty is "to have faith in God, whose aid is required for the fulfillment of obligations" and that the "championing of a worthy cause is not a service... it is part of his duty."[415] Yvain now fully understands his obligations regarding the latter; it is the former that he has yet to comprehend. After his madness, Yvain's one desire is to reconcile with his wife Laudine. To that end, Chrétien utilizes a lion to symbolize God's presence in Yvain's life and to assist him in achieving his goal.

In this section I explore the symbolic representation of Christ through Yvain's lion.[416] Through this symbolism, Yvain's nascent spirituality is fully espoused and with the lion's assistance, Yvain completes his turning away from sin through the symbolic killing of two demons (evil) and a giant (pride),[417] clearing the way for his reconciliation. Additionally, through his lion, Yvain learns to care for another creature, symbolizing his commitment to put his love for God first, and officially marking Yvain's entrance into Bernard's second degree of love.

[415] Diverres 101 & 104.
[416] Harris 1148. "the lion was commonly taken as a symbol of Christ."
[417] Harris 1151. "The giant, whose speech is full of boastfulness and insult is… full of pride… It is quite possible that the poet intended the combat between Yvain and the lion, on the one hand, and the giant on the other, to be the hero's final struggle against Pride."

Imitatio Christi: A Lion's Tale of Love

Shortly after leaving Noroison, Yvain comes across a lion and a serpent battling[418] and notices that the serpent has the lion by its tail. To a medieval audience, the lion would readily have been associated with Christ[419] and the serpent with the devil.[420] The lion in *Yvain*, for me, is Chrétien's way of symbolically representing Christ as Emmanuel, God with us.[421] The struggle Yvain encounters between the lion and the serpent then becomes an anthropomorphic representation of the struggle between God and the Devil, i.e. Good and Evil. However, Brody sees this struggle as a manifestation of Yvain's own struggles, both "literally (Will he help the lion or the dragon?) and figuratively (Will he choose nobility and honor over wickedness?)."[422] I would argue that the struggle between the lion and the serpent is also Yvain's struggle between his spiritual and secular choices: Will he choose altruistic love over pride? Yvain's hesitation of a few moments before deciding to rescue the lion signals that he is not quite ready to let go of his old self, i.e. his pride. However, the pity Yvain feels at the lion's plight finally moves him to choose the lion,[423] illustrating Yvain's rejection of both evil and pride. Yvain's rescue of the lion also demonstrates his new role as a social lover as he prioritizes ending the lion's suffering even when it risks his own life.[424]

---

[418] *Yvain* 256 verses 3348-3351.
[419] Harris 1148. In the Bible, Christ is given many different names, one of which is the Lion of Judah (Revelation 5:5).
[420] Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner, "The Lady and the Dragon in Chrétien's *Chevalier au Lion*," in *From Beasts to Souls: Gender and Embodiment in Medieval Europe*, eds. E. Jane Burns and Peggy McCracken (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013) 73. Bruckner writes that Yvain's "insistence on the dragon's evil connects it to the biblical serpent in the Garden of Eden." See also Genesis 3:1-4.
[421] *The Holy Bible: New International Version* Isaiah 7:14.
[422] Brody 282.
[423] *Yvain* 258 verses 3373-3374. "Que pités l'en se monte et prie / Qu'il faiche secours et aÿe // Because pity urged and incited him to rescue and give aide (to the lion)."
[424] *Yvain* 258 verses 3356, 3365-3366, & 3369-3372. "Lors dist c'au lyon secorra… / Et met l'escu devant se faiche, / Que la flambe mal ne li faiche… / Si li lions après l'assaut, / De la bataille ne li faut / Mai quoi qu'i l'en aviengne après, / Aidier li vaurra il adés // He says to himself that he will rescue the lion... and [he] puts the shield before his

It is not only pity which moves Yvain to make his choice but also the human characteristics displayed by the lion during his struggle with the serpent. Yvain sees the lion as a generous and noble creature.[425] During his period of madness, Yvain lost some of his humanity and acquired animalistic characteristics. The lion however is an animal given human traits, such as generosity, nobility and humility.[426] For me, the provision of human characteristics to a wild animal is Chrétien's illustration of what is both human and divine within all of us.[427] Yvain's lion is a symbol of both Christ's humanity and his divinity, but the lion also provides a way for us to comprehend how we too are human and divine as we are created in God's image and have His likeness within us. Yvain's choice of saving the lion is the choice of choosing the divine (love) over evil (pride). Yvain's internalization of the lion's human characteristics, his "courage and prowess, nobility yet ferocity in service, humility, gratitude and generosity,"[428] are what assist Yvain in creating his new identity, in turning away from sin, and eventually, in achieving reconciliation. In other words, Yvain is reborn or resurrected.[429]

Yvain's rebirth or resurrection begins the moment he eats the hermit's bread; however it is not until after he rescues the lion that he begins to learn how to care for another. Yvain's lion instructs by example, as it is the lion who takes care of Yvain. He hunts for him[430] and keeps watch over Yvain as he sleeps at night while also guarding his horse.[431] He also makes the

---

face, to avoid the evil [flames] that [the serpent] could do to him... If the lion then attacks him, he will fight. But whatever happens later, he (Yvain) will come to his (the lion's) aide now."

[425] *Yvain* 258 verse 3375.
[426] *Yvain* 258 & 260 verses 3375 & 3401.
[427] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God* 25. "What was animal came first then what was spiritual."
[428] Bruckner, "The Lady and the Dragon" 73.
[429] Bednar 122. The lion is also a symbol of the resurrection.
[430] *Yvain* 262 verses 3420-3427.
[431] *Yvain* 266 verses 3479-3482.

decision to protect and serve Yvain.[432] In each of these instances it is the lion doing the educating through his deeds and behavior to Yvain.

As Yvain progresses through his adventures the physical position of the lion changes. Initially the lion is either in the lead or beside Yvain, demonstrating his role of supporter and sometimes leader.[433] The position of the lion also indicates where Yvain is spiritually. Just after his rescue from the serpent, the lion walks besides Yvain, indicating his support of Yvain's choosing good (love) over evil (his pride). A few lines later, the lion is leading Yvain to hunt, demonstrating Yvain's need to put God first. After Yvain's fight with Gauvin the lion follows behind him,[434] indicating that Yvain has been fully redeemed[435] and is now ready for reconciliation. In each of these instances, except for the last, it is the lion who is instructing by example how to trust in God and care for another.

After Yvain rescues the lion there are three battles[436] interspersed with three returns to Laudine's magic fountain.[437] The juxtaposition of the fights with the fountain emphasizes Yvain's progression and redemption as a courtly knight and as a man who has learned to love God first. I see the first fight with Harpin and the second battle with the sons of Netun as both being very significant, and I will therefore discuss both in the following paragraphs. The third battle is the fight between Gauvain and Yvain to determine the right of inheritance. For me this battle is significant only in that it confirms Yvain's re-establishment as a courtly knight and

---

[432] *Yvain* 262 verse 3415.
[433] *Yvain* 262 verse 3412, 3416 & 3418. Verse 3412 states the lion took his place beside him. Verse 3416 has the lion taking the lead. Verse 3418 states the lion is walking in front of the knight.
[434] *Yvain* 464 verse 6708. In verse 6708 the lion is following Yvain.
[435] Harris 1149. Harris refers to the lion as the "symbol of the Redeemer accompanying Yvain on his journey of redemption
[436] The three battles are Harpin, the sons of Netun and the inheritance fight against Gauvain.
[437] Yvain's returns to Laudine's fountain will be explored in the next section but they will be mentioned here, when the lion is involved.

signals that he has been fully redeemed. Yvain's fight with Gauvain marks the end of Yvain's education as knight and sinner and signals his readiness to reconcile. This is confirmed for me by the fact that his lion does not assist him at all in this fight for right.

Yvain's first battle is with the giant Harpin. However, before that battle even takes place, Yvain comes upon Laudine's fountain and his grief and despair are such that he almost goes mad again and falls down in a faint, whereupon his sword cuts him and he begins to bleed.[438] The lion, believing that Yvain is dead, demonstrates his love for Yvain by mourning him. The lion mirrors Laudine's grief at Esclados' death and Yvain's grief at the "death" of his love by biting and scratching himself.[439] In other words, the lion demonstrates his love for Yvain by means of the same mourning gestures as Laudine and Yvain as well as by attempting suicide because of his grief. Fortunately, Yvain's coming out of his faint prevents the lion from killing himself.

This particular episode of grief illustrates how close the lion has become to Yvain, but it also illustrates how concerned God is when we are at our lowest.[440] The lion's willingness to join Yvain in death[441] corresponds to Christ's love for us as demonstrated by his willingness to join in our human suffering even unto to death.[442] In his humility and acceptance of suffering, the lion also echoes Christ's response to the Pharisees when asked why he associates with

---

[438] *Yvain* 266 verses 3486-3501.
[439] *Yvain* 266 verses 3502-3510.
[440] *The Holy Bible: New International Version* Deuteronomy 31:8 & Matthew 18:12-14. Deuteronomy describes God's love for us as being constantly with us: "The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged." Matthew uses the parable of the lost sheep: "'What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? And if he finds it, I tell you the truth, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off. In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost.'"
[441] Harris 1149. "He (the lion) is to suffer when Yvain suffers. In *Yvain*, Yvain notices that the lion "[q]ui pour moi a si grant duel fait // manifested for me such a great suffering" (270 verse 3545).
[442] Étienne Gilson, *The Mystical Theology of St. Bernard*, trans. A.H.C. Downes (Kalamazoo, Cistercian Publications, 1990) 80. "He became incarnate and suffered in the flesh precisely that He might touch the hearts of sensitive creatures by means of this sensible spectacle."

sinners, Christ replies, "I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance."[443] At the fountain, Yvain finally acknowledges verbally for the first time that he has done wrong.[444] By openly confessing his sin, Yvain proves he is turning his back on pride and vainglory. Just as the lion's location indicates where Yvain is spiritually, Yvain's confession illustrates how he is moving up Bernard's steps of humility by completing step five: confessing one's sins.[445]

Yvain's final rejection of his pride comes in the brief dialogue he has prior to engaging Harpin. Yvain recognizes in Harpin his own folly of pride when he calls Harpin cruel and arrogant and notes that Harpin "qui forment s'orgoille."[446] Harpin in his pride thinks to mock Yvain by taunting him for having lost his love.[447] However, Yvain's response finally puts an end to his pride[448] as he takes another step of humility.[449] In his carefully controlled response to Harpin's taunt, Yvain keeps his speech restrained and does not descend to Harpin's level of pride by taunting him back, because Yvain no longer fears anything.[450] Yvain's mastery of speech and his lack of fear indicate that he has mastered his pride and by mastering it he is ready to symbolically kill it by killing Harpin, with the lion's assistance of course.

The lion's assistance in battle illustrates Yvain's acceptance of knowing what "[he] can do by [himself] and what [he] can do with God's help."[451] Yvain's fight against Lunete's accusers[452] and his reluctance at locking his lion away when he meets the sons of Netun[453] illustrates Yvain's acceptance of God (his lion) as having a place in his life and the importance of His presence to

---

[443] *The Holy Bible: New International Version* Luke 5:32.
[444] *Yvain* 268 verses 3536-3537.
[445] Bernard of Clairvaux, *Bernard of Clairvaux Selected Works* 100.
[446] *Yvain* 304-306 verses 4130-4131. "puffs himself up with pride. "
[447] *Yvain* 308 verses 4178-4183.
[448] Harris 1151.
[449] Bernard of Clairvaux, *Bernard of Clairvaux Selected Works* 100. Step 11 of humility: Quiet and restrained speech.
[450] *Yvain* 308 verses 4184-4187.
[451] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God* 27. *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* Philippians 4:13 "I can do all things through him who strengthens me."
[452] *Yvain* 330 verses 4537-4539.
[453] *Yvain* 392 verses 5543-5547.

him. But it is in the fight against Lunete's accusers that Yvain reveals the level of love he has for the lion and the place God now has in his life. Yvain gets angry when he sees his lion is wounded,[454] and after the battle Yvain "[m]ais de tout che tant ne s'esmaie / Com de sen leon qui se deut."[455] Even though Yvain himself was severely injured, all his focus remains on the injured lion. Yvain is so concerned about his lion that he ends up carrying him for a while before constructing a litter upon which he gently places his lion.[456] All of these gestures complete the "new" Yvain. He has finally learned to care for another. His lion means everything to him now, because his lion is pleasing to him[457] in the same way that the hermit's bread was pleasing to him. Yvain has "tasted" God and found him good.[458]

The last battle at Pesme Adventure in which Yvain's lion fights alongside him is the battle against the sons of Netun. Yvain's host has described them as ".ii. fix de dyable"[459] and states that their custom of enslaving female weavers is "diablie."[460] In other words, they are evil. The battle is significant because we see Yvain faltering when his lion is not with him.[461] However, once his lion joins the fight, the lion kills one of the brothers and his presence strengthens Yvain so that Yvain is able to beat the other into submission.[462] Yvain's successful defeat of the sons, with the lion's help, demonstrates not only his acceptance of his chivalric duty (rescuing women) but also his understanding that with God's help he can defeat anything and anyone. This struggle against the sons of Netun illustrates Yvain's spiritual progression:

---

[454] *Yvain* 330 verses 4543-4546.
[455] *Yvain* 332 verses 4558-4559. "he was not worried about himself but instead he worried about his lion who was suffering a lot."
[456] *Yvain* 336 verses 4645-4649 & 4652.
[457] *Yvain* 392 verses 5545. "Que molt me plaist et molt me siet // Because he pleases me and he suits me perfectly"
[458] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God* 13. "Who east me, will hunger for more." Bernard is discussing the fact the once man has tasted God, i.e. sought him and turned to him for help, will have their spiritual hunger satisfied.
[459] *Yvain* 376 verse 5267.
[460] *Yvain* 388 verse 5464.
[461] *Yvain* 396 verses 5610-5616.
[462] *Yvain* 400 verses 5666-5678.

> as he overcomes his opponents in the first two episodes he becomes more and more like the lion. In the third, he reaches a stage where he transcends the lion in showing mercy. In the fourth, Yvain has not only incorporated the lion into himself but also surpassed it, and thus the lion not need be physically present.[463]

In other words, Yvain has progressed to a point spiritually were he has internalized all the characteristics of the lion: loyalty, humility, prowess, mercy, and love. The episode of the sons of Netun "shows that Yvain has now reached the status of the perfect knight: brave, courteous, generous, merciful, humble, temperate, a man of God who has acquired a capacity for forgiveness akin to sanctity and, above all, a man faithful to his lady in face of temptations of the flesh and of wealth."[464] Because Yvain has taken God into himself, he no longer needs the lion's external representation. Yvain even states his affinity with the lion after his combat with Gauvain by saying "qu'il est a moi et jë a luy."[465] Furthermore, after Yvain's fight with Gauvain, the lion disappears from the narrative.[466] The lion's declining presence in the narrative as regards his deeds and his emotional descriptions is a direct result of Yvain's learning how to truly love. When the lion's objective is complete, he is no longer needed as an instructor and can now accompany Yvain as a silent, supportive companion for the rest of his life.[467]

---

[463] Brody 288.
[464] Diverres 107.
[465] *Yvain* 448 verses 6457-6458. "he is mine and I am his." Yvain's statement mirrors Paul's words to the Galatians when he writes: "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me" (*The Holy Bible: King James Version* Galatians 2:20). In other words, Christ lives in me and I in him.
[466] He is present at Yvain's reconciliation with Laudine but only to allow Laudine to identify Yvain as the *Chevalier au Lion* (460 verse 6661).
[467] *Yvain* 452 verses 6521-6522. "Qui onques en toute sa vie / Ne vaut laissier sa compaignie // this beast who never wanted, with all his life, to leave his (Yvain's) company." This is the last time that we have an insight into the lion's thoughts and feelings regarding his association with Yvain. In this instance the lion provides his last similarity to Christ. "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (*The Holy Bible: New International Version* Matthew 28:20b).

Yvain's period of madness and his lion illustrate the Christian theme of being dead to sin; that is, being dead to an old life in order to be born into a new one.[468] The self-interested Yvain of the first half of the story had to die in order for the "new" Yvain to learn the importance of love from the lion. Through the bread, the ointment, and the lion – symbols of Christ – Yvain is reborn, brought back to life, and started on the path to reconciliation. The *courtois* reciprocal relationship with the lion teaches Yvain about the importance of relationships. Yvain comes to terms with his own sin, kills his prideful and narcissistic self, and evolves into someone who is concerned for another's welfare. Yvain's love for his lion and his success at recognizing what his true chivalric duties are enable him to become an altruistic social lover.

Reconciliation and Love in the Second Degree

Through the lion's *imitatio christi* Yvain learns how to be an altruistic social lover. However, for him to finally progress into Bernard's second degree of love, Yvain must also come to "love God not for his own advantage but for the sake of God." To that end Yvain's three return trips to Laudine's fountain monitor his progress towards reconciliation. Even though Yvain has completed his rejection of sin, and put God in the center of his life as demonstrated by his care of the lion, his desire for Laudine still commands his attention and actions.

The first return to Laudine's fountain is fraught with despair. It is Yvain's first open confession of how he wronged Laudine but it is also his first acknowledgement that "joie" has gone out of his life. In fact, Yvain is so distraught at the loss of his joy that he states that "[q]ui

[468] Romans 6:1-11 and 1 John 1:5- 2:3. Romans and I John establish this biblical precedent.

pert la joie et le soulas / Par son meffait et par son tort / Mout se doit bien haïr de mort." [469] Yvain's distress is such that he notes his "[d]e moi s'est la joie estrangie."[470] Yvain reveals that he is cognizant of the fact that his own sin has caused the distance in his relationship with Laudine. His despair at the loss of his joy (i.e. Laudine and her love) and the distance that now exists between them illustrates how sin distances one from God's love. Yvain's continuous lament over the loss of his "joie"[471] emphasizes how sin veils and distorts our likeness to God.[472] Yvain's adventure immediately following this event is his slaying of Harpin. Killing his pride and his vainglory prepares Yvain for his next encounter with Laudine's fountain.

When Yvain returns to the fountain to rescue Lunete, he encounters his wife for the first time since their wedding. His delight is such that he cannot keep his eyes off her.

> Et lui est mout tart quë il voie / Des iex chele que ses cuers voit / En quel que lieu quë ele soit. / Ad iex le quiert tant qu'il la treuve / Et met son cuer en tel espreuve / Qu'il le retient, et si l'afraine / Si com l'en retient a grant paine / Au fort fraine le cheval tirant. / Et nepourquant en souspirant / Le regarde mout volentiers
>
> As for him, he longed to see her with his own eyes as his heart has seen her wherever she might be. He looked for her and finished by finding her and this put his heart to the test and he had to hold it back and check it with the same difficulty one might have in holding back a headstrong horse. Nevertheless, he looks at her with pleasure.[473]

Yvain's pleasure at seeing his wife is like man's pleasure at being in God's presence. Yvain's distance from Laudine causes him to long for her, but once in her presence his love for her takes

[469] *Yvain* 268 verses 3538-3540. "When one loses the source of his joy and his pleasure by his own fault and his own wrongs (sins) one must hate oneself to death."
[470] *Yvain* 270 verse 3550. "joy has distanced itself from me."
[471] *Yvain* 270 verses 3554-3556. "De joie fu la plus joieuse / Chele qui m'iert asseüree, / Mais mout m'ot petite duree // The joy that was assured me, was of the most joyous sort, but it was a very short duration." Yvain's joy, i.e. his love relationship with Laudine is encapsulated within this sentence. However, this could also be Adam's lament in the Garden of Eden, when his innocence abruptly ends once he eats the apple.
[472] *The Holy Bible: New International Version* II Corinthians 3:18.
[473] *Yvain* 318 verses 4338- 4347.

command as it is his heart he must restrain. Bernard's dialectic of desire[474] comes to the fore in this encounter between Yvain and Laudine. With the arrival of Laudine, Yvain is overwhelmed with his love for her just by seeing her. According to Bernard, love is what he is supposed to be experiencing at this time as he is in his beloved's presence. However, Yvain is "dead" to her, so he must stifle his love[475] which forces Yvain to enter the "absent" state, where he must act as if Laudine is not present. In this state Yvain's desire manifests itself and it is this desire, to be re-united with his lady, which is verbally acknowledged. Yvain is fully cognizant that he cannot yet give free rein to his love as he has not yet attained a level of worthiness to return to her.[476]

While Yvain's reputation may not yet be considerable (it will be by the time he returns for the third and final time), his conversation with Laudine is significant for two reasons. First, because it gives him hope that she might find it in her heart to forgive him, and second, because she acknowledges both Yvain's suffering and his value.

> Je ne tieng mie pour courtoise / La dame qui mal cuer vous porte. / Ne deüst pas veer sa porte / A chevalier de vostre pris / Se trop n'eüst ver li mespris.
>
> I don't find it courteous that your lady persists in keeping her rancor against you. She shouldn't forbid her door to a knight of your valor, unless he has committed a very grave error against her.[477]

Laudine recognizes Yvain's worth as a knight, but her words regarding his lady withholding herself indicates her acknowledgement of Yvain's suffering. However, it is her parting remark about committing a serious error that informs Yvain that she is not yet ready to forgive him. Yvain still has work to do to achieve his goal. Thus it is a hopeful Yvain who sets off for his last two adventures, the defeat of Netun's sons and his fight with Gauvain. Both of these encounters

---

[474] Desire is the state one experiences when one is absent from the beloved and love is the state one experiences when the beloved is present.
[475] *Yvain* 318 verse 4350. "Ains les retrenche a grant angousse // he stifles them with the greatest effort."
[476] *Yvain* 334 verses 4613-4614. "'Dame, pour chou savoir poés / Que ne sui gaires renommés // Lady, you can judge thus that I haven't enough renown'"
[477] *Yvain* 333-335 verses 4588-4592.

deepen his understanding of having God be the support and strength upon which he draws[478] and of loving another, all which prepare him for his final encounter with Laudine.

Luckily Yvain has some help in achieving his goal of reconciliation, in the character of Lunete. According to Artin, Lunete represents the Church.[479] Her management of Laudine, both for Laudine's marriage and now at the time of reconciliation, illustrates the Church's role as intercessor. Laudine as the Church provides a way for man to come to know God[480] and when the sinner sins to assist in reconciling him with God. However, in the end, even with the Church's assistance, it is still man who must acknowledge his own sins and seek forgiveness from God, which is what Yvain finally does when he returns to Laudine's fountain the third time.

As Hunt points out "the key word is *pes*, 'reconciliation'...and [it] occurs no fewer than ten times in the finale."[481] Hunt's insistence on reconciliation is justified in the language and action Chrétien gives to Yvain when he encounters Laudine:

> A ses piés se laissa cheoir / Mesire Yvains trestous armés…/ Et dist: «Dame, misericorde / Doit on de pechaour avoir. / Comperé ai mon mal savoir / Et je le doi bien comperer. / Folie ne fist demourer, / Si me rent coupable et fourfait. / Et mout grant hardement ai fait / Quant devant vous osai venir. / Mais s'or me volés retenir, / Jammais ne vous fourferai rien.
>
> My lord Yvain lets himself fall at her feet, covered in all his armor... 'Lady, one must have pity on sinners. I have paid dearly for my lack of wisdom and justifiably so. It was madness that made me stay away, and I recognize my culpability and worthiness to be punished. I have shown an excess of audacity in daring to present myself before you, but if you would like to keep me, never will I commit the slightest error against you again.[482]

---

[478] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God* 27. "It is a matter of prudence to know what you can do by yourself and what you can do with God's help."

[479] Tom Artin, *The Allegory of Adventure: Reading Chrétien's Erec and Yvain* (London: Associated University Presses, 1974) 227.

[480] In this case Yvain's meeting and subsequent marriage to Laudine. Her captivity and rescue by Yvain allows the two to meet and her maneuvering of Laudine into forgiving Yvain all demonstrate her abilities as intercessor.

[481] Hunt, 165. Z.P. Zaddy, "The Structure of Chrétien's *Yvain*" 536. Hunt is in contrast to Zaddy who writes that "[t]here is no indication in the text that any of Yvain's exploits are undertaken by him as a means of redemption or as a form of penance. Zaddy provides a very secular reading of Yvain and fails to account for the religious symbolism, lexicon, and tone.

[482] *Yvain* 465 verses 6720-6721 & 469 verses 6770-6779.

Yvain's lowering of his body to Laudine's feet signifies his contrition and in his words he openly admits his "folie" of pride and his acceptance of punishment.[483] His plea for forgiveness of his "excès d'audace" in coming before her is coupled with his hope that she will forgive him.

Laudine does forgive him, saying: "Chertes... je veul bien / Pour tant que parjure seroie / Se tout mon pooir n'en faisoie / De pais faire entre vous et moi."[484] Laudine's response is somewhat curious. If one recalls that she wished Yvain to reconcile with his lady and promised Lunete that she would assist *le chevalier au lion* in reconciling with his lady, then her answer becomes clear. She is doing it because she does not want to perjure herself. However, if Laudine symbolizes God, then her response makes even more sense. She has to forgive Yvain, not because Lunete made her swear to do so, but because if she does not then she breaks one of her own commandments. She cannot "parjure" herself because she cannot lie. Numbers 23:19 states: "God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?" Read in this light, Laudine's responses and promises to Lunete and Yvain make perfect sense. As a representative of God, she cannot bear false witness,[485] i.e. lie, and she has made a promise which she must fulfill. In order to fulfill her promise to Yvain and Lunete, she must reconcile with her husband. Laudine has no other choice but to do so, especially as Yvain has come to her with a humble and contrite heart.

---

[483] Brody 293. Yvain "presents himself as a man who is contrite and looking for more than a pro forma acceptance by Laudine. Using the language of a penitent, he asks her to have mercy on a sinner, acknowledges his guilt and wrong, and pledges never to do her wrong again... (The language of penance, with its references to contrition, confession, and satisfaction, is of course one more device used by Chrétien to signify the inner transformation of Yvain)."

[484] *Yvain* 469 verses 6780-6783. "Assuredly, said she, I want to, because I will be a perjurer if I don't do everything in my power to conclude peace between you and me.'"

[485] *The Holy Bible: New International Version* Exodus 20:16. "You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor."

Yvain's humility and contrition finally secure his progression into Bernard's second degree of love. Chrétien's narrator remarks on this changed Yvain at the end.

> Mout en est a boin chief venus, / Qu'il est amés et chiers tenus / De sa dame et ele de luy. / Ne lui souvient de nul anuy, / Que par la joie les oublie / Qu'il a de sa tres chiere amie.
>
> He has arrived at a good conclusion, because he is loved and cherished by his lady, and she by him. He no longer remembers any torment, because under the effects of joy which are given to him by his very dear love, he has forgotten all.[486]

Yvain is living in perfect love. He loves and is loved by Laudine, to the point where nothing torments him. He is not suffering the effects of desire (being absent from his beloved) because he is in her presence. Instead he is under the effects of "joie" or love dispensed by Laudine, where joy has erased all his suffering. Now that Yvain is no longer absent from the object of his love, he can bask in the perfect love given to him by the presence of his beloved.

Yvain's marriage has changed,[487] because the manner in which he loves has changed. Yvain now understands completely the reciprocal nature of love. The work that Yvain's lion began comes to fruition in the final lines of the romance. Yvain now embodies the progressive man whom Bernard describes at the end of his first degree and at the beginning of his second. Yvain was once a rational creature who through pride laid claim to glory that was due to his Creator and when Yvain sinned, God, as a lion, came to help him. Thus, Yvain was saved by God and the Yvain who knew only how to love himself gave way to a new Yvain, who began to love God, because he had learned from frequent experience that with God nothing was impossible and that without God he could do nothing.[488] Because Yvain learned to trust in God and love God first, Yvain left behind his arrogant, prideful, narcissistic self and learned to care for another, becoming an altruistic social lover and loving God not because it was an advantage

[486] *Yvain* 471 verses 6793-6798.
[487] Artin 177.
[488] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God* 27.

for him but for God's sake.[489] In rejecting his pride and by learning to love God, Yvain shifts into Bernard's second degree.

Yvain begins as a story of a prideful man whose only interest is in securing his own renown. Yvain's quest for glory and his fear of being accused of being labeled another "Erec" lead him to set himself up as a king and to forget the promise he made to his wife. Upon learning of Laudine's repudiation of him as both a courtly knight and lover, Yvain "dies" as he descends into madness, a state in which God's grace takes hold and brings him back to his senses. Reborn into a "new man," Yvain repents of his sin and struggles to learn what it means to truly be a knight and truly love. The support and examples given to him by the lion assist him in redeeming himself as a knight and as a lover, allowing him to finally reconcile with his wife.

Yvain's story is an example of man's constant struggle with his spiritual needs and his terrestrial desires. It is only by consciously rejecting these terrestrial desires and turning to God that man masters and overcomes them. For Yvain, mastering his pride and vainglory enables him to yield to unconditional love and forgiveness. In recognizing his sin and openly confessing it Yvain illustrates the steps of humility and becomes a humble man.

Chrétien's adventure-romance, *Yvain*, exemplifies how a selfish and self-centered man discovers his sin, repents of it, turns to God and discovers how deeply God loves him, the sinner, illustrating man's progression from Bernard's first degree of love to his second. In the next chapter, I will demonstrate that Chrétien's knight, Lancelot, is already cognizant of his love at the beginning of his story and thus does not face the challenge between spiritual needs and terrestrial desires. Instead he faces the challenge of Bernard's third degree of love, loving God for God's sake which is also the test of obedience.

[489] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God* 28.

Chapter Four: *Lancelot* - A Monk's Love for the Divine

A parable is a succinct and didactic story, in either prose or verse, used to illustrate one or more moral or spiritual lessons.[490] As a secular story, *Lancelot* provides instruction on how to conduct a courtly love affair as well as illustrating the appropriate conduct of a worthy courtly lover-knight and lady. Spiritually, *Lancelot* instructs the reader on how man can deepen his relationship with God through obedience and humility, since these attributes prepare man for his ultimate goal of union with God. Chrétien's *Lancelot* is a parable which illustrates and emphasizes the preparations man must endure prior to achieving union with God.[491] Hence *Lancelot* is a parable of waiting and preparation, i.e. a story in stasis. In *Lancelot*, unlike in *Yvain*, there is no driving need to correct one's behavior towards one's beloved, nor is there a progression from one degree of love to another. As readers, we have no idea where Lancelot comes from nor do we know how he hears about the Queen's abduction, and at the end the reader is left with an open ending with no clue as to what will happen between Lancelot, the Queen, or the rest of the court.

Because *Lancelot* is a narrative in stasis, Lancelot perfectly models Bernard's third degree of love, in which God is already loved, and in which state man's soul remains for the longest time.[492] In this degree of love, obedience to God has become the battle ground between man's will and God's.[493] *Lancelot* attempts to provide a Christian response to the question of will: Whose will, will you obey? Your own or God's? For Lancelot, his answer, illustrated

---

[490] "Parable," Def., *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, 2015, 26 September 2015, <www.merriam-webster.com>
[491] True union, as Bernard conceived of it, is not achieved while man inhabits his physical body. Chrétien's *Perceval*, which will be discussed in the next chapter, illustrates the parable of true union.
[492] Étienne Gilson, *The Mystical Theology of St. Bernard*, trans. A.H.C. Downes (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, Inc., 1990) 88. The soul can never wholly emerge from this stage in this life.
[493] Unlike *Yvain*, which illustrates how to overcome sin and turn to God for assistance, *Lancelot* illustrates a soul who has already done both these things.

throughout his adventures, is God's. He obeys God's will and in so doing he "loves purely and he does not find it hard to obey a pure commandment, purifying his heart… in the obedience of love."[494] Lancelot's willingness to sacrifice his honor and himself, in addition to his willingness to suffer both the mental hardship of separation from his beloved as well as the physical hardships incurred while rescuing his beloved, illustrates both his obedience to and love for the Queen, and thus, God. To that end, I argue that Lancelot, by fulfilling all the courtly requirements of the ideal lover, especially the tenet of obedience, demonstrates how God is to be truly loved, because perfect obedience to God's will attests to one's love for God.[495]

Lancelot's obedience, however, is challenged by his hesitation during the episode of the cart and for that reason, I argue, Lancelot's hesitation portrays a brief instance of a lack of faith. This moment of doubt delineates Lancelot's humanity, which contrasts sharply with his superhuman, and perhaps divine, abilities demonstrated throughout his other adventures. Prior to encountering the cart, Lancelot's prowess demonstrates his comprehension of the role of God or love in his life for he already understands that, "he can do everything that is good for him in God and that without God he can do nothing good."[496] Lancelot's parable, then, is one of a man who has already been touched by love and hence is willing to suffer, in order to be with his beloved. Because Lancelot already understands the role of love in his life, he is driven to seek for this love continuously. In other words, Lancelot's rescue mission reflects man's spiritual mission; to constantly seek, love, and obey God, surrendering one's own will.

Lancelot's devotion to and search for the Queen illustrates not only a monk's desire for God but also a monk's marriage to God. In *On Loving God*, Bernard explains that desire is

---

[494] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, Inc., 1995) 28.
[495] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God* 28
[496] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God* 27. Unlike Yvain who had to learn this aspect of love through the assistance of his lion.

virtue, in which "man seeks continuously and early for his Maker and when he finds him, adheres to him with all his might."[497] Lancelot's love story illustrates Bernard's conception of virtue, where step by step, adventure by adventure, he is drawn closer and closer to the Queen, culminating in their night of love. The parable of *Lancelot* explores a spiritual journey wherein God is already loved, but is still sought after and climaxes with the Christian's ultimate goal, union.[498]

I open with an exploration of one of the most discussed episodes of this narrative; Lancelot's encounter with the cart, and close with his distinctive behavior at the tournament of Noauz. I am not examining the structure of Lancelot's narrative, as Z. P. Zaddy and others have already done so,[499] but I do wish to emphasize what I believe is a correlation between the opening episode of the cart and the tournament at Noauz. Like Bruckner, I do not see the tournament as a correction of Lancelot's hesitation[500] but rather as the logical outcome of his entering the cart and subsequent adventures. These two episodes, the cart and the tournament, provide the *alpha* and *omega* for this chapter. In between them, I examine other episodes in

[497] Bernard, *On Loving God* 5. He continues by stating that God "is the efficient and final cause of our love. He offers the opportunity, creates the affection, and consummates the desire. He makes, or rather is made himself lovable. He hopes to be so happily loved that he will not be loved in vain. His love prepares and rewards ours"(24).
[498] Michael Casey, *A Thirst for God: Spiritual Desire in Bernard of Clairvaux's Sermons on the Song of Songs* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, Inc., 1988) 131. "In Bernard's view, the basis of the human being's yearning for the Absolute is the nature with which the Creator endowed him. It is because he has been made to God's image- with a natural affinity with his Maker - that the human being cannot be wholly engaged or satisfied by realities in his own order of existence. Thus he is driven by a natural tendency to transcend his own order and to seek the divine. Because Bernard believed that union with God was the ultimate goal of nature."
[499] Z. P. Zaddy, *Chrétien Studies: Problems of Form and Meaning in Erec, Yvain, Cligès and the Charrette* (Glasgow: University of Glasgow Press, 1973). In Zaddy's article there is a critique of several other writers who have examined and attempted to provide a schema of how to read *Lancelot*'s episodes. Zaddy identifies a two part structure of Lancelot, in which part I constitutes the pursuit of the Queen and part II constitutes her rescue and is subsequently broken down into two additional phases. In all told Zaddy indicates that there are six predominate episodes in *Lancelot.*
[500] Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner, "Le Chevalier de la Charrette: That Obscure Object of Desire, Lancelot, in *A Companion to Chrétien de Troyes*, eds. Norris J. Lacy and Joan Tasker Grimbert (Cambridge U.K: D. S. Brewer, 2005) 150. "In the *Charrette*, we cannot read the second part as a correction of the first: unlike the sequence of separate quests that organize the adventures of Erec and Yvain, Lancelot's single-minded quest to rescue the Queen operates from beginning to end."

which the following Christian themes – obedience, humility, contemplation, adoration, veneration, *imitatio Christi* (both narratively and spiritually), suffering, and ecstasy - are exemplified by Lancelot. In each episode, Lancelot demonstrates how he can be read as a monastic whose whole being is grounded and oriented to God and His will.

Cart of Shame, Cart of Love, Cart of Obedience to My God

> By dint of turning to God out of need, the soul soon begins to feel that to live with God is sweet: then she begins to love Him for Himself, yet without ceasing to love Him still for herself; so that she hesitates, alternating between a pure love and a self-interested cupidity... [and it] is in this state that that soul remains for the longest time, nor indeed can she ever wholly emerge from it in this life.[501]

When the reader first encounters Lancelot, he is an un-named knight encountered by Gauvain along the road upon which the abducted Queen has just traveled.[502] Lancelot is in such a hurry to catch up to those who have taken the Queen that he does not even assess Gauvain's horses, he simply takes the one that is closest to him.[503] Lancelot's haste and lack of concern over which horse would suit him best illustrates the extent to which he loves the Queen. Like the soul who feels "that to live with God is sweet," Lancelot's haste demonstrates his need to be with her as well as his love for her. He cannot tolerate being without her, hence his haste and his ferocity in attempting to retrieve her.[504]

---

[501] Étienne Gilson 88.
[502] *Lancelot* 508 verses 271-272.
[503] *Lancelot* 509 verses 290-294. "Mes cil cui granz besoigne en est / N'ala pas querant le meillor / Ne le plus bel ne le graignor. / Einz monta tantost sor celui / Que il trova plus pres de lui // But him, in the great need that he has, didn't look for the best, neither the most beautiful nor the biggest. He preferred to hop on the one that was the closest to him."
[504] *Lancelot* 509 verses 299 & 307-311. "Li chevaliers sanz nul arest... / Et vit molt grant defoleïz / De chevax et grant froisseïz / D'escus et de lances antor. / Bien resanbla que grant estor / De plusors chevaliers i ot // The knight (Lancelot) without ever stopping [leaves]... he (Gauvain who was following Lancelot) saw the ground trampled by horses and all around a plethora of broken lances and shields. Evidence that a great battle had taken place amongst several knights."

No sooner has Gauvain come upon Lancelot a second time - this time on foot - then both encounter *la charrette*, the cart.[505] Chrétien gives a lengthy description of the cart and how it is used as an instrument of shame.[506] David Shirt, who examines the two types of public shaming carts that were in use during the twelfth century, [507] asserts that Lancelot's cart is somewhere between a mobile pillory[508] and a tumbril. [509] Shirt acknowledges that based on Chrétien's description, the cart more closely resembles that of a tumbril. One of the "principal aims of punishment by the tumbril was to shame its occupant publicly...[w]hen he is in the cart Lancelot hears himself publicly degraded and vilified."[510] Either as pillory or tumbril, the goal of the cart is meant to shame and point out to others that the person in it has committed some dishonorable act. Given its negative connotations, it is meant to be humiliating,[511] and Lancelot gives a very human response to the dwarf's order to mount: he hesitates.[512] Lancelot knows what he should do; as the lover par excellence, he should climb into the cart. However, he does not do so immediately. Instead he has a momentary psychological argument between Reason and Love[513] or between his own "self-interested cupidity" and "pure love" or ennobling love.[514]

---

[505] *Lancelot* 509-510 verses 316-320.
[506] *Lancelot* 510 verses 321-344.
[507] David J. Shirt, "Chrétien de Troyes and the cart" in *Studies in Medieval Literature and Languages: In Memory of Frederick Whitehead*, eds. W. Rothwell, W.R.J. Barron, David Blamires and Lewis Thorpe (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1973).
[508] Shirt 291. "the pillory.. an instrument of punishment which consisted of a wooden post and frame arranged in such a way that an offender was kept standing behind it, his head and hands protruding through holes"
[509] Shirt 293. The tumbril "appears to have been a mobile ducking stool, fitted with two wheels and two long poles forming shafts to which a chair was attached in which the offender had to sit - generally he or she was fastened to the chair; the tumbril was then drawn, sometimes pushed, through the town so that its occupant could be exposed to the mockery and derision of the public."
[510] Shirt 295.
[511] Shirt 286.
[512] *Lancelot* 511 verse 361. "Li chevaliers que il n'i monte // The knight hesitates to climb in." In the translation into modern French verse 362 states: "Le temps seulement de faire deux pas / the time only to make two steps." This is the famous length of time Lancelot waits before eventually climbing in and has repercussions for him later on in his first interview with the Queen.
[513] *Lancelot* 511 verses 367-380.
[514] Chapter one discusses Jaeger's concept of ennobling love.

The fact that Lancelot does hesitate for me expresses a fear and a doubt. On a spiritual level, Lancelot's hesitation expresses a doubt of faith and for a moment it seems he will disobey God. Love has given him a task to complete; get into the cart; yet Lancelot cannot obey outright. In this episode Lancelot embodies Christ's statement to his disciples at Gethsemane. When asked why they could not even stay awake and pray one hour, Christ adds: "The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak."[515] In other words, Lancelot's hesitation illustrates the struggle between our human nature and our divine likeness, between our human desires and our spiritual needs. Lancelot's eventual decision to climb aboard is a leap of faith. He chooses to "[t]rust in the Lord with all [his] heart and lean not on [his] own understanding."[516] By climbing into the cart Lancelot leaves his doubt behind.

On a secular level, Lancelot fears what riding in the cart will mean, especially in the eyes of everyone else.[517] By climbing into the cart, Lancelot accepts the humiliation associated with it. Gauvain, ever the courtly knight par excellence, quickly refuses the dwarf's order because to climb in would be madness.[518] But Love, as Yvain discovered, is mad. Lancelot is willing to risk the madness[519] of climbing into the cart even if he loses all honor and reputation as a good

---

[515] *The Holy Bible: New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996) Matthew 26:41.

[516] *The Holy Bible: New International Version* Proverbs 3:6. Proverbs 3:6 states "in all your way acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight." The straightness of the path becomes significant as Lancelot throughout the rest of the rescue always searches for the quickest and most direct route (straight path) to the Queen. Lancelot twice has to remind his companions to follow the right road, once with the hospitable maiden just before finding the comb and again with the two sons of the vavasour before the sword bridge. The straight path is also mentioned just before the challenge of the Ford Knight as his horse follows it (521 verses 727-728).

[517] *Lancelot* 512 verses 405-409. "Einz le huient petit et grant / Et li veillart et li anfant / Parmi les rues a grant hui, / S'ot molt li chevaliers de lui / Vilenies et despit dire. // They (the castle folk) all began to boo him, the small and the tall, the elderly as well as the children, with loud cries amongst the streets. The knight (Lancelot) well heard their insults and their scornful words."

[518] *Lancelot* 512 verses 388-390. "Quant mes sire Gauvains l'oï / Si le tint a molt grant folie / Et di qu'il n'i montera mie // When my lord Gauvain hear it (the proposition to get into the cart), he estimated that it was pure madness and he refused to climb in." This establishes a comparison between Gauvain who will follow Reason and Lancelot who will follow Love.

[519] *Lancelot* 511 verse 375-376. "Amors le vialt et il i saut / Que de la honte ne li chaut // Love wanted it, so he climbed in, without worrying about the shame."

and valiant knight, because Love "le comande et vialt."[520] In overcoming his fear and willingly following Love's command Lancelot "loves purely and he does not find it hard to obey a pure commandment...in obedience of love."[521] Lancelot's obedience to Love's command[522] demonstrates not only how entrenched, important, and "sweet" love is to him, but also illustrates his love for the Queen or a monk's love for the Divine.

Virtually every scholar who writes about *Lancelot* has their own take on the cart and Lancelot's hesitation.[523] Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner, David J. Shirt, and Barbara Newman see the cart as a mythical representation of death.[524] I agree with this interpretation in so far as Lancelot's stepping into the cart represents his death to sin and upon alighting from it he begins a new life where he places himself in obedience to God's will. Jacques Ribard also argues that the cart is a symbol of death but could also be "l'avatar celtique ou médiéval de la barque de Charon."[525] The cart, for Ribard, also implies movement - a voyage, and thus "le chemin de croix"[526] where Lancelot embodies Christ who searches for and redeems the lost soul,

---

[520] *Lancelot* 511 verse 377. "wanted it and ordered it."
[521] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God* 28.
[522] *Lancelot* 511verses 372-374. "Mes Amors est el cuer anclose, / Qui li comande et semont / Que tost an la charrete mont. // But Love who is enclosed in his heart commands him to quickly climb into the cart.
[523] Jean Frappier, *Chrétien de Troyes: The Man and His Work*, trans. Raymond J. Cormier (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1982) 107. Frappier sees Lancelot's hesitation as a sin for which atonement must be made. Peter S. Noble, *Love and Marriage in Chrétien de Troyes* (Cardiff: University of Wales, 1982). Noble sees whole the episode as a representation of common sense versus love. David F. Hult, "Lancelot's Two Steps: A Problem in Textual Criticism" in *Speculum* 61.4 (1986) 838. Hult sees the cart as an object of mystery as well as a test for Lancelot. In another article, Hult posits Lancelot's hesitation as an argument between knowledge and ignorance (David F. Hult, "Steps Forward and Steps Backward: More on Chrétien's Lancelot." in *Speculum* 64.2 (1989) 309). Z. P. Zaddy, *Chrétien Studies* 120. Zaddy sees the cart as evidence of Lancelot's self-abnegation and martyrdom. Shirt, whose article deals exclusively with the cart implies that perhaps the cart was meant to have a minor role in the narrative and lists several other scholars who share that view point (282). Shirt continues by noting that thus far no one has successfully explained the purpose or significance of the cart (283). Shirt however does see the cart as critical to Lancelot's identity (284), an exposition by Chrétien of contemporary punishment practices, and as representative of Death or an evil omen (286).
[524] Bruckner, "Le Chevalier de la Charrette" 140. Shirt 286. Barbara Newman, *Medieval Crossover: Reading the Secular Against the Sacred* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013) 58.
[525] Jacques Ribard, *Le Chevalier de la Charrette: Essai d'interprétation symbolique* (Paris: A. G. Nizet, 1972) 21. "the Celtic avatar or medieval boat of Charon."
[526] Ribard 22. "the way of the cross" or "the road of the cross."

represented by Guenièvre.[527] I can concede to Ribard's interpretation of the cart as a symbol of death, even its Celtic or Greek origins, however, I cannot agree entirely with his sole interpretation of Lancelot as representative of Christ the Redeemer, nor the Queen as a lost and disembodied soul. To accede to Ribard's interpretation would be to pigeonhole Lancelot and the Queen into just one interpretation and no other and they are complex enough to allow for the exploration of both the secular and the divine.[528] Additionally, accepting Ribard's limited interpretation would make it impossible to answer one of Bruckner's questions: "How does the queen learn about it (Lancelot's hesitation)?"[529] Reading the Queen as representing God answers this question. Like God, she knows what is in Lancelot's heart.[530] If the Queen, as Ribard would have her, is a lost soul, she would have absolutely no knowledge of Lancelot's hesitation and her anger with him later would remain shrouded in mystery. However as a stand-in for God, she would be omniscient and therefore one easily comprehends how she knows of Lancelot's hesitation.

Although Lancelot's cart episode is brief, it both indicates a foreshadowing of subsequent adventure and actions[531] and establishes Lancelot's identity[532] up until the Queen names him. As Lancelot's identity is so closely linked to his cart,[533] for a significant portion of the narrative, Lancelot's true character can only be known by his deeds and words. In a certain sense, Lancelot reads as being both of the cart and opposed to the cart. He is of the cart in the sense that his

---

[527] Ribard 22.
[528] Delphie Piraprez, "Chrétien de Troyes, Allégoristes Malgré Lui? Amour et Allégorie dans *Le Roman de la Rose* et *Le Chevalier de la Charrette*" in *Conjointure Arthurienne*, ed. Juilette Dor (Louvain-La-Neuve: Université Catholique de Louvain, 2000) 93. "Le *Chevalier de la Charrette*… inciter le lecteur à s'essayer au jeu des interprétations multiples / The *Chevalier de la Charrette*... incites the reader to play the game of multiple interpretations."
[529] Bruckner, "Le Chevalier de la Charrette" 140.
[530] *The Holy Bible: New International Version* Luke 16:15b. "but God knows your hearts."
[531] Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner, "Redefining the Center: Verse and Prose *Charrette*" in *A Companion to the Lancelot-Grail Cycle*, ed. Carol Dover (Cambridge, U.K.: D. S. Brewer, 2003) 99.
[532] Shirt 298-299.
[533] Bruckner, "Redefining the Center" 101. "The episode plays a crucial role in defining Lancelot's identity"

riding in it foreshadows an act of criminal adultery.[534] However, as the narrative unfolds Lancelot demonstrates by his actions and his love how he is opposed to the cart.[535] He performs his chivalric and courtly duties honorably, in escorting and protecting women, in rescuing the captive people of Logres, in displaying his prowess as well as his mercy, in being courteous to the Queen in the face of her anger, and in obeying her wishes. Thus the negative connotations of criminality associated with the cart should not be the foundation upon which his identity is constructed.

Lancelot's willingness to surrender himself to love illustrates his obedience and his humility, and clearly marks him as opposed to the cart. Lancelot like the cart is ambiguous, alternating between virtue and criminality. Like the soul described earlier, Lancelot could be of the cart and express his own self-interested cupidity or be opposed to the cart and express his pure love. Here, both Lancelot and the cart illustrate the nebulous and constant struggle between human wants and desires and spiritual love and obedience. The fact that Lancelot chooses to obey Love exemplifies a man so deep in love that the thought of repercussions to the self[536] no longer has any sway or hold upon him, and this puts Lancelot firmly in Bernard's third degree of love.

In such a brief episode the cart crucially illustrates how Lancelot's parable can be explored on two registers. On the one hand, Lancelot is a model courtly lover, a knight willing to suffer humiliation for his love and engage in an act of adultery. On the other, Lancelot exemplifies a Christian monk through his humility and obedience to another's will. Lancelot's cart establishes his identity but also challenges the interpretations attached to his character

---

[534] Shirt 289.
[535] Emmanuèle Baumgartner, *Chrétien de Troyes: Yvain, Lancelot, la charrette et le lion* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1992) 93. "Lancelot's adventures serve to erase the shame of getting into the charrette."
[536] In this case Lancelot's reputation as an honorable knight but later also his physical wounds gained by crossing the Sword Bridge.

because of it. In the subsequent sections, Lancelot's identity as a faithful and obedient lover will be explored, establishing him as a monk in love with God.

Trials and Tribulations or Adventures in Proving One's Love

In my previous section I discussed the episode of the cart and Lancelot's hesitation. Climbing into the cart either confirms Lancelot as a criminal – he is an adulterer – which then requires a secular and thus vulgar reading of the text; or his decision to climb into the cart confirms Lancelot as a model of Christian love, humility, and obedience and thus a spiritual and ennobling reading of the romance is required. By accepting the latter, every episode which follows Lancelot's brief journey in the cart demonstrates his opposition to the criminality which the cart represents.

In this section, the subsequent episodes discussed will be grouped thematically and not necessarily chronologically. Lancelot is not really a romance that follows the idea of *ordo naturalis*[537] because like the cart and the Queen's knowledge of Lancelot's response to it, the romance retains its air of mystery, in that it elicits more questions than it answers.[538] However, by arguing that *Lancelot* is a parable of a monk's love, I attempt to explain how these episodes relate to each other thematically with each episode providing different foundations that culminate with identifying Lancelot as a monk. To that end, this section investigates some significant episodes which begins with Lancelot's ascent into the cart, build up to his "night of love" with the Queen and terminate in the tournament at Noauz. I argue that Lancelot's behavior illustrates

[537] *Ordo naturalis*: the natural order of things in which everything can be explained. It can also mean chronological order.
[538] Bruckner, "Redefining the Center" 102. "In Chrétien, information tends to generate further mystery."

the pedagogical module from the "cathedral schools" of the twelfth century[539] where the teacher models how to live and the student copies his master's model, thus facilitating the reading of Lancelot as an *imitatio Christi.*

What Makes a Great Knight Holy? Messianic Overtures and Superhuman Abilities, of course.

Frappier and Ribard describe Lancelot either as having a messianic role[540] or representing the Messiah.[541] While Lancelot does present himself sometimes as an *imago Christi* - image of Christ – in that he demonstrates some superhuman abilities, I cannot agree with reading the entire narrative as representing Lancelot as Christ. Lancelot does have faults and weaknesses (his hesitation before the cart for instance), which prohibits reading him as Christ, who was infallible and without sin. I do, however, agree with Frappier, Ribard, and Bruckner in so far as there are messianic overtones[542] linked to Lancelot by his superhuman abilities.

Lancelot is a successful knight, for he defeats the Ford knight, the Immodest Damsel's suitor, Méléagant (twice), the knight of the Stone Passage and the Orgueilleux knight. Each one of these combats displays Lancelot's skill-at-arms, and thus the reader is already disposed to view Lancelot as a skilled warrior. In fact, even before he steps into the cart at the beginning, his fierceness as a fighter is noticed by Gauvain, because Lancelot leaves nothing but wreckage

[539] C. Stephen Jaeger. *The Envy of Angels: Cathedral Schools and Social Ideals in Medieval Europe 950-1200,* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994) 15, 76 &109. Jaeger writes that courtly romance was a new type of fictional narrative became prominent in the twelfth-century and that "it provoked imitation" (15). He also states that the imitation of the teacher is most likely the most ancient form of pedagogy (76) and that in the eleventh-century it was the teacher (a personal presence) that one was supposed to imitate, however in the twelfth century the text replaces the teacher as providing the example that one was supposed to imitate (109).
[540] Frappier, *Chrétien de Troyes* 97.
[541] Ribard 15 & 22-23.
[542] Bruckner, "Redefining the Center" 104. Bruckner writes that there are "messianic overtones inscribed in Chrétien's *Charrette.*"

behind him.[543] However, Lancelot's superhuman episodes differ from his other martial adventures, as they presage Lancelot's ability to succeed in all that he undertakes. He will be the one to rescue the Queen, free the captives, and eventually defeat Méléagant. Spiritually they illustrate a man who has given himself over to love. In other words, he loves God first and because he loves God first he knows what he can do by himself and what he can do with God's help.[544] He is superhuman and can do the impossible, because he has already learned that with God all things are possible.[545]

The first episode which highlights Lancelot's superhuman abilities is the episode of the flaming lance. Shortly after his ride in the cart, Lancelot and Gauvain come to a castle and the castle folk put them up for the night.[546] Once their sleeping arrangements are made, the narrator comments upon the bed in which Lancelot chooses to rest for the night. The bed is described as being longer and higher than the others in the room and also sumptuous.[547] In other words, this is a bed fit for a king,[548] which at this point in the narrative in the eyes of all the castle folk, is a position for which Lancelot does not qualify.[549] Only Gauvain and the reader recognize Lancelot's worthiness to lay in such a bed.

At midnight a fiery lance comes hurtling down from the sky like a bolt of lightning, striking the bed next to Lancelot's leg, and setting the bed on fire.[550] Lancelot wakes briefly, just long enough to grab the lance, put out the fire, and throw it into the center of the room before

---

[543] *Lancelot* 509 verses 304-313.
[544] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God* 27.
[545] *The Holy Bible: New International Version* Matthew 19:26. "Jesus looked at them and said, 'With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.'"
[546] *Lancelot* 512-514 verses 398-460.
[547] *Lancelot* 515 verses 504-513. The bed is covered in yellow satin, has golden embroidery on it and a fur similar to mink.
[548] *Lancelot* 515 verse 510. "Bien fust a oés un roi metalbes // really worthy of a king."
[549] *Lancelot* 514 verses 482-487. "Cele respondi, pas ne panse, / Qui en ere apansee bien: / "A vos, fet ele, ne taint rien / Del demander ne de l'anquerre, / Honiz est chevaliers an terre / Puis qu'il a esté an charrete // She answered without thinking, 'cause she had it on her mind. 'It isn't for you, she said, to make the littlest request. A knight has lost all honor on earth after having been in the cart.'"
[550] *Lancelot* 515-516 verses 514-527.

falling back asleep.[551] Miraculously Lancelot only gets slightly singed on the side of his leg.[552] For Ribard and Frappier this episode provides the first proof of Lancelot's future role as a messiah,[553] especially as the flames symbolize a purification rite.[554] The lance refers perhaps to the five sacred wounds of Christ[555] or to the "lance of Longinus" which was discovered on the first crusade and was reported to be the lance that pierced Christ's side.[556] In any event, this episode provides a counter to Lancelot's humiliation of riding in the cart and illustrates Lancelot's superhuman qualities in that he is able to pick up the fiery object and toss it without burning himself. Chrétien's flaming lance foretells both Lancelot's messianic role and the wounds that he will suffer in crossing the Sword Bridge. The lance also provides a visible symbol of Lancelot's ardor.[557] The episode of the flaming lance prepares the audience to accept Lancelot as a holy man, for only someone spiritually close to God and in deeply in love with God would be able to pick up and throw such an object.

The next two episodes which contain additional messianic overtones as well as displaying Lancelot's superhuman abilities are linked with the cemetery of the future. In this cemetery Lancelot encounters his own tomb as well as all the other tombs of Arthur's knights.[558]

---

[551] *Lancelot* 516 verses 528-534.
[552] *Lancelot* 515-5166 verses 524-527.
[553] Ribard 64. Frappier, *Chrétien de Troyes* 97. Frappier writes "[t]he adventure of the cemetery (vv.1841-966) where he raises up the heavy stone lid to the tomb destined for him, reveals his messianic role, designating him as the liberator of the captives."
[554] Ribard 64.
[555] Frederick Holweck, "The Five Sacred Wounds" in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, 1912, Robert Appleton Company, New York, 2 October 2015 <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15714a.htm>. "The revival of religious life and the zealous activity of St. Bernard and St. Francis in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, together with the enthusiasm of the Crusaders returning from the Holy Land, gave a wonderful impulse to devotion to the Passion of Jesus Christ and particularly to practices in honour of the Wounds in His Sacred Hands, Feet, and Side."
[556] Richard W. Barber, *The Holy Grail: Imagination and Belief* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004) 126. The lance or spear was found in 1099 during the siege of Antioch during the first crusade. One of the leaders, Peter Bartholomew held the lance and walked through flames to test its authenticity. Bartholomew died of wounds inflicted by this trial and the lance was discredited. However, for years after there were a number of lances or spears that appeared, all claiming to be the one that pierced Christ's side (see John 19:31-37).
[557] Ribard 64. Ribard also describes the flaming lance and the resulting fire as: "feu de la luxure / fire of lust."
[558] *Lancelot* 553-555 verses 1845-1909.

Lancelot's sepulcher, made of marble, surpasses the other tombs in richness and beauty, and appears to be recently constructed.[559] Calling the hermit over, Lancelot interrogates him about the tomb.[560] The hermit replies that Lancelot will not ever see how sumptuous it really is both outside and inside because it takes seven strong men to lift its lid.[561] The hermit then proceeds to read a prophecy inscribed on the lid of the tomb which states: "Cil qui levera / Cele lanme seus par son cors / Gitera ces et celes fors / Qui sont an la terre an prison / Don n'ist ne sers ne gentix hom... / N'ancor n'es est nus retornez."[562] Upon hearing these words Lancelot steps up to the tomb and lifts the slab without any difficulties.[563] In lifting the lid of his own sepulcher, Lancelot marks himself as the one who will fulfill the prophecy by rescuing the people of Logres who are held captive in Gorre.[564]

Lancelot does fulfill the prophecy of the tomb by rescuing the captives of Logres. Shortly after Lancelot's crossing of the Sword Bridge, his first fight against Méléagant, and the agreement to a rematch between them in a year's time,[565] the narrator finally explains the custom of Gorre. The custom requires that if one person leaves all the others who had been held captive may also leave.[566] Lancelot's agreement to battle Méléagant later at Arthur's court and return the Queen there to wait for the rematch, fulfills the prophecy of the tomb and ends the captivity of the people of Logres. While Lancelot does not display any superhuman abilities in this episode, he is, however, greeted as a messiah.

---

[559] *Lancelot* 554 verses 1871-1873.
[560] *Lancelot* 554 verses 1881-1882.
[561] *Lancelot* 554 verses 1884-1888.
[562] *Lancelot* 555 verses 1900-1906. "The one who will lift this slab by himself will deliver all of those men and women who are in prison in the country from where no one leaves, neither serf nor noble. No one has ever returned from there."
[563] *Lancelot* 555 verses 1910-1914.
[564] John Bednar, *La Spiritualité et le symbolisme dans les œuvres de Chrétien de Troyes* (Paris: Librairie A. -G. Nizet, 1974) 96. Bednar sees Lancelot raising the lid of his own tomb as evocative of his role as messiah, for just as he will save the people of Logres, so too did Christ save the world.
[565] *Lancelot* 610-612 verses 3806-3898.
[566] *Lancelot* 612 verses 3899-3901. "Tel costume el païs avoit / Que puis que li uns s'an issoit, / Que tuit li autre s'an issoient. //The country had a custom. It sufficed for one to leave so that all the others could as well.

> La genz estrange asanble tote, / Qui de Lancelot font grant joie / Et dient tuit por ce qu'il oie: / "Sire, voir, molt nos esjoïsmes / Tantost con nomer vos oïsmes, / Que seür fumes a delivre / C'or serions nos tuit delivre." / A cele joie ot molt grant presse, / Que chascuns se painne et angresse / Comant il puisse a lui tochier, / Cil qui plus s'an puet aprochier / An fu plus liez que ne pot dire.
>
> The strangers all gathered, in expressing their joy to Lancelot and in proclaiming so that he could hear: 'Yes, my lord, we have been filled with joy since we heard your name, because right away we were sure that we would be delivered.' There were masses of people for these demonstrations of joy, because they all tried with impatience to try to touch him. Those who succeeded the most to be close to him did not have enough words to express their happiness.[567]

The description of Lancelot's reception by the former captives parallels how Christ himself was received by the crowds who came to hear him.[568] Everywhere Christ went crowds followed and many wished to touch him, believing that by so doing they would be healed.[569] To the masses, then Lancelot is the messiah, the one who has redeemed them, or in this case freed them, just as Christ's death frees us from sin. For Donald Maddox, Lancelot is only a "three-fold qualifying test, revealing extraordinary prowess in service to feminine honor, absolute fidelity to the Queen and a singular aptitude... to abolish the custom of Gorre"[570] which only, he, Lancelot the hero, will be able to achieve. While Maddox does acknowledge Lancelot's "extraordinary prowess" or superhuman abilities, for him there is no religious overtone to *Lancelot,* with the exception of the freeing of the captives. Otherwise, *Lancelot* only recounts a hero's ability to abolish a custom and demonstrate appropriate courtly behavior. However, taken in conjunction

---

[567] *Lancelot* 612-613 verses 3906-3918.
[568] *The Holy Bible: New International Version* Matthew 8:1 & 19:2
[569] *The Holy Bible: New International Version* Luke 9:11 &.John 6:2. Luke 6: 19 states: "and the people all tried to touch him, because power was coming from him and healing them all." Mark 5:26-34 recounts best the desire of the people to touch Jesus. Mark writes that there was a woman who suffered for twelve years with bleeding that no one could stop so "[w]hen she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, because she thought, 'If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed.' Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering." The crowd's response to Lancelot's freeing them from their captivity (ending their suffering) is similar to this lady's desire to touch Jesus' cloak.
[570] Donald Maddox, *The Arthurian Romances of Chrétien de Troyes: Once and Future Fictions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) 41.

with the prophecy in the cemetery, Lancelot's wounds in crossing the Sword Bridge,[571] his preternatural skill as a warrior, his immediate obedience to the Queen when she calls a halt to his combat against Méléagant,[572] and the celebration of his freeing the people of Logres, Lancelot portrays the actions and spiritual responses of someone who effects *imitatio Christi.*

These episodes encourage the reader to see Lancelot as not just another knight of King Arthur's court, but as a holy man and a courtly knight worthy of imitation, because Lancelot demonstrates how strong one is when one puts their trust in God and loves Him first above all others. The love of God, however, is not just demonstrated by superhuman actions. A holy man is not only defined by grand acts, but rather the time spent in prayer or contemplation, although grand acts do demonstrate God's power as well as the power that God grants to those who put Him first in their hearts. But it is in contemplation that "the mind may forget itself and… hastening towards God and clinging to him, becoming one with him in spirit."[573] Lancelot's contemplation, as the next section will explore, illustrates the soul that forgets itself in love and seeks for God.[574]

I Think About You All The Time: The Loving Knight's Experience of Contemplation

Leading a contemplative life is one of the primary characteristics of monastics. For some contemplation becomes so deep that they enter into a state of ecstasy, where their spirit becomes one with God. The following three episodes illustrate how Lancelot's behavior establishes him

[571] Lancelot cuts his hands, knees, and feet. This episode will be explore in one of the following sections.
[572] *Lancelot* 610 verses 3806-3813. "Ne puis que li darrïens moz / De la boche li fu colez, / Puis qu'ele ot dit: "Quant vos volez / Que il se taigne, jel voel bien", / Puis Lanceloz por nule rien / Nel tochast ne ne se meüst, /Se il ocirre le deüst. / Il nel toche ne ne se meut // As soon as the last word fell from her mouth, as soon as she said: 'If you wish that he stop, I wish it as well.' Not for anything in the world, would Lancelot touch or move, even if he was killed by the other. He fights not, he moves not."
[573] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God* 29.
[574] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God* 20-21.

as a holy man, an ecstatic, and a monk deeply in love with God. The first contemplative episode which displays Lancelot's ecstatic behavior is his reaction to seeing the Queen's cortege pass by under a window. Just after hearing morning mass and having passed the test of the flaming lance during the preceding night,[575] Lancelot sits next to a window and upon looking out he sees "une bele dame" passing.[576] Lancelot

> conut que c'estoit la reïne, / De l'esgarder onques ne fine / Molt antentis, et molt li plot, / Au plus longuemant que il pot. /Et quant il ne la pot veoir, / Si se vost jus lessier cheoir / Et trebuchier aval son cors, / Et ja estoit demis defors / Quant mes sire Gauvains le vit, / Sel trait arrierres.
>
> Was conscious that it was the Queen. He followed her without ceasing with his eyes, stretched out to the extreme, in the joy that was his, for the longest time as was possible. And when he could not see her, he had the desire to let himself fall, to let his body tip over into the void. He was already halfway out the window, when milord Gauvain saw him. He [Gauvain] pulled him back. [577]

Once Lancelot realizes that it is the Queen he has seen he cannot take his eyes off of her, illustrating both the fact that she is his lady and also how deep in love he is with her. His joy is extreme – just a glimpse and he is ready to launch himself out of the window in order to be with her, especially once he can no longer see her. Here is a description of a man's "soul thirsting for God." The Queen is his joy and his love. She is what he desires most in the world. Based on Lancelot's reaction to seeing her, it appears that his love for her is not something new, especially as he is willing to "trebuchier aval son cors."[578] Letting one's body float in the void is an interesting phrase as it makes one think of a saint's ecstatic experience where they are joined in a deep bond with God. This bond is not something that anyone can experience and it takes a lot of prayer or contemplation, amongst other things, to achieve it. For me the fact that Lancelot cannot keep his eyes off the Queen, experiences a deep and lasting joy at seeing her and desires

[575] *Lancelot* 516 verse 550.
[576] *Lancelot* 516 verse 559.
[577] *Lancelot* 516-517 verses 561-570.
[578] *Lancelot* 517 verse 567. let his body tip over into the void

to return to this deeply penetrating bond is the first indication that Lancelot's love for the Queen is not a vulgar secular love but rather a spiritual one. The way Chrétien writes Lancelot's experience in this episode requires the audience to view Lancelot's love for the Queen as ennobling and sublime.

The second contemplative episode which demonstrates that Lancelot has oriented his whole being towards God, occurs just before he reaches the ford. Lancelot and Gauvain have already chosen their routes[579] and Lancelot is on his way toward the Sword Bridge.[580] However, Lancelot is

> et cil de la charrete panse / Con cil qui force ne desfanse / N'a vers Amors qui le justise, / Et ses pansers est de tel guise / Que lui meïsmes en oblie, / Ne set s'il est ou s'il n'est mie / Ne ne li manbre de son non, / Ne set s'il est armez ou non, / Ne set ou va, ne set don vient, / De rien nule ne li sovient / Fors d'une seule, et por celi / A mis les autres en obli, / A cele seule panse tant / Qu'il n'ot ne voit ne rien n'antant.
>
> Lancelot is taken in his thought like a being without strength or defense to the place where Love governs. And in this thought he comes just to the point where he loses all notion of himself, he no longer knows if he is or isn't, he no longer has any knowledge of his name, he doesn't know if he is armed or not, he doesn't know where he's going, he doesn't know where he has come from, all things are erased from his memory, except one, and for this one he forgets all others. To this one only his thought is so strong that he doesn't hear or see or listen to anything. [581]

Once again Lancelot is lost in a contemplative and ecstatic moment. This time though it is not the sight of the Queen which sends him into a transport but rather just the thought of her. Ribard sees this as a clear instance of Lancelot's acting as the Redeemer Christ seeking the lost soul, which is the Queen. For me, this reads more as a man who has put all his trust in God and knows how sweet God is, and is experiencing once more that joy and sweetness. He is in Love's realm where all is delightful. Hence, Lancelot no longer knows who or where he is. His only concern is to be with the one he loves above all others even above himself. His

[579] *Lancelot* 520 verses 685-695.
[580] *Lancelot* 521 verse 710.
[581] *Lancelot* 521 verses 711-724.

contemplativeness is so deep that he ignores twice the challenges issued by the Ford Knight[582] and it is not until he has been unhorsed and in the water that he recalls himself.[583]

Lancelot's transport to the realm of Love is so deep that he "[n]e ne set s'il est ou s'il n'est mie." This is a key phrase. Lancelot almost loses all notion of himself – but not completely. This illustrates one of the key features of Bernard's concept of loving God; true union cannot occur in this lifetime and in true union the sense of self is not entirely lost. Lancelot's profound contemplation illustrates Bernard's concept of living union. This is the closest man can hope to experience God in this lifetime. For Bernard, true union occurs after death, but he was not opposed to moments of ecstasy in which one could experience what true union would be like in the afterlife.

Noble sees both of these episodes as being a way for Chrétien to deride his hero.[584] While Lancelot does seem to be slightly ridiculous in both these and other episodes, there is still a deeper meaning contained herein which is not something to be ridiculed or trivialized. What others see as Lancelot's silliness or as craziness, such as getting into a pillory - tumbril cart and being exposed to public ridicule, for me demonstrates the madness of pure love which makes one do strange things. Whether the object of one's love is present or absent, a man rooted in pure love keeps his eyes and heart focused on that object; everything and everyone else simply fades into the background. Lancelot's "craziness" illustrates the all-consuming nature of love which Bernard espouses and discusses in *On Loving God*.

---

[582] *Lancelot* 521 verse 744 & 522 verse 753
[583] *Lancelot* 522 verses 765-770.
[584] Noble 76. "As already indicated Chrétien more than once seems to mock Lancelot. On several occasions he is made to seem a figure of fun." Fanni Bogdanow, "The Love Theme in Chrétien de Troyes's 'Chevalier de la Charrette'" in *The Modern Language Review* 67.1 (1972) 53. Bogdanow sees Chrétien as "laughing at Lancelot for placing his love above his chivalric honor, but he is not blaming him."

The final episode of rapt contemplation that Lancelot performs is when he finds the Queen's comb lying next to a fountain, followed by the discovery of her golden hair trapped in its tines.[585] Lancelot's first remark is that it is a fine comb[586] and when the young maid he is escorting asks him to make a gift of it to her,[587] he agrees,[588] not knowing to whom the comb belongs. However, one he has it in his hands and sees the golden hair trapped in its tines, he hesitates in handing it over to the maid. In fact, Lancelot "[q]uant il let tint, molt longuemant / L'esgarder et les chevox remire."[589] Lancelot's hesitation here is not like his hesitation before the cart. Here there is no choice between obeying or disobeying, however one is reminded of the contest of wills between the divine and the secular. Lancelot's hesitation and fascination with the comb indicates that there is something unusual, special, or different about this comb and the hair caught in it. Lancelot is so fascinated with the comb that one could view it as a sacrament – something regarded as possessing a sacred character or mysterious significance, a sign, a token, or a symbol.[590] It certainly possesses a mysterious significance and has a profound hold on him as he does not immediately hand it over to the maiden.

As Lancelot hesitates with the comb in his hand, the maid eventually informs him, that the comb belongs to the Queen.[591] With this discovery a physical change comes over Lancelot: "[q]uant cil l'ot, n'a tant de vertu / Que tot nel coveigne ploier, / Par force l'estut apoier / Davant a

[585] *Lancelot* 540-543 verses 1384-1494.
[586] *Lancelot* 540 verses 1386-1388.
[587] *Lancelot* 540 verse 1389.
[588] *Lancelot* 540 verse 1390.
[589] *Lancelot* 540 verses 1392-1394. "He held them a long while starting at and examining them."
[590] A sacrament can also be defined ecclesiastically as a visible sign of an inward grace. So it is an object whose presence in the human sphere is meant to direct one's attention to the spiritual sphere. Emero Stiegman, "Afterward," in *On Loving God* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, Inc., 1995) 138. "the sacraments are elementary and earthly means of moving to divine union." Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness* (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, INC., 1940) 364. "St. Francis of Assissi became entranced whilst gazing on the crucifix." Thus a comb could produce the same effect.
[591] *Lancelot* 540 verses 1411-1412 & 541 verses 1422-1424.

l'arçon de la sele."[592] Lancelot's physical reaction is such that the maiden believes that he has fainted and is about to fall off his horse.[593] Lancelot's faint is a physical manifestation of a contemplation so profound that "[q]u'il avoit au cuer tel dolor / Que la parole et la color / Ot une grant piece perdue."[594] Describing some of the physical aspects of the ecstatic state, Evelyn Underhill writes:

> Physically considered, ecstasy is a trance; more or less deep, more or less prolonged. The subject may slide into it gradually from a period of absorption in, or contemplation of, some idea which has filled the field of consciousness; or, it may come on suddenly, the appearance of the idea – or even some word or symbol suggesting the idea – abruptly throwing the subject into an entranced condition… During the trance, breathing and circulation are depressed. The body is more or less cold and rigid.[595]

Lancelot's immediate rigidity and the sudden loss of his speech and color demonstrate that he is having an ecstatic, contemplative moment brought on by the mention of the Queen's comb and hair. However, it is the "douleur au fond de soi" which connotes to me the soul searing ache of love. This is a man who in the depths of his soul desires nothing more than to be with his Beloved and because he physically cannot, he attempts to commune with the Beloved in the spiritual realm.

Even though this moment lasts but an instant (Lancelot recovers quickly when he spies the maiden coming towards him ready to help him),[596] it prepares one for the veneration and treatment of the Queen's hair as a holy relic[597] which follows. However, before he venerates the

---

[592] *Lancelot* 541 verses 1424-1427. "at these words his body bent over, taken by a sudden weakness. He was forced to grab on to the pommel of his saddle."
[593] *Lancelot* 541 verse 1430 & 1432. "Qu'ele cuida que il cheïst // That she believed he would fall." & "Qu'ele cuida qu'il fust pasmez // That she believed he had fainted."
[594] *Lancelot* 541 verses 1435-1437. "he felt such an ache in the depths of himself (his soul) that he lost all speech and all color for a while."
[595] Underhill, *Mysticicm* 359.
[596] *Lancelot* 541 verse 1443.
[597] Frappier, *Chrétien de Troyes* 97. "he nearly swoons as he beholds some golden tresses caught in the teeth of a comb Guenièvre had left beside a fountain, *relics* he keeps" (italics mine for emphasis).

hair as a relic, he has a brief instance of shame.[598] He is ashamed because he lost control and visibly showed his love for the Queen, something a courtly knight is not supposed to do. Lancelot's shame is not because he loves but because he displayed it publicly, breaking the tenet of courtly love which requires secretiveness. While this might seem to be a critique of Lancelot as a perfect courtly lover, to me, this displays Lancelot's humanity. He is not in this moment super human as Frappier describes him,[599] he is human, and he made a mistake. In this instance, Lancelot is easier to connect with because of his moment of weakness. Even though he demonstrates ecstatic abilities just like a holy man, this moment of shame renders him human and thus provides a humanistic and relatable role-model.

The maid, not wishing to cause Lancelot shame or destroy his *amour propre,* pretends she was going after the comb,[600] thus restoring, his image a courtly love and knight. Respecting the maiden's wish, Lancelot hands her the comb,[601] but not before delicately removing the hairs without breaking any of them.[602] Once the hairs are removed, Lancelot then treats them as if they were a holy relic, for the narrator states:

> Ja mes oel d'ome ne verront / Nule chose tant enorer, / Qu'il les comance a aorer, / Et bien .C.M.. foiz les toche / Et a ses ialz et a sa boche / Et a son front et a sa face, / N'est joie nule qu'il n'an face, / Molt s'an fet liez, molt s'an fet riche, / An son saing pres del cuer les fiche / Entre sa chemise et sa char. / D'esmeraudes ne d'escharboncles, / Ne cuidoit mie que reoncles / Ne autres maz ja mes le praigne, / Diamargareton desdaigner / Et pleüriche et tiriasques, / Neïs saint Martin et saint Jasque, / Car an ces chevox tant se fie / Qu'il n'a mestier de lor aïe. / Mes quel estoient li chevol? / Et por mançongier et por fol / M'an tanra l'en
>
> Never has anything received such honor, because he vowed them *an adoration* (italics mine for emphasis). One thousand times he brings them up to his eyes, to his mouth, to his forehead and to his face! He receives all his joy from them, in them is his happiness and his treasure! He holds them to his chest, near his heart, between his shirt and his

[598] *Lancelot* 541 verse 1443.
[599] Frappier, *Chrétien de Troyes* 107.
[600] *Lancelot* 541 verses 1446-1456.
[601] *Lancelot* 542 verse 1457.
[602] *Lancelot* 542 verses 1458-1459.

> skin. He does not want to give them up for an entire cart full of emeralds or carbuncles. He judged himself safe from any future ulcers or harm. Look at him distaining the powder of pearls, the devil, and poison remedies and the saints Martin and Jacob. He no longer needs their help, such is the power of the hair. Do these hairs then have a special quality? If I told you the truth I'd be called a liar or a fool[603]

For Lancelot the Queen's hairs have become an object of veneration. His bringing them up to his face so he can see them, kiss them, and think about them before placing them next to his skin over his heart, illustrating the depth of his adoration. The Queen's hair is such a powerful object for him that Lancelot will no longer worry about his health even if he is poisoned, for the hair will protect him. He no longer needs to call on the saints to intercede for him because he has the ultimate holy talisman, a direct link with the divine. Lancelot's veneration and adoration of the Queen's hair is the first indication that he sees her as something more than human. She is not just the "dame plus haute" that he should love as a perfect courtly knight and love is supposed to, but instead as God above whom he loves before himself. This treatment of the Queen's hair as a holy relic openly recognizes the symbolic representation of the Queen as God and one worthy to be praised.

This final episode of contemplation accomplishes two things. First, it confirms Lancelot as a "man of God." Lancelot's contemplative acts illustrate how engrossing pure love can be. Each time Lancelot enters into contemplation he illustrates the "life of the monk, for he is concerned not simply with serving God but with adhering to God."[604] In other words, Lancelot belongs to God whole heartedly and with his whole being and there is no room left in his soul for anything else[605] than the joy and love he feels. Even though his obedience in climbing into the cart would have indicated his status as a "man of God," it is in the display of his contemplation and his first overt display of adoration that secures his identity as a monk. Second, it overtly

[603] *Lancelot* 542 verses 1460-1481.
[604] Gilson 67.
[605] Gilson 111. "In her [the soul] is no place anymore for anything less than love."

establishes the Queen as a symbol of the divine, which becomes important later in the narrative. These two reasons explain perhaps the narrator's remark when he states, "[s]i j'en dis la vérité, on me tiendra pour un menteur et pour un fou." The narrator is referencing Matthew 11:15 which states: "Whoever has ears, let them hear."[606] In other words, only some will understand and comprehend the spiritual meaning behind Lancelot's actions of quiet contemplation, veneration, and adoration.

My Body Sings of Love

Lancelot's superhuman abilities, messianic overtones, and ecstatic periods of contemplation identify him as a holy man and reveal his love. Along with his adoration and veneration of the Queen's comb and hair, there are two small episodes and one significant episode in which his loving adoration for the Queen is exhibited. All of these episodes are unusual because Lancelot's love is not illustrated by his words or actions, but rather through his body. In other words, love is inscribed on his body as well as his soul.

While he is staying at the castle of the Immodest Damsel, just after rescuing her from her staged attack, Lancelot, who had earlier grudgingly agreed to sleep in the same bed as her,[607] reluctantly agrees to uphold his promise.[608] However, his body language connotes both the depth of his disdain for the situation in which he finds himself and the depth of his feelings for the Queen. Lancelot's entire body speaks of his love for he sweats with "angoisse" because he must lie down with the Damsel.[609] Once he is stretched out beside her still clothed,[610] he takes care

[606] *The Holy Bible: New International Version.*
[607] *Lancelot* 527 verses 956-960.
[608] *Lancelot* 530 verses 1048-1049.
[609] *Lancelot* 535 verses 1204-1206. "D'angoisse le covint suer // He couldn't avoid a sweat of anguish."

not to touch her[611] and "[n']onques ne torne son esgart / Ne devers li ne d'autre part, / Bel sanblant feire ne li puet."[612] Lancelot's body language speaks to the Immodest Damsel for eventually she realizes that Lancelot is not going to do anything more than lie quietly beside her.[613] Lancelot physically cannot give her what she wants because as the narrator notes, "li chevaliers n'a cuer que un / Et cil n'est mie ancore a lui, / Einz est comandez a auturi / Si qu'il nel puet aillors prester / Tot le fet an un leu ester."[614] Through Lancelot's sweat, rigid body, and fixed sight, he communicates his lack of enthusiasm for lying with the Immodest Damsel. His body's language shouts that he loves another.

During his combat with Méléagant, Lancelot's body speaks of his love for the second time. Just after Lancelot is named by the Queen,[615] her handmaiden calls out to him to see who is watching.[616] Upon hearing her, Lancelot turns and sees the Queen,[617] and from that moment "[n]e puis l'ore qu'il s'aparçut / ne se torna ne ne se mut / Devers li ses ialz ne sa chiere, / Einz se desfandoit par derriere."[618] This is rather a comical situation in which Lancelot waves his sword behind his back to parry Méléagant's blows[619] until he finally turns Méléagant around[620] so that the Queen is kept in Lancelot's view. [621] He cannot take his eyes off her because he does not

---

[610] *Lancelot* 535 verse 1214. "Mes sa chemise pas ne tret // but he doesn't take off his shirt either."
[611] *Lancelot* 535 verses 1216-1217. "De tochier a li molt se gueite, / Einz s'an esloingne et gist anvers // He took care not to touch her, he preferred to distance himself from her, lying on his back."
[612] *Lancelot* 535 verses 1221-1223. "He stares ahead, without turning his eyes towards her or anywhere else. He is incapable of giving her any part of his face."
[613] *Lancelot* 536 verses 1243-1247 & 1264-1267.
[614] *Lancelot* 535 verses 1228-1232. "The knight only has one heart and it is not his, he has already given it to another; he cannot lend it to another. His [heart] is already entirely fixed on one place."
[615] *Lancelot* 605 verse 3660.
[616] *Lancelot* 606 verses 3666-3668.
[617] *Lancelot* 606 verses 3671-3674.
[618] *Lancelot* 606 verses 3675-3678. "He perceived her, he stopped without turning his eyes nor his face from her. He would rather defend himself from behind!"
[619] *Lancelot* 606 verses 3701-3702.
[620] *Lancelot* 606 verses 3712-3713.
[621] Noble 70 &76. "For a few moments the audience are treated to the spectacle of Lancelot waving his sword about behind his back to keep off the attacks of such a skilful and dangerous knight as Méléagant, while keeping his eyes fixed on the Queen (70). Again his behavior in his fight with Méléagant is comic, as is the idea that a great knight should need instruction on how to win his fights from one of the Queen's maidens (76)."

want to lose sight of "[l]a chose de trestot le mont / Que plus desirroit a veoir."[622] Such is his desire not to lose sight of the Queen that he has to be reminded by her handmaiden to turn Méléagant around so that he can fight and watch the Queen. For Noble, this displays Chrétien's mockery of Lancelot.[623] However, for me this demonstrates the all-consuming nature of his love. Lancelot is so absorbed in looking at his love that combat fades into the background. However, once he turns Méléagant to keep the Queen in sight, she becomes Lancelot's focal point and inspires his "grande ardeur contre Méléagant."[624] Lancelot's inability to take his eyes off the Queen illustrates how man is to keep God in his heart[625] and by so doing man experiences joy and is secure in the knowledge that anything is achievable.[626]

The last instance where Lancelot's body speaks loudly of love is when he crosses the Sword Bridge. There are two ways to view this episode; one which confirms for some scholars Lancelot's messianic role because his body displays the wounds of Christ, and the other which illustrates the lengths to which Lancelot will go to rescue the Queen. Both interpretations, however, allow Lancelot's body to speak of his love and obedience.

The narrator describes Lancelot's behavior prior to crossing the bridge as "estrange mervoille."[627] What is strange about Lancelot's crossing is that he "[q]ue ses piez desarme et ses mains,"[628] so he will cross this razor sharp bridge with no protection on his hands or feet. What

---

[622] *Lancelot* 606 verses 3672-3673. "The one who out of all the world he had the greatest desire to see." Frappier, *Chrétien de Troyes* 97. Frappier states that Lancelot is fighting in an ecstatic state because he "fights with his back turned to his adversary so as not to lose sight of his idol."
[623] Noble 76.
[624] *Lancelot* 608 verses 3750-3753.
[625] *The Holy Bible: New International Version* Psalm 16:8 & Hebrews 12:1b-2a. Psalm 16:8 states: "I keep my eyes always on the Lord. With him at my right hand, I will not be shaken." Hebrews states: "And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith." Both Bible passages remind us to keep God in our sight or in our hearts. In Psalms the one who does this will find his strength comes from God. The Hebrews passage parallels Lancelot's story, who kept the Queen as his goal, thus she was his inspiration and by keeping her in mind, Lancelot found the strength to persevere in his quest to rescue her.
[626] See Bernard of Clairvaux's First and Second Degrees of Love.
[627] *Lancelot* 589 verse 3096. "strange and marvelous"
[628] *Lancelot* 589 verse 3097. "disarmed his feet and hands." In other words, he took off all his armor.

is not clear at this point is where the "mervoille" of this crossing comes in, however this will be resolved a few lines later. Lancelot

> [d]e ce gueres ne s'esmaioit / S'es mains et es piez se plaioit, / Mialz se voloit si mahaignier / Que cheoir [d]el point et baignier / An l'eve don ja mes n'issist. / A la grant dolor con li sist / S'an passe outre et a grant destrece, / Mains et genolz et piez se blece, / Mes tot le rasoage et sainne / Amors qui le conduist et mainne, / Si li estoit a sofrir dolz / A mains, a piez et a genolz / Fet tant que de l'autre part vient.
>
> hardly worried about slashing his hands and feet, *he liked better to mutilate himself* than to fall from the bridge and swim in the water from where he would never escape. *With great suffering*, he passed into the beyond as he wanted to, in torment. He wounded his hands, knees, and feet but Love who all along leads him pours out a balm and completely heals him. *For him it was pleasurable to suffer*. With the help of his hands, feet, and knees, he reaches at last the other side.[629]

Newman points out that it is not hard to notice how Lancelot's bleeding hands and feet mirror the wounds of the holy men and women who suffer from stigmata.[630] This is perhaps the "merveilleuse" to which the narrator earlier referred, although it may also be the healing balm which Love provides. In either case, what is key is that Lancelot's body suffers demonstrating his love. Casey states:

> [t]he pain is merely the suffering induced by the agony of neutralizing the effects of sin and selfishness and of cutting off former sources of gratification. Such a process would never be initiated unless its necessary toil and grief were compensated for by a hope for expectation of a felicitous outcome. Who would willing embrace such suffering unless there were a reasonable assurance that it would be worthwhile? Thus Bernard noted that it is only when one is already touched by love that it is possible to bear such pain, and even to seek it out.[631]

Lancelot's complete disregard for his own personal safety demonstrates his willingness to suffer because he truly believes that he will be rewarded by the Queen. There is absolutely no hesitation here in crossing the bridge, like there was with the cart. Lancelot seems to willingly

---

[629] *Lancelot* 589-590 verses 3105-3117. (italics mine for emphasis)
[630] Newman 60. "No attentive listener could have missed this allusion to the stigmata." According to the *Catholic Encyclopedia* (Augustin Poulain, "Mystical Stigmata,"in *The Catholic Encyclopedia,* Vol. 14 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1912) <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14294b.htm>. St. Francis of Assisi is the first recorded stigmata in the thirteen century. This does not mean that there were not others before him, just that his is the first one documented, so if there were they are undocumented and thus unknown.
[631] Casey 127.

seek out the suffering he will endure in the crossing. Lancelot's body, willingly suffering the cuts and slashes, sings of his obedience and faith in God and thus his bleeding wounds, like the holy stigmatics who are "already touched by love," illustrates the profoundness of his love though the bearing of pain.

Through Lancelot's suffering he demonstrates his service to the Queen. She is his lady and thus he suffers because he cannot be with her. Except for the brief moments where Lancelot sees the Queen, he exemplifies the "absent" part of Bernard's dialectic of desire. Lancelot epitomizes the role of the absent lover who when not in the presence of his lady suffers because he is not with her, but who lives in a state of continual hope that he will be rewarded, which eventually will occur. However, his body's suffering at this point illustrates how "[t]he needs of the flesh are a kind of speech, proclaiming in transports of joy the good things experienced."[632] Lancelot's wounds then should be considered a joy[633] as they proclaim love a good thing worth suffering for to the point of mutilation.

Lancelot strives throughout every adventure, action, and deed to be deemed worthy of the Queen's love. Every adventure which requires a demonstration of his martial skill, even the interrupted ones with Méléagant, proves his worthiness as a courtly knight and lover.[634] Lancelot's obedience and humility to "Love's wishes" as well as his whole body's orientation towards the Queen demonstrates his love for her. More importantly however, the way Lancelot's

---

[632] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God 28.*

[633] Moshé Lazar. *L'Amour courtois et Fin'amor* (Paris: Librairie C. Klincksieck, 1964) 110 &116. "La joie ne fleurit que dans la présence réciproque de deux cœurs purs, dans l'union de deux êtres parfaitement courtois. Fille de la *fin'amors* cette joie est spirituelle, durable, parfaite. À côté d'elle existe aussi une autre joie, sensuelle, éphémère, avilissante. L'une élève l'homme et accroît sa vertu, l'autre le conduit à la déchéance. / Joy only florishes in the reciprocal presence of two pure hearts, in the union of two perfectly courteous beings. Daughter of *fin'amors* this joy is spiritual, durable, perfect. Next to it exists also another joy, sensual, ephemeral, degrading. One raises man and increases his virtue, the other drives him into degeneration (110)." Lancelot's wounds then suffered because of his love correspond to the spiritually elevating type of joy. Lazar finishes by stating that "joie signifie la cime de la *fin'amors* / joy signifies the height of *fin'amors*"(116).

[634] Twice Lancelot shows his generosity in staying his hand and granting mercy to defeated knights, even with Orgeuilleux he tries to do right by both maidens by granting both requests, one for mercy and the other for the knight's head.

body speaks of his love illustrates the all-consuming nature of spiritual love. Lancelot illustrates a man so spiritually absorbed with his beloved that his body trumpets his love.

Taken all together, Lancelot's contemplation, his body's language, and his superhuman abilities illustrate how "like the Christian before God, the lover must never cease being worthy of his lady, must live in dread of sinning, in a spirit of contrition; he suffers patiently every affliction, as humble as a believer, ready to endure all for his faith. His offering must be completely free of hesitation or regret."[635] Lancelot, as both a courtly lover and as a monk, endures suffering, believes that his efforts will be rewarded, accepts humbly his role of superhuman rescuer, and after his slight hesitation with the cart, does not hesitate from that point on to obey the Queen's every command.[636] Lancelot's superhuman achievements and bodily suffering balance his all-absorbing moments of ecstasy, delineating him as a holy man who, like a courtly lover, is worthy of reward.

After All I've Done I Need A Night of Love

Aside from the cart, the next most discussed and critiqued episode is Lancelot's and Guenièvre's night of love. However, prior to exploring this complex and significant episode it is necessary to briefly recount how Lancelot merits this rewarding night with the Queen. Obviously Lancelot's superhuman abilities, his engrossing contemplation, his whole body's orientation to the Queen, and his skill-at-arms, render Lancelot worthy of the Queen's love. But,

[635] Frappier, *Chrétien de Troyes* 107.
[636] *Lancelot* 609 verse 3794 & 610 verses 3810-3817. The Queen tells Bademagu that if he wants Lancelot to stop fighting then she wishes that as well. Lancelot upon hearing the Queen's words immediately stops fighting and does not move to defend himself even though Méléagant is still striking him. This is the first time that Lancelot demonstrates his obedience to the Queen's word. From this point on when the Queen speaks, Lancelot hears and then acts upon her words.

his worthiness is questioned by his hesitation before the cart. Because of his hesitation Lancelot must endure a brief interview with the Queen followed by a period of despair before returning to her presence for a second brief interview and then finally gaining his reward. As the two interviews and the brief period of despair are linked together and prepare Lancelot for his reward, I explore those three events briefly before discussing the oft-critiqued episode of their night of love.

When Lancelot first meets the Queen after crossing the Sword Bridge and battling Méléagant to a draw, the Queen reacts to Lancelot's presence before her with anger.[637] She does not want to even see Lancelot[638] and Bademagu is confused by the coldness of her reception of Lancelot.[639] In his eyes Lancelot merits her attention and a reward, for he is a worthy knight, and because he obeyed her commands.[640] However, Lancelot, ever the courteous knight, and with humility, accepts her judgment with the following words, "Dame, certes, ce poise moi, / Ne je n'os demander por coi."[641] He is saddened, but recognizes that he does not have the right to ask her to explain herself. He accepts the fact that he is not worthy in her eyes and when she

[637] *Lancelot* 613 verses 3937-3941. "Quant la reïne voit le roi / Qui tient Lancelot par le doi, / Si s'est contre le roi dreciee / Et fet sanblant de correciee, / Si s'anbruncha et ne dist mot. // When the Queen saw the King bringing Lancelot by the hand for a meeting, she stood up showing an angered face, she lowered her head without saying a word."
[638] *Lancelot* 613-614 verses 3945-3946. "Moi, sire? Moi ne puet il plaire, / De son veoir n'ai ge que faire. // To see me? No, he cannot, I want nothing to do with him."
[639] *Lancelot* 614 verses 3947-3953. "Avoi! Dame, ce dit li rois, / Qui molt estoit frans et cortois, / Ou avez vos or cest cuer pris? / Certes vos avez or trop mespris / D'ome qui tant vos a servie / Qu'an cest oirre a sovant sa vie / Por vos mise an mortel peril // Don't say that madame! said the king, who was a generous and courteous man, From where does such a terrible feeling come? It is in bad taste, truthfully, especially against someone who has served you well, who has often put his life in mortal peril during this journey to rescue you."
[640] *Lancelot* 615 verses 3986-3989. Bademagu says that the Queen shouldn't refuse an interview with Lancelot especially after all he has done for her today. Bademagu is referencing Lancelot's immediate halt to fighting against his son which spares his son, his agreement to a rematch later, and his freeing the captives.
[641] *Lancelot* 614 verses 3960-3964. "Madame, do not doubt it I am sad but I dare not ask you the reason for it."

leaves, he lets his body speak for him of both his sadness and his hope that he will eventually merit a reward.[642]

Shortly thereafter Lancelot leaves to search for Gauvain and is captured.[643] Rumors reach the Queen stating that Lancelot is dead[644] which results in her briefly contemplating suicide.[645] Eventually she decides against it.[646] However, Lancelot has heard rumors that the Queen is dead[647] and he attempts to hang himself from his saddle.[648] Luckily he is rescued by the men accompanying him who believe he has fainted.[649] Lancelot's attempted suicide reveals the link between his climbing into the cart and the Queen's cold reception,[650] as well as his belief that he was following Love's commands and should be forgiven for mounting the cart.[651] Noble sees Lancelot's failed suicide as both a comical situation, which it is not, but also divulgatory of the depths of his love.[652] It is a very melodramatic situation and demonstrates how emotionally distraught Lancelot has become at the thought that he will never again see his beloved. What is significant about both Lancelot and the Queen's contemplation of suicide is the illustration of the trauma incurred by separation[653] and the depths of despair one falls into when one is separated from the Beloved.

---

[642] *Lancelot* 614 verses 3965-3980. Lancelot's eyes and heart follow her as she withdraws to another room close by and Lancelot's heart followed her into the room. However, his tear filled eyes and his body had to remain on the outside.
[643] *Lancelot* 617-619 verses 4078-4139.
[644] *Lancelot* 619 verses 4140-4142.
[645] *Lancelot* 619-620 verses 4157-4183.
[646] *Lancelot* 620-622 verses 4184-4244.
[647] *Lancelot* 622 verses 4245-4254.
[648] *Lancelot* 622-623 verses 4254-4294.
[649] *Lancelot* 623 verses 4295-4297.
[650] *Lancelot* 625 verses 4348-4349. "Bien cuit que espoir ele sot / Que je montai sor la charrete. // Maybe, I believe it to be so, she learned that I climbed into the cart."
[651] *Lancelot* 626 verses 4368-4396.
[652] Noble 71.
[653] Lazar 62. "La séparation rend plus intense le désir amoureux et l'élève. / Separation intensifies desire and elevates it."

Lancelot's failed suicide does achieve a positive result: it earns him a second interview with the Queen. No longer does the Queen display anger at seeing him; quite the contrary, she "[e]inz l'ala lieemant requerre."[654] In this second interview, Lancelot finds the courage to ask the Queen for the reason of her earlier behavior towards him.[655] Believing that he has committed some crime against her he boldly asks: "Dame, or sui prez de l'amander, / Mes que le forfet dit m'aiez / Dom j'ai esté molt esmaiez."[656] The Queen's reply harkens back to the start of Lancelot's rescue pursuit, for she informs him that her anger was due to the fact that he waited "l'espace de deux pas"[657] before ascending into the cart. Lancelot is completely shocked that it is his hesitation that earned him her distain,[658] not the fact that he rode in the cart. Lancelot then asks the Queen to forgive him,[659] which she does willingly[660] and Lancelot, thus encouraged, asks for "un peu plus."[661] Like Lancelot, man suffers too from the same type of distance relationship with God wherein, according to St. Paul,[662] he hopes that his service of devotion and obedience will be rewarded, by gaining entrance into heaven and the divine presence.

At the end of this meeting between Lancelot asks, "Volantiers a vos parleroie / Plus a leisir, s'il pooit estre."[663] Lancelot is asking for his reward. Lazar writes that suffering is

---

[654] *Lancelot* 628 verse 4462. "was happy to meet him."
[655] *Lancelot* 628-629 verses 4469-4473. "Et quant Lanceloz voit son eise, / Qu'il ne dit rien que molt ne pleise / La reïne, lors a consoil // When Lancelot saw an opening and that nothing he was saying was unpleasant to the queen, then he added"
[656] *Lancelot* 629 verses 4480-4482. "Madame, I am ready to repair if you tell me of the crime which has caused me so many torments."
[657] *Lancelot* 629 verse 4487. "Quant vos demorastes .II. pas. // when you waited for two whole steps!"
[658] *Lancelot* 629 verses 4490-4492. "Autre foiz me doint Dex garder, / Fet Lanceloz, de tel mesfet // God forbid I commit another error such as that, said Lancelot." Alternatively this can be translated as "God keep me from committing another sin such as that.
[659] *Lancelot* 629 verses 4494-4497.
[660] *Lancelot* 629 verses 4498-4500.
[661] *Lancelot* 629 verses 4501-4505. "a little more" (Lazar 30).
[662] *The Holy Bible: New International Version* 2 Philippians 1:1-19.
[663] *Lancelot* 629 verses 4504-4505. "I would wish for another interview a bit more free (leisurely and/or intimate), if possible."

necessary because it prepares the lover to receive the reward.[664] All Lancelot's prior adventures and sufferings have lead him to this point where he merits his "little more." Lancelot hopes for and is granted another, more private interview with the Queen.[665] Following the tenets of courtly love the Queen determines Lancelot's reward.[666] He can speak with her or hold her hand through the window but he cannot risk being seen or even enter the room because Keu is there recuperating from his wounds.[667] Lancelot is so excited that the Queen granted his request that he completely forgets how much he has suffered to reach her.[668]

At last Lancelot has reached his goal, the reward of a night time *rendez-vous* with his lady. All his physical suffering at the Sword Bridge, his humiliation in being transported by the cart, the moments of ecstasy and displays of his superhuman abilities, his messianic role and his body's language culminate in this rewarding encounter. Because this encounter is so important, I have truncated it into what I consider to be the most significant verses.

> Quant Lanceloz voit la reïne… / D'un dolz salu l'a enerree, / Et ele un autre tost li rant, / *Que molt estoient desirrant* / *Il de li et elle de lui*… / Li uns pres de l'autre se tret / Et andui main a main se tienent. / *De ce que ansanble ne vienen*t / *Lor poise molt a desmesure*, / Qu'il an blasment la ferreüre… / Ja ne cuit que fers rien i vaille, / Rien fors vos ne me puet tenir / Que bien ne puisse a vos venir. / Se vostre congiez le m'otroie, / Tote m'est delivre la voie… / As fers se prant et sache et tire… / Mes si estoit tranchanz li fers / Que del doi mame jusqu'as ners… / Et del sanc qui jus an degote / Ne des plaies nule ne sant / Cil qui a autre chose antant… / Neporquant Lanceloz i passe… / Et puis vint au lit la reïne, / Si l'aore et se li ancline, / Car an nul cors saint ne croit tant, / Et la reïne li estant / Ses braz ancontre, si l'anbrace, / Estroit pres de son piz le lace, / *Si l'a les li an son lit tret* / *Et le plus bel sanblant li fet* / *Que ele onques feire li puet*… / *Or a Lancelotz quanqu'il vialt*… / Tant li est ses jeus dolz et buens / Et del beisier et del santir / *Que il lor avint sanz mantir* / *Une joie et une mervoille* / *Tel c'onques ancor sa paroille* / *Ne fu oïe ne seüe,* / *Mes toz jorz iert par moi teüe,* / *Qu'an conte ne doit estre dite*. / *Des joies fu la plus eslite* / *Et la plus delitable cele* / *Que li contes nos test et cele*… / Me li jorz vient, qui molt li grieve…/ Au lever fu il droiz martirs, / Tant li fu gries li departirs, /

[664] Lazar 62.
[665] Chrétien de Troyes, *Lancelot* 629 verses 4506 -4509.
[666] Lazar 30. The courtly lady decides if her lover merits being rewarded and what type of reward he deserves, sexual or not.
[667] Chrétien de Troyes, *Lancelot* 629 verses 4512-4527.
[668] Chrétien de Troyes, *Lancelot* 630 verses 4533-4555.

> Car il i suefre grant martire. / Ses cuers adés cele part tire / Ou la reïne se remaint, / N'a pooir que il l'an remaint, / Que la reïne tant li plest… / Li cors s'an vet, li cuers sejorne… / Au departir a soploié / A la chanbre et fet tot autel / Con s'il fust devant un autel, / Puis s'an part a molt grant angoisse
>
> When Lancelot sees the queen… he greets her so sweetly that she hastened to greet him back likewise, because *the same desire called him to her and her to him*… they got closer to each other and held hands. But *they suffered to the extreme at not being able to be together*, cursing the iron bars… 'I don't believe that this bar is a great obstacle, nothing except you alone could prevent me from reaching you. If you but authorize it, the way before me will be cleared.'… He attacked the bars… but the iron was so strong that he cut his little finger… But his spirit is elsewhere and he doesn't feel the blood that he is losing nor any other wound… Lancelot however passes within… then advances to the queen's bed. Before her he bows and adores her, because he no longer believers in any other holy relic but her, but the queen stretches out her arms to him, twines them about him, and holds him to her chest, *she draws him to her in her bed and gives him the most beautiful reception ever… Lancelot sees at this moment all his wishes are coming true…* in the kisses and talks he finds such sweet happiness that, without lying, *there came to them such a marvelous joy that no one has ever seen the like. But I will keep quiet about it, because its place is not in the story! This joy of which the story is quiet, of all others, was the most perfect and also the most delicious*… But day comes and with it sadness… He knows the experience of true martyrs, so painful was their separation. Yes, he endures martyrdom. His heart goes back without end to the place where the queen is and he does not have the power to withhold it, because it is so pleasant to be with the queen… The body may leave but the heart stays… In leaving he prostrated himself before the room, acting as if he was before an altar, then he left filled with anguish.[669]

As Newman argues, the language in this passage is indeed "double coded."[670] It is both "sublime and idolatrous; sublime and adulterous."[671] It is the vulgar recital of an act of adultery and sexual intercourse, and it is an ennobling ecstatic account of spiritual love and union. The moment when the Queen draws Lancelot to her bed is a prime example of this double coding. The Queen gives him a welcome reception ("Et le plus bel sanblant li fet / Que ele onques feire li puet") before they both experience "une joie et une mervoille." If one is reading this in a secular sense it confirms their sexual adultery. However it can also be construed as a moment of

---

[669] *Lancelot* 632-635 verses 4583-4719. (italics mine for emphasis)
[670] Newman X. "double coding: the propensity of certain texts to enable both sacred and secular readings."
[671] Newman 65. Claude Lachet, *Dieu, Amour, et Chevalerie* (Lyon: APRIME Éditions, 2008) 223. Lachet writes, "[l']union physique couronne l'harmonie des cœurs et confère à *la fine amor* une double dimension, charnelle et spirituelle."

spiritual union,[672] for the Queen's welcome could simply be the same type of welcome God gives to man, the sinner.[673] The Queen, like God who happily greets the repentant sinner, is just as happy to greet Lancelot and Lancelot reciprocates his contentment when "tous ses vœux comblés (quanqu'il vialt)."

At this point the narrator states that he will keep "[m]es toz jorz iert par moi teüe / Qu'an conte ne doit estre dite. / Des joies fu la plus eslite / Et la plus delitable cele / Que li contes nos test et cele." It is the narrator's emphasis on his silence and what will happen next between Lancelot and the Queen, which will not be recounted by him, that tends to direct the reader towards a secular reading. However, the emphasis on a perfect and delicious joy, for me indicates this is a spiritual moment not a base common one.[674] Ribard writes that Lancelot's love for the Queen expresses itself as "un amour spirituel exclusif, d'une manière de célibat mystique."[675] In this passage, the expression of love is indeed spiritual.

Lancelot's desire for the Queen and her desire for him illustrates Bernard's dialectic of desire.[676] When they first meet at the window they experience joy but this is tempered by their sadness which is expressed as longing for and desiring to be closer to each other. In fact they are suffering to the extreme at not being able to be together ("[d]e ce que ansable ne vienent / Lor poise molt a desmesure"), which leads them to curse the bars separating them. Their desire "springing from the experience of desolation [being separated by the bars] is directed toward

---

[672] *The Holy Bible: New International Version* 2 Peter 1:11 & Matthew 10:40. 2 Peter states "and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." Matthew states "Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me."

[673] *The Holy Bible: New International Version* Matthew 18:12. "What do you think? If a man own a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off. And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off. In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should perish." God is happy to find the lost sheep, man, the sinner who has wandered away.

[674] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God* 42. "'All those who rejoice, dwell in you'...'Everlasting joy will be theirs."

[675] Ribard 75.

[676] Or the *absence-presence* state of being. Desire is the emotion felt when one is absent from the beloved. Love or joy is the emotion felt when one is in the beloved's presence.

reunion, toward a mutual presence which suffers no obstacle."[677] Hence Lancelot's comment about the iron not being an insurmountable obstacle between them; if the Queen commands him to enter, he will. She does, he enters and begins his adoration of her ("[s]i l'aore et se li ancline, / Car an nul cors saint ne croit tant"). The Queen has become a "sainte relique" for Lancelot.[678] As a holy relic the Queen now represents God and Lancelot's behavior and desire for her demonstrates man's desire for spiritual union with God.

Lancelot's passing through the bars and the fact that he does not feel his wounds indicates that he has moved out of the terrestrial sphere of reference and into a spiritual sphere. If his spirit is elsewhere, "[e]t del sanc qui jus an degote," then one cannot and should not read his encounter with the Queen as a vulgar sex act.[679] It should be read as the expression of spiritual intimacy[680] that unfortunately must be conveyed in human language.[681] Hence, the narrator cannot comment upon the joy that the Queen and Lancelot are experiencing because it is on the spiritual level. This type of joy is one that only a holy man, a man so in love with God, who has prepared himself through suffering or trials, can hope to experience. This is why when day comes Lancelot suffers and is so loath to part from the Queen; for how can one who has tasted

---

[677] Casey 190.
[678] *Lancelot* 634 verse 4653.
[679] Z. P. Zaddy, "*Le Chevalier de la Charrette and the De amore* of Andreas Capellanus," in *Studies in Medieval Literature and Languages: In Memory of Frederick Whitehead*, eds. William Rothwell, W. R. J. Barron, David Blamires, and Lewis Thorpe (Manchester: Manchester University, 1973) 379. Zaddy writes that Chrétien and Capellanus' works "glorify sexual love as inspiring all that is highest and best in man." In other words, love in *Lancelot* is secular and only works to provide proof that Lancelot adheres to the tenets of courtly love. For Zaddy, Lancelot's love is not spiritual.
[680] Newman 61. "The famous night of love is no 'banal adultery,' but a mystical union". Piraprez writes: "Il s'agit de l'affirmation non pas d'un très grand amour humain, mais plutôt de la supériorité de l'amour divin. Il est cependant très peu vraisemblable que Chrétien ait décrit cette nuit d'amour dans un but essentiellement religieux / It is an affirmation not of a great human love but rather the superiority of divin love. It is however, a bit unlikely that Chrétien described this night of love essentially with a religious goal in mind." While acknowledging the spiritual tones to this episode, Piraprez notes both its secular and spiritual registers.
[681] Jean Leclercq, *Monks and Love in Twelfth Century France* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1979) 9. "God's love for man and man's love for God must needs be expressed in human language borrowed from human images and symbols and ultimately from human experience."

God's sweetness[682] not wish to stay?[683] Like a martyr then Lancelot will depart, after bowing again as if he is in front of a holy altar, and continue to endure suffering[684] as he distances himself from his Beloved.

This night of love is a prolonged spiritual or ecstatic moment as both lovers are so enraptured by each other that only joy can adequately express their love. Lancelot's adoration and veneration of the Queen as a holy relic, something to be worshiped, cements her identity as symbolic of God, while his devotion and obedience to her desires confirms his identity as a spiritual man. Lancelot's love for the Queen illustrates how God is loved, for the

> needs of the flesh are a kind of speech, proclaiming, in transports of joy the good things experienced. A man who feels this way will not have trouble in fulfilling the commandment to love... He love God truthfully and so loves what is God's. He loves purely and he does not find it hard to obey a pure commandment, purifying his heart, as it is written, in the obedience of love. He loves with justice and freely embraces the just commandment.[685]

Lancelot's obedience to the Queen's commands illustrates the depths of his love for her. The more he obeys her the more he ceases "to belong to himself and passes entirely into God and adhering to him, he becomes one with him in spirit."[686] Being one with God in spirit is the most Lancelot can hope to achieve in this lifetime, for true union to occur one's physical body must die. Hence, Lancelot will continue to experience suffering tempered with joy as he alternates between presence and absence.

Throughout all his sufferings, Lancelot remains steadfast in his love to the Queen. In fact, he is her most devoted and obedient servant, for when she commands he acts, as noted by

---

[682] Stiegman 121. "'Tasting God's sweetness', then, means, experiencing God's love for us."
[683] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God* 28. "Man's frequent needs oblige him to invoke God more often and approach him more frequently. This intimacy moves man to taste and discover how sweet the Lord is."
[684] Lachet 221. "L'amant sincère endure le martyre / The sincere lover endures martyrdom." In this case Lancelot's martyrdom means extreme suffering.
[685] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God* 28.
[686] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God* 41.

his immediate and astonishing ability to bend iron. While he was hurt by her initial rejection of him during their first interview, he accepted that he perhaps did not yet merit her and leaves, hoping that he can prove himself worthy. As Lancelot's love draws him closer and closer to the Queen, so too does his obedience to her wishes and in his perfect obedience he corresponds to Bernard's conception of loving God for God's sake. In this love, the will and desires of the self yield to the will of the Divine and by doing so one "exalts oneself to God"[687] and achieves spiritual union. [688]

I Yield to You. My Will for Yours. The Tournament of Perfected Obedience.

Lancelot's night of love is the greatest moment of his life. He has succeeded in his goal of rescuing the Queen and obtaining his reward. Following this union, Lancelot is the embodiment of a man "wholly emptied of self,"[689] for the "first duty of anyone who would serve God is to renounce his own will"[690] which is exactly what Lancelot does at the tournament of Noauz or Pomegeloi.[691] The Queen, suspecting that Lancelot has appeared at the tournament but is uncertain of his identity instructs one of her handmaids to go tell this unknown knight to fight "au noauz,"[692] to do his worst, i.e. to lose all his matches. Lancelot, "come cil qui est suens

[687] Gilson 71.
[688] Casey 131. "In Bernard's view, the basis of the human being's yearning for the Absolute is the nature with which the Creator endowed him. It is because he has been made to God's image- with a natural affinity with his Maker- that the human being cannot be wholly engaged or satisfied by realities in his own order of existence. Thus he is driven by a natural tendency to transcend his own order and to seek the divine. Because Bernard believed that union with God was the ultimate goal of nature."
[689] Gilson 98.
[690] Gilson 29.
[691] Fanny Bogdanow, "The Love Theme" 61. Some scholars refer to this tournament as Noauz, others as Pomegeloi. They are however, the same episode.
[692] *Lancelot* 662 verses 5636-5645.

antiers"[693] responds with "[s]i ... molt volantiers,"[694] promptly obeys her command and proceeds to lose all his matches,[695] for which he is subsequently ridiculed by his fellow knights.[696] Lancelot's terrible display of arms informs the Queen that it is indeed him,[697] so that on the next day when she sends her handmaid to him again,[698] she tells him "[q]u'au noauz le reface ancor."[699] Lancelot thanks the Queen for her orders and does as she commands.[700] The Queen on hearing Lancelot's answer, "[d]om ele s'est molt esjoïe / Por ce c'or set ele sanz dote / Que ce est cil cui ele est tote / Et il toz suens sanz nule faille."[701] A short time later she changes her mind and orders "[q]ue tot le mialz que vos porroiz."[702] To which Lancelot answers: "'Or li diroiz / Qu'il n'est riens nule qui me griet / A feire des que il li siet, / Que quanque li plest m'atalante.'"[703] Lancelot then proceeds to do his best and is proclaimed the best knight at the tournament.[704]

Lancelot has redeemed himself for his earlier hesitation with stepping into the cart. No longer does he hesitate to do the Queen's or love's bidding. He readily accepts her or love's commands because he is completely emptied of his own self will. For him now it is the Queen's

---

[693] *Lancelot* 662 verse 5656.
[694] *Lancelot* 662 verse 5655.
[695] *Lancelot* 662 verses 5660-5662. "N'onques puis jusqu'a l'anserir / Ne fist s'au pis non que il pot / Por ce qu'a la reïne plot // From that moment until nightfall, he did everything badly that he could, since it was the Queen's wish."
[696] *Lancelot* 663 verses 5674, 5686-5687. "Et li chevalier de lui font / Lor risees //The knights laughed at him (vers 5674). "Il estoit si preuz or endroit, / Et or est si coarde chose // They also wonder why a knight who was doing so well should suddenly do so badly."
[697] *Lancelot* 663 verses 5700-5703. "Ala reïne pas n'an poise, / Einz an est liee et molt li plest, / Qu'ele set bien, et si s'an test / Que ce est Lanceloz por voir. // And the Queen attentive to what's going on, was deeply delighted 'cause she knew, and kept from saying anything out loud, that it was really Lancelot."
[698] *Lancelot* 667 verses 5828-5840.
[699] *Lancelot* 667 verse 5842. "that who do even worse."
[700] *Lancelot* 668 verses 5856-5857. "Et cil, des qu'ele le comande, / Li respont: 'La soë merci.' // And he because she ordered it, answers: 'Thank her for me.'"
[701] *Lancelot* 668 verses 5872-5875. The Queen "was delighted because she was sure now that it was Lancelot, without a doubt she knew now to him she was everything and him to her."
[702] *Lancelot* 669 verse 5889. "now do the best that you can"
[703] *Lancelot* 669 verses 5890-5893. "You tell her... that nothing can be difficult for me to do, if she wishes it, because to do her will is all that I desire."
[704] *Lancelot* 673 verses 6023-6027. Lancelot does so well that he ruins the chances of the ladies, who were hosting the tournament so they could find husbands, because they all wanted him for their husband.

will which matters, thus demonstrating a monk's response to God's will. Lancelot illustrates the final two steps of Bernard's steps on humility and pride, quiet and restrained speech and containment of one's interests, which shows itself in a humble bearing and lowered eyes.[705] Lancelot's display of both of these steps shows how much he has given up of his own will because of his love for the Queen.[706] Lancelot's joyful acceptance of the Queen's commands illustrates how one is supposed to respond to God's commands.

While Lancelot's behavior is exemplary of both an obedient courtly lover as well as of an obedient and humble man before God, the Queen's behavior is sometimes criticized as illustrating *desmezura*.[707] Bruckner likens her to the troubadour lady, "the *donna* who commands and frequently rejects her lover's service."[708] In demanding that Lancelot "do his worst" the Queen demonstrates her *desmezura*, by making her lover humiliate himself to the extreme before the entire court. On a courtly level the Queen's behavior is both proper and improper. According to the tenets of courtly love the lover-knight must prove his worth to his lady by demonstrating his skill-at-arms and by obeying her wishes. Lancelot's perfect obedience and joyful responses to her commands renders her behavior proper. However, the taunts and jeers Lancelot experiences at the hand of his peers construes her behavior as improper, as his skill as a knight is called into question and his inability to satisfactorily demonstrate it at least until she changes her mind, causes him to be unworthy of her love. Regardless of whether or not her behavior is proper or improper as a courtly lady, what is more significant here is the spiritual illustration of man's response to God's will.

---

[705] Bernard of Clairvaux, *Bernard of Clairvaux Selected Works* 100. These are steps eleven and twelve. Quiet and restrained here can mean seriousness and confining oneself to the subject under discussion, not chatting about frivolous matters. Lowered eyes typically is a sign of one's obedience.
[706] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On the Song of Songs*, trans. Irene Edmonds, Vol.4 (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, Inc., 1980) 185. "Pure love has no self interest."
[707] *Desmezura* is impropriety.
[708] Bruckner, "The Chevalier de la Charrette" 145.

By subjecting Lancelot to ridicule, Chrétien actually illustrates how by humbling oneself one exalts oneself to God.[709] Lancelot's submission to the Queen's commands, confirms not only Lancelot's humility and obedience but also how purely he loves.[710] By loving purely, he "does not find it hard to obey a pure commandment, purifying his heart, as it is written, in the obedience of love."[711] Lancelot's love for the Queen and his willingness to accept the damage to his reputation illustrate a man who is wholly committed to his love, and thus, accepts the risks incurred by his obedience to another's will.

In a sense, Lancelot illustrates how "the love of the Beloved Himself [has] become at once both the means of love and its end."[712] One cannot hope to draw closer to God without loving God for who God is or, as Bernard writes, "loving God for God's sake."[713] In loving God this way one turns to God frequently for assistance, especially in achieving what seems impossible, and humbly accepts God's will even at the expense of the self. Lancelot's greatness is not just because his skill as a fighter, for as a knight this is a given; rather, he is a great lover. For Lancelot, love comes first and everything he is able to achieve flows from this love. Lancelot's story then is the story of a great lover, who by relying on and obeying Love's or the Queen's commands, illustrates a monk's love for God. Chrétien's Lancelot is a married man − he is a monk who through his obedience, humility, and contemplation, is married to God.

---

[709] Gilson 71.
[710] *The Holy Bible: New International Version* John 14:21 & 23-24a. In verse 21 Jesus says: "Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them." He continues "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home in them. Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching."
[711] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God* 28.
[712] Gilson 113.
[713] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God* 28. The third degree of love: Man Loves God for God's sake.

So in the end, I, Lancelot, am Married, Right?

Yes, Lancelot you are; for your life, like that of a monk, "is concerned not simply with serving God but with adhering to God."[714] By adhering to God, you illustrate that the goal of your desire is spiritual union with God, which must be related according to the terms of earthly lovers[715] in order to be comprehensible for us. Your desire to seek out the Queen and adhere to her demonstrates how she has become your spiritual spouse. By obeying her commands, you provide the example for man's service which is obedience and humility to God's commands. Your obedience and love also illustrate for us the attainability in this lifetime of the Christian's ultimate goal, spiritual union with God because "[l]ove is sufficient of itself, it gives pleasure by itself and because of itself. It is its own merit, its own reward. Love needs no cause beyond itself... yet if [man] loves with [his] whole heart nothing is lacking, for [he] has given all. Such love... is marriage, for a soul cannot love like this and not be beloved; complete and perfect marriage consists in the exchange of love."[716]

Lancelot's story is one of a man who has already been touched by love and hence is willing to suffer shame, rejection, physical pain, and mental anguish, all in order to be with the Queen. Just as there is no clear beginning[717] to Lancelot's journey to rescue the Queen, so too there is no definitive ending.[718] Lancelot returns to his tower after the tournament of Noauz[719]

---

[714] Gilson 37.
[715] Casey 191.
[716] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On the Song of Songs,* Vol. 4 184-186.
[717] Lachet 223. "On se demande même si le héros n'a pas commencé sa quête avant que la reine ait été enlevée. Manière subtile de suggérer un amour éternel. "
[718] Bruckner, "Chevalier de la Charrette" 149. "No closure will be found in the romance for the love story initiated between Lancelot and the queen, only expectations for something more… Desire that seeks and defers fulfillment."
[719] *Lancelot* 673 verses 6034- 6035. Like a monk returning to his cell for prayer or mediation.

and returns to court to defeat Méléagant definitively,[720] but in regards to his relationship with the Queen, Chrétien leaves that ending open. Chrétien's open ending to Lancelot's love story creates a story of eternal love,[721] because there is no end and no beginning,[722] like God's love for man.[723]

Lancelot's parable of love illuminates how love is eternal. However Lancelot's love is actually limited by the constraints and needs of his own physical body, for he must return to it after experiencing his moments of ecstasy or spiritual union. Bernard acknowledges that spiritual union can occur at any time, however, it is not true union, which can only occur after death. As Lancelot never dies, even with all the wounds he has endured, he can never surpass Bernard's third degree of love. Lancelot for all his perfectness in loving and obeying will not achieve true union. Perceval is the only one of Chrétien's knights who achieves true union. As the succeeding chapter explores, Perceval's adventure-romance encompasses all of Bernard's degrees of love and culminates in his fourth degree of love, where true union occurs.

[720] *Lancelot* 703 verses 7086-7089. Lancelot decapitates Méléagant.
[721] Ribard 58.
[722] *The Holy Bible: New International Version* Revelation 1:8. "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty."
[723] *The Holy Bible: New International Version* I John 4:10, 13, &16b. "This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins… This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit… God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them."

Chapter Five: Mysticism and Union in *Perceval*

In my two previous chapters I explored how, in Bernard's view, pride leads to sin, distorts one's likeness to God and distances one from Him necessitating a call to God for help to restore one's relationship with Him. I also considered how one's obedience to God's deepens one's love of Him allowing one to briefly achieve spiritual union. In *Yvain* and *Lancelot*, Chrétien presumes a familiarity with Christianity and its role in one's life, however his last work, *Le Conte du Graal* or *Perceval* explores the idea of someone completely unfamiliar with Christianity. By exploring how Perceval learns to be a proper courtly knight, I examine how one learns about and comes to know God.

Perceval is perhaps the most difficult work of Chrétien's romances to discuss as it is unfinished. The first three-fourths of the romance cover Perceval's journey from boy to knightly hero before he disappears from the story a little over halfway through. During Perceval's journey, certain aspects of Christian mysticism,[724] are exhibited through Christian symbols, themes, and events interspersed within the narrative. Paul Szarmach writes, "[m]ysticism was not separate from medieval society and culture, but rather it functioned effectively within them."[725] In other words, the overt symbolism, themes, and events are necessary components of *Perceval* and should not be divorced from it, even when they are never satisfactorily explained.[726] The lack of a concluding narrative and the unresolved and unexplained events and

[724] Evelyn Underhill, *Practical Mysticism* (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, 1915) Chapter 1. Underhill defines mysticism as "the art of union" and the mystic as "a person who has attained that union in greater or less degree; or who aims at and believes in such attainment." Underhill believes that mysticism belongs to the Christian tradition.

[725] Paul E. Szarmach, *An Introduction to the Medieval Mystics of Europe* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984) 4.

[726] Both the grail procession and the three drops of blood are full of symbols and themes yet neither are fully explained.

symbols add an air of mystery and mysticism to this parable, especially as the reader must attempt to make sense of *Perceval*.

In this last chapter, I explore the mystical elements and mysteries, which illustrate and illuminate Bernard's degrees of love, as Perceval journeys from boyhood to knighthood. In *Perceval* the predominant concern is one of understanding and misunderstanding. [727] Hence, I begin with Perceval's development as a courtly knight, for in these episodes Perceval begins to comprehend what constitutes a courtly knight. Perceval hears the words that are spoken to him by his mother and others but he cannot comprehend them. Perceval's desire to learn about knighthood results his departure from the maternal home.[728] However, Perceval's departure is, not just a quest for knowledge, but also a search for his missing father.[729] This search for the father has a dual connotation. On the one hand, Perceval is searching for his elusive biological father so he can learn about knights and knighthood, but on the other, it can be interpreted as Perceval's search for God, the Father.[730] In fact, Perceval's quest for knowledge is actually double coded[731] a journey towards God, the Father.

---

[727] Peggy McCracken, "The Poetics of Sacrifice: Allegory and Myth in the Grail Quest." *Yale French Studies* 95 (1999) 152-168.

[728] This corresponds to Bernard's first degree of love: Man loves himself for his own sake. Perceval is only concerned with his own wants and desires.

[729] Donald Maddox, *The Arthurian Romances of Chrétien de Troyes: Once and Future Fictions*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) 111.

[730] Michael Casey, *A Thirst for God: Spiritual Desire in Bernard of Clairvaux's Sermons on the Song of Songs* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, Inc., 1988) 72 & 81. As Casey puts it, "the idea of seeking God. The search for the beloved is also an important sub-theme in the *Song of Songs*"(81). "When a human being desires God, he seeks the highest possible goals, and the very nobility of his purpose has the effect of transforming his life, rendering it progressively more godly and open to the divine"(72). Perceval's entire narrative story lives out this citation as "the search for God precedes all good action and all acquiring of virtue... Seeking God seems... to follow upon a conscious decision on the part of the seeker to allow the desire welling up from his heart to shape the course of life" (82). Perceval's nobility comes from his conscious desire to acquire knowledge of the grail and later God.

[731] Barbara Newman, *Medieval Crossover: Reading the Secular Against the Sacred* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013) X. "double coding: the propensity of certain texts to enable both sacred and secular readings."

Initially Perceval's journey is also a return to Bernard's first degree of love in which man loves himself for his own sake, for the themes of pride, sin, and redemption surface again. But as Perceval progresses through his training, he changes from a prideful young man into a loving lover, illustrating, like Lancelot and Yvain, Bernard's concept of social love. Brought face to face with his failure at the Fisher King's castle, Perceval chooses to seek the Grail, indicating a rejection of the terrestrial in favor of seeking the spiritual. Unfortunately, he is hampered by his lack of understanding of Christianity and thus like Lancelot he must learn obedience before achieving his goal.

The unfinished narrative means, it is unknown if Perceval is able to find his father, understand the events he witnessed at the Fisher King's castle, or follow through with the teachings of the hermit. This leaves the romance open to speculation as to what happens or happened to Perceval. This lack of knowledge, for the reader, enhances the mystery and the mysticism present in the work. The uncanny parallel between the protagonist and the author's disappearance[732] (i.e. leaving the work unfinished) only increases the parable's mysticism and mysteriousness. Perceval's mysterious disappearance along with all the over Christian themes and symbols direct the reader to consider union with God, which is the last step achievable by man in Bernard's fourth degree.

Evelyn Underhill considers that the desire for complete union with God,[733] in which the mystic loses himself or herself in the greatness and beauty of God,[734] is a part of the mystical experience. Thus, Perceval's unexplained and unresolved journey pushes the exploration of

---

[732] Albert Wilder Thompson, "Additions to Chrétien's *Perceval* – Prologues and Continuations," in *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages*, ed. Roger Sherman Loomis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959) 206. Chrétien's death prevented the completion of *Perceval*.

[733] Underhill, *The Mystics of the Church* (New York: G. Doran, 1926) 10. For Underhill, union can occur in this lifetime.

[734] Richard Barber, *The Holy Grail: Imagination and Belief* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004) 156. For Bernard it is also a chance for one to experience the Beatific Vision, the possibility of seeing God face to face.

Bernard's fourth degree of love into the mystical realm with idea of union with the Divine, who is the great known and unknown. Union, which is the Christian's ultimate goal for Bernard, is "a celebration of the most intense love possible… between God and the perfected soul."[735] In other words, the fourth degree of love is true union with God, in which man "will easily reach the highest degree of love [because] he will no longer be held back by any desire of the flesh or upset by troubles as he hastens with the greatest speed and desire toward the joy of the Lord."[736] For Bernard, true union is possible but only after the soul has been released from the body. Perceval's disappearance symbolically represents Bernard's conception of union. In *Perceval* as the mystical and symbolic elements combine to illustrate the steps necessary for one to draw closer to God and finally achieve union with Him, Chrétien's exploration of man's relationship to God concludes.

A Knightly Education: Understanding and Misunderstanding the Rules of Engagement

Perceval begins like many of Chrétien's other romances, with a brief introduction to the adventure-romance. However, this introduction is very different from his others.[737] Barber notes that Chrétien's *Perceval* is different both thematically and narratively from his other romances as *Perceval* explores the development of a knight.[738] Chrétien's inclusion of three Bible references[739] in his prologue also indicates a more serious tone and subject matter. The inclusion of these biblical references in the prologue is an overt signal that Christian themes will be

[735] Szarmach 7. This is also a conception of union of Bernard.
[736] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, Inc., 1995) 31.
[737] Peter Noble, *Love and Marriage in Chrétien de Troyes*, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1982) 83.
[738] Barber, *The Holy Grail* 14.
[739] *Perceval* 26 & 28. Chrétien references II Corinthians 9:6-7 & 1-12 in verses 1-10; I Corinthians 13:1-13 in verses 41-44; and I John 4:16 in verses 45-48.

explored.[740] This is unlike his previous romances where it is left to the reader to grasp or decipher the Christian themes and symbols presented therein.[741] Even with the more serious tone and tropes Chrétien's *Perceval* still contains a dual register of secular and spiritual. On one hand Perceval's story can be read as the development and initiation of a young man into the knightly class, adulthood and courtly love; on the other, Perceval's journey examines in a very condensed space all four of Bernard's four degrees of love. In each of the following sections I examine how Perceval's journey progresses through each degree before finally culminating in union.

When the reader first encounters Perceval, he is a naïve young boy out hunting with javelins.[742] Perceval's hunting and then later defeating the Red Knight with his javelins would not have been unusual; throwing javelins from horseback was an accepted form of combat prior to the couching of the lance.[743] Perceval's javelins illustrate his lack of knowledge about knighthood and its fighting style, not unusual as he has not yet been exposed to this style of combat. However, his javelins also indicate his lack of courtly manners as he is not using the courtlier couched lance to fight. Perceval's lack of courtly manners becomes immediately

[740] Jean Frappier, *Chrétien de Troyes: The Man and His Work*, trans. Raymond J. Cormier (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1982) 128. "it celebrates the chivalric ideal by which worldly glory gives way to Christian humility and divine love... the religious idea predominates at the consummation of Perceval's ascent. Chrétien's goal seems to have been this: to direct, across a series of initiatory experiences... to comprehension of his duties and the discovery of the divine."

[741] Barber, *The Holy Grail* 92. "The most convincing argument for this is that the whole tone of the romance is no different from that of Chrétien's other works, where there is no question of a spiritual or religious dimension." Barber clearly does not see any religious connotations at all in *Perceval* especially in regards to the grail nor does he see any in Chrétien's other works. Considering the fact that in the very first lines of Chrétien's prologue he references a bible passage I do not see how Barber can make this claim.

[742] *Perceval* 30 verses 75-77.

[743]Matthew Bennet, Jim Bradbury, Kelly DeVries, Iain Dickie, and Phyllis Jestice, eds. *Fighting Techniques of the Medieval World- AD500 – AD1500: Equipement, Combat Skills and Tactics* (New York: Thomas Dune Books, 2005) 76. Between 1050 – 1150 the couched lance became the primary weapon for mounted knights. It was not until the mid- twelfth century that the couched lance began to dominate the battlefield. The couched lance became the courtlier weapon for knights at tournaments as it was the principle weapon of the crusaders in the Holy Land.

apparent when he hears five knights approaching,[744] whom he initially considers to be devils.[745] It is not the fact that Perceval misinterprets the knights as devils or later as angels that matters; what is key here is his blatant lack of respect for both the instructions of his mother and for God. Perceval states, "[m]ais ja voir ne m'en seignerai / Que cest ensiag desdaigner."[746] Here is a proud young man who is so certain of himself he needs neither his mother's instructions, "cet enseignment," nor God's aid, making the sign of the cross, in distinguishing between the forces of good and evil.

To some scholars[747] this illustrates Perceval's naivety or lack of comprehension of what he sees, which is true if one is reading on a secular level. For me, Perceval's behavior in these first few episodes demonstrates how alike he is to Yvain, prior to Yvain's madness. Both let their own pride and love of self dictate their actions. For Perceval, his pride comes across as purposefully ignoring the knight's questions in favor of pursuing his own interest in their armor and armaments,[748] as well as how to become a knight like them.[749] Perceval's curiosity about the knight's armor and weapons rather than focusing on the knight's questions, illustrates Bernard's first step of pride.[750]

Perceval's burning desire to become a knight immediately causes him to completely disrespect his mother. When telling her about his encounter with the knights he says "Taisez-

[744] *Perceval* 32 verses 98-100.
[745] *Perceval* 32 verse 111.
[746] *Perceval* 32 verses 115-116. "But no! Never will I make the sign of the cross, I have no need of that teaching."
[747] Peggy McCracken, Peter Noble & also Fanni Bogdanow in the first couple of pages of her article, "The Transformation of the Role of Perceval in Some Thirteenth Century Prose Romance," in *Studies in Medieval Literature and Languages: In Memory of Frederick Whitehead*, eds. William Rothwell, W. R. J. Barron, David Blamires, and Lewis Thorpe (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1973). Frappier in *Chrétien de Troyes,* occasionally mentions Perceval's naivety in his chapter on *Perceval.*
[748] *Perceval* 36-46 verses 164-297.
[749] *Perceval* 48 verses 326-334.
[750] Bernard of Clairvaux, *Bernard of Clairvaux: Selected Works,* trans. G. R. Evans (New York: Paulist Press, 1987) 100. Step one: Curiosity about what is not one's proper concern. In this case Perceval's curiosity is misplaced. He should be focused on what the knight's said but instead he is focused on what they have.

vous, ma mère!"[751] and later after she has explained the tragic loss of his father and brothers due to their service as knights,[752] Perceval is so occupied with his desire to become a knight that he does not even bother to listen.[753] Like Yvain, Perceval illustrates the "carnal love by which man loves himself above all others,"[754] because he is so wrapped up in his own desires that anything or anyone else's wants or desires have become secondary to his own.[755] Perceval's carnal love of self is exposed upon leaving the family manor. Perceval glances back and sees that his mother has fallen as if dead,[756] however, because his desire to become a knight has become paramount, he decides not to return to see if she needs assistance. Instead, he chooses to continue on his path.[757] Not only are Perceval's misinterpretation of his mother's instructions on the duties of a chivalric knight[758] at the root of his troubles, although they are a contributing factor, Perceval's lack of compassion,[759] stemming from his pride causes his succeeding problems. Perceval's pride manifested as a lack of compassion is his sin.[760] His prideful lack of compassion coupled with his lack of respect for his mother and God,[761] and later for the Tent Maiden, whom he encounters next after leaving his mother, validates how prideful he has become.

---

[751] *Perceval* 50 verse 364
[752] *Perceval* 50-56 verses 359-459.
[753] *Perceval* 57 verses 453-454. "Li vallez entant molt petit / A ce que sa mere li dit // The young man hardly paid attention to what his mother was telling him."
[754] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God* 25.
[755] Bernard of Clairvaux, *Bernard of Clairvaux: Selected Works* 111 & 123. "Pride in the mind is a great beam… and it blocks the mind's eye and blots out the light of truth, so that if your mind is full of it you cannot see yourself as you really are… Nor can you see what you might be" (111). "The first step of Pride is curiosity, worrying about external things and not knowing oneself" (123).
[756] *Perceval* 64 verses 584-589.
[757] *Perceval* 64 verses 590-594.
[758] *Perceval* 58-60 verses 497-510 & 61-63 verses 523-536.
[759] Barber, *The Holy Grail* 369. Barber describes *Perceval* as "a lesson in compassion."
[760] Bogdanow, "The Transformation of the Role of Perceval" 51.
[761] John Bednar, *La Spiritualité et le symbolism dans les oeuvres de Chrétien de Troyes* (Paris: Librairie A.-G. Nizet, 1974) 134. Bednar writes that Perceval's first sin was to forget the grandeur of God and his second was to leave when he saw his mother fall to the ground. Bednar is correct on both accounts. However, Perceval's forgetting the grandeur of God is due to pride which Bednar does not mention.

When Perceval first approaches the tent he mistakes it for a church,[762] illustrating the dichotomy between seeing or hearing and understanding[763] prevalent in this adventure-romance. Upon entering, he happens upon a maiden who awakes suddenly, and Perceval who because of his pride did not pay close enough attention to his mother's instructions demands a kiss from her,[764] to which she refuses.[765] So Perceval in his pride which has deafened him to her protests takes his kiss by force.[766] As he finishes kissing her he sees her ring and demands that she give it to him,[767] which of course she refuses,[768] but he takes it anyway.[769] By now the Tent Maiden is crying and begging for the return of her ring.[770] Her complaints and comments regarding her fate if he does not return the ring fall on deaf ears because "[l]i vallez a son cuer ne met / Rien nule de ce que il ot."[771] Perceval's heart cannot be touched because pride lives there and where pride lives there is no room for love.[772] Perceval's utter lack of compassion for the Tent Maiden's situation, especially as he abruptly leaves,[773] leaving her to her fate,[774] illustrates how he carnally loves himself as he "is aware of only himself."[775] Thus Perceval's misunderstandings are not completely due to his naivety or lack of courtly manners, but rather to his pride, as he demonstrates just how much he loves only himself.

---

[762] *Perceval* 66-68 verses 619-623.
[763] *The Holy Bible: New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan 1996) Matthew 13:13. "This is why I speak to them in parables: 'Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand.'"
[764] *Perceval* 70 verses 656-659.
[765] *Perceval* 70 verses 660-663.
[766] *Perceval* 70 verses 664-672.
[767] *Perceval* 70 verse 679.
[768] *Perceval* 70 verse 680.
[769] *Perceval* 70-72 verses 681-683.
[770] *Perceval* 72 verses 691-695.
[771] *Perceval* 72 verses 696-697. "nothing of what he heard touched the heart of the young man."
[772] *The Holy Bible: New International Version* I Corinthians 13:4-5. "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs."
[773] *Perceval* 74 verse 725.
[774] *Perceval* 76-78 verses 742-791.
[775] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God* 25.

Perceval's pride does not just manifest itself in his lack of compassion, respect, or lack of listening, but also in his impatience to attain what he desires. After leaving the Tent Maiden, Perceval next encounters King Arthur and his court. Perceval boldly rides up to the King and demands that the king make him a knight,[776] because he wants to go away.[777] The king kindly asks him to dismount but Perceval refuses and instead reiterates his request for immediate knighthood.[778] Eventually Perceval loses his patience with the King and the court and "[e]t li vallez plus ne demeure, / Ainz s'en retourne sanz consoil."[779] Perceval's abrupt departure displays his impatience. He wants the King to make him a knight and give him arms and armor like the Red Knight,[780] whom he had encountered on his way into Arthur's court,[781] but he does not understand the rules of courtly knighthood, even when the King begins to explain it.[782]

Perceval's impatience, which caused him to leave the court, now leads him to demand that the Red Knight take off his armor and give it to him.[783] The Red Knight ignores Perceval's demand and through his questioning of Perceval, reveals that in his eyes Perceval is not a knight. Hence, revealing the real purpose for his questions to ascertain if any of Arthur's knights will be coming to challenge him to combat. [784] Perceval is not yet a knight, but in his pride he believes himself to be. He ignores the Red Knight's questions regarding Arthur's knights, demanding instead that the Red Knight comply with his previous order to remove his armor immediately.[785] The Red Knight's frustration with Perceval's inability to respond to his questions and his

---

[776] *Perceval* 88 verse 930. "Faites, moi chevalier, fait il, / Sire rois...// Make me a knight, my lord King!"
[777] *Perceval* 88 verse 931. "...car aler m'en voil // because I want to go away."
[778] *Perceval* 88 verses 944-948.
[779] *Perceval* 94 verses 1020-1021. "without waiting and without taking any advice [he] leaves."
[780] *Perceval* 90 verses 955-958.
[781] *Perceval* 80-82 verses 824-833.
[782] *Perceval* 90-92 verses 969-988.
[783] *Perceval* 94-96 verses 1039-1041.
[784] *Perceval* 96 verses 1042-1045 & 1050-1052.
[785] *Perceval* 96 verses 1049 & 1053. In both lines Perceval asks the Red Knight to take off his armor "Ostez les tost" or "Ostez tost" (sur-le-champs) or immediately, at once, right away.

incessant demands for his own armor result in the Red Knight striking Perceval.[786] Perceval, however, quicker with his javelin, kills the Red Knight[787] and then orders Ivonet, a servant from Arthur's court who had followed Perceval, to give him the Red Knight's arms and armor,[788] which Ivonet does.[789]

In both of these brief episodes, Perceval's impatience reveals his ambition to be a knight. He is not going to wait for a king to knight him, instead he will go make himself one by defeating the Red Knight and then taking his arms and armor. Perceval's ambition fueled by his pride and his own self-importance reveals how conceited he is. His demands both to become a knight and for the Red Knight's armor illustrates two of Bernard's steps of pride; "trying to be different: claiming special rights" and "thinking oneself holier than others."[790] Perceval's demand to become a knight reveals how he is "trying to be different [by] claiming special rights," in this case his right to the Red Knight's armor and his commands to remove said armor illustrate just how he perceives himself as being better than the Red Knight, even though he has done nothing to merit them. In all four of these episodes Perceval's pride reveals the dark side of ambition which leads one to lack compassion, lack respect for one's superiors,[791] and turn a deaf ear to anything or anyone who does not immediately assist in helping to secure one's desire.

After Ivonet immediately assists Perceval in donning the Red Knight's armor a curious thing happens: Perceval offers Ivonet his hunter and asks Ivonet to "'[r]apportez au roi sa coupe

[786] *Perceval* 96 verses 1058-1064.
[787] *Perceval* 96-98 verses 1068-1075.
[788] *Perceval* 99 verses 1098-1099.
[789] *Perceval* 100-102 verses 1100-1138.
[790] Bernard of Clairvaux, *Bernard of Clairvaux Selected Works* 100. These are steps five and six of pride.
[791] Bernard of Clairvaux, *Bernard of Clairvaux Selected Works* 100. Step ten of pride is "rebelling against superiors." In this case his mother, the King, and the Red Knight are all Perceval's superiors.

et saluez-le de ma part.'"[792] In giving Ivonet his horse, Perceval for the first time genuinely acknowledges someone else's assistance and help. In other words, Perceval is beginning to set aside his pride and takes his first step towards humility by thanking him. Even though Perceval's gift is made in an offhand manner - he no longer needs his hunter because he has acquired the Red Knight's mount - the fact that he begins to display a generous nature indicates the beginning of a change, from an uncouth youth to a courtly knight and from prideful to humble young man.

Perceval's shift in manner is noticeable in his next encounter. Here he listens to and correctly answers the questions put to him[793] by Gornemant of Goort. This might be due to the fact that he has achieved his goal, at least in his mind[794] of being a knight, as Perceval glosses over how he became a knight and acquired his arms. It could also be another moment where his pride manifests itself, as Perceval uses King Arthur's name to justify his actions.[795] However, the fact that he is paying attention to the questions being put to him and responding directly to what is asked takes precedence over Perceval's sugar coating of how he acquired the trappings of a knight without internalizing a knight's code of conduct. Luckily his questioner is someone who will teach him this code of conduct.

Gornemant de Goort teaches Perceval about knighthood. Gornemant is to Perceval what the lion was to Yvain. Unlike Yvain's lion who had to demonstrate only by example, Gornemant both physically and verbally prepares Perceval for knighthood. He explains first the use of a knight's weapons and mount, and then shows Perceval how to treat a fellow companion knight,

---

[792] *Perceval* 102 verses 1145-1148. "Dit il vallez: "Ami, prenez / Mon chaceor, si l'en menez, / Et portez sa cope lo roi, / Si lo saluez de par moi // My friend, take my hunter (horse) and led him back. He is excellent, I give him to you, because I no longer have need of him. Take back the King's cup and greet him on my behalf."

[793] *Perceval* 114-116 verses 1311-1367.

[794] *Perceval* 114 verses 1317-1318 & verse 1326. "Chevalier m'a fait / Li rois // I was made a knight by the king" (verses 1317-1318). "Li rois Artus les me dona // King Arthur gave me these arms" (verse 1326).

[795] Bernard of Clairvaux, *Bernard of Clairvaux Selected Works* 100. Step eight of pride: Self-justification. Defending one's sinful actions.

before finally inducting him into knighthood[796] and giving him a set of four commands to abide by. [797] Gornemant's contribution is twofold and its significance lies first in making Perceval realize his "doel"[798] at leaving his mother and second in his parting instructions. Because Perceval finally expresses concern over the state of his mother - he doesn't know if she is living or dead[799] - Perceval refuses to stay to continue with his training.[800] In parting, Gornemant's final instructions to Perceval are to be merciful,[801] to not be loquacious,[802] to help others by giving advice,[803] and to go to church and pray to God.[804]

During his time with Gornemant, Perceval begins to climb the steps of humility. He begins by submitting to his superiors[805] by accepting Gornemant's instruction in knighthood. With the acknowledgement of his sin, (that of not checking on his mother), Perceval completes step five of humility: confessing one's sin.[806] While Gornemant is not a priest, this is the first time that Perceval openly acknowledges his own fault in causing injury or death to his mother.[807] By the time Perceval leaves Gornemant, he has become a courtlier knight. He is less proud and more humble which facilitates the coming to fruition of Gornemant's parting instructions, for they direct Perceval's behavior in his subsequent adventures.

After leaving Gornemant, Perceval's first adventure demonstrates his new skills as a knight but also initiates him into the game of courtly love. Perceval comes to Blanchefleur's castle, Beaurepaire, where he is welcomed; but following Gornemant's advice, he does not

---

[796] *Perceval* 132 verses 1582-1596.
[797] *Perceval* 118-128 verses 1370-1536 & 133-135 verses 1604-1628.
[798] *Perceval* 128-130 verses 1538-1550.
[799] *Perceval* 128 verse 1544.
[800] *Perceval* 128 verses 1530-1536.
[801] *Perceval* 132 verse 1604.
[802] *Perceval* 132-134 verses 1605-1614.
[803] *Perceval* 134 verses 1614-1620.
[804] *Perceval* 134 verses 1624-1628.
[805] Bernard of Clairvaux, *Bernard of Clairvaux: Selected Works* 100. Step three: submission to superiors.
[806] Bernard of Clairvaux, *Bernard of Clairvaux: Selected Works* 100.
[807] *Perceval* 128 verses 1545-1546. "De doel de moi quant la laisai, / Chaï pasmee, bien lo sai // It is my tragedy that at my leaving, she fell down in a faint, I know well it is."

speak[808] until Blanchefleur speaks to him.[809] While this initial encounter post-Gornemant may not seem significant, it illustrates that Perceval has begun the process of internalization of Gornemant's instructions. Gornemant's first instruction is demonstrated by Perceval, when he grants mercy to both Aguingueron and Clamadieu after defeating them in battle.[810] The granting of mercy to both besiegers confirms Perceval's development from a young unskilled and discourteous knight into a skilled combatant who now understands how to be a courteous conqueror.

What is perhaps more significant about Perceval's adventures at Beaurepaire is his introduction to love. Initially, Perceval is not interested in Blanchefleur or love, for he "[m]ais il ne savoit nule rien / D'amor ne de nule autre rien, / Si s'andormi auques par tans, / Qu'il n'estoit de rien en espanz."[811] Yet Perceval and Blanchefleur are made for love, as noted by the other members of her household.[812] However, Perceval's heart has not yet been touched by love and it is not until Blanchefleur wakes him in the night[813] and explains her troubles[814] that Perceval's heart begins to open. Before accepting his chivalric duty and agreeing to help her,[815] Perceval performs a very courteous action: he takes her in his arms.[816] In taking Blanchefleur in his arms, he transforms into a courtly knight as he opens his heart to love. However, it is not until the day of his combat with Aguingueron that he fully enters into a courtly relationship with Blanchefleur.

---

[808] *Perceval* 146 verses 1813-1817.
[809] *Perceval* 148 verses 1838-1839.
[810] *Perceval* 168-178 verses 2119-2293 & 181-203 verses 2304-2634.
[811] *Perceval* 152 verses 1899-1902. "ignored everything of love like the rest and it wasn't long before he fell asleep because nothing troubled his tranquility."
[812] *Perceval* 148 verses 1824-1832. The members of Blanchefleur's household note that God has made them for each other (verse1831 - "Que Dex l'un et l'autre feïst").
[813] *Perceval* 154 verses 1929-1931.
[814] *Perceval* 156-158 verses 1940-1995.
[815] *Perceval* 160 verses 2003-2004.
[816] *Perceval* 154 verses 1935-1936.

In taking up the task of defeating Aguingueron, Perceval tells Blanchefleur that "[m]ais se je l'oci et conquier, / Vostre druerie vos quier."[817] Blanchefleur agrees to his demands by replying that if she "[q]ue je devaigne vostre amie / Par tel covant ne par tel loi / Que vos ailliez morir por moi."[818] Perceval and Blanchefleur have both stated their expectations of their love relationship, which borders on being a contractual marriage agreement. Like Yvain, Perceval will be responsible for his lady's defenses, which he does successfully, and Blanchefleur, like a true courtly lady, will provide him with his recompense.[819] In adherence to the tenets of courtly love, Perceval accepts his masculine role: he will fight displaying his skills which will prove that he merits Blanchefleur's love, whilst Blanchefleur accepts her feminine role of task setter and judge.

Perceval's experience with love moves him from being self-interested and selfish to being a more altruistic and social lover. Echoing Yvain's transformation of self after his madness, Perceval helps Blanchefleur, not just because of love (he had already agreed to assist her before they entered into their courtly relationship), but also because it is the right thing to do as a knight, per Gornemant's instructions. Perceval's carnal love, his love of self, has become social as he begins to love others,[820] manifesting by his willingness to risk his life in single combat to secure Blanchefleur's land, which results in freeing her people who have been held captive by Clamadieu.[821] Perceval's nascent love for Blanchefleur, his commitment to defend her lands, and his liberation of her people from Clamadieu, demonstrate that he has left Bernard's first degree of

[817] *Perceval* 164 verses 2061-2062. "if I kill him and I am victorious, I require your favors."
[818] *Perceval* 164 verses 2072-2074. "become your love, it is on the condition and the demand that you will die for me."
[819] *Perceval* 180 verses 2998-2302.
[820] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God* 26. "carnal love becomes social when it is extended to others."
[821] *Perceval* 202 verses 2642-2643. Like Lancelot, Perceval's rescue of Blanchefleur's people fulfills a prophecy which Keu did announce to all of Arthur's court when Perceval first showed up demanding to be made a knight (94 verses 1015-1018. "Ceste pucele ne rira / Jesque tant que ele verra / Celui qui de chevalerie / Avra tote la seignorie // This girl would only laugh on the day when she would see him, whose knightly glory would surpass all others."

love, where he was focused only on his wants and desires, and has progressed into the second degree of love, where he has begun to love and care for others.

Perceval's love for Blanchefleur is challenged by his worry and concern for his mother. After the battle with Clamadieu, Perceval is living with Blanchefleur and "[l]a terre, se il li plaüst / Que son coraige aillors n'aüst."[822] Perceval's heart cannot yet be given in all its entirety to Blanchefleur because his heart is elsewhere, presumably with his mother. There are two instances of double coding[823] which seem to refute the idea that Perceval has not yet given his whole heart to Blanchefleur. The first instance occurs the very night Blanchefleur reveals her troubles. Perceval takes her into his bed, kisses her,[824] and there they lay "[l]i uns lez l'autre, boche a boche."[825] If read in a vulgar manner, Perceval and Blanchefleur have had sexual intercourse;[826] yet Chrétien carefully eschews this notion by writing that for Blanchefleur "[t]ant li fist la nuit de solaz."[827] While they do kiss, the whole episode is one of comfort, not sexuality.[828] It is the same type of comfort Bernard discusses in Sermon Eight when he reveals the meaning of the Kiss.[829]

Bernard writes that the kiss given to the Bride in the *Song of Songs* is "no mean or contemptible thing... because it is nothing less than the gift of the Holy Spirit... it cannot be wrong to see in the kiss the Holy Spirit, for he is the imperturbable peace of the Father and the

---

[822] *Perceval* 216 verses 2855-2856.
[823] Barbara Newman X.
[824] Claude Lachet, "Grandeur" et "Misère" de l'amour dans le *Conte du Graal*" in *Dieu, Amour et Chevalerie* (Lyon: APRIME Éditions, 2008) 231. Lachet notes that this nightly visit is "à la fois sensuelle et chaste / at the same time sensual and chaste."
[825] *Perceval* 160 verses 2020-2023. Stretched out against each other, mouth to mouth.
[826] Frappier, *Chrétien de Troyes* 133. "The hero now has a mistress and begins to be courteous, stirred by love, by its emotions, mixed with forthright sensuality and tender pity for the defenseless woman." Frappier see only a sexual aspect to Perceval's encounter with Blanchefleur. She is his mistress in every sense of the word.
[827] *Perceval* 160 verse 2025. "This night she took comfort"
[828] Noble 85. "Their relationship remains perfectly chaste as is made clear by the use of 'pucele.'"
[829] *The Holy Bible: New International Version* Song of Songs 1:2. Bernard's kiss is based upon the following verse from the *Song of Songs*: "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth - for you love is more delightful than wine."

Son."[830] As Perceval and Blanchefleur are lying next to each other, mouth to mouth,[831] there is no mention of kissing; yet Chrétien's emphasis on their mouths being close together implies a shared intimacy. Bernard's discussion of the kiss is a discussion of the intimacy between the soul and God. The kiss "is a kiss from mouth to mouth, beyond the claim of any creature. It is a kiss of love and of peace, but of the love which is beyond all knowledge and that peace which is so much greater than we can understand."[832] The "kiss" shared between Perceval and Blanchefleur is not a vulgar prelude to a carnal act but an act of peace, an act of resting in the arms of a beloved. This is an act of comfort, especially for Blanchefleur who "de solaz."[833]

The episode of the comforting kiss is Perceval's first encounter with non-maternal love yet it is not recounted in the same manner as Lancelot's night of love with the Queen. During his time at Beaurepaire, Perceval at one point rejects[834] Blanchefleur's offer of sexuality[835] when she tries to convince him not to fight Clamadieu. Perceval is not interested in Blanchefleur as a sexual partner. As a knight who has just internalized the meaning of courtly behavior and courtly love, he rejects her offer because he does not merit it. In other words, he has not yet proved himself worthy in his eyes to accept her recompense.

Perceval's supposed lack of interest and unavailable heart are also challenged by a second instance of double coding. After his defeat of Clamadieu, Perceval's life at Beaurepaire has been one of "[d]elez li s'aaise et delite, / Et si fust soe toute quite"[836] with Blanchefleur. Chrétien is not explicit as to what delights Perceval has received but it is clear they are a result of his martial

---

[830] Bernard of Clairvaux, *Bernard of Clairvaux on the Song of Songs*, trans. Kilian Walsh, vol.1 (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, Inc., 1971) 46.
[831] *Perceval* 160 verses 2023 & 2026.
[832] Bernard of Clairvaux, *Bernard of Clairvaux on the Song of Songs*, vol.1 51.
[833] *Perceval* 160 verse 2025.
[834] *Perceval* 198 verses 2578-2580.
[835] *Perceval* 198 verses 2572-2577.
[836] *Perceval* 216 verses 2853-2854. "of delight and well being"

skills.[837] For me Perceval's "delite" is simply the joy he experiences at being in the presence of his lady love. Joy and love, as Bernard's dialectic of desire indicates, are what one should experience in the beloved's presence. However, his delight is short lived as "une [autre] molt plus li tient."[838] Perceval cannot commit whole-heartedly to Blanchefleur at this time because of his mother. Ferrante describes the woman a courtly knight loves as signifying "the harmony he has achieved within himself and with his world."[839] At the moment Perceval is not in harmony with himself or his world. Yes, he is a successful knight and under the tenets of courtly love he merits Blanchefleur's love and affections, yet he cannot return them completely. Some would see this as evidence of Perceval's naivety, his lack of understanding what to do;[840] however, it is really his worry and concern for his mother[841] and the disharmony in his life as a result of not knowing what has occurred to her which prevents him from being the lover-knight Blanchefleur merits. In Capellanus' words, Perceval cannot love two women at the same time.[842] He must first break off his relationship with his mother before he can engage in a more fruitful relationship with Blanchefleur.[843] Spiritually, it is Perceval's sin which prevents him from forming a relationship with Blanchefleur. He has distorted his divine likeness and until he repents, turns to God, and atones, he cannot move forward. In other words, Perceval is not ready for union.[844]

---

[837] *Perceval* 216 verses 2850-2852.
[838] *Perceval* 218 verse 2857.
[839] Joan M. Ferrante, *Woman as Image in Medieval Literature* (Durham: The Labyrinth Press, 1985) 3.
[840] Noble 84. "Chrétien stresses that Perceval is completely innocent in matters of love."
[841] Noble 86. "He is not aware of love, however, and because of the worry in his mind about his mother is to some extent able to resist it."
[842] Andreas Capellanus, *The Art of Courtly Love*, trans. John Jay Perry (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960) 60 & 81. The lover "should not be a lover of several women at the same time" (61) and should keep himself chaste for the sake of her whom he loves (81).
[843] *The Holy Bible: New International Version* Ephesians 5:31. "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh."
[844] Ferrante 3. The woman is "an intermediary between man and God. Man's goal is not union with her, but union with God through her."

Perceval's development is both secular and spiritual. He does learn to be a skilled combat knight as well as a courtly one. However, his development into a successful courtly lover is halted by his concern for his mother and until he discovers her fate he cannot progress further in courtly love. Spiritually, though, Perceval has progressed quickly. His change of self is indeed a movement towards God.[845] He has moved from a prideful and self-interested man to a concerned and caring social lover. So Perceval has progressed from Bernard's first to second degree of love by the time he leaves Beaurepaire. However, Perceval has already begun to embody Bernard's third degree as well. Like Lancelot, Perceval does obey another's will. He obeyed his mother's commands when he left her but in his blind desire to become a knight he perverts them with tragic consequences for the Tent Maiden and the Red Knight. Unfortunately because sin has distorted him, he cannot comprehend the commands he has received from his mother. Perceval's lack of comprehension is not from his naivety[846] but from the distortion of the divine likeness within him. Sin causes one to misinterpret God's will, twisting it to favor one's own self-interested goals. With one small act of generosity Perceval begins his rejection of sin, and finally, by obeying Gornemant's advice, he moves further away from pride. Perceval still does not fully understand the commands he has been given but his willingness to obey them at Beaurepaire demonstrates how he has moved into Bernard's third degree of love.

Once Perceval leaves Beaurepaire his secular progression is halted. He now knows how to act as a courtly knight and has come to understand his role as a courtly lover. Perceval and the reader now know all that is required to be considered a courtly lover-knight. At this point

---

[845] Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982) 87. Bynum writes that the development of the self was towards God and that development signifies the restoration of one's likeness to God.

[846] Noble 86. "This whole episode is not important for the analysis of love in it nor indeed for the study of the relationship between the lovers, but for the light it throws on Perceval who is revealed as gauche and immature... emotionally and socially he is till immature, and this is what is stressed so vividly by the description of his stay at the castle of Blancheflor."

Perceval, like Lancelot, enters into a stasis narrative, in regards to his secular development. Chrétien no longer is interested in his secular development, favoring instead his spiritual development which becomes the primary source of the themes explored in Perceval's subsequent adventures. It is to this more serious thematic exploration which I now turn.

Looking For God: An Illuminating Night with the Fisher King

The grail procession more than any other in *Perceval* has captured and kindled the imagination of countless generations. According to Barber, the grail is an object steeped in mysticism and mystery as well as popular fiction. [847] For Chrétien it is a simple dish; for others it is a holy object to be revered and venerated.[848] The air of mystery and mysticism surrounding the grail is due to the fact that no one knows quite who or what the grail truly is. Grail myth and lore are beyond the scope of this project, but there is at least one thing most scholars and conspiracy theorists alike agree on: it is shrouded in mystery. Whatever the case may be for the grail, object or person, for Chrétien it is an object that is part of a procession of other objects and he is careful not to reveal the grail's holy nature until Perceval's encounter with the hermit. Which raises the question: why does Chrétien wait to reveal the nature of the grail in his narrative? For me there can only be two reasons for doing so; first because he wants his audience to experience the grail procession as Perceval experiences it,[849] full of awe and wonder

[847] Barber, *The Holy Grail* 1. "The Grail is a mysterious and haunting image, which crosses the borders of fiction and spirituality, and which, for eight centuries, has been a recurrent ideal in Western literature."
[848] Bednar 141 & 148-149. Barber, *The Holy Grail* 112. Barber writes that the grail after Chrétien is "raised to the pinnacle of the spiritual world."
[849] Barber, *The Holy Grail* 20.

at the mysteries presented; and second because it makes his question, "Who is served by the grail?"[850] more significant.

When Perceval first encounters the Fisher King, the King is fishing from a boat[851] in a deep and rapid river.[852] Perceval's finding of the Fisher King in a boat is not a coincidence. It signals the beginning of a series of Christian symbols commencing with the primary role of Christ. Christ called to Peter and Andrew "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."[853] In this instance Chrétien directs the reader's attention to Christ's ministry, which was to lead man to God.[854] In other words, Christ fished for men to so that they might be guided into God's presence. Perceval who has been traveling all day[855] asks where he might find lodging for the night.[856] The Fisher King answers with: "'De ce et d'el / Avreiez vos mestier, ce cuit. / Je vos esbergerai a nuit."[857]

Like Christ, who sought to bring man to God, the Fisher King's offer of lodging is more than just a lodging for the night, for he sees that Perceval needs "[d]e ce et d'el." What this other thing might be is not yet clear, yet it is obvious that the Fisher King, like Guenièvre in *Lancelot*, has some omniscience. He knows already what Perceval needs before Perceval knows himself.[858] In addition to already knowing what Perceval requires, the Fisher King provides him

---

[850] *Perceval* 238 verse 3183. "Do graal cui l'an en servoit"
[851] *Perceval* 222 verses 2938 & 2945-2946.
[852] *Perceval* 222 verse 2926.
[853] *The Holy Bible: King James Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000) Matthew 4: 19.
[854] *The Holy Bible: New International Version* John 14:6. "Jesus answered: 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'"
[855] *Perceval* 222 verses 2918-2922.
[856] *Perceval* 224 verses 292-2963.
[857] *Perceval* 224 verses 2964-2966. "Of this, and also of another thing, you have need, I believe. It is me who will lodge you for this night."
[858] *The Holy Bible: New International Version* Matthew 6:8 & 6:31-32. Matthew 6: 8 says: "Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him." Matthew 6:31-32 says: "So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them."

with directions to his castle, but in order to get there Perceval must "[m]ontez vos an par cele frete / Qui est en cele roche fete."[859] There are only two references to a cleft in a rock in the Bible,[860] one in Exodus and the other in Matthew. It is Matthew which is referenced here. Christ said: "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it."[861] Perceval's journey through the cleft in the rock and the valley in which the Fisher King's castle is situated[862] symbolizes his entrance into a different realm, an "otherworld."[863] Actually Perceval's entrance into this otherworld is marked by his arrival at the river. By stopping at the water's edge, which symbolizes purification or baptism,[864] Chrétien indicates symbolically that Perceval is about to begin a "new life."[865] With his passage through the cleft in the rock, Perceval enters into the otherworld through the "narrow gates" where a new life, a spiritual life, will begin for him.

Upon entering through the cleft in the rock, Perceval follows the road and sees nothing but earth and sky,[866] which leads Perceval to curse the Fisher King's directions.[867] Suddenly he spies a tower upon which Perceval then begins to sing his praises.[868] Upon reaching the Fisher King's castle Perceval is relieved of his armor and shown into a great hall where he meets the

---

[859] *Perceval* 224 verses 2967-2968. "climb through this clef tin the rock."
[860] *The Holy Bible: New International Version* Exodus 33:22 and Matthew 7:13-14. In Exodus, God himself hides Moses in a cleft in the rock, while God's presence passes by because God forbids Moses from looking at his face.
[861] *The Holy Bible: New International Version* Matthew 7: 13-14.
[862] *Perceval* 224 verse 2970.
[863] Bednar 91. In *Lancelot*, the two bridges evoke the Celtic "otherworld" and the Christian world. Here it this the route at the water's edge but through the clef in the rock.
[864] Jacques Ribard, *Le Chevalier de la Charrette: Essai d'interprétation symbolique* (Paris: A. G. Nizet, 1972) 72.
[865] Ribard 72. Baptism is new life in Christ. Bednar states that Perceval not crossing the river indicates that he is not yet prepared for baptism (140), however, his passage through the clef in the rock, the "narrow gate" also symbolizes this transition into "new life."
[866] *Perceval* 226 verse 2977.
[867] *Perceval* 226 verse 2978-2988.
[868] *Perceval* 226 verse 2997-3000. This tower here could be a reference to Luke 13:4 where Jesus is calling people to repent or they will perish as eighteen others who died when a tower fell on them.

Fisher King a second time.[869] As this is the otherworld there is no indication of how the Fisher King arrives before Perceval,[870] yet he is lying on a bed ready to welcome him.[871] After asking Perceval to sit next to him,[872] the Fisher King demonstrates his generosity when he gives a very finely crafted sword to Perceval, which he girds around Perceval.[873] The girding of the sword symbolizes the new direction Perceval's life will take. As a symbol of the cross[874] or referencing the armor of God, the sword of the Spirit,[875] Perceval's sword symbolizes the presence of the Word[876] entering his life. Any knight would comprehend, Perceval's sword, like scripture or the word of God, is a double edge weapon that when properly wielded can defend but also attack.[877] Perceval's acceptance of this sword indicates his acceptance of a life in which the spiritual will play a significant part.

The emphasis on the Word's presence is revealed by Chrétien's description of the hall in which Perceval and the Fisher King are seated. The narrator states that "[e]t leianz avoit

---

[869] *Perceval* 228-230 verses 3008-3043.
[870] Leonadro Olschki, *The Grail Castle and It's Mysteries* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966) 10. "The reader may be struck by the fact that this bed-ridden invalid, even though on a litter, is able to fish in a river at a considerable distance from his castle, and return home before our errant knight. However, this marks the entrance to the kingdom of mystery which is not always subject to the clarity and logic... [Chrétien] leads us, for once, into a world of symbols that is ruled by a complex and obscure allegory."
[871] *Perceval* 230 verses 3023-3024.
[872] *Perceval* 230 verses 3055-3056. Having Perceval sit next to him is his wish and his will (i.e. desire).
[873] *Perceval* 232 verses 3096-3099.
[874] J.E. Cirlot, *A Dictionary of Symbols*, trans. Jack Sage (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 2002) 323. The sword is a symbol of the cross.
[875] *The Holy Bible: New International Version* Ephesians 6:17. "and the sword of Spirit, which is the word of God."
[876] Bednar 141. For Bednar, who makes no mention of the sword relating in any way to the armor of God, which is glaringly obvious, that Perceval's acceptance of the sword indicates that some danger will occur to him and he must repair a fault via suffering. Bednar's idea of repairing a fault by suffering is an echo of Ribard's entrance through the "porte étroite." For Ribard,"il faut passer par la 'porte étroite' de la souffrance t de la mort pour renaitre à une vie nouvelle, spirituelle/ it is necessary to enter by the narrow gate of suffering and death in order to be reborn to a new spiritual life" (48). Chrétien makes no mention of the cleft in the rocks being a place of death or suffering. On the contrary the Fisher King's castle is nothing but light and hospitality. It is a place of life not a place of suffering and death.
[877] Jean-François Lecompte, *La Symbolique du Graal: Géométrie du Conte du Graal de Chrétien de Troyes* (Paris: Édite, 2008) 160. St. Bernard called his monks the *militia Christi*, the army of Christ.

luminaire / Si grant c'on ne puet greignor faire / De chandoiles en un ostel."[878] This brightness and emphasis on light and illumination is the key to the Fisher King's Castle. It illustrates that the light of Christ, the Word, is present[879] as well as indicating an awakening to knowledge, and narratively the beginning of the grail procession. The grail procession is described almost as a vision, an ecstasy, or as a sacred rite as the objects build upon each other. The grail procession begins with the lance. The "lance blanche et lo fer blanc, / S'an ist une goute de sanc / Do fer de la lance an somet."[880] Following the lance are "[q]ui chandeliers... / De fin or, ovrez a neel... / En chascun chandelier ardoient / Dis chandoilles a tot lo miens."[881] Immediately following the candelabras is "un graal"[882] which is succeeded by "un tailleor d'argent."[883]

According to some this procession is full of Christian symbolism,[884] but others, such as Barber, do not see any Christian ties whatsoever.[885] Barber writes of the grail that

> is no more and no less than what [Chrétien] himself says it is. There are no hidden meanings here, no agenda or ritual or symbol or allegory. The most convincing argument for this is that the whole tone of the romance is no different from that of Chrétien's other works, where there is no question of a spiritual or religious dimension.[886]

---

[878] *Perceval* 234-236 verses 3125-3127. "The interior was illuminated, to the point that no house lit by candles could ever provide a brighter light."

[879] *The Holy Bible: New International Version* John 1:4-5 & 9, John 8:12, John 9:5 and John 12:46. John 1 states:"In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it...The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world." John 8 states "'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.'" John 9 states "'While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.'" John 12 states "'I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness.'" Prior to Perceval entering the grail castle, he was in darkness, i.e. sin and non-comprehension. The emphasis on light indicates Perceval's becoming free from sin but also the beginning of understanding.

[880] *Perceval* 236 verses 3135- 3137.

[881] *Perceval* 236-238 verses 3151-3157.

[882] *Perceval* 238 verses 3158. "a grail."

[883] *Perceval* 238 verses 3169. "a silver platter.'

[884] Bednar 141. Olschki 11-13. Frappier, *Chrétien de Troyes* 130. Frappier states that Chrétien's symbols are ambiguous but deliberate, creating "an atmosphere of Christian spirituality." Claire Erskin Clement, *A Handbook of Christian Symbols and Stories of the Saints*. Ed. Katherin E. Conway. (Boston: Ticknor and Company, 1886). According to Clement all of these symbols are different ways to designate Christ.

[885] Olschki 12-13. Olschki does not deny that the grail procession contains Christian symbols, however he does state that the grail procession is not orthodox, because orthodox Catholicism during the twelfth century would never have allowed a woman to handle or touch holy items especially not ones that would be carrying the Body or Blood of Christ.

[886] Barber, *The Holy Grail* 91

Barber flat out denies that there is any hidden or allegorical meaning to the grail.[887] Barber, however, does acknowledge that "for the medieval reader, both the grail and the lance had biblical origins," would have been considered relics of the Passion, and that "except for Chrétien all romances insist on this."[888] For Barber, then, *Perceval* or any of Chrétien's other works do not have any spiritual connotation whatsoever; and yet pages later he writes that the grail is an "agent of healing and a provider of food"[889] and "a gateway to the spiritual world, a physical focus for the metaphysical."[890] Barber's lack of recognizing the religious connotation in Chrétien's grail and grail procession is surprising considering that when the grail enters there is nothing in it but light, and yet it somehow produces food to feed the Fisher King's father.

For those who do see the procession as full of symbolism, the lance, the candelabras, the grail and the silver platter all represent Christ. Supposedly, this lance represents the Holy Lance of Longinus[891] which pierced Christ's side during the crucifixion.[892] The lance, then directs ones attention to Christ and to his suffering during the crucifixion. Similarly, the candelabras' profusion of ten burning candles symbolize Christ as the Light of the World and the presence of the Divine. If the light of the candelabras is bright, the grail's is brighter. In fact the narrator states that the grail was of "[u]ne si grant clartez i vint / Qu'ausin perdirent les chandoilles / Lor clarté comme les estoilles / Quant li solaux luist o la lune."[893] This vessel shines with its own brilliance, so much so that the candlelight seems dim. This is extraordinary, especially as there is already so much light in the room already. The grail's light eclipses them all. Here then surely

---

[887] Barber, *The Holy Grail* 95. "Chrétien's use of the word [grail] carries no magical or religious connotation."
[888] Barber, *The Holy Grail* 116.
[889] Barber, *The Holy Grail* 100.
[890] Barber, *The Holy Grail* 112.
[891] Olschki 13. Frappier, *Chrétien de Troyes et le mythe du graal: Etude sure Perceval ou Le Conte du Graal* (Paris: Société d'Édition d'Enseignement Supérieur, 1972) 71. Barber 126.
[892] *The Holy Bible: New International Version* John 19:34
[893] *Perceval* 238 verses 3164-3167. "such great clarity that the candles lost their brilliance as the stars loose theirs when the sun rises."

is the symbolic representation of Christ as the Light of the World.[894] Following the luminescent grail is a silver platter, of which Chrétien provides no further details and unlike the grail, it does not process by a second time.[895] According to Olschki, this silver platter represents the paten of Mass[896] which holds the host or the bread, symbolizing Christ and providing a reminder of the Last Supper.[897] Each of these objects, the emphasis on illumination, the cleft in the rock, the King who fishes, are all different ways to direct the reader's attention to Christ and through Him, to God.[898]

Perceval "vodroit molt savoir,"[899] but in obedience to Gornemant's instructions, he remains silent as he watches these objects enter and pass[900] by before exiting into another room.[901] In fact the grail and the candelabras pass by a second time, while Perceval feasts.[902] The reason for Perceval's inability to ask the question "[d]o graal cui l'an en servoit"[903] is revealed later by both his cousin and his uncle, the hermit. It is his sin against his mother that ties his tongue.[904] At the same time that Perceval learns it is his sin that prevents him from

[894] Barber, *The Holy Grail* 120. Barber provides other possibilities for the grail: the cup that caught Christ's blood at the Crucifixion, the cup of the Last Supper, or the cup that held the gall or vinegar offered to Christ as he hung on the cross.
[895] After mentioning the silver platter Chrétien immediately returns to the grail providing a description of it as being golden and encrusted with gems. Neither Perceval's cousin, who is encountered right after Perceval leaves the Fisher King's castle, nor his uncle the hermit, whom Perceval encounters later and provides information about the grail, provide any further details about the silver platter.
[896] Olschki 12.
[897] *The Holy Bible: New International Version* Luke 22:17-18 or Matthew 26:26.
[898] *The Holy Bible: New International Version* John 14:6. "Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'"
[899] *Perceval* 242 verse 3241. " would really like to know"
[900] *Perceval* 236 verses 3142-3150 & 239 verses 3181-3185.
[901] *Perceval* 238 verses 3176-3180.
[902] *Perceval* 242 verses 3228-3231.
[903] *Perceval* 238 verse 3138. "who is served by this grail."
[904] *Perceval* 262 verses 3531-3533 & 451 verse 6336. Perceval's cousin tells him first of his mother's death as a result of his sin, but it is not until Perceval reaches the hermit that he fully understands how it tied his tongue. Paul Le Rider, *Le Chevalier dans le Conte du Graal* (Conde-sur-Noireau: Sedes, 1978) 33. Le Rider writes that the hermit explains that Perceval's sin had removed his understanding and his state of grace because Perceval broke one of God's commandments: Honor thy father and mother.

healing the Fisher King's father, he also learns what the grail is.[905] Up until Perceval's encounter with the hermit, the grail is just a vessel with light for both Perceval and the reader. Although it is twice suggested that Perceval could have healed the Fisher King's father,[906] both of these instances however are based on Perceval's not asking the question rather than with the grail itself. It is the hermit who provides the Christian description of the grail and what it contains.[907] The hermit informs us that the grail is a "tant sainte chose."[908] For those whose eyes and ears were already opened, the hermit's revelation of the grail as a holy object, is not much of a revelation. This is where the question's importance becomes significant.

After Perceval fails the second time to ask "Who is served by the grail," the Fisher King announces that it is time to retire for the night.[909] The Fisher King leaves and Perceval sleeps before awakening to an empty castle. After searching the castle for anyone to explain the grail procession Perceval eventually leaves without having his questions answered.[910] The first person Perceval encounters after leaving the Fisher King is his cousin. After informing him that he caused his mother's death, which is his sin,[911] she reveals several significant facts about the Fisher King, which in turn assist in comprehending the question and its answer. In her description of the Fisher King she states that he has no other pleasure than fishing.[912]

---

[905] Richard Barber, "Chivalry, Cistercianism and the Grail" in *A Companion to the Lancelot-Grail Cycle*, ed. Carol Dover (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2003) 8. "It is only later in the romance that we learn that this dish is a 'holy thing.'"

[906] *Perceval* 262 verses 3523-3527 & 333-335 verses 4584-4613. Perceval's cousin first informs the fact that the King's father would have been healed had he asked the question. This is repeated by the Hideous Maiden who tells Perceval it is his fault for remaining silent when he could have asked thus healing the king and because he didn't she tells the court of the misfortunes that will now befall maidens, orphans, and knights.

[907] *Perceval* 450 verses 6346-6350. The grail is a dish that could fit a whole fish in it but does not because it carries the Host.

[908] *Perceval* 450 verse 6351. "Tant sainte chose est li Graals // Such a holy thing is the Grail."

[909] *Perceval* 244-246 verses 3274-3281.

[910] *Perceval* 246-250 verses 3294-3359.

[911] *Perceval* 262 verses 3531-3533.

[912] *Perceval* 258 verse 3460.

Immediately, she reminds the reader of Christ's role of being a fisher of men to draw them to the Father.

Keeping Christ's role as a fisher of men in mind she then reveals that the Fisher King was wounded by a "javelot" between his legs,[913] supposedly in a spot that renders him impotent.[914] Once Perceval's familial relations are revealed by the hermit,[915] the location of Fisher King's wounds becomes important, as Perceval can claim to be an heir to his kingdom, through his mother.[916] If one accepts the Fisher King's father as God and the Fisher King as Christ, then Perceval, as their heir, spiritually has the power to heal.[917] The fact that Perceval did not ask is what his cousin laments, for the question would have healed.[918] Perceval's inability to ask the question is lamented again by the Hideous Damsel. She tells Perceval that it is his fault for not asking the question but does not explain why it is his fault before informing all of the devastations which will now occur because he did not open his mouth.[919]

Perceval's inability to open his mouth, while tragic, actually demonstrates steps six and nine of Bernard's steps of humility; to keep silent unless asked to speak and not to think oneself worthy to take initiative.[920] Perceval's lack of initiative in asking the question as well as his

---

[913] *Perceval* 256 verses 3447-3452. a javelin, i.e. a type of spear

[914] Roger Sherman Loomis, "The Origin of the Grail Legends," in *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages*, ed. Roger Sherman Loomis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959) 279. The "description of the Fisher King as wounded 'parmi les hanches ambedeus', 'through the two thighs', was a euphemism for emasculation.'

[915] *Perceval* 450 verses 6340-6341. The hermit is the Fisher King's brother and Perceval's mother was their sister. Thus the Fisher King is also Perceval's uncle.

[916] Christopher Gravett, *English Medieval Knight 1200-1300* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, Ltd., 2002) 42. "The rule of primogeniture meant that a man's inheritance usually passed to his eldest son... If a lord had no son, his inheritance was split between his daughter." As the Fisher King is wounded in a place that would ensure he had no offspring and the hermit, as a man of the cloth which implies he has taken a vow of chastity, would also not have issue, then the inheritance would pass to Perceval's mother, who is sister to the Fisher King. Since Perceval's older brothers are deceased whatever his mother stood to inherit now comes to him.

[917] *The Holy Bible: New International Version* Romans 8:17. Romans states "[n]ow if we are children, then we are heirs - heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory."

[918] *Perceval* 262 verses 3523-3527.

[919] *Perceval* 332-334 verses 4584-4613.

[920] Bernard of Clairvaux, *Bernard of Clairvaux Selected Works* 100. Step nine: Keeping silent unless asked to speak. Step six: Thinking oneself unworthy to take initiative.

ability to keep silent as instructed by Gornemant illustrate his humility and his obedience. Unfortunately, Perceval's humility and obedience is to such an extreme that his pride takes over and prevents him from speaking. Unlike Lancelot who obeyed out of love, Perceval obeys out of fear, which is based in pride.[921] So although Perceval is progressing towards humility and love, by working to leave his pride behind, he has not yet reached a point spiritually where love has consumed his pride and fear. Hence, the emphasis on the question and on Perceval's potential to heal if he but opened his mouth.

Chrétien's insistence on the question reveals the true meaning of the grail procession.[922] The focus of the grail procession is not the objects themselves but the wounded King, specifically the wounded King in the other room.[923] While the question directs one to the power of healing, it is not the healing of the Fisher King, himself, which is important, but rather the healing of the Fisher King's father. The grail procession and the question direct attention to the King in the other room, just like Christ always directs man to the Father.[924] Like the sacraments which point to a deeper spiritual meaning, the grail procession and the Fisher King himself, point to God, the Father, that wounded King in the other room.[925] The wounded Fisher King who likes to fish for men and bring them to the Father, can only be the Christ who suffered and died for our sins. The father who is served by the grail can only be God our Father, who loves us so much

---

[921] John Piper, "The Pride of Being Afraid," (*Desiring God* 19 May 1981 <www.desiringgod.org/articles/the-pride-of-being-afraid>). *The Holy Bible: New International Version* I John 4:18."There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love."

[922] Le Rider 98. Le Rider argues that asking the question in the first place is what is important during the grail procession.

[923] *Perceval* 450-452 verses 6355-6357. Olschki 18. "[i]t is not the Fisher King that draws physical and spiritual nourishment from the host within the Grail, but the king's father."

[924] *The Holy Bible: New International Version* John 14:6 & Luke 10:16. John 14: 6 states: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to that Father except through me." Luke 10:16 states: "He who listens to you listens to me; he who rejects you rejects me; but he who rejects me rejects him who sent me."

[925] Denis E. Tamburello, *Union with Christ: John Calvin and the Mysticism of St. Bernard* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994) 74. "the whole enterprise of approaching god is rooted in Christ."

that even though we wound Him by sinning and turning away from Him, still sent his son to find us and redeem us.[926]

Chrétien's grail procession, then, is not meant to be unduly mysterious.[927] The objects like the question are all presented and the question is repeated so that the reader will comprehend the answer.[928] The question of "Who is served by the Grail?" is answered with "God the Father[929] and any who seek Him or believe in Him."[930] The grail procession is not about the objects or a ritual,[931] it is about finding God, finding Him and adhering to Him so that one may live a life in the Light.[932] The grail procession is not about a

> body of secret lore within the Church, a tradition of ritual magic which was known to a select few...[in which] this knowledge could safely be presented as a romance which only initiates would understand, and which would read as a chivalric story with a strong moral element to those outside the charmed circle. The book which Philip of Flanders gave him [Chrétien] was a text similar to *The Sworn Book.*[933]

Chrétien is not attempting to hide the true meaning of the grail procession nor is he trying to promote a ritualistic or magical event as suggested by Barber. Chrétien simply provides a succession of objects symbolizing Christ which directs the reader's attention to the luminosity of the Divine Presence.

---

[926] *The Holy Bible: New International Version* John 3:16. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."
[927] Richard Barber, "Chivalry, Cistercianism and the Grail" 8. Barber states that the grail's function is "an object of mystery" and "deliberately sets out to conceal rather than reveal."
[928] Zrinka Stahuljak, Virginie Greene, Sarah Kay, Sharon Kinoshita, and Peggy McCracken, *Thinking Through Chrétien de Troyes*, (Woodbridge, U.K.: D. S. Brewer, 2011) 96. "The question is an occasion, not for a search for an answer to the questions, but for supplying an already pre-existing answer." In other words, the answer and the question are not mutually exclusive and both are already provided.
[929] *Perceval* 450 verses 6341-6344.
[930] *The Holy Bible: New International Version* Luke 19:10. "For the Son of man came to seek and save what was lost." Man as sinner, the lost sheep, is what was lost. Therefore the grail procession is a way of seeking us because Christ came "not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."(Luke 5:32).
[931] Olschki 11-30.
[932] *The Holy Bible: New International Version* John 3:21. "But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God."
[933] Barber, *The Holy Grail* 359. *The Sworn Book* of Honorius is a text that supposedly reveals the true name of God, instructs on how to communicate with angels, spirits, and demons as well as explaining how to exorcise the demons.

Chrétien's emphasis on light during the episode of the Fisher King castle and grail procession illustrates the awakening to knowledge and spirituality within Perceval. At the time of the grail procession Perceval is still a seeker. He does not yet understand the symbols with which he has been presented nor does he yet comprehend his sin. As his adventures unfold though, these are revealed to him. During the adventure in the Fisher King's castle, what is important for Perceval is that he obeyed the instructions that he was given.[934] He is trying to be respectful even through his silence.[935] Perceval's fear of speaking, his pride, and his sin are what keep him from asking the question, illustrating that Perceval is still lacking in compassion and does not yet understand love. Perceval, though, has moved beyond Bernard's first degree of love, which is focused on the self, into Bernard's second degree by which he begins to focus on things that do not necessarily grant or bring him honor, and into his third degree where he is obedient.[936] He is, however, not yet ready to move out of the second or third degree of love.

In the adventures that follow the Fisher King's castle, Perceval learns of his sin from his cousin and the Hideous Damsel. However it is in restoring the relationship between the Tent Maiden and her knight that Perceval begins to demonstrate compassion for another.[937] Perceval finally comprehends that he destroyed a loving relationship and he sets about righting it.[938] In other words, Perceval repents and by defeating Orgueilleux de la Lande, Perceval purifies his

---

[934] *Perceval* 236 verses 3144-3147 & 238 verses 3184-3185. "Que do chasti li sovenoit / Celui qui chevalier lo fist, / Qui li commanda et aprist / Que de trop parler se guardast // Because he remember the lesson given to him from him who made him a knight and who had taught him not to speak too much." (3144-3147). "Que toz jorz an son cuer avoit / La parole au prodome sage // Because he still had at heart the words of the wise gentleman" (3184-3185).

[935] *Perceval* 236 verses 3148-3149. "Et crient, se il lo demandast / C'on nel tenist a vilenie // Thus he feared that if he asked one would judge his question rude."

[936] Perceval is in fact simultaneously in Bernard's second and third degree at the same time. After his time with Gornemant Perceval begins to focus on other people, his mother and Blanchefleur. However, he also is in a state of obedience to the lessons Gornemant has taught him. So while he is willing to obey another's will, he still hesitates between pure love (for his mother and Blanchefleur, ie: God) and cupidity (his own renown)..

[937] *Perceval* 276 verses 3734-3744.

[938] *Perceval* 276- 288 verses 3745-3914.

spirit,[939] illustrating the change in the direction of his life. By recognizing his part in the downfall of the Tent Maiden, Perceval understands her present condition,[940] thus demonstrating his compassion. Perceval's compassion for the two lovers defines him as a social lover who can see and love God in others[941] and reminds him of his love for his own absent lady.[942]

Lost in Thought: Contemplation is Spiritual Union

The second most explored episode in *Perceval* involves Perceval's contemplation of the three drops of blood on pristine snow. While not as famous as Chrétien's grail episode it is still mysterious, and perhaps even more so than the grail episode. Like the grail procession this episode is filled with Christian symbols. Rather than trying to point one to God, this episode is one of contemplation. Perceval's contemplation shares similarities with Lancelot's constant ecstasies and because of these similarities, I argue that Perceval illustrates the spiritual union attainable only to those who are in Bernard's third degree of love. Tamburello discusses Perceval's contemplative state of mind after restoring the Tent Maiden by explaining that "[a]fter a good work one rests more securely in contemplation, and the more a man is conscious that he has not failed in works of charity through love... the more faithfully will he contemplate things sublime and make bold to study them."[943] Contemplation creates the space to hear and be with God. Perceval demonstrates how he has progressed from incomprehension to contemplation and in so doing he illustrates his love by his entrance into spiritual union with the divine.

---

[939] Bednar 143.
[940] *Perceval* 268-274-verses 3631-3716. She is described as wearing a torn and dirty dress, with unkempt hair, a tear streaked face, and riding a thin palfrey.
[941] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God* 27. "how can one love one's neighbor with purity, if one does not love him in God?..It is necessary, therefore to love God first; then one can love one's neighbor in God."
[942] Which could be either his mother or Blanchefleur.
[943] Tamburello 80.

Perceval watches a falcon strike a wild goose on the neck.[944] The goose falls to the ground, wounded, and there "[s]i saigna .III. goutes de sanc / Qui espandirent sor lo blanc."[945] In this short section there are five different symbols present; two symbols are avian while the other three are attached to blood. A wild goose, in Celtic Christianity, represents the Holy Spirit,[946] whereas the falcon represents evil thoughts.[947] The falcon's attack on the goose's neck, the place of pride,[948] illustrates how pride kills the spirit. The falcon symbolically represents Perceval's sinful state prior to his night at the Fisher King's castle. This is why the goose falls to the ground, wounded but not dead, Perceval's pride wounds the spirit, i.e. distorts our likeness to God, but does not kill it. Instead the goose bleeds three drops onto the pristine while snow before eventually flying off.[949] The flight of the goose symbolizes the soul's ascent to God,[950] and thus, man though distorted by sin can still reach God through Christ's suffering and death, symbolized by drops of blood.[951]

The red blood against the white snow has two significances: first it emphasizes two contrasting states, sin and purity,[952] and second it represents Christ's blood spilled for all sinners at the crucifixion. Isaiah 1:18 states "[t]hough your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as

---

[944] *Perceval* 300-302 verses 4106-4120.
[945] *Perceval* 302 verses 4121-4122. The goose "bled three drops of blood which spread out on the white [snow]."
[946] Josh Sweeden, rev. of *Chasing the Wild Goose: The Story of the Iona Community*, by Ronald Ferguson (Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications, 1998), <www.bu.edu/cpt/resources/book-reviews/chasing-the-wild-goose-the-story-of-the-iona-community/>
[947] "Birds are used as Christian Symbols" *Cathoicism.org* Oct. 2004, <catholicism.org/birds-are-used-as-christian-symbols.html>
[948] Tom Artin, *The Allegory of Adventure* (London: Bucknell University Press, 1974) 67.
[949] *Perceval* 302 verse 4127.
[950] "Birds are used as Christian Symbols" *Cathoicism.org* Oct. 2004, <catholicism.org/birds-are-used-as-christian-symbols.html>
[951] José Manuel Losada Goya, "La nature mythique du Graal dans *Le Conte du Graal* de Chrétien de Troyes," *Cahiers de Civilisation Médiéval* 52 (2009) 17. Losada Goya suggests that the three drops symbolizes the Trinity.
[952] K. Sarah-Jane Murray, *From Plato to Lancelot: A Preface to Chrétien de Troyes* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2008) 236. The three drops of blood for Murray evoke the Eucharist. However, as there is no bread or symbol for bread present, the Eucharist is not represented here. This is an episode which deals with Perceval's sin and repentance.

snow."[953] The red blood symbolizes man's state of sin; he becomes as white as snow upon repenting and turning to God. If one believes as Christians do that Christ died for all sins,[954] then the white snow symbolizes those sinners "who have come out of the great tribulation; [and] have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."[955] Both the falcon and the goose, the red and the white, emphasize sin and repentance and symbolize Perceval's spiritual state up until this point in the narrative.

The drops of blood on the snow however also have another function for Perceval, for they cause Perceval to start thinking of Blanchefleur.[956] To some scholars the two colors are only indicative of the complexion of Blanchefleur,[957] a "divertissement chevaleresque,"[958] or a manifestation of Perceval's desire and love for her as well as their future marriage.[959] In other words, there is nothing in this episode other than the courtly love of Blanchefleur. However, this does not completely nor even adequately explain the deep contemplation Perceval falls into after seeing those colors together. Perceval "[e]t panse tant que toz s'oblie... / tant li plaissoit."[960] In forgetting himself Perceval's contemplation is worthy of one of Lancelot's ecstasies, for Perceval cannot be roused unless attacked.[961] Twice two of Arthur's knights seek to bring him out of his

---

[953] *The Holy Bible: New International Version*
[954] *The Holy Bible: New International Version* Romans 4:25. "He was delivered over to death for our sins."
[955] *The Holy Bible: New International Version* Revelation 7:14. Washed in the blood of the Lamb refers to Christ's death which provides absolution for all sinners. Thus those who are washed will be purified, made white.
[956] *Perceval* 302 verses 4133-4136. "Et li sanz et la nois ensanble / La fresche color li resanble / Qui est en la face s'amie, / Et panse tant que toz s'oblie // Because the blood and the snow together are a resemblance of the fresh color of the face of his love."
[957] Noble 86. Frappier, *Chrétien de Troyes* 135. Stahuljak et al, 98. Stahuljak et al write that "Perceval is lost in metaphoric though of Blanchefleur instead of contemplating the marvel he has just witness."
[958] Frappier, *Le Mythe du Graal* 130.
[959] Pierre Gallais, "Le sang sur la neige (le conte et le rêve)" *Cahiers de Civilisation Médiévale* 21 (1978): 39 &40.
[960] *Perceval* 302 verses 4136 & 304 verse 4142. "he forgot himself... such was the pleasure he had there."
[961] James Harpur, *Love Burning in the Soul* (Boston: New Seeds, 2005) 45. "With regard to ecstasy, Augustine says that in this state the mind is withdrawn from sense experience. The person's eyes are open but sights and sounds cannot be seen or heard: the attention of the mind is directed either to the images of a spiritual vision or to the imageless things of an intellectual vision." In this case Perceval is experiencing "the images of a spiritual vision."

reverie.[962] On the first attack Perceval "[a]inz fait senblant que il ne l'ot"[963] and on the second "[q]u'il n'avoit d'autre chose soig"[964] because he is still engaged in an all absorbing reflection. However, as the snow melts, Perceval is finally approached by Gauvain,[965] whereupon he reveals that he was absorbed by "une panse qui molt me plaisoit."[966]

To some scholars Perceval's contemplation of the three drops of blood illustrates the narrative tension between "l'amour charnel et l'amour divin,"[967] as well as serving as an introduction to mystical contemplation.[968] Perceval's contemplation of the blood on the snow which reminds him of Blanchefleur is actually a contemplation of God.[969] The traumatic news of his mother's death means that Perceval cannot return to her. In other words, Perceval's leaving his mother symbolizes mankind's expulsion from the Garden, where before Perceval, like Adam, lived in blissful ignorance. Perceval's sin, his desire for knighthood and lack of compassion, causes his "Fall" which separates him from his mother or God. Thus like Adam, Perceval must find another path to return to the loving state he experienced with his mother. Because God loves man unconditionally, He provided his Son, Christ, to show us the way to return to Him. Knowing that he can never return to his "pre-Fall" state, Perceval is free to love Blanchefleur, and in loving her, Perceval actually loves God. The grail procession initiates Perceval's return to Him and the three drops of blood provoking the profound contemplation initiates a pleasing and loving state.

---

[962] *Perceval* 304-308 verses 4154-4205 & 309-317 verses 4205-4344.
[963] *Perceval* 306 verse 4180. "seems not to hear"
[964] *Perceval* 308 verse 4225. "had no worries of anything else" (i.e. he was not troubled by anything else other than his contemplation)
[965] *Perceval* 318 verses 4364-4373. "a thought that was entirely to my pleasure."
[966] *Perceval* 318 verse 4379.
[967] Le Rider 189. "carnal love and divine love"
[968] Frappier, *Chrétien de Troyes* 135. "This amorous ecstasy... is his first sign of introspection."
[969] Ferrante 2-3. Ruth Mazo Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe* 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2012) 82. The lady is representative of God.

In centering all of Perceval's attention on the three drops of blood,[970] Perceval reclaims his love for Blanchefleur, or God. In his moment of reverence, Blanchefleur who is absent is actually present,[971] similar to when one prays "he who seemed so distant has been quickly brought close."[972] The *rapprochement* between Perceval and God is effectuated through his contemplation, the quietness of prayer in which he achieves communication with God. Perceval through the spiritual union of contemplation has access to God as well as His will.[973] Contemplation is one of the first steps in which a mystic engages.[974] This means that the mystic[975] hears the voice of God, which is perhaps why Perceval does not try to excuse or justify his silence at the Fisher King's castle and simply accepts the responsibility imposed by the Hideous Damsel to find an explanation of the grail question.[976] He has heard God's voice[977] and now understands and obeys the new spiritual direction of his life. In other words, Perceval has moved further into Bernard's third degree of love, where love and obedience are intertwined. After the grail procession, the contemplation of the drops of blood on the snow, and the words of the Hideous Damsel, Perceval's life is re-oriented away from chevaleresque and earthly adventures towards the spiritual and the Divine.[978]

---

[970] According to Clement the use of the number three signifies the Trinity.
[971] Frappier, *Le Mythe du Graal* 140. "la dame absente et présente, présente parce qu'absente."
[972] Tamburello 69.
[973] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God* 29-30. "inebriates with divine love, the mind may forget itself and... hastening towards God and clinging to him, becoming one with him in spirit. The satisfaction of our wants, chance happiness, delights us less than to see his will done in us and for us, which we implore every day in prayer says in: 'your will be done on earth as it is in heaven...'" Tamburello 67. Tamburello states that in mystical union, the "mystic is one with the *will* of God."
[974] Underhill, *The Mystics of the Church* 10
[975] Harper 4. Harper notes that during the Middle Ages, "those whom we would now consider to by mystics were covered by the word *contemplatives*."
[976] Frappier, *Le Mythe du Graal* 145.
[977] Tamburello 68. "union between the Word and the soul is a spiritual union."
[978] Frappier, *Le Mythe du Graal* 143 & 145.

In fact, Perceval illustrates a new type of warrior knight,[979] "one who feels guilt and seeks to reform his life."[980] Perceval's contemplation is the culmination of a mystical experience that had been developing since his passage through the cleft in the rock. All the Christian symbols presented both in the grail procession and the blood on snow, as well as Perceval's deep contemplation of them,[981] suggest a mystical experience which has "led to a profound transformation in the individual, who is blessed with a greater capacity for spiritual virtues, such as a heightened sense of compassion."[982] Perceval's experience at the Fisher King's castle did indeed transform him and lead him to greater compassion with the Tent Maiden. The three drops on the snow suggest a greater capacity for spirituality which leads one to be absorbed in private prayer so that one can reach God. While absorption is needed to reach God, contemplation is fed by active service, participation, and living an active life.[983] Perceval's contemplation while all absorbing only provides a brief moment of spiritual union with God. It is not true union and this is what Perceval seeks in his acceptance to search for the meaning of the grail question and the lance that bleeds.

Through Perceval's journey, Chrétien explores the idea of seeking God through mystical experiences, such as the grail procession and the three drops of blood on the snow. Perceval's initial desire to return to his mother, reflects man's journey to restore his relationship with God. Although man sins, God provides Christ to help man find Him. Perceval's journey is indeed the search for the Father,[984] but it is the Father as Beloved[985] which he truly seeks. Perceval's

[979] Maurice Keen, *Chivalry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984) 2, 46, & 48-51.
[980] William Farina, *Chrétien de Troyes and the Dawn of Arthurian Romance* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland and Company, Inc., 2010) 148.
[981] Tamburello 134. Tamburello defines contemplation as "the total centering of one's attention on God."
[982] Harper 3.
[983] Tamburello 78 & 81.
[984] Maddox 100.

journey illustrates the steps necessary for restoring the divine likeness through true repentance and compassion, so that true union can occur.

All I Want Is to Be with You: Union and Conclusion

Unlike Lancelot, who is Chrétien's example par excellence of the monastic lover of God, Perceval, who has attained spiritual union, has a very human experience of God. After all the indications of God, experiencing compassion and love, Perceval forgets Him and turns his eyes and heart to earthly matters for five years. During this time, Perceval "[n]e Due ne sa croiz n'aora / Tot ensin .V. anz demora, / Por ce ne relaissoit il mie / A requerre chevalerie, / Que les estranges aventures / Les felonesses et les dure... / Ensinc les .V. anz empleia, / N'onques di Deu ne li sovint."[986] Perceval's forgetfulness is not an illustration of an evil man, but instead an illustration of a sinner, a prideful man who is more interested in his own renown and glory.[987]

In fact Perceval's forgetfulness recalls the first two lines of Chrétien's prologue which speak of a sower.[988] In the Gospel of Luke, Christ recounts a parable about a sower and when asked what it means, one of the explanations He gives is: "The seed who fell among the thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature."[989] Perceval embodies this type of seed in that for five years he forgot God; and like the seed which fell among the thorns, Perceval had knowledge and

---

[985] Perceval's beloved could either be his mother or Blanchefleur.
[986] *Perceval* 438 verses 6149-6154 & 6162-6163. He "didn't worship God or his Cross... however he didn't hesitate to search for chivalrous acts, always in quest of strange, terrible, and fierce adventures... this was his work of five years without which the thought of God never entered his head."
[987] *Perceval* 438 verses 6159-6161. "A la cort lo roi Artus pris / Dedenz .V. anz i enveia. // For five years Perceval sent his prisoners back to Arthur's court. Stahuljak et al 158. Stahuljak et al suggest that Perceval's adventures during this five years were not meaningful "in any way other than in their accumulation." In other words, they were not important, meaning to Chrétien it was the spiritual that mattered in *Perceval*.
[988] *Perceval* 26 verses 1-4.
[989] *The Holy Bible: New International Version* Luke 8:14.

experience of God from seeing the grail procession, meeting the Fisher King and experiencing a profound contemplation at seeing the blood on the snow, but was distracted by an earthly thing, combat and renown. Perceval's life may have started taking a new direction, but like many men, he was distracted by earthly things and forgot to set his mind on the spiritual,[990] and thus, he has not matured. This however is about to change and change very rapidly.

When Perceval encounters the group of penitents on the road on Good Friday,[991] he is made fully aware of his sinful nature, as he has "en son cuer enui."[992] Recalling the grief he caused his mother and his failure at the Fisher King's castle,[993] Perceval decides to makes straight for the hermit's abode.[994] Touched by the penitents' words, as he follows the route indicated by them, Perceval enters into a state of despair "[q]ui sospire del cuer del ventre / Por ce que mesfaiz se santoit / Vers Deu, dont molt se repantoit."[995] Upon entering the chapel close to the hermit's abode, Perceval falls to his knees because he fears "[a]voir vers Dalmedeu mespris."[996] The hermit, moved by the sincerity of Perceval contrition, expressed by his tear streaked face,[997] instructs him to confess so he may receive forgiveness.[998] Perceval complies noting that he "'[n]e ne fis rien que je deüsse.'"[999] The hermit imposes a penance upon Perceval

---

[990] *The Holy Bible: New International Version* Colossians 3:2. "Set your mind on things above, not on earthly things."
[991] *Perceval* 438 verses 6168-6186.
[992] *Perceval* 438 verses 6187. " he had a troubled heart."
[993] *Perceval* 444 verses 6241-6243. "Ce que Percevaus oï ot / Lo fait plorer // The words he just heard made Perceval cry." What Perceval has just learned is that one must confession one's sins if one wants to return to God."
[994] *Perceval* 444 verse 6248. Perceval asked for directions and was told to follow "cest santier tot droit // this straight path here." The straight path here could refer to Hebrews 12:13 which states "Make level paths for your feet, so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed." The lame in this case are sinner, who need to be healed and thus should follow the straight path. This also brings Matthew 7:14 to mind, which speaks of the "small gate and narrow road" to God.
[995] *Perceval* 444 verses 6260- 6262. "from the bottom of his soul because he felt guilty towards God et he repented of it."
[996] *Perceval* 446 verse 6280-6281. 'having offended God."
[997] *Perceval* 446 verses 6277-6279.
[998] *Perceval* 446 verses 6286-6288.
[999] *Perceval* 448 verse 6311. "has done nothing that he should have." *The Holy Bible: New International Version* Mark 14:38b. "The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak."

which he accepts with all his heart[1000] and proceeds to instruct him on his duties both Christian and knightly.[1001] Perceval then accepts the hermits offer to stay a couple days to receive further instructions on his penance and Christian life.[1002] Perceval hears Mass, adores the cross, and confesses his sins, before remembering that the day is Good Friday when Christ was crucified.[1003] Finally, Perceval's narrative ends on Easter Sunday with the following sentence: "A la Pasques comenïez / Fu Percevaus molt dignement."[1004]

Easter Sunday is significant in that it is the day of Christ's return from the dead but also the day he ascends to heaven. It is unknown what experiences Perceval had between Good Friday and Easter Sunday, but whatever they were, they enabled Perceval to achieve union. Perhaps through Perceval's preparation, learning to pray, learning the contemplative and penitent life from the hermit and learning to love through his adventures, he achieves that which all Christians seek, union with the Divine. Chrétien use of the verb "comenïez" can be translated as either to take communion or to be united. If the former, then one could argue that Chrétien did indeed intend to return to Perceval's narrative.[1005] However, if it is the later, Perceval can go no further either narratively or spiritually because he has achieved true union.[1006] Perceval's disappearance from the narrative fulfills Bernard's forth degree of love, because Perceval has

[1000] *Perceval* 452 verses 6360-6361.
[1001] *Perceval* 452- 454 verses 6385-6394.
[1002] *Perceval* 454 verses 6400-6404.
[1003] *Perceval* 456 verses 6418-6431.
[1004] *Perceval* 456 verses 6432-6433. "The day of Easter, Perceval received communion with dignity."
[1005] Barber, *The Holy Grail* 139. "union with Christ in the Eucharist was spiritual not physical." If the union is spiritual then Perceval's story would continue because he had not achieved true union.
[1006] Bogdanow , "The Transformation of the Role of Perceval" 49. "Chrétien did not complete his *Conte du Graal*, but he implies that once Perceval has expiated his sins, and only then, he will succeed in the greatest of all the adventures." Bogdanow sees Perceval achieving the Grail, I perceive it as fulfilling the Christian goal of union with God.

achieved "communia" with God. In other words, Perceval has lost himself, as if he no longer existed.[1007]

Bernard's fourth degree of love explores two types of union. The first is a spiritual union in which the "mind may forget itself and become in its own eyes like a broken dish, hastening towards God and clinging to him, becoming one with him in spirit."[1008] This is the type of union experienced by contemplation and it eventually ends, returning the contemplative to his own body.[1009] Lancelot's night of love and Perceval's absorption in the three drops of blood illustrate this type of spiritual union, in which one has access to God's love and His will.[1010] Bernard also writes of another deeper union: "[t]o lose yourself, as if you no longer existed, to cease completely to experience yourself, to reduce yourself to nothing is not a human sentiment but a divine experience." This true union is "the highest degree of love" in which man will no longer "be held back by any desire of the flesh or upset by troubles as he hastens with the greatest speed and desire toward the joy of the Lord,"[1011] and thus, man no longer loves himself except for God.[1012] In this union man cannot be held back by the flesh, because man is freed of his flesh, that is deceased.[1013] This does not mean that man is annihilated by union with God; instead Bernard perceives that the "distinction between creator and created is maintained - it is a union of wills and not a complete absorption and loss of identity on the part of the individual soul."[1014] This is what Bernard means when he describes true union as a drop of water that seems to disappear completely in a big quantity of wine; even when the souls assumes the wine's taste and

[1007] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God* 29.
[1008] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God* 29.
[1009] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God* 30. "Alas, he has to come back to himself, to descend again into his being"
[1010] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God* 30.
[1011] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God* 31.
[1012] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God* 29. This is also the title of the fourth degree of love.
[1013] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God* 32
[1014] Harper 6.

color,[1015] it still remains water. Perceval's Easter Sunday communion is in fact union, illustrating Bernard's conception of true union; Perceval like the drop of water has been lovingly embraced within the greatness of the Divine.

Perceval's journey is a parable in which Chrétien attempts to "propel readers and auditors towards the love of God."[1016] By showing how Perceval moves from an uncouth youth, full of pride and lacking in compassion and respect, to a young knight who begins to comprehend his role in courtly society,[1017] Chrétien explores the ways in which man distorts his likeness to God and attempts to restore this likeness. Chrétien's *Perceval* reveals man's love for God as well as God's unconditional love for man, that is, His determination to seek all who are lost, by demonstrating how God attempts to reach man through symbols and contemplation to call man to repentance thus restoring the relationship between them. Through the grail procession and the question, *Perceval* "celebrates the power of the Eucharist"[1018] which culminates in Perceval's final act of communion and union.

Chrétien's exploration of Bernard of Clairvaux's four degrees of love illustrated throughout Perceval's journey discloses the three stages of mysticism - purgation, illumination, and unification.[1019] *Perceval* is purgative because Perceval repents and in so doing he purifies his soul. It is illuminative because Perceval struggles with turning from earthly attachments but when he does his spiritual virtues, such as compassion, prayer, and love are displayed. Finally, *Perceval* is unitive because after true contrition, Perceval's final act is to be with God. Perceval's

[1015] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God* 30.
[1016] K. Sarah-Jane Murray 253.
[1017] Barber, "Chivalry, Cistercianism and the Grail" 9.
[1018] Barber, *The Holy Grail* 250.
[1019] Harper 6. Purgative means the soul is purified. Illumination means the soul is weaned from earthly attachments and illuminated by spiritual virtues. Unitive means being united with God.

progression through all four of Bernard's four degrees of love simultaneously illustrates the three levels of mysticism.

The parable of *Perceval* is man's search for and union with God. The tenets of courtly love are used by Chrétien as a cover to demonstrate how the role of the male lover, separated from his Beloved, parallels Bernard's instructions on how man is to love God and draw closer to Him. As Chrétien's final adventure-romance, Perceval's love and desire to return to his beloved, mother or lady love, illustrates man's desire to return to God and restore the divine likeness within him. Through courtly love - where the love of the lady, obedience to her will, and one's worthy service is paramount - Chrétien exposes Bernard's degrees of love as steps man must follow to reach the ultimate goal, God Himself.

Conclusion

In this dissertation I have argued that Chrétien's narratives function on two registers, the secular and the spiritual. On the secular level, Chrétien's narratives provide a manual of how to be a courtly knight and a courtly lover. On the spiritual level, Chrétien's narratives explore man's relationship with God. Chrétien's knights illustrate how a courtly knight must be noble, an excellent fighter but even more so he must understand what is expected of him socially. As a courtly lover-knight, he is expected to have a love interest and know how to behave within such a relationship. Towards his lady, he is to be humble, devoted, obedient, but find his worth through the trials and sufferings which he must endure when not in her presence. In *Yvain*, Chrétien explores how a knight loses and restores both his reputation and his love relationship. In *Lancelot*, by adhering rigorously to the tenets of courtly love advocated by his patron, Marie de Champagne, Chrétien explores the qualities a knight must conform to in order to achieve his reward. In *Perceval*, Chrétien illustrates how one becomes a knight, learns and achieves a love relationship, and comes to know God. Chrétien's knights demonstrate some of the twelfth-century expectations of masculinity, especially those which define a courtly knight as both a skilled warrior as well as a courteous lover.

Read as secular stories Chrétien's narratives conform to the cathedral school's idea of the text as instructor.[1020] Each narrative and knightly role model provides an example for achieving the goal of courtly knighthood as well as the steps one would need to take when one errs. Additionally each knight demonstrates the qualities necessary to earn the love of a lady, keep her, and how to go about reconciling with her when one has offended her. Unlike Capellanus'

[1020] C. Stephen Jaeger, *Envy of Angels: Cathedral Schools and Social Ideals in Medieval Europe, 950-1200* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994) 15.

text, which reduces the courtly relationship to a social gesture and thus to ridicule,[1021] Chrétien's knights elevate love to a higher plane,[1022] ennobling it. The courtly love relation between the knight and his lady is the vehicle with which Chrétien transforms secular love into spiritual love. Hence, the reason for his married knights. As married knights, Chrétien's protagonists are best suited to illustrating the intimate relationship between man and God.

Chrétien's courtly lover- knights exemplify and embrace Bernardian values, such as humility, the rejection of pride, obedience, and love. These courtly qualities – humility, obedience, and love – esteemed by Bernard, enable man to progress through each degree of love, drawing man closer and closer to God. For Bernard, man can achieve the Christian's ultimate goal: a deeper, more intimate relationship with God, followed by union with Him. Chrétien's knights illustrate how man discovers God's love for him and his own need and desire for God in his life. Once they realize that their faults, i.e., their sin, distance them from God or their lady, Chrétien's knights illustrate the ways in which man seeks to return to Him, demonstrating how one's likeness to God is restored.

As parables, Chrétien's narratives provide a manual for a secular man to comprehend Bernard's teachings, illustrating how sin damages man's relationship with God and distorts man's divine likeness, but also that even though flawed, man can return to God and restore both his likeness to and relationship with Him. Bernard's four degrees of love, read through Chrétien's adventure-romances illustrate how courtly love, forms the foundation for religious ideological exploration. Chrétien's romances, which are more interested in exploring the intimate relationships between a knight and a lady, are successful parables, in that the reader must

[1021] C. Stephen Jaeger, *Ennobling Love* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999) 195.
[1022] Jean Leclercq, *Monks and Love in Twelfth-Century France* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1979) 103.

comprehend the spiritual themes and symbols presented to them, eliciting their thoughts about their own relationship with God.

Chrétien's romances offer a way to read secular stories as manuals that can communicate both secular and sacred themes. Chrétien's texts are didactic parables, where it is up to the reader to determine which register he chooses to read and comprehend. Nonetheless, the Christian themes and values contained within Chrétien's romances cannot and should not be overlooked, for they provide an interesting exploration of Bernardian ideology. Chrétien's combination of the secular and the spiritual demonstrates his ingenuity and his originality. Because of this combination Chrétien's romances not only portray memorable characters engaged in interesting and complex love stories, they also exemplify twelfth-century Bernardian ideology. This fascinating imbrication means that Chrétien's narratives remain open to the variety of interpretations that have been offered over the centuries.

Works Cited

Primary Sources

Bernard of Clairvaux. *On Loving God*. Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, Inc., 1995. Print.

---------- *On the Song of Songs*. Trans. Kilian Walsh. Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, Inc., 1971. 4 vols. Print.

---------- *Bernard of Clairvaux: Selected Works.* Trans. G.R. Evans. New York: Paulist Press, 1987. Print.

Capellanus, Andreas. *The Art of Courtly Love*. Trans. John Jay Perry. New York: Columbia University Press, 1960. Print.

Chrétien de Troyes. *Erec et Enide.* Ed Michel Zink. Trans. Jean-Marie Fritz. Paris: Lettres Gothiques, Livre de Poche, Librairie Générale Française, 1992. Print.

---------- *Le chevalier au lion ou Yvain.* Ed. Michel Zink. Trans. David F. Hult. Paris: Lettres Gothiques, Livre de Poche, Librairie Générale Française, 1994. Print.

---------- *Le chevalier de la charrette.* Ed. Michel Zink. Trans. Charles Méla. Paris: Lettres Gothiques, Livre de Poche, Librairie Générale Française, 1996. Print.

--------- *Le conte du Graal.* Ed. Michel Zink. Trans. Charles Méla. Paris: Lettres Gothiques, Livre de Poche, Librairie Générale Française, 1990. Print.

The Holy Bible: English Standard Version. Crossway Bibles, 2011. biblehub.com. <biblehub.com/proverbs/16-5.htm>. Web. 31 June 2015.

The Holy Bible: King James Version. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000. Print.

The Holy Bible: New International Version. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996. Print.

Secondary Sources

Allen, Peter. *The Art of Love*. Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1992. Print.

Artin, Tom. *The Allegory of Adventure: Reading Chrétien's Erec and Yvain.* London: Associated University Presses, 1974. Print.

Astell, Ann W. *The Song of Songs in the Middle Ages*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990. Print.

Barber, Richard W. "Chivalry, Cistercianism and the Grail." In *A Companion to the Lancelot-Grail Cycle.* Ed. Carol Dover. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2003. 3-12. Print.

---------- *The Holy Grail: Imagination and Belief.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004. Print.

Baumgartner, Emmanuèle. *Chrétien de Troyes: Yvain, Lancelot, la charrette et le lion*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1992. Print.

---------- "Chrétien's Medieval Influence: From the Grail Quest to the Joy of the Court." In *A Companion to Chrétien de Troyes*. Ed. Norris J. Lacy and Joan Tasker Grimbert. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2005. 214-227. Print.

Bednar, John. *La Spiritualité et le symbolisme dans les œuvres des Chrétien de Troyes*. Paris: Librairie A.-G. Nizet, 1974. Print.

Bennet, Matthew, Jim Bradbury, Kelly DeVries, Iain Dickie, and Phyllis Jestice, eds. *Fighting Techniques of the Medieval World AD500 – AD 1500: Equipment, Combat Skills, and Tactics*. New York: Thomas Dune Books, 2005. Print.

"Birds are used as Christian Symbols." *Cathoicism.org* 30 October 2004. 22 October 2015. <catholicism.org/birds-are-used-as-christian-symbols.html>

Bogdanow, Fanni. "The Grail Romances and the Old Law." In *Arthurian Studies: In Honor of P.J.C. Field*. Ed. Bonnie Wheeler. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004. 1-13. Print.

--------- "The Love Theme in Chrétien de Troyes's 'Chevalier de la Charrette.'" *The Modern Language Review*. 67.1 (Jan. 1972): 50-61. Print.

---------- "The Transformation of the Role of Perceval in some Thirteenth Century Prose Romances." In *Studies in Medieval Literature and Languages: In Memory of Frederick Whitehead.* Eds. William Rothwell, W. R. J. Barron, David Blamires, and Lewis Thorpe. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1973. 47-65. Print.

Brody, Saul N. "Reflections of Yvain's Inner Life." *Romance Phiology*. 54 (Spring 2001) 277-298. Print.

Bruckner, Matilda Tomaryn. "Le Chevalier de la Charrette: That Obscure Object of Desire, Lancelot." In *A Companion to Chrétien de Troyes*. Eds. Norris J. Lacy and Joan Tasker Gimbert. Cambridge, U.K.: D. S. Brewer, 2005. 137-155. Print.

---------- "The Lady and the Dragon in Chrétien's *Chevalier au Lion.*" In *From Beasts to Souls: Gender and Embodiment in Medieval Europe,* eds. E. Jane Burns and Peggy McCracken. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013. 65-86. Print.

---------- "Redefining the Center: Verse and Prose Charrette." In *A Companion to the Lancelot-Grail Cycle*. Ed. Carol Dover. Cambridge, U.K.: D. S. Brewer, 2003. 95-105. Print.

Brundage, James A. "Sex and Canon Law." In *The Handbook of Medieval Sexuality.* Eds. Vern L. Bullough and James A. Brundage. New York: Garland Publishing, 1996. 33-50. Print.

Bullough, Vern L. "On Being a Male in the Middle Ages." In *Medieval Masculinities*. Eds. Clare A. Lees, Thelma Fenster and Jo Ann McNamara. Vol.7. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994. 31-46. Print.

Burns, E. Jane. "Refashioning Courtly Love: Lancelot as Ladies' Man or Lady/Man?" In *Constructing Medieval Sexuality*. Eds. Karma Lochrie, Peggy McCracken and James A. Schultz. Vol. 11. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997. 111-134. Print.

Bynum, Caroline Walker. *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982. Print.

Casey, Michael. *A Thirst for God: Spiritual Desire in Bernard of Clairvaux's Sermons on the Song of Songs.* Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, Inc., 1988. Print.

Cirlot, J. E. *A Dictionary of Symbols*. Trans. Jack Sage. Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 2002. Print.

Clement, Claire Erskine. *A Handbook of Christian Symbols and Stories of the Saints*. Ed. Katherin E. Conway. Boston: Ticknor and Company, 1886. Print.

Coulson, John. *The Saints*: *A Concise Biographical Dictionary*. New York: Hawthorn Books, 1958. Print.

Delaney, John J., and James Edward Tobin. *Dictionary of Catholic Biography*. New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1961. Print.

Diverres, A.H. "Chivalry and *fin'amour* in *Le chevalier au Lion.*" In *Studies in Medieval Literature and Languages: In Memory of Frederick Whitehead.* Eds. William Rothwell, W.R.J. Barron, David Blamires and Lewis Thorpe. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1973. 91-116. Print.

Encyclopedia of Catholic Saints. Wilkes-Barre, Pa: Dimension Books, Inc., 1966. Print.

Farina, William. *Chrétien de Troyes and the Dawn of Arthurian Romance*. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland and Company, Inc., 2010. Print.

Ferrante, Joan M. *Woman as Image in Medieval Literature*. Durham: The Labyrinth Press, 1985. Print.

Finke, Laurie A. "Sexuality in Medieval French Literature." In *The Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*. Eds. Vern L. Bullough and James A. Brundage. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1996. 345-368. Print.

Frappier, Jean. *Amour Courtois et la table ronde*. Genève: Librairie Droz, 1973. Print.

---------- *Chrétien de Troyes et le Mythe du Graal: Étude sur Perceval ou le Conte du Graal.* Paris: Société d'Édition d'Enseignement Supérieur, 1972. Print.

---------- *Chrétien de Troyes: The Man and His Work*. Trans. Raymond J. Cormier. Athens: Ohio University Press: 1982. Print.

Gallais, Pierre. "Le sang sur la neige (le conte et le rêve)." *Cahiers de Civilisation Médiéval*. 21 (1978): 37-42. Print.

Gaunt, Simon. *Troubadours and Irony.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989. Print.

Gilson, Étienne. *The Mystical Theology of St. Bernard*. Trans. A.H.C. Downes. Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, Inc., 1990. Print.

Gravett, Christopher. *English Medieval Knight 1200-1300*. Oxford: Osprey Publishing, Ltd., 2002. Print.

Harpur, James. *Love Burning in the Soul.* Boston: New Seeds, 2005. Print.

Harris, Julian. "The Rôle of the Lion in Chrétien de Troyes' Yvain." *PMLA* 64.3 (1949) 1143-1163. Print.

Holweck, Frederick. "The Five Sacred Wounds." *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. Vol. 15. New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1912. 2 Oct. 2015 <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15714a.htm>.

Hult, David F. "Lancelot's Two Steps: A Problem in Textual Criticism." *Speculum*. 61.4 (1986): 836-858. Print.

---------- "Steps Forward and Steps Backward: More on Chrétien's Lancelot." *Speculum* 64.2 (1989): 307-316. Print.

Hunt, Tony. "The Emergence of the Knight in France and England 1000-1200." in *Knighthood in Medieval Literature*. Woodbridge, Suffolk: D.S. Brewer, 1981. 1-22. Print.

---------- "Le Chevalier au Lion: Yvain Lionheart." In *A Companion to Chrétien de Troyes*. Eds. Norris J. Lacey and Joan Tasker Grimbert. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2005. 156- 168. Print.

Jaeger, C. Stephen. *Ennobling Love.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999. Print.

---------- *Envy of Angels: Cathedral Schools and Social Ideals in Medieval Europe, 950-1200*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994. Print.

Karras, Ruth Mazo. *From Boys to Men: Formations of Masculinity in Late Medieval Europe.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003. Print.

---------- Sexuality *in Medieval Europe: Doing Unto Others*. 2nd ed. London: Routledge, 2012. Print.

Keen, Maurice. *Chivalry*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984. Print.

---------- *Nobles, Knights and Men-at-Arms in the Middle Ages*. London: The Hambledon Press, 1996. Print.

Lachet, Claude. *Dieu, Amour, et Chevalerie*. Lyon: APRIME Éditions, 2008. Print.

Lazar, Moshé. *L'Amour courtois et Fin'amor*. Paris: Librairie C. Klincksieck, 1964. Print.

Leclercq, Jean. *Monks and Love in Twelfth Century France.* Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1979. Print.

---------- Introduction in *Bernard of Clairvaux Selected Works*. Trans. G. R. Evans. New York: Paulist Press, 1987. 13-57. Print.

Lecompte, Jean-François. *La Symbolique du Graal: Géométrie du Conte du Graal de Chrétien de Troyes*. Paris: Édite, 2008. Print.

Le Rider, Paule. *Le Chevalier dans le Conte du Graal*. 2nd edition. Condé-sur-Noireau: SEDES, 1978. Print.

Lewis, C. S. *The Allegory of Love*. Oxford: University of Oxford, 1936. Print.

Losada Goya, José Manuel. "La nature mythique du Graal dans *Le Conte du Graal* de Chrétien de Troyes." *Cahiers de Civilisation Médiévale.* 52 (2009): 3-20. Print.

Loomis, Roger Sherman. "The Origin of the Grail Legends." In *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages*. Ed. Roger Sherman Loomis. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959. 274-294. Print.

Maddox, Donald. *The Arthurian Romances of Chrétien de Troyes: Once and Future Fictions.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991. Print.

Matter, E. Ann. *The Voice of my Beloved: The Song of Songs in Western Medieval Christianity*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990. Print.

McBrien, Richard.P. *Lives of the Saints*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001. Print.

McCracken, Peggy. "The Poetics of Sacrifice: Allegory and Myth in the Grail Quest." *Yale French Studies* 95 (1999) 152-168. Print.

McGuire, Brian P. *The Difficult Saint: Bernard of Clairvaux and His Tradition.* Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, Inc., 1991. Print.

Muir, Lynette R. *Literature and Society in Medieval France*. Basingstoke: MacMillan Publishers Ltd., 1985. Print.

Murray, Jacqueline. "Hinding Behind the Universal Man." In *The Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*. Eds. Vern L. Bullough and James A. Brundage. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1996. 123-152. Print.

Murray, K. Sarah-Jane. *From Plato to Lancelot: A Preface to Chrétien de Troyes.* Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2008. Print.

Newman, Barbara. *Medieval Crossover: Reading the Secular against the Sacred*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013. Print.

Noble, Peter S. *Love and Marriage in Chrétien de Troyes.* Cardiff: University of Wales, 1982. Print.

Olschki, Leonardo. *The Grail Castle and Its Mysteries*. Trans. J. A. Scott. Ed. Eugène Vinaver. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966. Print.

"Parable." Def. *Merriam Webster Dictionary*. 2015. 26 September 2015. <www.merriam-webester.com>

Paris, Gaston. "Etudes sur les Romans de la Table Ronde: Lancelot du Lac." *Romania* 12 (1883): 459-534. Print.

Pelen, Marc M. "Madness in *Yvain* Reconsidered" *Neophilologus* 87 (2003): 361-369. Print.

Piper, John. "The Pride of Being Afraid." 19 May 1981. *Desiring God*, 2015. <www.desiring god.org/articles/the-pride-of-being-afraid> Web. 31 July 2015.

Piraprez, Delphine. "Chrétien de Troyes, Allégoriste malgré lui? Amour et allégorie dans *Le Roman de la Rose* et *Le Chevalier de la Charrette*." In *Conjointure Arthurienne*. Louvain-la-Neuve: Institut d'Études médiévales de l'Université Catholique de Louvain, 2000. 83-94. Print.

Poulain, Augustin. "Mystical Stigmata." *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. Vol. 14. New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1912. 18 Sept. 2015 <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14294b.htm>.

Ribard, Jacques. *Le Chevalier de la Charrette: Essai d'interprétation symbolique.* Paris: A. G. Nizet, 1972. Print.

Shirt, David J. "Chrétien de Troyes and his cart." In *Studies in Medieval Literature and Languages: In Memory of Frederick Whitehead.* Eds. William Rothwell, W.R.J. Barron, David Blamires and Lewis Thorpe. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1973. 279-301. Print.

"Sin of Pride." All About God, 2002-2015. <www.allaboutgod.com/sin-of-pride.htm>. Web. 5 Oct. 2014

Stahuljak, Zrinka, Virginie Greene, Sarah Kay, Sharon Kinoshita and Peggy McCracken, eds. *Thinking Through Chrétien de Troyes*. Woodbridge, U.K: D. S. Brewer, 2011. Print.

Stiegman, Emero. Afterword. *On Loving God*. By Bernard of Clairvaux. Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, Inc., 1995. 45-195. Print.

Sweeden, Josh. Rev. of *Chasing the Wild Goose: The Story of the Iona Community*, by Ronald Ferguson (Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications, 1998). 22 October 2015. <www.bu.edu/cpt/resources/book-reviews/chasing-the-wild-goose-the-story-of-the-iona-community/> .

Szarmach, Paul E., *An Introduction to the Medieval Mystics of Europe*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984. Print.

Tallis, Frank. "Crazy for You." *The Psychologist* 18.2 (February 2005): 72-74. Print.

Tamburello, Dennis E. *Union with Christ: John Calvin and the Mysticism of St. Bernard*.

Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994. Print.

Thompson, Albert Wilder. "Additions to Chrétien's *Perceval* - Prologues and Continuations." In *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages*. Ed. Roger Sherman Loomis. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959. 206-217. Print.

Thurston, Herbert, and Donald Atwater, eds. *Butler's Lives of the Saints.* Vol. III. New York: P. J. Kenedy & Sons; 1956. Print.

Trachsler, Richard. "A Question of Time: Romance and History." In *A Companion to the Lancelot-Grail Cycle*. Ed. Carol Dover. Cambridge, U.K.: D. S. Brewer, 2003. 23-32. Print.

Underhill, Evelyn. *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness*. New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, INC., 1940. Print.

---------- *The Mystics of the Church.* New York: G. Doran, 1926. Print.

---------- *Practical Mysticism.* New York: E. P. Dutton & Company, 1915. Print.

"What does the Bible say about anger?" Got Question Ministries, 2002-2015. <www.gotquestions.org/anger.html>. Web. 31 July 2015.

"What is Pride? A Bible Study." Small Group Publishing Co. LLC, 2006-2014. <www.free-online-bible-study.com/what-is-pride.html>. Web. 5 Oct. 2014.

Zaddy, Z. P. *Chrétien Studies: Problems of Form and Meaning in Erec, Yvain, Cligès and the Charrette.* Glasgow: University of Glasgow Press, 1973. Print.

--------- "Le Chevalier de la Charrette et the De amore of Andreas Capellanus." In *Studies in Medieval Literature and Languages: In Memory of Frederick Whitehead.* Eds. William Rothwell, W.R.J. Barron, David Blamires and Lewis Thorpe. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1973. 363-399. Print.

--------- "The Structure of Chrétien's *Yvain*." *The Modern Language Review*. 65.3 (1970): 523-540. Print.

Appendix:

Plot Summaries

Yvain

At Pentecost in the court of King Arthur, Calegorant a cousin of Yvain's, recounts a shameful adventure that he had some years earlier. Another knight who defended a fountain defeated him in battle and left him horseless. Calegorant, encouraged by the Queen recounts this story and reveals his failure. Arthur announces his intention to visit this magical fountain with the court but Yvain wishing to restore family honor and keep Sir Keu from wining its riches, departs immediately to find this fountain. On his way he runs into a man tending beasts who points him in the direction of the fountain. Yvain approaches and pours water on it, setting off a storm and summoning a fierce knight. The knight, Esclados, who is the defender of the fountain challenges Yvain to a duel. As the battle rages on the knight realizes he is not going to defeat Yvain. So mortally wounded Esclados flees to his castle with Yvain in pursuit. Yvain's,horse is cut in two as the portcullis comes down trapping Yvain. Lunette, using a side door, rescues Yvain because he was courteous to her when she came to Arthur's court years before. Lunette gives Yvain a magic ring which makes the wearer invisible and leads him to a room to hide while everyone else in the castle searches for Yvain. Sometime later, Yvain glances out the window and sees the funeral cortege lead by the castle's lady, Laudine. He falls instantly in love with her. When Lunette appears, he reveals his love to Lunette who agrees to help him win Laudine. Lunette convinces Laudine that the knight who killed her husband is the better knight and Laudine agrees to meet this man. Upon seeing Yvain, Laudine falls in love and she convinces the other men at the castle, her advisors, to agree to their marriage. Yvain and Laudine are married. In the meantime King Arthur and his court arrive at the fountain. Keu pours water on the stone, setting of the storm and summoning Yvain. Yvain defends the fountain and unhorses Keu. Yvain reveals himself to King Arthur and the court and leads them all back to Laudine's castle. There they celebrate Yvain and Laudine's marriage. Learning that the court is to depart, Gauvain encourages Yvain to leave with them in order not to be accused of losing his prowess due to his marriage. Gauvain suggests that Yvain participate in a series of tournaments. Yvain is hesitant at first because it will take him away from Laudine, but he eventually agrees to go. Before he leaves Laudine makes him promise to return to her at the end of a year's time and she gives him a ring to be a reminder of his promise. Yvain agrees and he and Gauvain leave for the tournaments. Yvain is having so much fun and gaining so much glory at the tournaments that when a maid of Laudine's shows up at the court to berate Yvain and demand the return of the promise ring, because more than a year has passed and he has not returned. Yvain suddenly remembering and feeling guilty about forgetting his love goes mad. He flees the court and his friends and spends some time living wild in the forest. Eventually he runs into a hermit's cottage. Yvain brings him game from the forest and the hermit leaves him bread and water. A young maid recognizes Yvain and rushes back to tell her lady that he is in the forest nearby. The lady of Norison provides some magic ointment which the maid spreads all over Yvain's sleeping body and thus he is nursed back to health. In payment for the healing ointment Yvain helps defend Norison's castle, but refuses the reward of becoming her husband. Yvain returns to wandering in the forest and he comes upon a lion that is battling a serpent. Seeing that the serpent is not playing fair and that the lion is injured Yvain springs into action and defeats the serpent. The lion, grateful for Yvain's assistance, now becomes his loyal friend and companion. Returning to the fountain, Yvain sees Lunette imprisoned in the chapel. Lunette informs him that she is imprisoned for treason and that the only way to rescue her from being burned alive is to defeat the three knights who guard her. Yvain agrees to return to defend

her the next day. Yvain and the lion leave to look for lodging; they come to a castle and learn of a giant that is threatening them. Yvain agrees to battle the giant, Harpin. Yvain and the lion defeat Harpin and then rush off to rescue Lunette. Upon returning to the fountain Yvain trips and falls on his sword wounding himself. The lion believing that Yvain is dead takes the sword and is on the point of committing suicide when Yvain revives and then the two proceed to defeat the knights who were guarding Lunette. Laudine watches the battle and once Yvain has won invites him to return with her. Yvain refuses because of his lady's anger with him. Laudine tells Yvain that it is wrong of his lady to be angry with him because of his valor. She asks his name and Yvain states that he is the Knight of the Lion. Laudine wishes him well and Yvain and the lion leave and come upon a castle in which women were imprisoned and forced to weave. Yvain learns that the women are guarded by two devils. Yvain agrees to fight the devils but they tell Yvain they will not fight him unless he removes his lion. Yvain agrees and has the lion locked up. Yvain battles the devils but it is a draw until the lion who has escaped turns up and kills one enabling Yvain to dispatch the other. Yvain and his lion free the women.

The last portion of the narrative involves a question of inheritance by two daughters of Noire-Épine. Yvain has been tracked down by a young woman on behalf of the younger sister of the lord of Noire-Épine. She came to Arthur's court hoping to find the Knight of the Lion to fight on her behalf to help settle an inheritance dispute between her and her elder sister. Gauvain has already agreed to fight for the elder sister. Yvain agrees to help the maid and hurries off to the court. At the court Yvain and Gauvain agree to fight. Neither recognizes the other and they fight to a tie before they reveal who they are whereupon they both call it a draw. Arthur finally steps in and settles the dispute. Yvain reveals himself to the court as the Knight of the Lion. Yvain then asks to return to his lady so that he can be reconciled to her as well. With the help of Lunette Yvain is reconciled to Laudine. Yvain promises to be a faithful lover and husband and Laudine accepts Yvain as her husband.

Lancelot

It is Ascension day at King Arthur's court when a knight (Méléagant) arrives and challenges the king, by saying that if there is even one knight at the court whom the King entrusts to escort the Queen to where Méléagant is staying and if that knight is able to best him then he will return all the prisoners (who are all King Arthur's subjects) which he has taken and imprisoned in his land of Gorre. The knight leaves and the court is in turmoil. Sir Keu argues for and eventually is granted the right to escort the Queen. Gauvain convinces Arthur to follow Keu and the Queen. The court then sets off and soon after comes across Keu's horse, riderless and bloodstained and neither Keu nor the Queen in sight.

Gauvain leads the way and comes across an unknown knight (Lancelot) who begs a mount from him. Gauvain gives him one and the knight, Lancelot, takes off in pursuit, leaving Gauvain behind. Gauvain follows him and comes across the horse he'd just given the knight as well as the remains of a fierce battle. Gauvain continues and soon catches up to Lancelot who is now on foot but who has just been overtaken by a cart. This particular cart was used as a pillory for criminals and anyone who entered it would be dishonored.

Gauvain sees Lancelot hurrying after the cart and demanding the dwarf who was driving it to tell him if the Queen had passed by. The dwarf refuses to answer unless Lancelot gets in the cart. Lancelot hesitates briefly before entering. Gauvain catching up to them asks the dwarf for information about the Queen and the dwarf gives him the same answer he gave Lancelot. Gauvain however does not enter the cart. All three soon enter a town and all the townsfolk assume Lancelot is a criminal. Gauvain dismounts and is served by a town maiden. Lancelot has also left the cart and disappeared. As the maiden is preparing bedding for Gauvain, Lancelot reappears. She forbids Lancelot from laying down on the third bed as he arrived in the cart. Lancelot ignores her and lays down upon it. At midnight a bolt of lightning like a lance shoots down on Lancelot's bed, setting fire to the bedding and grazing Lancelot's side. Lancelot puts out the fire and hurls the lance into the center of the hall before returning to sleep.

The next morning as Gauvain is speaking to the girl who'd prepared their beds the night before, they spy from a window a funeral procession with the Queen at the lead. Lancelot also sees the procession from another window and he gazes upon the Queen with such abandon that when the Queen is out of sight, he wishes to throw himself from the window. Lancelot is halfway out of the window when Gauvain restrains him.

Both knights then leave to pursue the Queen. They enter a forest and at the crossroads meet a maiden who tells them that to follow the Queen they must prepare for tribulations and suffering. She also describes the two routes available that they might take to reach the Queen, the Underwater Bridge or the Sword Bridge. Lancelot chooses the Sword Bridge, leaving Gauvain to take the Underwater Bridge.

Shortly after Lancelot has started down the Sword bridge path he encounters a knight at a ford. Lancelot is so engrossed in his own thoughts of the Queen that he does not heard the ford knight's three challenges. It is only when the ford knight has struck him that Lancelot is pulled out of his reverie. They fight and Lancelot wins, allowing him to continue on his way. Towards nightfall he encounters another maiden who offers him the hospitality of her lodgings but only if Lancelot agrees to sleep with her. Lancelot initially refuses but then reluctantly agrees to do so at her insistence. She leads him to her abode, cleans and feeds him, before reminding him of his promise. Lancelot tarries in the courtyard as long as he can before he reluctantly returns to the hall to seek his bed. He cannot however find the maiden and so begins to search for her.

Eventually he finds her half naked in a bed being attacked by another knight. Lancelot fights the knight and the six other men who were with him, until the maiden calls a halt to the battle and dismisses all her men. She then leads Lancelot back into the hall where the bedding has been prepared. She lays down and Lancelot lays next to her but he is careful not to touch her and turns his back on her. The maiden realizes that Lancelot has already given his heart to another so she leaves him to go sleep elsewhere.

The next morning she accompanies Lancelot on his journey and they come upon a spring in a meadow. Lying next to the spring is an ivory comb which still has some hairs on it from the person who had been using it. The maiden sees the comb and tries to lead Lancelot off in another direction from it. Lancelot realizing she's misleading him calls a halt and they return to the spring where he sees the comb. He picks it up and stares at the hairs until the girl's laughter recalls him and she informs him that the hair is from the Queen. Lancelot almost faints upon hearing this news and the maiden moves to assist him but not wanting to shame him, she says she was trying to get the comb. Lancelot removes the hairs from the comb and puts them close to his heart before giving it to her and they continue on their way.

As they are traveling the maiden spies a knight who had long been trying to win her. He challenges Lancelot for her but they postpone their battle until they reach a more suitable location. They ride into a meadow filled with other knights and ladies at leisure and playing games. The knight's father approaches and warns his son not to try for the maiden or press the fight with Lancelot. The son refuses. So his father has his liegemen restrain him and Lancelot and the maiden ride on.

Lancelot and the maiden come upon a church and Lancelot enters it to pray. As he exits the church he meets a monk and Lancelot asks him to explain what was within the walled area. The monk says that it is a cemetery and takes Lancelot there. They come upon the tombs intended for other knights of Arthur's court as well as a tomb that bears the inscription that he who is able to lift the slab will free all the men and women imprisoned in the land of Gorre (where Lancelot is now traveling and Méléagant's home region). Lancelot goes and lifts the slab with ease. The monk is astonished and demands Lancelot's name, which he refuses to give. Lancelot leaves and the maiden joins him.

Towards nightfall a vavasour approaches and offers them lodging for the night which they accept. The vavasour asks Lancelot where he is from and what he is doing in Gorre. Lancelot informs him that he is from Logres (Arthur's lands) and the vavasour tells Lancelot that he will not be able to leave now because he is in Gorre, where people may enter but not leave. The vavasour also tells Lancelot that the Queen is in Gorre and offers to lead Lancelot by a longer but safer route to the Sword Bridge. Lancelot refuses this in favor of a short but more dangerous path. The vavasour's sons offer to accompany Lancelot on his route.

The next morning they leave and come to the Stone passage which is defended by a knight. Lancelot defeats the Stone knight and he and the vavasour's sons continue on. They then engage in a huge battle at a castle fought between the armies of Gorre and Logres. Lancelot enters the castle and is trapped when its gate shuts behind him. However, Lancelot and the vavasour's sons find another door and hack it down to escape. Lancelot then helps the men of Logres to an almost victory but all have to stop fighting as night falls. Lancelot and the vavasour's sons accept lodging for the night.

The next day Lancelot and the sons continue on their way. They are invited to spend the night at another knight's home where Lancelot is again challenged by a strange knight, who states that he defends the Sword Bridge. The next day Lancelot and the knight engage in battle

and Lancelot is just about to kill the knight when he spares the knight's life at the behest of a maiden. Lancelot returns to his previous night's lodgings. The following day Lancelot and the sons set out for the Sword Bridge. The sons tell Lancelot that they can see two lions or leopards on the far side of the bridge and are afraid for Lancelot. Lancelot scoffs at their fear and crosses the bridge, cutting his hands, knees, and feet in the process. Lancelot arrives on the opposite side and does not encounter any lions.

King Bademagu, Méléagant's father, and Méléagant see Lancelot crossing the bridge. King Bademagu asks his son to go and make peace with Lancelot and send him to the Queen. Méléagant refuses his father's request three times and King Bademagu goes to Lancelot himself. King Bademagu tries to convince Lancelot to take the time to rest and heal his wounds before fighting for the Queen. Lancelot initially refuses this but then agrees to rest for one day. King Bademagu also tries to convince his son to reconcile with Lancelot but Méléagant still refuses.

Méléagant and Lancelot duel the next day and is seen by one of the maiden's attending the Queen who points him out and begs the Queen to name the knight. Lancelot hears the Queen name him and turns towards her, leaving his back to Méléagant. Lancelot defends himself from behind so he would not have to take his eyes off the Queen. Méléagant is able to take advantage of this until the Queen's maiden tells Lancelot to maneuver Méléagant around so that Lancelot can fight and stare at the same time. King Bademagu worried for his son's life asks the Queen to intervene and end the fight as Lancelot is clearly going to kill his son. The Queen says she wishes for Lancelot to restrain himself and he obeys. He ceases to defend himself causing King Bademagu to have to order his son to quit hitting Lancelot. Eventually a truce is established and Méléagant and Lancelot agree they will meet again in one year's time to continue their fight. Lancelot is free to go and since he is free to return to Arthur, all of Gorre's prisoners may as well.

King Bademagu agrees then to take Lancelot to see the Queen. The Queen though acts as if she is angered at Lancelot's arrival which causes King Bademagu to reproach her for her behavior but Lancelot answers her as a perfect lover and accepts that she has her reasons for greeting him thusly. Lancelot then see Keu who is also amazed at the Queen's treatment of him. Lancelot then decides to leave and go in search of Gauvain.

While searching for Gauvain, Lancelot is captured by some men of Gorre, who had not yet heard that all of Gorre's captives were free. The rumor of Lancelot's capture and death reaches King Bademagu and the Queen. The Queen is distraught and contemplates suicide. Lancelot hears a rumor of the Queen's death and is himself distraught and he too considers suicide. He attempts to hang himself but is rescued and then he learns that the Queen is still alive so he decides to return to her.

At Lancelot's and the Queen's second meeting she tells him she was angry with him because he hesitated before getting into the cart. She forgives him and they arrange to meet later. Later that night, Lancelot comes to the Queen's bedchamber window and they talk and hold hands before Lancelot breaks the iron bars, cutting himself in the process, and enters the room. Lancelot does not realize he is injured because he is with the Queen. Lancelot bows before her and she draws him into her bed where they kiss and hold each other all night. At daybreak, Lancelot leaves her and returns to his own bed where he discovers his wound.

Méléagant enters the Queen's room and sees the bloodstained bedding and accuses the Queen of adultery with Keu. The Queen denies this and claims she had a bloody nose. Méléagant does not believe her and goes to inform his father of her falseness. King Bademagu asks her if she and Keu have committed adultery which they both deny. Lancelot, whom the Queen sent for secretly, arrives and the Queen informs him of Méléagant's accusation. Lancelot

agrees to battle Méléagant on behalf of Keu. Lancelot and Méléagant fight but neither is victorious and King Bademagu fearing for his son's life again asks the Queen to intervene. The Queen orders a cessation of hostilities which Lancelot obeys but Méléagant still hits Lancelot until King Bademagu restrains him.

Lancelot then leaves again to search for Gauvain. Close to the Underwater Bridge, Lancelot is greeted by a dwarf who leads him away from his companions and traps him. Lancelot's companions find Gauvain in the water and rescue him. They tell Gauvain of Lancelot's rescue of the Queen and that he is now missing and that they suspect Méléagant had a hand in it. Gauvain insists they return to the Queen and inform her and King Bademagu of Lancelot's disappearance. The Queen is saddened by the news and asks that Lancelot be sought for throughout the land. Just as they are about to leave in search of Lancelot a squire arrives with a parchment and informs them that Lancelot is alive and well and requests them all to return to King Arthur's court. They all set off for Arthur's court and realize they have been duped when they arrive but find no Lancelot.

The Queen then agrees to the preparations which were already underway for a tournament at Pomeglas. The news of the tournament spread far and wide and Lancelot, who is being held captive by Méléagant's seneschal and seneschal's wife, also hears about the tournament. The wife seeing Lancelot's disappointment at not being able to attend agrees to let Lancelot borrow some armor and go but on the condition that he promise to return after it is over. He agrees and she lends him a red shield and some red armor. Upon reaching the tournament Lancelot is recognized by a herald, but Lancelot gets him to agree to keep his identity and name concealed.

Lancelot begins to fight in the tournament and is recognized by the Queen who sends one of her maid's to order him to "do his worst." Lancelot agrees to the Queen's request and then proceeds to lose every fight. Lancelot is mocked by the other knights. The next day the Queen again sends her maid and orders Lancelot to "do his worst." Lancelot readily agrees and when the maid informs the Queen of his acquiescence she sends her back to tell him to "do his best" because she had realized that Lancelot is hers through and through. Lancelot agrees and wins every fight thus earning the respect of his fellow knights.

After the tournament Lancelot returns to his imprisonment with the seneschal's wife. Méléagant's seneschal however had returned when Lancelot was away and went to inform Méléagant of this, but Méléagant was not worried because Lancelot would not violate a promise. He did however order his seneschal to keep Lancelot so firmly imprisoned that he could not escape. Méléagant has a sea-side tower built for Lancelot and once it is completed has Lancelot removed there. Méléagant then returns to Arthur's court and reminds the Queen that a year has passed and he is to meet Lancelot. But since no one has seen Lancelot, he accepts the substitution of Gauvain for Lancelot and arranges to return in another year's time to fight Gauvain if Lancelot cannot be found.

Méléagant returns to his father's court and boasts about how he was able to outwit Lancelot. King Bademagu reproaches his son for his foolishness. One of King Bademagu's daughters hears her brother's boast and leaves to search for Lancelot. Eventually she comes to Lancelot's sea-side tower and rescues him. She then leads him back to safety and feeds and heals him. Lancelot now recovered from his imprisonment heads back to Arthur's court. Méléagant and Gauvain are just about for fight when Lancelot arrives. Lancelot and Méléagant battle and Lancelot guts him before beheading him. The court is happy and the Queen (the happiest) removes Lancelot's armor before leading him to the celebration feast.

Perceval

It is spring time when Perceval leaves his mother's castles and takes his three javelins with him into the forest. After practicing with his javelins he hears the sound of some knights approaching. As he sees them exiting the woods and the sun striking their armor he mistakes them for angels and falls to the ground. The leader of the group of knights approaches and Perceval asks if they are God. The knight replies that they are knights and proceeds to ask Perceval if he has seen five other knights and three maidens. Perceval ignores his question and instead asks the knight about his lance, his shield, and his hauberk.

Perceval also asks if the knight was born so clothed and the knight informs him that King Arthur knighted him and provided him with his armor. Perceval eventually leads the knight's group to his harrowers so that the lead knight might ask his question to them. After obtaining their information Perceval asks where he can find King Arthur. One of the knights tells Perceval that King Arthur is at Carlisle.

Perceval returns home where his mother was sad because he had been gone so long. Perceval tells her of his encounter with the knights and his mother nearly faints from hearing the word knight. Perceval's mother informs him that his father and brothers were also knights as was her father and that Perceval's father and brothers died from wounds received during combats.

Perceval informs his mother that he wants to go to the king who makes knights. His mother tries to keep him but her efforts are in vain. But she does give him three pieces of advice. The first is to help any maiden and serve them because the one who does so will receive honor, not to annoy or do anything to displease the lady who grants him her love, to allow a kiss but to go no further and if she has an alms purse he may wear it. The second is to learn the names of those with whom he keeps company. The third is to pray in a chapel or church. Perceval has to ask her to explain what a chapel or a church is before he pledges to her to attend them. Perceval then takes his leave and his mother is overcome with grief at his going. Perceval looks back and sees that his mother has collapsed, lying in a faint and appearing dead. The collapse of his mother does not stop him from leaving.

The next morning after traveling some distance Perceval comes to a meadow with a large tent erected in it. Perceval assumes the large tent is a church and enters it, where upon he sees a damsel lying on a bed. He greets her but the manner of his greeting frightens her and she warns him to be off before her lover returns. Perceval insists on getting a kiss from her. The maiden refuses and Perceval manages to kiss her repeatedly until he sees her ring, which he then takes. The tent maiden pleads with Perceval not to take her ring because she will be in trouble with her lover. Perceval ignores her and proceeds to eat his fill of her food. After eating Perceval leaves. The tent maiden is left weeping. Her lover returns from the woods and sees the hoof prints Perceval's horse has left. He accuses the tent maiden of infidelity even though she tells him the Perceval was the aggressor, stealing her ring and her kisses. The tent maiden's lover swears vengeance on Perceval.

Perceval however, obtains directions to King Arthur's castle from a charcoal-burner and continues on his way, until he sees the Red knight carrying a golden cup. The Red knight informs Perceval to go to King Arthur and to tell him that the Red knight requests that King Arthur send him a champion to win back the golden cup. Perceval does not understand what the Red knight is requesting and continues on his way to King Arthur's.

Perceval arrives at King Arthur's court and does not know who King Arthur is until he asks a squire who points him out. Perceval then greets King Arthur but the king gives no

response. Perceval is shocked that this is the King who makes knights, so he tries to leave but in his haste knocks King Arthur's hat off thus getting King Arthur to speak to him. King Arthur tells Perceval the Red knight took his cup and spilled the wine all over the Queen. Perceval has no interest in the king's trials with the Red knight, but demands that King Arthur make him a knight. King Arthur asks Perceval to dismount, Perceval refuses and instead asks for armor like the Red knight's. Sir Keu mocks Perceval and is critiqued by King Arthur for it.

A maiden at the court laughs at Perceval's situation and Sir Keu angered by her words slaps her. Perceval leaves to go challenge the Red knight. They end up fighting and the Red knight is killed by one of Perceval's javelins. Perceval obtains the Red knight's armor and with the help of Yonet (one of King Arthur's squires) dons it but Perceval refuses to don the Red knight's finery which was underneath the armor. So Yonet is forced to put the armor on over Perceval's "Welsh clothing." Perceval takes the Red knights mount as well and sends Yonet back to King Arthur with the golden cup.

Perceval rides off to a river and spies a castle nestled in the middle of the water. He meets a man on the bridge and he begins to teach Perceval about his new armaments, the lance and the sword. Perceval then goes with the man to lodge for the night and learns the man's name is Gornemant of Gohort. Gornemant offers to teach Perceval how to be a knight for a year but Perceval declines because he wants to see if his mother is alive and says he plans to leave the next day. Gornemant then teaches Perceval how to dress as a knight and then gives him some instructions on knightly behavior. He says that in combat if Perceval gains the upper hand he must grant mercy rather than kill, that he should not be too talkative or prone to gossip, to console women, and to go to church and pray to God. Perceval leaves the next day.

He comes to another castle and begs lodging for the night. Perceval finds the inhabitants are under siege and are starving but he is greeted courteously by Blanchefleur, who turns out to be Gornemant's niece. During the night, she approaches Perceval and informs him of her troubles with Anguingueron, Clamadieu's seneschal, and Clamadieu himself. Both have been laying siege to her because Clamadieu wishes to take her to wife. Perceval comforts her and the next day promises to help her by defeating her besiegers.

Perceval calls for his arms and rides out the next day to confront Anguingueron. They duel and Perceval is victorious. Perceval grants Anguingueron mercy and sends him to King Arthur. Perceval returns to Blanchefleur and is greeted with joy and kisses. Clamadieu, however, is approaching and hears of Anguingueron's defeat and he decides to test Perceval by sending twenty knights to challenge him. Perceval defeats them all. Clamadieu then sets up camp for a lengthy siege but Blanchefleur's castle has the good luck of receiving a supply ship which had been blown off course. Clamadieu hears of the re-provisioning and issues a challenge of single combat to Perceval, who accepts. Blanchefleur tries in vain to dissuade Perceval from fighting.

The next day Perceval and Clamadieu fight and Perceval is again victorious. Perceval sends Clamadieu off to King Arthur as well. Blanchefleur's folk rejoice at Perceval's victory. Clamadieu arrives at King Arthur's court at Pentecost and announces he is King Arthur's prisoner and informs the court that he was bested by the knight whose armor is red and that he was to speak to the maiden whom Keu slapped.

Perceval who had been enjoying his time with Blanchefleur decides once again to leave and return to his mother. Perceval promises to return to Blanchefleur once he knows if his mother is alive or dead. Perceval leaves and prays to God for his mother. Eventually he comes to a river and sees two men fishing on it in a boat. Perceval calls out to them and asks where he

can find lodging and one of the men offers his home. Perceval rides up to the hill leading into a valley but when he looks down into the valley he initially sees nothing. Perceval curses the fisherman, until he spies the top of a tower of a castle and then Perceval praises the fisherman.

Perceval enters the castle and finds a nobleman seated on a bed, who welcomes Perceval and asks him to sit by his side. The nobleman asks from where Perceval has come and while they are conversing a quire enters with a sword which is given to Perceval. Perceval hands the sword to another squire, who is tending to his other armor. Perceval sits down and begins conversing again when third squire enters carrying a white lance upon whose tip is a drop of blood. Perceval marvels at this but does not ask any questions about it. Then two more squires enter carrying golden candelabras. Then a maiden enters carrying a grail, which is so illuminating that it outshines the candelabras. She is followed by another maiden who enters carrying a silver platter. All of these - the lance, the candelabras, the grail and the platter- pass by Perceval and out into another chamber. Perceval watches this procession but does not question it. Perceval and the lord then wash their hands before eating. As they are eating the grail passes by again. Perceval wants to know who is served by it but still he does not ask. Perceval decides to put off asking until the morning. The lord tells Perceval he is going off to bed but that Perceval can lay down where he is at now. The lord is carried out of the hall and Perceval lays down to sleep.

Perceval wakes up the next day alone, so he clothes and arms himself. Then he searches the castle for any members of the household but there is no one there, so he leaves. Perceval is riding through the forest when he encounters a maiden weeping over a dead beheaded knight. The maiden notices how well fed and fresh both Perceval and his horse are and informs Perceval that he must have stayed the night with the Fisher King. The maiden informs Perceval of the king's wounds and how he obtained the name of "Fisher King." She asks if Perceval saw the lance, the candelabras, the grail, and the platter and if Perceval asked to where those items were going. Perceval states that he saw the items but did not ask where they were going. The maiden the calls Perceval "wretched" because if he had asked then the king would have been healed. She calls Perceval a sinner because he sinned against his mother and tells Perceval that his mother died from grief brought on by him. She then tells Perceval she is his cousin. Perceval offers to avenge her knight's death and she tells him which path to take, but then she asks about his sword and tells Perceval where to go to get it fixed.

Perceval leaves her and follows the path she'd indicated, where upon he comes upon a mangy palfrey and a wretched girl riding it. Perceval rides over to help her and discovers that she is the maiden from the tent, from whom he'd stolen a ring and kisses. She tries to warn Perceval to flee from her knight, the Haughty Knight of the Heath, but he comes riding out of the forest to them. Perceval acknowledges to the knight that he was the one who stole her ring and kisses and that she should not be punished any longer for his misdeeds. They end up dueling and Perceval wins. Perceval grants him clemency and orders him to care for his lady before going on to King Arthur's court. The Haughty knight agrees and after seeing to the tent maiden's health, continues on to King Arthur's court.

King Arthur decides to go in search of Perceval and the whole court sets off. They pitch their tents in a meadow and it snows overnight. Perceval comes upon this meadow and watches a flock of geese fly over when a flacon kills one and it drops to the ground spilling three drops of blood on the pristine white snow. Perceval gazing at the blood on the snow becomes lost in contemplation as the white and the red recall to him Blanchefleur's skin and cheeks. Perceval is so lost in contemplation that he does not acknowledge the greeting of Sagremor. Sagremor then

charges Perceval who stops musing long enough to fight and defeat him. Sir Keu approaches and orders Perceval to the king but Perceval fight and defeats him. Gauvain offers to go get Perceval and get him to come to the court. Gauvain sees that Perceval is lost in some deep reverie but not as deep as before because the bloody snow was melting away. Gauvain greets Perceval courteously and succeeds in bringing him to King Arthur. Perceval is greeted and honored by the court and everyone returns to Caerleon where they celebrate until the third day when a hideously ugly damsel appears.

The ugly damsel berates Perceval for his behavior at the Fisher King's castle. She then tells the court of a tournament and of the Sword with the Strange Straps and then she leaves. Perceval swears an oath not to sleep two nights in the same lodgings, nor refuse to cross dangerous passages, nor refuse to test himself against other knights of renown, until he learns who is served from the grail or why the lance bled. The other knights swear different oath and Gauvain is challenged by Guinganbresil. (The narrative then follows Gauvain adventures until he swears an oath to go after another lance which bleeds).

Five years have passed in which Perceval has forgotten God but not deeds of chivalry. Perceval is riding through a deserted region when he encounters three knights and ten ladies dressed for penance. One of the knights questions Perceval and asks if he believes in Jesus Christ and if he known it is wrong to bear arms on Good Friday. Perceval asks what the day is and the knight proceeds to inform him of the meaning of Good Friday. Perceval asks from where they are coming and the tell him of a near-by hermit. Perceval asks what they were doing there and one of the knights answers that they were seeking forgiveness and confessing their sins. Perceval decides to go see this holy man. He finds the hermit in a small chapel. The hermit welcomes Perceval and sees his contrition and asks Perceval to make his confession.

Perceval says it has been over five years since he knew where he was going and that he has not loved God or believed in Him and that he has done evil. Perceval says that he was once at the castle of the Fisher King but he neglected to ask about the blood on the lance or whom the grail served. The hermit asks for Perceval's name and when he hears it, he recognizes it. The hermit then informs Perceval of his mother's death and as a result he has had to suffer hardships. The hermit also tells him that it was sin that stopped his tongue and prevented him from asking about the lance and the grail. He then tells Perceval that it is his brother (the hermit's brother) who is served from the grail and that he is Perceval's uncle. The hermit then says that Perceval must have true repentance and do penance each day in a church, to stay and hear Mass if it has begun when he enters, to believe, love and worship God, to honor gentlemen and ladies and to help the widowed, orphaned, and maidens if they ask it. He then asks Perceval to stay with him for two day and Perceval agrees.

During those two days the hermit teaches Perceval a prayer and they pray together. On Easter Sunday, Perceval receives communion and "the tale no longer speaks of Perceval." (The rest of the narrative follows Gauvain's adventures until the end of the text).

Vita

Carrie Pagels is the only child of Rev. David and Deborah A. Ottsen. She was born in Iowa but spent her childhood in Texas and Oklahoma before moving to Indiana during high school. After graduating from James Whitcomb Riley High School in South Bend, Indiana, she studied French in Belgium with AFS (American Field Service). Returning after her year abroad, she attended Saint Mary's College in Notre Dame, Indiana, where she double majored in French and History and graduated Magna Cum Laude. Upon obtaining her Bachelor of Arts degree from Saint Mary's College in May of 2001, she participated in the JET Program and spent the next year living and teaching in Japan. In Japan, she taught English at five different elemenatry schools in and around Kani City in Gifu Prefecture. After returning from Japan and working for several years outside of academia, she attended The University of Illinois at Chicago where she pursued and obtained a Master of Arts degree in French in May of 2008. Immediately after obtaining her Master's degree, she pursued and obtained her Doctor's of Philosophy at The University of Tennessee - Knoxville. She is currently teaching French at her Alma Mater.