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A STRUCTURAL STUDY OF SIX MEDIEVAL
ARTHURIAN ROMANCES

DISSERTATION
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

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Introduction

The present study is a critical evaluation of a small group of related Arthurian romances based on a close structural examination. The underlying assumption is that the dominant themes and ultimate meanings of the individual tales can be further clarified by defining the ways in which the romances are put together: that is, by pointing out and by tracing in greater detail than has been done before the significant themes, motivations, and miscellaneous plot devices, and by determining how the focal points of the action relate to the whole. The basis for this discussion is a study of what Chrétien de Troyes calls the matiére, or subject matter (cf. the opening lines of Lancelot). As one critic has wisely stated, "It can hardly be disputed that to try to arrive at the sans—-or symbolic meaning--without a thorough study and understanding of the obvious and basic plot material is to build a house upon shifting sands."^1

Three of the romances analyzed are those of Chrétien, and the other three are analogues or redactions of these Old French poems. They are discussed in the following order:2 Chrétien's Erec et Enide,

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^2The dates now generally agreed upon for Chrétien's works are as follows: Erec, 1170; Yvain and Lancelot, 1177-1181; Yvain and Lancelot seem to have been written concurrently. (See Jean Frappler in Roger S. Loomis [ed.], Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages [London, 1959], p. 159.) Concerning the dates of the other romances, see the notes, below, in the appropriate chapters.
together with the Old Welsh prose analogue, Gereint; Chrétien's Yvain (or Le Chevalier au Lion), together with the derivative Middle English poem, Ywain and Gawain, and the Old Welsh prose analogue, Owelín; and Chrétien's Lancelot (or Le Chevalier de la Charrette). All of these romances are concerned with the extravagancies of the Matter of Britain. On this basis, Chrétien's Cligès, a tale whose spirit differs significantly, is excluded. Chrétien's Perceval is also excluded because the Grail story, with its many continuations and separate treatments by diverse authors, is fantastically complex and therefore would require a whole series of individual treatments.

Lancelot is the only one of Chrétien's romances analyzed for which an English or Welsh version is not included. There seems to be little point in analyzing the much later Lancelot romances of the fifteenth century, which are so indirectly related to Chrétien, derived as they are from the thirteenth-century French Prose Lancelot: that is, the Stanzaic Morte Arthur, the Lancelot material in Malory, and the Scots Lancelot of the Laik. Chrétien's Lancelot is important to this study, however, because of its close thematic relationship to the companion pieces Erec and Yvain and because each of these three romances, in a variety of ways, throws a bright light on the other two.

Each romance is divided into sections whenever division clarifies meaning, even though the text may not indicate a break. The only evidence admitted is thematic. Further, each romance is studied on its own merit as a separate and distinct work of art, so that source studies have no place in the analysis. The individual analogues and derivative tales are compared here and there, but only to emphasize
the individuality and distinct qualities of the variants; mutual influences are generally not considered. The single exception is *Ywain and Gawain*, for the poem is so obviously derived from *Yvain* that the differences alone distinguish it. The three "families" of tales (*Erec*, *Yvain*, *Lancelot*, as well as their respective analogues or derivatives) are sometimes compared, but only when similarities or dissimilarities help clarify the particular tale under consideration, or when useful generalizations can help us understand concepts of romance writing. Comparisons can be especially helpful when they involve such common themes as the interrelationship and conflict between courtly love, marriage, and knight errantry. The discussions of Chrétien's romances are longer than those of the variants, since they delineate the basic plots rather fully.

The romances bristle with structural problems which as yet have not been adequately defined, much less solved. In *Erec*, for instance, we must determine the relation of the adventure called *la Joie de la Cour* to the love theme, since Erec and Enide have already been completely reconciled in the preceding adventure. There is the problem in *Yvain* of the relevance to the love theme of the long-awaited battle between Yvain and Gawain. Does this climax to the romance occur in a giant digression? If the theme of *Lancelot* is the Lancelot-Guinevere relationship, we must somehow justify the first half of the tale in which the

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3For a lively discussion of three kinds of chivalry—Feudal, Church, Courtly—and of the interaction and frequently mutual exclusiveness of the three, see Sidney Painter, *French Chivalry* (Baltimore, 1940). The book includes a discussion of courtly love in relation to Chrétien.
lovers do not even meet. Similarly, we must define the structural significance of the last third of the tale after the consummation.

The other three tales are much shorter than Chrétien's corresponding versions, with the significant result that the central themes differ considerably. Perhaps the most valuable result of grappling with these and all the other related problems is that we will necessarily have to re-examine, restate, and to some extent redefine the meaning of the tales. The six romances are by no means organized with the same degree of success, but the motivation implied in the following assertion about Chrétien has guided the present study: "When critics . . . are able to reconcile all the plot elements . . . they can dismiss definitely the charge of random and purposeless incidents and arrive at a central theme which will join all the adventures into a unified and intelligent whole for any given romance."4

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4 Woods, p. 15.
CHAPTER I

Erec et Enide

The central theme of Chrétien's *Erec et Enide* is the love of Erec and Enide. The second and central section of the book is concerned specifically with the growth of the love relationship, for both Erec and Enide have to learn much about each other and about their relationship; a secondary but related theme in the section is Erec's demonstration of valor. The first section of the romance presents the beginning of the relationship, and, more important, it tells us what we need to know in order to understand the narrative in the second section. The third section is merely the logical conclusion of the plot. The action is presented as follows (after the twenty-six-line introduction): in the first section (27-1796), Erec meets Enide and takes her to Arthur's court; in the second (1797-6358), Erec and Enide marry and undergo a long series of adventures which culminates with *la Joie de la Cour*; in the third (6359-6878), Erec and Enide are crowned.

The first section is very tightly organized—more so, in fact, than the other two; consequently, it lends itself to a more thorough

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structural analysis, page by page, than the rest of the romance. It consists of two skillfully intermingled episodes. The action of the sparrow-hawk-contest episode, which results in Erec's winning of Enide, grows out of the action of the white-stag-hunt episode with which the story begins. The completion of the white-stag-hunt, which requires the bestowal of a kiss on the fairest maiden of the court, occurs only after Erec and Enide return from the sparrow-hawk contest. (The bestowal of the kiss is anticipated near the outset of the story [41-48] by Gawain.) Enide, whose very presence in the story is due to the second episode, receives the kiss that ends the first episode, which frames the second. The action begins in Arthur's court, proceeds from it, and eventually returns to it.

Arthur's own position and function are themselves interesting as unifying devices. He is prominent at the outset as the one who launches the action (the stag hunt) and at the end as the one who concludes it (with the kiss). In addition, he speaks formally at the beginning of the section and at the end: when Gawain suggests the difficulty of agreeing on a maiden to receive the kiss, Arthur briefly comments on the allegiance owed a king (59-62); later, after he has decided to give the kiss to Enide, he elaborates, addressing the knights of the court, and attempts to forestall any dispute about his choice of Enide (1732 ff.). Ending on a note of courtly formality and ceremony, the climax of the first section anticipates the conclusion of the other two: the festivities at the end of the Joie de la Cort adventure, and the pomp of the coronation at the end of the romance.
The two episodes which comprise the first section are themselves basically quite similar. Both the stag hunt and the sparrow-hawk contests are, among other things, beauty contests, and both are traditional rites. It is interesting that while the outcome of the one is decided by a fight, the outcome of the other must not be decided by a fight: the king's word must be accepted. We have already noticed that Arthur has to go to some trouble to avoid a quarrel which we are more than once told might develop. This contrast between the nature of deciding the two contests is subtle, and it is only suggested; in itself, it is certainly not crucial to the plot. It is typical, however, of the small touches by which Chrétien adds depth, meaning, and unity to the story. Perhaps the thing which most securely fastens the two episodes together and thereby unites the first section is the happy fact that Enide herself wins at both contests.

We must now consider even more closely how the two episodes intermingle. Chrétien blends together the stag hunt and the sparrow-hawk contest by means of a natural, believable sequence of events which are bound to each other. The queen and her damsel, escorted by Erec, follow the king and his other knights on the hunt. (The queen's function in the plot should be watched throughout the section.) They meet Yder and his rude dwarf who insults the queen and her damsel. Erec himself is struck on the face. He leaves the queen and pursues the knight alone. Briefly, the focus is left upon the king and his retinue, who, having finished the hunt, return to Cardigan. There Gawain (for the second time) warns Arthur that each of his knights thinks his own mistress should receive the kiss (302 ff.). Now
Guinevere convinces the king to wait until Erec returns (335 ff.). She gives no reason, but the interlacing of the two episodes is made possible by her action.

Instantly the story switches back to Erec, who follows the knight into a town; here he finds lodging with a vavasor whose beautiful daughter is Enide. Erec's revenge leads him to fight Yder in the sparrow-hawk contest and to win Enide as his promised bride. During a lull in the fight, we are reminded that Erec is triply motivated (909 ff.): he has promised the queen to avenge the insult; he is angered by the blow which he has received from the dwarf; and he is inspired by his feeling for Enide. The first two motivations result from the stag-hunt episode, and the last from the sparrow-hawk episode. Thus the two episodes are still more tightly connected.

After defeating Yder, Erec decides to send him to the queen to be placed at her disposal. The first episode is again recalled to the reader, and another relationship between the first and second is established. In addition, Erec at once sends Yder to Arthur's court with great speed, and the narrative follows him there without a break in continuity. Chrétien skilfully shows the excitement and suspense which Guinevere and the court feel as Yder approaches the castle. The queen instantly demands news of Erec from Yder, and he tells her that the knight will arrive on the following day with the fairest damsel he ever knew. At once the queen reminds Arthur (and the reader) that her advice to delay the kiss had indeed been wise (1211 ff.).

The narrative now suddenly switches once more to Erec. The structural importance of these shifts in the reader's point of view
Is obvious: the relationship between the two separate but simultaneous sets of action is constantly kept before the reader. After a leisurely account of the remainder of the action in the sparrow-hawk episode, and after Erec refuses to let Enide be richly clothed until Guinevere herself might robe her (thus anticipating that event), Erec and Enide leave for Cardigan. As they approach the castle, Chrétien skillfully jumps ahead to the activities at the castle itself where he catches the excitement of the court as Erec approaches with his damsel. Finally, Guinevere prompts Arthur to award the kiss to Enide (1721 ff.), and the section ends.²

This introductory section seems too long in relation to the rest of the tale, for Chrétien takes up over a quarter of the story in allowing the hero and heroine to meet and fall in love. The section is very important, though, since it prepares for the second section by developing the personalities of the lovers. Jean Frappler characterizes Erec and Enide as follows:

Erec is courteous, generous, but proud, a little secretive and quick to take offence, reluctant to owe anything to anyone, prompt to decide, resolute in carrying out the decision at any hazard, moved by a deep but imperious love for his beautiful bride. Enide, lovely in soul as in body, is active in household duties, modest in manner, with little experience of life, filled with love, gratitude, and an almost superstitious awe for the son of a king who chose her from her humble station.³

²Line 1796, "ici finit il premiers vers" ("Here ends the first part"), may or may not be a later interpolation, since Chrétien does not usually supply this kind of remark. The break is justified thematically, however, because the action to this point could easily stand as a complete story.

No matter how we summarize Erec's personality, the important thing is that he is an accomplished courtier.\(^4\) He is a chivalrous knight errant. Enide's awareness of her own advancement and good fortune gives us just a hint of the pride she will later discover in herself (688-690). By developing Erec's and Enide's personalities rather fully and in leisurely fashion, Chrétien better prepares the reader for what seems to be the main concern of the second section. The romance would certainly have less meaning if we plunged into the second set of adventures without having been shown that Erec is already, in fact, a knight errant par excellence, and that both of the lovers are thoroughly wonderful people. Similarly, it is essential that we realize fully the profundity of their love for one another\(^5\) before we can imagine the profundity of Enide's sorrow when, later, she will have to suggest to Erec that perhaps he is not the knight he should be.

Chrétien dwells at length on the circumstances of the "boy-meets-girl" theme which is so essential to any love story, and these circumstances reveal a great deal about the lovers. The most interesting thing of all about the first section is that it does apparently tell, at least in the modern sense, a complete love story. The lovers meet, fall in love, and, after tremendous difficulties are overcome, are married. But one element is missing: the lovers' quarrel—the strain

\(^4\) Cf., for instance, his polished behavior toward the queen when he rides up to her in the forest and says that his only purpose is to accompany her (107-110): "Dame, fet il, a vos serole, / s'il vos plieisoit, an ceste voile; / je ne ving ça por autre afrere / fors por vos compaignie fere."

\(^5\) See esp. 1459 ff.
on a relationship which will ultimately result in even greater happiness. For Erec and Enide, this strained relationship will occur after marriage, because Chrétien is interested in showing how Erec and Enide ultimately attain perfect love. The first section ends with the attainment of one stage of happiness; the second and third sections will end in even greater happiness.

II

The second section begins with a well-planned, closely integrated sequence of events. Erec immediately fulfills his promise to reward the vavasor; thus there is at once a continuity with the first section, in which he made the promise. The marriage follows. The following lines which occur immediately after the wedding may or may not be intended to recall to us the first section and the circumstances of the lovers' meeting, and may or may not be intended as a structural device, but they are worth noting (2027-32): "Cers chaciez qui de soif alainne / ne desirre tant la fontainne, / n'espreviers ne vient a reclain / si volontiers quant il a fain, / que plus volontiers n'il venissent, / einfois que il s'antre tenissent." ("The hunted stag which pants for thirst does not so desire the spring, not the sparrow-hawk for hunger return so willingly when called, as did these two closely embrace each other.") After the tournament which follows the

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6 I do not agree with William S. Woods' observation that Erec gains supreme secular happiness in the first section ("The Plot Structure in Four Romances of Chrestien de Troyes," SP, L [1953], 7). I am not sure of his meaning of "secular," but Erec's happiness, as well as Enide's, grows in each section.
wedding, Erec and Enide leave Arthur's court and return to Erec's father's (King Lac's) land, where they are warmly received. Now Erec neglects his knightly duties and devotes himself almost entirely to Enide. She reacts, and certain consequences follow.

In order better to understand the structural significance of the rest of the second section, one must first examine Erec's and Enide's motivations, which have already been largely prepared for in the first section. Erec neglects his knightly duties because he loves Enide deeply. The simple explanation is the only one we have, and it is believable. We remember that Enide's great beauty has been stressed throughout, and that shortly after she was introduced into the story we were told quite casually, apparently, that she was made to be looked at (438-439). Erec's trouble arises, in fact, because he could not look at her enough (1466). Because he is a knight, however, and a knight second only to Gawain (2230-36), his neglect of knightly duties because of love seems to suggest a conflict between the two interests. Whereas Enide's love and beauty had greatly inspired Erec at the sparrow-hawk contest, the same love and beauty, when the couple settle down to married life, reduce him to inactivity. Adding to the paradox, Enide grieves because Erec's knightly reputation is being ruined. However, she hesitates painfully to speak to her husband about the matter, for she knows he will take affront—as he instantly does when he overhears her lament (2572 ff.).

Perhaps it is enough simply to know that Enide has realized she must not tell Erec of his shortcoming. But we can understand her hesitancy and his reaction if we recall the basic nature of their
relationship. Their love has been anything but that of a hypothetical courtly love. Erec has been dominant in the relationship from the start. He did not woo Enide: he merely won her. He even refused to permit her to be suitably robed before she appeared at court with him. In short, Enide has been passive in the entire relationship up to this point. Although Erec realizes that her criticism, or her account of others' criticism, is valid, he feels that she is too bold, that she has overstepped her role as a passive and obedient wife. It is not difficult for us to suppose Erec venting his anger on the one who informs him of his own shortcoming, especially since that one is at the same time the person whom he deeply loves and the person who has caused him to have this shortcoming. He may even decide, as apparently he instantly does, to test her love for him, and, at the same time, both to prove his sovereignty to her in marriage and to prove to Enide and to all others (perhaps even to himself) that he can still perform deeds of valor. In the adventures which follow, he will also teach her, finally, to accept with quiet bravery the dangers which his chivalric life necessitates. He tests her love in the first place because he seems to think that the report she has given him of his failure in the performance of knightly duties is in part a report of her own feelings. This explanation accords with his statement to her

7Frappier points out (Loomis, p. 170) that a knight must be chivalric, and that a wife must lay aside all egotism "and know how to efface or even sacrifice herself for his good." Chrétien teaches an equilibrium between romantic love and social duty." Frappier also stresses the importance of Enide's education in Chrétien de Troyes (Paris, 1957), p. 102. Surely William A. Nitze oversimplifies the problem when he says that Erec's motive is purely one of "Soveraynétee" ("The Romance of Erec, Son of Lac," MP, XI [1912-13], 448).
after the test is over that his proof of her is complete, that he loves her more than ever, is assured of her love, and pardons her for any word she might have spoken against him (4882-93).

The moment Erec commands her to mount her best palfrey, the structure shifts. The organizing principle at once becomes that of a series of eight barely connected, episodic adventures. The two intertwining episodes in the first section can be compared to a two-strand rope, and the several tightly linked events in the second section, until now, can be compared to a well-constructed chain; however, the rest of the action in the second section consists of adventures which are so weakly linked that they threaten to break apart. These adventures do contribute in varying ways, however, to the central concern of the section.

At the outset of each of the first four adventures, Enide breaks the taboo imposed upon her by Erec and warns him of the approaching dangers. Each time, Erec rebuffs her for not obeying him. (The taboo against speaking unless spoken to first is itself interesting, because it was imposed upon Enide in the first place after she had spoken in the presence of Erec about a matter which Erec seemed to think she should not have; and she only spoke about it after extreme hesitance.) After the fourth rebuff, however, he realizes that she loves him above all else (3752-55). The fourth adventure involves a fight with Guivret the Little, who, after his defeat, promises Erec assistance anytime he might be of service. Guivret will reappear later. The action in the first four adventures is scarcely connected at all, except by the taboo motif.
After the fourth adventure, there is an interruption in the forward movement of the section (3920 ff.): Arthur, Guinevere, Kay, Gawain, and the king's barons appear in the forest, and Erec and Enide spend the night at their camp. This interruption is a direct reminder of the first section of the romance and anticipates the third; the reminder is strengthened when Gawain tells Erec that the queen has been speaking of Enide and desires greatly to see her again and when we see the affection which both the king and queen display for Erec and Enide at their arrival. We recall all of the mutual affection shown in the first section. The encounter also permits Arthur to treat Erec's wounds (received from Guivret) with his magic plaster. The wound is not healed; that is left for Guivret in adventure seven. But this partial cure climaxes the first great lesson of the fourth episode, as Guivret's later cure will climax the total reconciliation.

It is significant that this King Arthur interlude occurs precisely in the middle of the eight adventures. In the first four adventures, Erec is only concerned with his personal relationship with Enide, while the events which follow allow him to attend to his social duties as well. Not only is the love theme intensified in the second set of adventures as the attitudes and actions of each of the partners change, but it is also seen in relation to the gratuitous assistance which Erec gives others. Personal love and public duty are not only compatible, but complementary. Since Erec is a knight and a future king as well, and since Enide is learning to be a queen, this lesson is extremely important. Arthur's court stands as the bridge between the two sets of adventures which teach the lesson, as it rightly should since it is the center of chivalric conduct.
The fifth adventure, then, is somewhat different from the ones which have preceded. No longer does Enide have to warn Erec of the danger involved, because there is at first no direct danger to either of them. They are told by a lady who is crying in the forest that her lover, who turns out to be Cadoc of Tabriol, has been abducted by two cruel giants. Erec voluntarily fights and ultimately defeats the giants, and reunites the lovers. Meanwhile, he has left Enide by herself to wait for him. This adventure, then, marks a decided change in Erec's attitude toward Enide, and a change in their relationship in general. The adventure has nothing to do with the kind of testing of Enide with which the other adventures have been concerned. Instead, she is being shown what it is like, in fact, to be the wife of a knight who must attend to his chivalric duties. She waits for Erec in great concern, but apparently misconstrues his purpose, thinking that he had deserted her (4542-47). We remember that Erec has already realized that Enide loves him, but since he has not told her so yet, her concern is all the more believable. This adventure also functions to let Erec continue his demonstration of valor. His valor is tested even more in this adventure because of the nature of his giant adversaries; and he is already wounded. The adventure is connected to the King Arthur interlude which immediately precedes it, and therefore indirectly related to the first section of the romance, when Erec sends Cadoc to Arthur, who is still hunting.

After this episode, Erec finally faints because of his wounds; Enide, who thinks he is dead, blames herself at length because of her presumption and even intends to kill herself (4570 ff.). The structural
value of Erec's fainting spell is, then, that it allows Enide to indulge once more in that self-reproach which has been a minor theme at least twice before: immediately after Erec decided to test her, she blamed her pride (2600-06), as she also did after the second adventure (3102-03). The fainting spell also makes possible the dramatic situation which climaxes the next adventure.

The sixth adventure begins when Count Oringle of Limors appears just in time to prevent Enide from committing suicide; he takes Erec and Enide to his palace. There he twice strikes Enide, thus acting as a foil to Erec; even his own barons upbraid him for his brutality. Just as Enide had previously refused to be Count Galoain's mistress (in a sort of prelude to the third adventure), now she refuses to give her favors to Count Oringle, even though he forces her to marry him. Erec opportunely recovers from his swoon and takes courage from the love of his wife (4824-25) as he had much earlier at the sparrow-hawk contest. He kills the count. The adventure ends with another significant change in the lovers' relationship: having decided at the beginning of the fourth adventure that Enide loves him, Erec now assures her of the fact. We notice, too, that whereas in the fifth adventure he had asked her merely to await his return, in this adventure he is actively defending her—quite the reverse situation from his use of her as lure in the first four adventures. The adventure also functions to again prove Erec's valor. Apart from these structural significances, the suspense value inherent in the adventure is quite obvious from the moment before Count Oringle's timely appearance prevents Enide's suicide to the moment before Erec awakens to save Enide from the count.
At the outset of the seventh adventure, the change in relationship is again reflected in Erec's protection of Enide: Immediately he hides her when he sees Guivret arriving with his knights. As in the fifth adventure, she has to suffer because of Erec's chivalric duties. After Erec and Guivret fight (because they do not recognize each other at first), Guivret takes the couple to his castle where Enide bathes Erec's wounds. We are once more reminded that Erec is assured of Enide's love (5096-98). Then, after Guivret's two sisters treat Erec's wounds with their plaster and restore him to health, Erec and Enide are completely reconciled at last (5200 ff.). And so, another major change in their relationship—and it is the most significant—has taken place. And, of course, Erec's valor has once more been demonstrated.

Guivret's very presence in the adventure reminds us of the fourth adventure in which he had first appeared in the romance. The fulfillment of his promise to help Erec relates the two adventures even more clearly. The present adventure is also related to the sixth adventure which immediately precedes it: Guivret tells Erec that he has hastened to him because he has heard of the events at Limors (5028 ff.); then Erec describes those events to him. Erec's wounds themselves provide a thematic link for all of the action since the fourth adventure in which he received them, and Guivret's sisters' application of the plaster particularly recalls the plaster treatment administered by Arthur after the fourth adventure. Finally, we cannot help but notice that Guivret, who is now instrumental in healing Erec's wounds, was the person who, in fact, originally inflicted them in the fourth adventure.
It has not been unusual for critics to consider the *Joie de la Cort* adventure extraneous to the romance. Their failure to see that the adventure is structurally integrated into the story results from their failure to interpret the entire romance, and the second section in particular, as a comment on an ideal love relationship: what it is and how it is achieved. Even those critics who do consider the adventure an integral part of the entire story usually treat it as a part of the last section of the romance—as a thing apart from the series of adventures which precedes it.

Structurally, the *Joie de la Cort* adventure belongs at the end of, but within, the second section of the romance because it is the last in the series of adventures which marks a development in the Erec-Enide relationship. In order to understand how this eighth adventure completes the development of this relationship and permits it to be defined, let us briefly review the development through the first seven adventures. Erec's treatment of Enide changes, with the result that an ideal relationship is gradually established. He ceases being harsh to Enide after the fourth adventure when he has decided that her love for him is true (even though he briefly delays telling her of his decision) and when his position of active dominance has been established. Then he forces her to endure passively his dangerous adventures, to stand by quietly while he risks his life and is wounded.

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8Gaston Paris, in his review of Wendelin Foerster's edition of *Erec*, called the adventure absurd and incoherent (*Romania*, XX [1891], 154), and Foerster thought it a frameless adjunct (*Erec und Enide*, 3d ed. [Halle, 1934], p. xx).
Meanwhile, he is now actually defending and protecting her. Secondly, Erec's change of attitude results in Enide's growing realization of the full meaning of her marriage to a chivalric knight. Enide maintains a degree of active participation in the first four adventures as she warns Erec of approaching dangers, and she suffers because of the conflict between her fear of disobeying Erec and the apparent necessity of warning him. After the fourth adventure, however, she cannot help Erec at all, and she suffers as she learns that she must be content to do nothing and to trust her husband's prowess.

In the Joie de la Cort adventure, Enide learns her final lesson in passive suffering, for she is greatly distressed and fearful for her lord (5628-33). For the first time at the beginning of an adventure, however, Erec comforts her tenderly with the words beginning, "Bele douce suer, / gentix dame lässt et sage, / bien conus tot vostre corage." ("Fair sweet sister, gentle lady loyal and wise, I know your desire well"—5784 ff.) But more significantly, he instructs her that she must not be distressed until she should see him defeated; he tells her she has begun her lament too soon (5800-03). With this passage, Erec completes Enide's education as his wife.

This eighth adventure also completes the development of the relationship because it is the final and climactic demonstration of the valor which Erec must possess as knightly husband, and which had once been questioned. Previously, he has overcome knights, counts, a king, and even giants. But this adventure against the supernatural requires more valor than any of his previous experiences. It is interesting, too, that his victory this time benefits an entire people.

9William A. Nitze comments that the Joie "is both the motive and the fulfillment of Erec's career" ("Erec and the Joy of the Court," Speculum, XXIX [1954], 700).
The *Joie de la Cort* adventure belongs in the second section not only because of what it directly tells us about the relationship, but also because of what it indirectly tells us. The relationship between Mabonagrain and his mistress is a foil to that of Erec and Enide. It is probably based on the concept of courtly love: the mistress is dominant, and the lover serves her. The result is that Mabonagrain is unhappy and wants to leave the garden where he is imprisoned, but he does not dare let his mistress even suspect his unhappiness. Presumably, the conventions of courtly love as well as the chivalric code in general prevent him from either breaking his promise or allowing himself deliberately to lose in battle. In addition, although Mabonagrain's valor is never questioned (after all, he has defeated all previous adversaries), he is the one being put to a test (or something very like a test) by his mistress—not the other way around, as in the Erec-Enide relationship. Also, the fact that Mabonagrain's uxoriousness is so intense and the fact that Erec defeats him seem to suggest both that uxoriousness is not the best basis for a love relationship and that Erec (who has already learned his lesson) is thoroughly opposed to it. Finally, the contrast between Enide and Mabonagrain's mistress is significant. The latter is selfish and is concerned only with her own happiness, not with her lover's. Whereas Enide's tears are inspired by her love for Erec, Mabonagrain's mistress's tears occur when she is no longer able to confine her lover to the garden.  

10 The point is made in an excellent article by E. Hoepffner, "'Matière et Sens' dans le Roman d'Erec et Enide," *Archivum Romanum*, XVIII (1934), 448-449.
is Enide who comforts her—Enide, who, because of the consequences, did not desire to have her husband with her constantly, and who has learned much that Mabonagrain's mistress has not. Almost the entire love relationship between Mabonagrain and his mistress is a studied contrast to that between Erec and Enide; this fact, together with the very presence of the adventure in the romance, to say nothing of its climactic structural position, emphasizes that the romance is basically a comment on the growth of an ideal love relationship.

These main structural considerations of the eighth adventure relate it most significantly, of course, to the rest of the story; however, it is related in other, perhaps more specific, ways. The minor theme of love inspiring valor, introduced at the sparrow-hawk contest and repeated at Limors, reappears for the last time, as Erec says (5806-09), "S'an moi n'avoit de Lardemant / fors tant con vostre amors m'an baille, / ne crien broie je an bataille, / cors a cors, nul home vivant." ("If I had as much courage as your love inspires, truly I would not fear to face any man alive.") Now, as before, the theme indicates that love should inspire valor, not conflict with it as it apparently did shortly after Erec and Enide's marriage. Guivret's continued presence is the most direct link with the preceding adventure (and thus both adventures remind us of the fourth adventure in which, as we have seen, he first appears). It is he, also, who first tells Erec about the Joie de la Cort as they approach Brandigant. Erec is immediately interested, and the more he hears about it, the more interested he becomes, and the greater the suspense grows. Once the suspense begins, Chrétien builds it up at great length (5319-5828).
The fact that Mabonagraint's mistress turns out to be Enide's cousin and the fact that Enide retells the entire story to her serve to connect the adventure with everything which precedes it, especially the first section. Incidentally, the enthusiastic reception which Erec receives as he enters Brandigant may make us faintly recall the lack of enthusiasm and attention he was accorded in the town in which the sparrow-hawk contest was held, as well as his tremendous reception at his homecoming after his marriage.

We should not think that the Joie de la Cort is a thing apart from the preceding adventures merely because Erec decides after the seventh adventure to return to Arthur's court; we must remember that he qualifies this decision by saying (5231), "se ne sui pris ou retenez" ("unless I am captured or detained"). The very possibility of another adventure which his remark implies should be excuse enough for one, since some of the adventures (particularly the earlier ones) are very loosely connected. And the fact that the adventure is almost completely unprepared for until Erec sees Brandigant itself should not bother us for the same reason.

IV

The third section of the romance, the coronation, is short. As soon as the section begins, the structure becomes once again (compare the beginning of the second section) that of a well-ordered sequence of events: Erec and Enide return immediately to Arthur's court, now at Tintagel; they decide to remain there three or four years; the news of the death of Erec's father, King Lac, reaches them; Erec asks
Arthur himself to crown him; Arthur consents to do so in Nantes at Christmas; elaborate preparations are made for the coronation and are described at length; and the romance ends climactically on a high note of ceremony with the coronation itself and the festivities associated with it at court.

The third section is related structurally to the rest of the romance in a number of ways. Most important, the action returns to King Arthur's court where it originally began. Once again, Chrétien uses the device of summary, as he has Erec relate his adventures to the king (6416 ff.), to connect the preceding action to the current action. The theme of Guinevere's love for both Erec and Enide is stressed once more when the three meet at court (6407 ff.); and we notice that the queen again dresses Enide, this time for the coronation. The fact that Guivret is still present in the story tends to recall much of the action of the second section to us, and Chrétien reminds us that Yder, whom Erec sent to court from the sparrow-hawk contest, still attends Arthur. The action of the first section is also vividly recalled when Erec remembers Enide's mother and father and calls them to court for their daughter's coronation; Erec even thanks the vavasor once more for his kindness at the sparrow-hawk contest when he furnished Erec with lodging and gave him his beautiful daughter. Finally, the coronation itself, with its stress on Enide, seems to be the logical conclusion to a story about the son of a king and his beautiful wife; we remember, in particular, Enide's anticipation immediately after her betrothal that she will someday be a queen; and we recall that Erec has referred to himself throughout the romance as Erec, son of King Lac.
The romance has structural unity only if we consider the general theme to be no less than the whole love relationship between Erec and Enide, with special emphasis on the growth of an ideal relationship. The romance is basically unified around this theme, but, because the theme is so general, we should not be surprised when we are forced to conclude, finally, that the three separate sections are not really inextricably, but only loosely, bound to each other by the central theme. The first reason this unity is not tighter is that the central part of the theme really only begins in earnest in the second section. Although the first section is necessary to the second (because it prepares us for it, especially by developing Erec's and Enide's personalities and by presenting the first stage of their love relationship), it seems disproportionately long when it is read in the context of the whole work; it seems to begin too far away from the apparent central concern of the whole work. The second reason is that even though the very short third section is the logical conclusion of the plot—-and even though we may assume that Enide's education and growth in love prepare her not only to be the ideal wife of a knight but of a king as well—the third section is not very explicitly connected to the central love theme of the romance. We should not be too surprised, either, that the individual adventures within the main section, the second, are only somewhat loosely connected to each other. After all, the central theme only calls for a growth in Erec and Enide's love relationship; in order for this growth to be accomplished, it is only necessary for Erec and Enide to experience a series of
adventures, however loosely connected, which will teach them certain things about each other and about that relationship. The very nature of the central theme, then, lends itself to an episodic development. So does the nature of the secondary theme: Erec's demonstration of the valor which is necessary in an ideal knightly husband.

Much of whatever disunity there is in the romance can be explained by the fact that two distinctly different organizational methods are used. The method of intertwining two episodes in the first section is followed by that of linking together several "events" and then several "adventures" in the second, and of linking together several "events" in the third. Simply stated, the "two-strand-rope" principle in the first section is followed by the "chain" principle in the second and third sections, and these two very different principles are not entirely compatible. Another problem also arises: the links of the chain in the second and third sections are not all of the same sort. The tight links at the beginning of the second section, a series of well-ordered "events" (the marriage, the tournament, the return to Erec's homeland), are followed by a series of weakly linked, episodic "adventures" throughout the remainder of the section; the action in the third section is once more that of a series of tightly linked, well-ordered "events" (the return to Arthur's court, the decision to remain there, the news of King Lac's death, and so on).

In the last analysis, we must not look for the structural unity of the Erec merely in the central theme; we must not expect merely the forward action which the metaphors of the rope and chain
suggest to completely unify the romance, even though the central theme and the forward action are of chief importance. But as we read through the romance, we must consider, as well, the numerous reminders (with which Chretien seems careful to supply us) of things we have already read. The repetition of minor themes, the reappearance of minor figures with consistent personalities, the summaries of action, the remembrance of promises, the use of Arthur, Guinevere, and the court as reference points, the pattern of climactic court scenes at the end of each major section—all these things, and others, help to unify the romance around the plot. In addition, believable motivations help to unify the story around both the central theme and the plot. On the whole, then, the many structural virtues of the tale far outweigh the weaknesses.
CHAPTER II

Gereint

The Old Welsh prose Gereint is organized more loosely than Chrétien's Erec, its somewhat earlier analogue, so that we will have to state its theme more broadly. About half the length of Erec, it may be divided into two sections at the point where Gereint receives word from Erbin to return to his homeland (p. 246), for there the strands of a major portion of the story are gathered up.

The story opens with a rather detailed description which stresses the magnificence of Arthur's court. The time and place are mentioned, as well as the names of people and the precise numbers of knights and churches. The conversation which follows between Arthur and the "tall auburn-haired youth" who rides up to tell Arthur about the white stag shows attention to the verisimilitude that makes a good story. It also prepares us most carefully for the stag-hunt. The author even points out in some detail that Gwenhwyfar and Gereint

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1References are to the convenient Everyman's Library translation of Gwyn Jones and Thomas Jones, The Mabinogion (London and New York, 1949 [reprinted 1961]), pp. 229-273. Although the matter is not definitely settled, scholars now consider Gereint to be later than Erec et Enide and both versions to have a common source. For reviews of scholarship on the relationship between the two tales, see James D. Bruce, The Evolution of Arthurian Romance, 2d ed. (Gloucester, Mass., 1958), 11, 59-74, and Idris Llewelyn Foster's more recent commentary in Roger S. Loomis (ed.), Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages (Oxford, 1959), pp. 192-196.
must trail along behind the main hunting party because each has over-
slept. In a lengthy story, such a leisurely beginning would be highly
effective, but in so short a one as this the writer might have economized
in order to emphasize more important details later. We might compare
the abundance of detail with the overly long fourth adventure in the
second section (pp. 256-261); its length is completely out of proportion
to that of the other adventures, and some of its detail even seems
superfluous (e.g., the excessive attention given to "the youth" who
tells the earl about Gereint).

In general the stag hunt and the sparrow-hawk contest are tied
together very skillfully (for the most part in the same fashion as
they are in Chrétien, so that repetition of the narrative here is
unnecessary). The bonds and similarities between Enid and Gwenhwyfar
and between Gereint and Arthur especially add depth to the romance.
Not only does the queen suggest that the award of the stag's head be
delayed until Enid appears (pp. 241-242) and then remind Arthur that
such a delay was wise (pp. 245-246), but Gereint introduces Enid to
her (p. 244) as "the maiden because of whom thou hast been freed from
thy disgrace." This strong bond between the two women is further
strengthened by Gereint's insistence that Gwenhwyfar clothe Enid and
by the sorrow which Gwenhwyfar displays (p. 247) when the couple leave
for Gereint's own land. The two women are linked together in still
another way, too, for twice we see Gwenhwyfar acceding to Arthur's
commands to show mercy to Edern (pp. 243, 248), just as we see Enid
obeying (and trying to obey) Gereint for the remainder of the romance.
It seems significant that the mercy Arthur shows should be the quality Gereint displays several times to his own adversaries: to Edern (p. 239), to an earl who desires Enid (p. 261), to Gwiffred Petit (p. 263), and to the knight behind the hedge of mist (p. 273). Also the authority Arthur displays toward the queen and the rest of the court as well as his firmness later when Gereint does not want to leave the pavilion (p. 266) bear comparison to Gereint's conduct as lord of his own court (pp. 248-250). The bonds between the two men are further strengthened when Gwenhwyfar points out to Arthur that he no less than she was insulted by the knight whom Gereint defeated and when Arthur is reluctant to allow Gereint to return to his own land (pp. 246-247).

The rather carefully defined relationships between Gwenhwyfar and Enid and between Arthur and Gereint help illuminate the roles of these four characters, and Gereint and Enid may almost be viewed as doublets of the king and queen. The relationships are not emphasized long enough, however, to give the romance all the unity it needs. The appearance in the forest of the royal retinue between the fifth and sixth adventures (pp. 264-266) allows Arthur's physician to heal the wounded Gereint and reminds us briefly of the earlier bonds, but Arthur and Gwenhwyfar are not seen again.

There are some distractions in the first section. Enid's beauty, which is important in the sparrow-hawk contest, might be more carefully emphasized, especially if it is later the cause of her winning the stag's head. Prior to the sparrow-hawk contest her beauty is only mentioned when Gereint first sees her (p. 235). It is mentioned at the beginning of the contest (p. 237), but its significance is not
made clear later when Edern tells the queen about the contest (p. 243).

Further, there is not much point to Gwenhwyfar's suggestion (pp. 241-242) that the prize of the stag's head not be granted until Gereint returns, for as yet she knows nothing of Enid. Even if the queen knew of her, Enid would have no special claim to the prize, since the only stipulation is that it be awarded to the winner's or to a companion's lady-love.

The matter is not cleared up by Gwenhwyfar's statement (pp. 245-246) that it is proper to give the stag's head to Enid, "the maiden of most fame," or by the author's remark (p. 246) that "from that time forth her fame increased thereby, and her companions [sic], more than before." The author does not bother to clarify this series of causes and effects in the first section any more than he troubles with Gereint's reason for suspecting another lover in the second (p. 251).

The most distracting thing about the first section, however, is that the love relationship between Gereint and Enid is not stressed enough to prepare for its importance in the second section. From the very first the love theme is entirely subordinated to the sparrow-hawk contest: Gereint simply asks the father's permission for the maiden to accompany him and adds that if he wins the contest he will love her and be loyal to her. Enid seems brought into the story merely as a mechanical plot device, and we do not perceive a growing love relationship as we do in Chrétien. No thought of Enid motivates Gereint during the fight with Edern. We are told nothing of Enid's own feelings, aspirations, or personality, and the wedding is scarcely mentioned (p. 245).

In the second section the love theme can easily be traced. Shortly after Gereint's love for his wife causes him to neglect his
chivalric duties (p. 250), Enid weeps because she fears she is responsible (p. 251). Throughout the first four adventures her desire for Gereint's safety causes her to break the taboo against speaking. Twice her anxiety over Gereint's safety is mentioned explicitly: in the second adventure (p. 254) and in the eighth (p. 273); it is implied at least once more: during the sixth adventure we are told (p. 267), "And she was certain Gereint would never come." In the fourth adventure she says to the earl who tries to lure her from Gereint (p. 259), "To yonder man did I first of all pledge my troth, and I will not break faith with him." Her further qualification (p. 259), "lest I be accused of faithlessness," shows her carefully avoiding the unfaithfulness of which she has been accused and indicates that she is aware of Gereint's earlier suspicions (p. 251). Perhaps her present loyalty helps convince Gereint that those suspicions were groundless.

After the sixth adventure, Enid shrieks and stands over her severely wounded husband, and at the beginning of the seventh she tells earl Limwris (p. 268) that Gereint was "the one man that ever I loved best and ever shall." Thereafter she is so concerned over Gereint's well being that she refuses to change clothes, to eat, to drink, or to be happy in any way (pp. 268-269). This extreme concern for Gereint causes the earl to strike Enid, and Gereint immediately regains consciousness and kills him. Gereint's attitude toward Enid then changes; we are suddenly told (p. 269) that he grieved because "he knew then she was in the right." This isolated statement is not entirely clear, but must mean either that he realizes he had indeed once lost his fame and prowess or that he agrees with Enid's earlier
fear that she had been responsible (see p. 251). At any rate, as the journey is resumed, Gereint immediately thinks of Enid's safety when he next hears a commotion behind them, and for the first time on the road he protects her from approaching danger (p. 269). As the eighth adventure is about to begin, Enid's happiness is reflected in the statement (p. 270), "... more joyously and gladly than ever did Enid fare along... that day."

Thus the second section contains enough individual references to the love theme for it to be of major importance. We even see a growth in the Gereint-Enid relationship when, after Enid demonstrates her loyalty and faithfulness (especially in the fourth and sixth adventures), Gereint changes both his attitudes and his actions toward Enid in the seventh adventure. The slap Gereint responds to here reminds us of the slap in section one which resulted in the winning of Enid, and thus helps bind the two sections together.

Two major problems arise, however, if we consider love the main theme in the second section. First, there is a rather uneasy feeling that Gereint's change in the seventh adventure is not climactic enough. We do not see the lovers as completely or as dramatically reconciled as we might wish. Secondly, insofar as the seventh adventure is the high point of the love theme, the eighth adventure is distracting, for it does not stress the lovers' relationship; instead, it represents the high point of Gereint's adventures, which have already received so much attention. The importance of the eighth adventure is emphasized by its position at the end, by the deliberateness with which Gereint seeks it out and the steadfastness with which he then refuses to avoid
by the mysterious and supernatural aspects associated with it, and by the benefits which Gereint's victory bestows on the community. The high point of the love theme, then, does not coincide with the high point of the action, and the extremely abrupt ending only serves to underline the problem. These major structural discrepancies contrast vividly with the artistry Chrétien displays as he brings his own Erec to a close.

Individual elements of the second section are linked together with considerable skill. Gereint's motive for leaving Arthur's court is quite clear (his aging uncle needs him to defend the borders), and Gwalchmei eases the transition between the two courts by accompanying Gereint. (Gereint's request for Edern to go with him helps unite the two major sections.) The first three adventures occur on the same day and are further bound together by Gereint's growing collection of horses (he wins four, then three, then five). Gereint later uses the same twelve horses to discharge the obligations he incurs in the fourth adventure. The taboo that Gereint imposes on Enid not to speak first is a formal element which binds the first four adventures, and his insistence that she ride ahead of him binds the first six. The wounds Gereint receives in the sixth adventure allow earl Limwris to capture him in the seventh and permit Gwiffred, who had been the subject of the fifth adventure, to fulfill in the seventh his earlier promise of assistance; Gwiffred also accompanies Gereint to the eighth adventure.

The romance as a whole, however, is held together only by the presence and activities of Gereint, whose single purpose is to gain fame by experiencing adventures--in short, to perform his chivalric
duties. The first section is dominated by the central sparrow-hawk contest, for most of the action either prepares for it or results from it (if sometimes vaguely). After Enid wins the stag's head near the end of the first section (and thus increases her fame, as we have seen), we are told that Gereint engages in tournaments for three years, "until his fame had spread over the face of the kingdom" (p. 246). When he returns to his own land, at the beginning of the second section, we see his people rejoicing at the fame he has won since leaving them (p. 248).

Just before the knight succumbs to a life of ease, we are again told that his knightly feats have caused "his fame [to] spread over the face of the kingdom" (p. 250). Although the word "fame" is not mentioned just before the eighth adventure, Gereint's desire to "journey one more day and then return" (p. 270) clearly shows that the hero is seeking adventure, for he then deliberately takes the road to the hedge of mist, which he has just been advised to avoid. As the romance ends, we are told that he ruled his land "from that time forth prosperously, he and his prowess and valor continuing with fame and renown for him and for Enid from that time forth" (p. 273). Perhaps the most important indication of the theme is Enid's crucial remark about Gereint which precipitates the eight adventures: "'Woe is me,' said she, 'If It Is through me that these arms and this breast are losing fame and prowess as great as was theirs'" (p. 251).

The eight adventures themselves, then, serve to increase the fame and prowess about which Enid is so concerned, although they do not merely show the hero seeking self-glorification. In the first five
adventures he defends himself when attacked respectively by four knights, three knights, five knights, fourscore knights and an earl, and Gwiffred Petit. By killing the three giants in the sixth encounter, he avenges the cruel slaying of a grieving widow's husband, and he defeats an earl in the seventh for doing an injustice to Enid (just as he had avenged an insult to Gwenhwyfar in the first section). He benefits an entire community in the final adventure by defeating the knight behind the hedge of mist. We must not forget either that much earlier (pp. 240-241) he helped Enid's father (Ynywl) recover his earldom. Gereint himself thrice states the organizing principle of the romance: once when he asserts in the fourth adventure (p. 258) that he has in mind "only to look for adventures and to perform quests that please me"; again when he tells Cel (p. 264) that he is "looking for adventures and journeying the way I would"; and still again when he informs Gwalchmei (p. 264), "I am going about mine errands, and looking for adventures."

The theme of the romance is thus expressed in very general terms, but no less general statement of it would allow as much unity. The main structural feature is the strong break between the two sections, which might very well function as two separate stories. If the first section were to underline the love relationship a little more clearly, as in Chrétien's *Erec*, the romance could be considered a love story, but even then the adventures in the second section would compete for attention, perhaps to the point of distraction. A certain lack of focus and disregard for proportion characterize the story, even though many of its details show a distinct and occasionally subtle concern for unity.
Like *Erec*, the *Yvain*, or *Le Chevalier au Lion*, can most easily be divided into three parts. Section I (Marriage) introduces all the principal characters and ends with the Yvain-Laudine marriage and the Yvain-Kay fight (1-2330); Section II (Errantry) consists largely of adventures and culminates in the great Yvain-Gawain fight (2331-6516); and Section III (Reconciliation) shows Yvain returning to his wife (6517-6808).

The first 172 lines of the first section contain a sort of prelude which introduces the love theme. Once lovers were courteous, brave, generous, and honorable, says Chrétien, but now love is a mockery. The poet seems to imply that he will go back in time to show us a pair of ideal lovers, but, as we shall see, he will be more interested in defining the difficulties of ideal love; and the word "love" itself will not be restricted to a particular relationship between man and woman, but will include "friendship" as well, and in a fairly wide sense.

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The poet not only asserts that love is his theme, but he also creates through narrative a distinctive court consisting of memorable people. After a meal, the knight Calogrenant has begun to tell of an adventure he took part in, even though it was to his shame, and not to his credit. As the queen comes closer to him to hear better, Kay unleashes his sharp invective on the knight for no reason at all (69 ff.). When Guinevere upbraids Kay for his speech, he speaks unpleasantly to her, and Calogrenant, embarrassed, reluctantly continues his tale. A lesser writer would have merely stated the essential facts and proceeded directly with plot development in ordinary once-upon-a-time fashion. Chrétien, however, takes time enough to create a believable social world for the action.

Calogrenant then relates in detail how he was defeated by a strange knight who challenged him at the magic spring. No sooner does he end his tale than Yvain chides him for keeping the story secret for seven years (581 ff.); Yvain asserts unequivocally that if he can obtain leave he intends to avenge Calogrenant's shame. In the first words we hear the hero utter, then, he is seeking the active life of knight errantry. Kay immediately insults Yvain, and Guinevere again reproaches him (590 ff.). Thus the magic spring adventure is framed by the animated and insulting taunts of Kay and Guinevere's courtliness. Suddenly Arthur appears and, after Guinevere has repeated Calogrenant's story, swears that he will go to the spring within a fortnight; thus the king prepares us for his timely later arrival. Yvain, however, is anxious to have the adventure by himself, for he fears that Kay or Gawain may ask the king for it.
The Calogrenant episode is important to the story, first, because it shows us that Yvain sees quite clearly his duty to avenge his cousin. The relationship between these two knights, which is developed no further, is but one of the relationships between two people whose obligations toward one another are studied in the romance; it specifically anticipates the Yvain-Gawain relationship. The episode is important, secondly, because it allows the romance to begin with an exciting account of knight errantry and the supernatural—the very essence of romance. That the details of the magic spring adventure are important is emphasized when Chretien, telling us of Yvain's plans, repeats them; and he repeats them yet again when Yvain experiences the adventure. The poet is clearly dwelling on the sort of detail that appeals to his twelfth-century reader. After Yvain defeats the strange knight, he pursues him to the knight's castle. Characteristically Chretien restates Yvain's double motivation during the chase (894 ff.): to avenge at one and the same time Calogrenant's shame and Kay's insulting remarks.

This vigorous scene is followed by one in which Yvain, to save his life, is extremely passive, for once caught inside the castle, he is maneuvered about by Lunete, who appears speedily to help him. Thus begins the Yvain-Lunete relationship, which is to be developed at length. Without delay Lunete supplies Yvain—and the reader—with the information that Yvain has killed the lord of the castle. Then, just as we begin to wonder why she is so eager to help him, she tells him that he had once befriended her at Arthur's court (1004 ff.). (No motivation, however insignificant, is overlooked.) Clearly, it
is her duty now to return the favor. Throughout the romance they will continue to help one another. As she leaves him alone, she repeats her gratitude and thus her motive (1082 ff). We will shortly be reminded of her motive for a third time (1284-85) as she places Yvain by a window so that he can see Laudine mourning the death of her husband in the procession below.

At this point, however, the corpse's wound bleeds, and Laudine is nearly beside herself in grief and anger as she notes the paradox of the presence of the murderer and her inability to see him. Why should he fear her, she cries, when he has shown such bravery against her husband? This paradox suggests another: how could he have killed her husband whose match even God had not seen? He must be a treacherous knight. All of this frustration has two structural functions. First, it prepares us for the argument which Lunete will later use in convincing her mistress to marry Yvain. More important, it anticipates the parallel scenes which follow in which first Yvain and then Laudine find themselves caught up in a series of paradoxes.

When Yvain sees Laudine grieving for her husband, he feels sorry for her and immediately wants to comfort her. Not only is the love relationship being prepared for, but the opportunity afforded Lunete to restrain him also emphasizes Yvain's now passive role and her own role as manipulator of the action. She lectures Yvain at some length on the care with which he must conduct himself (1309 ff). Not only, then, can Yvain not escape from the castle: he cannot even comfort a damsel in distress.

As Lunete leaves, the knight realizes that when the corpse is buried he will have no token with which to prove to Kay his part
in the adventure. Thus we are reminded of the events which determine the present action at the very time we are being prepared for the love relationship which will soon replace it as motive force. This revision of Yvain's motivation also reminds us that the knight has already accomplished his first purpose: to avenge his cousin Calogrenant.

Now, quite suddenly, we are told of Yvain's love for Laudine, and we see him despairing because of the apparent impossibility of ever fulfilling that love. He dwells on the paradox at great length (1364 ff.): he loves the creature who most hates him; the lady has unknowingly avenged her husband's death, and the wound she has inflicted is more enduring than that of sword or lance; he will voluntarily be the slave of the one whose lord he has killed. We should probably remember Yvain's assertion (1448-50) that whoever does not welcome love gladly when it comes commits treason and a felony, because later he is accused of being a traitor for breaking his promise to Laudine. This lament ends with Yvain praising Laudine as extravagantly as she had praised her husband: even God could not make another such as she. Lunete returns and perceives that Yvain is in love with her mistress.

Now Lunete goes to Laudine and immediately, if not overtly, begins to plead Yvain's case. She first gently chides Laudine for her excessive grief, and then suggests that God might give her another lord as good, or one even better. Laudine is, of course, outraged. Then Lunete asks how she is to defend the spring the following week when (as certain letters have advised) King Arthur will come. The poet tells us that Laudine knows Lunete is giving
sincere advice, but that she must forbid talk of a new lord. Thus
the apparently trivial detail of Arthur's earlier intention to travel
to the spring not only triggers Yvain's adventure in the first place,
but it also continues to be of crucial importance to the plot.
Chrétien is at such pains to account for every incident in this
first section that he even goes to the bother of explaining (perhaps
needlessly) that Lunete can speak to her mistress so freely because
she stands in such good favor as her confidante and companion (1593 ff.).

After Lunete leaves, Laudine's curiosity gets the better of
her, and she wishes she had not forbidden her confidante to speak
further. When Lunete returns, Laudine promises that she will not be
angry and urges Lunete to speak more explicitly of how she might find
a lord better than her slain husband. When Lunete points out that in
a fight the victor is the better, Laudine does take offense and again
forbids such talk—thus breaking her promise, for which Lunete chides
her. As Lunete leaves once more—she is constantly going from Laudine
to Yvain and back again—we are told, as if to underline the parallel
tensions, that Yvain is still in a state of misery and that Laudine,
too, is greatly perplexed about how to defend her spring (1729 ff.).

Laudine convinces herself that Lunete is a loyal friend who
would not have mentioned the knight because of any reward, bribe, or
undue affection. She quickly—and with questionable logic—decides
that the knight has wronged neither her nor her husband. She
apologizes to Lunete the next morning and says she will marry Yvain,
but that he must conduct himself so that no one can reproach her.
The mere mention of the possibility is enough to prepare us for his
later disloyalty.
It is important to notice that Lunete is concealing a great deal from her lady at this point. No reader would seriously question Lunete's essential loyalty, but since she will later be accused of treason when Yvain breaks his promise to Laudine, we must view Lunete's actions the way Laudine would if she had all the facts. Lunete has concealed Yvain when he was hunted as a murderer, and she has been guilty of promoting the marriage partly because of her own affection for Yvain. Now Lunete is forced to pretend that Yvain (whom she names at last) is at Arthur's court and that it will take some time to send for him. (She also tells Yvain that Laudine knows all about the concealment and is angry with her, but wants him nevertheless. Then, to emphasize her benevolent duplicity, she says she is speaking the truth, not being a traitor.) Perhaps it is here that we first realize how completely Lunete has controlled the action in this section.

With the stage thus carefully set, events can move forward in rapid progression. Lunete brings Yvain before Laudine. The knight who has killed Laudine's husband pleads self-defense and, paradoxically, speaks the extravagant language of courtly love. Their peace is made. We should notice that on no less than four occasions has Laudine's action been justified: we have already heard Lunete's, Laudine's, and Yvain's arguments of expediency and self-defense; now the seneschal at Laudine's court restates the matter succinctly and logically once more (2083 ff.). The lords of the court then endorse the lady's proposed marriage (for they are cowards and will not defend the spring), and the ceremony takes place. The rapid reversal of events is underlined by the significant lines, "Mes or est mes sire Yvains sire, /
et li morz est toz obliez." ("So my lord Yvain is master now, and the dead man is quite forgot" [2166-67].)

At this point Chrétien seems to be more concerned with structure than anywhere else in the romance, for here almost all the threads of the plot are neatly tied. Now we see Arthur fulfilling his resolution to go to the spring. Kay again speaks sarcastically of Yvain and asks the whereabouts of the would-be avenger of Calogrenant's shame. After Arthur causes the storm at the spring, Yvain (at first unrecognized) defends it by defeating and humiliating Kay. Thus the Yvain-Kay conflict is brought to a climax, and the second of Yvain's original motivations is fulfilled. The section is further unified when Yvain tells Arthur everything that has happened since he left Arthur's court. The company now proceeds to the castle, and Section One ends.

II

The enmity between Yvain and Kay stands in sharp contrast to the friendship between Yvain and Gawain, for which, significantly, the poet now begins to prepare us. When Kay taunts Yvain just before Arthur causes the storm, it is Gawain who silences him. And immediately after the fight between Yvain and Kay it is Gawain who rejoices a hundred times more than anyone else and loves Yvain's companionship more than that of any other knight (2288-92). This fight, which climaxes the action of the first section, stands as an obvious foil to the much more significant battle between the two friends which climaxes the action of the second section.
The second section begins with an elaborate account of the reception of Arthur and his party at Laudine's castle. Instead of concentrating on the joys of the newly married couple and on tournaments—both of which were important sequels to the wedding in *Erec*—Chretien here shows us Arthur's men talking to, caressing, and kissing some ninety ladies of noble birth. (How such a crowd of noble women happen to be in one castle is not explained.) The contrast with *Erec* indicates the lack of any deep and really meaningful love between Yvain and Laudine. We have already seen that Laudine's love was born of necessity, and we never see her showing much affection toward Yvain. The very excess of Yvain's courtly love language makes us wonder about the depth of his passion, when we contrast his professions of undying love with his subsequent desertion of his bride at the urging of Gawain.

Gawain is entertained by Lunete, and he even places himself at her service and gives her his love, for he is grateful to her for having saved his friend's life. We hear no more of the love, and Chretien does not make its relevance very clear, but by serving as a foil to the more enduring relationship of Yvain and Laudine, it adds to the complexity of the various human bondages dealt with in the romance. Gawain then abruptly upbraids Yvain for neglecting his knightly duties and makes quite clear his fear that Yvain's prowess will degenerate (2487 ff.). He does not seem to think that merely defending the spring will allow Yvain to fulfill his knightly duties properly. (The reader already knows that Lunete has told Yvain [1921] he is to be the slave and prisoner of a mistress who wants to completely possess his body.) Gawain urges Yvain to leave
his present life and take up the life of the active knight once more and increase his fame so that no one can say he is uxorious (or lustful; the Old French word is jalous). He serves here as a plot device to pry Yvain away from Laudine so that the story can get on—just as Yvain's promise to Laudine a little later is only required so that it can be broken.

Arguing at great length about the proper conduct of a knight and asserting that a lady should inspire action, not inaction, Gawain makes his advice sound as platitudinous as Lunete's had sounded some time earlier. This lecture, too, emphasizes Yvain's passivity: he is more acted upon than acting. When Gawain goes on to say that if he had such a fair mistress as Laudine he would leave her most reluctantly too, he is (besides teasing an intimate friend) under-scoring the difference between his own frivolous attachment to Lunete and Yvain's bonds with Laudine. But much more important, Gawain appeals strongly to Yvain's friendship—a theme which becomes central in the romance. His entire appeal suggests a certain incompatibility between friendship and knight errantry on the one hand and marriage on the other. The fact that Yvain asks his wife's permission to depart also suggests the conflict.²

Soon after Laudine has secured the promise from Yvain to return after a year, Yvain leaves with Arthur and his party. The year is

passed over without any detail, and we are told that Gawain causes Yvain to forget to return on time. One day a damsel on a black palfrey rides up and upbraids Yvain severely for breaking his promise (2706 ff.). She emphasizes at great length that he is disloyal and a traitor. For the third time, then, Yvain is lectured to. This lecture on true love and the conduct of true lovers especially recalls Gawain's lecture on the hazards of love. After the damsel departs, Yvain leaves the other knights. His motive is made explicit (2795-97): he would rather go mad than not take vengeance on himself. No one tries to stop him from leaving.

As in Erec, the plot so far has moved rectilinearly. With the possible exception of Gawain's insistence that Yvain leave Laudine, every event in the story has been directly caused by a preceding event. Now, however, the principle of construction shifts, and, as in Erec, a series of loosely related adventures follows. Now the development of themes becomes much more important than a clear storyline. In Yvain, the thematic development is more complex than in Erec: in the earlier romance, the corresponding part of the great central section continued merely to develop Erec and Enide's love; in Yvain, however, the rest of the second section is concerned not so much with the Yvain-Laudine relationship, which became more and more important in the first section, as with the Yvain-Gawain friendship, which became increasingly significant near the end of the first section. The Yvain-Lunete theme is developed, too; in fact, the relationships between a number of people are dealt with, and they sometimes overlap and conflict. The poet is trying to accomplish so much in the second
section that a single story-line will not do. The order of the five adventures which follow is rarely important, because the adventures do not grow out of one another in the way the events of the first section do. In fact, some of the adventures have little or nothing to do with the others as narrative, but each develops one or more of the themes directly or indirectly. 3

Yvain's excessive sorrow causes him to go mad, and for a while he leads an animal-like existence and depends upon the grace of a hermit for food and water. Then one day two damsels and their mistress find him as they are riding by. At first they do not recognize him, since he is naked, but one of the damsels soon identifies him by a facial scar and tells her mistress that if only the knight were well he could help in the war against Count Alien. By means of a magic ointment Yvain later regains his senses and returns with one of the damsels to town, where he completely recovers.

Thus the episode shows Yvain beginning to undergo penance and atonement for his disloyalty and treason—one of the main themes of the second section and the chief means by which the section is directly related to the love theme of the first section. The episode suggests that for Yvain treason has resulted in chaos. Cut off from the highly regulated world of chivalry, the only world he knows, he seems to revert to the primitive existence of a savage or a wild man. Stripped

3For the view that Yvain's redemption from the sin of Pride binds the adventures together, see Alfred Adler, "Sovereignty in Chrétien's Yvain," PMLA, LXII (1947), 281-305, and Julian Harris, "The Role of the Lion in Chrétien de Troyes' Yvain," PMLA, LXIV (1949), 1143-63.
of his position in a hierarchical society, symbolized by his nakedness, he is at the mercy even of the damsels with whose protection he was once charged. Viewed as folklore, the episode and subsequent adventures may also be considered a series of obstacles for The Man on a Quest for his Lost Wife (cf. Thompson Tale Type 400).

So far Yvain has been more helped than helpful, but his own chance quickly comes as he engages in his first adventure. Just as he had once defended Laudine's spring, now he defeats Count Aller and again saves the day. The fact that he inspires all the other knights around him also signals his return to civilization and knightly respectability. The townspeople praise him in the highest terms possible and wish that he would marry their lady and be their master; a little later we are told that the lady wishes the same. So Yvain is shown refusing as much as he had already won and lost from Laudine. The adventure serves thematically to underline Laudine's priority in his affections, but it has no direct and overt narrative relevance to the rest of the section.

In a kind of interlude (3337 ff.), Yvain now meets the Lion, whom he saves from a wicked serpent, even at the risk of a subsequent fight with the animal he has helped. But the Lion is grateful to the knight and accompanies him throughout the ensuing adventures in order to help him whenever possible. Besides adding a note of the exotic and thereby holding the reader's interest, the encounter again allows Yvain to display his knightly prowess and fearlessness. The subsequent coming and going of the Lion also serves as a minor link between the various episodes in the rest of the romance. But more important
structurally, the gratitude and loyalty of the lion add measurably to the growing comment of the romance on the proper conduct between friends.  

Immediately before the next adventure begins, Yvain comes upon the magic spring and is so painfully reminded of his sorrow that he almost loses his wits again; he reproaches himself severely and at length for his conduct toward his lady (3486 ff.). Again we are told that Yvain blames himself for his misfortune. The episode shows the sorrow of Yvain at its height just prior to the tremendously active and tremendously important adventure which follows.

The second adventure is very tightly linked to the first section of the romance. Lunete is imprisoned and threatened with execution. Since she helped Yvain win Laudine and since Yvain broke his promise to return, she is accused of sharing Yvain's treason. Now Yvain has the chance not only to fulfill his chivalric duty to save a damsel by displaying his prowess (he must defeat three knights), but the chance as well to repay an obligation to the damsel who had once saved him. And, of course, the action takes place at the same magic spring which seems to be a focal point throughout. Gawain, who always aids damsels in distress, is remembered at the beginning of the adventure when Yvain asks Lunete why the famous knight has not helped her.

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4Frappier says that the companionship of the lion attests to Yvain's own knightly perfection (Chretien de Troyes, l'homme et l'oeuvre [Paris, 1957], p. 169).

5Frappier points out that the spring and the court of Arthur are two of the crossroads (carrefours) where threads of the romance cross (Le Roman Breton. Yvain, ou le Chevalier au Lion [Paris (1952)]), p. 28.
By means of brilliant entrelacement, the completion of the adventure is delayed until noon of the following day, and Yvain indulges in the first of two adventures within adventures. An evil giant, Harpin of the Mountain, is going to kill a baron's four sons since the baron will not give the giant his daughter. Again we are told that Gawain would have helped, but he is on another adventure. (Gawain is the baron's brother-in-law.) Yvain promises to fight the giant if the latter appears in time for him to fulfill his promise to defend Lunete by noon of the next day. (Yvain can have adventures now only by virtual appointment!) The baron's wife and daughter then are about to throw themselves at Yvain's feet in gratitude, but Yvain will not presume to allow the sister and niece of Gawain to humble themselves before him. Thus, in effect, we see Yvain helping Gawain by taking on his familial obligations.

The rest of this very long third adventure is now deliberately and effectively stretched out (especially the fight itself) in order to achieve a great deal of tension: we wonder whether Yvain will get back to Lunete in time. Yvain emphasizes the great importance of the Lunete adventure when he says (3991-92) that it is the greatest necessity (afeire) he could ever have. Thus all his other chivalric duties, even those to a damsel of Gawain's family, take second place to his duty to Lunete. He is intensely aware, though, of the paradoxically conflicting obligations (4077 ff.). After winning the battle with the giant, Yvain (known only as the Knight of the Lion) sends the sons and daughter of the baron to Gawain at Arthur's court with instructions to tell Gawain of his conduct.
Yvain quickly returns to Lunete, and just in time. Now another significant display of prowess benefits not only one damsel, but many ladies of the court: Lunete's friends who look to her for favor with their mistress. And as another important link with the first section, Yvain is offered, ironically, the service of a people over whom, unknown to all except Lunete, he is already master. Laudine further emphasizes the irony by telling the knight that his lady ought to forgive him. Once more Lunete is concealing Yvain's identity. Yvain then rides off, bidding Lunete to keep a place for him in his lady's heart, and recuperates at the house of a certain lord.

The fourth adventure, which will reach its climax in the fight between Yvain and Gawain, begins and largely develops without Yvain. All threads of the story are temporarily dropped, but gradually the adventure picks each thread up again and, after another encapsulated adventure interrupts, completes the second section of the romance. The lord of Noire Espine had died and left his two daughters to quarrel over his estate. The elder daughter claims the entire legacy; when she realizes that her sister plans to get King Arthur's help, she rushes to Arthur's court herself and secures Gawain's promise of assistance. Thus the basis of the later fight with Yvain is established. The relationship between the two sisters is the second example in the

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6C. A. Robson argues that this adventure is a digression, since the theme is Yvain's reconciliation with Laudine ("The Technique of Symmetrical Composition in Medieval Narrative Poetry," in Studies in Medieval French Presented to Alfred Ewert [Oxford, 1961], p. 39). Cf. T. B. W. Reid's view that the structural significance of the adventure is uncertain (Yvain, Le Chevalier au Lion [Manchester, 1948], p. xiii).
tale of the way people should not act toward one another (compare the Yvain-Kay relationship), and in both cases the conflicts are settled by fights.

Meanwhile, as the younger sister arrives at court to seek a champion, Gawain's niece and nephews, whom Yvain had sent to find Gawain, arrive praising the Knight of the Lion. Quite naturally, then, the younger sister sets out to secure the services of this excellent knight (for he is now known as one who devotes himself to the service of women) and thus provides the main link with the rest of the section (4813 ff.). The structure now becomes complex indeed. What forward action there has been in the second section has been held together by the adventures of Yvain (traveling incognito as the Knight of the Lion). But now Yvain is recuperating from his wounds and has not been in the story for some time. At this point the action is held together by a quest for Yvain by the younger sister of the daughter of a now dead stranger who has had no prior connection with the story. But that is not all. The younger sister soon becomes ill and recuperates at the dwelling of a friend who proceeds to take up the search!

At this point we would seem to be at some remove from the main tale. However, the friend (whose loyalty, by the way, provides a vivid contrast to the selfishness of the elder sister) finds the lord of the castle where Yvain slew the giant, and the lord sets her out on the road Yvain departed on. This road, in turn, leads to the magic spring and Lunete. Thus this retracing of Yvain's route helps link the present adventure (although Yvain is not yet a part of it) to the preceding two. Lunete then escorts the friend as far as she had
escorted Yvain. Soon the friend finds the dwelling where Yvain had recuperated, only to be told that he had already left. (The suspense value of this quest is quite effective.) She quickly catches up with him, however, and explains her mission. Yvain instantly agrees to help her friend, for a man cannot win praise in a life of ease:
"N'ai soing, fet il, de reposer; / ne s'en puet nus hom aloser" (5089-90). Ironically, these lines which remind us of Gawain's advice much earlier also make inevitable the fight with Gawain.

Before the climactic fight ends this fourth adventure, however, a fifth takes place (at the town of Pesme Avanture) which is, like the earlier encounter with Count Alier, essentially digressive from the first section and the preceding parts of the second section, although there are some connecting links, and entirely unrelated to the remainder of the second section. The very length of the adventure draws attention away from the climactic Yvain-Gawain fight to come. It does not even keep us on the edge of our seats as the Harp in of the Mountain episode did. It is unusual also in another way: it is the only time in the romance Yvain indulges in an adventure against his will. The only plausible explanation is that such an involuntary experience is unavoidable in knight errantry, and that this is one of the final forms of expiation Yvain must undergo for breaking his promise. This is also the only adventure in which he is insulted; he is accused of cowardice (5488 ff.).

Yvain has already become known for championing the causes of damsels in distress (cf. each of the other adventures), but this time, by fighting two sons of the devil, he is able to save no fewer than
three hundred imprisoned maidens. The knight is once more offered a wife and land in return for his deeds of prowess, but for the second time he remains faithful to Laudine. An aside points out that no one should recover from true love except by reason of faithlessness (5379 ff.), and there is once again the suggestion that people do not love as they did in the old days. These remarks add to the growing commentary on love and remind us of Yvain's essential loyalty to Laudine, despite his "arrant errantry." Yvain joins the damsel who has been waiting for him, and they continue their journey to the sister who needs his services.

The Yvain-Gawain fight (5985 ff.) not only climaxes the dispute over the two sisters' inheritance and ends the long fourth adventure, but it also climaxes the second section, and even the romance itself. As we have seen, it has been carefully, even elaborately prepared for, and the fight itself is dwelt upon at great length. The poet's concentration on the paradoxical tension between Love and Hate which results from the mutual lack of recognition reminds us of the similar paradox Yvain was aware of when he first began to love Laudine.

Once the two knights stop fighting and recognize each other, they lay a great deal of emphasis on courtesy and friendship (6261 ff.); they almost try to outdo one another, in fact. This emphasis makes clear that one of the great central themes of the story is the proper conduct between knightly friends. Now the Lion joins Yvain, and Gawain learns that all of the deeds of the Knight of the Lion were Yvain's. That Yvain is unable to defeat the mighty Gawain emphasizes the climactic importance of the fight as one of a gradated series in which
Yvain demonstrates his prowess. It is paradoxical that Gawain cannot
defeat Yvain either, for Yvain's prowess now completely cancels Gawain's
former charge of inaction. The paradox is heightened when we consider
that the hero has already taken on one of Gawain's kinship duties;
Gawain himself sees Yvain's part in the Harpin of the Mountain episode
as a personal act of friendship.

III

Suddenly Yvain decides he can no longer live without Laudine.
He rides off alone to the magic spring, and the very short third
section begins without any warning. Yvain's plan is extremely
practical: he will make a storm at the spring until Laudine is
forced to make peace with him. The Lion is still accompanying him
and provides a tenuous link between the two sections. At this point,
the story begins to repeat itself. This passage shows Laudine again
actively seeking Lunete's advice and remarking on the value of a friend
in time of need. Thus once more we are reminded that this is a story
about friendships.

Lunete once more deceives her mistress (6592 ff.), for she
convinces her to secure the help of the Knight of the Lion (whom she
knows is Yvain). But first, she convinces Laudine to promise (actually,
to swear a formal oath on a relic) to help the knight win back his
lady's favor. The deception reminds us of Lunete's maneuvering in
the first section, and the reconciliation Lunete effects reminds us
that Yvain had reconciled Lunete and Laudine in the second section.
Thus Yvain and Lunete, whose fates seem interdependent, each clear
the other of treason, and their obligations to each other and their
great friendship are clearly stressed at this point.

The denouement occurs quickly, as Lunete tells Laudine that
the Knight of the Lion is really Yvain. Laudine is visibly angry,
but realizes that she is trapped. She makes it quite clear that she
reconciles herself to Yvain only because of her oath, which she dare
not break. (The whole trouble had begun because of a broken oath.)
That the adventures in the second section were a form of self-purgation
Yvain implies when he tells his lady (6772 ff.) he has had to pay
dearly for his madness (folle). The last several lines are direct
comments by the poet assuring us of the couple's subsequent happiness.

If Yvain were merely a long tale about a pair of lovers, too
much of the great middle section would be irrelevant and even dis­
tracting. Adventure for the sake of adventure would actually run
away with the central theme. We do, in fact, often and for relatively
long periods of time forget about Laudine entirely in the second section.
Only the second adventure is explicitly connected to the Yvain-Laudine
relationship, and we might justify the inclusion of the third adventure
which interrupts it (but for too long, probably) on the grounds that
it adds highly effective suspense. One or two incidents in the first
adventure faintly echo the relationship, but the fourth and fifth
adventures, comprising about one fourth of the romance, would be almost
entirely irrelevant.

In fact since Yvain himself completely drops out of the tale
for some 349 lines (4697-5046), we cannot even be completely satisfied
that the purpose of the second section is to allow Yvain to be punished
for breaking his promise and to demonstrate the prowess which Gawain feared he was losing. There is no reason why Chrétien would not have made the point more explicit if this was to be the only purpose of the section.

That the Yvain-Laudine relationship is of extreme importance is, of course, evident. As we have seen, the theme climaxes the first section, is touched upon in the second, and dominates the third. It is a rather curious relationship, precipitated in part by necessity, and perpetuated merely by the facility with which each partner keeps a promise. In some ways it reflects courtly love, since Yvain's role in general is that of the servant, and since he twice seeks his lady's pardon and forgiveness. It may even suggest a conflict between courtly love and marriage. But the important thing about the relationship is that it does not become more meaningful, as Erec and Enide's did, after a marital crisis. It is this lack of growth in love which marks the essential difference between the two sets of lovers. And, of course, we are never really convinced that Laudine loves Yvain very profoundly. (We never see her in a very favorable light either; she seems, in fact, to be rather unpleasant.) The concept of marriage, as well as the entire relationship between the sexes, is indeed a very different thing in Erec and Yvain.

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9For a valuable demonstration of Chrétien's repetition of scenes in Yvain and for the interesting view that the poet tried to adapt principles of amour courtois to the everyday conditions of bourgeois married life (and in contrast to the ideal world in Lancelot), see Eilse Richter, "Die künstlerische Stoffgestaltung in Chrestiens Ivain," Zs. f. rom. Ph., XXXIX (1918), 385-397.

8Alfred Adler's suggestion that Yvain achieves marital sovereignty seems unfounded (op. cit., p. 286).
The fact is, however, that the romance is a kind of exciting narrative handbook which demonstrates both the theory and the examples not of one but of several kinds of relationships and the conflict in loyalties that results. The second important relationship is between the two knights, Yvain and Gawain, with the resulting conflict between Yvain, Laudine, and marriage on the one hand and Yvain, Gawain, and knight errantry on the other. The structure of the romance emphasizes the conflict. Whereas the former relationship is heavily stressed in the first section, largely neglected in the second, and again heavily stressed in the third, the latter relationship is correspondingly only begun in the first section, greatly emphasized in the second, and entirely neglected in the third.

The failure of the poet to better integrate the two alternately stressed relationships is the most distracting structural feature of the romance. Just at the beginning of the second section when the Yvain-Laudine theme is so important, Gawain urges Yvain to leave his wife and tend to his knightly duties. Thus he precipitates the rest of the action, which is partially a digression from the love theme. But even more obvious is the sharp break between the elaborately prepared-for climax of the second section, emphasizing so climatically Yvain and Gawain's friendship, and the love theme which is immediately begun.

9This conflict in loyalties shows that Chrétien is dealing with life in some of its complexity; it certainly does not mean that "Chrestien used his over-all pattern to look with disfavor upon the morals of courtly society, preferring a code of conduct which was acceptable to the Church . . . ." (Joseph H. Reason, An Inquiry Into the Structural Style and Originality of Chrestien's "Yvain" [Washington, 1958], p. 76).
resumed at the beginning of the third section. The poet makes no attempt at all to show a connection.

Even if the fight between Yvain and Gawain is also considered the climax of Yvain's punishment for breaking his promise to Laudine, the episode is not as closely integrated into the love theme as the climactic Joie de la Cort episode is in Erec where Enide is not only present but is seen reacting to Erec's plight. Since the theme of Yvain is more complex than that of Erec, the rather simple structure which was sufficient for the earlier romance does not allow enough continuity between the sections in Yvain. Not only does Yvain suffer structurally, then, from the same mixture of organizational techniques that we saw in Erec, but it suffers also from a not entirely successful fusion of the various elements of a more complex theme.¹⁰

Lunete adds to the thematic complexity of the romance, since her role as confidante introduces two additional relationships, with a resulting conflict of loyalties. Her ties to Laudine and Yvain are similar, in a very general way, to the other two major relationships we have looked at, for loyalty to one's lady and to one's friend are involved in both cases, and the nature of the loyalty is the same. But this time the connection between the two ties is clear and direct, and the structure of the romance emphasizes both this connection and the conflicting loyalties by stressing, as we have seen, Lunete's double relationship in each of the three sections. Thus Lunete

¹⁰I think that Frappier oversimplifies the romance when he argues that the poet skillfully reconciles the themes of love and chivalry (Chrétilen de Troyes, p. 168). The themes do not seem to be as compatible here as in Erec.
functions as an extremely important unifying device. Her brief relationship with Gawain emphasizes her central position by making her the only character besides Yvain to have connections with everyone of importance, and by allowing her to act as a kind of liaison between the Yvain-Laudine and the Yvain-Gawain relationships. Add to all of this her small part in making possible the Yvain-Gawain encounter in the second section, and we realize that Lunete, like Yvain himself, is never very far out of sight throughout the romance.
CHAPTER IV

Ywain and Gawain

The fourteenth-century poem Ywain and Gawain, which has been properly described as "essentially an abridged free translation of Yvain," holds the distinction of being the one extant redaction in Middle English of a poem by Chrétien. Considered individually, the changes in Ywain and Gawain (henceforth called YG) are not very significant or even very noticeable, but taken together they result in a very different poem. The most outstanding difference is that the English poet carefully de-emphasizes the various relationships which constitute the central theme of the French work, for his consistent aim is to highlight the narrative movement. Since the two romances are so closely related, a continuing comparison is not only unavoidable, but essential.

1Albert B. Friedman and Norman T. Harrington (ed.), Ywain and Gawain (London, 1964), p. xiii. All line references are to this E.E.T.S. edition. References to Chrétien's Yvain are still to Mario Roques' edition and differ slightly from those Friedman and Harrington cite, since they use the edition of Wendelin Förster, Der Löwenritter (Yvain), (4th ed., Halle, 1912). For concise discussions and reviews of the usual problems of author (unknown), date (c. 1325-50), sources, etc., see the "Introduction." The excellent section called "Relation to Chrétien's Yvain, le Chevalier au Lion" (pp. xvi-xxxiv) has been particularly useful for the present study and should be consulted for a detailed comparison of the poems.

Ywain and Alundyne’s love is de-emphasized in several important passages. The opening lines do not call attention to the love theme in the way that the corresponding passage in Chrétien does. In YG, the knights and ladies of Arthur’s court speak of love, but they are obviously much more interested in knightly valor and prowess.

Fast pal carped and curtaysly
Of dedes of armes and of yeneri
And of gude knightes pat lyfed þen,
And how men might þam kynedel ken
By doghtines of þalre gude ded
On ilka syde, wharesum þal þede (25-30).

Thus from the very beginning the English poet prepares us for a tale of action.

The enthusiasm and agony which Yvain feels as he falls in love with Laudine in the French poem (1302-1544) are passed over lightly in YG (869-908), where we are merely told, not convinced, of the hero’s love. In YG we do not see Lunete restraining an eager lover who, upon seeing the wailing Laudine, wishes to rush to her and seize her hands. We do not hear Lunete’s little lecture on the way Yvain should conduct himself, nor are we made to examine the paradox of Yvain loving the lady whose husband he has slain. The whole complex set of feelings the hero experiences in Chrétien are simplified, glossed over, or entirely ignored in YG by such palatable but perfunctory lines as these:

Now lat we þe lady be,
And of Sir Ywayne speke we.
Luf, þat es so mekIL of mayne,
Sare had wounded Sir Ywayne,
Þat whare so he sal ride or ga,
His hert sho has þat es his fa (869-874).
When the hero leaves his wife for the joys of errantry (cf. 1545-60), he does not weep in YG as he does in Chrétien. The English poet further de-emphasizes the importance of the love theme by deleting Chrétien's rather tedious explanation (2641 ff.) about Yvain's leaving behind his heart even though the king takes his body away. The consistent lack of emotion which Ywain displays for Alundyne is important structurally, for we are allowed to pass on quickly to the action, which is of greater interest to the poet. But it also has a negative result. We are less willing to accept Ywain's madness later when Alundyne rejects him. The sudden reversal in Chrétien's emotional courtier hero seems more consistent with his personality.

Alundyne does not struggle through the profound change of attitude toward Ywain that Chrétien's heroine does (Yvain 1729-82). Chrétien's Laudine carefully convinces herself that Yvain has not wronged her by slaying her husband. She combines the love which she practically wills into existence with the convenience of having a defender of her spring. In the corresponding passage in YG (1021-32), Alundyne merely decides that she has been unfair to Lunet. Even she, then, seems more interested in the knight's prowess than in his love. The heroine's general lack of passion corresponds to Ywain's, and her own sudden changes of attitude, now as later, are less credible than those of Chrétien's more peppery heroine.

A comparison of the two poets' treatment of one short scene makes clear the essential difference between the two works. In Chrétien, when Laudine's messenger rides up to demand the ring from the forgetful Yvain (2706-82), the hero receives such a biting lecture
on love and on the difference in conduct between true and false lovers that it is little wonder he is left senseless and speechless. The point to be emphasized is that the lecture is unmistakably directed against the sin of a lover. The corresponding lecture in YG, on the other hand, underlines the sin of a knight more than that of a lover, for the disquisition on love is deleted. The messenger says, in part:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Art was treson and trechery,} \\
\text{And that he sal ful dere haby,} \\
\text{It es ful mekyl ogains be right,} \\
\text{To cal so fals a man a knight} \! \! (1609-12),
\end{align*}
\]

and again:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Certainty, so fals a fode} \\
\text{Was never cumen of kynges blode,} \\
\text{That so sone forgat his wyfe,} \\
\text{That lofed him better pan hyr lfe} \! \! (1621-24).
\end{align*}
\]

To be sure, Ywain is a traitor in love, but here and elsewhere the conduct of Ywain the Knight is much more significant than that of Ywain the Lover; Chretien, on the other hand, is usually careful (although not in this passage) to emphasize both themes.

Since deeds of arms are so important in the tale, and since the love theme is so deliberately curtailed, we might expect the friendship between Ywain and Gawain to receive a great deal of attention, especially when we consider its importance in Chretien. But this theme, too, is relatively unimportant, for the poet deliberately shortens and tones down the passages relating to it. In Chretien, Gawain's appeal to Ywain to leave his wife is tremendously important, but in YG the corresponding plea "To haunt armes in ilk cuntre" (1467) is much abbreviated and almost seems to be a mechanical plot device
It lacks the genuineness and emotive force which in Chrétien stems largely from Gawain's obvious affection for a fellow knight and friend. The most important result structurally is that the English poet fails to highlight the conflict between marriage and knight errantry, a significant conflict that Chrétien is concerned with in Yvain no less than in Erec. As usual, the English poet is more interested in action than ideas. Incidentally, we are not told in YG, as we are in Yvain (2669-71), that Gawain himself would not allow the hero to return to his wife.

The YG poet severely condenses the paradoxical passage in which Chrétien's Yvain and Gawain fail to recognize each other before they fight. At first we feel that the condensation may be an improvement, for Chrétien's elaborate aside on Amor and Haïne and his minute examination of the paradox seem tedious to superficial modern taste. As always, however, the French poet knows what he is about: he gains an unusual amount of suspense by deliberately delaying the battle, and he heavily underlines the knights' friendship. The English poet de-emphasizes both the suspense and the friendship and hastens on to the action. He cuts Chrétien's 119 lines (5992-6111) to 23 (3513-36). When the knights later recognize each other in Yvain (6262-6359), the warmth of their affection and politeness has thus been more fully prepared for. The English poet stresses the same affection and politeness (3645-3714), but, significantly, he cuts Chrétien's passage by a quarter.

The friendship between Gawain and Lunet is ignored altogether in YG, and other relationships are made less important. Kay's invective
early in the romance against Colgrevance, Ywain, and the queen, as well as the queen's response (68-134; 466-508), is considerably less biting than in Chrétien. As a result, not only are the characterizations less distinctive, but the conversations, although really shorter, seem longer and duller, and therefore direct our attention away from the very action the poet apparently wants to emphasize. Further, Kay's later defeat by Ywain is less carefully prepared for, and the poetic justice seems less meaningful.

The relationship between Alundyne and Lunet is not as important as it is between Chrétien's Laudine and Lunete. Chrétien's account of the lady's repentence after she has severely scolded her companion is more detailed and therefore more effective. For fifteen lines (1740-54) Laudine ponders Lunete's loyalty and love, whereas there are only eight corresponding lines in YG (1025-32), and they are somewhat more perfunctory. Further, the English poet does not make very clear later the reason for Lunet's fall from her mistress' favor after Ywain has failed to return. Lunet merely states (2159-66) that she is accused of being a traitor to her lady, whereas in Chrétien she carefully explains at some length (3644 ff.) that when Yvain failed to return Laudine thought herself betrayed by her friend's earlier advice. This lack of detailed attention to the relationship of the two women once more shows the English poet hurrying over passages containing little action.

The account of Arthur's stay at Alundyne's court is cut drastically in the English version. The description of Arthur's reception itself is less elaborate (YG 1383-1412; Yvain 2331-73),
and the highly interesting lines telling of Alundyne's duties and
graciousness as hostess are omitted (Yvain 2456-77). As Arthur departs,
we hear nothing of his hostess escorting him until, seeing her tears,
he implores her to turn back (Yvain 2631-40); instead, we are only
told (1555-56),

\[
\text{Pe lady toke leve of pe kyn} \\
\text{And of his menye aid and zing.}
\]

Unlike Chrétien, the English poet is clearly not interested in writing
a handbook of courtly conduct.

Not only is the English poem less rich than the French because
of the lack of attention to the relationships between people. In
passing, we might briefly notice that some of the details of the plot
are not handled as cleverly. For example, Ywain's motivation is not
repeated as he chases Salados pe Rouse to the castle. After the
Harpyns-of-Mountain adventure he does not send Gawain's nephews and
niece to Arthur's court, even though they later appear there (2777 ff.).
Before the younger daughter sets out to find Ywain, she already knows
that Gawain will defend her elder sister (2793-94), even though such
knowledge would not logically allow Ywain and Gawain to fight incognito.
The plot is garbled when the poet omits about a hundred lines (between
2826 and 2827) of the journey of the second maiden who takes up the
search for Ywain (cf. Yvain 4827-4930).³ Here there is an obvious
attempt to avoid retracing Ywain's route and to move quickly on to

³For a detailed analysis of this bothersome and complex
problem, see Friedman and Harrington, pp. 127-128.
the Ywain-Gawain fight. Finally, Ywain's motive for returning to the well near the end is not clear (3829-46); Chretien's simple explanation that the hero will cause a storm and thereby force Laudine's hand is entirely ignored. Too often, then, the English poet is content to tell a story whose threads are not very tightly tied together.

It would be wrong for us to leave the poem feeling merely that it is a rather unsuccessful version of Yvain. The YG redactor has his own ideas of what a romance should be and controls his material carefully to make it conform to that idea. Chretien's work is more subtle because of the network of friendships which not only overlays the narrative but becomes its central theme, whereas the redactor, relying on this structural principle only enough to keep the plot from falling apart, devotes his major attention to the forward movement of the action.

We must not think, however, that he is always insensitive to human feelings. When Ywain leaves Alundyne to journey with Gawain, we are told of the heroine (1557-58):

\[
\text{Hir lord, Sir Ywayne, sho bisekes}
\text{With teris trikland on hir chekes.}
\]

This moving detail is not in Chrétien. Again, when near the end Chretien assures us (6794-95) that all has turned out well,

\[
\text{qu'il est amez et chier tenuz}
\text{de sa dame, et ele de lui}
\]

(for he is loved and treasured by his lady, and she by him), the English reads (4011-12),

\[
\text{Ful lely lufed he ever hys whyfe}
\text{And sho him als hyr owin life.}
\]
We should notice, too, the poignant lines Ywain utters at the depth of despair over Alundyne shortly after he finds the Lion (2091-96):

Alias, for dole how may I dwell
To se his chapel and his well,
Hir faire thorn, hir riche stane?
My gude dayes er now al gane,
My joy es done now al bidene,
I am noght worthi to be sene.

That these lines do not merely reproduce their source is much to the English poet's credit.

There are undoubtedly other lines here and there in YG which reveal the emotion of the characters and thereby strengthen the structure of the romance, but we have to look harder to find them than we do in Chrétien, and when we discover them the rhetoric is less heightened and less sustained. The real merit of the poem is not the strength of its structure, but the vigor and excitement of its pace.
CHAPTER V

Owein

Owein, also called The Lady of the Fountain,¹ is the later Old Welsh prose version of Chrétien's Yvain. Consisting only of twenty-seven pages in translation, the romance is the shortest we have analyzed and by far the most poorly organized. It is best divided into two major sections at the point where Owein overstays his leave from his wife (p. 173).

The romance is not without some structural merit, of course. The first episode, for example, is very effective narrative. Cynon's tale of the magic fountain is framed by a lively conversation initiated by Arthur, who announces that he is going to sleep while awaiting his meal and that the others can entertain themselves by telling tales. Cei quickly provides the immediate occasion by insisting that Cynon relate the tale promised him. At the end of Cynon's story, then, Arthur wakes up, and the household go to their meal. Arthur's sleep

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¹References are to the Everyman's Library translation of Gwyn Jones and Thomas Jones, The Mabinogion (London and New York, 1949 [reprinted 1961]), pp. 155-182. Scholars consider Owein to be later than Chrétien's Yvain and both versions to have a common source, even though these matters, like the Gereint-Erec relationship, are not definitely settled. For reviews of scholarship on the relationship between the two romances, see James D. Bruce, The Evolution of Arthurian Romance, 2d ed. (Gloucester, Mass., 1958), 11, 75-82, and Idris Llewelyn Foster's more recent commentary in Roger S. Loomis (ed.), Arthurian Literature In the Middle Ages (Oxford, 1959), pp. 196-199.

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and the anticipated meal thus frame the tale nicely. As Cynon speaks he is careful to address Cel directly, and these frequent reminders of the specific audience help place the overly-long encapsulated tale within the larger setting of the romance and thus help the reader keep his bearings. Arthur and Cel's function as narrative catalysts bears comparison to Luned's later when she arranges the marriage of Owein to her mistress (pp. 164 ff.) and also to Gwalchmei's role even later when he suggests that Arthur search for Owein (p. 170).

References to Cynon's tale in Owein's subsequent adventure provide several connecting links (pp. 162-163). By reminding the reader that Cynon had already undergone certain experiences, these references obviate the necessity of repeating a great deal of the very detailed description already given. Most of them also emphasize how much more impressive Owein's experiences are than Cynon's (p. 163): maidens are fairer, the meal they serve is more remarkable, the black man with the iron club is larger, and the peal of thunder and the resulting shower are greater. Cynon had already discovered some of these phenomena to be more remarkable than he himself had been told (cf. pp. 159-160). This familiar narrative technique is essential in any effective story which repeats itself so closely.

The remaining action is frequently linked to Arthur or his court, even though most of it does not occur there. At the Lady of the Fountain's (the countess') castle, Owein sleeps in a bed worthy of Arthur (p. 166). Luned tells her mistress (p. 168) that only a member of Arthur's household can defend the fountain and so pretends to seek Owein at court (pp. 168-169). At the beginning of Section Two
we switch back to the court, where the king is grieving intensely because of Owein's three-year absence (p. 170). Arthur and his retinue begin a quest for Owein, and eventually they are reunited. Arthur and Owein embrace and partake of the feast which the knight assures his king he has been preparing during their three-year separation (p. 173). Thus at this point, as in Chrétien's *Yvain*, most of the elements of the tale are bound together. Owein then returns with Arthur to Britain, where he remains for three years—much longer than the three months to which his wife has consented. Although Arthur's court is mentioned a time or two during the adventures which follow (pp. 174, 177), it is not significant in the narrative until Owein takes his lady there to live (pp. 180-181).

The almost photographically detailed examination of daily life adds interest to the narrative.  

More important structurally, however, is the detail which is only mentioned so that it can be used to develop someone's personality or to further the plot. For example, when the Lady of the Fountain banishes Luned for suggesting she can marry a man as good as or better than her former husband, Luned tells her that the suggestion has been for her own good; then she adds (p. 168), "'And shame on whichever of us first sends to the other, whether it be I to seek invitation of thee, or thou to invite me.'" No sooner does Luned

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2E.g. (p. 167), "'And thereupon the maiden arose and kindled a charcoal fire, and filled a pot with water and set it to warm, and took a towel of white brilliant and placed it round Owein's neck; and she took an ivory ewer and a silver bowl and filled with warm water and washed Owein's head; and then she opened a wooden case and drew out a razor with its haft of ivory and two gold channellings on the razor. And she shaved his beard and dried his head and neck with the towel.'"
leave than "the countess arose and went to the chamber door after Luned, and coughed loudly, and Luned looked back. And the countess gave Luned a nod, and Luned came back to the countess" (p. 168). The countess then adds, "... since it was my own good thou wast telling me, show me what way that might be." 'I will,' said she." The cleverness with which the countess thus effects reconciliation without incurring shame anticipates the perceptiveness she shows later (p. 169) when she tells Luned, who pretends that Owein has just arrived from Arthur's court, that the knight does not have the look of a traveller and that he has killed her husband.

Several structural devices near the end of the tale are worth noticing. After Owein forgets to return to his wife and undergoes his first adventure, we learn that the adventure has been precipitated by his desire to repay "a widowed countess" for causing his wounds to be healed by the magic ointment discussed earlier. Thus the ointment serves as a framing device. The second and third adventures are tenuously linked: after Owein discovers that Luned is imprisoned, he asks her where he might spend the night; she directs him to the castle of an earl, where the third adventure occurs, after which he returns to free Luned. Finally, the presence of the Lion helps hold the romance together after the first adventure (pp. 177 ff.).

All of the elements of unity we have looked at, however, are not enough to unify the romance, for the redactor has no sense of proportion. The introductory paragraph of stage-setting gives us the first hint of imbalance, for over seven lines are devoted to Glewlwyd Mighty-grasp's function as Acting Porter in Arthur's court, even though
the Information has no significance elsewhere. This attention to
minutiae anticipates the immense amount of description which at times
completely dominates Cynon's long story.

The detail itself is frequently devoted to physical appearance
(cf. the "curly yellow-headed youths" [p. 156]) or to manners (cf.
the politeness shown Cynon [p. 157]); it often alludes to valuable
objects and the exotic (cf. the description of the room [p. 165] and
the "pure white lion" [pp. 177 ff.]). We should not overlook Owein's
injunction to Cynon (p. 156) to tell "the most wondrous thing thou
knowest," for Cynon's tale and Owein's experiences as well reflect
fascination with the unbelievable and the unreal for their own sake.
This attention to "wondrous things" in the Welsh tale contrasts with
the more courtly interests dwelt upon in the French version.

The striking degeneration of Owein after he forgets to return to his
wife, especially mention of the long hair which covers his body, is
thus explained, as is the fright the handmaidens feel when they see
him (p. 174). We notice, too, the huge black man (pp. 159, 163),
"a savage monster" (p. 179), and so forth. The excessive attention to
detail in general vividly distinguishes the Welsh tale from the fast-
paced English story. Many of the details are even repeated, since
Cynon is told what is going to happen ahead of time, and since Owein
then has the same experiences. The redactor's inconsistency in
handling details may be seen vividly by noting Luned's not really
essential explanation to Owein about the problem of communication
when the magic ring makes him invisible (pp. 164-165); this sort of
detail seems absurd when we compare it with the omission of any explanation at all of the ring (probably a different one) taken from Owein after he forgets to return to his wife (p. 173).

Even more distracting than the excessive and inconsistent use of detail is the inept fashion by which various parts of the story are related. Cynon's anticipatory tale is inordinately long (pp. 156-162). A full quarter of the romance elapses before Owein plays an important role, so that the whole is not held together, as in Chrétien and the Middle English version, by the adventures of the hero. After Cynon's tale, the story progresses methodically through Owein's adventure at the fountain and his marriage to the countess. Arthur's search for Owein begins perhaps too abruptly (p. 170), but the reunion at the end of Section One ties the two narrative strands together. The relevance of Owein's two fights with Cei, however, and of the subsequent fights with the rest of Arthur's retinue (pp. 171-172), culminating in the fight with Gwalchmai, is not made any clearer than Cei's earlier sarcasm after Cynon's tale (p. 162), Owein's reason for undertaking the fountain adventure (p. 162), or Luned's reason for instantly liking Owein (p. 164).

The connection between Sections One and Two is so tenuous that the relevance of the last third of the romance is questionable. The three adventures which occur after Owein overstays his leave from his wife seem to exist for their own sake. If Owein is meant to be undergoing penance, the fact is not made clear enough, especially since he so suddenly returns for the Lady of the Fountain (p. 180) and whisks her off to Arthur's court, where "she was his wife so long as she
lived" (p. 181). If he is merely displaying his prowess, there is no gradation in the difficulty of the three adventures, and certainly no climax. The very last episode, at the court of the Black Oppressor, is extraneous. The significance and even the meaning of this appendage are unclear, and it is the most distracting structural feature of the tale. It especially detracts from the story of Owein and his wife, despite the apparent attempt to show a connection in the final sentence: "And this tale is called the Tale of the Lady of the Fountain" (p. 182).

Love is not really a very important theme, for the Lady of the Fountain and the love Owein feels for her are not mentioned until the tale is well over a third told (p. 166), and even then the relationship is not emphasized. The countess' role is not very great. The Owein-Luned friendship, in fact, seems more important. The warmth of Luned's initial remarks to the knight (p. 164), the attention and gentleness she subsequently shows him (pp. 164-167), and the friendship and loyalty she expresses (pp. 177-178) all make Owein's rescue of her (p. 180) overshadow the knight's barely mentioned reunion with his wife (pp. 180-181) or any other experience with her. But neither relationship is spread over enough of the tale to be the central theme or to hold the narrative together.

In the last analysis, the romance really has no central theme. If Owein were to take his wife with him when he returns to Arthur's court at the end of Section One, instead of after the three adventures, the story could well end and be loosely bound together by Owein's search for a wife, although the long Cynon tale at the beginning would still be distracting and some of the action still not clearly relevant. If the tale were constructed like this, it would be generally similar
to the first section of *Gereint*. As it stands, Section One ends with a very slight excuse for a continuation which lengthens the tale by a third and which is only tenuously connected to everything which precedes it. Individual parts of the romance are sometimes organized with some skill, but they do not add up to a meaningful whole. There is a tangled quality which must be Celtic in appeal and origin, as it reminds us of other conglomerate *märchen*.³ The tale is entertaining largely as a narrative about the strange and exotic, but it reads like a first draft, not a polished romance.

CHAPTER VI  

Lancelot

Lancelot, or Le Chevalier de la Charrette,\(^1\) cannot be divided into distinct parts with the ease that Erec and Yvain can, and consequently critics have had more difficulty establishing its thematic unity.\(^2\) For the moment, however, let us merely say that the romance consists of two parts, the division occurring somewhere after the first Lancelot-Meleagant fight, and that its theme—as in Yvain—is the intricate relationship between a number of people.

There is none of the careful stage setting at the beginning of Lancelot that Chrétien used so effectively at the beginning of Yvain. Instead of easing us into the story, the poet begins rather abruptly and only relates what the story cannot do without, although probably not as much as it really needs. Erec, we remember, began in a similar

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\(^2\) As usual, Jean Frappier's comments have great merit. See, e.g., Chrétien de Troyes (Paris, 1957), pp. 124-146; and his analysis in Roger S. Loomis (ed.), Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages (London, 1959), pp. 175-180. He does not make a clear enough case, however, for dividing the romance at the Sword Bridge Adventure.
way, but in that earlier poem the poet was mainly interested in straightforward narration. In *Lancelot*, however, he sacrifices a certain amount of clarity for drama. A strange knight suddenly rides up to Arthur and asserts that he holds captive a number of the king's people, whom he will release only if a knight escorts Guinevere to the woods, defends her, and brings her safely back to court.

Besides being highly dramatic—Guinevere prostrating herself before Kay to convince him not to leave adds to the histrionic effect—the scene emphasizes the importance both Guinevere and Kay will have later. The value of the queen's degradation before Kay is not immediately certain, except that it underlines her normally dignified role at court and her later elevated position as Lancelot's mistress. Kay's action, for the moment at least, seems merely a plot device to get the story underway. The scene also shows Arthur being bound to his foolish promise to Kay; later, other promises will be important. Arthur's weakness is stressed, especially when he says, after the strange knight insults him, that he must endure what he cannot change (61-63), and Gawain does not hesitate to point out the king's foolishness (226-27). Finally, the challenges and fights of the strange knight, who turns out to be Meleagant, are perhaps the one formal element which unifies the romance. Freeing the captives in Gorre becomes one of the important themes, and the story only ends much later when Lancelot defeats Meleagant at Arthur's court.

We first see Lancelot in the second scene as, already engaged in his quest for the queen, he rides up to Gawain and asks for the extra horse which his friend happens to have with him. But where has
Lancelot come from? The romance would have greater unity if Lancelot were introduced in the opening scene and if his motivations in the cart scene were prepared for a little more carefully. Guinevere will reproach him much later for hesitating momentarily before entering the cart in this second scene, but as yet we have only a hint of his love. As the rude dwarf invites him to enter the cart, we are told (365 ff.) that Reason, a thing apart from Love, cautions him. A kind of corollary to this conflict between Reason and Love occurs about as far from the end of the romance (6842 ff.) as this does from the beginning when Guinevere is careful not to show her emotions at court.

The moment Lancelot enters the cart, and thus degrades himself for love, the dwarf takes him to the castle where he knows the queen to be, and the pursuit theme, or quest, begins in earnest. The scene is important first of all for introducing the cart theme, which will help link together many subsequent episodes and adventures. But it is also important for introducing the Lancelot-Gawain friendship. The subsequent separation of these two knights and their ultimate reunion are important structurally.

Accompanied by Gawain, Lancelot undergoes the first of many experiences which, because of their frequency and the number of people they introduce into the story, finally become too hard to remember.

\[3\]

We should be grateful that long ago a number of minor problems were pointed out so well, but it is unfair to discredit the structure of the romance because of such discrepancies as Meleagant's initial lack of motivation, the confusion resulting from Lancelot arriving in Gorre before crossing the bridge which leads there, and so forth. See additional problems discussed in Jessie L. Weston, The Legend of Sir Lancelot du Lac (London, 1901), p. 43 ff.; Lucy A. Paton, Sir Lancelot of the Lake (London, 1929), p. 32 ff.
In the Perilous Bed Adventure Lancelot now meets the first of several damsels who figure in the story in varying degrees of importance. Throughout the adventure Lancelot is taunted for having ridden in the cart; this fact, together with the test he must undergo, may suggest that the damsel anticipates Guinevere. (The repeated mention of the cart in this romance is more directly relevant structurally than the repeated mention of the lion in Yvain.) The adventure is also important structurally because this is the only time during the quest that Lancelot sees the queen. The fact that he almost throws himself out of the window when he does see her anticipates his attempt at suicide when he learns of her supposed death and his longing for death even later when he is imprisoned in the tower.

Then as the two knights meet another damsel at a crossroads, the organizing principle of the first half of the tale is made explicit. The damsel tells them that Guinevere is held captive by Meleagant, son of King Bademagu, in the land of Gorre and that they will encounter many obstacles on the way (648-649). These obstacles will occupy our attention through the long anticipated Sword Bridge Adventure to the climactic first battle with Meleagant. The damsel describes the Water Bridge and the Sword Bridge and whets our interest by telling the knights there are some obstacles about which she will say nothing. The damsel's emphasis on obstacles thus makes clear in retrospect the most important function of the preceding Perilous Bed Adventure.

It seems curious that Gawain chooses the path leading to the less dangerous of the two bridges, the Water Bridge, but after all
the more dangerous adventure must be left to the main hero. Gawain, usually the exemplary knight, is in somewhat the same position here as he was in *Yvain* when the exigencies of the plot required him to defend the wrong daughter. For the information given, the damsel tells Gawain and Lancelot that they owe her a favor (704-707). This is the first of two damsels who mention favors which are not repaid; the incident is rather distracting, for Chretien usually mentions such details only to pick them up later in the story (cf. Guivret's offer of assistance in *Erec* and Meleagant's sister's gratitude later in this romance).

After Lancelot and Gawain take their separate paths (to meet again only in the second half of the romance), and after we see Lancelot thinking about the queen, our hero immediately has to fight a knight who is in the company of the second damsel who mentions a favor. When Lancelot has clearly defeated and given chase to the knight, the damsel implores Lancelot for mercy on the knight's behalf and promises to repay him later upon demand. Not only is the favor not mentioned again, but we are not told why the damsel fears that Lancelot may recognize her (925-27). The structural value of the adventure is not entirely clear, except that it affords a comparison with the later damsel who urges Lancelot not to show mercy (2779 ff.). The very length of the adventure (730-930), however, detracts from the main plot.

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The next episode, in some ways the most interesting and certainly the most humorous, finds Lancelot hesitating once more in the service of love. This time he deliberates not for an instant, but for twenty-eight lines (1097-1125) while he argues with himself about whether to save a damsel, his hostess, who is on the very point of being raped by one of her own knights. The humor implicit in the adventure is heightened since the damsel has already got Lancelot's promise to lie with her, and since she herself has just taken nine and one-half lines (1070-79) to appeal to Lancelot for assistance when one would suppose a simple "Ate!" would be not only sufficient, but all she had time for. The scene even becomes infused with something like slapstick comedy as Lancelot draws back when he starts to enter the room in order to miss two descending swords which then shatter as they strike the floor. After Lancelot has fought a number of men, thus again showing his prowess and courage, the damsel stops the melee; the whole affair has apparently been a sort of joke.

The high point of the adventure occurs (1195 ff.) as we see the discomfort with which Lancelot partially disrobes and lies beside the damsel, being careful to turn away from her and, like a monk, not speak a word. This second "perilous bed" scene contrasts vividly with the great consummation scene with Guinevere later on. (The contrast is made very clear when, as the damsel finally goes to another bed and leaves Lancelot to sleep alone, she comments to herself about the grave affair Lancelot has undertaken.) Here Lancelot has been caught between his duty to keep his promise to lie with the damsel and his
duty to be faithful to Guinevere. Like the bedded and tempted Gawain in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, he has managed to resolve his moral dilemma. Throughout this long adventure we are reminded time and time again of Guinevere.

The damsel accompanies Lancelot on the road the next day after he promises to protect her, and she is with him when he discovers Guinevere's comb. The hair on the comb prompts Lancelot and the poet to extol its beauty in the most extravagant of language. Then as they come upon a knight who loves the damsel and wants to take her away with him, the damsel says she will be convinced of Lancelot's bravery and worth if he will protect her. The knights decide that they need a better place to fight, and they find a meadow which is filled with a number of people, one of whom is the father of the knight Lancelot is supposed to fight.

The structural function of the father-son episode now dwelt upon at length (1649-2011) is to anticipate and to contrast with the Bademagu-Meleagant relationship to be developed later. This father and son argue too, for the former does not want the young knight to fight Lancelot. The difference is that the son respects the father.

The relationship between Lancelot and his hostess should also be seen as one of several minor relationships which add depth to a romance whose theme is the conduct between people.

See the excellent article by Jerome Mandel ("Elements in the Charrette World: The Father-Son Relationship," MP, LXII, No. 2 [Nov. 1964], 97-104) which examines in detail these two father-son relationships together with the Arthur-Kay relationship as reflections of one another and as manifestations of the loyalty-disloyalty theme so important in the romance.
enough to obey him and to be proved wrong. They must follow Lancelot to see how good a knight he is before the father will let his son fight; and when Lancelot proves his worth—necessary because he has been derided once more as the Knight of the Cart—the son is satisfied and no longer wishes to fight. Lancelot proves his worth—as the father and son learn from a hermit—by lifting the lid from a sarcophagus—a feat which takes the strength of seven men and which signifies that the captives in Gorre will be freed. Thus the tomb adventure is effectively woven into the father-son episode, and we are given the strongest possible reminder of Lancelot's overt purpose; before this adventure is over, we are also reminded of his search for the queen. The damsel who has been accompanying Lancelot since the temptation scene now turns back, and Lancelot rides alone. Thus the temptress has provided a measure of unity for about a thousand lines (930-2011).

Although the great number of people active in the plot have threatened by now to envelop us, Chrétien has managed to combine and develop a number of themes in the interwoven father-son episode and tomb adventure: he has touched upon Lancelot's faithfulness, prowess, and bravery, has reminded us of the hero's purpose of finding Guinevere and freeing the other captives, and has commented on a son's obligations to a father. He has consciously and effectively used a really complex structural technique. Nevertheless, even Chrétien cannot successfully sustain such complexity for long. The tight construction we have just noticed loosens somewhat, and we begin to wish for fewer episodes and, especially, for fewer characters. It
may be true that at any point we usually know where we are on the quest for Guinevere, but it is equally true that we rarely have any precise notion about how we got there. As the details continue to pile up, we cannot keep in mind their significance as we usually could in *Frec* and in *Yvain*. We must simply relax and enjoy the separate elements of the story and be content with the relatively frequent reminders of the cart motif, the Sword Bridge, and the hero's double intention of reaching Guinevere and freeing the people of Logres.

Lancelot lodges that night with a knight and his family who are prisoners of Gorre. First we are reminded of Lancelot's search for the queen (2116 ff.); then the knight says (2144 ff.) that the best way to reach the Sword Bridge is to take a certain road which goes through "the stony passage." The only function of this episode is anticipatory. Accompanied by the knight's two sons (also knights), Lancelot is again taunted with the cart episode by a knight on a tower at the Stony Passage, but Lancelot defeats him and wins the praise of the two sons. After another man meets them and offers to lodge them at his house farther up the road, a squire rides up and tells the man that the captives have revolted and that they have heard of the worthy knight who will free them. Lancelot soon fights with the people of Logres for their freedom, and he inspires all those around him. They are winning the battle but have to quit at nightfall; thus the theme of freeing the captives is developed and still remains important, and Lancelot has won great praise from the partial victory.

Lancelot and the two knights still accompanying him resume their journey, and, strangely enough, we are told (2505-07) that they
had no adventures from morning until evening. Still another damsel invites them to lodge with her family. While everyone is eating, another strange knight rides up and ridicules the Knight of the Cart for waiting so long to cross the Sword Bridge. After this double thematic reminder, Lancelot fights the knight. He takes a long time to win, but the memory of the cart and the taunts of the knight spur him on. (The cart theme is heavily stressed.)

The drama of an already lively scene is heightened when still another damsel suddenly rides up, just as the defeated knight is beseeching Lancelot in God's name for mercy, and asks Lancelot for the defeated knight's head. (Lancelot has already stipulated that he will grant her favor only if it is not extravagant: here we recall how Arthur's failure to be as cautious when Kay asked a favor contributed to Lancelot's present plight.) Lancelot is once more caught in the sort of moral dilemma that we have seen in Yvain as well as in this romance. The poet lays considerable stress on the conflict between two chivalric duties: whether Lancelot should show pity or generosity. Lancelot's solution is ingenious: he will fight the knight again, and if he wins for the second time, he will reward the damsel with the head she desires. The knight agrees and loses. This time his appeals in God's name are to no avail. The damsel thanks Lancelot and promises to reward him—which she later does—at the proper time.

The clever culmination to this adventure, one of Chrétien's wonderfully told little short stories, bears comparison to two other similar delays. We have already noticed that Lancelot fights with
the imprisoned people and all but frees them. (The final outcome had already been settled, really, when he lifted the sarcophagus lid.)

The delay allows the poet to postpone the climax of the first half of the romance until the Lancelot-Meleagant fight. Lancelot's adventures can continue yet for a while. Even more important are the delays the poet achieves later when King Bademagu twice keeps Lancelot from killing Meleagant by stopping their two fights and thus allowing the really climactic fight to take place at Arthur's court. Lancelot's solution to his problem of conflicting loyalties—not of particular significance at first glance—mirrors one of the structural principles of the tale.

The long anticipated and most formidable adventure, that of the Sword Bridge, now takes place. The two knights still accompanying Lancelot—like the temptress before them—have provided some continuity for about a thousand lines (since 2187), and now their fear serves as a foil to the bravery and determination of the hero. Once more the poet stresses the seemingly impossible situation, as Lancelot faces the triple hazards of water, bridge, and lions. But Love assuages the pain on the bridge, and the adventure is directly connected to the love quest. The tremendous valor which Lancelot displays apparently cancels the tremendous shame of the cart episode, for Lancelot is no longer called the Knight of the Cart; shortly he will be called simply Lancelot or the Lancelot of the Lake who crossed the Sword Bridge. And now that the knight has endured shame and valor, he is worthy to accomplish his goal.

Suddenly the point of view switches to King Bademagu and his quarrelsome son Meleagant, the same knight who precipitated all the
action by taking Guinevere away from Arthur's court, and who now realizes that Lancelot intends to fight him. Throughout, Meleagant is especially singled out for his disloyalty and for his lack of gentleness and pity—qualities for which Lancelot is famous—and Chrétien highlights the two knights' differences by letting Meleagant emphasize (3456-59) that he is just as eager for fame as Lancelot, and by even letting Meleagant dwell upon Lancelot's good qualities. In addition, the king not only tells his son how he should act, but also shows him in his own conduct toward Lancelot, so that Meleagant has two foils. The entire episode is dwelt upon at great length, and the fight itself is elaborately led up to. Just before the fight we are yet again reminded of Lancelot's double motive of finding the queen and freeing the captives.

The fight between Lancelot and Meleagant, which has been anticipated since the opening scene at Arthur's court, now takes place at Bademagu's court (3536 ff.). At first Lancelot does not do very well in battle, but a damsel, one of Guinevere's companions, calls to him so that he looks up and sees the queen, the sight of whom increases his powers. Thus a damsel has helped Lancelot. (The shame Lancelot momentarily feels as he is losing the fight echoes the shame he felt earlier when he could not beat the knight at the ford more quickly.) Bademagu then asks Guinevere, as he will again later, to intercede in the fight to keep his son from being killed, and thus emphasizes the conflict between filial loyalty and the dispensation of justice. She consents because of the great respect she has for the king's kindness to her.
Guinevere's honored position in the court where she is held in bondage contrasts sharply with the subservient role she played in Arthur's own court, where she humiliated herself at Kay's feet and before the entire court merely because of expediency. We notice too that Bademagu upbraids Meleagant for striking Lancelot after he quit fighting, and that father and son quarrel at length—a theme which continues throughout most of the romance. Perhaps it is at this point that we become aware of the extent to which the romance is a handbook of proper conduct. Especially interesting is the complex behavior demanded of Bademagu: as host he must be gracious to Guinevere and Lancelot; as father he must be devoted to his disloyal son; and as king he must preside over the fight fairly. In addition, the episode has helped define the roles of knight and queen. The next Lancelot-Meleagant fight will throw even further light on the romance as a handbook of conduct.

The fight is the first great climax of the romance, for the result is that Guinevere is freed, as well as the other captives; both of Lancelot's goals, then, are accomplished. Indeed, except for the peculiar terms of peace, the story might well end rather soon now: Lancelot shortly meets Kay, who points out that Lancelot has shamed him for accomplishing what he himself could not; and Lancelot tells Kay that Gawain is waiting at the Water Bridge. In short, the important threads of the narrative are almost brought together. The structure of the rest of the romance would be quite clear if Guinevere were to rejoice at her deliverance and grant Lancelot her favors, and if the two of them, accompanied by the other freed captives, were to collect Gawain at the Water Bridge on their way back to a joyful reception at Arthur's court.
The terms of peace, however, only free Guinevere if Lancelot agrees to fight Meleagant again, at Arthur's court, within a year of the time that Meleagant shall summon him. If Lancelot loses, Guinevere must return with Meleagant. (The fight indeed takes place at the end of the tale.) Thus the organizing principle of the second half of the romance is substantially the same as that of the first half when Meleagant agreed to free Guinevere and the captives if a knight could defeat him. One is tempted to suggest, in fact, that the framework which this agreement furnishes for the action of the rest of the romance is only contrived by the poet to keep the tale going. Why should Meleagant, who was being resoundingly defeated, be allowed to prescribe the terms of an agreement which might result in Guinevere's recapture? It seems rather curious that King Bademagu, the very model of justice and generosity—even Kay praises his gentleness and kindness—should allow his son, whom he knows to be in the wrong, to be favored in an agreement which ends a fight he has clearly lost. In effect, the king has asked Guinevere, to whom he has previously shown great honor, to run the risk of being further degraded by his son.

King Bademagu restates the organizing principle of the first half of the tale when he tells Guinevere (3947-56) that she should not scorn a man who has been faithful to her in repeatedly exposing his life on his journey to rescue her. His remark should be compared to that of the damsel who earlier told Lancelot he would meet many obstacles on the road to Gorre. It is just as important, however, that Bademagu is stressing his role as the impartial observer who represents justice. He even goes on to tell Lancelot that he is amazed at Guinevere's conduct. When he asks Lancelot if the knight knows the reason for her conduct, he is whetting the reader's curiosity as well. (The only hint the
reader has been given was the remark when Lancelot entered the cart
that he would be sorry for it later.) Kay, too, shows surprise at
the queen's conduct. These reactions of Bademagu and Kay may suggest
that the poet is criticizing courtly love, but we can be certain that
they emphasize Lancelot's suffering—a mental or spiritual suffering,
first precipitated by the cart, which he has to endure no less than
he has had to overcome the physical obstacles. Lancelot still has not
earned his lady.

II

Two parallel scenes now occur before the lovers are united.
Guinevere believes a mistaken report of Lancelot's death (Bademagu
has guaranteed him safe passage, while Guinevere stays behind to
await Gawain), and she not only laments but reproaches herself for the
wrong she has done her lover. She seems herself, in fact, to renounce
the precepts of courtly love, and even declares that she was only
jesting (4197 ff.). Her very suffering, seen in the light of
Bademagu's earlier remarks to her, seems to suggest that she has been
in the wrong. After expressing to herself the lust she feels for
Lancelot (4224–29), she toys with the notion of suicide, but decides
that she would rather stay alive and mourn for him.

7Elaine Southward, who has had more than moderate success with
a rather narrow view of the theme, emphasizes the development of the
queen's character, and says the romance tells how Guinevere became
unfaithful to Arthur ("The Unity of Chrétien's Lancelot," Mélanges
de Linguistique et de Littérature Romanes Offerts à Mario Roques, II
[1953], 281–290). She also says (284–285) that Guinevere's attitude
ward the cart episode allows her to treat Lancelot badly so that
she can feel remorse and grow to love him; then when she hears of
Lancelot's death, she can reproach herself.
Lancelot hears that the queen has died, and his parallel scene of sorrow (4250 ff.) makes us think of the scenes in Yvain in which each lover is caught in a dilemma concerning the other (1343 ff.; 1657 ff.). For a second time, then, Lancelot considers suicide. This time he actually attempts to hang himself, but is freed before he dies. He emphasizes the hopelessness of his plight by wondering which is more his enemy, life or death, and he emphasizes his loyalty first by wishing he had killed himself the moment Guinevere showed her hate, and then by admitting that she must have had a good reason to be displeased even though he does not know what it is. (The reminder of her unknown reason keeps the suspense before the reader.) It is highly ironical that he should then guess that Guinevere was displeased because he mounted the cart. But he cannot understand why she should object to such self-dishonor in the service of love. This is the closest Lancelot comes to reproaching the queen, and this near-reproach faintly anticipates the later prison scene when, as the knight faces death again, he wonders why his friend Gawain has not rescued him.

Just as Lancelot is making his lament, he is told that the report of Guinevere's death was a mistake. The lovers meet very rapidly now. Guinevere explains that she treated him with displeasure because he had hesitated two whole steps before entering the cart. Hereafter, the cart motif is no longer important. She pardons her lover, and they make arrangements for their night meeting. Then in one sentence Lancelot sums up the entire love theme and the structural principle which has guided its development (4609-10): "Rien fors vos ne me puet tenir / que bien ne puisse a vos venir." ("Nothing but
your command could thwart my power to come to you."

In the consummation scene, for he sleeps in the room with the queen. When Meleagant later finds blood on the sheets of both Guinevere's and Kay's bed and accuses Kay of violating the queen, it is quite clear that once more Kay is, at least in part, a plot device to keep the story going—especially when we consider the coincidence of the wounds bleeding at such a critical time. Once more, too, Bademagu's role is to seek justice, for he says that his own eyes will judge the truth of the matter (4826-28), and even Meleagant says explicitly that it falls upon his father to see that justice is done (4852-53). Once more, however, justice is obscured. Even more important, both Meleagant and Kay make clear the evil of the deed, no matter who has lain with the queen, for they both heavily emphasize that Arthur has been betrayed (4854 ff.; 4860 ff.). This suggestion of a conflict between a knight's loyalty to his courtly mistress and to his king indicates that courtly love is not being defended in the romance, for, as we have seen, considerable attention is paid elsewhere to correct knightly behavior, including the loyalty other knights owe to their lords: Kay to Arthur, a son to his father (1649 ff.), and Meleagant to Bademagu.

The ironical similarity between the disgrace Guinevere now suffers, or nearly suffers, at Bademagu's court and the disgrace she suffered earlier at Arthur's court is fascinating. At Arthur's court, Kay's desire to leave the king (i.e., to be disloyal) caused Guinevere to disgrace herself at the seneschal's feet, and his subsequent inability to defend her against her impudent abductor Meleagant did her further disservice. At Bademagu's court, Kay, ironically, is called upon to
defend himself against Meleagant's charge of being disloyal to Arthur by disgracing Guinevere. In both cases, Guinevere is a helpless pawn. Lancelot, who has already partly avenged the queen's abduction by fighting Meleagant, whom Kay was unable to defeat, now defends Guinevere's name, no less than Kay's loyalty, by once more fighting the same Meleagant whom Kay is supposed to fight again but cannot because of the wound Meleagant gave him in their earlier encounter and has not allowed to heal subsequently!

And we must not miss the obvious irony (poetic justice) that Lancelot, the one who really has been disloyal to his king—and charged unknowingly by both Kay and Meleagant, as we have seen—should be the one to fight Meleagant, the accuser. The story further repeats itself when Bademagu asks Guinevere for the second time to stop the fight. At this very point Bademagu reminds Meleagant, and the reader, of the later fight with Lancelot at Arthur's court. Thus the three fights, which hold the tale together more securely than any other formal element, are not only implicitly as well as explicitly related, but are all made to be seen as part of one another. Nowhere is Chretien's structural artistry more admirable.

Lancelot then sets out for the Water Bridge, for he is impatient to find Gawain. On the way, however, he is led astray by a dwarf—a plot device to keep the story going—and the rest of his entourage proceed to the bridge where they find Gawain almost drowned. (Actually, we do not see the Water Bridge Adventure take place.) After reviving him, they tell him all that has happened. It is interesting that it should take so long for the Water Bridge to be used in the plot, for,
although it nicely counterbalances the Sword Bridge Adventure in the first half of the romance, we must remember that it was originally introduced into the plot as one of the obstacles to be overcome on the way to Gorre. Instead of being used to make the rescue more difficult, however, it is appropriately used to reintroduce Gawain into a plot which cannot allow both Lancelot and Gawain to meet again until the end of the romance. Once Gawain goes to Bademagu's court and reports Lancelot's disappearance to Guinevere, he and Kay set out to search for Lancelot. The seeker is now sought. Guinevere is saddened for the second time by the loss of Lancelot (5192 ff.), although, paradoxically, she is full of joy at the sight of Gawain.

For a second time after a high point in the romance at which the structure seems remarkably clear, we begin to feel that the tale is not moving forward with the certainty it should. The end seems to be needlessly delayed. To be sure, the delays in getting the hero back to Arthur's court are analogous to the obstacles he overcame to free Guinevere and lie with her, but getting back to Arthur's court now seems unmistakably anticlimactic: the only event that we are now anticipating is the final fight with Meleagant, but, as we have seen, it even seems to have been contrived—and not once, but twice—by the premature end of the two Lancelot-Meleagant fights.

A letter from Lancelot—another mere plot device, completely unprepared for—now asks Guinevere, Gawain, and Kay to join the knight at Arthur's court. Arthur greets them upon their arrival, but they learn that Lancelot is not there and that the letter was a forgery. The queen then agrees to attend a tournament the damsels and ladies
of the court have planned while she was gone. Meanwhile, at Lancelot's request, the wife of Meleagant's seneschal who is holding Lancelot captive agrees to let him go to the tournament after he rather surprisingly promises her his love (5482-83). And so another damsel helps Lancelot. At the tournament Guinevere asks the unrecognized Lancelot to do his worst in order to see if he is really her lover. Even though we are told that she was fully convinced of his identity, she repeats her request the following day (although she quickly reverses her decision). Again we are told that she is fully convinced of the knight's identity—an assurance which hardly seems necessary. If these requests are meant to be further tests of Lancelot's devotion or punishments for his hesitation before the cart, we are not told so, and there seems to be no reason why we should not be; furthermore, playing the part of a coward, especially since he is unrecognized, would surely be anticlimactic proof of Lancelot's devotion after the supreme disgrace of mounting the cart. The tournament receives so much attention that we can be sure the poet is dwelling upon it partly for its own sake. Lancelot disappears after the tournament and, keeping his promise, returns to prison.

Meleagant is told of the arrangement the seneschal's wife made with Lancelot, but, stressing Lancelot's integrity, he says that he knows the knight will not break his promise to return. Then, after Meleagant imprisons Lancelot in a special tower from which he knows he cannot escape, he goes to Arthur's court to schedule a battle with Lancelot a year hence. Gawain emphasizes his devotion to Lancelot
by offering to fight Meleagant if Lancelot cannot be found. Meleagant then returns to his father's court. The poet deliberately mentions that Meleagant's sister is present in the court (6242 ff.) and that she is going to be mentioned later when the time comes. The poet seems deliberately trying to avoid a deus ex machina later, and, of course, such a statement whets the reader's interest. We also note his intriguing comment that here he does not wish to confuse or entangle his subject matter, but to treat it straightforwardly.

Now Meleagant reminds his father of the agreement to fight Lancelot at Arthur's court—more and more the story focuses on the fight—and tells him that Lancelot had not been there to schedule the encounter. At this point the important theme of the quarreling between Meleagant and Bademagu reaches its climax. Using exceptionally strong language (6304 ff.), the father stresses his son's lack of pity and his foolishness. All bonds are severed between them. Bademagu demonstrates his ability—this time unthwarted—to see through outward appearances and perceive the truth when he asserts his conviction that Lancelot must either be dead or locked in a prison from which escape is impossible. The scene serves to further blacken Meleagant's character and to praise Lancelot's.

As Meleagant's sister now sets out to search for and free Lancelot, the poet reminds us that she is the same damsel mentioned earlier. He also carefully tells his reader (6410 ff.) that he believes

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8 Now Chrétien's continuator, Godefroi de Leigni, as we are told at the end of the poem.
the damsel will find Lancelot after many journeys in many lands and
that there is no need for him to give an account of her lodgings and
journeying. She finds Lancelot in the tower, where once more he is
imploring death to come. In a very long speech Lancelot also chides
Gawain for not searching for him; he knows nothing, of course, of
Gawain's loyalty since they last met. Lancelot stresses the friendship
theme which became important quite early in the tale, especially when
he says that he would have looked for Gawain if the situation were
reversed, and when he finally concludes that his friend must not know
that he is imprisoned (6483 ff.).

Meleagant's sister provides a strong link with the first
section of the romance when she identifies herself to Lancelot as
the damsel who had asked him for the head of a knight Lancelot fought
on the way to the Sword Bridge (6572-81). Now, she says, she will
return the favor by freeing him. Lancelot is yet once more helped by
a damsel. Then, without any prompting or bribery on her part, Lancelot
suddenly promises that if she frees him he will always be hers (6587 ff.).
This promise, of course, reminds us of the earlier vow he made to his
jailoress (although this time the word amor is not used) and strongly
reminds us of his already consumated relationship with Guinevere, to
whom presumably he now wants to return. After the damsel revives him
at her country estate, Lancelot asserts again that he is at her command
(heart, body, service, and estate). She releases him, however, from
whatever obligations he may owe her and allows him to return to
Arthur's court.
The dramatic effect of Lancelot's arrival is heightened by Meleagant's presence there. Gawain again gets to show his great friendship for Lancelot—a theme now stressed—by preparing to fight in his place, as he had promised earlier. In fact, he is on the very verge of beginning the fight with Meleagant when Lancelot rides up. Arthur and the entire court then rejoice, and Guinevere is happier than all the rest. She decides to wait for a more private time and place to greet him, however, for she fears that the king or the others might guess her true feelings. Reason controls her, we are told (6842 ff.), not rashness and impulse—a statement which contrasts clearly with Lancelot's conduct much earlier in front of the cart. This is the last we hear of her love.

After Lancelot quickly summarizes for Arthur much of the action of the latter half of the romance, Gawain once more offers to fight for Lancelot. Throughout, the Lancelot-Gawain relationship has been a direct contrast to the Lancelot-Meleagant relationship, although in this romance Chrétien has given more attention to the relationship which illustrates how knights should not behave toward one another. How they should behave is treated in Yvain. Meleagant then reviews his plight and comes to the conclusion that he has only himself to blame: he should have been more certain of Lancelot's imprisonment. As a matter of fact, he is not presented in an altogether bad light here at the end, for he says he knows he will suffer shame and humiliation, but he will do his best if it pleases God. Chrétien understands the principle of the worthy opposite. (After the fight begins, the poet remarks that both knights are strong and brave.)
In our last glimpse of Guinevere, she is doing what has become characteristic of her: from her window in a tower she watches Lancelot fight. Considerable attention is given to the details and intensity of the battle: for instance, after the knights knock each other off their horses, the poet adds the delightful touch that even the horses fight each other. The romance ends as Lancelot kills Meleagant and is led away in triumph. A short epilogue adds the information that one Godefroi de Leigni, the clerk, has finished the tale, with Chrétien's permission, from the point that Lancelot was imprisoned in the tower.  

III

I believe that in the past scholars have missed much of what Chrétien has to say in Lancelot by insisting too firmly that the central theme is the love relationship between Lancelot and Guinevere. Perhaps we have overstressed this theme because much of it is relatively easy to isolate and, even more important, because it is the theme which has most appealed to us. We have dismissed as irrelevant and distracting everything in the poem which does not seem clearly to develop the love theme. It is not surprising, then, that most critics have been able to find less structural integrity in this romance than in Chrétien's other works.

Most of the episodes and adventures of the first half of the tale do, in fact, remind us of this theme either directly or indirectly, especially on second reading; the trouble is not only that they are sometimes unclearly related to one another, but that there are so many of them. It is true that the long delay in bringing the lovers together
allows Lancelot to earn Guinevere's love by overcoming a number of obstacles, and that the long anticipation engenders a certain amount of suspense; but if we consider the first half of the romance to be only, or even mainly, the account of the first stage of this relationship, then we must close our eyes to much more than a broader concept of the theme would make necessary. Not only do Lancelot and Guinevere meet too late for their relationship to be the single theme of the tale, but they part too soon. That is, since the climax of the love theme, the consummation, occurs a third away from the end of the tale, the last third is entirely anticlimactic if the tale is only about the Lancelot-Guinevere relationship. (It is anticlimactic enough even considering the themes that are continued in the last third.)

The romance has more meaning, however, if we grant that throughout, like Yvain, it emphasizes and contrasts the sometimes conflicting and always complex relationships between several people. We have noted these relationships throughout, especially at the second Lancelot-Meleagant fight, the highpoint of the conflict and complexity. Although these relationships do provide a great deal of unity, they do not provide enough, for no single focal point in the plot can be called the climax of the entire romance. In a complex tale which develops a number of themes simultaneously, such a focal point seems especially desirable.

For the first half of the tale we think the climax will occur at, or shortly after, the first Lancelot-Meleagant fight. Unquestionably, the fight is the point around which the plot turns, since this event alone has been so carefully prepared for from the beginning, and since
Its logical outcome must be delayed until another fight at the end. (Now the rest of the action begins to move toward the final fight.) Indeed the various themes seem to be coming together at this point, but they do not quite meet. Instead, another climax, the consummation, has to take place some time later. Then, as if all the relationships still have not been highlighted enough, yet another climax (a rather unexpected one) immediately follows: the second Lancelot-Meleagant fight, which, as we have seen, does bind the multiple themes together more tightly and more intricately than they are bound anywhere else. (Only Gawain is not worked into the plot; the very next episode therefore leads us to him.)

But this is not the fight for which the structural machinery has already been set up, so it too must be halted and the plot mechanically and lengthily drawn out. The rest of the plot deals largely with the commonplaces of medieval romance: an abduction by a mean dwarf, a forged letter, imprisonment, escape from prison when everything seems hopeless, a last minute arrival, and so forth. Then, too, since the Lancelot-Meleagant theme is kept going, most of the others are dragged along by the momentum, especially the Bademagus-Meleagant relationship, which, as it turns out, only reaches a climax quite late in the tale. The focal point in the middle is only one of a series of three exciting but not entirely successful climaxes which must still be followed, after a long and rather tiring delay, by a fourth.

On the other hand, it is unfair to say, as many critics have said, that Lancelot is the least successfully organized of Chrétien's
romances. The problem of this romance is precisely that of *Yvain*: the weight of the complex multiple themes sits heavy on the rather weak but plainly visible framework provided by the plot. The point to be stressed is that the ratio of unity and complexity is as high as it is.
Conclusion

One might suppose that every Arthurian romance would be pretty much like the other, since nearly all of them are so unashamedly episodic. Although the degree of difference is understandably less noticeable in the mediocre productions, by and large each tale has its own distinguishing features. A contrast of the structure of Gereint and Erec, for example, throws light on the major interests of the two authors. We have seen that Gereint is held together by what is perhaps the most vague of all structural principles, the adventures of a wandering hero. The love theme is stressed so little in the first section that the romance lacks firm unity, while Chrétien prepares for it so carefully that the length of his corresponding section is somewhat out of proportion to the remainder of the tale. The failure of the Welsh writer to allow the love theme and the high point of the action to meet in the same adventure in the second section, as they do in Erec, is remarkably similar to the structural problem Chrétien has with the Yvain-Gawain battle in Yvain. Chrétien's failure to fully integrate the love theme at this point stems from thematic complexity, however, and not from a lack of structural artistry.

A comparison of the Yvain trilogy also emphasizes the uniqueness of each romance. Chrétien not only attempts to write an effective tale of adventure and magic, but at the same time a handbook about the relationships between people. The result is that complex problems of
morality and conflicting loyalty arise which have to be dealt with. The structure of a relatively simple story of action, then, is made to bear almost more of a burden than it is capable of. The Middle English poet, on the other hand, is primarily interested in the tale itself and pares down Chrétien's account closer to the core of action. In theory, then, one might expect the story line of the English poem to be clearer and more forceful than its more elaborate source. But in the process of laying bare the actor, the poet pays less attention to the passion and psychological tension—to everything, in short, that distinguishes Chrétien's poem—and creates duller characters who necessarily have duller experiences. Nothing gets emphasized, then, since the story moves swiftly along at a consistently modulated tone.

Much of Chrétien's success, then, is due to the pauses in the story, not to the forward movement of the action. The impassioned display of grief here, the sharp invective there, the minute examination of conflicting emotions and duties add so much meaning to the conventionalized action which is the core of medieval romance that they make all the difference. At times we are a little unsure of the meaning of the Middle English poem, because of the de-emphasis of the very themes which Chrétien makes clear in the lulls in the action. We may summarize the difference between the tales by saying that Chrétien tries to do too much, the Middle English poet too little. To put it another way, Chrétien tells an excellent story because he does not stick to the point, while the English poet tells a merely successful story because all he does is stick to the point. It is unfortunate that we must compare what is really one of our better English romances
with the work of one of the best of all medieval writers, for beside
most of the productions of the period, YG is a fine piece of work.

In contrast to both Yvain and YG, the Welsh Owein lacks a
unifying principle, even though, like Gereint, the story is well told
for a few paragraphs or even a few pages at a time. In its favor we
must admit that the conversation is lively, the action exciting, and
the description vivid. One is seldom bored reading a Welsh romance.
But in Owein, as well as Gereint, there is not enough continuity and
proportion between the episodes and sections. Especially distinguishing
in Owein is the excessive description of the exotic and valuable, of
manners, and of physical detail in general. This concern with mere
description contrasts markedly with Chrétien, who is so interested
in why something happens, and with the English redactor, who is
interested only in the fact that it happens.

As successful as Yvain is, we can perhaps no longer maintain,
as we have tended to in the past, that it is Chrétien’s best constructed
romance. This is an honor which is best reserved for Erec, since a
clearer view of the latter’s central love theme, particularly as
expressed in the maturing relationship effected by the adventures in
the middle section, gives the early romance more unity than previously
admitted. Yvain is not as well organized as Erec, but that is only
because Chrétien attempts a great deal more in it. Its structure is
much more complex because of its multiple themes.

The structure of the two romances might be represented
graphically as follows (although in simplified terms):
Section I  "Courtship"
Section II  Married Life (Crisis + Reconciliation)
Section III  Coronation

Fig. 1. Structure of Erec

Fig. 2. Structure of Yvaln
Erec is so successfully organized because the single love theme is dwelt upon continuously: it builds up to the climactic Jole de la Cort, which is almost immediately followed by the grand coronation. Erec's demonstration of valor helps define the love theme, but never vies with it for our attention. It is significant that Erec and Enide's love is emphasized at the very places Erec's prowess is most evident.

Yvain is less tightly organized, because its several themes do not move together in a single line. Yvain's prowess in particular (as expressed in the Yvain-Gawain relationship) is not directly enough related to the love theme.

The structure of Lancelot is at least as complex as that of Yvain, and largely for the same reasons: the poet is simultaneously handling several themes which are not tied together clearly enough. In Yvain, however, we can point to the Yvain-Gawain fight as the climax, even though it is not as closely related to the love theme as we might wish. At least it is quickly followed by the reunion between Yvain and Laudine. In Lancelot, as we have seen, there is no single climax, but a whole series of them, so that it is difficult to represent the structure graphically. We have failed to appreciate the structure of Lancelot in the past, however, largely because we have failed to perceive its thematic complexity, which we have mistaken too often for mere obscurity.

Perhaps the most valuable result of analyzing the three romances of Chrétien so closely is this clearer awareness of thematic complexity. We have tended to oversimplify the themes and thus to miss not only much of the poet's artistry, but much of his comment on medieval life.
His major themes are courtly love, marriage, and knight errantry, and, taken together, the three romances explore all the relationships and conflicts possible among these themes.

If we were to try to summarize in one word the theme of Chrétien's romances, the word would be "knighthood," which in the three tales examined seems to be defined as an equal mixture of love and errantry. Chrétien pretty well frowns on courtly love: in Erec marriage is eloquently defined and praised, and in Yvain the hero and heroine only find happiness in marriage. One of the most intriguing problems, though, is not finally solved, only mentioned. In Lancelot Meleagant and Kay make clear that to lie with Guinevere, as we know Lancelot has done, is to betray Arthur. Since this is a romance in which Lancelot is the hero, however, the theme is quietly dropped. Perhaps without being fully aware of the enormity of this hastily dismissed problem, Chrétien has planted a seed which in the treatment of Malory will grow into one of the causes of the destruction of the Arthurian world.

In the romances under consideration, "loyalty" is the key to Chrétien's definition of knighthood: loyalty to a courtly mistress, a wife, a friend, the concepts of errantry, and even, as we have just seen, to a king. The only major concern in the life of a knight with which Chrétien does not deal is loyalty to the Church, a subject which he reserves for Perceval. It is true that God is never far from the minds of the people in Erec, Yvain, and Lancelot, and that some of the action can be explained as conflicts with the teachings of the Church (such as Erec's uxoriousness or Lancelot's thoughts of suicide), but only in Perceval is the Church's role important either thematically or structurally.
Finally, perhaps a word should be added about Chrétien's total achievement. Even though the present study has not hesitated to point out whatever seems to be structural weaknesses or inconsistencies, the criticism has not been intended to detract--nor could it possibly do so--from the outstanding artistry of the first great Arthurian poet. It is, in fact, only because of Chrétien's greatness that such a study might have any value at all. Only a great poet will continue to be discussed by so many critics after seven hundred years. Whatever apparent structural faults have been found may well result from our own imperceptiveness, not the poet's inability. It is only this kind of probing and questioning, however, that eventually allows us to appreciate fully any poet. Chrétien, understandably of course, has not written stories as tightly unified as post-Jamesian novels; but the unity which he achieves seems adequate for his apparent purposes, and it is considerably greater than many of his critics have been willing to admit.
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