

MODES OF PERSONAL PRESENCE IN THE ROMANCES OF CHRÉTIEN DE
TROYES

By

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NOTE ON CITATIONS AND TRANSLATIONS OF CHRÉTIEN'S ROMANCES

For citations of the romances, I rely, throughout the dissertation, on the edition of Chrétien's collected works published by Librairie Générale Française (Chrétien de Troyes, *Romans*, Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1994).

In general, the English translations I have cited, for Chrétien's poems, are those of David Staines in *The Complete Romances of Chrétien de Troyes* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990); I have tried to indicate when this is not the case.

INTRODUCTION

The question of what it means for one human being to be present to another is relevant both to Western culture today, with its embrace of new ways to bring about presence in absence (e-mail, text messaging, Skype), and to the culture of twelfth century Europe, with its reliance on hierarchical structures of mediation and its insistence on the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. We often take for granted the mediations of personal presence that occur as parts of our day-to-day routine: when, for example, we are reading a letter, we are liable to let the oddness of what is happening slip by us unnoticed and unanalyzed. However, I would like to suggest that fictions are places where cultural anxieties about various modes of personal presence may reveal themselves, and that this is also true for twelfth century European culture and its fictions. In the bulk of my dissertation, I will examine the ways in which personal presence is mediated in the late twelfth century romances of Chrétien de Troyes, and will seek to investigate the effects of these mediations on the characters involved in them and on these characters' ethical behavior to one another.¹

Before such an investigation may proceed, some preliminary explanations are in order. In what sense is it possible to speak of personal presence within the genre of Old French romance?² To answer this question requires that I demonstrate what I mean by the terms *personal* (or *person*), and *presence*. My discussion of these terms will occupy a

¹ I am using the word *ethical*, here, in a similar sense to that defined by Wayne Booth when he writes that “[f]rom ancient Greece to the present, the word ‘ethos’ has meant something

² By speaking of *romance*, I am speaking of the poetic form developed in the twelfth century by writers such as Béroul and Thomas (to whom we owe two variants of the *Tristan et Iseut* story), the *Roman de Renart* poet(s), and Chrétien de Troyes himself.

large part of this introduction, and it is in the context of discussing the term *presence* that I will offer an explanation of how I have organized my chapters. I will conclude by giving an account of my methodology.

Terms

Person

Why speak about the *person*, rather than the *subject*? Although both these terms may refer to the human being, as well as to his or her representation in spoken or written language, each term has a distinct history and carries distinct connotations. To study the *subject* and *subjectivity* is to study the grammatical articulation of a particular self.³ Indeed, according to the linguist Emile Benveniste, the subject has its very foundation in language: “[c]’est dans et par le langage que l’homme se constitue comme *sujet*.”⁴ There are at least two interesting things to be pointed out about the term *subject*, whether in French or in English. One is that, when it is used to describe a human being, the term makes no necessary reference to that human being’s body.⁵ The other interesting thing about this term is that it stands in opposition, both grammatically and philosophically, to another term: *object*. By definition, a subject is someone who acts, whereas an object is

³ An example of a highly grammatically dependent definition of subjectivity is the one used by Sarah Kay in her *Subjectivity in Troubadour Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990): by *subjectivity* she means “the elaboration of a first-person position in the rhetoric of courtly poetry” (p. 1).

⁴ *Problèmes de linguistique générale*, Paris: Gallimard (1966), p. 259. Benveniste himself seems to employ almost synonymously the term *sujet* and the term *personne*.

⁵ Michel Zink defines literary subjectivity as “ce qui marque le texte comme le point de vue d’une conscience” (*La subjectivité littéraire*, Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1985, p. 8).

someone or something that is acted upon.⁶ The use of such terms makes it easier to depict a world in which most, if not all, human actions, can be understood as functions of basic power relations.⁷

To speak of *persons* and *personhood*, on the other hand, is, first of all, to speak of what was seen—in the twelfth century, at any rate—as an ontological reality, not merely a linguistic one.⁸ In the case of the human person, this reality was made up of both body and soul.⁹ The terms *person* and *personal* allow us to take into account, when reading

⁶ Kay speaks both of the “alternation of subject and object roles,” in the lyric genre of the *canço*, and to the “alternation between passivity and activity” (*Subjectivity in Troubadour Poetry*, p. 97). The role of the subject is associated, here, with activity, and that of the object with passivity.

⁷ Such an understanding of human activity is visible in Peter Haidu’s *The Subject Medieval / Modern: Text and Governance in the Middle Ages* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004). Haidu states that the “goal of [h]is book” is “[t]o recapture the flickering evanescence of the subject of freedom for a material and agonistic historiography” (p. 5). Speaking of twelfth century romances, he writes, “Power is their focus, vernacular their vehicle, secular their problematic” (*The Subject Medieval / Modern*, p. 98).

⁸ I do not mean to preclude the possibility that talking about persons may lead us into grammatical territory: on the contrary, we ought to note that, in Richard of Saint Victor’s discussion of the term *persona*, he writes that “[a]d interrogationem [...] quis, nomen proprium reddi solet” (“[T]he answer to the question “who?” is a proper name,” *De Trinitate* IV, 7, ed. Gaston Salet, Paris: Sources Chrétiennes, 1959, p. 244; Eng. trans. Ruben Angelici, Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011, p. 147).

⁹ “*Constat namque homo ex corpore et anima; et haec duo simul nonnisi una persona*” (“For man consists of body and soul, and together these two are only one person,” Richard of Saint Victor, *De Trinitate* III, 9, ed. Salet, p. 186; Eng. trans. Grover A. Zinn, New York: Paulist Press, 1979, p. 382). See also *ib.* IV, 10: “[I]n humana natura, alia substantia est corpus et alia est anima, cum tamen non sit nisi una persona” (“[I]n the human nature, the body is a substance and the soul is a different substance: yet, there is but one single person,” *De Trinitate*, p. 248; Eng. trans. Angelici, p. 149). In a similar way, Isaac of Stella speaks of “the high point of the body and the low point of the soul, through which body and soul can be easily joined in a personal union without confusion of nature” (“*corporis [...] supremum, et spiritus infimum, in quibus sine naturarum confusione, personali tamen unione, facile necti possunt*,” *Epistola ad quemdam familiarem suum de anima*, Migne, Patrologia Latina 194, 1875-1890A, downloaded from http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/04z/z_1155-1169_Isaac_Cisterciensis_Abbas_Epistola_Ad_Quemdam_Familiarem_Suum_De_Anima_M_LT.pdf.html; Eng. trans. Bernard McGinn, in *Three Treatises on Man: A Cistercian Anthropology*, ed. McGinn, Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1977, p. 164).

about human characters in a fictional text, not only the text's depiction of these characters' wills and intellects, but its depiction of their bodies, as well. Another way to say this is that these terms allow us to think about the human being as a whole.

Not only this, but the term *person*, when applied to a human being, also permits an idea of human freedom very unlike the one permitted by the term *subject*. In a world of subjects and objects, freedom tends to be understood as independence, plain and simple,¹⁰ whereas in a world of persons, freedom may be understood as the grounds for responsibility. If our very perception of the subject is contingent on his or her enjoying some degree of agency, and if this agency is always won at the cost of someone else's agency, and thus someone else's subjectivity—that is, if every subject defines himself or herself over and against an objectified, or abject, other—then the word *subject* seems to be tied to a logic of dominating and being dominated.¹¹ This does not apply to the word

¹⁰ See, once again, Haidu, who sets out two “models of subjectivity.” As an example of the first, he speaks of the monk who lives according to the Benedictine rule; such a monk, he says, is “an inferior, thrown under the authority and command of another, reduced to ‘passive ... reflex-type conduct’” (*The Subject Medieval / Modern*, p. 9). (In speaking of “‘passive ... reflex-type conduct,’” Haidu is quoting from Theodor Adorno's *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E.B. Ashton, New York: Continuum, 1973-85, p. 277; interestingly enough, the words that Haidu cites come from a section entitled “Against Personalism.”) The second model is characterized, according to Haidu, by “self-assertion” (p. 10).

¹¹ See Judith Butler: “Th[e] exclusionary matrix by which subjects are formed thus requires the simultaneous production of a domain of abject beings, those who are not yet ‘subjects,’ but who form the constitutive outside to the domain of the subject” (*Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex,”* New York: Routledge, 1993, p. 3). My own anthropology is influenced by Christian Smith's description of human beings as “moral, believing, narrating animals,” as well as by a desire, which I share with him, to avoid “laps[ing] into liberal political theory's fictional notions of individual autonomy and self-determined moral agency” (*Moral, Believing Animals: Human Personhood and Culture*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 145 and p. 150). The term *agency*, itself, is closely related to the term *subjectivity*: it would seem, indeed, that the measure of a *subject*, as the term is used in literary criticism today, is the degree to which he or she *acts* independently. Thus Haidu can ask whether Chrétien's Enide “will [...] act as subject, voicing independent judgment of the danger incurred by the couple and especially the husband?” (*The Subject Medieval / Modern*, pp. 100-101).

person; rather, speaking of human *persons* as they are depicted in stories frees us to speak of their relationships to one another in other terms besides those simply of power.

Although the two terms *person* and *subject* are often used, in our own day, to describe the same reality,¹² I want also to propose—*pace* Peter Haidu—that in speaking of the twelfth century person, rather than of the twelfth century subject, we may be slightly less susceptible to anachronism.¹³ Similarly, I prefer to speak of the person instead of the individual, another term that has been used to describe how human beings understood themselves in the twelfth century.¹⁴ Michel Zink is surely right to note the influence of Christian anthropology on art in the Middle Ages; however, in characterizing medieval spirituality as “presque exclusivement préoccupée du salut individuel et de la relation individuelle entre chaque homme et Dieu,”¹⁵ he directs our attention away from the ways in which faith, as understood and practiced in the twelfth century, was formed not only

¹² Indeed, Sarah Kay, who uses the words *subject* and *subjectivity* throughout her book, *Subjectivity in Troubadour Poetry*, proposes the possibility “that medieval readers were prepared to take the first person [in lyric poems] as referring to an ontological entity (a person)” (pp. 212-213). Not only this, but she argues that this possibility has its basis in “a relationship between the lyric first person and the characters of other medieval genres” (p. 212; earlier in her book, on page 49, Kay mentions romance and epic as examples of such genres). My own decision to speak of *persons*, as opposed to *subjects*, is due more to the wider breadth offered by the former term than to a belief that the two terms refer to utterly different realities.

¹³ Haidu argues that “[t]he modern subject was invented in the Middle Ages” (*The Subject Medieval / Modern*, p. 1).

¹⁴ For one way of deploying the term *individual*, see Brigitte Miriam Bedos-Rezak, “Medieval Identity: A Sign and a Concept,” *The American Historical Review* 105.5 (2000), note 9 on p. 1491; Bedos-Rezak borrows a definition from Catherine McCall, *Concepts of Person: An Analysis of Concepts of Person, Self, and Human Being*, Brookfield, VT: Gower Pub. (1990), p. 12. Another possible term is *self*, for which see Ienje van ’t Spijker, *Fictions of the Inner Life: Religious Literature and Formation of the Self in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*, Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols (2004), esp. pp. 1-17; van ’t Spijker also uses the expression *homo interior*.

¹⁵ *La subjectivité littéraire*, p. 13. I do not wish to call into question the perspicacity and helpfulness of Zink’s study as a whole.

by love of God, but also, at times, by love of neighbor.¹⁶ If it is true that theological assumptions about human worth and the human *telos* shaped artistic portrayals of the human being, then it is worth noting, if we want to understand the art of the twelfth century, that, rather than being interested only in their own salvation, at least some people living in twelfth century Europe were also preoccupied, at times, with the “edification” of those around them.¹⁷

It is important to specify, before going further, what this dissertation does *not* aspire to accomplish. This is not a word study; rather, I draw on the concept of *person* as a fruitful means towards understanding the social world of Chrétien’s romances. Nor is my dissertation a genealogical project—I am not searching for the subject, the individual, or the self (much less the modern subject, the modern individual, or the modern self). Finally, I have not set out to write about “self-creation,” as popular as this way of thinking about the individual human being has become in recent years.¹⁸ What I hope to get at, in using the category of *person* to think about twelfth century romances, is the way

¹⁶ My language here echoes the theological expression *fides caritate formata*; I am not sure of this expression’s origins.

¹⁷ Caroline Walker Bynum, “The Spirituality of Regular Canons in the Twelfth Century,” in *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages*, Berkeley: University of California Press (1982), p. 55; see *ib.*, pp. 36-58. Cf (in rather a different context) Chrétien de Troyes, *Erec et Enide*, vv. 1-18 (*Romans*, Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1994, p. 61), as well as John F. Plummer’s remarks in “*Bien dire and bien apprendre* in Chrétien de Troyes’ *Erec et Enide*,” *Romania* 95 (1974), pp. 380-394; and Marie de France, Prologue, vv. 1-4, in *Lais*, trans. Harf-Lancner, ed. Karl Warnke, Paris: Librairie Générale Française (1990), p. 22.

¹⁸ I agree with Smith that, while “[p]ostmodernism wishes to liberate individuals from moral orders by granting the freedom of unfettered self-creation,” this “liberation is an illusion” (*Moral, Believing Animals: Human Personhood and Culture*, p. 156). See also some helpful footnotes in van ’t Spijker’s introduction to her *Fictions of the Inner Life* (notes 27 and 28 on p. 9).

in which these romances portray the human being in his or her relation to other human beings.

According to Richard of Saint Victor, men and women of the period themselves frequently used the word *person*.¹⁹ What did they mean by it? I am unprepared to offer a definitive answer to this question. However, if Richard's own use of the Latin *persona* is any indication of how the term had come to be understood by the twelfth century, we may imagine that it no longer carried the primary denotation that it had in classical times: namely, that of "the mask actors wore in theatres to represent characters in plays."²⁰ By using the word *person* to refer to a human being, here in this introduction, I mean, first of all, following Richard, to refer to that human being as a *quis*—that is, a *who*, as opposed to a *what*²¹—and, second, following Caroline Walker Bynum, to refer to him or her "as a composite of body and soul."²²

When we read Chrétien de Troyes's romances, today, we are dealing with many different persons, historical and fictional. There is the poet himself, shadowy though his

¹⁹ "Nomen personae in ore omnium, etiam rusticorum, versatur" ("The term 'person' is on everybody's lips, even [those of] the unlearned," *De Trinitate* IV, 4, p. 236; *On the Trinity*, trans. Angelici, p. 144).

²⁰ Angelici, introduction to Richard of Saint Victor, *On the Trinity*, p. 47.

²¹ In his explanation of Richard of Saint Victor's definition of a person (and it is necessary to note that Richard is speaking here of divine Persons, not of human persons), Vladimir Lossky writes, "[A] la question *quis*, on répond par un nom propre, qui seul peut désigner la personne" (*A l'image et à la ressemblance de Dieu, A l'image et à la ressemblance de Dieu*, Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1967, p. 116). A similar distinction is made by Isidore of Seville (*Etymologies* VII.iv.3, ed. Stephen A. Barney et al., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, p. 159).

²² Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200-1336*, New York: Columbia University Press (1995), p. 135.

identity is to us.²³ There are various scribes, one of whom is attached to a name.²⁴ There is the romance's narrator, whom we may or may not identify with the poet. Finally, there are the romance's characters. It is the last of these groups that will occupy my attention, here, in the modes through which they are present to one another.

Presence

For a basic notion of presence, I defer to Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, who writes that “[b]y calling them ‘present,’ [...] we are saying that things are ‘in front’ of us and thereby tangible.”²⁵ Using Gumbrecht's description as a point of departure, I understand various modes of presence primarily as analogous, at the level of human experience, to

²³ On Chrétien as a historical person, see Douglas Kelly, “Chrétien de Troyes: The Narrator and His Art,” in *The Romances of Chrétien de Troyes: A Symposium*, ed. Kelly, Lexington, KY: French Forum (1985), pp. 15-20; Daniel Poirion, “Introduction,” in Chrétien de Troyes, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Poirion et al., Paris: Gallimard (1994), pp. x-xxv; Joseph J. Duggan, *The Romances of Chrétien de Troyes*, New Haven: Yale University Press (2001), pp. 4-8; John W. Baldwin, “Chrétien in History,” in *A Companion to Chrétien de Troyes*, ed. Norris J. Lacy and Joan Tasker Grimbert, Rochester, NY: D. S. Brewer (2005), pp. 3-14; Matilda Bruckner, “Chrétien de Troyes,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval French Literature*, ed. Simon Gaunt and Sarah Kay, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2008), pp. 79-94 (I am grateful for this reference to Zrinka Stahuljak et al., *Thinking through Chrétien de Troyes*, Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2011, note 1 on p. 1); Stahuljak et al., *Thinking through Chrétien de Troyes*, pp. 1-14; Lori Walters, “Holy Adultery: The *Charrette*, Crusader Queens, and the Guiot Manuscript (Paris, BNF fr. 794),” in *Dame Philology's Charrette: Approaching Medieval Textuality through Chrétien's Lancelot: Essays in Memory of Karl D. Uitti*, Tempe, AR: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies (2012), p. 41. On Champagne as a “jardin d'amour [...] au XIIe siècle,” see Jean LeClercq, “La Champagne, jardin d'amour,” in *L'Amour vu par les moines au XIIIe siècle*, Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf (1983), pp. 121-148 (I cite *ib.*, p. 134).

²⁴ On Guiot, the scribe associated with Chrétien's romances as they appear in Paris, B.N.F. fr. 794, see Karl D. Uitti with Alfred Foulet, “On Editing Chrétien de Troyes: Lancelot's Two Steps and Their Context,” in *Speculum* 63.2 (1988), pp. 271-292; Jean-Marie Fritz, in Chrétien, *Romans*, pp. 58-59; Charles Méla, in *ib.*, p. 498; David F. Hult, in *ib.*, p. 708; and Keith Busby, *Le Roman de Perceval ou Le Conte du Graal: Édition critique d'après tous les manuscrits*, Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag (1993), pp. 57-60.

²⁵ Gumbrecht, “Presence Achieved in Language (With Special Attention Given to the Presence of the Past),” *History and Theory* 45.3 (2006), p. 319.

bodily presence. I take bodily presence to be normative, for human beings, and other modes to be derivative: that we may speak of being present to another human being through words on a page (or on a screen) depends on our prior notion of what it means to be present to that human being in one's own body.

This kind of analogy has a basis in twelfth century thought, as is evident in two treatises on the human soul. Both Isaac of Stella and the anonymous *On the Spirit and the Soul* compare the relationship between human body and human soul to the relationship between words and the meaning that they express.²⁶ The basis for this kind of image is the notion of the body as that which manifests the soul, that which makes it present in a specific time and place. Although this notion certainly does not preclude the possibility that a human being could be present in some other way—say, through words—it does speak to the sense that the union of *this* body and *this* soul is far from arbitrary.²⁷

I have chosen to treat four different modes of presence. The divisions I have made between these four modes are not rigid; some of the examples I have chosen could be analyzed in terms of more than one mode. In keeping with the notion that it is by analogy to bodily presence that we may then understand other ways of being present, I will begin by looking, in chapter one, at the presence of Chrétien's men and women to

²⁶ See, respectively, Isaac of Stella, *Letter on the Soul*, trans. McGinn, in *Three Treatises on Man: A Cistercian Anthropology*, p. 167; and *On the Spirit and the Soul*, trans. Erasmo Leiva and Sr Benedicta Ward SLG, in *ib.*, p. 182. McGinn writes, of the latter text, that “it is dependent on almost pure quotation and paraphrase from earlier authors,” and that “[t]he very shaky evidence we have seems to suggest production in Cistercian circles some time after 1170” (*ib.*, introduction, p. 63 and p. 67, respectively).

²⁷ On this kind of understanding of the relationship between body and soul, see Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200-1336*, New York: Columbia University Press (1995), pp. 117-155.

one another in their own bodies; in chapter two, at their presence to one another through human intermediaries or representatives; in chapter three, at their presence to one another through objects; and in chapter four, at their presence to one another through language, both spoken and written. The analysis of these modes of personal presence in Chrétien's romances opens up room for asking questions about the desirability of transcending human limitations, about human responsibility and its relation to bodies (and specifically to visibility), and about the relationship between language and memory.

Methodology

In reading Chrétien, I have relied on the work of others at many levels. The first of these is the etymological level, at which I am heavily indebted to several dictionaries, especially those of A. J. Greimas and of Hilaire Van Daele.²⁸ For my basic understanding of Chrétien's poems, I have also found various of his translators to be helpful.²⁹ Although, as I have already said, this is not a word study, I have at times devoted attention to particular words as a means of coming to a better understanding of the passages in which they appear; examples include the words *fantosme*, *vaine*, and *faillie* in chapter three, and the words *emploia* and *entresaignes* in chapter four.

In drawing comparisons between different scenes both within the same romance and across romances, I agree with Matilda Bruckner when she writes that “[r]epetition in the world of romance [...] constitutes the very path by which we can attain meaning through

²⁸ See, respectively, A. J. Greimas, *Dictionnaire de l'ancien français jusqu'au milieu du XIVe siècle*, Paris: Librairie Larousse (1968 [1969 edition]); and Hilaire Van Daele, *Petit Dictionnaire de l'Ancien Français*, Nendeln, Liechtenstein: Kraus Reprint (1969). Other resources that have been helpful are listed under “Reference works” in my bibliography.

²⁹ See translations listed under “Primary sources” in my bibliography.

interpretation, measurement of repeated elements in the play of variation.”³⁰ I believe that insofar as Chrétien’s romances encourage their audience to make judgments about their characters, they tend to do this indirectly, through the use of parallels and variations (to use Bruckner’s word) that motivate us to ask questions such as the following: why might character *X*, in one situation, behave differently from character *Y*, in a similar situation? Which characters, if any, are worthy of emulation? One critic adept at noting such parallels and variations, and at making suggestions based on them, is Antoinette Saly.³¹

Other scholars, particularly Caroline Walker Bynum, Fredric L. Cheyette, Howell Chickering, and Brigitte Miriam Bedos-Rezak, have helped give me a better understanding of the historical context in which Chrétien’s romances were composed.³²

³⁰ Bruckner, *Shaping Romance: Interpretation, Truth, and Closure in Twelfth-Century French Fictions*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press (1993), p. 77. See also Joan Tasker Grimbert, who writes, of “[l]e roman en vers du moyen âge,” that “il faut renoncer à une approche linéaire selon laquelle on procéderait systématiquement d’un bout à l’autre du roman en examinant chaque épisode sur la base uniquement de ce qui précède,” (Yvain *dans le miroir: Une Poétique de la réflexion dans le Chevalier au lion de Chrétien de Troyes*, Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1988, p. 9). I believe that Grimbert describes a valuable way of reading Chrétien, but am aware, at the same time, that many members of Chrétien’s medieval audience may have experienced his poems in just the way that she rejects, here (see Evelyn Birge Vitz, *Orality and Performance in Early French Romance*, Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1999, p. xii).

³¹ See Saly, “Le Chevalier au Lion : Un jeu de cache-cache ?,” in Saly, *Image, Structure et Sens : Études arthuriennes*, Aix-en-Provence, France: Publications du CUER MA (1994), pp. 23-32; and “L’itinéraire intérieur dans le *Perceval* de Chrétien de Troyes et la structure de la quête de Gauvain,” in *Voyage, quête, pèlerinage dans la littérature et la civilisation médiévales ; actes du colloque organisé par le C.U.E.R. M.A.*, Aix-en-Provence: Edition CUER MA (1976), pp. 353-360. It is through Tony Hunt that I was directed to the former piece (see “*Le Chevalier au Lion: Yvain Lionheart*,” in *A Companion to Chrétien de Troyes*, note 11 on p. 158), and through Mimi Zhou that I was directed to the latter (see “‘Le Senestre Chemin’: Aporia, Paradox, and the Ritual Act of the Search in Chretien [sic] de Troyes’ Conte du Graal,” *UCB Comparative Literature Undergraduate Journal* 2.3, Summer 2012, note 14).

³² For Bynum, see the works cited in my bibliography; for Cheyette and Chickering, see “Love, Anger, and Peace: Social Practice and Poetic Play in the Ending of Yvain,” *Speculum* 80.1

Bynum's work has been helpful to me in its demonstration of the distinction between "twentieth-century awareness of personality" and "twelfth-century discovery of self."³³ Cheyette and Chickering have helped to underline the importance, against the background of medieval "conflict resolution,"³⁴ of the character Lunete's mediation between the protagonist of Chrétien's *Chevalier au Lion* and his wife,³⁵ a mediation that I examine in chapter three. And Bedos-Rezak's article on "Medieval Identity" has helped me theorize personal representation by means of signs, in chapter four.

Finally, I have been influenced at a theoretical level by Denis de Rougemont, Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, Eelco Runia, and Marshall McLuhan.³⁶ Although De Rougemont's *L'amour et l'Occident* was originally published in 1939, it still offers a helpful paradigm of a kind of romantic love, *amour-passion*, in comparison to which the particular shapes

(2005), pp. 75-117; for Bedos-Rezak, see "Medieval Identity: A Sign and a Concept," *The American Historical Review* 105.5 (2000), pp. 1489-1533.

³³ Bynum, "Did the Twelfth Century Discover the Individual?" in *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages*, Berkeley: University of California Press (1982), p. 90. "The twelfth-century person," Bynum explains, "did not 'find himself' by casting off inhibiting patterns but by adopting appropriate ones" (*ib.*, p. 90). See Sharon Kinoshita, who writes, of "the first of [Enide's] many monologues," in Chrétien's *Erec et Enide*, that "[i]t clearly represents the emergence of an 'interiority' ostensibly marking the 'individuality' long taken to be the hallmark of romance" ("Feudal Agency and Female Subjectivity," in Stahuljak et al., *Thinking through Chrétien de Troyes*, pp. 122-123). Kinoshita then makes an interesting and persuasive point: "[f]or Enide, however, this is not a positive achievement but a symptom of the way she fails to fit" (*ib.*, p. 123).

³⁴ Cheyette and Chickering, "Love, Anger, and Peace: Social Practice and Poetic Play in the Ending of Yvain," p. 89.

³⁵ See Cheyette and Chickering, *ib.*, pp. 96-104 and pp. 110-116.

³⁶ See, respectively, De Rougemont, *L'Amour et l'Occident*, Paris: Librairie Plon (1972; orig. pub. 1939); Gumbrecht, "Presence Achieved in Language (With Special Attention Given to the Presence of the Past);" Runia, "Presence," *History and Theory* 45.1 (Feb. 2006), pp. 1-29 (I suspect it is through Gumbrecht's piece that I was led to Runia's; see Gumbrecht, "Presence Achieved in Language," note 10 on p. 323); and McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, New York: McGraw-Hill (1965; orig. pub. 1964).

of Lancelot's love for Guenièvre and Enide's love for her husband (in the *Chevalier de la Charrette* and *Erec et Enide*, respectively) may be more clearly discerned.³⁷ I have already acknowledged my debt to Gumbrecht's definition of presence; also helpful to me have been his distinction between presence-cultures and meaning-cultures,³⁸ and his suggestions about how presence may be mediated through language.³⁹ Runia has helped me think about metonymy as a mode of presence.⁴⁰ And McLuhan's work in *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* has proved helpful, in my third and fourth chapters as well as in my conclusion, for the notion of media as "extensions" of human beings.⁴¹

My treatment of the modes through which Chrétien's characters are present to one another has not been exhaustive. For each of the four modes on which I have based my chapters, I have chosen particular examples, organizing the chapter around close readings of these examples. The work I have done has been largely typological, consisting of comparisons of different modes and sub-modes of personal presence, as well as of their effects.

³⁷ See De Rougemont, *L'Amour et l'Occident*, pp. 25-39.

³⁸ See Gumbrecht, "Presence Achieved in Language," pp. 319-320 and pp. 323-324.

³⁹ See *ib.*, pp. 320-325.

⁴⁰ See Runia, "Presence," pp. 6-29.

⁴¹ See McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, pp. 45-46.

I am convinced that, in reading Chrétien's romances, to seek out sites of power is to tell only part of the story.⁴² What becomes easily obscured or even lost in such projects is the human being himself or herself as he or she is depicted in these poems, and who, oftentimes, has both abject and subject-like characteristics.⁴³ By referring to the human being, I mean not simply the human voice, but rather the complex creature suggested by the word *person* in its application to human beings: for whereas a subject seems to be a grammatical abstraction, unattached to any material reality, a human person has a body, and thus a capacity to be present to other human persons. In writing about modes of personal presence in Chrétien's romances, I hope to deepen critical conversations about these romances by demonstrating the variety of ethical possibilities that Chrétien's characters propose to us in their relationships with one another, possibilities that do not confine themselves simply to "passive ... reflex-type conduct," on the one hand, or "self-assertion," on the other.⁴⁴

⁴² Nor is expanding one's attention so as to encompass not only *power* but also *ideology* enough to remedy the lacuna. For it seems to me that *ideology*, at least as the term is used by Marxist critics, can always be reduced to power's own justification of itself.

⁴³ See Bynum's reference to her friend's complaint about "the body dissolv[ing] into language" ("Why All the Fuss about the Body? A Medievalist's Perspective," *Critical Inquiry* 22.1, Autumn 1995, p. 1).

⁴⁴ Haidu, *The Subject Medieval / Modern*, p. 9 and p. 10, respectively. For the source of Haidu's reference to "passive ... reflex-type conduct," see my earlier footnote.

CHAPTER I

PRESENCE IN BODIES

One of the purposes of this dissertation is to test, and to corroborate, if possible, Caroline Walker Bynum's observation that, if we truly want to understand the concerns we find in a particular discourse of a given culture—in philosophical discourse, for example—it may help us to look at the ways in which these concerns find their way into other discourses of that culture.⁴⁵ The path by which they do this is, of course, not a one-way street: it would be difficult, in most cases, to say which discourse, whether philosophical, literary, popular, or some combination of all of these, gave birth, in the first place, to any specific problem that worries us. I will make no attempt, here, to answer such genealogical questions. Rather, I want to suggest that members of a given culture do tend to pose themselves, whether explicitly or implicitly, a common set of questions, be they philosophers, writers of popular fiction, musicians, or accountants.⁴⁶

How is the human body inscribed in a text? Often this occurs by the mention or the portrayal of limitations to which we are subject because of our bodies: among these

⁴⁵ Bynum gives us an example of this method in her article, "Material Continuity, Personal Survival, and the Resurrection of the Body: A Scholastic Discussion in Its Medieval and Modern Contexts," *History of Religions* 30.1 (1990), remarking that "the examples used in philosophical investigation [...] may be the place where popular assumptions and academic discourse touch each other most closely and most specifically" (p. 59).

⁴⁶ This is certainly not to say that they answer these questions in the same way. As Bynum herself reminds us elsewhere, "It would be no more correct to say that medieval doctors, rabbis, alchemists, prostitutes, wet nurses, preachers, and theologians had 'a' concept of 'the body' than it would be to say that Charles Darwin, Beatrix Potter, a poacher, and the village butcher had 'a' concept of 'the rabbit'" ("Why All the Fuss about the Body? A Medievalist's Perspective," *Critical Inquiry* 22.1, 1995, p. 8).

limitations are time, place, sickness, and death. Far from being a uniquely twelfth century concern, the question of what it means to be personally present also motivates the fictions we read and write today. We worry about how the transcendence of bodily limitations may bring about isolation, the forsaking of personal responsibility, and the lack of a connection to a place. In other words, we worry about what other modes of presence, beyond the bodily, do to our relationships with other people and with the world around us. One may argue that this is because bodies are not only sites of limitation but also sites of connection.⁴⁷

This chapter is an investigation, conducted mainly through close readings of examples from the romances, of how personal presence is mediated (or “achieved,” to use Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht’s term⁴⁸) through bodies in these poems. I have divided the chapter according to three different roles, all three of which are among the most frequent of the roles occupied by Chrétien’s characters throughout the romances. These roles—the role of a knight, the role of a lover, and the role of a host—all have particular practices and patterns attached to them.⁴⁹ In each section of the chapter, I will ask how embodiment, and the particular kind of personal presence that it makes possible, contributes to the ability of Chrétien’s characters to fulfill the role under consideration.

⁴⁷ Thus N.-A. Luyten writes, “Nous pouvons dire que le corps n’est autre chose que la présence de l’esprit au monde matériel, avec tout ce qu’implique cette présence” (*La Condition corporelle de l’homme*, Fribourg: Editions universitaires, 1957, p. 24).

⁴⁸ See Gumbrecht, “Presence Achieved in Language (With Special Attention Given to the Presence of the Past),” *History and Theory* 45.3 (2006).

⁴⁹ In *Narrative Invention in Twelfth-Century French Romance: The Convention of Hospitality (1160-1200)* (Lexington, KY: French Forum, 1980), Matilda Bruckner has suggested that the convention of hospitality “plays a vital role in twelfth-century romance” alongside the conventions of combat and love.

How important, to the tasks and responsibilities of being a knight, is bodily presence? How important is it to being a lover? To being a host? What happens when someone who ought to be bodily present is instead bodily absent? These are some of the questions I will attempt to answer, here.

Bodily presence and being a knight

This section will deal with two different conceptions of knighthood by which Chrétien's knights abide. The first I have called the knighthood of the *siècle*, a term which, in the twelfth century, had not only a chronological, but also a sort of philosophical, meaning. To speak of the *siècle*, or *siegle*, as does Perceval's mother in *Le Conte du Graal*, was to speak of the realm of temporal things, as opposed to that of eternity.⁵⁰ By speaking of the knighthood of the *siècle*, I am describing a kind of knighthood that can be understood on its own terms, without reference to other external considerations. Adherents to the knighthood of the *siècle* have, as their judges, persons who already stand within its scope: these knights, in other words, are judged by other knights. I will distinguish between this kind of knighthood, practiced mainly for the sake

⁵⁰ Perceval's mother urges him to "*proier nostre Seigneur / Q'an cest siegle vos doinst enor / Et si vos i doint contenir / Qu'a bone fin puissiez venir*" ("pray to our Lord, that He grant you honor in this age, and that, in this way, He deign to lead you in it, so that you may come to a good end," *Le Conte du Graal*, vv. 533-536, my translation, for help with which I am indebted to Daniel Poirion's modern French translation in Chrétien de Troyes, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Poirion et al., Paris: Gallimard, 1994). For citations of the romances, I rely, throughout the dissertation, on the edition of Chrétien's collected works published by Librairie Générale Française (Chrétien de Troyes, *Romans*, Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1994). In general, the English translations I have cited, for Chrétien's poems, are those of David Staines in *The Complete Romances of Chrétien de Troyes* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990); I have tried to indicate when this is not the case.

of goods internal to itself, and a second kind, practiced not only for its own sake but also for the sake of goods that come from outside the world of knighthood itself.

The knighthood of the siècle

In the following passage from the *Chevalier au lion*, Chrétien's protagonist is conversing with his host, the lord of a castle. Yvain has just asked the host why everyone in the castle is so distraught, and his host has explained that their grief is the result of a terrible alternative that awaits him the very next day: a giant has kidnapped his six sons, has killed two of them, and threatens to kill the other four. This fate can be avoided only if their father finds someone to challenge the giant, or gives him, in exchange for his four sons, his daughter. In the verses directly preceding the passage below, Yvain has expressed his surprise that the host has not "*quis conseil / A la court le fort roi Artu*" (vv. 3902-3903).⁵¹ The reason for this failure, as it turns out, has to do with Gauvain's absence:

*Et lors li descovre et desloie
Li riches hom quē il eüst
Boine aÿe, sē il seüst
Ou trouver monseigneur Gavain :
'Chil ne l'enpresist pas en vain,
Que ma femme est sa seur germaine.
Mais la femme le roi en maine
Un chevalier d'estrangle tere,
Si l'ala a le court requerre ;
Ne pour che ja ne l'en eüst
Menee pour riens que il seüst
Ne fust Keus qui embriconna
Le roy tant quē il li bailla
Le roÿne et mist en se garde.
Chil fu faus et chele musarde
Qui en son conduit se fia.
Et ge sui cil qui ja i a*

⁵¹ "[...] sought counsel / At the court of the strong king Arthur" (my translation).

*Trop grant damage et trop grant perte.
 Et chë est chose toute aperte
 Que mesire Gavains li preus,
 Pour sa nieche et pour ses neveux,
 Fust cha venus grant aleüre
 Së il seüst cheste aventure.
 Mais il ne set, dont tant me grieve,
 Pour poi que li cuers ne m'en crieve ;
 Ains est alés après chelui
 Qui Damedix doinst grant anui
 Quant menee en a le roÿne.’
 Mesire Yvains onques ne fine
 De souspirer quant chë entent ;
 De la pitié quë il l'em prent
 Li respont: ‘Biaux dolz sires chiers,
 Je m'en metroie volentiers
 En l'aventure et el peril
 Se li gaians et vostre fil
 Venoient demain a tel heure
 Que n'i faiche trop grant demeure,
 Que je serai ailleurs que chi
 Demain a heure de midi,
 Si comme je l'ai creanté. (vv. 3908-3947)⁵²*

Eugene Vance has argued, based on this and other episodes in *Le Chevalier au lion*, that in this romance we see a special attention to chronological—that is, measurable—time:

“Time in *Yvain* has precise value, and timeliness is a great virtue.”⁵³ I would add that, in

⁵² “The noble man explained to him that he would have had great assistance had he known where to find Sir Gawain. ‘Not in vain would I have entreated him, because my wife is his own sister. But a knight from a foreign land went to the court to ask for the king’s wife, and has led her away. Yet for all his efforts he would never have taken her had it not been for Kay, who tricked the king into entrusting him with the queen and placing her in his keeping. He was a fool, and she foolish to entrust herself to his escort. And I in turn endure such great pain and loss, for had the brave Sir Gawain known what was happening, he certainly would have raced here for the sake of his niece and his nephews. But he is ignorant of this, and I am so sad that my heart is almost breaking. Gawain has gone in pursuit of the knight. May the Lord God bring that knight great harm for leading away the queen.’ While listening, Sir Yvain did not restrain his sighs. Moved by pity, he responded, ‘Dear noble sir, I would gladly undertake this dangerous adventure if tomorrow the giant comes with your sons early enough to prevent my delay, for to keep a promise, I will be elsewhere tomorrow at noon.’”

⁵³ Vance, *Mervelous Signals: Poetics and Sign Theory in the Middle Ages* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), p. 138. See also Poirion’s introduction to the Pléiade edition of Chrétien’s works: “L’idée d’aventure suppose une attention particulière prêtée au temps, durée du récit pour le lecteur, ordre successif des événements pour les personnages” (Chrétien, *Oeuvres complètes*, p. xxx).

the foregoing passage, attention to time is closely allied with an attention to bodies as modes of presence. We see at least two signs of this attention to bodies. First of all, we see that the host's predicament has been drastically worsened through the absence of a particular body, that of Gauvain, for the host "*eüst / Boine aÿe, s'ë il seüst / Ou trouver monseigneur Gavain*" (vv. 3909-3911).⁵⁴ Second, we see that, within the poem's chivalric economy, bodily presence is highly valued, and that the value of a particular human body can be measured in prowess. It is through Yvain's body that he manifests his knightly prowess, and it is because this body is needed elsewhere that he has such a limited amount of time during which to deal with the giant.

Bodily presence is integral to all of the knightly responsibilities mentioned in this passage, whether it is a question of keeping watch over someone who has been put into one's protection (vv. 3920-3921), going to the rescue of a captive (vv. 3933-3934), combatting giants (vv. 3940-3941), or intervening to save someone from being burnt at the stake (vv. 3945-3947). (This last responsibility has fallen on Yvain because of his promise to Lunete.) And it is often because of one knight's bodily absence that another's bodily presence becomes necessary.⁵⁵ Gauvain replaces Arthur as the natural protector of the queen; Yvain then replaces Gauvain as the natural protector of Gauvain's niece and nephews. At the origin of the successive absences leading to the plight of Yvain's host lies Arthur's initial absence from his wife's side as she is led off by Méléagant, and

⁵⁴ He "would have had great assistance had he known where to find Sir Gawain."

⁵⁵ I will have cause to discuss this phenomenon of replacement more deeply in my next chapter, and to distinguish it from the phenomenon of representation.

accompanied by Keu, in *Le Chevalier a la charrette*.⁵⁶ Arthur's absence brings about Guenièvre's and then Gauvain's absence from their places at the court. "*Et ge sui cil,*" says the host, "*qui ja i a / Trop grant damage et trop grant perte*" (vv. 3924-3925).⁵⁷ Arthur's failure to take care of Guenièvre, far from being relevant only to their marriage, is a calamity with ever growing social ramifications. Nor is the host the last in the chain of persons affected by this failure—rather, his need for Yvain's presence threatens to affect, in turn, the latter's ability to fulfill the earlier promise he has made to Lunete. A whole constellation of disastrous absences is responsible for involving Yvain in the time constraints that he mentions here (vv. 3945-3946): both the host's and Lunete's problems can be solved only through bodily presence, and specifically through a knight's willingness to put his own body "[*e*]n l'aventure et el peril (v. 3941).⁵⁸

Inasmuch, then, as the knights Chrétien depicts are responsible for coming to the aid of those incapable of defending themselves, they must fulfill this responsibility either in person—that is, through their own bodily presence—or by sending others to be their representatives. When called upon for help, the knight resorts, as a rule, neither to letters, nor to spells, nor even to prayers; rather, he "sets forth," to use Erich Auerbach's words.⁵⁹ It is a condition of the knight's ability to restore justice that he do so in his own body.

⁵⁶ See *Charrette*, vv. 171-223.

⁵⁷ "And I am the one to whom this has now brought very great suffering and very great loss" (my translation, for help with which I have consulted the French translation of David F. Hult, in the Librairie Générale Française edition of Chrétien's works).

⁵⁸ "In adventure and in danger" (my translation). The central absence in the *Lion* is, of course, Yvain's absence from his wife. In participating in adventures like these, he is thus not only serving as a substitute for Gauvain, but also redeeming his own past delinquency.

⁵⁹ Auerbach, *Mimesis* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), pp. 123-142.

This makes sense especially if we think of medieval society as separated into the three orders of *oratores*, *bellatores*, and *laboratores*; certainly the word *bellator*, in particular, implies the performance of certain bodily acts.⁶⁰ To stop here, though, would be to neglect an extraordinarily important dimension of what it means to be a knight, in Chrétien's romances. There is another practice in which the knight is expected to engage, and that the knight cannot accomplish except through his body: *viz.* the practice of searching for adventures. This practice is less readily comprehensible than those already mentioned, yet it is also foundational to them. For not only is it the knight's responsibility to right certain concrete wrongs by means of his own body, but it is also his responsibility, again by means of his own body, to wander about, looking for wrongs to right. When Erec leaves home with Enide, he is not answering a specific call for help: "*Erec s'en va, sa fame en moinne, / Ne set quel part, en aventure*" (vv. 2762-2763).⁶¹ Yet it is still necessary, if he wants to reoccupy his place as a knight, that he leave home in the first place.⁶²

Bodily presence is required, then for rescuing those in need, as well as for seeking adventure. It is also required—although not sufficient—for the specific task (a task that may be separated only artificially from the first two) of establishing and maintaining

⁶⁰ See Vance, *Merveulous Signals*, p. 111; Vance notes both the limitations and the "heuristic value" of this model.

⁶¹ "Erec set out on his way, taking his wife with him. He did not know his direction, but rode on according to chance."

⁶² I have not mentioned here the complexity, not to say the *mystery*, of Erec's motivation in leaving, nor his refusal to take anyone along with him besides his wife. It seems to me that Erec's desire to reenter the world of *aventure* (v. 2763) is subordinated to his desire to re-establish his reputation (see vv. 2572-2573), and that both these desires are tangled up with his desire to be sure of Enide's love for him (see vv. 4918-4919).

one's reputation as a knight. Arthur is called *faus* in the passage cited above because he has trusted unwisely in Keu's *conduit*, that is, his accompaniment, of the queen (v. 3923). It is clear from the speech of Yvain's host that, by giving over his own responsibility of *conduit* to an unworthy representative, the king has damaged his own reputation. We see another example of the way that bodily absence can adversely affect a knight's reputation in *Erec et Enide*. It is precisely because of the loss of Erec's body to the chivalric world that he is *blasmez de totes genz* (v. 2459), criticized by people from various walks of life. Indeed, the poem makes it very clear that the problem is specifically Erec's own bodily absence—for he never ceases, even at the height of his absorption in his wife, to fit out his own knights with everything they need in order to attend, and participate in, tournaments: "*Mais onques por ce ne donoit / De riens moins a ses chevaliers*" (vv. 2446-2447).⁶³ If Erec's fulfillment of the expectations placed on him by the world of knighthood could have been accomplished by means of representation—that is, by sending others in his place—there would have been no complaints regarding his behavior. The implication of this crux in Chrétien's romance is that it is impossible to respond adequately, from a distance, to accusations of *recreantise*.

The importance of bodily presence to the keeping up of one's knightly reputation is especially evident when it comes to tournaments. In *Le Chevalier au lion*, Yvain asks his wife Laudine for a leave of absence, not because he has been called upon to help anyone in particular, but rather because Gauvain has convinced him that it is the job of a knight, even once he is married, to continue seeking glory for himself: "*Or ne devés vous pas songier, / Mais les tournoiementz ongiez / Et emprendre a fort joster*" (vv. 2505-

⁶³ "Yet he was no less generous to his knights[.]"

2507).⁶⁴ Gauvain makes a strict division between the life of a lover, by nature contemplative, and a life devoted to increasing one's fame through competition with other knights. “*Assés songe,*” he says, “*qui ne se muet*” (v. 2509).⁶⁵ Dreaming is static and thus incompatible with the active pursuit of glory. The true *chevalier* is alert, not asleep. Gauvain's conception of knighthood is shared, in *Cligès*,⁶⁶ by Alixandres, who remarks, near the beginning of the romance, that

[M]eint haut home par lor peresce
 Perdent grant los que il porroient
 Avoir se par le monde erroient.
 Ne s'acordent pas bien ensemble
 Repos et los, si com moi semble,
 Car de rien nule ne s'alose
 Riches hom qui touz jorz repose.
 Proesce est fais a mauvés home
 Et au preuz est mauvestiez some,
 Einsint sont contraire et divers. (vv. 154-163)⁶⁷

Note, first of all, the poet's use of antithesis: *repos* and *los*, like dreaming and tournaments, are utterly irreconcilable with one another. It is also worth mentioning that Alixandres associates *los*—that is, praise, or glory—with wandering about “*par le monde*” (v. 156); in order to be a good *chevalier*, it is necessary, above all, to keep moving.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ “You must not daydream now. You have to frequent and engage in tournaments and strike with all your force[.]”

⁶⁵ “He is indeed in a dream who does not stir.”

⁶⁶ I am spelling “Cligès” as it is spelled in Chrétien, *Romans*, p. 285.

⁶⁷ “Through their laziness, many highborn men lose the great renown that could be theirs were they to travel the world. Rest and renown, in my opinion, are not compatible, for a powerful man who is all the time at rest adds nothing to his renown. Thus the two are divergent and contrary.”

⁶⁸ See Poirion: “L'aventure est liée à une morale de l'action, à une conception de la vie comme élan vers l'avenir, projection de soi vers le monde, projet de la pensée curieuse de

If it is through their bodies that knights like Gauvain and Yvain render services and safeguard their reputations, it is also through their bodies, or rather through the limitations imposed on them by their bodies, that they are prevented from doing these things. It seems banal to point it out, but Gauvain cannot at the same time pursue the queen's captor and rescue his niece and nephews.⁶⁹ What is more, in *Le Chevalier de la charrette*, it is precisely temporal delay that he cites as the reason for his failure to rescue Guenièvre: “[*J*]e n’i ving n’a tans n’a ore, / Failli i ai par ma demore” (vv. 5325-5326).⁷⁰ In a similar way, Yvain cannot simultaneously defeat the giant and fulfill his promise to Lunete. The limitations of time and place so visible in the extract with which I began this section are important because they make plain the *shape* of the life to which the knight is meant to aspire. In doing so they contribute to the romance’s “inquir[y] into the human good,” as Martha Nussbaum puts it.⁷¹ Gauvain, in particular, does not seek transcendence, as a rule. Rather, his pursuits are directed towards ends that are basically immanent. He does seek glory, but the glory that he wins for himself is an immanent sort of glory, a glory that has its place in the sphere of Arthur’s court and in the pockets of the wider world where the conventions of that sphere are shared.

Yvain differs very little from him in this regard until the arrival of the messenger from his wife who reminds him of his broken promise to her (*Le Chevalier au lion*, vv.

découverte, défi au sort et au danger” (introduction to Chrétien, *Oeuvres complètes*, pp. xxx-xxxii).

⁶⁹ Interestingly, Gauvain is not even aware of his niece’s and nephews’ predicament (v. 3931); among his bodily limitations are limitations of knowledge.

⁷⁰ “I did not arrive in time. My delay caused my failure.”

⁷¹ Nussbaum, *Love’s Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature*, New York: Oxford University Press (1990), p. 390.

2704-2780). At least two moments in the romance suggest that, up to this point, Yvain has, like Gauvain, adhered to the knighthood of the *siècle*. First, it is noteworthy that, after having killed Laudine's husband, earlier in the story, Yvain is troubled by the knowledge that he has nothing to bring back with him to the court as proof that he has in fact defeated his opponent: "*Du cors qu'il voit quē on enfuet / Li poise, quant avoir ne puet / Aucune cose qu'il en port / Tesmoing qu'i l'a conquis et mort*" (vv. 1345-1348).⁷² Yvain is determined to accomplish feats of prowess in such a way that they will be visible, or at least demonstrable, to his fellow knights; it is essential to such an understanding of knighthood that the knight be able to produce physical signs of his exploits. The high value that Yvain places on knighthood as spectacle—on the kind of knighthood in which it is important not only to perform certain deeds in one's body, but also to have one's body recognized by others—is evident, too, in his consent to leave his wife so that he may attend tournaments with Gauvain (vv. 2479-2546). In order to be a knight of the sort that Yvain wishes to be, at this stage in the romance, he must continue to put in an appearance at the kinds of gatherings where his feats will be noticed.

For Gauvain, as well as for Yvain before he recognizes the injury he has done to his wife, the whole business of being a knight has, as its object, goods that are internal to knighthood. In other words, the good for which they strive is the knightly way of life itself, and the fame that comes from practicing this way of life well. This good cannot be achieved unless they are bodily present at the court or in places whence reports of their activities will return to the court. That said, the knight's (or at least the hero's) prolonged presence at court would itself be suspect, if we believe Charles Méla, for whom the

⁷² "As for the body, which he sees being buried, it displeases him that he cannot have anything to take away from it as evidence that he has conquered and killed him" (my translation).

“sens” of Arthur’s court is “d’être ce lieu de toute parole où recueillir les nouvelles de l’Autre Monde, les voix des Fées, les échos de la gloire, mais dont un héros s’absente toujours pour n’y laisser que son renom.”⁷³

The knighthood of the siècle transcended

What about Lancelot, and Perceval? Lancelot does not follow quite the same model of knighthood as Gauvain—what we might call the immanent model.⁷⁴ Although he does appear at the tournament of Noauz, he is present there not so much *qua* knight as *qua* lover. This is made clear by his decision to fight incognito.⁷⁵ There are, however, moments in *Le Chevalier de la charrette* when Lancelot does engage in certain behaviors characteristic of knighthood as it is practiced in *Le Chevalier au lion*. For example, even Lancelot—as single-minded as he is in his devotion to the queen—must still, like his fellow knights, succor those in need. And here we arrive at one of the complexities of Lancelot’s role in the *Charrette*. On the one hand, Guenièvre does not need to be bodily present to Lancelot in order for him to be her lover, for nothing prevents him, no matter where he is and no matter who is accompanying him, from at least thinking about her.⁷⁶

⁷³ Méla, *Blanchefleur et le saint homme ou la semblance des reliques*, Paris: Seuil (1979), p. 32.

⁷⁴ Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner speaks of Lancelot’s “own, anomalous heroism” (*Shaping Romance: Interpretation, Truth, and Closure in Twelfth-Century French Fictions*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993, p. 62).

⁷⁵ See *Charrette*, vv. 5510-6035. If, as Bruckner has argued, “the tournament episode operates as a *mise en abyme* of the entire romance,” the story’s portrayal of Lancelot in that episode gives us an especially concentrated look at the kind of knighthood that he espouses and practices (*Shaping Romance*, p. 61).

⁷⁶ When he is in the company of the damsel who has, the night before, pretended that she was being assaulted by her servants, Lancelot is so deep in thought that he does not even want to

On the other hand, he may accomplish those things required of a knight only by being bodily present to accomplish them.

This tension is perfectly illustrated when the protagonist and a maiden who is traveling under his protection discover a comb containing some of Guenièvre's hair. Upon finding out whose hair is in the comb, Lancelot comes close to fainting, and proceeds to treat the hair as if it was the relic of a saint. He does not fully emerge from this contemplative state until the maiden whom he is supposed to be defending is on the point of being led away by another knight; when she warns him of the knight's approach, he says only, "*Alez, alez!*" (v. 1536),⁷⁷ which, explains the narrator, is as good as saying, "*Po m'en chaut, / Que por neant vos esmaiez, / De chose que dite m'aiez*" (vv. 1538-1540).⁷⁸ Although this gloss, on the narrator's part, may be interpreted merely to mean that Lancelot wishes the maiden to understand that she is in no danger, I would like to suggest that Lancelot dismisses her warning not only because he regards her worries as unnecessary, but also because she is interrupting him from his dreaming. Although Lancelot is not present in body to Guenièvre, at this point in the story, she is more present to him, mentally, than is his companion. In order to fulfill his promise to the maiden, Lancelot must engage in battle with the other knight, thus becoming, once again, present

talk to her: "*Pansers li plest, parlars li grieve*" ("Thinking pleases him, speaking burdens him," *Charrette*, v. 1335). See also vv. 1361-1362 for another example of Lancelot's absorption in his thoughts.

⁷⁷ "Go on, go on!" (My translation.)

⁷⁸ "I care little about anything you have said to me, for you are dismayed for nothing" (my translation).

to the physical world around him.⁷⁹ Still, it is clear that the battle itself is more an interruption from that which is occupying his thoughts than a welcome opportunity to exhibit his prowess.⁸⁰ As a knight, Lancelot is obliged to pay attention, from time to time, to his immediate surroundings; he is never, however, as fully present to the persons who seek his aid, on his journey, as is Gauvain. Rather, he tends to remain somewhat abstracted from them.⁸¹

As for Perceval, he is confronted, at the beginning of the *Conte du Graal*, with an

⁷⁹ Another example of this is the moment, earlier in the romance, when Lancelot is riding along, so rapt in thought that “[...] *il n’ot ne voit ne rien n’antant*” (“he neither hears, nor sees, nor pays attention to anything,” *Charrette*, v. 724, my translation, for help with which I have consulted both Poirion’s Modern French translation in Chrétien, *Oeuvres complètes*, and Ruth Harwood Cline’s English translation, in *Lancelot or The Knight of the Cart*, Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1990), and is awakened from his reverie only by being tossed into a *gué* by the knight who is guarding it (see vv. 711-771). It is thanks, in part, to Peter Haidu’s commentary that I tracked down this scene, which he compares with the scene, in the *Conte du Graal*, when Arthur is similarly roused from his thoughts by Perceval’s having inadvertently knocked his hat off (see *Conte*, vv. 861-899): “[t]he comic means are grosser in the Lancelot episode,” writes Haidu, “including movement, a number of ‘properties,’ and a more direct preparation for the comic climax. [...] The Lancelot episode is farcical; the Perceval parallel is suggestive only” (*Aesthetic Distance in Chrétien de Troyes: Irony and Comedy in Cligès and Perceval*, Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1968, p. 138).

⁸⁰ At at least one point Lancelot does attempt to require, of a knight whom he has defeated, that this knight render himself prisoner “*la ou ge voldrai*” (“there where I wish,” *Charrette*, v. 909, my translation); this is a traditional method, in Chrétien’s romances, of advertising one’s victories. However, he relents when the *dameisele* accompanying the defeated knight begs that her companion be allowed to go free.

⁸¹ For an example of the difference between the two knights’ responses to those around them, see the scene just before Lancelot catches sight of the queen through a window: “*As fenestres dever la pree / S’an vint li chevaliers pansis [...] Et esgardoit aval les prez. / A l’autre fenestre delez / Estoit la pucele venue, / Si l’i ot a consoil tenue / Mes sire Gauvains an requoi, / Une piece, ne sai de quoi*” (“The pensive knight came up to the windows that look out on the meadow [...] and was looking down at the meadows. The damsel had come to the other, neighboring window, and my lord Gauvain had sought her counsel there for a while in secret, I know not on what subject,” *Charrette*, vv. 540-541; 543-548, my translation, for help with which I have consulted both Cline’s and Poirion’s translations). I will offer an analysis of this passage in chapter three.

example of what seems to be the model of knightly life represented by Gauvain.⁸² Perceval's determination to leave home, in order to become a knight like the ones he meets, indicates his acknowledgment of the requirement that a knight be bodily present in the world—that is, the world outside the *gaste forest* (v. 73). However, it is at the moment of Perceval's departure that the *Conte du Graal* offers us something that is lacking in Chrétien's other poems. The *Conte* gives us—in the character of Perceval's mother, first of all—an alternate reading of the paradigm of immanent knighthood that has been established in the other romances.⁸³ There is irony in his mother's remark that Perceval has met with “[*l*]es anges don les genz se plaignent / Qui ocient quant qu'il ataignent” (vv. 371-372).⁸⁴ It is unclear whether, when she says this, she has already guessed the true identity of what her son has called the “[*l*]es plus beles choses qui sont” (v. 365),⁸⁵ or whether she believes him to have met with devils—the description could designate either knightly or diabolical violence.⁸⁶ At any rate, the knights' bodily

⁸² I will include an analysis of this scene in my second chapter.

⁸³ Others have noted what we might call the “transvaluation of values” distinctive to the *Conte du Graal*, although interpretations of this transvaluation have varied.

⁸⁴ “[T]he angels people complain of, and who kill all they meet.”

⁸⁵ “[T]he most beautiful creatures[.]”

⁸⁶ According to Haidu, she is already talking about knights, here (*The Subject Medieval / Modern: Text and Governance in the Middle Ages*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004, p. 102). Emmanuèle Baumgartner agrees, speaking of “ces chevaliers en qui la mère de Perceval ne voit que des anges exterminateurs” (*Chrétien de Troyes: Le Conte du Graal*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1999, p. 61). In his earlier book on *Cligès* and the *Conte*, Haidu speaks of Perceval's mother's remark as characterized by “bitter irony” (*Aesthetic Distance*, p. 127). Ewa Slojka uses the remark as an example of “how [Perceval's mother's] pessimism overrides reality,” pointing out that “upon hearing that Perceval has seen the most beautiful things that exist, she exclaims that he must have encountered ‘Les anges dont la gent se plaignent, / Qui ocient quanqu'il ataignent’ [...], even though he is standing alive and well in front of her” (“Escape from Paradox: Perceval's Upbringing in the ‘Conte du Graal,’” *Arthuriana* 18.4, In Memoriam: Elisabeth Brewer, Derek Brewer, Winter 2008, note 14 on p. 84).

presence in the world, in the *siècle*, is cause not for joy—as would be the case with the presence of angels—but rather for dismay. In explaining how his two brothers died, Perceval’s mother indicates her distinctive understanding of knightly practices and their consequences: “*Par armes,*” she says, “*furent mort endui*” (v. 447).⁸⁷ The knightly way of life is identified here as the way that leads to death.⁸⁸ Perceval’s mother’s desire to keep her son in the forest, away from any knowledge of knights and knighthood, reflects her hope not only that he remain bodily present to her, but also, quite simply, that he remain present on this earth—she wants, in other words, to keep him alive.

It is possible to read the hermit’s counsel to his nephew, in the last glimpse the romance gives us of Perceval, as a variation on this alternate reading of knighthood:

*Deu croi, Deu aime, Deu aore,
Bon home et bone fame henore,
Contre les provoires te lieve,
C’est uns servises qui po grieve,
Et Dex l’aime por verité,
Por ce qu’il vient d’umilité.
Se pucele aïde te quiert,
Aïde li, que mielz t’en iert,
A veve fame o orfenine,
Icele aumosme iert enterine.* (vv. 6385-6394)⁸⁹

On the whole, the hermit is more sanguine about knighthood than is Perceval’s mother; certainly he does not condemn it altogether. Still, his words make it plain that he does wish Perceval to change his ways; this is indicated by his reference to “*repentance*” (v.

⁸⁷ “[T]he two were slain in combat.”

⁸⁸ Haidu describes Perceval’s mother’s assessment of this way of life as “remarkably harsh” (*The Subject Medieval / Modern*, p. 102).

⁸⁹ “Believe in God, love God, worship God. Honor worthy men and good women. Stand in the presence of priests. These are observances that cost little, and God truly loves them because they spring from humility. And if a widow, maiden, or orphaned girl seeks your assistance, help her, and you will be the better for it. This is the highest act of charity.”

6367). Besides this, he is in agreement with at least some of the guidelines that Perceval's mother gave him at the beginning of the romance. Perceval's mother instructs him to come to the aid of any lady or maiden who needs his help (vv. 497-506); so does the hermit (vv. 6391-6394). She begs him, as well, to go to church (vv. 531-536; vv. 556-558); this piece of advice, too, is echoed by the hermit (vv. 6368-6384). What seems, however, to be different about the hermit's counsel is that it suggests not so much a reluctant consent, like that of Perceval's mother, to the hero's continued bodily presence in the wider world (v. 496), but rather an endorsement of that presence. Instead of encouraging the young knight to withdraw once again from the *siècle*, the hermit seems to accept that a knight will necessarily be engaged with immanent reality, especially when it comes to the business of aiding his neighbors.

Does this mean that there are no differences at all between the knightly way of life as practiced by Gauvain, in the *Conte du Graal* and elsewhere, and the knightly way of life as Perceval is encouraged to practice it? Certainly not. Although Gauvain is well aware that bodily presence in the world is a prerequisite for adventures and for the acquisition of fame, he is never brought to a knowledge of the shortcomings of mere immanent heroism.⁹⁰ Perceval, on the other hand, is being reminded that this kind of heroism may easily descend into aimlessness, and that exclusive presence to the *siècle* may easily become absence to God. Nor is this the only consequence to making the pursuit of *aventure* the main activity of one's life; Perceval's mother suffers, too, from his negligence. *Le Conte du Graal* suggests, paradoxically, that one cannot be a

⁹⁰ As Keith Busby writes, "Gauvain [...] is powerless to progress beyond a certain stage" (*Gauvain in Old French Literature*, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1980, p. 143).

supremely good knight without striving to be a good human being.⁹¹ And for this, presence to the *siècle* is not enough.

An analogous, although not identical, point is illustrated in the case of Lancelot. There is a way in which Lancelot's love, despite its seeming ridiculousness, makes him into a better knight than Gauvain.⁹² The same turns out to be true, by the time their stories come to an end, for Erec and for Yvain. Although both Erec and Yvain must engage in the typical knightly pursuits of rescuing those in distress, seeking adventures, and honing their reputations, what sets them apart from Gauvain is their commitments to their wives. Once they have made such commitments, they can no longer be absorbed wholly in the activities of knighthood. This means, too, that they can no longer be motivated wholly by the praise of their peers; each comes to a realization that more is at stake, as he meets his adventures, than his own personal glory. Gauvain, on the other hand, although he remains an exemplar of courage and of courtesy, continues to inhabit a sphere whose highest good is earthly recognition, a sphere in which it is crucial not only to be present, but to be visible.

To whom, then, are knights required to be present, in body? The answer to this question depends on what conception of knighthood is being followed. For a knight like Gauvain, it is important to be present to one's lord and to one's fellow knights. It is also, of course, important to be present to those who may be in need of one's help; notice that Gauvain speaks, in the *Conte*, of being motivated by "*leal jostise / Qui est estable et*

⁹¹ On paradox in the *Conte*, see Rupert Pickens, *The Welsh Knight: Paradoxality in Chrétien's Conte del Graal* (Lexington, KY: French Forum, 1977).

⁹² On this point, see Busby, *Gauvain*, p. 65.

assise / Par tote la terre lo roi” (vv. 7043-7045).⁹³ Even here, however, Gauvain seems to possess no reliable way of judging between competing claims of justice; this explains, in part, his tendency to let himself be distracted from his successive aims in the sections of the *Conte* devoted to his adventures. Meanwhile, this kind of bodily presence turns out to be only relatively important for Lancelot, for Yvain, and for Erec. Throughout *Le Chevalier de la charrette*, and by the conclusions of *Erec et Enide* and *Le Chevalier au lion*, all three knights are motivated to be present to the world not only because it is there that glory may be won, or even because it is there that suffering may be relieved; rather, bodily activity in the world is also, for each of them, a means to a higher end: reconciliation, or reunion, with his lady. This allegiance to a higher end, an end that transcends the desire for glory, is shown in Erec’s case by his unwillingness to stop at the Arthurian court when he is urged to do so by Keu and by Gauvain (*Erec et Enide*, vv. 3930-4150). In Yvain’s case, it is shown by his concealing of his name after his return to sanity: after promising to save her, he says to Lunete, “*Mais de conter ne de retraire / Qui je sui as gens ne vous chaille. / Que qu’aviengne de la bataille, / Gardés quē on ne me connoisse !*” (*Le Chevalier au lion*, vv. 3724-3727).⁹⁴ And in Lancelot’s case, it is shown by his anonymity at Noauz. None of these three is committed, without reserve, to being openly present in the knightly world.

The *Conte du Graal* gives us the clearest glimpse of what immanent knighthood, the knighthood of the *siècle*, may look like when pursued without regard to other considerations. When he meets the pilgrims in the *desert*, Perceval’s *enui* is so great that

⁹³ “[T]he true justice that has been instituted and established throughout the king’s land.”

⁹⁴ “But don’t worry yourself about recounting to people, or about telling them, who I am. Whatever comes of the battle, make sure that they do not recognize me!” (My translation.)

he has “*nul espanz / De jor ne de nul autre tans*” (v. 6188).⁹⁵ Although he has perfectly learned the practices pertaining to knighthood, especially that of sending vanquished knights back to the court, these practices cannot, in and of themselves, serve as chronological markers. Nor can they serve to tell him where he ought to go, from one adventure to another. Strangely, it is the hermit’s reminder of Perceval’s duties to God that will recall him, simultaneously, to an awareness of time and place.⁹⁶ As Lancelot’s love for Guenièvre gives him a compass that guides him through his other adventures, so Perceval’s meeting with the hermit gives him a new way of orienting himself to the *siècle*—a way of being a knight without being fully absorbed in the pursuits of knighthood.

Presence and being a lover

Chrétien’s protagonists—except, perhaps, for Gauvain—all have some acquaintance with love, whether we are talking about Erec and Enide, about Cligès and Fénice,⁹⁷ about Lancelot, about Yvain, or about Perceval. But what kind of love is it? And what is its relationship to bodily presence?

⁹⁵ “[N]o conception of the day nor of any other time” (my translation).

⁹⁶ Or perhaps not so strangely: note that Kierkegaard says, of “[t]hose [...] who carry the jewel of faith,” that “their outward appearance bears a striking resemblance [...] to Philistinism” (*Fear and Trembling*, in *Fear and Trembling and The Sickness Unto Death*, trans. Walter Lowrie, Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1941 [1954 reprint], p. 49), that is, to worldliness (see *ib.*, p. 50). I am not the only one to mention Kierkegaard in connection with Chrétien: “Il est clair que la pensée religieuse prend une place plus forte parmi les composantes d[u] [*Conte du Graal*], tandis que la présence de la mort s’y fait plus obsédante. En soi une telle évolution paraît logique, préfigurant cette dialectique qu’évoquera Kierkegaard pour qui l’itinéraire humain comprend trois étapes: esthétique, éthique et religieuse” (Poirion, introduction to Chrétien, *Oeuvres complètes*, p. xxiv).

⁹⁷ Not to mention Alixandres and Soredamors, in the same romance.

Lancelot's love for Guenièvre

It is possible to argue that bodily presence is central to the love that Lancelot has for Guenièvre. This seems particularly to be the case in the passage, in *Le Chevalier de la charrette*, during which Lancelot comes to visit the queen at night, and must break through the bars of a window in order to get to her:

*A tant la reïne s'an torne,
Et cil s'aparaille et atorne
De la fenestre desconfire.
As fers se prant et sache et tire
Si que trestoz ploier les fet
Et que fors de lor leus les tret,
Mes si estoit tranchanz li fers
Que del doi mame jusqu'as ners
La premiere once s'an creva,
Et de l'autre doi se trancha
La premerainne jointe tote,
Et del sanc qui jus an degote
Ne des plaies nule se sant
Cil qui a autre chose antant.
La fenestre n'est mie basse,
Neporquant Lanceloz i passe
Molt tost et molt delivrement.
An son lit trueve Kex dormant,
Et puis vint au lit la reïne,
Si l'aore et se li ancline,
Car an nul cors saint ne croit tant,
Et la reïne li estant
Ses braz ancontre, si l'anbrace,
Estroit pres de son piz le lace,
Si l'a lez li an son lit tret
Et le plus bel sanblant li fet
Que ele onques feire li puet,
Que d'amors et del cuer li muet,
D'amors vient qu'ele le conjot. [...]
Or a Lanceloz quanqu'il vialt,
Qant la reïne an gré requialt
Sa conpaignie et son solaz,
Qant il la tient antre ses braz
Et ele lui antre les suens. (vv. 4633-4661; vv. 4667-4673)⁹⁸*

⁹⁸ “The queen turned away at once, and Lancelot prepared to try and loosen the window. Gripping the bars, he pulled and tugged until he made them all bend; then he wrenched them from

The love that Lancelot and Guenièvre show for one another in this passage could hardly be any more dependent on its bodily expression. Mention is made here of the nerve in Lancelot's finger (v. 4640), the joint of his other finger (v. 4643), his blood (v. 4644), his wounds (v. 4645) and his arms (v. 4672). As for Guenièvre, the narrator speaks of her arms (v. 4655; v. 4673), her breast (v. 4656) and her heart (v. 4660). When the poem tells us, "*Or a Lancelot quanqu'il vialt,*" the logical conclusion to be drawn is that Lancelot wants to be physically close to his beloved, and that this proximity is what he has been striving towards, up to this point in the romance. Note, too, the hyperbole with which the poem describes Lancelot's reluctance to depart, in the morning: "[...] *fu il droiz martirs, / Tant li fu gries li departirs*" (vv. 4689-4690).⁹⁹

And yet it is also possible to regard Lancelot's and Guenièvre's love as radically dependent on distance, and, indeed, on a series of separations. In a section on the *Charrette*, in his book, *Chrétien de Troyes Revisited*, Karl Uitti writes that

[t]he 'far away love' (*amor de lonh*) motif runs through most of Chrétien's narrative: much of the time Guenevere, the object of the knight's love, is as physically inaccessible to him as the Countess of Tripoli was to Jaufre Rudel, the princely troubadour who celebrated *amor de lonh*.¹⁰⁰

their position. But the iron was so sharp that the end of his little finger was torn to the nerve and the entire first joint of the next finger severed. Since his mind was elsewhere, he did not feel his cuts or the blood that dripped from them. Although the window was not at all low, Lancelot slipped through with great ease and speed. He found Kay asleep in his bed, then came to the bed of the queen. He adored her and knelt down beside her; in no saint's relics did he place such faith. The queen held out her arms to him, embraced him, and hugged him to her breast. When she drew him into bed beside her, she showed him every possible pleasure. Love and her heart transported him. It was Love that made her give him such a joyous welcome. [...] Now Lancelot had all he desired. The queen eagerly sought his company and his pleasure as he held her in his arms, and she held him in hers."

⁹⁹ "He was a real martyr, so painful to him was the departure" (my translation).

¹⁰⁰ Karl Uitti, with Michelle A. Freeman, *Chrétien de Troyes Revisited*, New York: Twayne Publishers (1995), p. 74. Jaufre is described, in a *vida*, as having loved the Countess of Tripoli (see James J. Wilhelm, *Seven Troubadours: The Creators of Modern Verse*, University

It is true that, for large portions of the romance, Lancelot is not spatially close to Guenièvre. In a romance that, in Méla's edition,¹⁰¹ is 7112 verses long, not counting the *explicit*, I estimate that Lancelot is present, in body, to the queen for approximately 1452 verses, or a little over a fifth of the romance.¹⁰² Out of this group of 1452 verses, it is for only 1348 of them that he is actually conscious of being present to her and for only 1394 of them that she is actually conscious of being present to him. And they are mutually conscious of being present to one another for only 1290 verses, or under a fifth of the romance.¹⁰³ How are we to understand this?

Here, it may be helpful to refer to Denis de Rougemont's classic study, *L'Amour et l'Occident*, in which he explains that readers, in the West, like to read about a kind of love, which he calls *amour-passion*, that is tragic, painful, and, ultimately, fatal. Other characteristics of *amour-passion* include its reciprocity,¹⁰⁴ its unhappiness,¹⁰⁵ and its love of death: "la mort [...] se révèle au terme de l'aventure comme la vraie fin, le désir

Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1970, pp. 89-90; Wilhelm offers an English translation, possibly his own, of the *vida*). For the *vida* itself, in a long version and a short version, see *The Songs of Jaufré Rudel*, ed. Rupert T. Pickens, Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1978, p. 56 and p. 58).

¹⁰¹ In Daniel Poirion's edition of the *Charrette*, in the Gallimard edition of Chrétien's works (Chrétien, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Poirion et al., Paris: Gallimard, 1994), there are 7122 verses (again, leaving out the *explicit*).

¹⁰² It is not always completely clear whether Lancelot and Guenièvre are present to one another throughout a given passage of the romance; for examples of such passages, see verses 4912-5047 and verses 6820-7097 (I have included both passages in my count of 1452 verses).

¹⁰³ All of these counts are approximate.

¹⁰⁴ De Rougemont, *L'Amour et l'Occident*, Paris: Librairie Plon (1972), p. 38. (Orig. pub. 1939.)

¹⁰⁵ De Rougemont, *ib.*, p. 38.

désiré dès le début de la passion.”¹⁰⁶ Readers, according to de Rougemont, enjoy reading about obstacles to the fulfillment of passion just as much as they enjoy reading about the fulfillment itself, for it is the obstacles, de Rougemont explains, that allow the story to continue. Could de Rougemont’s theory help to explain why Lancelot and Guenièvre are (comparatively) seldom in the same place?

As a paradigm for *amour-passion*, de Rougemont uses various versions of the story of Tristan and Iseut. His theory allows him an explanation of the presence, in Bérout’s *Roman de Tristan*, of the love-drink imbibed by the two lovers on their way from Ireland to Cornouailles, the effects of which, according to Bérout’s version of the story, last only three years. At the end of the three years, at which time Tristan and Iseut are living together in the forest, both express regrets about having left behind the privileges that were theirs at court. “I have forgotten chivalry,” says Tristan.¹⁰⁷ And Iseut’s sentiments are similar (*Tristan*, vv. 2205-2206). De Rougemont’s theory provides a convincing interpretation of this episode: it is the expiration of the love-drink that, by separating the two lovers from one another, allows the love story itself to continue. Such separation is necessary because, without it, the *amour-passion* that Tristan and Iseut have sustained up to this point might very well resolve itself into what de Rougemont has

¹⁰⁶ *Ib.*, p. 39.

¹⁰⁷ “Oublié ai chevalerie” (Bérout, *Le Roman de Tristan*, v. 2165). I am using *Tristan et Iseut: Les poèmes français: Le saga norroise*, ed. Daniel Lacroix and Philippe Walter, Paris: Librairie Générale Française (1989).

called “la paix féconde du couple.”¹⁰⁸ In other words, their passion would become happy rather than tragic, and, in becoming happy, would cease to be *amour-passion* at all.¹⁰⁹

Let us look at another example that could easily be interpreted as bearing out de Rougemont’s thesis. My earlier citation, from Uitti, compares the distance between Lancelot and the queen to the distance between “the Countess of Tripoli [and] Jaufré Rudel, the princely troubadour who celebrated *amor de lonh*.” And indeed Jaufré Rudel’s song, “Lanquan li jorn son lonc en may,” demonstrates the importance of separation and distance to a certain kind of love.¹¹⁰ The song speaks of an “*amor de loing*,” a faraway love, which the singer prefers to all other loves. In at least some of the manuscript traditions, one of the song’s last stanzas contains the following words:

“[N]uills autre jois tant no.m plai / Cum jauzimens d’amor de loing,” that is, “No other joy pleases me so much / As enjoyment of a faraway love.”¹¹¹ In the versions of the song that do not contain this declaration, we might naturally understand the singer’s desire as directed toward an actual, real person who just so happens to be at a geographical

¹⁰⁸ De Rougemont, *L’amour et l’Occident*, p. 11.

¹⁰⁹ Another episode that could be interpreted in this way is the series of events, near the beginning of the romance, when the dwarf Frocin sets a trap for the two lovers by sprinkling flour on the floor between the hero’s bed and the bed of the queen, hoping that Tristan will leave footprints in it on his way to sleep with Iseut. Tristan, although he guesses the dwarf’s plans, still pays Iseut a visit. True, by jumping the distance between the two beds, he tries to avoid leaving traces in the flour, but he has mysteriously forgotten about a wound he has received in his leg, which bleeds all over the queen’s sheets, as well as on the floor. Needless to say, the blood provides the necessary evidence for the lovers’ conviction; the king decides to have them both burned. (For this episode, see *Tristan*, vv. 643-826.) This episode would seem to support de Rougemont’s remark that the lovers “never fail to take advantage of the opportunity to part company” (“ils ne perdent pas une occasion de se séparer,” *L’amour et l’Occident*, p. 29).

¹¹⁰ Here, I rely on Pickens’s *The Songs of Jaufré Rudel*.

¹¹¹ Pickens, *The Songs of Jaufré Rudel*, “Lanquan li jorn son lonc en may,” p. 168, vv. 45-46. I have slightly modified Pickens’s English translation, which reads, “[N]o other joy pleases me so much / as enjoyment of love from afar” (p. 169).

distance; hence, we could say that what the singer truly wants is to be reunited with this person. However, the singer's explicit expression of a predilection for the "enjoyment of a faraway love" suggests an alternate possibility—namely, that it is precisely the love's faraway quality, in and of itself, that makes it so enjoyable.

Given these two examples of *amour-passion* as de Rougemont defines it, it is now possible to ask whether Lancelot's love for Guenièvre is best understood according to this same model.¹¹² I have already acknowledged that he and the queen are separated for much of the romance. Moreover, at least one of their separations seems to bear a resemblance to the waning of the love-drink's power in Bérroul's *Tristan*. I am speaking of the moment when, after the wounded Lancelot has fought Méléagant in the queen's presence, she treats him coldly (*Charrette*, vv. 3937-3969). It is later revealed that she has done this because of his delay in getting into the cart, earlier in the story: "[...] *Don n'eüstes vos honte / De la charrete et si dotastes?*" (vv. 4484-4485).¹¹³ Or perhaps she has done it as a joke: "*Et sel cuidai ge faire a gas*" (v. 4205).¹¹⁴ But is either explanation really sufficient, at the level of the *Charrette*'s structure? Could the queen's coldness be

¹¹² María Rosa Menocal groups the *Charrette* together with "the *Tristan*" (I am not sure to which version of the story she is referring, here), saying, "It is true that particularly in the narrative form of the romance—and this is true par excellence in romances such as the *Tristan* and the *Chevalier de la Charrette*—the strongly antisocial ethos of the solipcism of the lyric is nakedly displayed[.]" (*Shards of Love: Exile and the Origins of the Lyric*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1994, p. 147). She also notes that "[c]ritics have dealt gingerly [...] with the very ambivalent Lancelot of Chrétien's romance" (*ib.*, p. 147). Yet it is not clear to me that Lancelot—"ambivalent" though he may be—is "antisocial" in the same way that Tristan is.

¹¹³ "Were you not afraid and ashamed of the cart?"

¹¹⁴ "I meant it as a jest." Méla's translation is helpful, here: "J'ai cru le faire par simple jeu" (Chrétien, *Romans*, p. 621).

another example of the kind of obstacle that, for de Rougemont, is a necessary stage in the cycle of *amour-passion*?

On the face of it, the parallel between the two stories and the two separations seems justified. Both separations prevent de Rougemont's "paix féconde du couple" from establishing itself.¹¹⁵ Thus they open up room for the display of those emotions proper to lovers who have been separated, emotions that would presumably not be displayed, otherwise. In the case of Tristan and Iseut, their separation at the end of the three years of love (*trois anz d'amistié*, v. 2140) inspired by the *vin herbez* (*Tristan*, v. 2138), permits Tristan to lament "losing" Iseut (vv. 2681-2682), and, later, to rejoice in receiving news of her from a messenger (vv. 3321-3323). And in the case of Lancelot, his separation from Guenièvre permits both of them to suffer agonies while each is laboring under the misconception that the other is dead (*Charrette*, vv. 4157-4399), and then for each of them to rejoice in learning that the other is in fact alive (vv. 4400-4427).

Yet let us compare, specifically, Tristan's recalling of knighthood after the three years of love-potion-love are over (*Tristan*, vv. 2161-2194) to another incident in the *Charrette*, namely Lancelot's returning to his prison after the tournament of Noauz (*Charrette*, vv. 6057-6107). Both are examples of a lover deciding, of his own volition, to be parted from his beloved. When the love potion has worn off, in Bérout's *Tristan*, Tristan mourns having forgotten *chevalerie* (v. 2165). The possibility of returning to this form of life seems to make up at least part of his reasoning in deciding to give Iseut back to her husband (vv. 2221-2222; vv. 2243-2248; vv. 2307-2313). "*Tot m'est failli*," says

¹¹⁵ De Rougemont, *L'amour et L'Occident*, p. 11.

Tristan, “*et vair et gris*” (v. 2168).¹¹⁶ Among Greimas’s translations for the substantive *vair* are “[f]ourrure de l’écureuil du Nord” and “[f]ourrure de diverses couleurs,” and his translation for the substantive *gris* is “[f]ourrure grise, petit-gris.”¹¹⁷ It is hard to escape coming to the conclusion that Tristan misses the material possessions that would accrue to him were he to occupy his proper rank in the social order—or, at least, that he misses these material possessions insofar as they are visible signs of this rank. Tristan has come to the realization, in the wake of his three years of love, that the form of life he has adopted, as a lover, is incompatible with the form of life characteristic of knights. The goods of the latter form of life include not only *vair* and *gris*, but also Marc’s love (vv. 2170-2171), the company of other knights (v. 2169; vv. 2173-2176), participation in the feudal economy of service rendered and received (vv. 2177-2178), and Iseut’s own return to the comforts of royalty (vv. 2179-2184).¹¹⁸ These goods would appear to be inaccessible to Tristan so long as he continues to lead the life he has been leading, with the queen.

Lancelot, too, is recalled, from being bodily present with Guenièvre at the tournament, by something external to their love (*Charrette*, vv. 6033-6039). But what, precisely, is the string that pulls Lancelot away from Guenièvre, here? What, or who, is pulling that string? Is it Lancelot’s membership in a larger social world, a world that contains more people than simply himself and the queen? After all, he has promised the

¹¹⁶ “Everything is missing to me, the vair and the gray” (my translation, based on Lacroix’s and Walter’s modern French translation, *Tristan et Iseut*, p. 123).

¹¹⁷ Greimas’s entry for *faillir* was helpful to me, too.

¹¹⁸ Lacroix’s and Walter’s translation was helpful to me in understanding the verses I cite, in this sentence (*Tristan et Iseut*, p. 123).

wife of Méléagant's *seneschaus* that, if she would allow him to go to the tournament, he would return again afterwards to prison (vv. 5453-5458), and he keeps his promise (vv. 6105-6107). Lancelot resembles Tristan in that neither is so absorbed by his love as to lose sight completely of what it means to be a knight.

And yet, to my mind, Chrétien is doing something quite different with Lancelot than Bérout did with Tristan. Note, first of all, that both the *seneschaus*'s wife and Méléagant express confidence in Lancelot's word:

*Riens nule retenir nel puet,
Que il le me jura sor sainz
Qu'il vanroit ja ne porroit ainz.* (Charrette, vv. 6082-6084)¹¹⁹

*'Il n'an fera ja mesprison,
Fet Meleaganz, bien le sai[.]* (ib., vv. 6092-6093)¹²⁰

Their confidence is justified (vv. 6105-6107). Yet Lancelot certainly does not wish to be in prison. Nor is it that, like Tristan, he has suddenly felt the need to seek out "chivalry," or the company of his fellow knights: for indeed he is leaving both these things, in leaving the tournament. Thus Lancelot leaves the place where both knightly recognition and proximity to his beloved are possible, in order to return to a place where he does not want to be. This is not the case in Tristan's decision to give Iseut back to her husband. Note that Tristan's dilemma forces him to choose between fulfilling his desire for Iseut and fulfilling his desire for social integration. This is not Lancelot's dilemma, here; rather, he is prevented from continual bodily presence either to Guenièvre or to the court by something that somehow exerts a stronger force on him than his desire to be close to

¹¹⁹ "Nothing can detain him, for by the saints he swore to me to return as soon as he was able." Note that I have generally chosen to replace French quotation marks with English ones.

¹²⁰ "He will never break his word," Méléagant said. "I know that well."

either one of these—this stronger force is his faithfulness to his word. If Lancelot is separated from Guenièvre, here, it is because of his reliability, even his maturity. Chrétien makes this “obstacle” to Guenièvre’s and Lancelot’s “paix féconde”¹²¹ to stem at least partly from a real virtue in Lancelot himself. At this point, however, are we talking about the same kind of “obstacle” that de Rougemont sees as crucial to the flourishing of *amour-passion*?

It may help us gain a better idea of Lancelot’s love for the queen if we compare it with that of Yvain for Laudine, in the *Lion*. Yvain falls in love with his future wife while observing her secretly: first while wearing a magic ring that renders him invisible, and then through a window. In both cases, she is present to him, but he is not openly present to her.¹²² He has in effect been reduced to a pair of eyes.¹²³ His invisibility is very different from Lancelot’s anonymity at the tournament of Noauz. Lancelot is like Yvain in that he has been rendered invisible, in a sense, to most of the spectators at the tournament, from whom he manages to hide his true identity. He is, however, unlike Yvain in that he is very much visible—and thus present—to the lady he loves.

¹²¹ De Rougemont, *L’amour et l’Occident*, p. 11.

¹²² Lancelot’s first glimpse of Guenièvre in the *Charrette* is similarly mediated by a window. However, given that his recognition of her appears to take place right away (*Charrette*, vv. 560-561), the reader may deduce that he and the queen are already acquainted. This in and of itself makes his behavior somewhat less disturbing than Yvain’s. Moreover, Guenièvre is outside, in what may be considered a public space, when Lancelot sees her, while Laudine is at home, and may thus reasonably expect that no one outside the members of her own household is watching her. Again, I will return to the question of windows in chapter three.

¹²³ A similar character who comes to mind, from our own day, is J.R.R. Tolkien’s Sauron, in *The Lord of the Rings*. Nor is Yvain’s observation of Laudine completely unlike the practice of looking someone up on a social media site.

Let us look more closely at the episode of the tournament of Noauz in the *Charrette*. Note, first of all, that, to Lancelot, it is important that he be bodily present at the tournament: “[...] *trop sui desconseilliez, / Quant je ne porrai estre la*” (vv. 5448-5449).¹²⁴ Why does Lancelot want to be at the tournament? He describes the place he wants to be as “[...] *la / Ou toz li biens del mont sera, / A l’ahatine out toz asamble / Li pueples*” (vv. 5449-5452).¹²⁵ Méla translates *toz li biens* as “tout bien”¹²⁶—this could refer to the queen, but the reference is far from clear. Could it be that Lancelot goes to the tournament in order to be seen by its spectators? This is possible, but if so, he does not go in order to be both seen and known under his own name; for recall, again, that he participates in the tournament anonymously (vv. 5510-5511; vv. 5550-5555). At the tournament Lancelot reveals himself, by name, not to the public at large, but to the queen, through his obedience to her commands (vv. 5636-5662; vv. 5829-5921). Notice both what Lancelot’s presence at the tournament makes possible and what it does not make possible. In the economy of the *Charrette*, Lancelot’s presence at the tournament allows him to demonstrate to Guenièvre, in a dramatic way, his love for her. His presence there does not, however, allow him to speak directly to her. Nor does it allow him to touch her. Visible presence is privileged, here, over audible or tangible presence.

Then there is, again, the question of why Lancelot returns to prison after the tournament. His presence at the tournament allows him to be seen by the queen, but this presence and the visibility that it permits have a limited duration. In keeping his promise

¹²⁴ “I am greatly discouraged that I will not be able to be there” (my translation).

¹²⁵ “[...] where all that is good in the world will be: that is at the tournament where [...] all the people are gathering.”

¹²⁶ Chrétien, *Romans*, p. 656.

to the *seneschaus*'s wife, Lancelot shows himself to be bound by an ethical code that is more powerful even than any desire he may have to remain close to Guenièvre. This is not to call into question Lancelot's devotion to Guenièvre, a devotion that has been made especially apparent over the course of his journey to rescue her; rather, it is to point out that his devotion to her seems, at least in this case, to be fully compatible with his leaving her in order to fulfill a promise to someone else.

Recall, here, that Méla speaks of the "sens" of Arthur's court as being "ce lieu de toute parole [...] dont un héros s'absente toujours pour n'y laisser que son renom."¹²⁷ Could Lancelot's relationship to the queen be analogous to the relationship that a hero, according to Méla's description, has to the court? In other words, might the queen herself be a "lieu de toute parole" from which Lancelot always absents himself in order to leave nothing behind but his reputation? This might explain Lancelot's presence at the tournament, but it does not necessarily explain his and Guenièvre's presence to one another elsewhere in the romance. For one thing, our description of Lancelot's love must take into account his near-worshipping of the queen: "*Si l'aore et se li ancline, / Car an nul cors saint ne croit tant*" (vv. 4652-4653).¹²⁸ It is not the desire for companionship that drives Lancelot so much as it is the desire for contemplation—mutual contemplation, perhaps, but still contemplation. Bodily presence is important, even if not absolutely necessary, because generally if one is bodily present to someone, one can see him or her.

Indeed, bodily presence has an important place in the economy of Lancelot's love for Guenièvre, and for several reasons. First, it is important for Lancelot to be near

¹²⁷ Méla, *Blanchefleur et le saint homme ou la semblance des reliques*, p. 32.

¹²⁸ "He adored her and knelt down before her; in no saint's relics did he place such faith."

Guenièvre so that he can see and adore her, as one would a saint. If this were the only reason for his proximity to her, Lancelot might easily risk becoming a voyeur and a spy, as does Yvain in his first glimpses of Laudine. Instead, the story shows that bodily presence is important for Lancelot, as a lover, for a second reason—it is important because it allows for direct communication between him and the queen, and thus for mutual understanding. This occurs both in the conversation wherein Lancelot and Guenièvre discuss his hesitation before getting into the cart (vv. 4469-4500) and in their conversation, later on, prior to Lancelot's entry through the window (vv. 4597-4632).

Yet to stop here would be to neglect what may be the most fundamental reason for Lancelot's bodily presence to Guenièvre in the *Charrette*. Lancelot must be present, in body, to the queen, in order to compensate for Arthur's and Gauvain's insufficiencies. He must be present to her in order to rescue her and to defend her from Méléagant. Lancelot is an active kind of lover, the kind of lover who, rather than sending someone else to rescue his beloved, goes, himself. And, at least up to a point, his activity as a lover and his activity as a knight coincide. This is the basic fantasy of the *Charrette*: that the bodily economy of knighthood, and the bodily economy of loving, are compatible with one another, and may be fulfilled by the same body. Lancelot can love at night (vv. 4651-4697)—in a way that involves not only seeing, but also hearing and touching—and he can fight the next day (vv. 4912-5009).¹²⁹ Not only this, but he can love the queen at night, and fight for the queen's honor the next day.

¹²⁹ Guided by Méla's modern French translation, I understand "[a] tant," in verse 4912, to mean that Lancelot comes to defend the queen the day after their night together. Méla translates "[a] tant" as "[a]lors" (Chrétien, *Romans*, p 641). The ensuing fight with Méléagant seems to happen the same day (*Charrette*, vv. 4987-5029).

Lancelot thus demonstrates that the lover-knight can, up to a point, have it all. This said, there are moments, in the *Charrette*, where the synthesis of loving and fighting is threatened by bodily limitations. (For the moment, I leave to the side, as does the *Charrette* itself, the basic *moral* problem reflected by Lancelot's being both defender of, and offender against, the queen's honor.) First of all, when it comes to the cart, early on in the poem, Lancelot cannot simultaneously enjoy the esteem of the queen and the esteem of the general public, simply because, as an embodied human being, he cannot be simultaneously in the cart and out of it. A similar limitation arises at the tournament of Noauz: Lancelot cannot both please the queen and perform consistently well as a participant in the tournament. In the first case, that of the cart, his hesitation seems to reflect a desire to have it both ways; yet it becomes clear that, in this case, public approbation and the demonstration of his love for the queen are incompatible. In the second case, at the tournament, Lancelot displays no such hesitation: he chooses to please the queen.

Another threat is posed to the lover-knight synthesis in the case of Lancelot's attendance at the tournament of Noauz, which I have already discussed. It is clear that Lancelot cannot be simultaneously in prison and at the tournament. (We are reminded of Yvain's temporal dilemma, in the *Lion*.) Lancelot cannot, then, both maintain his honor as a prisoner and see the queen—or so it would seem. The solution adopted, here, has both physical and moral dimensions: it depends both on an economy of time and on the reliability of Lancelot's word. Lancelot will be present at the tournament and thus absent from prison, but only for a time. Because of his credibility—Lancelot is apparently the

kind of person who keeps his promises—he is allowed a sort of temporary transcendence of bodily limitations.

Another kind of limitation arises and is conquered when Lancelot is fighting with Méléagant for the first time, in the *Charrette* (vv. 3584-3812). At a certain point during the battle, it is revealed to Lancelot that Guenièvre is watching him. At first, this revelation seems to do him more harm than good, since it prompts him to turn his eyes to the queen in such a way that he “[...] *se desfandoit par derriere*” (v. 3678).¹³⁰ The economy of the senses immediately adopted here is hardly sustainable: as good a swordsman as Lancelot may be, surely he needs his eyes for the battle. A more sustainable bodily economy is suggested to Lancelot by “[*l*]a *pucele*” (v. 3691) who has revealed Guenièvre’s presence to him in the first place: “*Torne toi [...]*” (v. 3701), she tells him. Lancelot thus turns himself (and not just his eyes) to the tower, putting Méléagant between himself and the queen. He can now see both his beloved and his enemy.

And yet we hear nothing of this kind of gymnastic maneuver during Lancelot’s last battle with Méléagant. Perhaps Guenièvre is not present for this fight,¹³¹ or perhaps Lancelot’s ability to maintain the lover-knight synthesis has become less dependent on literal contemplation of the queen. By the end of the *Charrette*, this synthesis seems to have survived all the attacks on it. Lancelot enjoys both public approbation (vv. 6807-6819; vv. 7095-7097) and the approbation of the queen (vv. 6820-6853). He has been

¹³⁰ “[...] defended himself from the back.”

¹³¹ She is present at the tournament, though, and Per Nykrog points out that “à aucun moment pendant le tournoi il n’est question du moindre regard lancé par Lancelot en direction de la reine” (*Chrétien de Troyes: Romancier discutabile*, Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1996, p. 142).

guilty neither of breaking his promise to the *seneschaus*'s wife nor of failing to put in an appearance at Noauz. And his final defeat of Méléagant punishes the king's enemy (vv. 47-60; vv. 6181-6184) at the same time that it protects the queen from being taken captive once again (vv. 3885-3894).¹³²

Lancelot's love for Guenièvre is nourished by bodily presence, but is also capable of transcending its dependency on bodily presence if need be. Per Nykrog has suggested that, by the end of the *Charrette*, Lancelot has ceased to love the queen.¹³³ Nykrog makes a good case for such an interpretation, but this is not the only possible explanation for the *Charrette*'s silence, in its final stages, on the subject of Lancelot's love. I have already suggested that Guenièvre's bodily presence to Lancelot is not necessary in order for him to go on loving her. Her presence to his thoughts is sufficient for this. It is part of the nature and shape of Lancelot's love that it be fed by contemplation of the queen, but it is also part of its nature and shape that it be able to survive for long periods of time on a starvation diet. Might not the author of the last part of the *Charrette*, whether this author be identified as Chrétien de Troyes himself or as "*Godefroiz de Leigni, li clers*" (v. 7102),¹³⁴ have assumed that his audience had come to understand so well this nature and shape of Lancelot's love that, after a certain point, no further mention of it was necessary?

Although Lancelot's love for the queen bears some resemblance to *amour-passion* as de Rougemont describes it, it is not tragic in the way that Tristan's and Iseut's is. Part

¹³² Méla's translation helped me to understand verses 3889-3894.

¹³³ Nykrog, *Chrétien de Troyes: Romancier discutabile*, pp. 142-149.

¹³⁴ "Godefroi de Leigni, the clerk."

of the reason for this may be that Lancelot has seemingly found a way to remain united with the queen, in his heart, even when he is separated from her in body:

*Des ialz et del cuer la convoie,
Mes as ialz fu corte la voie,
Que trop estoit la chanbre pres,
Et il fussent antré après
Molt volantiers, s'il poïst estre.
Li cuers qui plus est sire et mestre,
Et de plus grant pooir assez,
S'en est oltre après li passez,
Et li oil sont remés defors,
Plain de lermes avoec le cors. (vv. 3971-3980)¹³⁵*

Lancelot has recourse again, later on, to this *plus grant pooir* of the heart, when leaving the queen: “*Li cors s’an vet, li cuers sejourne*” (v. 4697).¹³⁶ Now, in *Cligès*, Chrétien denies that someone may give his or her heart to someone else: “[...] *nus son cuer doner ne puet*” (*Cligès*, v. 2775)¹³⁷—it is impossible for “*I. cors*” to have “*II. cuers ensemble*” (v. 2780)¹³⁸—yet he explains, too, in what sense we may speak of such a thing happening: “*Bien puet estre li voloirs uns / [...] / Ausi com maint home divers / Puent ou chançonete ou vers / Chanter a une concordance*” (v. 2795; vv. 2797-2799).¹³⁹ Two hearts cannot actually come together, but two persons may have the same desire (*voloirs*, v. 2795). Chrétien compares this situation to that of many voices singing together in such

¹³⁵ “Lancelot escorted her to the door with his eyes and his heart. His eyes, however, had only a short trip, since the room was quite near; if they could, they would have followed her gladly. While the tearful eyes remained behind with the body, the heart, lord and master and much more powerful, passed through the door after her.”

¹³⁶ “His body departed; his heart remained.”

¹³⁷ “No one can give his or her heart” (my translation). Méla’s and Collet’s translation has helped me understand *Cligès*, verses 2775-2812.

¹³⁸ “One body” ... “two hearts together” (my translation).

¹³⁹ “Their desires may well be the same, [...] just as many different men may sing verses and songs in unison.”

a way that “[...] *tout une chose semblent*” (v. 2806).¹⁴⁰ And indeed Lancelot is ready to tune his will to that of the queen: “[...] *quanque li plect m’atalante*” (*Charrette*, v. 5893).¹⁴¹

The romance contains hints, however, that closeness of the heart is not an ideal solution to the problems of distance between the lovers. Physical distance may allow for rumor to insinuate itself between them (vv. 4157-4399; see also vv. 4483-4489). Not only this, but the sojourning of Lancelot’s heart with Guenièvre is apparently insufficient to prevent her, in his physical absence, from putting her trust in an outright imposture (vv. 5241-5271). Finally, the closeness of the heart that exists between the lovers comes at the cost of a radical dislocation between heart (or will) and body. This dislocation is signaled not only by the passages I have cited above, relating to Lancelot, but also by a passage near the romance’s end, this one relating to the queen:

*Ou est donc li cuers? Il beisoit
Et conjoïssoit Lancelot.
Et li cors, por coi se celot?
N’estoit bien la joie anterine?
A y donc corroz ne haïne?
Nenil certes, ne tant ne quant,
Mes puet cel estre, li auquant,
Li rois, li autre qui la sont,
Qui lor ialz expanduz i ont,
Aparceüssent tost l’afeire,
S’ainsi veant toz volsist feire
Tot si con li cuers le volsist.
Et se Reisons ne li tolsist
Ce fol panser et cele rage,
Si veïssent tot son corage,
Lors si fust trop granz la folie.
Por ce Reisons anferme et lie
Son fol cuer et son fol pansé[.]* (vv. 6830-6847)¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ “Seem to be all one thing” (my translation).

¹⁴¹ “Whatever pleases her is what I want” (my translation).

There is a sense in which this passage brings Guenièvre's love into such sharp focus as to make the earlier passages about Lancelot's heart look, in comparison, like so much shadow-boxing on Chrétien's part. What it makes clear is that the more fundamental cause for the fissure between heart and body is not the lovers' physical separation from one another—for here they are, together again—but rather their need to guard against the appearance of folly. Recall the precautions Lancelot takes when he goes to visit the queen at night, earlier in the romance (vv. 4546-4567). Only in “[u]n boen leu et un plus privé” (v. 6851) may heart and body act in tandem.

Enide's love for Erec

What kind of love does Enide have for her husband, in *Erec et Enide*? What distinguishes it, if anything, from de Rougemont's *amour-passion*, and from Lancelot's love for Guenièvre? Do Erec's and Enide's adventures function to separate the lovers temporarily—that is, can they be identified with de Rougemont's “obstacles”—or do they do something else?¹⁴³ I will concentrate my analysis here on adventure's function in the second part of the poem, after the courtship narrative that begins the romance, since it is in this second part that we can see the effects of the various adventures undergone by

¹⁴² “Where, then, was her heart? It was welcoming Lancelot with kisses and joy. And why did her body hide? Why was her happiness incomplete? Was anger or hatred there too? Certainly not, not even the slightest trace. But this might have happened: the king and the others there might have opened their eyes and discerned the entire situation had she publicly obeyed all the desires of her heart. Without Reason, which removed this mad fit of passion, everyone would have witnessed all her feelings. That, then, would have been too great a folly. Therefore, Reason contained and controlled her foolish heart and her mad passion.”

¹⁴³ For de Rougemont's description of the role of “obstacles” in *amour-passion*, see *L'Amour et l'Occident*, pp. 30-33.

Erec and Enide, as a couple. I have chosen three different episodes from this section of the romance as representative of these adventures. Before looking at these episodes, it is worth noting that the couple's journey is associated, at its inception, with the word *aventure*. Erec departs, with Enide, from his father's kingdom, "*en aventure*"—that is, without an established itinerary (v. 2763).¹⁴⁴ The essence of an adventure is that it *happens to* a person. Adventures can be actively sought, but not actively brought about.¹⁴⁵

In the episode that I have called the Adventure of the Five Robbers, (vv. 2921-3081), Erec and Enide are set upon by five knights, who are out seeking "[r]oberie" (v. 2927), or "plunder," in Staines's translation. These knights are covetous not only of their horses but also of Erec's armor and of Enide herself; indeed, one of them claims Enide for himself, before even engaging Erec in battle. Erec pretends not to see the knight who is riding towards him to challenge him. Thus Enide decides to speak to her husband, to warn him, despite Erec's prior orders that she remain silent. After defeating the knights, Erec reprimands Enide for speaking. Let us compare Enide, in this situation, to Tristan and Iseut, as described by de Rougemont: "Ils ont besoin l'un de l'autre pour brûler, mais non de l'autre tel qu'il est; et non de la présence de l'autre, mais bien plutôt de son absence!"¹⁴⁶ Such a description does not fit Enide, in the Adventure of the Five Robbers. Far from needing to be separated from her husband in order to love him, she is allowed, in this adventure, to demonstrate her love for Erec precisely through her bodily presence

¹⁴⁴ "[A]ccording to chance."

¹⁴⁵ Chrétien often uses the word *aventure* in this sense; see *Erec et Enide*, v. 4484 and v. 4894.

¹⁴⁶ De Rougemont, *L'Amour et l'Occident*, p. 30.

to him. What Enide accomplishes, here, she accomplishes not only through her thinking—“*Lasse ! fait ele, je ne sai / Que je die ne que je face*” (vv. 2962-2963)—but also through her body.¹⁴⁷ For it is through her eyes that Enide notices the robbers (v. 2959) and through her voice that she warns Erec of their approach (v. 2979; vv. 2981-2992). Already it looks as though Enide’s love for her husband may have a different shape than that of Tristan and Iseut for one another.

Let us now look at a later adventure, one that follows a somewhat different pattern. In the Adventure of the Two Giants (vv. 4302-4573), Erec hears the cries of a woman in the forest, and tells Enide to wait for him while he goes to investigate the matter. The woman, once he has found her, begs Erec to rescue her sweetheart, a knight, from two giants who have taken him captive. Erec tells her, too, to wait for him, and he sets out to fulfill her request. Finding the giants, along with their captive, he challenges them. Erec manages subsequently to kill both giants, and to free the knight, who reveals that his name is Cadoc of Carlisle. Erec and Cadoc ride back to Cadoc’s lady, who is overjoyed to be reunited with her lover.

Might this adventure be more easily comprehensible as one of de Rougemont’s obstacles? After all, it does briefly separate Erec and Enide from one another. Not only this, but we are told that Erec’s absence causes Enide to worry that he has forsaken her once and for all: “*Car bien cuidoit tot entresait / Qu’il l’eüst guerpie del tot*” (vv. 4578-4579).¹⁴⁸ We might also notice that, whereas Enide was present for the Adventure of the Five Robbers, she does not actually get to observe Erec’s prowess in rescuing Cadoc.

¹⁴⁷ “‘Alas!’ she said, ‘I do not know what to say or do’ (my translation).

¹⁴⁸ “[S]he was firmly convinced that he had abandoned her completely.”

Thus it could be argued that this latter adventure, rather than furthering Enide's and Erec's knowledge of one another, does in fact increase Enide's passion for her husband by removing him from her for a time. The trouble with this argument is that the romance gives us no indication, at any point, that her passion for him is at an ebb. Instead, Enide demonstrates, time and time again, her love and concern for Erec. For example, witness her earlier words to Gauvain, after the latter has tricked Erec into being "[h]erbergiez" with the king and queen: "*Sire,*" she tells him, "*mal ne dolor n'eüsse, / Se en grant dotance ne fusse / De mon seignor ; mais ce m'esmaie, / Qu'il n'a gaires membre sanz plaie*" (vv. 4171-4174).¹⁴⁹ There is no indication, in the interim between these verses and the beginning of the Adventure of the Two Giants in verse 4302, that Enide is in need of Erec's absence "pour brûler." Her commitment to the good of her husband is apparent both prior to the adventure (vv. 4171-4174) and following it (vv. 4602-4615). It begins to look as though Enide, rather than seeking out and willing suffering for its own sake, endures suffering as the consequence, even the byproduct, of a commitment to another person. There is thus a subtle but important difference between Tristan's and Iseut's love for one another in de Rougemont's reading, and Enide's love for Erec.

The final adventure that we will consider, briefly, is the Adventure of the Count of Limors (vv. 4574-4932), which directly follows the Adventure of the Two Giants. On Erec's way back to Enide, the wounds he has sustained break open again, and, as he rides up to her, he falls off his horse and is rendered unconscious. Enide is about to commit suicide when a count and his men happen upon her and prevent her from carrying out the

¹⁴⁹ "Sir, no pain or suffering would be mine were I not so uneasy about my lord. But this distresses me, that scarcely a limb of his body is without wound." For other examples, see vv. 2959-2979, vv. 3460-3483, and vv. 3761-3764.

deed. The count tries to comfort her by telling her of his desire that she become his wife; Enide has no interest in fulfilling this desire, but allows herself and Erec to be taken to the count's palace in the town of Limors. There, everyone being convinced that Erec is dead, the count marries Enide, against her will. Unable to persuade her to stop grieving over Erec, the count becomes angry and hits her, not once, but twice. They are arguing, when Erec awakens and, taking rapid stock of the situation, kills the count. Since the people of the town believe Erec to be a dead man brought to life by a demon, they are terrified of him. In the confusion, Erec and Enide are able to escape. As they ride away, Erec reassures Enide of his love for her, and they are reconciled.

This adventure, more so than the other two that we have examined, seems as though it could be understood in terms of *amour-passion*: does not de Rougemont say that what we call passion disguises our love for death?¹⁵⁰ And does not Enide's love for her husband nearly lead to her own demise? Again, here, it is necessary to make some distinctions. What Tristan and Iseut are truly seeking, according to de Rougemont, is a sort of annihilation: "les amants malgré eux n'ont jamais désiré que la mort!"¹⁵¹ Now, this is not the case for Enide, whose desire for death is motivated by her belief that her husband would still be alive were it not for her: "*Encor fust or mes sire vis, / Se je, con outrageuse et fole, / N'eüsse dite la parole / Par qoi mes sire ça s'esmut*" (vv. 4620-4623).¹⁵² From the perspective of Catholic orthodoxy, her near suicide is a grave error, but there is no need, in order to explain it, to resort to the theory that her love for Erec has

¹⁵⁰ De Rougemont, *L'Amour et l'Occident*, pp. 30-33.

¹⁵¹ *Ib.*, p. 33.

¹⁵² "My lord would still be alive now had I not acted like a presumptuous fool and uttered those words that made my lord set out."

hitherto disguised an underlying death-wish. Rather, once again, Enide's suffering, and even her despair, are incidental to her marital devotion. They are not an end in themselves.

Erec's and Enide's adventures do not seem to function as elements in a process of delayed gratification, but rather as tests of Enide's love for her husband (as offensive as these tests tend to be to twenty-first century readers).¹⁵³ It is necessary, for these tests, that Enide be bodily present to her husband. And thus it would appear that, whatever else we may be dealing with, we are not dealing with *amour-passion* in de Rougemont's sense. Enide's love for Erec is cultivated not through a sequence of separations and reunions, but through a sequence of shared trials. This remains true even if we balk—as well we might—at the nature of these trials and of Enide's participation in them.

The importance of personal, bodily presence in *Erec et Enide* has an ironic cast to it, as it is possible to trace Erec's decision to leave their home, in the first place, to Enide's exclamation, "*Con mar i fus*" (v. 2503).¹⁵⁴ What Enide explicitly mourns, and indeed regrets, is Erec's initial presence in what K. Sarah-Jane Murray calls her "world."¹⁵⁵ As the world to which he belonged before encountering her is the world of

¹⁵³ See *Erec et Enide*, vv. 4914-4919. We can find all manner of fault with the actions that Erec takes in his attempt to test Enide's love, whether we agree with Kathryn Gravdal's assertion that he deliberately "expose[s] her to assault" (*Ravishing Maidens: Writing Rape in Medieval French Literature and Law*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991, p. 58), or merely wonder, with Derek Pearsall, whether "the women in the audience might think that Erec's behavior towards his beloved wife was unnecessarily severe or even misguided" (Pearsall, *Arthurian Romance: A Short Introduction*, Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2003, p. 30). I myself am inclined to agree with Neil Cartlidge that Erec's treatment of Enide is "unjust" (*Medieval Marriage: Literary Approaches, 1100-1300*, Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1997, p. 52).

¹⁵⁴ "What a pity for you[.]"

¹⁵⁵ Murray, *From Plato to Lancelot: A Preface to Chrétien de Troyes* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2008), p. 186.

Arthur and of Erec's fellow knights, we can conclude that it would have been better for Erec, according to Enide, had he remained there. It would have been better for him, as well, Enide says to herself, if she, too, had never left her own world—that is, if she were now absent to him: “[...] *Lasse, con mar m'esmui / De mon país! Que ving ça querre?*” (vv. 2492-2493).¹⁵⁶ It is interesting, then, that Enide is bid thereafter to accompany her husband as he returns to the chivalric world, the world of adventures.

Kathryn Gravdal has argued that, in bringing his wife along with him, Erec “use[s] [her] as a kind of lightning rod: an invitation to crime.”¹⁵⁷ And Gravdal's reading does succeed in drawing the reader's attention to at least one effect of Enide's presence on the journey: for it is plain that Enide's appearance often motivates the actions of other characters in the story, among these the robber who says, after seeing her, that he will have her or die (vv. 2941-2942), and the Count of Limors, who longs eagerly to marry her because of her “*beautez, qui tant est fine*” (v. 4695).¹⁵⁸ Nevertheless, Enide's bodily presence to her husband ought not, for all this, to be reduced to her beauty. Caroline Walker Bynum has written of her friend's complaint about a scholarly neglect

¹⁵⁶ “Alas, what a pity for me! [...] What did I come to find here, far from my own country?”

¹⁵⁷ Gravdal, *Ravishing Maidens: Writing Rape in Medieval French Literature and Law*, p. 55.

¹⁵⁸ “[E]xquisite beauty.”

of “[t]he body that eats, that works, that dies, that is afraid[.]”¹⁵⁹ Now, Enide’s body—as beautiful as it may be—is also a body that notices, that warns, that laments.¹⁶⁰

It is in fact by her continued presence, in both mind and body, to her husband, that Enide distinguishes herself from several of Chrétien’s other heroines. Laudine, in *Le Chevalier au lion*, seems to be present to Yvain largely through the mediation of objects, such as the ring she gives to her husband, as well as through that of people, such as her servant Lunete. As for Blanchefleur, in *Le Conte du Graal*, she is bodily present only very briefly, to Perceval, after which time her body disappears, to reappear only in Perceval’s memory, when three drops of blood in the snow make him think of her face.¹⁶¹ Guenièvre is of course repeatedly present, in her body, both to Lancelot and to the reader; nevertheless she is generally removed from taking a corporeal part in her rescuer’s adventures. Neither does Fenice accompany Cligès on his journey to England (her heart goes with him, but her body does not¹⁶²); perhaps more importantly, she is married to another man and cannot display her love, in bodily fashion, for Cligès, as openly as Enide can display hers for Erec.¹⁶³ Enide’s love, on the other hand, is shown through her bodily presence to Erec. It is an alert and practical kind of love, a love that knows its object and

¹⁵⁹ Bynum, “Why All the Fuss about the Body? A Medievalist’s Perspective,” p. 1.

¹⁶⁰ Two of these are “speech acts,” and could thus be seen as bearing out Bynum’s friend’s complaint about “the body dissolv[ing] into language” (“Why All the Fuss about the Body?,” p. 1). The act of noticing, however, does not fall into this category.

¹⁶¹ See *Le Conte du Graal*, vv. 4098-4388.

¹⁶² See *Cligès*, vv. 5141-5153.

¹⁶³ On the split between Fenice’s body and heart, see *Cligès*, vv. 4285-4289; vv. 4398-4408; and vv. 5140-5144. Even in vv. 4041-4061, when Fenice does express her love for Cligès in public, this expression is misinterpreted. Méla’s and Collet’s translation has helped me understand vv. 4294-4295.

seeks his good. Chrétien breaks drastically with the model of the *amor de loing* in *Erec et Enide*; he does this by presenting us with a heroine who is allowed to help her beloved through her bodily participation in his search for adventures.

In order to prove her love, and in order to prevent harm from coming to her beloved, Enide, like Lancelot, is willing to put herself into bodily danger. Both Enide's and Lancelot's love is tested not simply by time and separation, but by the weathering of adventures, each of which contributes not so much to bolster his or her reputation as to demonstrate his or her devotion to another person. This said, it is not clear that Enide's love has the same shape as that of Lancelot. In accompanying Erec on his journey, Enide is able to give visible expression to her marital commitment in a variety of circumstances. This is something Lancelot, who has no such marital commitment to Guenièvre, cannot do. Indeed, Guenièvre, unlike Erec, is doubly inaccessible to her lover—she is not only Meleagant's captive, but Arthur's wife. This is why the bodily consummation of Lancelot's passion can take place only at night, and in secret. In *Erec et Enide*, on the other hand, the context of marriage allows for Enide's love to be more holistic: her body, her reason, and her will are integrated with one another.

Seeing is important to both Lancelot's and Enide's love, but for different reasons. Remember that Lancelot, in his first fight with Méléagant, is advised to put his enemy between himself and the queen, so that he can see her and fight at the same time: "*Torne toi,*" says the *pucele* who has revealed to him the presence of the queen, "*si que deça soies / Et que adés ceste tor voies, / Que boen veoir et bel la fet*" (Charrette, vv. 3701-3703).¹⁶⁴ Lancelot uses his eyes for the contemplation of his beloved. Enide does this, as

¹⁶⁴ "Turn round to the other side where you may always see this tower. Sight of it will help you." Méla's translation has helped me to understand these verses.

well—“*Son seignor a mont et a val / Commença tant a esgarder*” (*Erec et Enide*, vv. 2486-2487)¹⁶⁵—but she also uses her eyes for perception, or noticing. Indeed, she notices both the condition of her husband¹⁶⁶ and the actions of third parties (v. 2827; v. 2959). Nykrog has pointed out the importance, to the romance, of the words “*Cil dormi, et cele veille*” (v. 3095), calling them a leitmotif.¹⁶⁷ And he is right to do this: for not only do these words describe Enide’s vigilance during the first night of their journey, but, as Nykrog has noticed, they also echo the words used to describe her earlier vigilance (v. 2475) when she is in bed with her husband and is on the verge of uttering the words, “[...] *Con mar i fus !*” (v. 2503).¹⁶⁸ The practice and posture of vigilance, or watching—and not just watching, for that matter, but watching over—differs from the practice and posture of contemplation in that the latter seems to presume a sort of static quality in its object. Contemplation can thus be accomplished fairly easily at a distance—think of Lancelot contemplating the queen’s hairs (*Charrette*, vv. 1460-1494)—whereas it is harder to imagine how vigilance, at least vigilance of the kind practiced by Enide, may be practiced by someone not present in body.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁵ “She began to gaze on her lord from head to toe[.]” Jean-Marie Fritz’s translation, in the Librairie Générale Française edition of Chrétien’s romances, has helped me to understand these verses.

¹⁶⁶ See again her words to Gauvain in *Erec et Enide*, verses 4171-4174.

¹⁶⁷ “He slept, and she kept watch” (I have modified Staines’s translation, which reads, “And so he slept, and she kept watch”). See Nykrog, *Chrétien de Troyes: Romancier discutable*, p. 64, p. 66, and p. 79.

¹⁶⁸ “What a pity for you[.]”

¹⁶⁹ The example of Perceval’s mother, in the *Conte du Graal*, will show, however, that vigilance from a distance is not completely a contradiction in terms.

Enide's love for Erec closely resembles companionship, even friendship. In fact, it resembles—in at least some respects—friendship of a kind that was described, in the twelfth century, by Aelred of Rievaulx, who listed the following “benefits in spiritual love, through which friends can be present and of advantage to one another:”

The first is to be solicitous for one another, then to pray for one another, to blush for one another, to rejoice for one another, to grieve for one another's faults as for one's own, to consider each other's progress as one's own.¹⁷⁰

The first, third, and fifth activities on this list seem particularly applicable to Enide, who shows concern for her husband's wellbeing (vv. 2829-2844; vv. 3441-3442; vv. 4171-4174; vv. 5015-5040; vv. 5122-5127; vv. 5668-5673), takes personally other people's reproaches regarding him (vv. 2492-2502), and is saddened by his “fault” of being *recreanz* (vv. 2461-2465).¹⁷¹ (This holds true whether or not we believe that being

¹⁷⁰ I cite John Sommerfeldt's English translation of this passage, in his book *Aelred of Rievaulx: Pursuing Perfect Happiness* (New York: The Newman Press, 2005, pp. 74-75); as Sommerfeldt notes, the passage comes from Aelred's *De spiritali amicitia* (*On Spiritual Friendship*). I am indebted to Sommerfeldt for citing and translating the passage in question. The original Latin is as follows: “[...] *in spiritali amore beneficia, quibus et adesse sibi, et prodesse possunt amici. Primum ut solliciti sint pro inuicem, orent pro inuicem, erubescant alter pro altero, gaudeat alter pro altero; alterius lapsum ut suum lugeat; alterius profectum, suum existimet*” (*De spiritali amicitia* III,101, in Aelredi Rievallensis, *Opera omnia*, ed. A. Hoste and C.H. Talbot, Brepols: Turnholt, 1971, p. 340). In another passage that is helpful for an understanding of Enide, Aelred writes that “[i]n friendship there is nothing more outstanding than faithfulness, which seems to be both the nurse and the guardian of friendship” (“*Nihil in amicitia fide praestantius, quae ipsius et nutrix uidetur et custos*[.]” *De spiritali amicitia* III, 62, ed. Hoste and Talbot, p. 329; Eng. trans. Mark F. Williams, in *Aelred of Rievaulx's Spiritual Friendship*, Scranton: University of Scranton Press, 1994, p. 70).

¹⁷¹ In his *Petit Dictionnaire de l'Ancien Français* (Nendeln, Liechtenstein: Kraus Reprint, 1969), Hilaire Van Daele offers, as part of one of his definitions for *recreant*, “*qui renonce à la lutte, qui se déclare vaincu et se rend — à bout de force, épuisé — lâche*” (Van Daele's italics).

recreanz is a real fault.) The text plays on the polysemy of the word *amie* (v. 1551; v. 2511; v. 2515; v. 4682): Enide is both friend and lover to Erec.¹⁷²

If Lancelot is a friend to the queen, theirs is a different kind of friendship. It seems to require a surrender of his judgment and will to hers:

*Rien fors vos ne me puet tenir
Que bien ne puisse a vos venir.
Se vostre congiez le m'otroie,
Tote m'est delivre la voie,
Mes se il bien ne vos agree,
Donc m'est ele si anconbree
Que n'i passeroie por rien.* (vv. 4609-4615)¹⁷³

Other passages in the *Charrette* reveal this kind of submission to be an intrinsic part of Lancelot's and Guenièvre's friendship (*Charrette*, vv. 3788-3817; vv. 4076-4077; vv. 5019-5022; vv. 5652-5656; vv. 5850-5857; vv. 5888-5893),¹⁷⁴ at least up through her commands to him at the tournament of Noauz. Enide, on the other hand, frequently shows her judgment and will to be bound ultimately not by what Erec wants, or seems to want, but by what she believes to be best for him (*Erec et Enide*, vv. 2827-2844; vv. 2959-2992; vv. 3547-3558; vv. 3711-3761; vv. 5015-5040).¹⁷⁵ Lancelot's love crosses over—for at least some of the time—from loyalty to idolatry; Enide's does not.

¹⁷² Greimas translates *ami* as “[a]mi fidèle,” as “[a]mant,” and as an adjective meaning “[a]pparenté.” For an interesting use of the word *amor*, with *compagnie*, see *Erec et Enide*, v. 6204. It is worth noting that Aelred of Rievaulx recommends, in his *De spiritali amicitia*, that we test a person before making him or her our friend (*De spiritali amicitia* III, 61-76). See also Fredric L. Cheyette's and Howell Chickering's description of medieval understandings of love in “Love, Anger, and Peace: Social Practice and Poetic Play in the Ending of Yvain,” *Speculum* 80.1 (Jan. 2005), p. 84.

¹⁷³ “Only you may prevent me from reaching you. If you grant me permission, my way is clear. But if my scheme does not suit you, then the way is so difficult for me that my entry is impossible.”

¹⁷⁴ Méla's translation helped me to understand verse 4076.

¹⁷⁵ Fritz's translation helped me to understand verses 4982-4983.

Now, Peter Haidu has suggested—if I have understood him correctly—that the only medieval alternative to being a subject, in the sense in which modern critics tend to use this term, was to be “an inferior, thrown under the authority and command of another, reduced to ‘passive ... reflex-type conduct.’”¹⁷⁶ Yet to do justice to Chrétien’s portrayal of Enide in the romance requires us to posit a third category, to recognize in Enide a character who is neither “subject” in the sense of someone who asserts himself or herself,¹⁷⁷ nor abject in the sense of being “reduced to ‘passive ... reflex-type conduct.’”¹⁷⁸ In fact, I am not sure that the terminology of subjectivity is terribly helpful, here. On the other hand, Enide is certainly portrayed as a “person” in the sense I have proposed in my introduction, that is, as a *quis*; we might even say that she is portrayed as a person in the sense according to which, “in the twelfth century,” writes Bynum, “schoolmen after mid-century usually understood” the term: “as a composite of body and soul.”¹⁷⁹

What is the relationship between bodily presence and being a lover? Lancelot’s love is bodily insofar as it motivates his general trajectory, especially during the first part of the romance. He expresses his love, in his body, through journeying, through contemplation, through fighting, and—exceptionally, at least—through lovemaking. That he actually be physically present to Guenièvre is necessary only for some of these

¹⁷⁶ Haidu, *The Subject Medieval / Modern : Text and Governance in the Middle Ages*, p. 9.

¹⁷⁷ See *ib.*, p. 10.

¹⁷⁸ *Ib.*, p. 9.

¹⁷⁹ Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200-1336*, New York: Columbia University Press (1995), p. 135.

activities. Lancelot is given not so much the role of a companion as he is given the role of a deliverer; and a deliverer, although it is important that he be present at the moment of deliverance, is not obliged to stay on after this work has been accomplished. Enide shows the possibility of a different kind of love, less glamorous, certainly, but able to draw body and mind into a cooperative union for the continued good of the beloved. If Lancelot attempts a synthesis of knightliness and loving, Enide attempts a synthesis of friendship and wifeliness.¹⁸⁰ And it is precisely through bodily presence that she accomplishes this synthesis.

Bodily presence and being a host

What can we glean from what we have seen so far? It seems that, in Chrétien's romances, bodily presence is integral to the activities required of a knight, as well as being helpful to the activities required of at least a certain kind of lover—or perhaps I should say a certain kind of friend. I would like to end this chapter by looking at a third role that is prominent in the romances: that of a host. Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner has performed an excellent study of the convention of hospitality in Chrétien, arguing that, “as flexible as romance narrative is, it still operates as a conventional system of repetition and variation: the great variety of materials is firmly held within the organizing force of typical patterns.”¹⁸¹ One of these patterns is what Bruckner calls “the Hospitality

¹⁸⁰ Again, it is useful to note, here, Aelred of Rievaulx's association of faithfulness with friendship (*De spiritali amicitia* III, 62; Eng. trans. Mark F. Williams, in *Aelred of Rievaulx's Spiritual Friendship*, Scranton: University of Scranton Press, 1994, p. 70).

¹⁸¹ Bruckner, *Narrative Invention in Twelfth-Century French Romance*, p. 9.

sequence.”¹⁸² My own reason for treating hospitality in the context of a discussion of personal presence is somewhat different from Bruckner’s: I am interested not so much in the hospitality sequence itself as I am specifically in the presence of the host to his or her guests.¹⁸³ Still, I will rely heavily on her book throughout this section for guidance in discerning which elements of a given hospitality sequence are typical and which ones are anomalous.

It would seem, on the face of it, that, out of the three roles I have chosen to explore in this chapter, the role of a host would be the most reliant of all on bodily presence. How is it possible to host someone without being bodily present to do so? As will become clear, however—and as is often the case with Chrétien—things are not as simple as one might anticipate. I will examine here a series of hospitality sequences in Chrétien’s work, in the hope of getting a better grasp on the importance of bodily presence to the business of being a host. In the first part of this section I will look at two such sequences, from *Erec et Enide* and from *Le Chevalier de la charrette*, that provide examples of hosts who fulfill certain responsibilities to their guests through being bodily present to them. The second part will deal with another sequence, also from *Erec et Enide*, involving a host who is bodily present to a degree that is unwarranted by his duties to his guest. In the third part, finally, I will discuss a hospitality sequence, from *Le Conte du Graal*, in which the host is unexpectedly absent.

¹⁸² *Ib.*, p. 28. Sequences, for Bruckner, are made up of “motifs linked together in the development of action and plot.” As she explains, “[t]he manipulation and combination of these motifs allow their limited number to produce an unlimited variety of Hospitality sequences” (*ib.*, p. 21).

¹⁸³ Bruckner herself does mention the presence and absence of the host as a possible variation within the hospitality sequence (*ib.*, p. 16).

Hosts whose bodies are present

Once Erec and Enide have already survived their first two adventures (which we might call, respectively, the Adventure of the Three Robbers and the Adventure of the Five Robbers), they spend the night out in the open, as they have reached neither *vile* nor *recet* (v. 3083). Around noon they are met by an *escuiers*, who, after offering them a condensed version of hospitality, in the form of a picnic, or what Bruckner calls a “‘déjeuner sur l’herbe,’”¹⁸⁴ agrees to ride to a nearby town in order to prepare a place for Erec to sleep that night:

*Sus monte par l'estrier senestre,
Andeus les a enqui lessiez,
Ou chastel vient toz eslessiez,
Hostel a pris bien atorné.
Ez le vos arriers retorné:
'Or tost, fait il, sire, montez,
Que bon hostel et bel avez.'
Erec monte, la dame après.
Li chasteaux estoit auques pres :
Tost furent a l'ostel venu.
A joie furent receü :
Lor hostes mout bel les reçut,
Et trestot quanque lor estut
Fist atorner a grant planté,
Liez et de bone volenté.
Quant li escuiers fait lor ot
Tant d'honor que fait lor pot,
A son cheval vient, si remonte. (vv. 3190-3207)*

Must a host be bodily present in order to host his or her guests? In this passage, many of the actions required by hospitality are performed not by the *borjois* who will give them *ostel* (v. 3221), but rather by the *escuiers*, who serves as a go-between and thus a representative for both the host and Erec. It is the *escuiers*, and not the host, who shows Erec and Enide the way to their lodgings (vv. 3195-3199). It is the *escuiers*, too, who does them “*honor*” (v. 3206) before leaving them and riding home. At this point,

¹⁸⁴ *Ib.*, p. 24.

however, the personal, bodily presence of the host himself begins to play an important part in the hospitality sequence. This is especially the case when it comes to receiving guests and bidding them farewell. Thus, upon Erec's and Enide's arrival, the host "*mout bel les reçut*" (v. 3201); then, when they leave the following morning, he and Erec speak directly to one another so that Erec may settle up his debt for the night's accommodation.

It is possible here to advance the tentative hypothesis that, in order to conduct oneself as a proper host, one must be either present oneself, or have retainers who will serve as one's representatives. Let us look, now, at a longer hospitality episode, this time from *Le Chevalier de la charrette*. In this episode, Lancelot, who is in a cart driven by a dwarf, and Gauvain, who is on a horse, have made their way to a *chastel*. As in the episode from *Erec et Enide* that I just described, it is a third party—the dwarf, in this case—who leads the travelers to the place where they will stay the night: "*li nains [...] le chevalier mainne a l'ostel / Et Gauvains siut adès le nain / Vers une tor qui tot a plain / Par devers la vile seoit*" (v. 418; vv. 420-423).¹⁸⁵ After the two knights' arrival, however, at the tower where they will be lodged, their guide departs; the bulk of the responsibilities belonging to hospitality is then left to the *dameisele de la tor* (v. 536) who is their host.

Although the maiden allows her servants and companions to greet her guests, to disarm them, and to prepare them food and beds, there are also certain tasks with which she, as host, charges herself: she must, of course, give directions to her servants (v. 449), but what is more relevant to our purposes here is that she remains present with the two knights throughout supper, sitting next to Gauvain at the table (vv. 452-453), and

¹⁸⁵ "Followed by Gawain, the dwarf led the knight to the place where he would stay, a tower keep which was straight ahead on the other side of the town."

providing both him and Lancelot with “*conpeignie boene et bele*” (v. 457). It is she, as well, who guides them to the beds that have been prepared for them (“[*l*]a *dameisele prist andeus / Ses ostes qu’ele ot ostelez*, vv. 468-469), who cautions Lancelot to stay away from the Perilous Bed (vv. 484-495),¹⁸⁶ and who sees to it that both of them are awakened in the morning and that Mass is said for them (vv. 536-538).¹⁸⁷ It seems, in this episode, to be demanded by the duties of hospitality that the host should involve herself bodily not only in ensuring that her guests are fed and given a place to sleep, but also in amusing them. This last duty—that of keeping her guests company—belongs not to the host’s servants, but to the host herself.

The maiden, who has made at various times what appear to be rather discourteous remarks to Lancelot on the subject of his chosen mode of transportation, shows herself finally to be a good host—the narrator credits her with *corteisie*, *proesce*, and *largesce* (vv. 585-586)—by giving the Knight of the Cart, before he leaves, a horse and a lance (v. 589). Like Erec’s and Enide’s host in the earlier hospitality sequence, Lancelot’s and Gauvain’s host is particularly attentive to her guests upon their arrival and upon their departure. The reader may construe from both episodes that a host is expected to be bodily present in order to greet his or her guests and to see them on their way.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁶ Uitti calls it “the Perillous Bed” (*Chrétien de Troyes Revisited*, p. 67).

¹⁸⁷ “[T]he young lady took both her guests[.]”

¹⁸⁸ This conclusion is supported by Bruckner’s description of “a complete Hospitality sequence” (*Narrative Invention*, p. 29).

Hosts whose bodies are too present

In the case of the *borjois* who provides lodging for Erec and Enide, we are dealing with an example of what Bruckner has called “socio-economic bourgeois (or commercial) Hospitality.”¹⁸⁹ The *dameisele de la tor*, on the other hand, does not ask her guests for money. Bruckner calls this second form of hospitality “courtly,” but notes that even a bourgeois host, although he “does not qualify as a *cortois* in social position,” may exhibit *cortoisie* through “his behavior and good manners.”¹⁹⁰ In fact, the two hosts at whom we have looked, so far, are similar in their observance (however erratic in the *dameisele*’s case) of the conventions dictating the manner in which a host ought to be present to his or her guests: both are *cortois* in the sense of being “well-mannered.”¹⁹¹ We do not have to look very far, though, to find hosts, in Chrétien’s work, who, by imposing their presence overmuch on their guests, violate the proper distance between host and guest. In other words, it is possible for a host’s body to be too present. Examples of such hosts include Keu, who does not suggest that other knights stay at the court so much as he attempts to force them to do so,¹⁹² and also the *dameisele* in the

¹⁸⁹ As she explains, “[c]ommercial Hospitality is available on a ‘cash and carry basis, offered by a bourgeois host, most often a merchant, to any guest who can afford to pay or repay the expenditures made in his behalf” (*ib.*, p. 118).

¹⁹⁰ *Ib.*, p. 121.

¹⁹¹ *Ib.*, p. 121. Bruckner offers a threefold definition for *cortois*: “1) a class meaning—the opposite of ‘vilain’ ; 2) a reference to social graces—‘well-mannered’ ; and 3) something between the two—a person who acts in accord with nobility [...]” Bruckner is generally in agreement with Greimas (whom she cites), on this point.

¹⁹² See *Erec et Enide*, vv. 3979-4021; and *Le Conte du Graal*, vv. 4221-4229. In calling Keu a host in these two scenes, I am using the term rather loosely; in fact, Keu is trying, in both scenes, to convince or compel another knight to accompany him to the court, thus it could be argued that Arthur is the real host in both cases. I will discuss both these scenes in the second chapter. Besides this, there is the question of whether Keu’s words, in the second scene, actually

Charrette whose offer of hospitality to Lancelot is contingent on his willingness to sleep with her.¹⁹³

I would like to look in detail, here, though, at an especially dramatic example of a character who, if he can indeed be called a host at all, practices hospitality in an overbearing and aggressive fashion: the example of the count of Limors, in *Erec et Enide*. Just before the count's appearance in the story, Enide is lamenting over Erec's wounded body; she believes him to be dead, and is ready, as we have already seen, to kill herself (vv. 4654-4663). Her intention is thwarted by "[u]n conte [...] / *Qui de mout loing avoit oïe / La dame a haute voiz crier*" (vv. 4671-4673).¹⁹⁴ The count attempts to comfort her; next, however, instead of proposing that Enide become his guest, he proposes—or dictates, rather—that she become his wife:

[...] *por neant vos esmaiez,
Qu'encor poez assez valoir.
Ne vos metez en nonchaloir ;
Confortez vos, ce sera sens ;
Dex vos fera lie par tens.
Vostre beautez, qui tant est fine,
Bone aventure vos destine,
Car je vos recevrai a fame,
De vos ferai contesse et dame :
Ce vos doit mout reconforter.* (vv. 4690-4699)¹⁹⁵

qualify as an invitation in any meaningful sense of the word: “*Vasaus, vasaus, venez au roi ! / Vos i vanrez ja par ma foi, / Ou vos le conparrez molt fort.*” (“Vassal, vassal, come to the king! On my word, you shall come there at once, or pay dearly,” *Conte*, vv. 4227-4229.) See Bruckner’s analysis of the scene from *Erec et Enide* in *Narrative Invention*, pp. 128-130; she also mentions the scene from the *Conte* in endnote 11 on page 212.

¹⁹³ See *Charrette*, vv. 936-957.

¹⁹⁴ “A count [...] who from far off had heard the lady shouting in a loud voice” (my translation).

¹⁹⁵ “[...] you torment yourself for nothing, for you might yet know a better fate. Do not become indifferent to everything. You will be wise to comfort yourself. God will make you happy soon. Your exquisite beauty will be your good fortune. I shall take you as my wife and make you my countess and my lady. That should bring you much comfort.”

The speech betrays that the count has failed to understand the nature of Enide's grief: he believes her to be fretting because of the material distress into which Erec's seeming death has put her. This is made even clearer once Enide has been forced to marry the count, after which he speaks of the *richece* (v. 4794) and the *honor* (v. 4797) that have become hers through the marriage. His speech also shows that he has little respect for her as a person (as opposed to a thing). That he bypasses making any simple offer of hospitality to Enide suggests that he sees her primarily not as a stranger in need of help but as an unclaimed woman. His demand that Enide comply with his wishes is reminiscent of Keu's demand that Erec come to see "*la roïne et le roi*" (v. 4002); yet the count's actions and words are considerably more sinister than those of the *seneschaus*. This is partly because of the nature of the count's desire, partly because of its object, and partly because of the lengths to which he is willing to go in order to have it fulfilled. The count treats Enide not simply as a guest, nor even—following Keu's example—as a mere prisoner, but, rather, as a potential spouse. Enide herself, unlike Erec and Perceval in the scenes with Keu, is unarmed and a woman.¹⁹⁶ And, finally, the count is ready to force Enide, by means of violence, to obey him.¹⁹⁷

Other examples from Chrétien's romances make it clear that, when the count responds as he does to his discovery of a woman in a vulnerable situation, he is not

¹⁹⁶ Although the count does not actually rape Enide in the story, his remark, "*Si ferai de li mon plesir*" ("I shall do with her what I wish," v. 4833), indicates that he is not loath to do so. On this scene as one of several "scenes of assault" in the romance, see Gravdal, *Ravishing Maidens*, p. 57.

¹⁹⁷ Keu, too, is willing to use violence in order to bring about his will, but he does so in the context of a fight with a fellow knight.

simply behaving as any knight would behave. In the *Conte du Graal*, Chrétien presents us with at least two scenes in which knights come upon similarly afflicted women without seeking to take possession of them. In the first of these scenes, Perceval finds a *pucele* who refuses to leave the body of her dead *ami*; although Perceval does encourage her to come with him, and expresses his sympathy for her plight in rather clumsy fashion (“*Les morz as morz, les vis as vis !*”, v. 3568¹⁹⁸), he accepts her decision to stay with the body. In the other scene, Gauvain encounters a maiden “[*q*]ui molt li sambloit estre bele, / *Se ele eüst joie et leesce*” (vv. 6462-6463).¹⁹⁹ This maiden, too, is weeping over a knight; in this case, however, the knight is not dead, but simply wounded (vv. 6464-6479). Gauvain, determined to learn news of the “*affaires de ceste terre*” (v. 6490),²⁰⁰ wakes the knight from his sleep. At the end of their conversation, he promises the wounded man that, if possible, he will return later on to see whether he is dead, in which case Gauvain will give the maiden *consoil* (v. 6568). Neither Perceval nor Gauvain comes through either of these scenes, which Antoinette Saly has called “*pietà*,” with his ethical record unblemished.²⁰¹ Not only this, but Perceval, earlier in the romance, has

¹⁹⁸ “The dead with the dead, the living with the living!” I agree with Haidu that Perceval’s “words [...] though perhaps uttered with a kindly intention leave his lips with a brutality destructive of whatever kindness may have been intended” (Haidu, *Aesthetic Distance*, p. 182). Haidu also cites Jean Frappier’s description of Perceval’s words as ““violent, almost insulting”” (*Aesthetic Distance*, p. 181), a description that can be found in Frappier, *Le roman breton. Chrétien de Troyes: Perceval ou le conte du Graal* (Paris: Centre de documentation universitaire, 1959, p. 63), although Haidu is referring, apparently, to the 1961 edition of Frappier’s study. The translation of Frappier’s description is presumably Haidu’s. See also Nykrog (*Chrétien de Troyes: Romancier discutabile*, p. 199).

¹⁹⁹ “Who, it seemed to him, ought to be very beautiful, if she had joy and happiness” (my translation, for which I have consulted, to my profit, Méla’s modern French translation).

²⁰⁰ “Doings of this land” (my translation, for which I have consulted that of Staines).

²⁰¹ See Saly, “La récurrence des motifs en symétrie inverse et la structure du *Perceval* de Chrétien de troyes [*sic*],” in Saly, *Image, Structure et Sens : Études arthuriennes*, Aix-en-

been guilty of transgressing the boundary between himself and a woman (vv. 599-741), while Gauvain admits to the very next woman he meets, after the weeping maiden, that he would like to carry her away on his horse (vv. 6582-6611). Still, the *pietà* scenes, in particular (to borrow Saly's term), do represent the possibility that a knight may be presented with the opportunity to use a woman for his own purposes, without taking advantage of it.

The count of Limors also disobeys “[*I*]es costumes et les franchises” that would be laid out later on, in the *Charrette*, for the treatment of women. These customs dictate that

[...] *dameisele ne meschine,*
Se chevaliers la trovast sole,
Ne plus qu'il se tranchast la gole
Ne feïst se tote enor non,
S'estre volsist de boen renon,
Et, s'il esforçast, a toz jorz
An fust honiz an totes corz.
Mes se ele conduit eüst,
Uns autres, se tant li pleüst
Qu'a celui bataille an feïst
Et par armes la conqueïst,
Sa volenté an poïst faire
Sanz honte et sanz blasme retraire. (Charrette, vv. 1304-1316)²⁰²

Kathryn Gravdal has commented that, according to the custom of Logres, “rape is permissible as long as a man remembers that the rules of good sportsmanship apply.”²⁰³

Provence, France: Publications du CUER MA (1994), pp. 89-109. I have already called attention to Perceval's cavalier dismissal of the responsibilities that the living owe to the dead. As for Gauvain, Haidu remarks that Arthur's nephew “wishes to disturb a man who appears to be mortally wounded for the sake of general travel information, and reveals thereby an egoism as deep as Perceval's” (*Aesthetic Distance*, p. 234).

²⁰² “[I]f a knight came upon a girl—be she lady or maid-in-waiting—he would no more treat her with dishonor than cut his own throat should a noble reputation concern him. If he assaulted her, he would be held in disgrace always and at every court. But if she was under the escort of one knight, another, anxious to fight for her and successful at winning her in armed combat, might do with her as he pleased without receiving censure or shame.”

She is right in pointing out that the second part of the custom fails to protect women (vv. 1311-1316); however, she does not concentrate on its first part, the part having to do with the treatment of unaccompanied women, except to say that “[t]he hero cannot attack a woman who is alone, for that would serve no purpose in the romance economy.”²⁰⁴ I would add, here, though, that even the first part of the custom may not do women much good. Specifically, it does not do Enide much good in the case of the count of Limors, who does not seem to care whether he is “*honiz en totes corz*” (v. 1310). Although the count does *enor* to Enide in his own way, he also does her violence.²⁰⁵

I have treated the count of Limors as a host, here, but I could also have treated him as a lover. In either case, he is more present than he ought to be, to Enide. Neither his wooing nor his hospitality is courtly.²⁰⁶ As for Perceval and Gauvain, although they cannot be regarded, in the scenes that I have described above, as hosts, their behavior stands nevertheless in contrast to that the count of Limors just insofar as they guard a proper distance between themselves and the two grieving women they meet.

Hosts whose bodies are absent

What happens, finally, when a host’s body is absent? We encounter this situation in at least one other Old French poem of Chrétien’s era. In the Old French version of *Le*

²⁰³ Gravdal, *Ravishing Maidens*, pp. 66-67.

²⁰⁴ *Ib.*, p. 67.

²⁰⁵ Charles Méla translates the words *s’il l’esforçast* as “s’il lui faisait violence” (Chrétien de Troyes, *Romans*, p. 537).

²⁰⁶ See once again Bruckner, *Narrative Invention*, p. 121, for a discussion of courtesy in relation to hospitality.

Voyage de Saint Brendan, the abbot and his companions arrive at a “[p]ort” (v. 261), and then follow the *veie* (v. 266) to a *castel* (v. 267).²⁰⁷ They discover “[q]ue en la citét hume n’i out” (v. 278),²⁰⁸ and even when Brendan is “en le palais” (v. 281), there does not seem to be anyone there to greet him: “Fors sul les soens altres n’i vit” (v. 283).²⁰⁹ In the absence of a host, Brendan allows his monks to eat their fill from the food they find, there (vv. 284-304). This does not stop one of the monks from stealing gold during the night (vv. 309-320). Later on this monk dies, after confessing to his crime; following his death, a *message* arrives, bringing them [p]ain and *le beivre* (v. 357) and telling them not to be afraid (v. 361). Although it is not completely clear where this messenger comes from, Ian Short and Brian Merrilees identify him, in their edition of the poem, as “l’ange gardien des voyageurs [...] qui apparaît ici pour la première fois.”²¹⁰ Such an interpretation sheds light, retrospectively, on the problem of why there seemed to be no one in the city and in the palace. The providential tone of the episode (vv. 241-246; vv. 266-268; vv. 356-378),²¹¹ and indeed of the poem as a whole,²¹² suggests that the monks’

²⁰⁷ I am using Ian Short’s and Brian Merrilees’s edition of the poem, which also includes a translation into modern French (*Le Voyage de Saint Brendan*, ed. Ian Short and Brian Merrilees, Paris: Honoré Champion, 2006). Short’s and Merrilees’s introduction suggests that the *Voyage* was composed in the early twelfth century (*ib.*, p. 17), making its composition prior to that of Chrétien’s romances.

²⁰⁸ “That there was no one in the city” (my translation).

²⁰⁹ “Besides his own companions he saw no others” (my translation, for which I have consulted Short’s and Merrilees’s modern French translation of the *Voyage*, p. 63).

²¹⁰ *Le Voyage de Saint Brendan*, ed. Short and Merrilees, footnote on page 69.

²¹¹ I am possibly influenced, here, by the title that Short and Merrilees give to the section containing the messenger’s visit (*ib.*, p. 69).

host, in this instance, is not so much absent as invisible—there is a way in which they are being hosted by God.²¹³

I want to look, now, at Perceval's sojourn at the Fisher King's castle. However atypical this particular hospitality sequence may turn out to be, some of the host's actions are not at all dissimilar to those of other hosts whom I have discussed. For example, once the Fisher King's servants have led Perceval into the room where the king is sitting in bed, the latter carries out faithfully the ritual of greeting his guest: "*Quant li sires lo vit venant, / Si lo salue maintenant / Et dit : 'Amis, ne vos soit grief / Se encontre vos ne me lief, / Que je n'en sui mie aeisiez'*" (vv. 3043-3047).²¹⁴ Even though the host's condition hinders him from rising to show respect to Perceval, his apology demonstrates that he is far from lacking in courtesy.

Perceval's arrival at the Grail castle seems not to be so very different from Erec's and Enide's arrival at the home of the *borjois*, or from Lancelot's and Gauvain's arrival at the home of the *dameisele*. The main particularity, leading up to the arrival itself, is that the hero has more than a little trouble finding the castle in the first place.²¹⁵ As for

²¹² See *Le Voyage de Saint Brendan*, ed. Short and Merrilees, footnote on page 69, second footnote on page 153, and page 20 of their introduction to the poem, where they describe it as "un récit d'aventures qui se déroulent dans un contexte moral."

²¹³ Short's and Merrilees's modern French translation has been very helpful to my understanding of this poem.

²¹⁴ "The moment the lord saw his guest approaching, he greeted him. 'Friend,' he said, 'take no offense if I do not rise to meet you, for I cannot move without pain.'"

²¹⁵ On the difficulty of finding the Grail castle and the related question of whether its appearance to Perceval is supernatural (or *merveilleux*), see Frappier, "Féerie du Château du Roi-Pêcheur dans le Conte du Graal," reprinted in *Autour du Graal*, Geneva: Librairie Droz (1977), pp. 307-322 (as cited by Barbara N. Sargent-Baur, *La Destre et la senestre: Etude sur le Conte du Graal de Chrétien de Troyes*, Atlanta: Rodopi, 2000, p. 101); Haidu, *Aesthetic Distance*, note 135 on p. 168; Sargent-Baur, *La Destre et la senestre*, pp. 101-107 and 109-118; and Sarah

the Fisher King's greeting and subsequent remarks to Perceval, Barbara N. Sargent-Baur says that they are "d'une banalité criante."²¹⁶ Yet the story provides us, even at this juncture, with a sign that this host may not be capable—at least in a physical sense—of exercising all of the responsibilities belonging to his role. For, of course, this host's body is infirm.

Leaving aside here the Grail procession, which is surely at the heart of this episode, I would like to examine Perceval's departure from the Fisher King's castle, which is quite a bit stranger, in at least one regard, than his arrival. First recall that, in the case of Lancelot's and Gauvain's stay at the maiden's castle, there is someone there to wake them in the morning and someone to say Mass for them. This is not the case for Perceval, who, when he wakes up,

[...] *ne vit leienz nelui*
Quant il esgarde environ lui,
Si l'estut par lui sol lever,
Que que il li deüst grever.
Des que voit que faire l'estuet,
Si se lieve, qant miez ne puet,
Et chauce senz aïde atandre,
Et puis reva ses armes panre,
C'au chief d'un dois les a trovees
Ou l'en les li a aportees. (vv. 3297-3306)²¹⁷

Breckenridge, "Cognitive Discoveries and Constructed Mindscapes: Reading the Grail Castle as a Mnemonic Device," *Modern Language Review* 106.4 (October 2011), pp. 970-972. Erich Köhler calls the castle "à la fois réel et irréel" (*L'aventure chevaleresque : Idéal et réalité dans le roman courtois : Études sur la forme des plus anciens poèmes d'Arthur et du Graal*, trans. Eliane Kaufholz, Paris: Gallimard, 1974, p. 265; I am indebted for help with this citation to Daniel Rocher, review of *L'aventure chevaleresque*, *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale* 19, 1976, pp. 397-398).

²¹⁶ Sargent-Baur, *La Destre et la senestre*, p. 109.

²¹⁷ "He [...] looked about, and seeing no one there, had to get up alone. However upset he was, he rose, having no alternative. Without waiting for aide from anyone, he put on his leggings, then went to fetch his arms, which he found at the head of the table where they had been brought for him." I have removed, from Staines's translation, the words "opened his eyes and[.]"

The passage's use of the verb *estoveir* and of the two expressions “[q]ue que il li deiüst grever” and “qant mielz ne puet” makes it plain that the situation is unusual.²¹⁸ It is by necessity, not according to custom, that Perceval gets up and puts on his shoes without anyone else's help. Unlike the absence of Gauvain in the passage from *Le Chevalier au lion* with which I began this chapter, the absence of Perceval's host does not threaten to bring anyone either *grant damage* or *grant perte*;²¹⁹ it is, however, unsettling. Perceval's behavior, upon waking, suggests that he himself expects an attendant to be near: “*il esgarde environ lui.*” And this is not an unreasonable expectation, given that, the night before, he was attended by “[a]utre vallet qui lo servirent.” The text repeatedly, and almost redundantly, draws the reader's or listener's attention to the absence of those persons whose responsibility it would be, in an ordinary hospitality sequence, to see Perceval on his way (vv. 3297-3303; v. 3313; vv. 3322-3323; v. 3326; vv. 3330-3339; vv. 3350-3359).²²⁰ The passage, from Perceval's waking (v. 3294) to his encounter with the Weeping Maiden in the forest (v. 3368), has the quality of a nightmare; things are not as they should be.

That Perceval's host is absent, along with his household, is problematic not only because it prevents Perceval from remedying the failure of which he was guilty the night before, but also because it implies a lack of courtesy on the part of the Fisher King

²¹⁸ As part of his definition for *estoveir*, Van Daele suggests “*être nécessaire, falloir, convenir*” (Van Daele's italics).

²¹⁹ *Le Chevalier au lion*, v. 3925.

²²⁰ Bruckner describes “Welcome,” “Supper time,” “Bedtime,” and “Departure” as “subunits” of “a complete Hospitality sequence” (*Narrative Invention*, p. 29). The fourth of these subunits she describes as follows: “The guest, already awakened, dresses and orders his departure prepared—arms brought, horses saddled, etc. Having thanked (or repaid) his host, the guest mounts and takes his leave to resume his journey” (*ib.*, p. 29).

himself. It is not clear, in other words, that the king's absence is simply part of Perceval's punishment. There may be fault on the host's side, as well. What distinguishes the irregularity of this situation from others—such as Laudine's unwitting lodging of Yvain in the *Chevalier au lion* (vv. 930-1900) and the *Orgueilleus de la Lande*'s similarly unwitting entertainment of Perceval in the *Conte* (vv. 599-741)—is that the host's failure to attend to his guest, whether in person or by proxy, is morally ambiguous. The *Orgueilleus* does not, of course, host Perceval by choice. Neither does Laudine knowingly host her husband's murderer. The Fisher King, on the other hand, bears no grudge against Perceval of which the reader or listener is aware at this point in the story, and indeed has conducted himself as an exemplary host up to Perceval's awakening. As for Perceval himself, he has not forced himself on the king's hospitality, in contrast to his earlier behavior in the Tent Maiden episode. The king's absence cannot be explained in terms of hostility.

What this absence ensures is that Perceval, having failed to obtain answers to the requisite questions from his host the night before, will be prevented from obtaining those answers from him or from any of his attendants in the morning. Perceval's cousin suggests that the good effects of the questions—“*Que tant aüsses amandé / Lo bon roi qui est mehaigniez / Que tot aüst rehaitiez / Les manbres et terre tenist, / Et que molt granz biens en venist !*” (vv. 3524-3528)—could have been achieved only had Perceval posed the questions at the right time, that is, the night before. There is perhaps a hint, here, that the host is absent in the morning because he is physically incapable of seeing Perceval on his way. There is also a hint that Perceval is being rejected from the castle, although no one expresses this rejection to him verbally. It is due in no small part to the

bodily absence of the host and his proxies that the hospitality sequence ends in incompleteness, mystery, and frustration. While, in the case of Saint Brendan and his followers, their stay with a seemingly absent host was followed by the confirmation that God would take care of them (*Voyage*, vv. 359-368),²²¹ Perceval's stay with the inconsistently present Fisher King is followed by the revelation that he, Perceval, is *malaiïrous* (*Conte*, v. 3521).

It is helpful to think about hospitality as a convention, *à la* Bruckner, in that it gives us a standard against which to measure the behavior of particular hosts. Among the many variations that, as Bruckner has shown, may be made to this convention are variations in the distance between host and guest. If a proper host is present to welcome his or her guests, to keep them company at supper, and to see them off in the morning, it is possible for a host to deviate from this ideal both by way of excess and by way of deficiency. A host may press himself or herself on a guest in a way that crosses the boundaries of courteousness; this kind of host may threaten—and may even commit—rape or other kinds of violence. But a host may also be overly absent, cutting off the possibility of communication between himself and his guest, and thus leaving that guest's questions without answers.

Conclusion

In which ways is the kind of personal presence that is mediated by bodies important to the men and women of Chrétien's romances? First of all, it is important to knights, who rely on their bodies in order to travel the kingdom, looking for adventures,

²²¹ Again, I am indebted to Short's and Merrilees's modern French translation.

and in order to engage in battle. The knight of the *siècle* must also be bodily present in what might be called the world of the *siècle* because it is this world that allows him to win and to retain knightly glory. It is important for a knight of the *siècle* both to perform certain tasks and to perform them in a manner that is visible to others. Moreover, in order for such a knight to receive personal credit for these performances, not only must the performances be visible, but the knight himself must be recognizable, whether by his name or by some other mark of identity.²²²

Meanwhile, in the *Conte du Graal*, we catch sight of another possible motivation for the bodily acts of knighthood: a knight may engage in these acts so as to bring about justice. Evidence for this possible motivation appears in counsel that Perceval receives from various quarters, including his mother (*Conte*, vv. 497-502), Gornemant (vv. 1615-1620), and the hermit. The last of these tells him, “*Se pucele aïde te quiert, / Aïde li, que mielz t’en iert, / A veve fame o orfenine, / Icele aumosne iert enterine*” (*Conte*, vv. 6391-6394).²²³ The hermit’s use of the word *aumosne* to refer to the helping of those who ask for help, while it leaves open the possibility that, in doing this, a knight may advance his reputation, puts explicit emphasis on serving the vulnerable rather than on winning glory.²²⁴ Further support for such an understanding of knighthood appears in Gauvain’s speech to Greorreas later on, in which he declares that “[...] *an la terre lo roi Artu / Sunt*

²²² Note the role of armor in mediating knights’ identities at the tournament of Noauz (*Charrette*, vv. 5771-5824); see Bruckner, *Shaping Romance*, p. 63 and p. 71.

²²³ “[I]f a [maiden], [widow], or orphaned girl seeks your assistance, help her, and you will be the better for it. This is the highest act of charity” (I have changed the order of “widow” and “maiden” in Staines’s translation to reflect more directly the Old French as I have cited it above). Van Daele’s dictionary was helpful to my understanding of verse 6394.

²²⁴ Van Daele defines *aumosne* as “*aumône, charité, bonne oeuvre*” (Van Daele’s italics).

puceles aseürees” (vv. 7036-7037),²²⁵ and speaks, too, of “[...] *leal jostise / Qui est establie et assise / Par tote la terre lo roi*” (vv. 7043-7045).²²⁶ Given that Gauvain expresses more than once his aversion to the prospect of being found *recreant* (vv. 6532-6539; vv. 6704-6711), it would be difficult to argue that he himself is motivated solely by the desire to restore justice; it is quite possible, though, to see his motives as mixed. What is more, his words confirm that, at least in theory, a knight is present in the *siècle* not only to seek glory but also to help those who need help.

Should a knight attempt to remove his body from the economy of the *siècle*—an economy made up largely of seeking adventures, proving one’s personal valor, and having this valor advertised—he risks exposing himself to charges of *recreantise*, as in the case of Erec. Yet this is exactly what several of Chrétien’s heroes do. Lancelot makes little attempt to be recognized by others; on more than one occasion, in fact, he explicitly refuses to reveal his name (*Charrette*, vv. 1915-1933; vv. 1997-2010). Yvain, as the *chevalier au lion*, is intent upon keeping his prior identity a secret from almost everyone (*Lion*, vv. 3724-3727; vv. 4605-4609). And Erec waits, to reveal his identity to Gauvain, until Gauvain has tricked him into being hosted by the king (*Erec et Enide*, vv. 4143-4150). It becomes clear, given these examples, that the visibility and recognizability of these knights’ bodies to the world at large is only a relative good for them. While none of them leaves the *siècle* definitively, the presence of their bodies in it is motivated by their desire for goods that stand apart from the economy of glory. Thus Lancelot seeks, through his presence in the *siècle*, to behold Guenièvre, Yvain seeks to

²²⁵ “[I]n King Arthur’s land, maidens are protected.”

²²⁶ “[T]he true justice that has been instituted and established throughout the king’s land.”

keep his promises, and Erec seeks to test the faithfulness of his wife. Bodily presence to the *siècle* has its place in all of these projects, but it is not an end in itself.

Chrétien allows differing conceptions of knighthood, with differing relationships to bodily presence, to exist alongside one another in his romances. In a similar way, he allows various characters to act out differing conceptions of love and love's relationship to bodily presence. Lancelot's love for Guenièvre has a different shape, and promotes a different series of actions, than does Enide's love for Erec. It is characteristic of Lancelot's love for him to desire to look at the queen. It is also characteristic of his love for him to submit his heart, or will, to hers. The first of these two acts is bodily, at least if we are talking about literal contemplation; the second is not. Lancelot's behavior demonstrates that in fact both of these acts may be practiced, in some sense, from a distance. Witness, as examples of the first, his contemplation of the queen from a window (*Charrette*, vv. 560-564) and his musing on her as he rides (vv. 711-724). Witness, as an example of the second, the narrator's remark that Lancelot "[...] *n'a cuer que un / Et cil n'est mie ancor a lui*" (vv. 1228-1229).²²⁷ Lancelot's love is expressed, when Guenièvre is present to him, through his literal contemplation of her and through his obedience to her will. Rather than fixing him permanently to the queen's side, however, this love is capable of expressing itself from afar, allowing Lancelot to be at once the queen's lover and—in a sense—everyone's knight.

Enide shows us another possibility. Her love leads her both to contemplate her husband and to keep watch over him; more fundamentally, it leads her to work for his good. It is possible to recognize the active nature of her love without proceeding

²²⁷ "[Has] only one heart, and it [is] no longer his" (I have changed Staines's translation slightly).

immediately to the step of classifying her as a subject, a term that is, as I have already mentioned, problematic insofar as it implies a division of human beings into the two possible categories of subject and object (or object). Enide both acts and receives action, yet this does not have to indicate a continual sliding from one pole of subjectivity to another; instead, it may simply indicate her maturity as a human person. What is interesting about the bodily expression of Enide's love is its cooperation with her mind and will. Not only does she desire Erec's good, and ponder how it might be fostered, but her desire and her reasoning overflow into the bodily practices of watching and warning. It is conceivable that this kind of love, too, might find a way of expressing itself from a distance,²²⁸ but in *Erec et Enide* Chrétien shows his audience what it looks like when directed towards someone who is not only one's spouse but also literally one's neighbor.²²⁹

Chrétien uses what Bruckner calls the convention of hospitality as a *topos* for the revelation of character, and one of the possible variations that may be made to the convention has to do with the extent to which a host is bodily present to his or her guest or guests. As Bruckner has pointed out, the courtesy that ought to be observed in issuing invitations is demonstrated positively by Gauvain and negatively by Keu;²³⁰ now, courtesy requires that one keep the proper distance between oneself and another person.

²²⁸ See the effects of Perceval's mother's prayer for him in the *Conte* (vv. 6329-6334).

²²⁹ St. Augustine signaled the importance, when it comes to fulfilling the Scriptural command to love one's neighbor as oneself, of attention to "those who by the chance of place or time or anything else are, as if by lot, in particularly close contact with you" ("*qui pro locorum et temporum vel quarumlibet rerum opportunitatibus constrictius tibi quasi quadam sorte iunguntur*," *De doctrina Christiana* I. 61, ed. R. P. H. Green, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995, p. 38; Eng. trans. R. P. H. Green, *ib.*, p. 39).

²³⁰ Bruckner, *Narrative Invention*, pp. 128-131.

This distance can be violated to varying degrees. The count of Limors offers an extreme example of tyrannical hospitality, while Keu, the Lovesome Damsel (to use just one of her names²³¹) in the *Charrette*, and the host of the “*chastel de Pesme Aventure*” (*Lion*, v. 5105), in the *Chevalier au lion*, offer less extreme examples.

Examples of absent hosts are harder to find. Besides the Fisher King, though, we may also cite the example of the *Orgueilleus de la Lande* in the *Conte du Graal*, who is not present for Perceval’s visit to his *trez* (*Conte*, v. 605). In both cases, there seems to be a sense in which Perceval himself, as guest, is to blame for the irregularity of the situation. In the case of the *Orgueilleus*, it is Perceval who violates the proper distance between guest and host, making himself at home despite instructions to the contrary (vv. 655-656; vv. 660-663). And in the case of the Fisher King, Perceval’s over-reticence has surely something to do with why his host has disappeared the morning after the Grail procession. What is important to notice, I think, is that these are indeed irregular situations. The host-guest relationship is characterized by rituals that generally imply the bodily presence of both parties: “[t]he first part [of a complete Hospitality sequence],” writes Bruckner,

includes the arrival at a lodging, with an implicit or explicit arrangement for the exchange of hospitality. The host greets his guest(s), helps him dismount and disarm, sees that his horse is taken care of, and leads him inside.²³²

These tasks can of course be delegated, but given that Arthur himself tends to greet his guests in person,²³³ it would seem that the host’s bodily presence for what Bruckner calls the “Welcome” may be important regardless of his or her rank.

²³¹ Gravdal uses this title in *Ravishing Maidens*.

²³² Bruckner, *Narrative Invention*, p. 29.

It remains to be seen what use is made of other modes of presence in Chrétien's romances. But it is appropriate to end this chapter by drawing attention to what seem to be frequent consequences of bodily absence: namely, gossip, rumor, and mistaken belief. We may think of Erec, whose absence from the world of knighthood is noticed and criticized by others (*Erec et Enide*, vv. 2439-2464); of Lancelot, whose absence from the queen encourages her mistaken belief that he is dead (*Charrette*, vv. 4157-4247);²³⁴ or of Perceval, whose departure from the *Orgoilleus de la Lande*'s tent prior to the latter's arrival, combined with the report of the *Orgoilleus*'s *amie* on Perceval's visit, leads—chronologically, at least—to the *Orgoilleus*'s mistaken belief that she has been unfaithful to him (*Conte*, vv. 742-790). Bodily presence, when it is withdrawn, can leave in its wake a sea of words that rush in to take its place. And those uttering the words may not be terribly scrupulous about what they say;²³⁵ hence the need for reliable messengers, or, more generally, intermediaries. It is to this subject that I will turn in the next chapter.

²³³ *Erec et Enide*, vv. 1535-1547; vv. 4199-4204; vv. 6454-6457; *Conte*, vv. 4486-4491.

²³⁴ This is not to say that such an error may not also be made in the bodily presence of the beloved; see *Erec et Enide*, vv. 4599-4663.

²³⁵ The case of the *Orgoilleus* and his *amie* shows, however, that it is possible for fault to lie on the side of the listener, too.

CHAPTER II

PRESENCE BY PROXY

In my first chapter, I discussed the importance of bodily presence to the roles of knight, lover, and host. Yet it is also possible to be present to a person through someone else's mediation: without being myself physically present to a given person, I may send a messenger or a mediator in my stead, who will then represent me—that is, will render me present—to that person. Someone may even represent me without being aware of it. Or someone may represent me, consciously, without my own being aware of it. These kinds of representation still fall into the category of what we might call presence by proxy.

One approach to analyzing this mode of presence in Chrétien's romances would be to analyze it from a historical perspective: can we see, in the romances, the influence of changes in government in France and in England during the twelfth century? What about the influence of developments, over this period, in Eucharistic theology? Such questions have their place; however, I am more interested in asking questions of a philosophical and ethical nature. What does it mean to represent another person well—that is, faithfully? What difference does it make that someone is consciously representing another person, as opposed to representing him or her unconsciously? What happens to a person's moral responsibility when he or she is being represented by another man or woman? What is the moral responsibility of the intermediary himself or herself? In what ways can we say that a person is truly present to another person through the mediation of a third party?

I will proceed by looking at three different kinds of personal intermediaries in the poems: at fairly straightforward examples of representation, first of all; then at representatives who overshadow, or who come close to overshadowing, those they represent; and, finally, at intercessors, who play a special kind of intermediary role: the members of this last group are not only present on behalf of another person, but are trying specifically to bring about peace between two people.

Representatives

Let us begin by looking at a passage from *Le Chevalier au lion*, in which Yvain is given a message from his wife, Laudine. Just before Laudine's messenger arrives, Yvain, who has been absent from his wife for more than a year, suddenly begins to think about his broken promise to her: "[...] *bien savoit / Que couvant menti li avoit / Et trespasés estoit li termes*" (vv. 2699-2702).²³⁶ Already, even prior to the messenger's arrival, Yvain has begun to withdraw into his thoughts (vv. 2695-2696); he is no longer fully present to the king or to the other knights in attendance at the court. Yet he is still somewhat conscious of his immediate bodily surroundings: "*A grant paine tenoit ses lermes / Mais hontes li faisoit tenir*" (vv. 2702-2703).²³⁷ Yvain's sense of decorum, of what is appropriate in a courtly setting, outweighs the remorse he has begun to feel for his delay in returning home. He is still thinking when he notices the messenger, who

[...] *vint mout tres grant ambleüre
Seur un paleffroi noir bauchent.
Devant le paveillon dessent,
Que nus n'ala son cheval prendre,*

²³⁶ "[H]e realized that he had broken his promise and overstayed the time."

²³⁷ "He was scarcely able to hold his tears, but did so out of shame."

*Ne nus ne fu a son dessendre.
 Et leus que le roy pot veoir,
 Laissa jus son mantel cheoir ;
 Ainsi toute desafublee
 En est el paveillon entree
 Et tres devant le roy venue. (vv. 2706-2715)²³⁸*

The *damoisele* takes not only Yvain, but the whole court, by surprise. In Yvain's case, this is presumably due to his absorption in his thoughts; however, it is harder to explain his companions' failure to act. In any case, it is plain that the *damoisele* herself is determined to deliver her mistress's message, and is undaunted by the king's and his knights' seeming paralysis.

The poem includes very little in the way of a description of this messenger—in fact, we are given more details about her horse's appearance than about hers—for as soon as she has made her way to the king,²³⁹ she begins to speak. From her first words, it is clear that she is not speaking on her own behalf; rather, it is *sa dame*, her mistress, who greets everyone there present, except for Yvain (vv. 2716-2718). The messenger herself is almost completely eclipsed by her message, in the barrage of name-calling that ensues:

*“Le desloial, le jangleour / Le menchongnier, le guileour, / Qui l'a gabee et decheüe. /
 Bien a sa guile apercheüe / Qu'i se faisoit le vrai amerres, / S'estoit faus, soidoians et*

²³⁸ “[She] approach[ed] at a gallop on a black piebald palfrey. She dismounted in front of their pavillion, where no one helped her down or went to take her horse. As soon as she could see the king, she let her cloak fall. Without a cloak she entered the pavillion and presented herself before the king.”

²³⁹ Jacques Merceron points out that she also takes off her cloak; commenting on similar scenes, Merceron explains that “[c]e geste [...] correspond à une règle d'étiquette: les messagers (aristocratiques) doivent [...] en présence du destinataire enlever leur *mantel* pour s'acquitter de leur message” (*Le message et sa fiction: La communication par messenger dans la littérature française des XIIe et XIIIe siècles*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998, p. 203). In support of this, Merceron cites Jean Dufournet, “Etude de l'épisode du roi Marc dans la hutte des amants (Béroul, *Tristan*, vers 1943-2062),” *L'Information littéraire* 27.2 (1975), p. 82. *Pace* Merceron, the *damoisele* does not seem to be “en présence du destinataire,” yet, when she takes off her cloak; Merceron's explanation, however, remains helpful.

lerres” (vv. 2719-2724).²⁴⁰ The reader or listener is reminded by the third person pronouns *l’*, in v. 2721, and the verb *a*, in v. 2722, that Laudine is not actually present in body. Apart from these grammatical markers, however, these verses give us no hint of the person who stands between Laudine and her husband.

In his edition of *Le Chevalier au lion*, David F. Hult points out that B.N. fr. 794 is the only manuscript of the romance in which the damsel’s speech to the assembly does not shift into *discours direct* until v. 2746.²⁴¹ Hult’s reading of vv. 2725-2745, on the other hand—a reading based for the most part on B.N. fr. 1433—is as follows:

*Ma dame a cist lerres souduite,
 Qui n’estoit de nul mal requite,
 Ne ne quidoit pas a nul fuer
 Qu’il li deüst embler son cuer.
 Chil n’emblent pas les cuers qui aiment ;
 Tix y a larrons les claiment,
 Qui en amor sont non veant,
 Si n’en sevent ne tant ne quant.
 Li amis prent le cuer s’amie,
 Et si que ne li emble mie,
 Ainz le garde que ne li emblent
 Larron qui prodome resambent.
 Et chil sont larron ypocrite
 Et traïtour, qui mettent luite
 Es cuers embler dont eux ne chaut.
 Mais li amis, quel part qu’il aut,
 Le tient chier et si le raporte.
 Mais Yvain a ma dame morte,
 Qu’ele li dist qu’il li gardast
 Son cuer, et si li raportast
 Anchois que fust passés li ans. (vv. 2725-2745)²⁴²*

²⁴⁰ “The disloyal, the speaker of evil words, the liar, the trickster, who played with her and deceived her. Well has she perceived his trickery, for he made himself out to be a true lover and was false, traitorous, and a thief” (my translation, for help with which I have consulted David F. Hult’s modern French translation in Chrétien, *Romans*, Librairie Générale Française, 1994).

²⁴¹ Chrétien, *Romans*, p. 800.

²⁴² “This thief seduced my lady, who had looked for no evil. Nor did she think, for anything, that he would steal her heart from her. Those who love do not steal hearts; there are those who call them thieves, who are blind when it comes to love, and know nothing about it, not even a bit. The lover takes the heart of his friend, and does not steal it from her; instead he keeps

Here again, the principal indications of distance between the interlocutor and the message she has brought from her mistress are grammatical: *ma* (v. 2725 and v. 2742); *estoit* (v. 2726); *quidoit* (v. 2727); *li* (v. 2728, v. 2743 and v. 2744); *ele* (v. 2743); and *son* (v. 2744). The only possible clue, here, as to the *damoisele*'s own sentiments on the matter is the digression she allows herself to make in vv. 2719-2741, where she delivers what amounts to a brief sermon on the difference between the friend, or lover (*li amis*), on one hand, and thieves (*larron*), on the other. Even when it comes to these verses, however, a more natural reading would suggest that they are pointing to Laudine's own definition of love more than to her servant's.

The *damoisele* will end her speech by reminding her audience of the intermediate status that she occupies between Laudine and Yvain: "*Yvain, n'a mais cure de toi / Ma dame, ains te mande par moi / Que jammais a li ne reviennges / Ne son anel plus ne detiennges / Par moi que chi en present vois / Te mande que tu li envois : / Rent li, car rendre le t'estuet*" (vv. 2767-2773).²⁴³ The expression *par moi*, repeated twice over the course of these verses, serves to clarify the relationship between Laudine and her messenger. In a speech that Keu makes to Erec, in *Erec et Enide*, and in which he claims to speak on Gauvain's behalf, the *seneschaus* makes this claim using an ambiguous turn

it safe for her so that it is not stolen from her by thieves who seem to be good men. And those are hypocritical and traitorous thieves who strive to steal hearts they care nothing for. But the friend, wherever he goes, keeps it safe and brings it back. But Yvain has killed my lady, for she told him to keep her heart for her and to bring it back to her before the year was out" (my translation, for which I depend heavily on Hult's modern French translation).

²⁴³ "Yvain, my lady no longer has care for you. Through me she sends you words to return to her never and to keep her ring no more. She commands you to send it back to her with me, whom you see here before you. Give it back to her, for you are bound to return it."

of phrase: “*Tant de la soe part vos di*” (*Erec et Enide*, v. 4060).²⁴⁴ Rather than claiming outright that Gauvain has sent him, Keu merely suggests that, in some way, he is representing the king’s nephew. The *damoisele*’s words, on the other hand, make the origin of her message very clear: “[...] *te mande par moi*” (v. 2768);²⁴⁵ and, “*Par moi [...] [t]e mande que tu li envois*” (v. 2771-2172).²⁴⁶ The messenger herself occupies the place of a direct object pronoun following a preposition, while Laudine is the subject of the verb *mander*. These expressions make it clear that the *damoisele*’s role is instrumental.

In representing Laudine to Yvain, the messenger does not limit herself only to words; rather, after she has finished speaking, “*la damoisele avant saut, / Si li osta l’anel du doi.*”²⁴⁷ Not content with having chastised Yvain verbally before his community, she also takes away his wife’s gift to him, thereby demonstrating concretely, both to him and to everyone else there present, the result of his delinquency. Her action serves as a visible corroboration of her message: Yvain no longer has the ring, just as he no longer has his wife’s love. Nor is there any reason to suspect that the *damoisele* is an unfaithful representative of her mistress. Both her words and her action, here, are in perfect accord

²⁴⁴ “So much on his part do I tell you” (my translation).

²⁴⁵ “Through me she sends you word[.]”

²⁴⁶ “She commands you to send it back to her with me[.]” Staines’s translation, which I cite, here, seems to rely on an understanding of “[p]ar moi,” in verse 2771, as referring to the way in which the ring will be returned to Laudine, i.e. through the *damoisele*. “[P]ar moi” could also be understood, though, as a second reference (after the one in verse 2768) to the *damoisele*’s relaying of her mistress’s message to Yvain; this ambiguity could better be captured by modifying Staines’s translation to read: “Through me she commands you to send it back to her.”

²⁴⁷ “The young lady stepped forward and took the ring from his finger.”

with Laudine's earlier words to Yvain: "[L]amours devenra hayne, / Que j'ai a vous, seür soiés, / Chertes, se vous trespasiés / Le terme que je vous dirai" (vv. 2564-2567).²⁴⁸

Recall that, before he sees the messenger, Yvain has already recognized his failure to keep his word to his wife. Laudine's presence to him, in his thoughts, however, does not occupy his full attention; he feels guilt over his absence to her, yes, but his awareness of those around him prevents him from weeping. His remorse is not deep enough to lead to action until he is given a physical representation of his wife's sentiments. While his initial recognition of his fault (vv. 2695-2703) saddens him ("a grant paine tenoit ses lermes"), this is a far cry from the degree of compunction that he shows following the *damoisele*'s message and her ensuing action: "[m]is se voudroit estre a la fuie / Tous seus en si sauvage terre / Quë on ne le seüst ou querre" (vv. 2784-2786).²⁴⁹ The messenger makes Yvain's wife present to him in such a way that he can no longer disregard his responsibility to her.²⁵⁰

Let us look at some more complicated examples, now, of representation through a messenger. One of the conventions followed (at least some of the time) by Arthur's knights, in Chrétien's romances, is that of sending back to the court the opponents whom

²⁴⁸ "[B]e absolutely certain, the love I have for you will turn to hate if you outstay the term I tell you."

²⁴⁹ "He wanted to flee by himself to some wild land where no one would know or seek him[.]" For a perceptive reading of Yvain's reaction (he eventually loses his mind), see Jacques Ribard, "Amour et oubli dans les romans de Chrétien de Troyes," in *Amour et chevalerie dans les romans de Chrétien de Troyes*, Paris: Les Belles Lettres (1995), pp. 86-87.

²⁵⁰ Sharon Kinoshita compares "the messenger's imprecation" to "a performative speech act negating [Yvains's] previous identity," ("Feudal Agency and Female Subjectivity," in Zrinka Stahuljak et al., *Thinking through Chrétien de Troyes*, Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2011, p. 134). For another passage in which a messenger recalls someone to his responsibilities, see *Conte*, vv. 4540-4670; see also Merceron's comments on this passage from the *Conte (Le message et sa fiction)*, p. 283).

they have overcome in battle. Jacques Merceron calls this convention a “motif propre au roman arthurien,” and notes that “[c]e motif valorise le héros, tout en jouant un certain rôle unificateur entre les diverses *aventures*.”²⁵¹ I would like to concentrate here on the knights that Perceval dispatches to Arthur’s court in *Le Conte du Graal*, with a view to discerning what kind of messengers these knights are, and how they represent Perceval.

The first knight that Perceval defeats is the Chevalier Vermeil, who does not become any sort of messenger, since he does not survive the encounter. Ivonez, however, who has witnessed the combat, bears a graphic report of Perceval’s exploit to the court: “[...] *le vallez referi lui / D’un javelot parmi l’oeilliere / Si qu’il li fist par de derrière / Lo sanc et la cervelle expandre, / Et si lo vi a terre estandre*” (vv. 1184-1188).²⁵² Ivonez’s announcements to the court, including an account of Perceval’s promise to avenge the wrong that Keu has done to a certain *pucele* (see vv. 990-1008), have, as their effect, a change in Perceval’s reputation. Those gathered at the court, when Perceval makes his entrance, already “*por bel et por gent lo tenoient*” (v. 936);²⁵³ however, there has of yet been no evidence, beyond the *pucele*’s laughter (v. 993) and her words (vv. 995-1000), to suggest that he has the makings of a *chevalier*. After Ivonez describes Perceval’s victory, though, the poem presents us with the first of Arthur’s speeches bewailing the loss of the

²⁵¹ Merceron, *Le message et sa fiction*, note 5 on p. 356. On Chrétien’s use of this “motif” in the *Conte*, and, especially, the repetition of Perceval’s oath for which it allows, Merceron cites Haidu, *Aesthetic Distance in Chrétien de Troyes: Irony and Comedy in Cligès and Perceval*, Geneva: Droz (1968), p. 197.

²⁵² “[T]he youth struck him back with a javelin through the face so that he made blood and brains ooze out behind his neck, and hurled him dead to the ground.”

²⁵³ “[T]hought him handsome and imposing.” Frédéric Godefroy’s dictionary defines the adjective *gent* as “gentil, joli, beau” (Godefroy, *Dictionnaire de l’ancienne langue française, et de tous ses dialectes du IXe au XVe siècle*, Vaduz: Kraus reprint, 1961).

young man to his company of knights. Ivonez's subsequent delivery of Perceval's message to Keu provokes another such speech from the king. From being merely "*bel et [...] gent*" (v. 936), Perceval is now, from the king's point of view, a "*chevalier [...]* [*q*]ui molt m'a hui ce jor valu" (1193-1194).²⁵⁴ He is still "*nices et bestiaux*" (v. 1249) according to the king,²⁵⁵ but he has at least become someone who merits attention.

What do Arthur and his companions learn about Perceval from other messengers? The next of these is the first knight against whom Perceval fights in defense of Bel Repaire: Aguinguerons, the *seneschaus* of Clamadeu des Illes. Perceval has, by this time, been formally initiated into the *ordre de chevalerie* (v. 1595) by another knight named Gornemant, but Arthur knows, as yet, nothing of this. Previous to his battle with Aguinguerons, Perceval has received instructions from Gornemant about what to do if one has overpowered one's opponent: "[...] *vos vodroie proier / Se vos en vaignez au desus / Que vers vos ne se puise plus / Desfandre ne contretenir, / Ainz l'estuise a merci venir, / Qu'à escient ne l'ociez*" (vv. 1600-1605).²⁵⁶ Aguinguerons's arrival at the court is, first of all, a sign that Perceval has learned something about the customs of the knightly world since his encounter with the Chevalier Vermeil.²⁵⁷ He has learned, from

²⁵⁴ "[K]night [...] who has been worth much to me this very day" (my translation, for help with which I have consulted Méla's modern French translation; see Chrétien, *Romans*, Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1994, p. 979).

²⁵⁵ "Naïve and uncultivated" (my translation).

²⁵⁶ "I would pray you, if you get the better of him, in such a way that he can no longer defend or maintain himself against you but rather must surrender himself to your mercy, that you refrain from killing him on purpose" (my translation, for help with which I have consulted Méla's).

²⁵⁷ Barbara N. Sargent-Baur draws attention to the importance of Gornemant's intervention on this point (*La Destre et la senestre: Etude sur le Conte du Graal de Chrétien de Troyes*, Atlanta: Rodopi, 2000, pp. 67-68).

Gornemant, to have mercy.²⁵⁸ He has also learned a more worldly lesson: how to make use of his foe, after sparing him, for the increase of his own fame.²⁵⁹ Unlike Ivonez, whose testimony resides chiefly in his words, Aguinguerons will serve both as a bearer of news and also as a visible reminder of the young man's prowess.

While the poem does not give us a detailed account of how Aguinguerons delivers his message, it does give us just such an account in the case of his master, Clamadeu, whom Perceval also defeats in battle. While Clamadeu is still approaching, and before he has even the chance to open his mouth, his appearance, on its own, betrays his errand to his *seneschaus*, who is quick to announce his master's arrival to the court:

[...] *Aguingerons le conut,
 Qui son mesaige avoit ja fait [...]
 Son seignor tot de sanc vermoil
 Vit covert, no mesconut pas,
 Ançois saut sus plus que lo pas
 Et dit: 'Seignor, veez merveilles,
 Li vallez as armes vermoilles
 Envoie ci, si m'en creez,
 Ce chevalier que vos veez.
 Il l'a conquis, j'en sui toz serz,
 Por ce qu'il est do sanc coverz.
 Je conois bien lo sanc de ci
 Et lui meïsmes autresi,
 Il est mes sire et je ses hom,
 Clamadex des Illes a non,
 Et je cuidoie que il fust
 Tes chevaliers que il n'aüst
 Meïllor en l'empire de Rome*

²⁵⁸ This remains true even if one suspects, with Sargent-Baur, that Perceval understands very little, if anything, about the reasons behind Gornemant's teaching on this point (see *La Destre et la senestre*, pp. 67-68).

²⁵⁹ It is from Aguinguerons himself that Perceval learns about this practice: “[S]e je lo tesmoig t'en port,” says Aguinguerons, “*Que tu m'aies d'armes oltré, / Voiant ma gent, devant mon tré, / Ma parole en sera creüe / Et t'anors en sera saüe, / Que nus chevaliers n'ot greignor*” (vv. 2194-2199). “If I bear the evidence for you that you have defeated me by arms, in view of my people and my tent, my word will be believed, and you will thereby be known to have honor greater than that of any knight” (my translation, for help with which I have consulted Méla's).

Mais il meschiet bien a prodome.’ (vv. 2698-2699; vv. 2704-2720)²⁶⁰

This passage mentions twice the blood in which Clamadeu is *covert*, covered. Indeed, it is curious to note that Aguinguerons claims to recognize his master’s blood (v. 2713), before he claims to recognize his master himself. His remark, “*Je conois bien lo sanc de ci / Et lui meïsmes autresi*” (vv. 2713-2714), forms the second half of a chiasmus that begins in the previous verse: “[...] *il est do sang coverz*” (v. 2712).²⁶¹ Beyond this, however, the order of the two statements suggests that Clamadeu’s history prior to his meeting with Perceval has been obscured by his defeat.²⁶² By surrendering himself into Arthur’s custody while still bearing all the physical evidence of having been routed, Clamadeu is following a custom according to which “[...] *chevaliers se devoit metre / An prisson atot son ator / Si com il partoit de l’estor / Ou il aüst conquis esté, / Que ja rien n’en aüst osté / Ne rien nule n’i aüst mise*” (vv. 2664-2669).²⁶³ Perceval’s victory is thus

²⁶⁰ “He was recognized by Anguiguerron, who had already delivered [...] his message [...] When he saw his lord covered in crimson blood, he did not fail to recognize him. ‘Sirs, sirs, behold marvels!’ he immediately exclaimed. ‘Believe me, the youth with the vermillion armor sends here this knight you see. He has defeated him, I am completely certain, since this man is covered in blood. From here I recognize the blood and the man himself as well, for he is my lord and I his liegeman. Clamadeu of the Isles is his name, and I once believed there was no finer knight in the empire of Rome. But misfortune befalls many a worthy man.’”

²⁶¹ K. Sarah-Jane Murray writes that “[t]he chiasmus was a rhetorical figure studied with great care in twelfth-century schools” (*From Plato to Lancelot: A Preface to Chrétien de Troyes*, Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2008, note 42 on p. 32).

²⁶² This is reinforced by Aguinguerons’s use of the imperfect tense: “[...] *je cuidoie que il fust / Tes chevaliers que il n’aüst / Meïllor en l’empire de Rome*” (“I once believed there was no finer knight in the empire of Rome,” vv. 2717-2719).

²⁶³ “[A] knight defeated in combat had to yield himself prisoner in all the equipment he wore at the time he left combat, not adding or removing any piece.” On customs in Chrétien, see Donald Maddox, *The Arthurian Romances of Chrétien de Troyes: Once and future fictions*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1991). On this custom in particular, see *ib.*, p. 93 and p. 110.

mediated simultaneously through the visible signs of Clamadeu's blood and through the audible signs of Aguinguerons's words.

Before Clamadeu's formal delivery of his message, Arthur has already judged that Perceval is capable of learning the necessary skills belonging to knighthood: "*Qui ensaignié et adecié / Lo vallet as armes aüst / Tant c'un po aidier se saüst / Et de l'escu et de la lance / Bons chevaliers fust sanz dotance*" (vv. 1234-1238).²⁶⁴ He is far from confident, however, about the young man's chances of success in combat at this stage in his education: "*Ja desfandre ne se savra*" (v. 1248).²⁶⁵ This explains why, even after Clamadeu's report, in which he describes his opponent's *armes vermoilles* and his claim to have gotten them from the king, Arthur still seeks to be reassured of Perceval's well-being (vv. 2792-2795). Not only does Clamadeu confirm that Perceval is "[d]elivres et haitiez et sains" (v. 2795),²⁶⁶ but he also goes on to compare him to "*li mierz vaillanz chevaliers / A cui je onques m'acointasse*" (vv. 2798-2799).²⁶⁷

What is the effect of these words of praise on those who hear them? If Perceval is in some way present to the court through Aguinguerons and Clamadeu, one effect of their representation is to confirm and strengthen the emotions that Perceval had already inspired in Arthur and in the fool of vv. 1010-1019 and vv. 1202-1231. For Arthur, Clamadeu's arrival serves to renew his regret for Perceval's absence—an absence which,

²⁶⁴ "If there had been someone to direct and guide the young man when it came to arms, so that he knew how to help himself a little by means of shield and lance, he would surely have become a good knight" (my translation, based heavily on Méla's; both Méla's and Staines's translations have been helpful, although I disagree with Staines's translation of verse 1238).

²⁶⁵ "[H]e will not know how to defend himself."

²⁶⁶ "[F]it, healthy, and well."

²⁶⁷ "[T]he most valiant knight I have ever known."

just as before, he attributes to Keu and to his *fole laingue* (v. 2822). Similarly, the fool is once again overjoyed to hear of Perceval's promise to avenge Keu's insult to the "*pucele qui li rist*" (v. 2801), and reiterates his prophecy that Keu will get his comeuppance in battle.²⁶⁸ Clamadeu's arrival and speech is a restaging of the scene in which Ivonez described Perceval's battle with the Chevalier Vermeil; as a restaging, it returns its spectators to the positions they took up, at that point, in relation to the young man.²⁶⁹

Although Perceval will have a long and distinguished career of sending knights whom he has vanquished to Arthur's court, the only other one of these whose name we know is the *Orgueilleus de la Lande* (v. 3751). It is, first of all, noteworthy that Arthur identifies Perceval immediately from the *Orgueilleus*'s description of him: "*Tot maintenant que li rois ot, / S'antant molt bien qu'il i viaut dire*" (vv. 3952-3923).²⁷⁰ Perceval has, by this time, acquired a reputation through the testimony of Ivonez, Aguinguerons, and Clamadeu. However, Arthur is not the only character whose reaction to the *Orgueilleus*'s appearance is recorded; Gauvain, who as yet knows nothing of Perceval, is impressed, too (vv. 4022-4029). He notes that "*an totes les Illes de mer / N'ai oï chevalier loer, / Ne ne lo vi ne ne conui / Qui se poïst panre a cetui / D'armes ne de chevalerie*" (vv. 4025-4029).²⁷¹ In fact, the knight that Gauvain is describing, here, is

²⁶⁸ As for Keu himself, he takes the fool's prophecy to be "*molt grant musardie*" (v. 2815). Godefroy translates *musardie* as "folie, bêtise, étourderie, fainéantise, chose vaine[.]" The poem does not say whether Clamadeu's report encourages, in Keu, a new respect for Perceval's prowess; certainly, it does not seem to make him regret his own past actions.

²⁶⁹ The poem does not tell us how the "*pucele qui [...] rist*" reacts to Clamadeu's message.

²⁷⁰ "As soon as the king heard this, he understood what the knight meant."

²⁷¹ "In all the Isles of the Sea I have not seen, known, or heard named a knight to compare with him in feats of arms and in chivalry."

not Perceval—whom he has never seen—but the *Orgueilleus*. It is because he recognizes the chivalric excellence of Perceval’s foe that he wishes to be acquainted with the person who has defeated him.²⁷²

What kind of representatives are these knights, not to mention the sixty others that Perceval will send back to the court over the course of his wanderings (v. 6159)?²⁷³ Is Perceval as we see him in body the same as Perceval as he is represented by his prisoners? The custom that we have seen the prisoners follow, the custom according to which they are to appear at the court in the same clothes and in the same armor that they were wearing when they were overcome, has the effect of emphasizing Perceval’s physical strength—as well as, perhaps, his absorption of the lesson that one ought to show mercy to those who ask for it—over any other qualities he may possess. For Gauvain, Perceval is the one “[*q*]ui seus par ses armes conquest / Si bon chevalier comme *cist*” (vv. 4023-4024). Now, certainly, anyone who had accompanied Perceval on his journey up to this point in the romance would be able to confirm Gauvain’s opinion of him; for Perceval has indeed enjoyed uncommon success in the battles he has undertaken. Such an eyewitness would also know, however, that Perceval’s messengers have left out some important parts of his story (for the most part, this is due to their ignorance). Perceval, as he is present to the court through the mediation of these messengers, is a valiant young knight whom the king is impatient to hunt down (v. 4067-4074); yet the listener or reader knows that Perceval is also, according to his cousin, *chaitis, malaïrous*,

²⁷² Later, Perceval will express to Gauvain his desire for “[*l*]a compaignie de nos deus” (“companionship between us,” my translation, v. 4422), and Gauvain will respond that “[*e*]le ne me plaist mie mains” (“it pleases me no less,” my translation, v. 4426).

²⁷³ I am indebted to Méla for his translation of verse 6159.

and *mal aventurous* (vv. 3521-3522), as well as that his dealings with his mother, with the *Orgueilleus's amie*, and with the Fisher King have not exactly been blameless.²⁷⁴

Aguinguerons, Clamadeu and the *Orgueilleus* offer, then, a picture of Perceval that is both accurate, as far as it goes, and rather limited. How does their representation differ from that of the messenger in the *Lion*? Recall that there was very little characterization of Laudine's messenger, and thus very little distancing of her from her mistress. Her role is simply to mirror her mistress's concerns via a kind of direct imitation. In fact, I want to suggest that this is the reason why the message has such a dramatic effect on Yvain's mental state: for, as far as he knows—and as far as we know, as readers—the messenger is both speaking and acting exactly as her mistress would speak and act were she herself present, in body, to her husband. The mediation of Perceval's messengers is a little more complicated. As prisoners having been sent to the court by their adversary, they represent Perceval not by resemblance, but by contrast. The more evident their disgrace, the greater his credit and glory in the eyes of Arthur and his companions. In short, they have become trophies of his victories. It is helpful, here, to think about Yvain's distress, in the *Lion*, upon realizing that he has no *tesmoing et garant* (*Lion*, v. 1349) to offer as evidence that he has indeed killed the man at whose hands Calogrenant suffered defeat.²⁷⁵ Perceval has no need to preserve such evidence so long as he preserves the lives of his enemies, whereupon each knight's visible humiliation serves as proof of the young man's status. Although the appearance, at the court, of the defeated knights does evoke their

²⁷⁴ Similarly, Rupert Pickens observes, in reference to the “end of the Perceval section” (he is not counting the Good Friday scene as part of this section), that “[t]he audience's knowledge of Perceval's flaws casts the hero in an ironic light” (*The Welsh Knight: Paradoxality in Chrétien's Conte del Graal*, Lexington, KY: French Forum, 1977, p. 33). See also Haidu, *Aesthetic Distance*, p. 255.

²⁷⁵ “Evidence and guarantee” (my translation).

encounters with Perceval, the relationship between their appearance and these past encounters is one of metonymy, not of metaphor: that is, Perceval's messengers do not so much point away from themselves to an already accomplished event—in the way that a sign points away from itself to its referent—as they make that event present by manifesting its effects in their own bodies.

What these messengers do have in common with the intermediary between Laudine and Yvain is that all of them are, in some way, putting on a show. In no case is the mediation accomplished by any of these characters a question merely of words. Rather, Laudine's servant both announces a message and takes action on her mistress's behalf; similarly, the knights sent by Perceval deliver news from him at the same time that they embody it. There is more room, however, for interpretation, in the case of the knights, than there is in the case of the messenger in the *Lion*. After the *damoisele's* departure, we know, and Yvain knows, that his wife is displeased with him. We also know the specific reasons for her displeasure. The knights, on the other hand, hide as many things about Perceval as they display: yes, the king knows, through their mediation, that Perceval is capable of unhorsing even veteran knights, but he knows little of Perceval's character.

We are not told that the messenger who takes Laudine's ring away from Yvain adds anything to her mistress's message, whether from her own stock of discernment or from her own knowledge of the particular situation. Similarly, the knights conquered by Perceval confine themselves, for the most part, to delivering the messages he orders them to bear. True, Aguinguerons also announces the arrival of his lord (vv. 2707-2720), while Clamadeu embellishes his own report with words of praise for Arthur (vv. 2773-

2778) and Perceval (vv. 2798-2799), as well as with an allusion to the regret he feels over his own defeat (v. 2781)—these interventions are minimal, however. Even the custom of arriving at the court in the same state in which one fought puts the burden of interpretation on the spectator. If these knights are representatives, theirs is a kind of representation that does not require all that much skill.²⁷⁶ The effect of their representation, for these messengers, is to make another person present, and to do so by effacing themselves, at least to some extent.

More complex representatives

An example of representation that, although it may be initially unconscious, is nevertheless thoroughly effective, appears at the beginning of the *Conte du Graal*. The story's protagonist, Perceval, is riding through the forest near his home when he hears the sound of "*V. chevaliers armez / De totes armes acesmez,*" coming towards him.²⁷⁷ He believes, at first, that what he is hearing is the sound of *deiable*, of devils (v. 111), but the sight of the knights themselves persuades him that they are in fact *ange*, angels (v. 132). One of the knights corrects this second misapprehension by revealing that he is a *chevaliers* (v. 169). After a long discussion, Perceval finally finds out the source of the knights' splendor, which has made a great impression on him. He asks the knight,

[...] *Fustes vos ensin nez?*
— *Nenil, vallez, ce ne puet estre*
Que nule riens puise ansin nestre.
— *Qui vos atorna donc ensin?*
— *Vallez, je te dirai bien qui.*
— *Dites lo donc. — Molt volantiers.*

²⁷⁶ It does seem to require courtly manners.

²⁷⁷ "Five knights in full armor."

*N'a pas encore .V. jors antiers
Que tot ce hernois me dona
Li rois Artus qui m'adoba. (vv. 276-284)²⁷⁸*

Perceval's hypothesis, after having spoken with the knight for a while, is that perhaps everything he sees is the result of nature: "*Fustes vos ensin nez?*" (v. 276). This hypothesis is perfectly appropriate to the setting of the "*gaste forest*," like the trees, the bushes, the meadows, and the birds with which Chrétien has begun his tale (vv. 67-70), the knights themselves seem at first, to Perceval, to belong to the natural world around him.

The knights, however, turn out to be representatives not of nature, but of art, in the sense of what Marie-Dominique Chenu calls "techniques."²⁷⁹ "[*N*]ule riens puise ansin nestre," the knight tells Perceval (v. 278).²⁸⁰ And it is this statement that prompts Perceval to come to the conclusion that, behind everything that appeals to him about the knights, there lies a particular person. The knights are present not only in their own name but also in someone else's. Having come to this conclusion, Perceval asks a question that, once it is answered, will decide his own future as a knight, a question beginning

²⁷⁸ "Were you born like this? 'No, youth. That is impossible, for no one can be born like this.' 'Then who dressed you so?' 'Youth, I shall certainly tell you who.' 'Then tell it.' 'I am glad to. It has not been five full days since King Arthur dubbed me knight and presented me with all this armor.'"

²⁷⁹ Chenu relates the "découverte de la nature," in the twelfth century, to an "essor des techniques;" among his examples are windmills, the compass, and the mechanical clock (*La Théologie au douzième siècle*, Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1957, p. 21; pp. 47-48).

²⁸⁰ Perceval will later ask his mother, "[...] *Ne solez vos dire / Que li ange Dé nostre sire / Sont si bel c'onques Nature / Ne fist si bele criature, / N'o monde n'a si bele rien?*" ("[D]id you not often say that the angels of God our Lord are so very beautiful that Nature never made such beautiful creatures, and that there was nothing in the world so beautiful?," vv. 357-361). In contradiction to her teaching, he will then claim to have seen "[*I*]es plus beles choses qui sont" ("the most beautiful things there are," v. 365); now that he has seen the results of Arthur's craft, there is no longer any room for either natural or angelic beauty in his imagination.

with *qui*: “*Qui vos atorna donc ensin?*” (v. 279). In a certain sense—from the perspective of an aspiring initiate into the knightly world—Perceval has finally asked the right question.²⁸¹

For Richard of Saint Victor, “[T]he answer to the question “*who?*” is a proper name.”²⁸² This statement makes up part of Richard’s discussion of the distinction between a substance and a person.²⁸³ And indeed, Perceval’s conversation, here, with the knight, perfectly corroborates Richard’s observation, for the answer to his question is of course not a thing, but rather a person: “[*I*] *rois Artus*” (v. 284).²⁸⁴ Whether or not they are themselves fully aware of it, the knights have entered Perceval’s world as representatives of the king. Although Perceval himself has, up to this point, tended to

²⁸¹ Upon meeting him, Gornemant de Goort will ask Perceval a very similar question: “*Or me di, frere debonaire, / Ces armes, qui les te bailla?*” (“Now tell me, nobly born friend, those arms, who gave them to you?,” vv. 1324-1325). Translations for *debonaire* in Hindley’s, Langley’s, and Levy’s *Old French-English Dictionary* include “good, gentle, of noble spirit; bountiful, kind; full of noble sentiment; meek; patient; handsome, [and] elegant.” It seems to me that Gornemant’s address is mildly ironic. I am indebted to Sargent-Baur for this reference (*La Destre et la senestre*, p. 29). She interprets this question, on Gornemant’s part, as an expression of his “étonnement (à vrai dire son incrédulité) que malgré le dire de l’arrivant ce soit le roi Arthur qui avait fait ce ‘chevalier’” (*ib.*, p. 29). Certainly Gornemant’s reasons for asking the question are quite different from Perceval’s: Perceval is motivated by his desire to be like the knights, while Gornemant is motivated by a desire to help the young Welshman, as well as by what seems to be—if we follow Sargent-Baur’s interpretation—curiosity.

²⁸² “*Ad interrogationem [...] quis, nomen proprium reddi solet*” (*De Trinitate* IV, 7, ed. Gaston Salet, Paris: Sources Chrétiennes, 1959, p. 244; Eng. trans. Ruben Angelici, Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011, p. 147).

²⁸³ “*Ex his, ut arbitror, facile poteris advertere quod inter se multum differant significatio substantiae et significatio personae*” (“From all of this—I think—you can easily deduce that the meaning of ‘substance’ and the meaning of ‘person’ are very different from one another,” *De Trinitate* IV, 7, ed. Salet, p. 242; Eng. trans. Angelici, p. 147).

²⁸⁴ Following Pickens, Sargent-Baur suggests that Perceval initially interprets the word *chevaliers*, too, in v. 169, as a name: “Il semble que le garçon prenne cette désignation pour un nom propre” (*La Destre et la senestre*, p. 40; see also Pickens, *The Welsh Knight*, p. 112). Sargent-Baur also points out that, up to this point in the story, “le seul nom propre usité [...], c’est Diex” (*La Destre et la senestre*, p. 40).

encounter other persons—for instance, his mother and her plowmen—largely through the medium of these persons’ own bodies,²⁸⁵ he now learns about King Arthur through the medium of Arthur’s knights.

The knights stand out prominently from the world with which Perceval is already familiar not so much because of their words or their deeds, but rather because of their appearance:

*Et quant il les vit en apert
Que do bois furent descovert
Si vit les hauberz fremienz
Et les hiaumes clerz et luisanz
Et vit lo vert et lo vermoil
Reluire contre lo soloil
Et l’or et l’azur et l’argent,
Si li fu molt tres bel et gent [.] vv. 123-130²⁸⁶*

The passage’s repetition of the verb *veoir* makes it clear that, just as, in Chrétien, it is sometimes upon seeing another person’s beauty that a lover falls in love with his or her beloved, so it is upon seeing the knights’ beauty—or, more precisely, the beauty of their armor—that Perceval falls in love with the knightly way of life.²⁸⁷ This is not to say, of

²⁸⁵ There are exceptions. Before he meets the knights, Perceval has already learned, by means of his mother’s teaching, about the existence of God (vv. 144-148), of angels (vv. 136-139; vv. 357-361), and of devils (vv. 109-114).

²⁸⁶ “When he did see them in the open without the woods concealing them, and noticed the jingling hauberks and the bright shining helmets, and beheld the green and the scarlet and the gold and the azure and the silver gleaming in the sun, he found everything most noble and beautiful.”

²⁸⁷ In *Cligès*, we read that Soredamors “[a]ccused her eyes of treason,” (“[s]es euz de traïson acuse,” v. 474); see also *Lion*, vv. 2017-2024 (Hult’s translation has helped me understand these verses and their context). Note, too, that the adjectives *cler* and *luisant*, used here to describe the knights’ helmets, may be used, as well, to describe female beauty: “*Por voir vos di qu’Iseuz la blonde / N’ot tant les crins sors et luisanz / Que a cesti ne fust neanz. / Plus ot que n’est la flor de lis, / Cler et blanc le front et le vis*” (“I tell you honestly, the shining gold hair of the blonde Iseut was nothing in comparison with this maiden’s hair. Her forehead and face were whiter and brighter than the lily-in-bloom,” *Erec et Enide*, vv. 424-428). See also the description of Blanchefleur, in *Le Conte du Graal*, vv. 1763-1787.

course, that the words of their chief are unimportant in this episode. In fact, his encounter with the knights leaves Perceval with two different kinds of knowledge regarding King Arthur: he knows both what the knights themselves look like, and what the knights' chief has said about the king.²⁸⁸ Yet it can be argued that the first of these two kinds of knowledge is more fundamental: Perceval's admiration for the knights' equipment is apparent even before any words are exchanged.

But what kinds of representatives are the knights? What exactly does Perceval learn of King Arthur, through both visible and audible signs, in this episode? Before the knights continue on their way, Perceval speaks one last time to their chief. He wishes to know "*la novele / Do roi qui les chevaliers fait / Et do leu o il plus se trait*" (vv. 326-328).²⁸⁹ Here is the principal notion that Perceval has garnered from the earlier conversation: Arthur makes knights. In his subsequent conversation with his mother, he uses the same language to describe the king: "*Mais molt iroie volantiers / Au roi qui fait les chevaliers*" (vv. 457-458).²⁹⁰ What does Perceval mean by saying that the king makes knights? What kind of relationship does he discern between Arthur and the knights he makes? It is far from clear that Perceval understands the knights to be Arthur's political representatives or deputies, even though, as we see elsewhere in the romance, this is in some sense what at least one knight understands himself to be: in words to which I have already alluded in my first chapter, Gauvain will later explain his own actions as having

²⁸⁸ Perceval has been brought up in such a way as to keep him, first of all, from seeing any knights (v. 315), and, second, from knowing what knights do (v. 316).

²⁸⁹ "[A]bout the king who makes knights, and the place where he usually resides."

²⁹⁰ "But I would love to go to the king who makes knights."

been based on “*leal jostise / Qui est estable et assise / Par tote la terre lo roi*” (vv. 7043-7045).²⁹¹

Perceval, on the other hand, is interested chiefly in the knights’ armor (vv. 180-270). Once he has reached the court, Perceval will demand that the king give him armor of his own: “*Donez moi les armes celui / Que j’encontrai de ors la porte*” (vv. 956-957);²⁹² the young man’s words to Arthur in this scene indicate that, to him, the making of a knight and the equipping of a knight amount to the same thing.²⁹³ If the knights he has met “*en la lande*” (v. 945) are representatives of Arthur, they are representatives by means of the things he has given them. Thus Perceval comes to see Arthur primarily as a giver of a particular kind of material gift; as Sargent-Baur writes,

grâce [au chef des chevaliers et à sa mère], le *vallet* part de chez lui fermement convaincu que; 1° Arthur est la personne qui fait les chevaliers et les arme, et 2° s’il va là où ce roi séjourne, ce dernier lui donnera des armes sans faute.²⁹⁴

²⁹¹ “[T]he true justice that has been instituted and established throughout the king’s land.” Méla’s translation of vv. 7043-7045 reads, “[C]ar je l’ai fait légitimement, selon la justice qui est établie, avec force de loi, sur tout le territoire du roi.” Opinions on Gauvain, especially as he appears in the *Conte*, have varied. Even within the *Conte* itself, what Gauvain himself claims to have been an act of *jostise* (v. 7043) does not seem to have been interpreted as such by the knight on whom he exercised it (vv. 7023-7031; vv. 7046-7054). Pickens, while he writes that Gauvain, “unlike Perceval, achieves simultaneously a measurable success” (*The Welsh Knight*, p. 43), also suggests that “the Hermitage episode,” which interrupts Gauvain’s adventures, affects our “perception” of these adventures (*ib.*, p. 54): “it introduces Christian charity into the fiction,” he explains, “and resonates with the prologue [...]. In the very next scene we see Gauvain behaving uncharitably” (*ib.*, p. 46; see also Haidu, *Aesthetic Distance*, pp. 231-234). Meanwhile, Keith Busby, writing just a few years after Pickens, says that “all [Gauvain] achieves is as a result of his physical prowess, not of any spiritual qualities he may possess” (*Gauvain in Old French Literature*, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1980, p. 142). Emmanuèle Baumgartner, on the other hand, sees in him, at the culmination of his adventures, “l’*élu*, le chevalier longtemps désiré” (*Chrétien de Troyes: Le Conte du Graal*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1999, p. 74).

²⁹² “Give me the arms of the man I met outside the gate[.]”

²⁹³ Here, again, I am following Sargent-Baur, who observes that, from Perceval’s point of view, “c’est à [Arthur] de lui faire don d’une armure (ce qui équivaut dans l’esprit du sauvageon à le faire chevalier)” (*La Destre et la senestre*, p. 46).

²⁹⁴ *ib.*, p. 49.

Nor is it apparent, at this juncture, that he is wrong to believe these things about Arthur.²⁹⁵ The knights' chief has given him no indication of their mission, beyond their search for a group of five knights and three *puceles* (v. 179), and he has explained the purpose behind their armor only in the simplest and most literal terms.

Do the knights represent Arthur faithfully? Perceval's meeting with them leaves him with the conception of a king who is ready to bestow arms on all and sundry.²⁹⁶ And Arthur's generosity is indeed apparent elsewhere in Chrétien's *oeuvre*; for example, at the end of *Erec et Enide*, he gives to those "[q]ui a la feste sont venues [...] [c]hevaus et armes et argent, / Dras et pailles de mainte guise, / Por ce qu'il ert de grant franchise / Et por Erec qu'il ama tant" (v. 6944; vv. 6946-6949).²⁹⁷ Still, even were Arthur to give Perceval the armor that he desires, it remains unclear whether he would, by receiving it, become a knight; if Sargent-Baur is right, Perceval's assumption that these are one and the same thing is a "*méprise*."²⁹⁸ And beyond this, there are surprises in store for

²⁹⁵ On this point, I have been persuaded, yet again, by Sargent-Baur: "L'idée que se fait le garçon de la chevalerie est-elle, au fond, tellement erronée? Qu'est-ce après tout qu'un chevalier, sinon un homme armé? Si la nudité de cette définition est susceptible de choquer, on pourrait la nuancer en ajoutant qu'un chevalier doit posséder un cheval et, en plus, doit être de lignage respectable; mais pour le *vallet* ces deux dernières conditions ne présentent aucun problème et n'entrent donc pas dans sa conception du chevalier en tant qu'être à part, différent des autres et de lui-même" (*ib.*, p. 50).

²⁹⁶ See *ib.*, p. 50.

²⁹⁷ "Who came to the feast [...] horses and weapons and silver, clothes and textiles of many kinds, because he was very generous and because of Erec whom he loved so much" (my translation, for help with which I acknowledge those of Staines and Jean-Marie Fritz; the latter translation can be found in the Librairie Général Française edition of Chrétien's romances). For other examples of Arthur's generosity, see *Erec et Enide*, vv. 2056-2064; *Cligès*, vv. 2319-2328; and *Charrette*, vv. 104-110.

²⁹⁸ According to Sargent-Baur, "Chrétien [...] a toujours dépeint les chevaliers comme des hommes étant passés par un long apprentissage d'armes et de savoir-vivre" (*La Destre et la*

Perceval at the *chastel sor mer* (v. 801) where he finally finds the king.²⁹⁹ Perceval's idea of Arthur, founded on his concrete knowledge of Arthur's knights, has given him no sense of the king's outward appearance: "*Ne ne set lo quel il salut / Que do roi mie no conut*" (vv. 871-872).³⁰⁰ And this is not the only gap between Perceval's preconceptions and the reality of the court. His acquaintance with the knights has failed to prepare him, notably, for the king's silence:

*La sale fu a terre aval,
Et li vallez entre a cheval
En la sale qui fu pavee
Et autant longue comme lee.
Et li rois Artus est assis
Au chief d'une table pansis
Et tuit li chevalier parloient
Et li un as autres disoient :
'Qu'a li rois, qu'est pensis et muz ?' (vv. 861-869)³⁰¹*

Once Ivonez has indicated to him which of the persons present is the king, Perceval speaks to Arthur but receives no answer. From the king's silence, Perceval draws the conclusion that the account he was given of Arthur was unsound. The young man has

senestre, p. 50). On the process by which one becomes a knight, in Chrétien's romances, see Sargent-Baur's article, "Promotion to Knighthood in the Romances of Chrétien de Troyes," *Romance Philology* 37.4 (May 1984), pp. 393-408; Sargent-Baur herself cites this article on page 50 of *La Destre et la senestre*.

²⁹⁹ Seemingly, Cardoeil (v. 797) is not to be identified with the "*chastel sor mer*" (v. 801); I owe this distinction to Sargent-Baur (*La Destre et la senestre*, pp. 49-50).

³⁰⁰ "Not recognizing the king, he did not know whom to greet."

³⁰¹ "The great hall was level with the ground, paved, and as long as it was wide. The youth entered the hall on horseback. King Arthur was seated pensively at the head of a table, and all the knights were engaged in conversations, [and they were saying to one another, "What ails the king, that he is pensive and silent?]" The text between the brackets is my translation, while the rest is that of Staines, whose translation, based on the Guiot manuscript (B.N. fr. 794), departs, here, from Méla's edition of the *Conte*, which is based on Berne 354 (for variants of vv. 868-869, see Méla's critical apparatus in Chrétien, *Romans*, p. 969, as well as Chrétien, *Le Roman de Perceval ou Le Conte du Graal: Édition critique d'après tous les manuscrits*, ed. Keith Busby, Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1993, p. 38).

ridden to the court in search of the “*roi qui fait les chevaliers*” (v. 458), but Arthur proves so unresponsive that Perceval concludes, “*Cist rois ne fist chevaliers onques.*”³⁰² Arthur has turned out to be unlike his knights, in more than one regard. The knight with whom Perceval talked in the *lande* (v. 945) was attentive to him, while Arthur does not even notice Perceval’s attempt to address him. The knights in the earlier scene were mounted, while the king is *assis* (v. 865). Indeed, later on, when the king asks him to descend from his horse, Perceval is indignant: “*Ja n’estoient pas descendu / Cil que je vi ore en la lande, / Et vos volez que je descende?*” (vv. 944-946).³⁰³ Perceval’s expectations regarding the king, expectations that arose from his original encounter with the knights, are at least partly confounded by the king as he is in person.

Who bears responsibility for this disparity? Even if we were to establish that the knights themselves are faithful representatives of Arthur’s generosity and his interest in making knights, we would still have to deal with the problem of Perceval himself and of his interpretation of what he sees and hears. Is Perceval himself at fault for failing to come to a proper understanding of the “*roi qui fait les chevaliers*” (v. 458)? At least one character in the poem itself implies that he is not. The *prodom*, Gornemant, who instructs Perceval in how to fight, will tell him,

‘*Ce qu’en ne set puet l’an apanre,
Qui i velt pener et entendre,
Fait li prodom, biax amis chiers.
Il covient a toz les mestiers
Et cuer et peine et us avoir,*

³⁰² “This king never made knights.”

³⁰³ “The men I met on the heath never dismounted, and yet you wish me to dismount.” Haidu’s remark is helpful: “That King Arthur should be a better guide to knightly deportment than the newly dubbed man on horseback he saw the previous day does not occur to Perceval” (*Aesthetic Distance*, p. 140).

*Par ces .III. puet en tot savoir.
Et quant vos onques n'apreïstes
Ne autrui faire nel veïstes,
Se vos faire ne lo savez,
Honte ne blasme n'i avez[.]* (vv. 1411-1420)³⁰⁴

If we look at Perceval's naïveté at the court as analogous to his inexperience in combat, Gornemant's speech suggests that, since he has not been trained in the ways of the court, he cannot be expected to know what to do upon meeting a king for the first time.³⁰⁵ What about the knights themselves? Certainly they do not mislead Perceval on purpose. At the same time, it is not all that surprising that Perceval comes away from the scene and from the conversation with an idea of Arthur as a source of material goods. The knights have given him no explicit reason to think otherwise. Their most immediately arresting characteristic is indeed their armor. Any additional ways through which they may reflect Arthur's character—note, for example, the courtesy of Perceval's interlocutor, who tarries willingly to answer the Welshman's questions—are simply too subtle for the young man to grasp or interpret.

The two scenes at which we have just looked—the scene in the forest and the scene at court—present the nature of the relationship between Arthur and his knights as based on material patronage. This is not, however, the only definition of that relationship to appear in the romance; Gauvain, after all, has a distinct conception of himself as helping to establish "*leal jostise [...] [p]ar tote la terre lo roi*" (vv. 7043 and 7045). The knights in the forest fail to pass along such a conception to Perceval, who, when he

³⁰⁴ "If willing to make the effort and apply himself, dear friend, a man may learn what he does not know," the worthy man said. "Every skill requires desire, effort, and practice. All knowledge comes from these three. And since you have never performed these activities, nor seen anyone perform them, no blame or shame is yours if you do not know how."

³⁰⁵ See also Perceval's mother's words to him in vv. 487-488.

arrives at Cardoeil, has no interest whatsoever in *leal jostise*. Do the knights themselves have an interest in justice? Perhaps. Yet whatever their conception of themselves, the lesson that they actually succeed in teaching Perceval is that it is Arthur who will give him the tools he needs in order to look and act like them.

What about Gauvain, though? Leaving Perceval behind, for the moment, let us turn our attention to the knight whom Chrétien calls, in *Le Chevalier au lion*, “[c]hil qui des chevaliers fu sire / Et qui seur tous fu renommés” (vv. 2400-2401).³⁰⁶ In what sense is Gauvain a representative of Arthur? How does his representation of the king differ from that of the knights in the *lande*? The first time that we see Gauvain in person, in the *Conte du Graal*, he is with Arthur at Carlion, and he is sitting at the king’s right (v. 4021). His spatial position gives us a fair indication of his prominence among his fellow knights; still, it is somewhat odd, given his importance later in the *Conte*, that he has not hitherto played any part in the events of the romance. Why does Chrétien wait until verse 4020 to introduce a character whose adventures will take up such a large amount of the romance’s remainder?³⁰⁷ And what is the nature of the relationship between Gauvain and Arthur?

³⁰⁶ “The man who was the lord of knights, renowned above all.” For a detailed treatment of Gauvain in Chrétien’s romances, see Busby, *Gauvain in Old French Literature*, pp. 50-151.

³⁰⁷ Chrétien devotes 4973 verses to Perceval’s story and 4093 to Gauvain’s. I am basing my count on the assumption that Perceval’s story occupies verses 1-4676 and verses 6142-6438 of the romance, while Gauvain’s occupies verses 4677-6141 and verses 6439-9066 (all of this in the version of the *Conte* that appears in the Librairie Générale Française edition of the romances). My count does not include the *explicit*, nor does it include a section of 48 verses that, as Méla explains, is missing from manuscript B (Chrétien, *Romans*, p. 1198; manuscript B is Berne 354, which Méla uses as his “manuscrit de base,” Chrétien, *Romans*, p. 941). Méla inserts the section following verse 8686 of the poem (see Chrétien, *Romans*, pp. 1198-1199); if it were included, the number of verses devoted to Gauvain’s story would increase to 4141.

Gauvain makes his first appearance just a few verses after the king has delivered a rebuke to Keu. Arthur blames Keu for Perceval's absence: "*A! Kex,*" he says, "*[M]olt feïs que cortois / Do vallet que tu me guabas! / Par ton gaboïs tolu lo m'as / Si que jamais no cuit veoir*" (vv. 4012-4015).³⁰⁸ The vice for which Keu is reproached, here, has to do with his *gaboïs*, which Hindley, Langley, and Levy translate as "jesting, boast, joke, taunt, mockery, derision," and Frédéric Godefroy's dictionary defines as "moquerie, dérision, raillerie." Keu has failed to take Perceval seriously. In the context of what has taken place up to this point in the romance, it is plain, too, that the *seneschaus* is jealous—or, at the least, resentful—of Perceval.³⁰⁹ The king ironically describes Keu's behavior towards Perceval as *cortois* (v. 4012), thereby calling attention to the discrepancy between Keu's actions and his surroundings. It is only after we have witnessed a clear example of what it looks like to fall from the king's graces that we

³⁰⁸ "Ah, Kay, most courteously you acted toward the youth in your mockery of him! By your mockery you robbed me of him so that I expect to see him never again."

³⁰⁹ See *Conte*, vv. 959-965; vv. 1004-1022; vv. 1225-1233; and vv. 2814-2818. A textual variant for verses 959-960 is signaled by Méla. It suggests that, when he meets Perceval for the first time, Keu is wounded. According to this variant, Keu, "*qui fu bleciez / De ce qu'il ot s'est correchiez*" (Chrétien, *Romans*, p. 971; see also Chrétien, *Le Roman de Perceval ou Le Conte du Graal: Édition critique d'après tous les manuscrits*, ed. Keith Busby, p. 41). Interpreting this variant is difficult in at least two respects. First, it is not clear whether "*De ce qu'il ot*" ought to be understood as belonging to what is presumably a relative clause containing "*qui fu bleciez*," in which case we might translate the variant as saying that Keu, "who was wounded by what he heard, got angry." It could also be understood as belonging to the main clause, in which case we might translate the variant as saying that Keu, "who was wounded, got angry over what he heard." Méla's rendering corresponds to the second of these two readings: "Le sénéchal, qui était parmi les blessés, s'est irrité de ce qu'il vient d'entendre" (Chrétien, *Romans*, p. 971). A related problem has to do with the word *bleciez* in particular: is Keu wounded in body, in spirit, or both? Daniel Poirion's edition of the *Conte* adopts the variant, with a comma after "*De ce qu'il ot*," and translates the lines as "Le sénéchal, qui était blessé de ce qu'il avait entendu dire, s'est irrité" (Chrétien, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Poirion et al., Paris: Gallimard, 1994, p. 710). How to answer either question—is Keu wounded? If so, what kind of wound are we talking about?—remains unclear.

encounter Gauvain; Keu, by his lack of courtesy, has set the stage for the entrance of a more perfectly courteous knight.

Gauvain's first words establish a gap between himself and Keu, for Gauvain, unlike Keu, is quite ready to praise the Welsh knight generously. Recall that Keu's first words, in the *Conte*, are addressed to Perceval, who has just arrived at the court and asked the king to give him the Chevalier Vermaus's arms. The tone of Keu's speech is disparaging and sarcastic: "[...] '*Amis, vos avez droit. / Alez li tolir orandroit / Les armes, que eles sont vos. / Ne feïstes mie que sos, / Qant vos por ce venites ci*'" (vv. 961-965).³¹⁰ His customary lack of sincerity makes Keu a problematic representative of the virtues and customs of the court;³¹¹ not only this, but if the king is a model of courtly behavior, it would seem that Keu is also unfit to represent Arthur. Gauvain, on the other hand, who was absent both for Perceval's initial entrance at Cardoecil, and for the arrivals of the knights Perceval has vanquished earlier on, has nothing but admiration for the young man; upon seeing the latest knight Perceval has sent to the court, he asks, "[*Q*]ui puet cil estre / *Qui seus par ses armes conquist / Si bon chevalier comme cist?*" (vv.

³¹⁰ "You are right, friend [...] Go at once and take the arms, for they are yours. You did not behave foolishly to come here for them."

³¹¹ See Calogrenant's words to Keu, in *Le Chevalier au lion*, vv. 112-115: "*A miex vaillant et a plus sage, / Mesire Keus, que je ne sui, / Avés vous souvent dit anui, / Que bien en estes coustumiers*" ("Sir Kay, you have insulted and offended men worthier and wiser than I. That is your usual pastime.") A few lines later, in vv. 132-135, Guenièvre gives Calogrenant the following counsel: "*Ne vous chaille de la haïne / Monseigneur Keu, le seneschal ; / Coustumiers est de dire mal, / Si qu'on ne l'en puet chastier*" ("[P]ay no attention to the attack of Sir Kay, the seneschal [...] He has always had a vicious tongue no one can correct"). Some translations offered by Hindley, Langley, and Levy, for *costumier*, are "accustomed, wont; habitual, customary." Similarly, for *costume*, Greimas gives (among other definitions) "habitude." For a very interesting treatment of Chrétien's Keu as endowed with a choleric temperament, see Merceron, "De la ['] mauvaise humeur ['], du sénéchal Keu : Chrétien de Troyes, littérature et physiologie," *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale* 41 (1998), pp. 17-34.

4022-4024).³¹² Gauvain shows courtesy to Perceval by extolling his accomplishments, accomplishments of which he knows only by report. Coming as they do just after Arthur's scolding of Keu for his ungraciousness, Gauvain's words seem to put him squarely in the camp of the king, not of the *seneschaus*. By showing generosity towards Perceval, who remains unknown to him, Gauvain hints at his ability to offer a broader and deeper representation of the king's concerns and character than that offered either by Keu or by the knights in the forest.

And indeed this is exactly what readers of Chrétien's other romances would expect from Gauvain, who is, after all, the king's nephew (v. 4030). In these other romances, Gauvain serves often not only as Arthur's companion, but as his representative *par excellence* to the world outside the court. Gauvain is so closely associated with Arthur, with the court, and with chivalry, that he cannot even be mentioned, in the romances, without making present simultaneously these things, and that person, for which he stands. "*Devant toz les bons chevaliers,*" we read in *Erec et Enide*, "*Doit estre Gauvains li premiers*" (vv. 1687-1688).³¹³ Similarly, in *Cligès*, he is described by others, at the "*tornoi [...] devant Oxenefort*" (vv. 4526-4527), as "*Gauvains, / Qui n'est a pié n'a cheval vains. / C'est cil a cui nus ne se prent*" (vv. 4861-4863).³¹⁴ And in *Le chevalier au lion*, when Gauvain convinces the newlywed hero to return to a life of chivalric

³¹² "[W]ho can this man be who, by himself, defeated in armed combat a knight as fine as this?" Busby comments that, at this juncture, Gauvain's "concern for worldly prowess is apparent" (*Gauvain in Old French Literature*, p. 86). This is certainly true; however, in its context, the question also demonstrates Gauvain's magnanimity in contrast to Keu's spitefulness.

³¹³ "Gawain has to be first, at the head of all the excellent knights[.]" The second *chevalier* to appear on this list is Erec; the third is Lancelot.

³¹⁴ "Gawain. He is no weakling on horseback or on foot. No one is his equal."

activity, he is in some sense speaking on Arthur's behalf, or at least on behalf of his fellow knights, who "[...] *avoient la semaine / Trestuit proiïé et mis en paine, / Du plus qu'i s'en porrent pener, / Quë il en peüssent mener / Mon seigneur Yvain avec eux.*"³¹⁵

The court, in Chrétien's universe, tends to exert a magnetic force on Arthur's knights, and Arthur himself is quick to lament their absence, as we see at the beginning of the *Conte*, when a *charbonier* explains to Perceval the sources of the king's joy and of his grief:

*Li rois des Illes est vaincuz,
Et de c'est li rois Artus liez,
Et de ses barons correciez
Qui as chastés se departirent,
La ou lor meillor sejour virent,
N'il ne set comant il lor va.
De c'est li diaux qui le rois a. (vv. 810-816)*³¹⁶

In urging Yvain, then, to accompany him to tournaments, rather than stay at his own *chastel*, Gauvain acts in perfect accord with what we know of Arthur's wishes.

Gauvain's role, as intermediary for Arthur, is, at least in part, to pull other knights back into their places as part of the king's orbit; if this involves pulling them away from other obligations, these obligations are not Gauvain's concern.

It is plain, too, that Arthur has both trust and respect for Gauvain. For example, while Keu must resort, in *Le Chevalier de la charrette*, to demanding a boon, in order to receive the responsibility of escorting the queen and of challenging Méléagant, Gauvain's recommendation, that he and the king ride after Guenièvre, Méléagant, and Keu, falls on

³¹⁵ "[D]uring that week, [...] had begged and pressed Sir Yvain, as insistently as they could, to let them lead him off with them" (*Le Chevalier au lion*, vv. 2479-2483).

³¹⁶ "[The King of the Isles] was defeated. For this reason King Arthur is happy. And he is angered by his companions, who departed for their castles, where they find better places to stay. And the king does not know how they fare. That is the reason he is doleful."

immediately receptive ears: “*Ah! biax niés,*” says the king, “*Molt avez or dit que cortois*” (*Charrette*, vv. 239-240).³¹⁷ Arthur grants Keu’s request against his better judgment;³¹⁸ he is quick to recognize Gauvain’s advice, on the other hand, as indicative of what a courteous person—a person of the court—ought to do in such a situation. Note, too, that when Gauvain eventually rides back with Guenièvre and Keu, Arthur assumes—wrongly—that it is by his nephew’s *proesce* that their rescue has been accomplished.³¹⁹

All of this points towards the conclusion that Gauvain serves as a more faithful representative of the king than does Keu. He is courteous, whereas Keu’s custom is “*de dire mal*” (*Lion*, v. 134).³²⁰ He and Keu are both mentioned more than once alongside Arthur;³²¹ yet it is Gauvain who can be depended upon to use his powers of persuasion to draw other knights to the court,³²² and Gauvain whom Arthur sees as a fit rescuer for the queen, whereas he has misgivings about entrusting her to Keu. If the reader is interested in becoming better acquainted with Arthur, he or she would surely do better to look at Gauvain’s behavior than to look at Keu’s.

And yet things may not be quite this simple. The romances also hint at qualities that Keu and Arthur have in common. Although Keu is more habitually sarcastic than

³¹⁷ “Ah! Dear nephew, [...] you have spoken now with great courtesy” (my translation; I have consulted Staines’s translation and have most likely been influenced by it).

³¹⁸ See *ib.*, vv. 180-183.

³¹⁹ See *ib.*, vv. 5303-5311.

³²⁰ “To speak ill” (my translation).

³²¹ See *Erec et Enide*, vv. 1520-1526 (Keu and Gauvain); *Cligès*, vv. 2308-2311 (Gauvain) and vv. 4988-4994 (Gauvain); *Charrette*, vv. 34-42 (Keu) and 245-250 (Gauvain); and *Lion*, vv. 2287-2292 (Gauvain).

³²² See *Erec et Enide*, vv. 4072-4192; *Conte*, vv. 4281-4485.

Arthur, the king, too, can be sarcastic; in a remark I have already cited, he describes thus Keu's treatment of Perceval: "[M]olt feïs que cortois" (v. 4012).³²³ Just as Keu is insincere in acquiescing to Perceval's demand for the arms of the Chevalier Vermaus (vv. 961-965), so Arthur is insincere in praising Keu for his courtesy (vv. 4012-4013). Neither is Arthur immune to a kind of rashness; note that, when Keu mocks one of his fellow knights, Sagremors, for his failure to bring another knight to the king, Arthur tells Keu, "*Or i alez et si verromes / Con vos lo feroiz mierz de lui*" (vv. 4214-4215).³²⁴ Surely this is not a reasoned decision on the king's part. Sargent-Baur has pointed out, too, that Arthur's annoyance with Keu—far from being the result of the injury the latter has done, in the scene of Perceval's first arrival at court, to the fool and to the young woman—has as its cause, rather, the king's loss of Perceval's presence through Keu's insult.³²⁵ That is, Keu's lack of concern for the fool and for the young woman may in fact be symptomatic of a court culture where even the king does not give such persons as much

³²³ Not only this, but Keu is not the only knight in Chrétien's romances who can be accused of *gabois*; in *Cligès*, Chrétien uses the same term to describe the trick that Alixandre and others employ against the count Angrès (*Cligès*, v. 1832).

³²⁴ "Proceed there yourself, and we shall see if you fare better than he."

³²⁵ Sargent-Baur refers to the fool and to the young woman as "des personnages rattachés à [l]a cour [du roi] [...] dont Arthur ne se soucie jamais, tout à ses regrets de ne pouvoir faire une recrue importante à sa ménie" (*La Destre et la senestre*, p. 183).

respect as he gives to knights.³²⁶ These examples suggest that Keu, like Gauvain, represents certain parts of Arthur's character.³²⁷

In order to get a better sense of the ways in which both knights represent their lord, let us look at two very similar sequences, one from *Erec et Enide*, and the other from *Le Conte du Graal*. In both of the sequences, each one of the two knights attempts to persuade another knight to come back with him to the court. In the first, Erec and Enide have just arrived in “*une plainne*,” near a forest where Arthur, Guenièvre, and some of Arthur's men have set up tents, presumably in order to hunt there. Erec has been wounded not long before, and, despite being in need of medicine for his wounds, has allowed himself only a brief pause from their journey—a pause just long enough for his wounds to be tied up with improvised bandages—before going on his way. Keu, who, “*por envoiseüre*,”³²⁸ has borrowed Gauvain's weapons and horse, and who is out riding, seemingly by himself, comes upon Erec without recognizing him or his wife. The narrator describes Keu's words of salutation to Erec as being proof of Keu's *grant orguil* (v. 3983): “*Chevaliers, fait il, savoir vuil / Qui vos estes et donc venez*” (vv. 3984-3985).³²⁹ After Erec calls him a fool, and refuses to answer his questions, Keu answers with the following explanation and proposal:

³²⁶ See, again, Sargent-Baur: “[A]ucun chevalier dans cette piètre compaignie ne court à la défense de la pucelle ni du fou; aucun d'entre eux ne va jusqu'à prononcer un mot de désapprobation” (*ib.*, p. 181).

³²⁷ On both Keu and Gauvain as problematic models for Yvain in the *Lion*, see Joan Tasker Grimbert, *‘Yvain’ dans le miroir: Une Poétique de la réflexion dans le ‘Chevalier au lion’ de Chrétien de Troyes*, Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company (1988), pp. 120-121.

³²⁸ It seems best to understand the word *envoiseüre*, here, as meaning “high spirits,” or “joke, jesting, humour;” all of these are among the translations proposed by Hindley et. al.

³²⁹ “‘Knight, I would know who you are and from where you come,’ he said.”

[...] *'Ne vos ennuit,
 Car por vostre bien le demant :
 Je sai et voi certainement
 Que plaiez estes et navrez.
 Enquenuit bon ostel avrez,
 Se avec moi volez venir
 Je vos ferai mout chier tenir
 Et honorer et aaisier,
 Car de repos avez mestier.
 Li rois Artus et la roïne
 Sont ci pres en une gaudine,
 De trez et de tentes logié,
 Par bone foi le vos lo gié,
 Que vos en veingniez avec moi
 Veoir la roïne et le roi,
 Qui de vos grant joie feront
 Et grant honor vos porteront.'* (vv. 3988-4004)³³⁰

What kind of a representative is Keu, in this scene? There are at least two respects in which his invitation to Erec is irregular. First of all, it is made without Arthur's knowledge: if Keu represents the king during his encounter with Erec, he does this by virtue of being a member of the king's company of knights, and not in any specifically designated capacity. Keu is not, in other words, an official messenger. As far as can be told from the text, his proposal to Erec is his own invention. An added complication is that, throughout the entire conversation, he is riding Gauvain's horse instead of his own, and is armed with Gauvain's lance and shield. Not only, then, does he presume to make promises in the king's and queen's names, telling Erec that Arthur and Guenièvre "*de vos grant joie feront / Et grant honor vos porteront*" (vv. 4003-4004), but there is a sense in

³³⁰ "Do not be annoyed [...]. I ask this for your own good. I see and realize that you are maimed and wounded. Pass the night at my lodging. Should you wish to come with me, I shall have you treated with great honor and respect, and put at ease, for you are in need of rest. King Arthur and the queen are nearby in a forest where they have lodged in some tents and pavilions. I advise you, in good faith, to come with me and visit the king and the queen. They will be happy to see you, and will honor you highly." According to Hindley et. al, the verb *loer*, which Keu uses in v. 4000, may mean to "speak highly of, praise, worship, extol;" among other proposed translations, though, are "advise, warn, counsel."

which he is also attempting here to play the part of Gauvain. Later on, in fact, once Erec has unhorsed Keu, the *seneschaus* claims to speak on Gauvain's behalf: "*Tant de la soe part vos di, / Que son destrier li envoie / Por ce que honor i aiez*" (vv. 4060-4062).³³¹ Stranger still, Keu then offers to be Erec's messenger, presumably to Gauvain (v. 4064). Throughout the scene, Keu's representation of any one person is erratic at best.

Gauvain's subsequent conversation with Erec takes place under very different circumstances. After Keu returns to the king's tent, and tells him all the details of what has just happened, Gauvain is summoned and told to ride after Erec with a message:

*'Biax niés Gauvains, ce dit li rois,
S'onques fustes frans ne cortois,
Alez après isnelement.
Demandez amiablement
De son estre [et] de son afaire ;
Et se vos le poez atraire
Tant qu'avec vos l'en ameingniez,
Gardez ja ne vos en feingniez.'* (vv. 4073-4080)³³²

There are several things worth remarking, here. Gauvain, unlike Keu, rides out with an express errand, an errand for which he has the king's blessing. The words with which Arthur begins his request to Gauvain demonstrate, once again, the king's trust in him. What, exactly, can Gauvain be trusted to do? He can be trusted to be *frans*, that is, "noble" or "gracious,"³³³ and *cortois*. He can also be trusted to speak to Erec

³³¹ "I tell you this much on [Gauvain's] part, that you should send him his charger, so that you may have honor from it" (my translation).

³³² "'Dear nephew Gawain,' the king said, 'if ever you were courteous and noble, follow this knight at once. Politely inquire of him his position and his business, and persuade him, if you can, to come along with you. Take care not to fail.'"

³³³ Translations from entry in Hindley et al. See also entry for *franc* in Godefroy (*Dictionnaire de l'ancienne langue française, et de tous ses dialectes du IXe au XVe siècle*, Vaduz: Kraus reprint, 1961).

amiablement, that is, “gently;”³³⁴ in its context, Arthur’s use of this adverb brings to mind the preceding scene, in which Keu treats Erec not as a friend, but rather as a conquered prisoner (vv. 3979-3981). Note, finally, that Arthur leaves room for Gauvain to interpret his request as Gauvain himself sees fit: “*Et se vos le poez atraire / Tant qu’avec vos l’en ameingniez, / Gardez ja ne vos en feingniez*” (vv. 4078-4080).

Gauvain is, at first, no more successful than Keu in convincing Erec to be the king’s and the queen’s guest (vv. 4096-4105); yet the poem tells us that he “*estoit de mout grant sen*” (v. 4106).³³⁵ And he will use this *sen* in order to accomplish the errand he was given by the king (vv. 4107-4141). Note, here, that both Keu and Gauvain share the same goal in regards to Erec, however different their approaches to seeking its fulfillment. Keu fails in his attempt to bring Erec back with him to the court; yet he succeeds perfectly in anticipating the king’s own desire: Arthur, like Keu, will indeed be intent on having Erec as a guest. Keu represents Arthur well in this one respect, without, however, representing him fully. Gauvain, on the other hand, not only satisfies the king’s request that he bring Erec back with him (v. 4079), but he does this by elaborating a plan of his own—he may be Arthur’s representative, but it is Gauvain himself whom Erec credits with persuading him to stay: “*Ahi! Gauvains, fait il, ahi! / Vostre granz sens m’a esbahi; / Par grant sens m’avez retenu*” (vv. 4143-4145).³³⁶ If Keu fails as a messenger

³³⁴ Translation from entry in Hindley et al.

³³⁵ “[W]as a man of great prudence.”

³³⁶ “Ahi! Gauvains,” he said, “Ahi! Your great prudence has tricked me; by great prudence you have retained me” (my translation, influenced by that of Staines and for which I have kept Staines’s earlier translation of *sens*—or *sans*, in the Guiot manuscript, which Staines is translating—as “prudence;” see previous footnote. Staines chooses to vary his translations of this word in this passage, thus obscuring Chrétien’s repetitions of it; see Staines, *The Complete*

through lack of courtesy and of authority, Gauvain succeeds because he has these qualities as well as the quality of good judgment.

Chrétien gives us a very similar sequence in the *Conte du Graal*. This time, however, Keu and Gauvain interrupt a knight, not from his pursuit of adventures, but from his thoughts. Another difference from the sequence we have just seen, from *Erec et Enide*, is that, this time, Keu is sent out by the king. Another knight, Sagremors, has just returned to the king's camp, having tried and failed to bring Perceval back with him; Keu now rides out, and, true to form, tries to impose his will on Perceval by shouting at him and threatening him (vv. 4226- 4229). Nor is he any more successful here than he was with Erec; in fact, it could be argued that he is less successful, given that this time he is wounded for his pains.³³⁷ Were the listener or reader to judge Arthur based solely on Keu's intervention, here, he or she might be tempted to come to the conclusion that the king himself is indifferent to the means employed by his knights in order to bring about his will.

Yet this is apparently not the case, if we are to believe Gauvain, who, once it is revealed that Keu is not in mortal danger, says to the king that

[i]l n'est pas droiz, bien lo savez,
Si con vos meïsmes l'avez
Toz jorz dit et jugié a droit,
Que chevaliers autre ne doit
Oster, si con cil .II. ont fait,
De son panser, que que il [l']ait,
Et s'il en ont lo tort aü,
Si ne sai je, mes mescheü

Romances, p. 52. In translating *esbahi* as “tricked,” I follow Staines, as well as Fritz, who translates it as “trompé”).

³³⁷ Perhaps he is wounded in *Erec et Enide*, too; see verses 4044-4048. Jean-Marie Fritz's translation of these verses has helped me understand them.

Lor en est, ce est chose certe. (vv. 4283-4291)³³⁸

According to Gauvain, it is Arthur himself who has dictated that no knight should behave himself as Keu and Sagremors have done. This would seem to be reasonable warrant for the conclusion that, at least in this instance, Gauvain considers himself to be a more faithful representative of the king than is Keu. Note, too, in regard to Gauvain's own character, the subtlety with which he implies that Keu and Sagremors have acted unjustly toward Perceval: he says that he does not know whether they have been in the wrong (vv. 4289-4290), but observes that they themselves have certainly not benefited from their own actions. Gauvain assumes that he and the king share the same perspective on Keu's and Sagremors's defeat. Nor does Arthur's response to his speech give the reader or listener any indication that this is not the case; although Keu is rankled by what Gauvain has said (vv. 4302-4335), Arthur shows his approbation for his nephew, telling him that he has "*molt [...] dit que cortois*" (v. 4346).

The approach that Gauvain takes, when he goes out to meet Perceval, confirms his skill as a representative: he praises Perceval's thought as "*cortois et dolz*" (v. 4391),³³⁹ and says that the one who disturbed him from it was "*soz et estouz*" (v. 4392).³⁴⁰ He also identifies himself, explicitly, as the king's messenger (v. 4371). Just as in *Erec et Enide*, Gauvain receives, in reward for his politeness, the attention and respect of his interlocutor; note that Perceval calls him *biax amis chiers* (v. 4398). Not only this,

³³⁸ "[I]t is not right[...]—well you know, as you yourself have always declared and rightly judged—that one knight distract another from his thoughts, whatever they be, as the two have done. I do not know if they were in the wrong, but misfortune is certainly theirs."

³³⁹ "Courteous and sweet" (my translation).

³⁴⁰ "Foolish and dull" (my translation).

but when Perceval agrees, finally, to return with him, this seems to be due more to his desire for Gauvain's *compaignie* (v. 4422) than to any specific desire to return to the court. It is after he and Perceval have become acquainted (vv. 4410-4418) that Gauvain wins him over; although Perceval admits that it is *droiz* (v. 4429) that he go with Arthur's nephew, it is worth noting that he describes the place where they are going as "*la ou vos vodroiz*" (v. 4430).³⁴¹ Gauvain may well be representing the king, but Perceval seems to be more interested in his friendship than in his message.

What does Perceval learn about Arthur, from these two knights, that he did not learn from the knights in the forest? In fact, Perceval could be excused for having a rather contradictory picture of the king and his character, if he were to form this picture on the basis of both Keu's and Gauvain's behavior. The two knights' representations suggest that there is room, in Arthur's court, for broadly differing conceptions and practices of knighthood. As for Perceval, however, the passages above suggest that, if he chooses a knight to emulate, it will not be Keu, but Gauvain. This makes sense given that it is Gauvain, not Keu, whose character is more reminiscent both of the knights in the forest and Perceval's teacher, Gornemant.

Yet if we really want to know what Perceval has learned about Arthur, from Keu and from Gauvain, we ought to look at his second encounter with the king. First of all, the circumstances of this encounter are very different from those of the first; instead of making a solitary entrance into the king's presence, in the garb of a Welshman, Perceval is accompanied this time by Gauvain, who has clothed him "*bien et bel / Et de la cote et*

³⁴¹ "[W]here you wish[.]"

do mantel” (vv. 4473-4474).³⁴² Even more tellingly, though, the scene suggests that Perceval is altogether less interested in Arthur than he was, before. Although, in a brief exchange with the king, Perceval does reveal his name to him (vv. 4489-4510), he seems to be more deliberate about showing courtesy to Guenièvre and her *pucele*:

*La raïne vint a ce mot,
 Qui la novele oïe ot
 De celui qui venuz estoit.
 Tantost com Perceval la voit
 Et dit li fu que ce iert ele,
 Et vint après la damoisele
 Qui rit quant il la regarda,
 Maintenant vers eles ala
 Et dit: ‘Dex doint joie et enor
 A la plus bele, a la meillor
 De totes les dames qui soient,
 Tesmoig de toz ces qui la voient
 Et toz ces qui veüe l’ont.’
 Et la raïne li respont :
 ‘Et vos seiez li bien trovez,
 Comme chevaliers esprovez
 De haute proesce et de bele.’
 Puis resalua la pucele
 Percevaus, celi qui rit,
 Si l’acola et si li dit :
 ‘Bele, se vos estoit mestiers,
 Je seroie li chevaliers
 Qui ja ne vos faudroit d’aïe.’
 Et la pucele l’en mercie. (vv. 4511-4534)³⁴³*

³⁴² “[W]ell and handsomely, both with tunic and coat” (my translation, in which I have been aided by that of Staines).

³⁴³ “The queen, who had heard the news of the one who had come, came at this word. As soon as Perceval saw her and it was told him that it was she, and afterwards there came the damsel who laughed when he looked at her, immediately he went toward them and said, ‘God give joy and honor to the most beautiful, to the best, of all ladies—such is the witness of all those who see her and all those who have seen her.’ And the queen answered him, “And welcome to you, as a knight distinguished by high and fair prowess.’ Then Perceval again greeted the young woman, the one who laughed, and he embraced her and said to her, ‘Fair lady, if you were in need, I would be the knight who would never fail to help you.’ And the young woman thanked him for it” (my translation, for which I have benefited from those of Staines and Méla).

Could it be that Perceval, having seen Arthur as reflected to him by the knights in the *lande*, by Keu, and by Gauvain, has begun to note the inconsistency of these reflections? Has he begun to suspect that Arthur himself is a less than reliable example of knighthood to his knights? Perceval's attraction to Gauvain, followed by his attentions to Guenièvre and to the *pucele*, suggests that the king's nephew, rather than simply being a *mesaiges* of the king (v. 4371), has also become a model, for the young Welshman, of a whole way of life, especially when it comes to a conception of women. Recall his response to Perceval's revelation that he has been thinking about his *amie* (v. 4387): "*Cil pansers n'estoit pas vilains, / Ainz estoit molt cortois et dolz*" (vv. 4390-4391).³⁴⁴ Gauvain is the kind of representative, the kind of *mesaiges*, whose knightly qualities threaten to transcend those of the person whom he is ostensibly representing. In other words, although Gauvain may well make Arthur's desires, and Arthur himself, present to Perceval, he does this while simultaneously making himself so present and so compelling that Arthur, even when he is actually present to Perceval in body, seems ghostly in comparison to his nephew.

If we go back and read the scene with the knights in the *lande* and the scene of Perceval's original entrance into the court through the lens of these later scenes with Gauvain and Keu,³⁴⁵ it appears that this transcendence of Arthur, on the part of those who are supposed to represent him, is already a concern very early on in the romance.

³⁴⁴ "This thought was not base, rather it was most courteous and sweet" (my translation).

³⁴⁵ On this method of reading Chrétien, see Grimbert, '*Yvain*' dans le *miroir*, p. 9: "Pour l'étude de ces poèmes [...], il faut renoncer à une approche linéaire selon laquelle on procéderait systématiquement d'un bout à l'autre du roman en examinant chaque épisode sur la base uniquement de ce qui précède. On ne peut saisir le sens d'un épisode ou d'un passage sans apprécier la façon dont il résonne au sein de l'ensemble." Whether this is how a twelfth century audience would have experienced Chrétien's romances is another question.

Perceval is impressed, when he sees the knights, by their *hauberz fremiēnz*, by their *hiaumes clerz et luisanz*, by *l'or et l'azur et l'argent* (vv. 125-129).³⁴⁶ He then discovers that Arthur is the source of these things (vv. 282-284), but when he actually sees Arthur he is disappointed (vv. 885-888). The sequence, as a whole, suggests that Perceval tends to see the king himself as the means to an end.³⁴⁷ If the knights in the *lande* have made the king present to Perceval, they have not made him present as a distinctive person, or even as a person worthy of respect; rather, they have managed only to make him present as the “*roi qui les chevaliers fait*” (v. 327), that is, as the person who can give Perceval what he wants. And Perceval’s encounters with Keu and Gauvain, followed by his second encounter with the king, confirms that Arthur, who was first eclipsed by the accoutrements of knighthood that Perceval hoped to gain from him, is now eclipsed by the *compaignie* of Gauvain. At no time is the king represented to Perceval in such a way that the young man is interested in becoming acquainted with him for his own sake.

There is something troubling about the disparate ways in which Arthur is represented by his knights. If the knights in the forest, Keu, and Gauvain have anything in common, it would seem to be their armor, which suggests in turn that the sole characteristic that the king has succeeded in consistently imparting to, or impressing

³⁴⁶ “[J]ingling hauberks” ... “[B]right shining helmets” ... “[T]he gold and the azure and the silver[.]”

³⁴⁷ Haidu makes a similar point: “[Perceval’s] uninterrupted obsession with becoming a knight can only urge the King to hurry up with the job” (*Aesthetic Distance*, p. 139); see also Debora B. Schwartz, “‘A la guise de Gales l’atorna:’ Maternal Influence in Chrétien’s *Conte du Graal*,” *Essays in Medieval Studies*, 12 (1996), article published online at <http://www.illinoismedieval.org/ems/VOL12/schwartz.html>, note 3 on p. 13 and note 24 on p. 14 (my page numbers are taken from the online edition of this article). Méla notes that “[Perceval’s] only care is ‘les armes,’ not in the sense of a feat of strength to be accomplished, but literally, as the dazzling armor he dreams to wear” (Méla and Catherine Lowe, “Perceval,” *Yale French Studies* 55/56, 1977, p. 262).

upon, all of his knights, is a readiness to engage in battle. And even though Gauvain's speech and actions offer hints of a fuller, more complex way of living as a knight than the one that could be glimpsed in the knights of the *lande*, it remains unclear whether, in speaking and acting in the way that he does, Gauvain is simply representing his uncle, or whether, perhaps, his considerateness, his generosity, and even his reputation (vv. 4420-4421) may surpass that of Arthur himself. It is interesting, here, to compare Gauvain's representation of Arthur to the pilgrims' representation of the hermit, in the *Conte*'s last sequence involving Perceval (vv. 6168-6258). If Arthur's representatives loom larger, in Perceval's story and in the *Conte* as a whole, than does the king himself³⁴⁸—if, that is, Perceval's encounters with the king tend toward anticlimax³⁴⁹—this is not the case when it comes to the hermit and his representatives. Rather, Perceval's encounter with the hermit is the fulfillment of what he has been told about this person by the pilgrims. Arthur's place, in relation to his own representatives, is considerably more troubled.

One ought not to conclude from this that Gauvain and his fellow knights fail to tell us anything about the king—for the similarities these knights do bear to one another suggest that Arthur has in fact left a mark on all of them—however, what they tell us about the king may not be all that reassuring when it comes to the king's conception of knighthood, his character, and his desires. Keu, Gauvain, and the knights in the *lande* all wear armor and ride horses: is this what it means to be a knight of Arthur's court?

³⁴⁸ See Sargent-Baur: “[A]ll of Chrétien's extant romances give considerably less prominence to Arthur than they do to the knights” (“Promotion to Knighthood,” p. 393).

³⁴⁹ Haidu applies the term “anti-climax” to Perceval's defeat of Keu and subsequent reunion with the *pucele* whom he, Perceval, has avenged (*Aesthetic Distance*, p. 197). He also remarks that “[Perceval's] acceptance at court is described briefly and almost meagerly” (*ib.*, p. 198), and relates this to Perceval's own ambiguous status at this point in the romance (*ib.*, pp. 199-200).

Although Keu's and Gauvain's characters are very different, each of them recalls Arthur in certain ways—Keu through his rashness and sarcasm, Gauvain through his generosity. And both Keu and Gauvain anticipate or reflect, as messengers, the king's desire to gather knights to himself. Arthur's knights represent him in all of these ways, yet they are, in the end, memorable more for their own clothes—especially in the case of the knights in the *lande*—for their own actions, and for their own characters, than for the ways that they make the king present. For indeed, the scenes, in the *Conte*, during which Arthur is actually present in body lead the listener or reader to wonder whether, perhaps, to represent Arthur in a literal, mimetic way might well require, paradoxically, that a knight be absent, at least in mind. Instead, Arthur's knights often make up for his deficiencies by way of contrast. It is incumbent on them not so much to represent another person who merely happens to be bodily absent as to compensate actively for this person's absence, an absence that remains a concern even when he is physically present. “*Cist rois ne fist chevaliers onques*,” says Perceval (v. 886), and we wonder whether he may be right.³⁵⁰

Intercessors

One of the more memorable persons in *Le Chevalier au lion* is the servant, Lunete. Lunete provides a complicated example of representation because she is both her mistress's servant and an ambassador for Yvain. I will first attend to the moments, in the poem, when she seems to speak or act on behalf of Laudine, her mistress, and will then speak about Lunete's intercession for Yvain.

³⁵⁰ See Sargent-Baur, *La Destre et la senestre*, p. 181.

Lunete appears for the first time just after Yvain has followed the knight of the fountain into his castle. The knight has escaped through another door, leaving Yvain trapped, and frustrated in his pursuit. It is at this moment that Lunete arrives; after explaining to him that the people of the castle are trying to decide how they would like to kill him (vv. 987-988), she promises to do her best to prevent this from happening. It turns out that she has a reason to be well-disposed to him:

*Une fois a le court le roi
M'envoia me dame en message ;
Espoir ne fui mie si sage,
Si courtoise, ne de tel estre
Comme puchele devoit estre,
Mais onques chevalier n'i ot
Qui a moi degnast parler mot,
Fors vous tout seul, qui estes chi.
Mais vous, la vostre grant merci,
M'i honerastes et servistes.
De l'honor que la me feïstes,
Vous rendrai chi le guerredon. (vv. 1002-1013)³⁵¹*

Within this context, Lunete's subsequent representation of her mistress to Yvain cannot be anything but ambiguous. For, in promising to repay Yvain for the notice he took of her in the past, Lunete acknowledges that her allegiance is not only to her lady, but also to him. Her actions confirm this double allegiance; she belongs to Laudine's household, but distinguishes herself from the other members of that household by harboring the man who has killed her mistress's husband. The reason she gives for helping Yvain is a personal reason, a reason anchored in their shared history. Lunete stands between Yvain and Laudine; she has a responsibility to each of them.

³⁵¹ "Once my lady sent me on an errand to the king's court. Perhaps I did not show the courtesy, prudence, or fine behavior a maiden should; yet not a knight there bothered to say a word to me except you alone, who are now here. Out of your deep compassion you honored and served me, and for the honor you paid me, I shall reward you now."

From one perspective, then, Lunete's efforts to bring about Laudine's and Yvain's marriage are motivated by her desire to serve her mistress, but this is not her sole motivation. "*Mais pour quoi,*" writes Chrétien, "*fust chele couarde / De sa dame reconforter / Et de s'onnour amounester?*" (vv. 1594-1596).³⁵² On the face of it, the narrator seems to be suggesting that, by engaging in matchmaking, Lunete is simply doing what any good servant would do in her place. In its context, however, the question may be read ironically: the reader or listener already knows that Lunete's reasons for encouraging her mistress to remarry are not purely disinterested.³⁵³ It is in the same ironic, or ambivalent, light that we may read later references to Laudine's trust in her servant:

*La dame set mout bien et pense
Que chele le conseille en foi[.]* (vv. 1638-1639)³⁵⁴

*Si ce commence a repentir
De celi qu'elle avoit blasmee,
Et laidie et mesaamee,
Qu'elle est toute seüre et certe
Que por loier ne por deserte,
Ne por amor quë a lui ait,
Ne l'en mist elle onques em plait.
Et plus aime elle li que lui,
Ne sa honte ne son annui
Ne li loëroit elle mie.
Car trop est sa loiaus amie.* (vv. 1738-1748)³⁵⁵

³⁵² "So why should she be afraid to console her lady and remind her of her [honor]?" (I have substituted "honor" for "welfare" in Staines's translation).

³⁵³ My awareness of irony in Chrétien's romances has been shaped by Haidu's *Aesthetic Distance*.

³⁵⁴ "The lady understood and realized the sincerity of the advice[.]"

³⁵⁵ "She began to feel shame for insulting and blaming her young lady so spitefully. Beyond a doubt, she knew that her young lady would never have mentioned him for reward or payment or for any love she herself felt for him. And she realized that the young lady loved her more than him and would never offer advice that would bring disgrace or embarrassment—she

Laudine's belief that Lunete is her *loiaus amie* (v. 1748) may well be justified, but it is not necessarily justified by the reasons that she gives, here. For contrary to what Laudine imagines, Lunete is in fact acting out of love (*amor*, v. 1743), in the sense of friendship, for Yvain; neither is it clear whether her love for her mistress actually eclipses her love for him (v. 1745).³⁵⁶

Lunete is not completely straightforward with Yvain, either. Later, when she announces to him that she will be taking him to her lady, she "*faint que sa dame savoit / Qu'elle l'avoit laienz gardé*" (vv. 1910-1911).³⁵⁷ Given that this statement, at least in its most obvious sense, does not reflect the truth, Lunete does not seem, on the face of it, to be a faithful messenger.³⁵⁸ Nor is her picture of Laudine consistent: although she tells Yvain that her lady is aware of his presence in her castle and that she, Lunete, is being blamed for this (vv. 1913-1917), she also tells him that, in her opinion, the *prison* in which Laudine wants to keep him will not be "*trop [...] grevaine*" (v. 1937).³⁵⁹ In this representation, Laudine thus appears to be both angry at Lunete for harboring Yvain and

was too loyal a friend for that." Hult's modern French translation has helped me understand verses 1743-1744. Hult translates *amor* (v. 1743) as "affection" (Chrétien, *Romans*, p. 767).

³⁵⁶ As has often been the case, my reading of this verse (v. 1745) was made considerably easier by Hult's modern French translation: "D'ailleurs, la demoiselle l'aime, elle, plus que lui" (Chrétien, *Romans*, p. 767).

³⁵⁷ "Pretended that her lady knew that she had harboured him therein" (my translation).

³⁵⁸ See vv.1881-1882; vv. 1899-1900. Laudine is eventually told that Yvain is [*s*]aienz (v. 1900); I understand this word to be a variation of *çaienz*, rendered in Greimas's dictionary as "ici dedans, à l'intérieur." She does not know, however, how long he has been there. As Tony Hunt remarks, "it is never made clear whether she ever understands that Yvain, the slayer of her husband, had remained imprisoned in her castle ("The Dialectic of 'Yvain,'" *The Modern Language Review* 72.2, 1977, p. 291).

³⁵⁹ "[T]oo unpleasant."

willing to be merciful in her treatment of him. While this is not too far from the truth, it is clear that Lunete has manipulated the facts of the situation in order to present her mistress to Yvain in a certain light. This is supported by the narrator's description of Lunete as *brete* (v. 1580), which Hult translates as "rusée comme une Bretonne."³⁶⁰ Lunete's words, spoken to Yvain *par couverture* (v. 1940), keep him in suspense, prior to his first meeting with Laudine, as to the treatment he can expect from the woman with whom he is in love. He may very well suspect that the *prison* of which Lunete speaks is metaphorical—"En sa prison veil je bien estre," he tells her (v. 1929)³⁶¹—still, he cannot yet be sure, and indeed, once she has brought him to Laudine, he will believe himself to have been betrayed, presumably by Lunete herself.³⁶²

Before he is introduced to her, Yvain's knowledge of Laudine is based on his surreptitious observation of her and on his growing acquaintance with Lunete. Even in regard to the first of these two sources, it is Lunete who—first by giving him a magic ring (vv. 1021-1038), then by guiding him to a window (vv. 1269-1285)—makes it possible for Yvain to see her mistress without being seen by her. Through observing her, Yvain knows that Laudine is beautiful (v. 1146-1149); that she is in mourning for her husband (vv. 1150-1172); and that she has at least entertained the suspicion that her husband was

³⁶⁰ Chrétien, *Romans*, p. 762. The adjective *brete*, according to Godefroy, means "bretonne;" he also gives, however, "sotte" as an alternate meaning. Meanwhile, Hindley et al. propose the following translations for *bret*: "British; Breton; cunning, crafty; simple-minded, stupid." Burton Raffel translates *qui fu brete* as "who knew [w]hat she was doing" (*Yvain, the Knight of the Lion*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987, p. 49). A textual variant for *brete* in *Lion*, v. 1580, is *preste* (Chrétien, *Romans*, p. 762).

³⁶¹ "I do wish to be in her prison" (my translation).

³⁶² "[...] il cuida estre traÿs" (v. 1958, "[h]e thought he had been betrayed"). Hult translates this as "il pensait être trahi" (Chrétien, *Romans*, p. 774).

killed by a *fantosme* (vv. 1226-1242). From Lunete's words and deeds, meanwhile, he knows that Laudine is capable of drawing uncharitable conclusions about her own servant's absence (vv. 1337-1342) and that she is quite rich (vv. 1039-1052; vv. 1881-1895).³⁶³ Yvain makes up for his lack of knowledge about Laudine as a particular woman by basing his assumptions about her on his beliefs about women-in-general:³⁶⁴

[...] *ele me het plus orendroit*
Que nule rien, et si a droit.
D' "orendroit" ai je dit que sages,
Que femme a plus de chent courages.
Chelui courage qu'ele a ore,
Espoir, changera ele encore ;
Ains le changera sans "espoir",
Si sui faus qui m'en desespoir. (vv. 1437-1444)³⁶⁵

How well does Yvain know the object of his love, prior to having any direct verbal exchange with her? He turns out to be right in believing that Laudine can be brought to think better of him (vv. 1749-1780).³⁶⁶ That is, Yvain's surmises about Laudine do allow him to predict the change in her feelings. Yet as Chrétien's audience, we are still in an

³⁶³ Eugene Vance proposes connections between Lunete, the marvelous, and money, stating that, "[f]rom her first appearance in the poem, Lunette [*sic*] is associated with marvels whose economic significance is readily perceptible" (*Mervelous Signals: Poetics and Sign Theory in the Middle Ages*, Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1994, p. 131).

³⁶⁴ The narrator's comments regarding women are hardly any more complimentary than Yvain's own (see *Lion*, vv. 1640-1644).

³⁶⁵ "[S]he hates me above all else at this moment, and she has reason. I am wise to say 'at this moment,' for a woman has more than a hundred moods. Perhaps she will soon change her present mood. No, she will change it without any 'perhaps.' I am a fool to despair." Yvain's words take on a certain dramatic irony in light of later events, since, as Vance points out, "it will be Yvain himself who undergoes shameful change with regard to his constant wife Laudine" (*Mervelous Signals*, p. 126).

³⁶⁶ This passage begins with the line, "*Estes vous la dame changiee*" (v. 1749, "Behold now the lady's altered attitude"), which Hult translates, helpfully, as "Voilà la dame transformée" (Chrétien, *Romans*, p. 768).

even more privileged position than Yvain himself,³⁶⁷ since we are privy to Laudine's thoughts and intentions (vv. 1654-1663; vv. 1734-1793), thoughts and intentions of which Yvain is unaware—this relative ignorance (along with Lunete's ambiguous remarks about her mistress's *prison* in v. 1924, v. 1934, and v. 1937), explains why he is still apprehensive when he is finally introduced to her.

Yvain falls in love with Laudine through listening to her (vv. 1173-1174) and watching her (vv. 1271-1287) from a distance. This distance is not always literal (when he first glimpses her, they are in the same room); rather, it is based on Yvain's earlier transgression. Nor does it seem that Yvain, in acquainting himself with Laudine as he does, is laying the foundations for a true friendship with her:

One does not become more familiar with a house by entering through the service entrance instead of the door set up for visitors. It may be that by doing that one gets to see things that the guest entering through the front door will never lay eyes on. But however much one gains in this way, one loses even more in true and correct impressions. If they appear closed from the front, one cannot sneak a look at their truth through the back door.³⁶⁸

Yvain does not literally come into the palace by the back door; however, in allowing himself to be hidden there by Lunete, it would seem that he has added, to the guilt that he has incurred in killing Laudine's husband, the guilt of discourtesy in failing to show himself openly. Yet in fact Yvain's passivity is encouraged, at least for a time, by Lunete (vv. 1309-1311). It is as the beneficiary of Lunete's mediation that Yvain manages to make the transition from being an eavesdropper and a spy to being a guest and a

³⁶⁷ I am likely indebted to Haidu, here, who, in a discussion of Yvain's return to the fountain toward the end of the *Lion*, calls attention to the differing perspectives of romance characters and of the reader ("Narrativity and Language in Some XIIth Century Romances," *Yale French Studies* 51, 1974, pp. 143-144). "[T]he reader's perspective," he writes, "is even more comprehensive than Lunete's (*ib.*, p. 144).

³⁶⁸ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-logic, Vol. I, Truth of the World*, trans. Adrian J. Walker, San Francisco: Ignatius Press (2000), p. 209.

wooer.³⁶⁹ He is thus spared—at least for a time—the natural consequences of coming in through the “back door.”

How ought we to characterize Lunete’s role in resolving the distance between these two characters?³⁷⁰ It is Lunete’s speech, in particular, that makes it possible for Yvain to abandon the posture of a spectator, and to enter into a reciprocal relationship with Laudine.³⁷¹ This is true even as late as the moment when Yvain, having been brought openly into Laudine’s presence for the first time, hesitates to come near her (v. 1959);³⁷² at this point, Lunete responds by cursing *fame*

Qui maine en chambre a bele dame

³⁶⁹ Vance discusses Lunete’s mediation in *Mervelous Signals*, ch. 5.

³⁷⁰ In representing Yvain and Laudine to one another, Lunete brings about peace between them, not once, but twice. If we follow Fredric L. Cheyette’s and Howell Chickering’s reading of the romance’s conclusion, the peace for which Lunete is then responsible bears a close resemblance to the historical “practice, [...] called a ‘peace,’ through which lords, ladies, monks, bishops, and even town governments resolved the conflicts in which they were involved” (Cheyette and Chickering, “Love, Anger, and Peace: Social Practice and Poetic Play in the Ending of *Yvain*,” *Speculum* 80.1, Jan. 2005, p. 82).

³⁷¹ For criticism that draws attention to Lunete’s words in the romance, see Haidu, who emphasizes her use of verbal ambiguity (“Narrativity and Language in Some XIIth Century Romances,” esp. pp. 143-44 and p. 148); Roberta L. Krueger, who speaks of her “clever verbal manipulations” (“Love, Honor, and the Exchange of Women in Yvain: Some Remarks on the Female Reader,” in *Arthurian Women: A Casebook*, ed. Thelma S. Fenster, New York: Garland Publishing, 1996, p. 14); and Melanie McGarrahan Gibson, who explains what she calls Lunete’s “manipulation, or perversion, of language” in terms of “Bakhtin’s carnival theory” (“Lyonet, Lunete, and Laudine: Carnavalesque Arthurian Women,” in *On Arthurian Women: Essays in Memory of Maureen Fries*, ed. Bonnie Wheeler and Fiona Tolhurst, Dallas: Scriptorium Press, 2001, p. 225).

³⁷² “*Et c’estut loins celle part la*” (“And he stood far off in that place, there,” my translation). My translation follows those of Philippe Walter and of Hult, for which see respectively Chrétien, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Poirion et al., pp. 386-387, and Chrétien, *Romans*, p. 774; Hult translates the line as “Il se tint debout, à l’écart, là où il était,” *ib.*, p. 774. According to Greimas, the word *loing* may also mean “longuement, longtemps;” this meaning is reflected in William W. Kibler’s translation, for which see Chrétien, *The Knight with the Lion, or Yvain (Le Chevalier au Lion)*, New York: Garland Publishing (1985), p. 80. However, my reading is supported by Lunete’s subsequent reference to “[c]hevalier qui ne s’en aproche” (v. 1964) and by her telling Yvain to draw near (v. 1967).

*Chevalier qui ne s'en aproche,
Et qui n'a ne langue, ne bouche,
Ne sens, dont acointier se sache.* (vv. 1961-1965)³⁷³

Taking Yvain *par le poing* (v. 1966),³⁷⁴ she continues:

[...] *'En sa vous traiez,
Chevalier, et poour n'aiez
De ma dame qu'elle vous morde ;
Mes querez li paiz et acorde,
Et j'en proieray avec vous
Que la mort Esclados le Rous,
Qui fu ses sires, vous pardoint.*' (vv. 1967-1973)³⁷⁵

Finding themselves finally in the same place, Laudine and Yvain are still in need of Lunete's mediation. And she very literally brings them together through spoken words and through physical action. Her intervention gives Yvain the courage he needs to use his own *langue* (v. 1964) rather than depending solely on hers. These passages reveal plainly that Lunete's representation of the two parties in question goes quite a bit farther than the (relatively) simple tasks of delivering a message or carrying out an errand. Not only has she already taken it upon herself to host Yvain (vv. 1039-1054), and to plead his cause to Laudine (vv. 1662-1726), but she also gives him advice, suggesting to him what approach that he ought to take if he wants to gain Laudine's favor. She is the embodiment of a certain kind of sense, if not of reason, and, as a counselor, she is generous in sharing her sense with those who seem to lack it.

³⁷³ “[Woman] who brings to a beautiful lady’s room a knight who does not draw near, who has not mouth or tongue or even the sense to introduce himself!” (I have changed “person” in Staines’s translation to “[w]oman.”)

³⁷⁴ “[B]y the arm,” according to Staines. Hult, however, translates *poing* as “poignet” (Chrétien, *Romans*, p. 774), and translates the entire line (v. 1966) as “[à] ces mots, elle le tire par le poignet” (*ib.*, p. 774).

³⁷⁵ “Step forward, knight. Have no fear that my lady will bite you. Implore her peace and accord. And I shall pray with you that she pardons you the death of Esclados the Red, who was her lord.”

This brings us, though, to the following question: what will happen once Yvain is put in the position of having to interpret his lady's words for himself? He is in fact none too successful in this regard. Although, by the end of their first conversation, the two characters seem to have come to an understanding (vv. 2035-2039), Yvain's behavior, following their marriage, leads us to doubt the depth of this understanding, at least on his side. It is—apparently—without seeking Lunete's advice that he asks his wife for *congié* (v. 2558), so that he may, as Hult's translation has it, "accompagner le roi et [...] aller participer aux tournois."³⁷⁶ When, subsequently, he leaves Laudine behind, he also leaves behind Lunete's good advice. Nor is it Lunete who bears Laudine's message of reproach to her husband; instead, it is the anonymous servant, who, as we have seen, leaves Yvain in a state of despair (vv. 2778-2789). As Yvain takes courage from Lunete's presence as a mediator (vv. 1974-1980), so he loses hope when she is absent (vv. 2790-2792). For, in addition to sharing her sense with him, she also encourages him, no less at the romance's end (vv. 6672-6683) than at its beginning. In representing her mistress—or, better yet, reflecting her (recall, here, Chrétien's discussion of her name in vv. 2409-2414)—to Yvain,³⁷⁷ Lunete is a source not only of news (v. 6680), but also of comfort.

It seems quite possible that it is the nature of the distance existing between Yvain and Laudine, at various points throughout the story, that requires them to have a go-between who possesses so many good qualities.³⁷⁸ But what is, in fact, the nature of this

³⁷⁶ Chrétien, *Romans*, p. 795.

³⁷⁷ Vance uses this metaphor (*Merveilous Signals*, p. 135).

³⁷⁸ On Lunete as go-between, see Gretchen Mieszkowski, *Medieval Go-Betweens and Chaucer's Pandarus*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan (2006), pp. 115-119.

distance? Both prior to Yvain's and Laudine's first meeting, and after Yvain's failure to return to his wife by the established time, the distance between the two characters is the result of a wrong that Yvain himself has committed. Yvain's killing of Esclados puts him in the position of an *omechide* and a *traïtour* (v. 1207)—these are the terms used by Laudine herself. At its foundation, then, the distance between them is a legal distance,³⁷⁹ symptomatic of an injustice that has not yet been redressed. Yet this distance is more easily resolved than the one that will establish itself after Yvain breaks his promise. At that time, he will again become, in Laudine's eyes, a *traïtour* (v. 2738), but more than this, he will also be a *lerres* (vv. 2724-2725).³⁸⁰ This form of betrayal will be personal in a way that his killing of Esclados was not:³⁸¹ whereas Laudine was able to absolve him of guilt for the latter offense by attributing it to self defense (vv. 1769-1770), she will be much less ready to excuse him for breaking his promise to her.³⁸²

In order to examine more closely Lunete's work as an intercessor, let us look at the scene immediately preceding Laudine's capitulation to Lunete's counsel. Lunete has

³⁷⁹ Cheyette and Chickering describe how Yvain's and Laudine's initial conversation may be read on a political level ("Love, Anger, and Peace: Social Practice and Poetic Play in the Ending of *Yvain*," pp. 85-87).

³⁸⁰ Hult translates this word as "voleur" (Chrétien, *Romans*, p. 800).

³⁸¹ Even if Yvain's lapse stemmed from his forgetfulness, which is unclear (vv. 2695-2703), this would presumably not be a point in his favor (see v. 2599 and v. 2608).

³⁸² Erich Köhler speaks of Laudine as "une dame qui ne se départira jamais de sa souveraine hauteur" (*L'aventure chevaleresque : Idéal et réalité dans le roman courtois : Études sur la forme des plus anciens poèmes d'Arthur et du Graal*, trans. Eliane Kaufholz, Paris: Gallimard, 1974, p. 198; I am indebted for help with this citation to Daniel Rocher, review of *L'aventure chevaleresque*, *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale* 19, 1976, pp. 397-398). Cheyette and Chickering, on the other hand, give a convincing account of Yvain's and Laudine's quarrel as a feud (Cheyette and Chickering, "Love, Anger, and Peace: Social Practice and Poetic Play in the Ending of *Yvain*").

already suggested the possibility of Laudine's finding a knight [*m*]eilleur (v. 1610) than her dead husband. In their next conversation, she begins dropping more hints as to Yvain's characteristics, without revealing his name. The conversation ends with Laudine's prohibition against any further discussion of the topic, but we learn, immediately afterwards, that she continues to think about Lunete's words, and concludes eventually that she, Laudine, has no right to hate Yvain (vv. 1734-1780). How has Lunete represented Yvain to Laudine? What, in her representation, has convinced Laudine to change her mind about him? Lunete's description of Yvain emphasizes his abilities in battle; she says to her mistress, "*Cuidiés vous que toute proesce / Soit morte avec vostre seignor ? / Chent aussi boins et chent mellor / En sont remés par mi le monde*" (vv. 1674-1677).³⁸³ Her rhetorical strategy, as she proceeds, is consistent with this first claim. Yvain is presented in fairly one-dimensional fashion:

*Quant .ii. chevaliers sont ensamble
 Venu as armes en bataille,
 Li quiex cuidiez vous qui miex vaille,
 Quant li uns a l'autre conquis ?
 Endroit de moi, doin je le pris
 Au vainqueur. Et vous, que faites ?* (vv. 1694-1699)³⁸⁴

The case that Lunete makes for Yvain depends on a linguistic equivalence between worth (*qui miex vaille*), on one hand, and victory in battle, on the other. Laudine is right to suspect that she is walking into a trap (vv. 1700-1701). The trap is not inescapable, though. One way to escape it—one way to reach a conclusion, in response to the question, that differs from the one suggested by Lunete herself—would be to question

³⁸³ "Do you believe all valor died with your lord? There are still other men in the world as fine as he was, or better."

³⁸⁴ "When two armed knights come together in combat, which man is better, do you think, when one defeats the other? I would award the prize to the winner. What would you do?"

this equivalence. Laudine might argue, in other words, that other qualities, besides prowess—other qualities such as justice and compassion—ought to be taken into account when determining the worth of a given *chevaliers*.

Laudine does not do this. Rather, she falls into the trap: this is, I think, because she has granted the premises of Lunete's question; as Yves Ferroul remarks, "[q]uand Lunete essaie de convaincre Laudine de prêter attention à Yvain, c'est bien sa valeur de guerrier, prouvée par sa victoire sur le défenseur de la fontaine, qui sert d'argument premier et qui emporte l'adhésion de la dame[.]"³⁸⁵ Laudine avoids the question of Yvain's moral character—when this question does arise, it is quickly stifled (vv. 1763-1767)—and thus is able to reason her way to the conclusion that Yvain has done no wrong either to her or to her late husband (vv. 1768-1772). While, according to Tony Hunt, "it is precisely Yvain's identity which leads Laudine to look favourably on Lunete's proposal that she should seek reunion with him," this reading does not quite stand up to scrutiny.³⁸⁶ For even though it is true that Laudine approves of Yvain once she is told who he is (vv. 1816-1818), it is also true that, even before this, she has already prepared herself to accept him as her *seigneur*, as long as he is willing and meets all the right conditions (vv. 1799-1806).³⁸⁷ She comes to see Yvain as a promising suitor not in

³⁸⁵ Ferroul, "La dérision de l'amour," in *Amour et chevalerie dans les romans de Chrétien de Troyes*, ed. Danielle Queruel, Paris: Les Belles Lettres (1995), p. 152.

³⁸⁶ Hunt, "The Dialectic of 'Yvain,'" p. 289.

³⁸⁷ See especially vv. 1803-1806: "*Së il est tiex qu'a moy atiengne, / Mez que de par lui ne remaingne, / Je le feray, ce vous otroy, / Seigneur de ma terre et de moy*" ("If he is worthy of me, and if he agrees, I shall make him, I promise you, lord of my land and of me"). Hult translates these lines as follows: "S'il est d'une condition qui soit à la hauteur de la mienne, et pourvu qu'il n'y ait pas d'obstacle de son côté, je le ferai, je vous l'accorde, seigneur de ma terre et de moi-même" (Chrétien, *Romans*, p. 769).

spite of, but rather because of his victory over her husband. After all, when she conducts her imaginary conversation with him and acquits him of any wrongdoing (vv. 1757-1772), this victory is the sole piece of information that she has about him, besides, of course, her knowledge that Lunete, whom she trusts (v. 1748), has recommended him to her attention.

To speak of “a disconcerting separation of Yvain’s reputation, by which Laudine accepts him, and his present self, which is responsible for actions of dubious morality and for which Laudine hates him” is thus misleading.³⁸⁸ In the end, it is indeed partly thanks to his reputation, or at least his lineage, that Laudine accepts Yvain (vv. 1816-1818), but Hunt’s reading does not take into account that, even prior to her third conversation with Lunete on the topic (vv. 1785-1880), Laudine has already ceased to see Yvain as worthy of her hatred (v. 1775). If, as Hunt suggests, the poem presents us with a “disconcerting separation” pertaining to Yvain’s “identity,” this is not a separation between “Yvain’s reputation” and “his present self” so much as it is a separation between his valor in battle, on the basis of which he is praised by Lunete (vv. 1705-1709), and his character as a whole, of which, when she decides to seek marriage to him, Laudine remains almost wholly ignorant.

Before Laudine learns his identity (v. 1817), Yvain is presented in a way similar to the way in which Perceval is presented through the defeated knights, in that both are presented in the moment of glory at which they triumphed over their adversaries in battle (although the reader knows that Yvain’s victory was not in fact all that glorious, Laudine does not). Perceval’s opponents preserve this moment, on Perceval’s behalf, by

³⁸⁸ Hunt, “The Dialectic of ‘Yvain,’” p. 289.

remaining in the same state that they were in at the battle's end; Lunete preserves it, on Yvain's behalf, by dwelling on it in her description of him to her mistress (vv. 1707-1709). It is on the basis of this moment, as well as her confidence in her servant (v. 1748) that Laudine judges Yvain's case (vv. 1760-1772). She fails even to take into account the pertinent question of what this knight was doing at her fountain in the first place. Relying on a very limited picture of him, she accepts Lunete's reasoning and changes her mind about Yvain: he is a valiant knight who acted in self-defense (v. 1770).

What are the consequences of Lunete's representation, a representation that Vance describes as a "launder[ing]" of Yvain's "past?"³⁸⁹ Hunt has argued that Chrétien uses a "dialectical technique" in the *Lion* to show that Yvain is not as courteous as he might seem:

After Ké has taunted him [Yvain] tells the queen, 'de ses ranposnes ... ne me chaut' [...], an affirmation that is entirely belied by the narrator's commentary on his subsequent pursuit of Esclados and on his reflections at the burial of the dead knight [...].³⁹⁰

Yvain is, in other words, very concerned about how he is seen by others, and Keu's mockery, in particular, has left a deep impression on him (vv. 1358-1359), as Hunt points out.³⁹¹ How much of the more questionable side of Yvain's character does Lunete know

³⁸⁹ *Mervelous Signals*, p. 134. In discussing Lunete's actions in this way, Vance refers not only to the speeches on which I have concentrated, here, but rather, I think, to all of her efforts on Yvain's behalf, leading up to the moment when she "orchestrate[s] [...] a spectacular daylight epiphany of his person before Laudine" (*ib.*, p. 134).

³⁹⁰ Hunt, "The Dialectic of 'Yvain,'" p. 287. For his quotation, "de ses ranposnes ... ne me chaut," Hunt cites *Lion*, vv. 630-631; in Hult's edition, see vv. 628-629: "de ses rampornes [...] ne me chaut." For "the narrator's commentary," Hunt cites vv. 892 ff and vv. 1346 ff; in Hult's edition, see vv. 890 ff and vv. 1345 ff.

³⁹¹ See Hunt, *ib.*, p. 288: "Yvain is motivated ostensibly by the conviction that Calogrenant must be avenged, but undeniably also by his need to combat Ké's 'ranposnes', to which [...] he declares himself indifferent but reveals himself to be hypersensitive." Hunt contrasts this motivation on Yvain's part with the motivation of Calogrenant himself, in his

about? She is of course aware that Yvain has killed Esclados, Laudine's husband; she may also be aware of his pride, as he tells her that he has no intention of allowing himself to be smuggled out of the castle in secret (vv. 1571-1577). However, she does not, presumably, know about the grudge he holds towards Keu (vv. 1345-1359; k vv. 1535-1537). She cannot, then, reveal this grudge to Laudine, and she does not choose to reveal Yvain's pride. Thus Laudine is made fully conscious of Yvain's *proesce* (v. 1674), but not of his anxiety about the opinion that other people, and especially his fellow knights, have of him.³⁹² This anxiety will play an important part in Yvain's decision to request permission to go to tournaments with Gauvain. For here is the reason that he cites for wishing to do this: "*Quē on ne m'apiaut recreant*" (v. 2561).³⁹³ In presenting Yvain simply as a successful knight, a *vainqueur* (v. 1699), Lunete leaves out—whether on purpose, out of ignorance, or out of negligence—the very parts of his character that will render him vulnerable to Gauvain's rhetoric. Not only this, but through her representation of Yvain to her mistress, she becomes personally—and bodily—liable for his later failure to keep his word. It is for "*Mesire Yvains*" that she is "*a tort*," as she says, "*[I]ivree a martire et a mort*" (vv. 3622-3624).³⁹⁴

earlier adventure: "Calogrenant is motivated simply by an uncritical adherence to a vacuous but conventional concept of knight-errantry" (*ib.*, p. 288).

³⁹² See, once again, Hunt, *ib.*, pp. 287-288.

³⁹³ "[S]o that [I will] not be called derelict in duty" (I have modified Staines's translation, which reads, "so that he would not be called derelict in duty").

³⁹⁴ "[U]njustly" ... "delivered tomorrow to the agony of death." See also vv. 3646-3650, in which Lunete tells Yvain, "*Voirs est que je ne fains mie / De vous aidier a boine foy*" ("It is true I did not hesitate to aid you in good faith"). The verb *fains*, here, would seem to be a form of *feindre*, based on the entry for *feindre* and related words in Greimas's dictionary. Among the translations that appear for this verb in Greimas are "[h]ésiter, manquer de courage," as well as "[m]ontrer de la mollesse, être paresseux." Hult translates *fains*, in verse 3646, as a past tense

How is it, then, that Lunete is still willing, later on, after coming so close to being put to death for her initial intercession on Yvain's behalf, to intercede for him again? How is she able to agree to his request "[q]ue vers la dame li tenist / Boin lieu, s'i l'en venoit en aise" (vv. 4640-4641)?³⁹⁵ Lunete never seems to be bitter about the trouble she has incurred for her championing of Yvain (vv. 3728-3745). Yet I would argue that her continued readiness to take up his cause, once she has been reconciled with her mistress, is influenced not only by her merciful character but also by Yvain's arrival in time to save her from being executed, and by his defense of her against her accusers. She was blamed for his failure to keep a promise; but now Yvain has shown himself to be capable of keeping promises.³⁹⁶ What Hunt calls Yvain's "new sense of responsibility" is grounds to suggest that he is no longer the man he was,³⁹⁷ and that Lunete, in representing him once again, is in fact representing a new person: the *chevaliers au leon*.³⁹⁸ And, of course, this is the person whom she will claim to represent, when, towards the romance's end, she asks Laudine to help reconcile him and his lady: "*S'ë il vous plaist, si juerrés / Pour le chevalier au leon / Que vous a boine entencion / Vous*

verb ("Il est vrai que je n'hésitai point," Chrétien, *Romans*, p. 831), as does Philippe Walter (Chrétien, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Poirion et al., p. 427; verse 3646 in Hult's edition corresponds to verse 3650 in Karl Uitti's, which is the edition used in Poirion et al.).

³⁹⁵ "[I]f she had the occasion, to intercede on his behalf with her lady."

³⁹⁶ For Yvain's promise to Lunete, that he will return to defend her, see vv. 3720-3723.

³⁹⁷ Specifically, Hunt writes that Yvain's "new sense of responsibility is revealed in his engagement with Harpin when he thinks of his promise to Lunete which he is determined to keep" ("The Dialectic of 'Yvain,'" p. 293); Hunt then cites vv. 4080-4082 (vv. 4074-4076 in Hult's edition).

³⁹⁸ For Yvain's identification of himself by this name, see vv. 4283-4290 and vv. 4605-4609.

penerés tant qu'il savra / Que l'amor de sa dame ara / Tout en tout, si com il ot onques"
(vv. 6634-6639).³⁹⁹

I will now turn to this scene (vv. 6546-6651), which mirrors Lunete's earlier representation of Yvain (vv. 1589-1653; vv. 1662-1726; vv. 1785-1880). In both cases Lunete is representing a person whom she does not identify, fully, to her mistress. Should we call this misrepresentation? Lunete may be accused of "ambiguity,"⁴⁰⁰ and perhaps also of hyperbole (vv. 1676-1677; v. 6548-6560), but when it comes to her representation of the *chevaliers au lion* in these two scenes, does she ever lie, outright?⁴⁰¹ Chrétien comments that it is "[a]u jeu de verité" (v. 6624) that Lunete has tricked her mistress; that is, according to Ruth Harwood Cline's translation of the romance, she "caught her by playing Truth[.]"⁴⁰² A certain degree of misrepresentation does enter into Lunete's strategy, for surely it is not the case that the *chevaliers au lion* will trust no one who does not promise to help him be reconciled to his lady, as Lunete claims in verses 6596-6603—after all, the lady whom Yvain has just defended in her quarrel with her

³⁹⁹ "Please, swear to do all in your power for the Knight with the Lion until he has his lady's goodwill exactly as he had it before."

⁴⁰⁰ Hunt, "The Dialectic of 'Yvain,'" p. 291.

⁴⁰¹ Her claim, in v. 6573, that she does not dare to give Laudine advice about how to defend her fountain, is clearly insincere, but does not have all that much bearing on how she represents Yvain.

⁴⁰² *Yvain; or, The Knight with the Lion*, trans. Cline, Athens: The University of Georgia Press (1975), p. 188. "[I]l semble," writes Jean Frappier, "d'après le contexte, qu'il s'agissait d'un jeu de société, pratiqué dans les cercles courtois, où l'on faisait prêter à quelqu'un un serment ou prendre un engagement dont elle ne saisisait pas toutes les implications et toutes les conséquences" (Frappier, *Etude sur Yvain ou le Chevalier au Lion de Chrétien de Troyes*, Paris: Société d'Édition d'Enseignement Supérieur, 1969, p. 57, as cited by Cline in her translation of the *Lion*, p. 201). Whether or not this is the case, Frappier's description of the "jeu de verité" resembles what has been described as the *don contraignant* (see Maddox, *The Arthurian Romances of Chrétien de Troyes: Once and future fictions*, p. 35; Maddox cites Köhler's description of the *don*).

older sister makes no such promise, and neither does Gauvain, or Arthur. As for her claim that, because of his quarrel with his lady, he is dying “*de duel et d’anui*” (v. 6604), this may be closer to the truth, for we do read that Yvain “[v]it bien que [...] pour amors enfin morroit / Se sa dame n’avoit merchi / De li ; qu’il se moroit pour li” (vv. 6503-6506).⁴⁰³ On the whole, however, her intercession for the *chevaliers au leon* in this scene is not any more straightforward than her earlier intercession for Yvain. For in both cases, Lunete, while she counsels her mistress to put her own cause into the hands of another person, fails to reveal all of the knowledge about this person that she herself possesses.

At the same time, though, remember that Laudine’s own conception of the *chevaliers au leon*, prior to this conversation with Lunete, is based on truth. One difference between their conversation, here, and their conversations toward the beginning of the romance, is that this time Laudine has already met the person being represented. When Lunete describes him as “[c]heli qui le gaiant ocist / Et les trois chevaliers comquist” (vv. 6593-6594),⁴⁰⁴ Laudine already knows at least the second of these two facts about the *chevaliers au leon*; not only this, but she also remembers, presumably, the context in which he conquered the *trois chevaliers*. In other words, whereas the picture of Yvain that Lunete presents to her mistress, towards the beginning of the romance, was limited to his prowess, the picture that she presents, now, of the *chevaliers au leon* is necessarily more complex, as it builds on a memory that her mistress already has—a memory of his prowess, yes, but specifically of his prowess in Lunete’s defense. If one assumes that Laudine was present throughout Yvain’s combat with her *seneschaus* and

⁴⁰³ “[S]aw well that he would die, in the end, for love, if his lady had no mercy on him; for he was dying for her” (my translation; Hult’s translation has helped me with the tenses, here).

⁴⁰⁴ “The one who killed the giant and overcame the three knights” (my translation).

his two brothers,⁴⁰⁵ then she has seen the *chevaliers au leon* arrive at the *chapele* just in time to champion Lunete's cause (vv. 4331-4335), she has heard him proclaim the charges against Lunete to be unjust (vv. 4426-4442), and she has seen him defeat his three opponents, with the help of his lion (vv. 4470-4559). What is more, she has had a conversation with him, after the battle, during which he tells her that his *travax*, his work, will not be over until his lady has forgiven him (vv. 4582-4586), that he is keeping the *acoison* and the *fourfait* a secret (vv. 4596-4598),⁴⁰⁶ and that he wants to be called the "*chevalier au leon*" (vv. 4607-4609).⁴⁰⁷ Thus Laudine knows pieces of the story belonging to Lunete's deliverer, even if she does not realize that he is her husband Yvain. When Lunete describes the *chevaliers au leon*, she can rely on her mistress having some knowledge of the person in question.⁴⁰⁸

Let us consider a bit more closely Lunete's description of the person whom Laudine knows as the *chevaliers au leon*:

— Dame, qui cuideroit trouver
 Cheli qui le gaiant ocist
 Et les trois chevaliers comquist,
 Il le feroit boin aler querre.
 Mais tant quë il avra le guerre,
 L'irë, et le courous sa dame,
 N'a il sous chiel homme ne fame

⁴⁰⁵ A fair assumption, given that she is clearly present both before the battle (vv. 4341-4350) and after it (vv. 4577-4628).

⁴⁰⁶ According to Greimas, *acoison* can mean "[c]ause, raison" as well as "[o]ccasion, motif" and "[a]ccusation," while a *fourfait* is a "[c]hose condamnable," an "[a]mende qui punit le délit," or an "[i]nfraction aux lois."

⁴⁰⁷ It is also worth remarking that, in this conversation, Yvain is reasonably honest in what he says about himself. Even when he suggests that he is "*ne [...] gaires renommés*" (4614), he is speaking the truth as regards his pseudonym.

⁴⁰⁸ Note, however, that Lunete does not in fact call Yvain *le chevaliers au leon*, in this conversation, until v. 6635.

*Quë il creïst, mien ensient,
 Jusquë on li jure et fiant
 Que on fera toute sa puissance
 De racorder la mesqueance
 Que sa dame a si grant vers li ;
 Qu'il en muert de duel et d'anui. (vv. 6592-6604)⁴⁰⁹*

Lunete's speech evokes that of the *chevaliers au leon*, himself, when he is conversing *incognito* with Laudine, and says that he dares not stay with her "[j]usques chertainement seüsse / *Que le boin gré ma dame eüsse*" (vv. 4619-4620).⁴¹⁰ The function of Lunete's words, at the level of the story itself, is to make the *chevaliers au leon* present once again to Laudine—that is, to bring to her mind and to her memory both the man with whom she spoke after he rescued her servant, and his story.⁴¹¹ Unlike her representation of Yvain at the beginning of the romance, which was concentrated at least initially on his prowess, Lunete's representation of the *chevaliers au leon* is a matter of adding touches to an already existing picture, a picture that suggests not only the knight's prowess but also his trustworthiness, which he has shown in regard to Lunete; his capacity for friendship,

⁴⁰⁹ "Lady, whoever would think to find the one who killed the giant and overcame the three knights would do well to go in search of him. But as long as he has war, anger, and displeasure from his lady, there is no man or woman in this world whom he would trust, in my opinion, until one swears and promises to him that one will do all in one's power to bring to a peaceful end the distrust that his lady has towards him, a distrust so great that he is dying from the grief and the sorrow of it" (my translation, which I have compared to Hult's). On the word *mesqueance*, see later footnote.

⁴¹⁰ "[U]ntil I was assured of my lady's goodwill."

⁴¹¹ What about at the level of the reader or listener? He or she, too, is encouraged, of course, to think of the earlier scene: yet, as Haidu has pointed out, the reader is not in the same position as Laudine. If, in hearing or reading Lunete's description, it is along with Laudine that we quickly identify "[c]heli qui le gaiant ocist / *Et les trois chevaliers comquist*" (vv. 6593-6594)⁴¹¹ as the *chevaliers au leon*, we are going a step further than Laudine when we identify the *chevaliers au leon* as Yvain. Haidu notes, too, that not only do we know more than Laudine does in this situation, but we even know more than Lunete does. As he writes, Laudine is not "able to close the circle of signification which the reader shares with Lunete. But the reader's perspective is even more comprehensive than Lunete's, for she is unaware that the present cause of the storm is Yvain at the Fountain" ("Narrativity and Language in Some XIIth Century Romances," p. 144).

which he has shown in regard both to Lunete and to the lion; and his devotion to his lady, which he has shown, paradoxically, in declining Laudine's invitation to stay with her (vv. 4582-4586; vv. 4618-4620).

This is not all. For in being reminded, by Lunete's words, of the *chevaliers au leon* and of his story at the time when he defended her, the reader or listener is also reminded of Laudine's response to that story:

— *Chertes, fait ele, che me poise.*
Je ne tieng mie pour courtoise
La dame qui mal cuer vous porte.
Ne deüst pas veer sa porte
A chevalier de vostre pris
Se trop n'eüst vers li mespris. (vv. 4587-4592)⁴¹²

"*Che me poise*," says Laudine; and the oath she takes, at the end of the romance—

"[I]'amor li rendrai et la grace / Quë il seut a sa dame avoir / Se j'en ai forche ne pooir"

(vv. 6646-6648)—ought to be understood in the context not only of her previous knowledge of the *chevaliers au leon*, but also of the sympathy she has expressed for him at the time of their earlier encounter.⁴¹³ It seems to me that, when Lunete tells her mistress that the *chevaliers au leon* "*muert de duel et d'anui*" (v. 6604) because of his lady's *mesqueance* (v. 6602),⁴¹⁴ she is encouraging Laudine to return to her posture of

⁴¹² "'This upsets me very much,' she replied. 'I think the lady whose heart harbors anger toward you knows little courtesy. She would not close her door to a knight of your honor unless he had sorely injured her.'" Hult, on the other hand, translates verses 4590-4592 as "Elle ne devrait pas interdire sa porte à un chevalier de votre valeur, à moins qu'il n'eût commis une trop grave faute envers elle" (Chrétien, *Romans*, p. 862).

⁴¹³ "I shall return to him the love and the favor he used to have with his lady, since I have the power and the ability." Cf Hult's translation: "Je lui ferai rendre l'amour et les bonnes grâces dont il jouissait jadis auprès de sa dame, si j'en ai la force et le pouvoir" (Chrétien, *Romans*, p. 930).

⁴¹⁴ Based on persusal of Greimas and Van Daele, I take *mesqueance* to be a form of the word *mescreance*, which Greimas translates as "[i]ncroyance, incrédulité," as "[f]ausse croyance," and as "[m]éfiance, soupçon." "Méfiance" would seem to make sense in the context

sympathy. True, Laudine finds herself in need, at the present time, of this knight's services, but it is also true that her servant has recalled him to her in such a way that she is inclined to be generous to him as she was in the past: thus when Lunete asks her to swear that she will help the *chevaliers au lion* be reconciled to his *dame*, she says, "*Che [...] ne me poise*" (v. 6619).⁴¹⁵

Now, according to Ferroul,

si Laudine accepte l'hommage d'Yvain repent, c'est parce que le Chevalier au Lion lui offre la garantie d'un bon défenseur de la fontaine, ce qui lui est absolument nécessaire. Mais cet intérêt est indépendant de la personne, et le premier défenseur, Esclados le Roux, ou Yvain, ou le Chevalier au Lion sont équivalents et interchangeables. Ce qui est particulièrement réducteur pour le héros, et plutôt en contradiction avec le caractère électif de l'amour.⁴¹⁶

Ferroul goes on to propose that "l'homme est aimé quand il pourra être utilisé par la femme pour ses projets à elle."⁴¹⁷ But is this actually true, in the case that he has cited, above? On the contrary, Laudine has better reasons to think well of the *chevaliers au lion* when she promises to help him, than she does to think well of Esclados's killer when she decides that he has committed no crime against her. The only thing she knows of Yvain in the earlier of the two cases is that he is capable of defeating another knight in

of Lunete's speech. On the other hand, Hult translates the word as "mauvais traitement" (Chrétien, *Romans*, p. 929), while Walter translates not *mesqueance* but *mesestance*, which replaces *mesqueance* in Uitti's edition, as "disgrâce" (Chrétien, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Poirion et al., p. 498; verse 6602 in Hult's edition corresponds to verse 6614 in Uitti's). Greimas's translations for *mesestance* are "[s]ituation fâcheuse, misère, affliction," "[m]ésintelligence, mésestence," and "[c]rime, délit." Another variant, noted by Walter, is *mescheance* (Chrétien, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Poirion et al., note on p. 1233), which, according to Greimas, may mean "[m]alheur, infortune," or "[m]alchance, accident;" "[m]ale *mescheance*" (still according to Greimas) may mean "malheur, mauvais traitement."

⁴¹⁵ "This does not grieve me" (my translation).

⁴¹⁶ Ferroul, "La dérision de l'amour," p. 153.

⁴¹⁷ *Ib.*, p. 153.

combat; in the case of the *chevaliers au lion*, on the other hand, she knows—if she has been paying attention—that he can be depended upon to keep a promise, as well as that he cares about making peace with his lady. In other words, it is at the level of his character that Laudine knows more about the *chevaliers au lion* than she did about her husband’s killer. As for the claim that all the fountain’s actual or proposed defenders are “équivalents et interchangeables,” this would be more tenable if Yvain were the same person, in his incarnation as the *chevaliers au lion*, that he was when he made his first visit to Laudine’s fountain. I want to suggest, though, that he is not.⁴¹⁸

None of this, of course, changes the fact that Lunete herself remains less than completely candid, as a representative. Although she has a deeper knowledge of the person for whom she is interceding, at the end of the romance, than she did towards its beginning, the kind of intercession in which she engages bears a certain resemblance to the kind of message-bearing characteristic of Gauvain: both are willing to use indirect means in order to achieve what they themselves believe to be best for the parties between

⁴¹⁸ Certainly not everyone agrees that Yvain has changed. Natalie Grinnell has argued that, after “betray[ing] [Laudine’s] trust,” Yvain “has done nothing to show that he has changed” (“The Other Woman in Chrétien de Troyes’s *Yvain*,” *Critical Matrix* 10.2, 1996, p. 12; page numbers refer to a full text version, downloaded from ProQuest, of this article, 5 July 2014). For Grimbert, on the other hand, “[S]i Yvain est mû dans la première partie du roman par un sentiment (la vengeance) qui ne contribue en rien—ou peu—au bien général, dans la seconde partie, en revanche, il entreprend une série d’aventures qui le poussent à sortir du domaine circonscrit par son désir de vengeance ou par sa soif de rehausser sa propre gloire” (*Yvain’ dans le miroir*, p. 152). Per Nykrog’s interpretation is similar: he speaks of Yvain, near the romance’s end, as “toujours l’ascète de la gloire chevaleresque qu’il était devenu dans sa crise” (*Chrétien de Troyes: Romancier discutable*, Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1996, p. 177), thereby implying that Yvain was not such an “ascète” before going crazy. Renée L. Curtis, meanwhile, has made the case that Yvain was not so very bad to begin with (“The Perception of the Chivalric Ideal in Chrétien de Troyes’s ‘Yvain,’” *Arthurian Interpretations* 3.2, 1989, pp. 1-22), yet she still speaks of “Yvain’s transformation and development through suffering” (*ib.*, p. 19). My interpretation is similar to Grimbert’s; it seems to me that what makes Lunete’s intercession (as well as Yvain’s arrival to the fountain and Laudine’s forgiveness of him) different, at the end of the story, is Yvain’s earlier defense of Lunete, by which he shows himself to be trustworthy—again, this is exactly the quality that he lacked, before.

whom they are mediating. “*Ahi ! Gauvains,*” says Erec, when he is tricked into stopping for the night, “*ahi ! / Vostre grantz sens m’a esbahi ; / Par grant sens m’avez retenu*” (vv. 4143-4145).⁴¹⁹ The surrender that he makes, in spite of himself, to Gauvain’s *sens*, is not unlike Laudine’s surrender to her servant at the end of the *Lion*. Both Lunete and Gauvain use their *sens* in order to bring one person literally into the presence of another. Gauvain realizes that Erec will not agree to being [*h*]erbergiez unless Arthur and his tents are actually “[*d*]evant aus, en mi le chemin” (*Erec et Enide*, v. 4113).⁴²⁰ Conscious that his own words are not enough to bring Erec and the king together, he makes sure that the king’s bodily presence will interrupt Erec’s journey. Likewise, Lunete, in her attempt to convince her mistress to forgive Yvain, relies not only on verbal rhetoric but also on Yvain’s arrival under another name. Lunete and Gauvain are accomplished mediators because they are able to ensure that a meeting of bodies takes place, even when they are dealing with wills that are in contradiction to one another.

Lunete is like other messengers we have seen in that she stands between two persons; note, however, the degree to which she allows her own perception of what is best in a given situation to exercise an influence on her actions as a messenger. It is in fact her engagement in this kind of interpretative process that allows us to call her not only a messenger, but also a mediator. She makes Yvain and her mistress present to one another, not—like Laudine’s messenger—via imitation, but, instead, via intervention.⁴²¹

⁴¹⁹ “Ahi! Gauvains,’ he said, ‘Ahi! Your great prudence has tricked me; by great prudence you have retained me” (my translation, influenced by that of Staines; see earlier footnote).

⁴²⁰ “Before them, in the middle of the path” (my translation).

⁴²¹ Indeed, Mieszkowski, in her book, *Medieval Go-Betweens and Chaucer’s Pandarus*, classifies Lunete among “Go-Betweens Who Intervene” (p. ix).

In drawing this distinction, I want to emphasize the measure in which Lunete makes her own decisions, and, in so doing, takes risks to her own person. These risks become especially evident when she is accused of treason and threatened with death because she has advised her mistress to marry Yvain (vv. 3600-3602).

As a mediator, Lunete is required—in a way that a mere messenger is not—to use her mind. By this, I do not mean to suggest that she is autonomous, but rather that she has in common with Gauvain the quality of *sens*. Indeed, like Gauvain, who proves himself to be not simply a representative by default of the king and of the court, but an expert ambassador, so Lunete proves herself to be the active benefactor of the persons she is representing.⁴²² As she tells Yvain, at the moment when she is in danger of being put to death because of him: “*Par l’amonnestement de moi / Ma dame a seignour vous rechet ; / Mon los et mon conseil en crut. / Et [...] / Plus pour son preu que pour le vostre / Le cuidai faire, et cuit encore*” (vv. 3648-3653).⁴²³ Lunete’s representation of her mistress and of Yvain is an art, and, by Lunete’s own account, it has as its object

⁴²² It is mainly, it would seem, for her *conseil* that she would be missed, were she to be put to death, by the *povres dames* (v. 4353) whom she has helped in the past (see v. 4358 and v. 4360).

⁴²³ “On my advice my lady received you as her lord. She trusted my opinion and my counsel. And [...] I did think, and still do, that I acted more for her welfare than for yours.” Hult’s translation reads as follows: “C’est grâce à mon conseil que ma dame accepta de vous prendre pour époux ; sur ce point, elle se fia à ma recommandation et à mon avis. Mais [...] c’est davantage pour son bien que pour le vôtre que je pensai le faire, et je le pense encore” (Chrétien, *Romans*, p. 832). The word *los* is interesting, here; Greimas suggests several translations for this word, among them “[l]ouange” and “[a]pprobation, consentement, conseil.” See *Lion*, v. 4367, for an example of the verb *loer*, which Greimas translates as, among other things, “[a]pprouver, conseiller” and “[o]rdonner;” it is used, here, by the *povres dames* of verse 4353, to describe what Lunete has done in the past—and what no one will do, apparently, if she is put to death.

Laudine's happiness. In giving us such a character, Chrétien suggests that, in order to represent someone well, one may be in need of a kind of skill that is in fact akin to virtue.

Another intercessor whom I would like to consider is Guenièvre. Near the beginning of the *Chevalier de la charrette*, Méléagant has just left the court after having delivered a challenge to Arthur; following Méléagant's departure, Keu declares to the king that he, too, is leaving (*Charrette*, vv. 87-90). After establishing that Keu is not joking, and after trying, unsuccessfully, to convince him to stay, Arthur has recourse to his queen: "*Ce qu'il ne vialt feire por moi*," he explains to her, "*Fera tost por vostre proiere*" (vv. 120-121).⁴²⁴ What distinguishes Guenièvre's *proiere* from that of the king?

Let us take a look. Here is Arthur's plea to Keu:

— *Est ce par ire ou par despit,
Fet li rois, qu'aler an volez ?
Seneschax, si con vos solez,
Soiez a cort, et sachiez bien
Que je n'ai en cest monde rien
Que je por vostre remenance
Ne vos doigne sanz demorance.* (vv. 104-110)⁴²⁵

And here is Guenièvre's:

[...] *Kex, a grant enui
Me vient, ce sachiez a estros,
Ce qu'ai oï dire de vos.
L'an m'a conté, ce poise moi,
Que partir vos volez del roi.
Don vos vient et de quel corage ?
Ne vos an tieng or mie a sage
Ne por cortois, si con ge suel.
Del remanoir proier vos vuel,
Kex, remenez, je vos an pri.* (vv. 132-141)⁴²⁶

⁴²⁴ "What he is unwilling to do for me, he will do at once at your request."

⁴²⁵ "“Is it anger or contempt that makes you want to go?” the king inquired. ‘Seneschal, continue to stay at my court. You can be certain that if you stay, I have nothing in this world I would not give you at once.’”

Guenièvre’s words are—initially, at least—no more successful than the king’s. Keu still refuses to stay at the court (vv. 142-143). Nevertheless, the structure and substance of her plea hints at why Arthur has given this mission to her in the first place. While Arthur tries to persuade Keu by offering to give him, if he will stay, whatever he wants, Guenièvre’s speech proceeds from an account of her own emotions (she feels *grant enui*, v. 132, and heaviness, v. 135⁴²⁷), to an account of her changed opinion of Keu (she judges him to be neither wise, v. 138, nor *cortois*, v. 139), to a straightforward request (vv. 140-141). Guenièvre’s rhetorical strategy is thus built on describing her own personal reaction to Keu’s threatened departure.⁴²⁸ This suggests in turn that the reason she has been chosen to speak to Keu has at least as much to do with who she is, as it does with any actual words she says.

And in fact Keu does not accede to the queen’s entreaty until her rhetoric becomes not just verbal, but visual:

*Et la reïne de si haut
Com ele estoit as piez li chiet.
Kex li prie qu’ele se liet,
Mes ele dit que nel fera :
Ja mes ne s’an relevera
Tant qu’il otroit sa volenté. (vv. 148-153)⁴²⁹*

⁴²⁶ “Kay, believe me, the news I have heard about you disturbs me very much. I am unhappy to hear you want to leave the king. Why do you do it? What is your reason? I don’t see the wisdom or the courtesy you usually exhibit. I implore you to stay. Kay, I beg you, stay.”

⁴²⁷ Méla translates *ce poise moi* as “je m’en afflige” (Chrétien, *Romans*, p. 504). The verb *peser* has, according to Greimas, both a literal meaning (“[ê]tre lourd”) and a metaphorical meaning (“[ê]tre pénible, désagréable, déplaire”), as well as the possible meaning of “[a]cheter.”

⁴²⁸ This strategy is very much in keeping with what Arthur himself has asked her to do (see v. 121 and v. 124).

⁴²⁹ “Then the queen, noble as she was, laid herself at his feet. She refused Kay’s request that she rise, declaring that she would not, that she would never again rise until he gave in to her will.”

This spectacle, in which Guenièvre adopts the lowly posture of a supplicant, is persuasive in a way that Arthur's promises were not. The text describes the height from which the queen descends (v. 148);⁴³⁰ her falling at Keu's feet⁴³¹ comes as the logical conclusion of a reversal of royal authority that has commenced with Méléagant's visit (vv. 43-79), and has continued with Arthur's powerlessness to prevent Keu from leaving his service. Thus far both Méléagant's and Keu's speeches have eschewed supplication in favor of declaration.⁴³² It is, however, directly after Guenièvre's bodily expression of humility, an expression suggested to her by Arthur (v. 125),⁴³³ that Keu asks her to get up, and, in so doing, begins to descend from his own pose of defiance.

The queen makes a promise to the *seneschaus* not only on her own behalf, but on Arthur's, too: "*Kex, fet ele, que que ce soit, / Et ge et il l'otroierons*" (vv. 158-159).⁴³⁴

⁴³⁰ Chrétien expresses himself similarly in *Lion*, vv. 4044-4045, when Gauvain's niece, his sister, and his brother-in-law realize that Yvain may go away without fighting the giant who is threatening them: "[...] [*l*] li vaurrent de si haut / Comme il ierent as piés chair," which Hult translates as "[...] ils sont sur le point de se prosterner, de toute leur hauteur, à ses pieds" (Chrétien, *Romans*, p. 845; Hult's translation has helped me understand these verses and their context).

⁴³¹ While confirming helpfully that the word *piez* in verse 149 is plural, neither Méla's nor Poirion's translation makes it completely clear to whom these *piez* belong (see, respectively, Chrétien, *Romans*, p. 505, and Chrétien, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Poirion et al., p. 511). That they are Keu's is, however, supported by Ruth Harwood Cline's English translation of the *Charrette* (*Lancelot, or, The Knight of the Cart*, Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1990, p. 5), as well as by that of Staines (*The Complete Romances of Chrétien de Troyes*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990, p. 172).

⁴³² Unless we count the words *vostre merci* (v. 142), which Keu addresses to Guenièvre, as a kind of supplication. See vv. 51-60; vv. 70-79; vv. 87-92; vv. 97-103; vv. 111-113; vv. 142-143; vv. 146-147.

⁴³³ Méla's translation (Chrétien, *Romans*, p. 504) has helped me to understand verse 125.

⁴³⁴ "'Kay,' she said, 'whatever it is, he and I will grant it.'"

Nor is Arthur himself—at least while he remains ignorant of what Keu’s boon entails—at all unwilling to fulfill the promise to which his wife has committed him (vv. 168-170).

This makes sense, given that Arthur has already made a similar promise, prior to Guenièvre’s intervention; still, we should note that, although Guenièvre’s words may not be incompatible with what Arthur has said directly to Keu (vv. 107-110), they do exceed what he has explicitly asked her to say to the *seneschaus*:

*‘Dame, fet il, vos ne savez
Del seneschal que il me quiert ?
Congié demande et dit qu’il n’iert
A ma cort plus, ne sai por coi.
Ce qu’il ne vialt feire por moi
Fera tost por vostre proiere,
Alez a lui, ma dame cheire !
Quant por moi remenoir ne daigne,
Proiez li que por vos remaigne
Et einz l’an cheez vos as piez,
Que ja mes ne seroie liez
Se sa conpaignie perdoie.’* (vv. 116-127)⁴³⁵

Guenièvre’s additions to the message she was bid to bear are not arbitrary; rather, they ought to be understood as an interpretation and an amplification of that message. As such, they indicate her knowledge of the king’s habits and tendencies—that is, of his character. The scene, as a whole, also suggests that Arthur trusts his queen not so much to deliver a message in a literal or mechanical way, as to use her own influence and her own sense in order to move Keu.

How is Arthur present, then, through Guenièvre? He is present, I think, primarily through the queen’s expression of a desire that the king has already expressed, just as

⁴³⁵ “‘Lady,’ he said, ‘do you know what the seneschal asks of me? He seeks permission to leave and says he will stay at my court no longer. I don’t know why. What he is unwilling to do for me, he will do at once at your request. Go to him, my dear lady. Since he will not even consider staying for my sake, beg him to stay for yours. Even throw yourself at his feet. If I were to lose his company, I would never be happy again.’”

Laudine is present to Yvain through her messenger's expression of her anger towards him. "Soiez a cort," Arthur tells Keu (v. 107),⁴³⁶ and Guenièvre echoes him: "*Del remanoir proier vos vuel, / Kex, remenez, je vos an pri*" (vv. 140-141).⁴³⁷ But Guenièvre's speech, as we have seen, is not a mere repetition of Arthur's. And she does not efface herself in her mediation. Rather, she uses her own gifts of persuasion to do for Arthur what he was unable to do for himself, thereby helping the king in a way that a straightforward messenger would not. Her intercession is skillful, like that of Gauvain when he approaches Perceval "[s]ans faire nul felon senblant" (*Conte*, v. 4366).⁴³⁸

In convincing Keu to do the king's will, Guenièvre shows herself to be a talented mediator. What goes wrong, then? Why does Guenièvre's mediation lead to her capture and captivity at the hands of Méléagant? I would suggest that the art of intercession depends not only on a knowledge of the character of the person for whom one is interceding, but also on a knowledge of the character of the person with whom one is pleading. In other words, it is important, if Guenièvre is to reconcile Arthur and Keu, for her to make allowances not only for Arthur's character, but also for Keu's. Does she do this? It would seem, given her interaction with Keu in the *Chevalier au lion* (the events of which overlap with those of the *Charrette*), that Guenièvre has at least some

⁴³⁶ "Be at court" (my translation).

⁴³⁷ "I implore you to stay. Kay, I beg you, stay."

⁴³⁸ "[S]howing no hostility." For a more complete description of Gauvain's approach, see *Conte*, vv. 4364-4366: "*Et messire Gauvains se trait / Vers lui tot soavet enblant / Sanz faire nul felon senblant[.]*" Méla's translation is helpful: "Monseigneur Gauvain s'approche de lui, en allant l'amble avec douceur, sans rien d'hostile dans son apparence" (Chrétien, *Romans*, pp. 1071-1072). It is hard for me to read these lines without sensing irony in them, given Keu's remarks in verses 4304-4335 and in verses 4450-4463, my reading of which, along with my reading of verses 4364-4366 themselves, has been influenced by Haidu's *Aesthetic Distance* (see pp. 194-196).

understanding of what may be expected of Keu, whom she describes as follows:

“*Coustumiers est de dire mal, / Si qu'on ne l'en puet chastier*” (*Lion*, vv. 134-135).⁴³⁹

Guenièvre knows that Keu is an inveterate slanderer of others. But it is not so much the *seneschaus*'s evil speech that leads to Guenièvre's capture as it is another vice: namely, his *orguel* (v. 186), or arrogance. Did Guenièvre consider this vice, in her mediation? Certainly, she is not pleased with the result of Keu's bargain: “*La reine an repesa molt*” (v. 184).⁴⁴⁰ The implication is that she did not foresee Keu's demand. Although her intercession is successful in an immediate sense, it fails in a deeper sense because it involves an unwise promise, a promise made to someone whose character suggests that he will take advantage of it for his own glory.

Yet if Arthur is truly present to Keu in Guenièvre's intercession, she is not the only one at fault when this intercession yields worrisome consequences. Guenièvre's lack of proper attention to Keu's character reproduces a corresponding lack of attention on Arthur's part. Small wonder, then, that Arthur's reaction to Keu's demand is similar to the queen's: “*Au roi poise, et si l'an revest, / Car einz de rien ne se desdist, / Mes iriez et dolanz le fist / Si que bien parut a son volt*” (vv. 180-183).⁴⁴¹ Both king and queen are

⁴³⁹ “He has always had a vicious tongue no one can correct.”

⁴⁴⁰ “The queen as well was equally distraught.” The verb *repeser*, according to Greimas, means both “[p]eser une fois de plus” and “[ê]tre également pénible.” He gives an example, from Bérout's *Tristan*, of *repeser* used in the second sense: “*E a Tristan repoise fort Que Yseut a por lui descort.*” It seems likely to me that the verb is being used in this second sense in verse 184 of the *Charrette*, too, especially given the statement that “[a]u roi poise [...],” in verse 180. Guenièvre's grief, or heaviness, echoes Arthur's.

⁴⁴¹ “Though dismayed, the king entrusted her to Kay, for he was never false to his word. But the demand caused his anger and unhappiness to be visible on his face.” Greimas's dictionary and Méla's translation have helped me to understand these verses (for the latter, see Chrétien, *Romans*, p. 506).

aggrieved; neither has taken into account Keu's *orguel*. In the *Chevalier au lion*, Yvain's host will blame the queen for having agreed to Keu's plan:

*Mais la femme le roi en maine
Un chevalier d'estrange tere,
Si l'ala a le court requerre ;
Ne pour che ja ne l'en eüst
Menee pour riens que il seüst,
Ne fust Keus qui embriconna
Le roy tant quë il li bailla
Le roïne et mist en se garde.
Chil fu faus et chele musarde
Qui en son conduit se fia. (Lion, vv. 3914-3923)⁴⁴²*

Yet Arthur also bears responsibility for this unwise decision; so it seems, at least, from Gauvain's words to him once the queen has been led off: "Sire," he says, "*molt grant anfance / Avez feite, et molt m'an mervoil*" (vv. 226-227).⁴⁴³ Guenièvre's mediation faithfully reflects Arthur's concerns, but fails to compensate for Arthur's lack of discernment—for what Gauvain calls his *anfance*.

How does Guenièvre's intercession for Arthur at the beginning of the *Charrette* compare to Lunete's intercession for Yvain? The two intercessors are similar in that they both expose themselves to danger on behalf of those for whom they are pleading.

⁴⁴² "But a knight from a foreign land went to the court to ask for the king's wife, and has led her away. Yet for all his efforts he would never have taken her had it not been for Kay, who tricked the king into entrusting him with the queen and placing her in his keeping. He was a fool, and she foolish enough to entrust herself to his escort." It is unclear to me whether [*c*]hil, in *Lion*, v. 3922, refers to Arthur or to Keu. Both Staines's and Hult's translations maintain the pronoun's ambiguity (for the latter's translation, see Chrétien, *Romans*, p. 841), while Walter's translation shows that he understands it to refer to Arthur (Chrétien, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Poiron et al., p. 434).

⁴⁴³ "Sire, what you have done is exceedingly childish, and I marvel exceedingly at it" (my translation, influenced by that of Staines). See also Lunete's words in *Lion*, vv. 3702-3705: "*Mais la roïne en a menee / Un chevalier, che me dist l'en, / Dont li rois fist que hors du sen / Quant après li li envoa*" ("But I am told that a knight has carried off the queen—a knight in regard to whom the king did an insane deed in sending her after him," my translation, which is closer to Hult's than to Staines's; for Hult's translation, see Chrétien, *Romans*, p. 833).

Guenièvre pays for Arthur's *anfance* (*Charrette*, v. 226) when she is led, by Keu, into the forest where Méléagant is waiting. And Lunete pays for Yvain's initial negligence when she is accused of [*t*]raison (*Lion*, v. 3675) by Laudine's *seneschaus*. Both these women become implicated, through their intercession, in another person's deficiencies—Guenièvre in Arthur's lack of wisdom and Lunete in Yvain's lack of responsibility. They are similar, too, in their skill as intercessors. Rather than simply repeating someone else's words, they use their own influence and their own knowledge of a particular situation in order to bring about reconciliation between persons who are divided from one another. Neither does it seem that either of these intercessors arrives at her aim through mere rhetoric: Guenièvre must make an bodily show of humility before Keu (*Charrette*, vv. 148-149), and the text implies that Lunete wins her mistress over at least partly through her loyalty (*Lion*, v. 1748).⁴⁴⁴

Although Lunete and Guenièvre both seem to be working, in their mediation, for the good of all parties concerned, both also plead on behalf of someone who does not necessarily deserve it. And although Lunete has better grounds to recommend Yvain at the end of the romance than at its beginning, her intercession is still problematic given that it depends on trapping her mistress *via* Laudine's words. Yet Chrétien does give us at least one example of an intercessor who is both wise and truthful. In *Erec et Enide*, after the protagonists have been reconciled (vv. 4911-4932), and before they arrive at the adventure of the *Joie de la Cort* (v. 5457), they come upon Guivret le Petit, a knight with whom Erec has already fought and who has, in an earlier episode, become his friend (vv. 3670-3929). Guivret, who believes Erec to be dead (vv. 4935-4938), has ridden out to

⁴⁴⁴ Hult's translation has helped me to understand verses 1749-1752 (Chrétien, *Romans*, p. 768).

rescue Enide from the count of Limors and to bury Erec's body (vv. 4950-4958). Erec and Guivret fail to recognize one another, and Erec, still suffering from wounds he has incurred in an earlier fight, rides towards Guivret and is struck from his horse by the blow he receives (vv. 5012-5014). Enide has been hiding, but emerges when she sees Erec fall to the ground. She proceeds to chastise Guivret in no uncertain terms:

*'Chevaliers, maudiz soies tu !
 Un home foible et sanz vertu,
 Doillant et pres navré a mort,
 As envahi a si grant tort
 Que tu ne sez dire por qoi.
 [...]
 Or soies frans et afaitiez,
 Se laisse ester par ta franchise
 Ceste bataille qu'as emprise,
 Car ja n'en vaudroit mieuz tes pris,
 Se tu avoies mort ou pris
 Un chevalier qui n'a pooir
 De relever, ce puez veoir,
 Qu'il a tant copx d'armes soferz
 Que touz est de plaies coverz.'* (vv. 5023-5027; vv. 5032-5040)⁴⁴⁵

Enide's intercession differs from those of Guenièvre and of Lunete in that it is both spontaneous, on her part—she runs to help (v. 5019)—and immediately convincing: Guivret agrees to let Erec go “*seürs et quites*” (v. 5050), and, soon after, both Erec's and his identities are revealed. Notice that Enide appeals both to Erec's weakness due to his wounds, and to Guivret's *franchise*, as reasons for Guivret to have mercy on her husband. Like both Guenièvre and Lunete, Enide takes into account the characters of both persons between whom she is mediating (although in the case of Guivret this can be no more than

⁴⁴⁵ ““Knight, may you be cursed! A weak and powerless man, who is suffering and wounded almost to death, have you attacked so wrongfully that you know not how to say why. [...] Now be noble and well-mannered, and in your nobility leave off this battle that you have begun. For never will your renown be bettered by having killed or taken a knight who has no strength to get up, as you can see, since he has suffered so many blows, from arms, that he is completely covered with wounds” (my translation).

a guess on her part, as she has presumably not yet recognized him), as well as their circumstances; yet the predominant virtue that she demonstrates in her intercession is not prudence or courtliness, but love.

Successful intercession, for Chrétien, depends on the intercessor's ability, first, to hold together, in his or her own mind, the interests and desires of two persons; and, second, to bring these persons, whether literally or figuratively, into the same place. This ability may be the fruit of friendship—as is, I believe, the case for Guenièvre and for Lunete—or it may be the fruit of love, as is the case for Enide. Note, too, that each intercessor relies, in her intercession, on an already established relation to at least one of the persons she is trying to reconcile. Finally, if the listener or reader is left with doubts about the stability of the reconciliations mediated by Guenièvre and by Lunete,⁴⁴⁶ this is due not only to these women's own characters, but also, at least in part, to the characters of the persons being reconciled: Arthur is imprudent, Keu arrogant, and Yvain—for a while, at least—irresponsible. Reconciliation is risky for these two women; it is also risky, for that matter, for Enide, who, not realizing that she is speaking to Guivret, puts herself into a vulnerable position by becoming an advocate for Erec. The kind of intercession practiced by each of these women requires her to entangle herself, personally, in the affairs of others. This implies, in turn, that, even once she has accomplished her task of reconciliation, her work may not be over—rather, the maintenance of the peace may require her continued presence.⁴⁴⁷

⁴⁴⁶ On this subject as regards the reconciliation of Yvain and Laudine, see Grimbert, *'Yvain' dans le miroir*, pp. 171-179.

⁴⁴⁷ It is quite possible that I have been influenced, here, by Chayette and Chickering, whose article, "Love, Anger, and Peace: Social Practice and Poetic Play in the Ending of *Yvain*," shows the importance of mediators for resolving conflicts in the Middle Ages and the relevance

Conclusion

It is helpful to think about personal representation in Chrétien's romances in terms of the three categories of representatives according to which I have structured this chapter. For there are straightforward representatives, whose function is simply to make present certain persons in situations where those persons cannot themselves be present. There are representatives who threaten to become replacements, or even usurpers, as regards those they represent. And there are representatives who are, through their virtues, capable of drawing together persons who are at odds with one another.

Both Laudine's anonymous messenger and Perceval's defeated opponents practice a kind of representation that is relatively uncomplicated. True, it is important that Laudine's and Perceval's messages be delivered through these messengers, rather than, for example, through letters: the messengers' bodily presence ensures, in the first case, that Yvain be publicly chastised and that Laudine's ring be taken from him, and, in the second, that Perceval's reputation be strengthened and that the effects of his valor be visible. Nevertheless, these representatives differ from Gauvain in that, even though their representation accomplishes a particular aim in a particular situation, this is not so much through any personal qualities (or virtues) that they may possess, but rather through their obedience to someone else's wishes. The *Conte* gives us evidence of this, when it comes to Perceval's messengers, in Arthur's repeated regret that the young man himself is absent: the knights that Perceval sends to the king, at least at the beginning of his career,

of this historical background to our understanding of Lunete's role in the poem. Cheyette and Chickering even reproduce an illustration from Paris, BnF, MS fr. 1433 that shows "the couple at peace, with the lion at the bedside and Lunete serving food and drink" ("Love, Anger, and Peace," p. 114; images on pp. 114-115).

do not, as a rule, so much comfort the king as they provide the occasion for Arthur to express this regret⁴⁴⁸—they do not, in other words, make up for Perceval’s absence. There is a spectrum within this category, of course, when it comes to these representatives’ personal involvement with the messages they carry. As members of Chrétien’s audience, we get to know the *Orgueilleus de la Lande* much better than we do Laudine’s messenger, and there is a correspondence between our knowledge of him and our appreciation of what it means for Perceval to have vanquished him. Nonetheless, even Perceval’s opponents become, in the end, indistinguishable from one another, when, instead of continuing to describe these opponents by name, the poem tells us that Perceval “.*LX. chevaliers de pris / A la cort lo roi Artu pris / Dedenz .V. anz i enveia*” (vv. 6159-6161).⁴⁴⁹

Arthur’s knights, on the other hand, seem sometimes to fall into the second of my three categories. This is, of course, especially true when it comes to Lancelot, whom I have not discussed in this chapter, but who certainly occupies an uneasy position, in the *Charrette*, in his rescue of the queen: does he act on Arthur’s behalf? On his own? On both his own behalf and Arthur’s?⁴⁵⁰ As for Gauvain, he seems, in the *Conte*, to become

⁴⁴⁸ See Arthur’s reactions following Ivonez’s account of Perceval’s battle with the Chevalier Vermeil (vv. 1190-1194), and following the respective arrivals of Clamadeu (vv. 2820-2823) and of the *Orgueilleus de la Lande* (vv. 4012-4015), at the court.

⁴⁴⁹ “He conquered and sent sixty renowned knights, within five years, to King Arthur’s court” (my translation, for help with which I am indebted to Méla’s; see Chrétien, *Romans*, p. 1124). As Nykrog writes, “[L]e narrateur se borne à citer le bilan de ses victoires, comme chiffre total, sans le moindre détail. Il y en a tant qu’elles ne signifient plus rien pour le héros; la chevalerie victorieuse est devenue une routine” (*Chrétien de Troyes: Romancier discutabile*, p. 207).

⁴⁵⁰ Maddox describes Lancelot as “one who, being perennially in Love’s service, on occasion finds himself inadvertently in the service of social institutions as well” (*The Arthurian Romances of Chrétien de Troyes: Once and future fictions*, p. 52).

Perceval's model, and this could be seen to take place at Arthur's expense. Although Gauvain's loyalty prevents him from ever actually replacing Arthur, the *Conte* itself does leave us with a sense of the king's strong dependence on his nephew, when, towards the end of the unfinished text, we read the words of "*li contret et li ardant*" (v. 9025) at the court of Orcanie.⁴⁵¹ Upon seeing a messenger, on his way to deliver a message to Arthur, the people express apprehension, for Gauvain is absent:

*Nos deüssien estre an esfroi
Et esmaïé et esperdu
Qant nos avons celui perdu
Qui por Dé toz nos revestoit
Et dun toz li biens nos venoit
Par aumone et par charité. (vv. 9038-9043)⁴⁵²*

The passage implies that Gauvain fills a special intermediary role, not only between Arthur and Perceval, but also between Arthur and his people. If, as a representative, he is

⁴⁵¹ "The sick and the lame," according to Staines. I understand *contret* to be a form of *contrait*, which Greimas identifies as the "p. passé de *contraire*." Among his definitions for *contraire* are "[r]esserrer, contracter," and he defines *contrait* as, among other things, "[p]erclus, paralytique." I am further indebted to *Langenscheidt's Pocket French Dictionary* (New York: Langenscheidt, 1992) for its definition of *perclus*. As for *ardant*, Raffel translates it, seemingly, as "beggars" (Chrétien, *Perceval: The Story of the Grail*, trans. Burton Raffel, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999, p. 290), but Busby offers the following explanation for the word in a glossary at the end of his critical edition of the *Conte*: "malades atteints du mal des ['] ardents ['] (érysipèle galeux, gangréneux, rogneux)" (Chrétien, *Le Roman de Perceval ou Le Conte du Graal : Édition critique d'après tous les manuscrits*, ed. Busby, Max Niemeyer Verlag: Tübingen, 1993, p. 548). The reading of verse 9025 as "*li contret et li ardant*" (textual variants exist; see Chrétien, *Le Roman de Perceval*, ed. Busby, p. 393) may be translated as "the lame and the sick," following Busby's definition of *ardant* and reversing the order of the adjectives in Staines's translation. The passage permits a comparison between the *charité* attributed to Gauvain (v. 9043; see also verse 9046, which speaks of "[l]es povres genz qui molt l'amoient"), on the one hand, and the *conseil* and *aje* attributed to Lunete in the *Lion* (*Lion*, v. 4358), on the other.

⁴⁵² "We ought to be frightened, dismayed, and dejected since we have lost the one who dressed us all in God's name, and from whom all good came to us through alms and charity."

sometimes more compelling than the person he represents, he remains tied to the king by bonds of kinship, loyalty (v. 8953), and perhaps even friendship.⁴⁵³

Guenièvre, Lunete, and Enide are in still another category. None of them, at least in the passages I have mentioned, effaces herself to the degree evident in Laudine's *damoisele*. Yet neither do they threaten, whether explicitly or implicitly, to usurp the places of those they represent, in the way that Arthur's knights sometimes seem to do. Lunete's loyalty, and indeed her friendship, to both her mistress and Yvain,⁴⁵⁴ is, I would suggest, more apparent than is even Gauvain's friendship to Arthur and to his fellow knights. This is not because her relationship to her mistress is fraught with less tension than is that of Gauvain to Arthur, but because she is willing to put herself at risk for the good of both the persons in whose lives she is at work. She is able to make them present—both mentally and physically—to one another by standing between them and being generous enough to hold onto both persons' concerns at the same time. Guenièvre achieves a similar feat in reconciling Keu and her husband. This kind of representation, practiced in the context of friendship, differs from either the competitive representation characteristic of Arthur's knights or the temporary representation provided by Laudine's servant and Perceval's messengers. Lunete and Guenièvre do not substitute themselves for the persons they represent, but neither are they anonymous or abject placeholders for these persons. Rather, it is through remaining present—and present in their own distinctive persons—to both parties that they mediate between them. This is true, also, for the reconciliation that Enide brings about between Guivret and Erec. Her love and intercession for her husband is sacrificial, but it is not necessarily self-effacing.

⁴⁵³ Note that Gauvain calls the queen both his *dame* and his *amie* (v. 8969).

⁴⁵⁴ On Lunete's and Yvain's friendship, see *Lion*, vv. 1002-1013.

One of the concerns yielded up by this study of personal representation comes from the possibility that a medium meant to make a person present may risk replacing this person instead. Might this sometimes be a concern even when the medium in question is an object, rather than a person? We will have also to think more about the sorts of representation made possible by a temporary expedient. What are their limitations? Finally, does Chrétien suggest any other ways to achieve the particular kind of personal presence made possible by the intercession of Lunete, of Guenièvre, and of Enide? It will be helpful to keep these concerns in mind in subsequent chapters.

CHAPTER III

PRESENCE IN OBJECTS

In this chapter, I hope to determine some of the ways in which, in Chrétien's romances, being present through an object differs from being present in a whole human body (whether the body in question is one's own, as in the examples of chapter one, or someone else's, as in the examples of chapter two). It is important to recall, first, that the eleventh century had been a time when theologians were especially concerned with the nature of Christ's presence in the sacrament of the Eucharist,⁴⁵⁵ and that, as Jaroslav Pelikan writes, "the twelfth century was to be the time when the definition, as well as the number, of the sacraments achieved final specification."⁴⁵⁶ In a discussion of the Eucharist, Hugh of St. Victor wrote against "those who think that they have drawn a defence of error from certain passages in the Scriptures, saying that in the sacrament of the altar the body and blood of Christ do not truly exist but only an image of this and an appearance and figure[.]"⁴⁵⁷ He refutes this position by showing that even when we know something to be "a figure" (*figura*) we cannot reliably conclude from this that it is

⁴⁵⁵ See Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine, Vol. 3: The Growth of Medieval Theology (600-1300)*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press (1978), pp. 184-204. Similarly, Miri Rubin lists "the nature of Christ's presence" among several "rather basic eucharistic issues [that] had remained only loosely formulated until the eleventh century" (*Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, p. 14).

⁴⁵⁶ Pelikan, *The Growth of Medieval Theology*, p. 187.

⁴⁵⁷ Hugh of St. Victor, *On the Sacraments of the Christian Faith* II.8.6, trans. Roy J. Deferrari, Cambridge, MA: Mediaeval Academy of America (1951), p. 308.

not also “truth” (*ueritas*).⁴⁵⁸ For a thing may be both a symbol and literally true at the same time.⁴⁵⁹

Questions having to do with personal presence and objects are far from irrelevant to twenty-first century Western culture(s). Often we rely intentionally on particular objects in order to make ourselves present to one another, and often this is a matter of transcending limitations that belong to our condition as embodied persons. What does it mean to be personally present through technology? Does it depend on the technology in question? For surely I am not present to you in a Skype conversation in the same way that I am present to you in a Facebook profile. Much less is the kind of presence achieved through bodies the same as the kind of presence achieved through either of these two technological means. Without going so far as to say, with Marshall McLuhan, that “the medium is the message,”⁴⁶⁰ I want to suggest that the medium is at least part of the message, as well as that the particular medium through which persons are present to one another does have effects on the quality of that presence.

⁴⁵⁸ *Ib.*, p. 308. For the Latin text, including the words I have cited, see Hugh of St. Victor, *De sacramentis Christiane fidei* II.8.6, ed. Rainer Berndt SJ, Aschendorff: Monasterii Westfalorum (2008), p. 405.

⁴⁵⁹ Else, Hugh says, Scripture’s qualification of Christ’s suffering as “an example” to us would thereby preclude this suffering having any kind of historical reality (*On the Sacraments of the Christian Faith* II.8.6, trans. Roy J. Deferrari, p. 308). “Far be it from the truth!” writes Hugh, who goes on to point out that “[t]he death of Christ was true, and yet it was an example, and the resurrection of Christ was true and was an example” (*ib.*; for Latin text, see *De sacramentis* II.8.6, p. 405). Such an understanding of signs can also be found in St. Augustine (see *In Iohannis evangelium tractatus* 25.12, ed. Willems, Turnhout: Brepols, 1990).

⁴⁶⁰ McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, New York: McGraw-Hill (1965), p. 7. For McLuhan, “the ‘message’ of any medium or technology is the change of scale or pace or pattern that it introduces into human affairs” (*ib.*, p. 8). McLuhan’s book was first published in 1964.

What I mean by presence in—or through—objects is, in some sense, the same as what is meant by the term *metonymy*. Metonymy is a figure of style in which one term stands in for another. It differs from *metaphor* in that, while in a metaphor one term is used to draw a picture of another, unrelated term, in metonymy the two terms in question are related to one another in some way.⁴⁶¹ Eelco Runia calls it “the trope [...] of ‘presence in absence,’” and writes that “[it] might be described as the willfully inappropriate transposition of a word that belongs to context 1 [...] to context 2 [...], where it subsequently stands out as just slightly ‘out of place.’”⁴⁶² Runia sees metonymy at work not only in the words that we use, but also in the objects we encounter. Metonymy, says Runia, is what is happening when an object, by bringing something from the past into the present, disrupts the continuity of its surroundings; as examples, he cites relics and monuments. He also suggests that “metonymy can account for humans’ inordinate ability to spring surprises on themselves.”⁴⁶³

This chapter investigates the capacity of objects to make Chrétien’s characters personally present to one another. Some of these objects will have the effect of an interruption, or even a disruption. I have divided the chapter into three categories. In the first category, entitled “Parts of bodies,” I will examine three episodes—the first two from the *Chevalier de la Charrette*, and the third from the *Conte du Graal*—in which a body part is encountered and then connected in some way to a specific character or to

⁴⁶¹ Here I follow Pierre Fontanier, who, in the nineteenth century, distinguished between “*métonymies*,” or “[les] Tropes par *correspondance*” (*Les Figures du discours*, Paris: Flammarion, 1977, p. 79; orig. pub. 1827 and 1830), and “la *Métaphore*,” or “[les] Tropes par *ressemblance*” (*ib.*, p. 99). Italics are Fontanier’s.

⁴⁶² Runia, “Presence,” *History and Theory* 45.1 (Feb. 2006), p. 6; pp. 15-16.

⁴⁶³ Runia, *ib.*, p. 6.

specific characters. The second category gathers together two windows, one from the *Chevalier de la Charrette*, and the other from the *Chevalier au Lion*, that permit what I have called, following Hans Urs von Balthasar, a back door presence, that is, a presence that is concealed, whether intentionally or unintentionally.⁴⁶⁴ Finally, in the third category, I will discuss two rings given to Yvain in the *Lion*, one by Lunete, and one by his wife. Throughout the chapter, I will ask questions about the modes through which certain objects make present, or fail to make present, certain characters as composites of body and soul—that is, as persons.⁴⁶⁵

Parts of bodies: Traces of presence

In *Les Figures du Discours*, originally published in the nineteenth century, Pierre Fontanier defines *synecdoque*, which he also calls “[l]es Tropes par *connexion*,” as “*la désignation d’un objet par le nom d’un autre objet avec lequel il forme un ensemble, un tout, ou physique ou métaphysique, l’existence ou l’idée de l’un se trouvant comprise dans l’existence ou dans l’idée de l’autre.*”⁴⁶⁶ In the case of a body part that stands in, somehow, for the body to which it belongs, we are dealing with a particularly

⁴⁶⁴ See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-logic, Vol. I, Truth of the World*, trans. Adrian J. Walker, San Francisco: Ignatius Press (2000), p. 209.

⁴⁶⁵ See Gedaliahu G. Stroumsa, who writes that “the discovery of the person as a unified composite of soul and body in late antiquity was [...] a Christian discovery” (“‘Caro salutis cardo’: Shaping the Person in Early Christian Thought,” *History of Religions* 30.1, 1990, p. 44). As for the word *persona* (or perhaps its Old French equivalent, *persone*), Richard of St. Victor wrote, in the twelfth century, that “[n]omen personae in ore omnium, etiam rusticorum, versatur” (“The term ‘person’ is on everybody’s lips, even [those of] the unlearned,” *De Trinitate* IV.4, ed. Gaston Salet, Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1959, p. 236; *On the Trinity*, trans. Ruben Angelici, Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011, p. 144). On the dating of the *De Trinitate*, see Salet’s introduction, p. 7.

⁴⁶⁶ Fontanier, *Les Figures du discours*, p. 87.

straightforward example of the kind of synecdoche called the part for the whole.⁴⁶⁷ Even here, though, there is the question of *which whole*. Do the hairs that Lancelot finds, for instance, and that his companion attributes to Guenièvre, make the queen present only in body, or do they manage to make her present as a person?⁴⁶⁸ I will begin here with two such relatively simple cases, before going on to a case in which the body part in question, although it does make one person present to another, belongs not to either of these persons' bodies, but to another body altogether.

After Lancelot's stay, in the *Charrette*, with the female host whom scholars have called by such names as the "desiring *dameisele*," the "Lovesome Damsel," and the "Immodest Damsel,"⁴⁶⁹ and who subsequently accompanies him on his journey, he finds a comb with some hairs in it. As I suggested in the first chapter, he is already somewhat mentally abstracted, before finding the comb, from his companion:

*Pansers li plest, parlars li griève.
Amors molt sovant li escriève
La plaie que feite li a,*

⁴⁶⁷ See Runia: "That fossils and relics are metonymies goes without saying—they are prototypical instances of the brand of metonymy called *pars pro toto*" ("Presence," p. 16); see also Fontanier, *Les Figures du discours*, pp. 87-88.

⁴⁶⁸ See *Le Chevalier de la Charrette*, vv. 1391-1499. Although we have only the *dameisele*'s word that the hairs Lancelot finds belong to Guenièvre (vv. 1413-1417; vv. 1422-1423), I will not concentrate my analysis of this scene on whether we ought to believe her. Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner seems to assume that the comb, at least, is the queen's ("An Interpreter's Dilemma: Why Are There So Many Interpretations of Chrétien's *Chevalier de la Charrette*?" in *Lancelot and Guinevere: A Casebook*, ed. Lori J. Walters, New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1996, p. 57).

⁴⁶⁹ Ellen Lorraine Friedrich uses the first of these appellations ("The Beaten Path: Lancelot's Amorous Adventure at the Fountain in *Le Chevalier de la Charrete*," in *On Arthurian Women: Essays in Memory of Maureen Fries*, ed. Bonnie Wheeler and Fiona Tolhurst, Dallas: Scriptorium Press, 2001), while Kathryn Gravdal uses the second (*Ravishing Maidens: Writing Rape in Medieval French Literature and Law*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991) and Bruckner uses the third ("An Interpreter's Dilemma: Why Are There So Many Interpretations of Chrétien's *Chevalier de la Charrette*?" p. 56).

*Onques anplastre n'i lia
 Por garison ne por santé,
 Qu'il n'a talant ne volanté
 D'emplastre querre ne de mire,
 Se sa plaie ne li anpire,
 Mes celi quer[r]oit volantiens. (vv. 1335-1343)⁴⁷⁰*

Presumably, Lancelot is thinking about Guenièvre. So absorbed is he in his thoughts that he almost fails to apprehend that the Lovesome Damsel is leading him *fors sa voie* (v. 1364); however, when he does realize this, he refuses to leave the path they are on, and thus they ride up to the *perron*, where they see the comb (vv. 1384-1385). Although Lancelot spends a long time looking at the comb and the hairs in it (vv. 1392-1393), it is not clear that he recognizes either as belonging to Guenièvre before they are identified by the *dameisele*, who tells him that the hairs “*que vos veez / Si biax, si clers et si luisanz, / Qui sont remés antre les danz, / Que del chief la reïne furent, / Onques en autre pré ne crurent*” (vv. 1414-1418).⁴⁷¹ Has Lancelot already begun, here, to suspect the hairs of being Guenièvre’s?⁴⁷² He replies to the *dameisele*’s revelation by observing that “[a]ssez sont reïnes et roi” (v. 1420),⁴⁷³ certainly, he may already be on the verge, now, of

⁴⁷⁰ “Thinking pleases him, speaking weighs heavy on him. Love tears open very often the wound that it has given him. Never did he bind it up with a plaster for healing or for health, for he has neither desire nor will to seek a plaster or a doctor, unless his wound gets worse—but this wound he would seek voluntarily” (my translation, for help with which I have benefitted from consulting those of Charles Méla, in the *Librairie Générale Française* edition of the romances, and of Ruth Harwood Cline; see, respectively, Chrétien, *Romans*, *Librairie Générale Française*, 1994, p. 538, and Chrétien, *Lancelot or The Knight of the Cart*, trans. Ruth Harwood Cline, Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1990, p. 38).

⁴⁷¹ “[Y]ou see left behind in the teeth of the comb, those strands that are so beautiful, so shining, and so radiant, they were from the queen’s head. In no other meadow did they ever grow.”

⁴⁷² It is possible that his suspicion begins as soon as he starts to look at the hairs, in vv. 1392-1393.

⁴⁷³ “[T]here are many queens and kings[.]”

guessing what she means, yet it is not until the *dameisele* answers him, saying that that she has been speaking of “*la fame le roi Artu*” (v. 1423),⁴⁷⁴ that he is nearly overcome by *dolor* (v. 1435). It is the verbal connection that has been made, between this object, on the one hand, and the queen, on the other, that provokes this reaction from him.

Even before this, the queen was certainly present, in some way, in Lancelot’s thoughts; however, the hairs, along with the Lovesome Damsel’s gloss on them, makes Guenièvre present in a way that she was not present, before. While his thoughts have caused Lancelot merely to be inattentive to what was happening to him (vv. 1361-1368), the hairs cause him to lose “*la parole et la color*” (v. 1436).⁴⁷⁵ As was true for Yvain in one of the scenes from the *Lion* treated in the last chapter, a concrete manifestation of his beloved’s presence induces Lancelot to withdraw more visibly from his immediate surroundings. For Yvain, this concrete manifestation was produced by Laudine’s messenger and her words, and led to his going mad (*Lion*, vv. 2774-2826); for Lancelot, it is produced by the hairs and the *dameisele*’s words, and leads to his nearly falling unconscious (vv. 1424-1437). Both knights, when confronted with the mediated presence of another person, have reactions so dramatic as to draw them, at least temporarily, out of the places where they find themselves. Lancelot is similar to Yvain, too, in that both knights remain capable—at least for a time, in the case of Yvain—of feeling social shame.⁴⁷⁶ Yvain “[*d*]’entre les barons se remue, / *Qu’il crient entr’eux issir du sen*”

⁴⁷⁴ “[T]he wife of King Arthur[.]”

⁴⁷⁵ “[H]is [voice] and his [color]” (I have changed the order of “color” and “voice” in Staines’s translation).

⁴⁷⁶ As distinct from either moral or religious shame.

(*Lion*, vv. 2796-2797);⁴⁷⁷ and Lancelot feels *vergoigne* when he sees the *dameisele* running to prevent him from falling (*Charrette*, vv. 1438-1445). An important difference between the two is, of course, that Lancelot is quickly called back from his fainting spell to the reality of the *dameisele*, while Yvain actually removes himself from society, first in body (*Lion*, vv. 2796-2803), and then in mind (vv. 2804-2823). This can, however, be explained in part by the difference in the length of the mediation itself: the mediation of Laudine's presence to Yvain through her messenger is limited, in some sense, to the time during which the messenger is herself present, whereas the mediation of Guenièvre's presence to Lancelot through the hairs is, presumably, available to him for as long as he has them in his possession.⁴⁷⁸

By the time that Lancelot gives the comb to the *dameisele*, keeping the hairs for himself (*Charrette*, vv. 1457-1459), he is neither wholly absent nor wholly present to her. At this point he begins to adore (*aorer*, v. 1462) the hairs. The passage that follows is unambiguous in its suggestion that Lancelot is treating the hairs as someone might treat a religious relic.⁴⁷⁹ First of all, there is his bodily veneration of them (vv. 1460-1469). Then there is his belief in the hairs' medicinal virtue:

⁴⁷⁷ “[L]eft the barons for fear of going mad in their presence.”

⁴⁷⁸ We may also note the difference in the particular emotions produced by the mediation of each of these ladies' presence. Yvain feels *grant anui* (*Lion*, v. 2780); Lancelot feels both *dolor* (*Charrette*, v. 1435) and happiness (*ib.*, v. 1467). The similarity between the two scenes that I want to point out has not so much to do with the emotions themselves, but rather with their intensity and with the way in which they take the person who is subject to them to another place, whether figuratively or literally.

⁴⁷⁹ Such seems to be the critical consensus. Karl D. Uitti and Michelle A. Freeman, in their summary of the romance, write that Lancelot “finds a comb containing several golden hairs, and, when told that the comb is the queen's, worships it as though it were a holy relic” (Uitti with Freeman, *Chrétien de Troyes Revisited*, New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995, p. 67). It may be noted, here, that Lancelot does not in fact worship the comb so much as the hairs. This quibble

*Ne cuidoit mie que reoncles
Ne autres max ja mes le praigne,
Diamargareton desdaigne
Et pleüriche et tirlasque, (vv. 1472-1475)⁴⁸⁰*

In a note to his edition of the *Charrette*, Charles Méla explains that the poet is making reference, in verses 1474 and 1475, to “[e]lectuaires aromatiques pour traiter la tristesse, la mélancolie, les troubles de la digestion, de la mémoire, de la perception, etc.”⁴⁸¹ The text suggests that Lancelot relies on the hairs in the way that another person might rely on medicine—or on the *aïe* of saints (vv. 1476-1478).⁴⁸² Not only this, but the text puts these two sources of healing—or, perhaps, protection—at direct odds with the hairs (vv. 1472-1478). In case these hints as to the hairs’ relic-like status are not enough, we are then presented with a reference to a fair taking place at *Lendi* (v. 1482), which, according to Méla, was a “[f]ête annuelle [...] en l’honneur des reliques de la Passion à Saint-Denis.” This feast was, he writes, “accompagnée d’une foire, du deuxième mercredi de

aside, Uitti’s and Freeman’s claim is largely consistent with how other critics have understood the passage: see Jean Frappier, *Chrétien de Troyes: L’homme et l’oeuvre*, Paris: Hatier-Boivin (1957), p. 130; Anita Guerreau-Jalabert, “L’amour courtois dans le ‘Lancelot’ de Chrétien,” in *Amour et chevalerie dans les romans de Chrétien de Troyes*, Paris: Les Belles Lettres (1995), note 6 on p. 248; and Per Nykrog, *Chrétien de Troyes: Romancier discutabile*, Geneva: Librairie Droz (1996), p. 126.

⁴⁸⁰ “He did not believe ulcers or any other illness would ever afflict him. He had nothing but contempt for essence of pearl, medicine for pleurisy, and antidotes for poison[.]”

⁴⁸¹ Chrétien, *Romans*, Librairie Générale Française (1994), p. 542. Méla makes reference to Hilka’s edition of the *Conte*, pp. 689-691 (for Méla’s reference, see Chrétien, *Romans*, p. 542; I have not managed to check on this reference in Hilka). An “électuaire,” according to the *Petit Robert*, is a “[p]réparation pharmaceutique de consistance molle, formée de poudres mélangées à du sirop, du miel, des pulpes végétales” (Paul Robert, *Le Petit Robert*, Paris: Société du Nouveau Littré, 1970, p. 550). On verses 1474-1475, see also Jacques Merceron, “De la [‘] mauvaise humeur [’], du sénéchal Keu : Chrétien de Troyes, littérature et physiologie,” *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale* 41 (1998), note 33 on p. 22.

⁴⁸² On relics and traveling, see G.J.C. Snoek, *Medieval Piety from Relics to the Eucharist: A Process of Mutual Interaction*, New York: E.J. Brill (1995), pp. 84-90; on the kissing of relics, see *ib.*, pp. 236-238; on relics and healing, see *ib.*, pp. 338-341.

juin à la veille de la Saint-Jean.”⁴⁸³ The poem tells us that Lancelot would not trade his finding of the hairs for everything present at the fair in question (vv. 1482-1486). Even though the hairs are being compared, here, explicitly, to material goods in general, and not to relics, the text’s association of these material goods with a feast honoring relics gives the reader or listener yet more reason to suspect that the hairs have a quasi-religious function for Lancelot.⁴⁸⁴

Given all this, what are we to make of Lancelot’s behavior? What would the *Charrette*’s audience have made of it? Writing of the *Charrette*, C.S. Lewis noted that Lancelot “is represented as treating Guinivere with saintly, if not divine, honours,” which is certainly true.⁴⁸⁵ D.W. Robertson suggested, later on, that “the religious imagery in the poem [was] designed [...] to make the significance of Lancelot’s misdeeds apparent and to emphasize the extent of the inversion to which a submission of the reason to the sensuality may lead.”⁴⁸⁶ In other words, Chrétien’s auditors were not meant to imitate Lancelot in his veneration of Guenièvre. If, for Robertson, Lancelot “shows others how

⁴⁸³ Chrétien, *Romans*, p. 542.

⁴⁸⁴ The passage also compares the hairs to gold; see verses 1487 ff. Méla’s translation helped me to understand these lines (Chrétien, *Romans*, pp. 542-543).

⁴⁸⁵ Lewis, *The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition*, Oxford: Oxford University Press (1959; orig pub. 1936), p. 29. See also, much more recently, Sharon Kinoshita, who writes that “[i]n the *Chevalier de la charrette*, Lancelot pours his love for Guenièvre into the gestural language of spiritual devotion” (“Feudal Agency and Female Subjectivity,” in Zrinka Stahuljak et al., *Thinking through Chrétien de Troyes*, Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2011, p. 131).

⁴⁸⁶ D. W. Robertson, Jr., *A Preface to Chaucer: Studies in Medieval Perspectives*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press (1962), p. 452. One problem with Robertson’s interpretation seems to me to be his application, to Lancelot’s case, of the view that “[I]ove [...] is a function of the sensuality unless it is reasonably directed” (*ib.*, p. 449). It is not clear to me that Lancelot’s love ought to be qualified as “a function of the sensuality[.]” at least if, by this, Robertson meant *merely* “a function of the sensuality[.]”

to live vainly without incurring social ostracism,⁴⁸⁷ Jacques Ribard, on the other hand, who links Lancelot's treatment of the hairs to "ce que sera la scène de dévotion devant le lit de Guenièvre,"⁴⁸⁸ sees in this later scene "l'utilisation consciente et délibérée de la forme la plus élevée de l'amour humain pour tenter de rendre compte, bien imparfaitement, de l'amour divin."⁴⁸⁹

Yet for Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner, "the sacred echoes in Lancelot's story are neither blasphemous nor parodic: the knight lover is not a figure of Christ; rather messianic reverberations effectively translate the extraordinary quality of Lancelot's secular heroism for a medieval public."⁴⁹⁰ More recently, K. Sarah-Jane Murray, who, like others,⁴⁹¹ notes the resemblance between the scene of the hairs in the comb and Lancelot's later veneration of Guenièvre herself,⁴⁹² has argued, apropos of this

⁴⁸⁷ Robertson, *ib.*, p. 452.

⁴⁸⁸ Ribard, *Chrétien de Troyes: Le Chevalier de la Charrette: Essai d'interprétation symbolique*, Paris: A. G. Nizet (1972), p. 79.

⁴⁸⁹ Ribard, *ib.*, pp. 126-127. Cf Lori Walters, who also offers an "allegorical interpretation of the [*Charrette*];" the citation is from "Holy Adultery: The *Charrette*, Crusader Queens, and the Guiot Manuscript (Paris, BNF fr. 794)," in *Dame Philology's Charrette: Approaching Medieval Textuality through Chrétien's Lancelot: Essays in Memory of Karl D. Utti*, ed. Gina L. Greco and Ellen M. Thorington, Tempe, AR: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies (2012), p. 38. Walters takes care, however, to distinguish her project from Ribard's (*ib.*, p. 44).

⁴⁹⁰ Bruckner, "Le Chevalier de la Charrette: That Obscure Object of Desire, Lancelot," in *A Companion to Chrétien de Troyes*, ed. Norris J. Lacy and Joan Tasker Grimbert, Suffolk: D. S. Brewer (2005), p. 147.

⁴⁹¹ Bruckner associates the two scenes; see "Le Chevalier de la Charrette (*Lancelot*)," in *The Romances of Chrétien de Troyes: A Symposium*, ed. Douglas Kelly, Lexington, KY: French Forum (1985), p. 155. See also Daniel Poirion's "Notice" on the *Charrette* in the Pléiade edition of Chrétien's works (*Chrétien, Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Poirion et al., Paris: Gallimard, 1994, p. 1251).

⁴⁹² Murray, *From Plato to Lancelot: A Preface to Chrétien de Troyes*, Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press (2008), p. 234 (see especially note 20).

veneration, that “the religious imagery of the ‘Night of Love’ is neither ironic nor hyperbolic,” but that “Lancelot’s (albeit extramarital) love for Guinevere points and guides him toward a higher purpose.”⁴⁹³ Bruckner’s and Murray’s readings both propose taking Chrétien’s Lancelot seriously.

Keeping in mind the lack of consensus on the *Charrette*’s tone, I suggest, following Pietro G. Beltrami, that it is possible to take Lancelot seriously without, for all that, becoming deaf to irony in the poem.⁴⁹⁴ I read the poem’s description of Lancelot and the hairs as making at least some use of hyperbole and of irony,⁴⁹⁵ especially given its resemblance to another passage, from *Cligès*. In this passage, Cligès’s father, Alixandres, is told that a shirt he has received as a gift from the queen has, woven into it,

⁴⁹³ Murray, *ib.*, p. 235 and p. 237.

⁴⁹⁴ Beltrami writes that “l’écriture de Chrétien, dans la *Charrete* plus encore que dans les autres romans (je laisse de côté le *Conte du Graal*), est toujours en équilibre instable entre le ton sérieux et l’ironie” (“Lancelot entre Lanzelet et Eneas: Remarques sur le sens du [‘] Chevalier de la Charrete [’],” *Zeitschrift für französische Sprache und Literatur* 99.3, 1989, p. 253). Bruckner notes “Chrétien’s irony” (see “*Le Chevalier de la Charrette: That Obscure Object of Desire, Lancelot*,” note 4 on p. 140), and Murray, although she suggests that “the religious imagery of the ‘Night of Love’ is [not] ironic” (*From Plato to Lancelot*, p. 235), nonetheless uses the word “ironic” to describe at least one element of the same scene (*ib.*, p. 234; see also note 19 on the same page).

⁴⁹⁵ Both these stylistic devices ought to be distinguished from parody, the detection of which, in Chrétien’s portrayal of Lancelot, characterizes “Robertsonian readings of the *Charrette*,” according to Murray, who refers to Bruckner’s categorization, here (Murray, *From Plato to Lancelot*, p. 234; see also Bruckner, “*Le Chevalier de la Charrette: That Obscure Object of Desire, Lancelot*,” note 13 on p. 146; it is through Murray’s reference that I found the latter citation). On the “hyperbole of character” in Chrétien’s “portrayal of Lancelot,” see Derek Brewer, “The Presentation of the Character of Lancelot: Chrétien to Malory,” in *Lancelot and Guinevere: A Casebook*, p. 8. Bruckner herself also speaks of the “hyperboles” used to describe “Lancelot’s feeling” and “the Queen’s hair” (“An Interpreter’s Dilemma: Why Are There So Many Interpretations of Chrétien’s *Chevalier de la Charrette*?,” p. 70). As for irony, see my previous footnote.

a hair that belongs to Soredamors, the woman with whom he has fallen in love.⁴⁹⁶ The queen bids Soredamors herself to tell him how she made the shirt:

*La pucele a del dire honte,
Neporquant volentiers li conte,
Car bien veult que le voir en oie
Cil qui de l'oïr a tel joie,
Quant ele li conte et devise
La feture de la chemise,
Que a grant peine se retarde,
La ou il le chevol esgarde,
Qu'il ne l'aoure et encline.
Si compeignon et la reïne
Qui leenz ierent avec lui
Li fesoient molt grant ennui,
Car por els laisse qu'il nel touche
Ne a ses euz ne a sa bouche
Ou molt volentiers le meist
S'il ne cuidast qu'en le veïst.
Liez est quant de s'amie a tant,
Mes il ne cuide ne n'atent
Que ja mes autre prou en ait :
Ses desirers douter le fait. (Cligès, vv. 1601-1620)⁴⁹⁷*

What Alixandres wishes to do with the hair in his shirt is very similar to what Lancelot actually does with the hairs he has found in the comb. Both passages include a form of

⁴⁹⁶ Bruckner, too, connects the two scenes; see “*Le Chevalier de la Charrette*: That Obscure Object of Desire, Lancelot,” p. 146, as well as her article on “*Le Chevalier de la Charrette (Lancelot)*,” in *The Romances of Chrétien de Troyes: A Symposium*, ed. Douglas Kelly, note 46 on p. 326. See also Nykrog, *Chrétien de Troyes: Romancier discutabile*, p. 126, as well as Poirion (Chrétien, *Oeuvres complètes*, p. 1251). Monica Wright discusses the example from *Cligès* in “Heart Economies: Love Tokens and Objects of Affection in Twelfth-Century French Literature” (in “*Li premerains vers*” : *Essays in Honor of Keith Busby*, ed. Catherine M. Jones and Logan E. Whalen, New York: Rodopi, 2011, pp. 557- 559), and mentions the example from the *Charrette* in the same essay (*ib.*, p. 561).

⁴⁹⁷ “The girl is ashamed to say, yet willingly she tells him, for she does want him to hear the truth. And he himself takes such joy in hearing it, when she tells him and describes to him the making of the shirt, that, looking at the hair, he barely keeps himself from adoring it and bowing down to it. His companions and the queen, who are there with him, bothered him greatly, for it is for their sake that he restrains himself from touching the hair to his eyes or to his mouth, where very willingly he would put it if he thought no one would see him. He is happy to have so much from his friend, but he does not think or believe that ever he will have any other good from her : his desire makes him doubt” (my translation, for help with which I have consulted those of Staines and of Méla and Collet; for the latter, see Chrétien, *Romans*, p. 338).

the verb *aorer*, as well as a discussion of touching the hair or hairs to one's eyes and mouth: Lancelot "*bien .C.M.. foiz les toche / Et a ses ialz et a sa boche* (vv. 1463-1464),⁴⁹⁸ while Alixandres is prevented, by the presence of his companions and of the queen, from engaging in comparable behavior (*Cligès*, vv. 1610-1616). Later on, once he is alone, Alixandres is described as yielding to his desire, in language that, in its use of exaggeration, equals, if it does not surpass, the language used to describe Lancelot's veneration of the hairs in the *Charrette*.⁴⁹⁹ While the *Charrette*'s narrator does not make his own position clear when it comes to what we are to think of Lancelot's treatment of the hairs, the narrator in *Cligès* is more candid: "*Bien fet Amors,*" he says, "*de sage fol / Quant cil fet joie d'un chevol*" (*Cligès*, vv. 1633-1634).⁵⁰⁰ And even though it is very much possible to imagine this remark being made in a spirit of indulgent or even compassionate amusement at Alixandres's expense,⁵⁰¹ it remains true that, in making such a remark at all, the narrator establishes a certain distance between himself and the character whom he characterizes as a *fol*.⁵⁰² The passage from the *Charrette* contains

⁴⁹⁸ "To his eyes, his mouth [...], he touched them a hundred thousand times." In the *Charrette*, Lancelot also touches the hairs to his *front* and to his *face* (v. 1465), and, finally, puts them "[a]n son saing pres del cuer" (v. 1468); Méla translates this line as, "Il les serre sur sa poitrine, près du coeur" (Chrétien, *Romans*, p. 542).

⁴⁹⁹ See *Cligès*, vv. 1621-1636.

⁵⁰⁰ "Love indeed made a wise man a fool, for the knight rejoiced over a strand of hair."

⁵⁰¹ See Nykrog, who says, of these lines, that "[l]e narrateur s'amuse gentiment avec nous" (*Chrétien de Troyes: Romancier discutabile*, p. 93).

⁵⁰² I would not go quite as far as Peter Haidu, who writes that "Chrétien's comment on the effect of Love leaves no doubt that the illusion to which Alexander is subject is as great, and as foolish, as his younger brother's" (*Aesthetic Distance in Chrétien de Troyes: Irony and Comedy in Cligès and Perceval*, Geneva: Droz, 1968, p. 86). In taking *fol* (*Cligès*, v. 1633) to be a noun, I am following Staines's translation, as well as Méla's and Collet's modern French translation (Chrétien, *Romans*, p. 339).

hints of a similar distance between narrator and character, even if these hints are less accentuated than the ones in *Cligès*. The narrator's reliance on hyperbole is one possible such hint (vv. 1470-1471; vv. 1487-1494), as is the potentially comic insertion, into the scene of Lancelot's fainting, of the *damoisele*'s haste to help him (vv. 1428-1442).

A final hint as to the narrator's attitude towards Lancelot, in this passage, appears fewer than a hundred lines later, when we meet a suitor to the *dameisele*, whom she has rejected but who, after greeting her, is rewarded by a greeting from her, in return.⁵⁰³ Of this greeting, the text says,

*Molt a au chevalier valu
Quant la pucele le salue,
Qui sa boche pas n'en palue
Ne ne li a neant costé,
Et s'il eüst tres bien josté
Cele ore a un tornoiemant,
Ne s'an prisast il mie tant
Ne ne cuidast avoir conquis
Ne tant d'enor ne tant de pris.* (vv. 1558-1566)⁵⁰⁴

The comparison between the greeting, on one hand, and success in a tournament, on the other, recalls verses 1470-1478 in the earlier description of the hairs. In both descriptions, a knight receives something either from, or associated with, the woman he loves; this thing is described as being even more precious to him than—in the case of Lancelot—things that are ordinarily prized in a broadly human economy,⁵⁰⁵ or than—in the case of

⁵⁰³ Bruckner calls this suitor “the Proud Son” (“An Interpreter’s Dilemma: Why Are There So Many Interpretations of Chrétien’s *Chevalier de la Charrette*?,” in *Lancelot and Guinevere: A Casebook*, ed. Lori J. Walters, p. 60).

⁵⁰⁴ “The knight attached great value to the young lady’s greeting, which had not dirtied her mouth or been of cost. Yet had he jousting brilliantly in a tournament that very moment, he would not have congratulated himself so much, nor thought [himself to have won] so much honor or so much renown” (text in brackets is my modification of Staines’s translation).

⁵⁰⁵ As Méla’s translation of vv. 1470-1471 reads, “Il ne voudrait pas avoir à la place un `char entier d’éméraires ou d’escarboucles” (Chrétien, *Romans*, p. 542).

the rejected suitor—something prized in a specifically knightly one. The focus, both in verses 1470-1478 and in verses 1562-1566, is on the knight's perception of what he has received. The narrator's attitude is not necessarily identical in both cases; he seems to make fun of the rejected suitor in a more overt way than he does—if he does—of Lancelot. Still, the two passages (vv. 1470-1478 and vv. 1562-1566) are similar enough to give us pause.⁵⁰⁶

Keeping in mind the possible distance, on the part of the *Charrette's* narrator, from Lancelot's lovesickness, we may now return to the question of how the queen is present, in the hairs, to her would-be rescuer. It is unclear that she is present in a reciprocal way:⁵⁰⁷ although she may be present to Lancelot by means of the hairs, he is not thereby present to her—or if he is, we are not told about it. In other words, unlike the kind of presence mediated through a human messenger, the kind of presence mediated here through the hairs is not necessarily tied to any intention on the part of the person whose presence they mediate—Guenièvre, in this case. Daniel Poirion and Antoinette Saly have suggested that the queen has left the hairs behind as a message to Lancelot,⁵⁰⁸

⁵⁰⁶ Bruckner notes both the similarity and the difference between Guenièvre and the *dameisele*, whom she calls “the Immodest Damsel” (“An Interpreter's Dilemma: Why Are There So Many Interpretations of Chrétien's *Chevalier de la Charrette?*,” in *Lancelot and Guinevere: A Casebook*, pp. 57-74); in so doing, she also draws a parallel between Lancelot and the suitor (*ib.*, p. 61).

⁵⁰⁷ Rather, Lancelot is like McLuhan's “film viewer,” and “silent book reader,” both of whom, McLuhan suggests, “sit[...] in psychological solitude” (*Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, p. 292).

⁵⁰⁸ See, respectively, Poirion's “Notice” on the *Charrette* in Chrétien, *Oeuvres complètes*, p. 1246; and Saly, “Motifs folkloriques dans le *Lancelot* de Chrétien de Troyes,” in Saly, *Image, Structure et Sens : Études arthuriennes*, Aix-en-Provence, France: Publications du CUER MA (1994), pp. 33-36 (see also Nykrog, who speaks of this scene in terms of a “faveur,” *Chrétien de Troyes: Romancier discutabile*, p. 126). I will come back to this question later on.

which is plausible; still, the poem itself does not, so far as I know, fill in this particular gap. If the hairs are tied, for Lancelot, to a certain person, it is seemingly not so much because of a pre-arranged agreement with that person, but rather because he has been convinced of this tie by his own eyes as well as by a third party.

For Lancelot's recognition of the queen in the hairs depends to some extent on the *dameisele*'s claim regarding their source.⁵⁰⁹ One medium (the hairs) is mediated through another (the *dameisele*).⁵¹⁰ Granted, even before he hears the comments of the *dameisele*, Lancelot recognizes the hairs as worthy of contemplation (vv. 1392-1393). However, it is the explicit verbal connection that the *dameisele* makes, between the hairs and the queen, that elicits the dramatic physical response from Lancelot that we have seen. In his book, *A Leg to Stand On*, Oliver Sacks writes, of being a patient in a "Convalescent Home," that

[e]very patient, no matter how strong-minded or strong-willed, encounters precisely the same difficulty in taking his first step, in doing (or re-doing) anything anew. He cannot conceive it—"the imagination is subdued"—and others, understanding, must tip him into action. They (inter)mediate, so to speak, between passivity and action.⁵¹¹

A similar thing happens, here, as Lancelot is "tipped" into action by the *dameisele*.

⁵⁰⁹ I am led to think about recognition by Poirion (*ib.*, p. 1246). See also Zrinka Stahuljak, who writes that "there is an obsession in the romances, not with knowing oneself, but with recognizing" ("Adventures in Wonderland: Between Experience and Knowledge," in Stahuljak et al., *Thinking through Chrétien de Troyes*, p. 105).

⁵¹⁰ "The moment of the meeting of media," writes McLuhan, "is a moment of freedom and release from the ordinary trance and numbness imposed on them by our senses" (*Understanding Media*, p. 55).

⁵¹¹ Sacks, *A Leg to Stand On*, New York: Summit Books (1984), p. 182.

I have noted that, before he comes upon the hairs, Lancelot seems already to be thinking about the queen (vv. 1332-1343).⁵¹² What are the differences between Lancelot's absorption in his thoughts and his absorption in the hairs? Both kinds of absorption have a similar emotional effect on him. For just as, before he finds the hairs, "[p]ansers li ples" (v. 1335), so, after he finds them, "*cil se delite et deporte / Es chevox qu'il a en son saing*" (vv. 1498-1499).⁵¹³ Both kinds of presence bring him joy, or at least pleasure.⁵¹⁴ Both, too, disincline him to conversation with his companion: before finding the hairs, "*il n'a cure / De quanque ele l'ap parole*" (vv. 1332-1333),⁵¹⁵ and, after finding them, his response to the *dameisele*'s request that he protect her from her unwanted suitor, is merely, "*Alez, alez!*" (v. 1536).⁵¹⁶ Lancelot does not require the hairs in order to be mentally abstracted. Rather, they serve as grounds for a sort of exteriorization (to borrow an explanation from Per Nykrog⁵¹⁷) of his devotion.⁵¹⁸

⁵¹² Méla's translation has helped me to understand verses 1340 through 1343.

⁵¹³ "[T]he knight felt pleasure and ecstasy from the hair he clutched to his breast."

⁵¹⁴ The reflexive form of the verb *desporter*, according to Van Daele, means "*se divertir, s'amuser, prendre du plaisir, se consoler.*"

⁵¹⁵ "[H]e cared nothing for her words[.]"

⁵¹⁶ "Go on, go on!" (my translation). See my comments on Lancelot's response, here, in my first chapter.

⁵¹⁷ See Nykrog, *Chrétien de Troyes: Romancier discutable*, pp. 168-169. Nykrog is speaking not of the hairs in the *Charrette*, but of Yvain's lion in the *Lion*.

⁵¹⁸ A parallel can be drawn between Lancelot's thinking prior to finding the hairs and Yvain's thinking prior to the arrival of Laudine's messenger (*Lion*, vv. 2695-2701). Another such sequence, of what we might call anticipation followed by exteriorization, occurs in the window scene, in the *Charrette*, that I will discuss in my next section (for this scene, see *Charrette*, vv. 539-552; vv. 556-570).

But what kind of grounds? How does this exteriorization work? I want to suggest that the function of the hairs, at the level of the *Charrette*'s characters, is not merely that of a symbol. They do not simply point away from themselves to something (or someone) else, in the way that a symbol does.⁵¹⁹ Rather, the hairs seem to have the metonymic function of a relic,⁵²⁰ mediating the queen's presence to Lancelot in a way that allows him to show his devotion to her through them. This function is made more complicated if one grants there to be a certain distance between the narrator and his protagonist. The text allows its readers and listeners to enter into Lancelot's prizing of the hairs, but it also allows them to question this prizing,⁵²¹ or to smile at it:⁵²² note the *dameisele*'s response to Lancelot's initial inspection of the hairs—“[e]t cele an comança a rire” (v. 1394).⁵²³ The hairs may make the queen present to Lancelot, but they do this

⁵¹⁹ I see this understanding of what a symbol does to be similar to what Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht is describing, when he speaks, in his article “Presence Achieved in Language (With Special Attention Given to the Presence of the Past)” (*History and Theory* 45.3, 2006), of “an intellectual style [...] that only allows for one gesture and for one type of operation,” and describes this operation as “the operation of ‘going beyond’ what is regarded to be a ‘merely physical surface’ and of thus finding ‘beyond or below the merely physical surface’ that which is supposed to really matter, that is, a meaning“ (p. 319).

⁵²⁰ I am not the only one to have interpreted the hairs in terms of metonymy; see Bruckner, “*Le Chevalier de la Charrette*: That Obscure Object of Desire, Lancelot,” in *A Companion to Chrétien de Troyes*, p. 146; and also Poirion (Chrétien, *Oeuvres complètes*, p. 1251).

⁵²¹ “*Mes quel estoient li chevol?*” (v. 1479); Méla's translation reads, “*Avaient-ils donc, ces cheveux, une qualité spéciale?*”

⁵²² See, *contra*, Peter F. Dembowski, according to whom “Lancelot's adventures in general and his great love adventure in particular were taken seriously by Chrétien's medieval audience” (“The *Sens* of the *Charrette*: A General Introduction to the *Charrette* Poem and Its Significance,” in *Dame Philology's Charrette: Approaching Medieval Textuality through Chrétien's Lancelot: Essays in Memory of Karl D. Uitti*, p. 14).

⁵²³ “[And she] began to laugh” (the text in brackets is my substitution for Staines's “His companion”).

in a way that leaves room for a degree of skepticism on the part of the listener or of the reader. Lancelot's enjoyment of the hairs is private—although his recognition of them is not—and the hairs themselves may tell us more about the quality of his love for the queen than they tell us about the queen herself; they could be seen as what McLuhan calls “extensions,”⁵²⁴ but whether of Guenièvre's body, or of Lancelot's, is hard to say. The hairs seem to make Guenièvre present as an object to be both worshipped (vv. 1460-1466) and possessed (v. 1467), if they make her present at all; it would be harder to argue that they make her present as a person, “a composite of body and soul.”⁵²⁵

Before going on to another example of possible metonymic presence, I want to note that the poem does leave open the possibility of interpreting the comb as a sort of message to Lancelot from the queen; such interpretations have been advanced by Poirion and by Saly. “C'est en abandonnant son peigne qu[e] [Guenièvre] lui a indiqué le chemin,” writes Poirion, after noting that “[l]a chevalerie, c'est aussi une civilisation du geste[.]”⁵²⁶ And Saly suggests that “Guenièvre [...] oublie son peigne, laissant ainsi, volontairement sans doute, un indice de son passage, un ‘signe de piste.’”⁵²⁷ Whether or not we follow these interpretations (both of which make a good deal of sense), the *dameisele*'s participation in the identification of the hairs shows that the link Lancelot

⁵²⁴ McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, p. 46. According to McLuhan, “[a]ny invention or technology is an extension or self-amputation of our physical bodies” (*ib.*, p. 45).

⁵²⁵ Caroline Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200-1336*, New York: Columbia University Press (1995), p. 135.

⁵²⁶ Poirion, “Notice” on the *Charrette*, in Chrétien, *Oeuvres complètes*, p. 1246. Poirion suggests that this sequence is an example of the “genre de communication” that is present “dans le *Lai du Chèvrefeuille* de Marie de France” (Poirion, *ib.*, note 3 on p. 1246).

⁵²⁷ Saly, “Motifs folkloriques dans le *Lancelot* de Chrétien de Troyes,” in Saly, *Image, Structure et Sens : Études arthuriennes*, p. 35. Ribard, too, describes the “peigne” as a “signe” (*Chrétien de Troyes: Le Chevalier de la Charrette: Essai d'interprétation symbolique*, p. 77).

makes between Guenièvre and the hairs is not merely subjective. Lancelot may be idolatrous, but he is not necessarily delusional—except insofar as idolatry itself involves delusion.

This passage from the *Charrette* gives us an example of a body part that seems to mediate presence; however, the nature of that presence remains problematic. The second example of possible metonymic presence that I want to treat, here, is also from the *Charrette*, and is also problematic in its own way. The passage in question appears later on in the poem, after Lancelot and Guenièvre have spent the night together, and after Lancelot has left:

*La reïne la matinee
Dedanz sa chambre ancortinee,
Se fu molt soef andormie,
De ses dras ne se gardoit mie
Que il fussent tachié de sanc,
Einz cuidoit qu'il fussent molt blanc
Et molt bel et molt avenant.
Et Meliaganz, maintenant
Qu'il fu vestuz et atornez,
S'an est vers la chanbre tornez
Ou la reïne se gisoit.
Veillant la trueve et les dras voit
Del fres sanc tachiez et gotez,
S'en a ses conpaignons botez,
Et com aparcevanz de mal
Vers le lit Kex le seneschal
Esgarde et voit les dras tachiez
De sanc, que la nuit, ce sachiez,
Furent ses plaies escrevees,
Et dit : 'Dame, or ai ge trovees
Tex anseignes con je voloie. (vv. 4737-4757)⁵²⁸*

⁵²⁸ “In the morning, the queen had fallen into a gentle sleep in her curtained room. She had not noticed that her sheets were stained with blood, but thought them still most clean, white, and presentable. As soon as Meleagant was dressed and ready, he went to the room where the queen lay sleeping. He saw her open eyes and noticed the drops of fresh blood that stained the sheets. Nudging his companions, he looked at the bed of Kay the seneschal, as though sensing some evil. There too he saw bloodstained sheets, for that night, you should know, Kay’s wounds had opened up.

‘Lady, now I have found the evidence I wanted,’ Meleagant exclaimed.”

The blood in the queen's bed belongs, actually, as far as can be told from the poem itself, to Lancelot, who has cut his fingers when bending the iron bars of Guenièvre's window in order to enter into her room (vv. 4636-4646). Although the discussion that follows Méléagant's discovery of the blood has to do with the blood as an indication (*[t]ex ansignes*, v. 4757) of presence in the past—presence that was, but that is now gone—I would submit that the blood has the capacity not only to point away from itself into the past, but also to continue to make present, in some sense, the person to whom it belongs.

At the level of the characters themselves, though, there is a question as to whose blood is in the bed. In answer to this question, Méléagant seizes upon someone who is actually present in body: Keu, the *senechaus*.⁵²⁹ Méléagant sees the blood as the quite literal extension, to use McLuhan's word again, of a person who remains readily available. By Keu's own account, Méléagant has already tried to kill him (vv. 4017-4043); hostile to Keu, he sees evidence of the *seneschaus*'s presence even when such evidence is far from speaking for itself. True, there is blood in Keu's bed as well, due to his wounds (vv. 4752-4755), but surely this is not enough, on its own, to incriminate him. Rather, Méléagant sees what he wants to see. It is "*com aparcevanz de mal*," (v. 4751) that he looks towards Keu's bed. Méla translates this phrase as "l'esprit prompt à voir le mal."⁵³⁰ Notice, too, Méléagant's first words to the queen, upon finding blood both in her bed and in Keu's: "*Dame*," he says, "*or ai ge trovees / Tex ansignes con je voloie*"

⁵²⁹ Keu is at once the likeliest and the unlikeliest of suspects. He would have had easy access, physically, to the queen's bed during the night, but his continued presence in her room in the morning (along with his wounds) suggests innocence.

⁵³⁰ Chrétien, *Romans*, p. 636.

(vv. 4756-4757).⁵³¹ The verbal form *voloie* reveals that Méléagant was already looking for signs to interpret in a certain way, even before finding any.⁵³² Meanwhile the queen herself, instead of tracing the blood to her lover, as Lancelot traced the hair in the comb to her, believes it to be her own—the effect of a nosebleed (vv. 4775-4784). When Lancelot leaves Guenièvre, the poem tells us that “[*l*]i cors s’an vet, li cuers sejourne” (v. 4697).⁵³³ So thoroughly absent has Lancelot’s body become that the queen fails even to recognize the part of it that he has left behind. And there is no third party to identify the blood to Guenièvre, in the way that the *dameisele* identified the hair to Lancelot.

Unaccompanied by an extra layer of mediation such as that provided by the *dameisele*, the blood seems to make a certain person present only to the degree that its interpreter is predisposed to link it to that person. The difficulty attached to identifying the source of the blood, which is, after all, part of Lancelot’s body, and thus could have a metonymic function,⁵³⁴ leads to a situation in which this identification is fragmented and potentially solipsistic.⁵³⁵ Rather than bringing two persons together, as the intercessors of chapter two were able to do, the blood is easily manipulated into revealing a certain

⁵³¹ “Lady, now I have found the evidence I wanted[.]” Méla’s translation is as follows: “Madame, [...] j’ai trouvé les preuves que je souhaitais!” (Chrétien, *Romans*, p. 636).

⁵³² For a similar reading of Méléagant’s interpretation, see Murray, *From Plato to Lancelot: A Preface to Chrétien de Troyes*, pp. 240-241. Murray cites Bruckner’s remark that “Meleagant has seen the signs of truth, but he does not fully read them” (for this remark, see Bruckner, “An Interpreter’s Dilemma: Why Are There So Many Interpretations of Chrétien’s *Chevalier de la Charrette*?” in *Lancelot and Guinevere: A Casebook*, p. 69).

⁵³³ “His body departed; his heart remained.”

⁵³⁴ Méla lists a variant for verse 4699 (from manuscript BN fr. 12560) that is very suggestive of such a function: for *de son sanc*, in “*Mes de son sanc tant i remaint*,” the variant (if I have understood correctly) would substitute *de son cors* (Chrétien, *Romans*, p. 635).

⁵³⁵ Again, I am indebted to Poirion, here (Chrétien, *Oeuvres complètes*, p. 1246).

person's presence; revelation seems to depend, here, more on the inclinations of those doing the interpretation than on anything inherent in the blood itself. At the level of the poem's characters, the blood in the bed keeps its secrets. We may know that it is Lancelot's, but Guenièvre and Mélégant do not. Nor does Keu, presumably, who was bodily present during the night, but not, apparently, conscious.⁵³⁶

One fairly obvious difference between Mélégant's identification of the blood in the bed and Lancelot's identification of the hairs from the comb is that hair is potentially more recognizable than blood. Lancelot, when he takes up the comb, "[...] *molt longuemant / L'esgarde et les chevox remire*" (vv. 1392-1393),⁵³⁷ it is conceivable that he begins even then to recognize the hairs, or at least the comb, as belonging to Guenièvre.⁵³⁸ Recognition—whether of the hairs or the comb—may also explain how the *dameisele* is able to identify the hairs as being "[...] *del chief la reïne [...]*" (v. 1417).⁵³⁹ Such recognition is much less likely in the case of blood. Thus the blood in the bed, on its own, poses little threat to the secrecy of Lancelot's and Guenièvre's encounter. Far from revealing Lancelot's earlier presence, it ends up concealing it.

Another difference, which I have already mentioned, is that the *dameisele* helps Lancelot to arrive at the conclusion that the hairs are Guenièvre's, but no one helps Mélégant to arrive at the conclusion that the blood is Keu's. At the level of the

⁵³⁶ Murray links Keu's presence in the chamber to Provençal poetry, proposing that "Keu functions as an ironic (and ineffective) pseudowatchman in a scene resembling an *alba*" (*From Plato to Lancelot*, p. 234); see also Uitti, with Freeman, *Chrétien de Troyes Revisited*, pp. 73-74.

⁵³⁷ "Long [...] stared at it [...] and examined the hair."

⁵³⁸ According to Ribard, "[c]ette contemplation silencieuse est déjà une reconnaissance" (*Chrétien de Troyes: Le Chevalier de la Charrette: Essai d'interprétation symbolique*, p. 78).

⁵³⁹ "[F]rom the queen's head."

Charrette's characters, the hairs are identified communally, but the blood is not. The hairs serve both to make the queen present to Lancelot, in some sense, and to bring him and the *dameisele* together—at least temporarily.⁵⁴⁰ The blood in the bed, on the other hand, shields Lancelot at the same time that it lends itself to further division between its interpreters: Méléagant accuses Keu (vv. 4763-4767), while Guenièvre accuses herself (vv. 4782-4784).

The leftover blood does not, then, seemingly, make either Méléagant or Guenièvre think of Lancelot.⁵⁴¹ No longer attached to the body that is its source, and outside of a community like that formed, earlier on, by Lancelot and the *dameisele*, it is interpreted, by Méléagant and by Guenièvre, in ways that tell us more about these interpreters than about Lancelot: Méléagant is suspicious and jealous, and Guenièvre is, quite possibly, unobservant. If, meanwhile, for Chrétien's audience, the blood remains a recognizable extension of Lancelot, this is because of the narrator's explanations (vv. 4639-4646; vv. 4698-4701). The metonymy of Lancelot's blood is recognized, by both Guenièvre and Méléagant, as metonymy; such recognition does not go far enough, however, to draw them into agreement with one another, much less to draw them to a right identification.⁵⁴²

Chrétien gives his audience another example, in the *Conte du Graal*, of a body part standing in for a body that is not its own. After sending the *Orgueilleux de la Lande*

⁵⁴⁰ It is soon afterwards that Lancelot is dismissive towards the *dameisele*'s request for his help (see *Charrette*, vv. 1510-1540).

⁵⁴¹ For the blood as leftover, see *Charrette*, v. 4699.

⁵⁴² Again, it is Poirion, at least in part, who has put me on the track of identification—or at least recognition—as something to think about in connection with the *Charrette* (Chrétien, *Oeuvres complètes*, p. 1246).

and the *Orgueilleus*'s *amie* to Arthur's court, Perceval, in his quest for "[a]venture et chevalerie" (*Conte*, v. 4101),⁵⁴³ witnesses a *gente* as it is attacked by a falcon and falls to the ground (vv. 4105-4119).⁵⁴⁴ The *gente* flies away, but leaves behind, in the snow, three drops of blood (vv. 4120-4127). Perceval becomes deeply interested in these drops:

*Qant Percevaus vit defolee
 La noif sor coi la gente jut
 Et lo sanc qui entor parut,d
 Si s'apoya desus sa lance
 Por esgarder cele sanblance.
 Et li sanz et la nois ensanble
 La fresche color li resanble
 Qui est en la face s'amie,
 Et panse tant que toz s'oblie,
 Q'autresin estoit en son vis
 Li vermauz sor lo blanc asis
 Con ces .III. gotes de sanc furent
 Qui sor la blanche noif parurent.
 En l'esgarder que il faisoit
 Li est avis, tant li plaissoit,
 Qu'il veïst la color novele
 De s'amie qui tant est bele. (vv. 4128-4144)⁵⁴⁵*

Keeping in mind that both the snow and the drops of blood, together, make Perceval think of his *amie*, I would like to concentrate on the blood, here, in order to be able to compare it to the body parts at which we have already looked.⁵⁴⁶ Note, first, that Perceval, unlike Lancelot in the scene with the hairs in the comb, is able on his own to

⁵⁴³ "Adventure and chivalry" (my translation).

⁵⁴⁴ Méla translates *gentes*, in verse 4106, as "oies sauvages" (Chrétien, *Romans*, p. 1064).

⁵⁴⁵ "Seeing the trampled snow where the goose had lain and the still visible blood, Perceval leaned on his lance to gaze on the image. The blood and the snow together reminded him of the fresh hue on his beloved's face, and he mused until he forgot himself. He thought that the rosy hue stood out against the white of her face like the drops of blood on the white snow. Gazing gave him such pleasure that he believed he was beholding the fresh hue on his beloved's face."

⁵⁴⁶ Murray draws together "[t]he blood on the sheets" and "the blood-drops scene in *Perceval*" (*From Plato to Lancelot*, note 25 on p. 236).

recognize the similarity, or *semblance*, between the body part in question and the person who is the object of his affections.⁵⁴⁷ Of course, Perceval does not, as does Lancelot in the scene from the *Charrette*, believe this body part to belong, in reality, to that person. Rather, he is attentive to a kind of resonance, a kind of resemblance, between two things that are not necessarily related; he demonstrates, in other words, a poetic sensibility, an ability to see in one thing the echo of another. A critic could, at this point, make the argument that the comparison Perceval draws between the blood drops and his *amie* is an example not of metonymy, but of metaphor.⁵⁴⁸ After all, the blood drops are not literally a part of “*la color novele / De s’amie*” (vv. 4143-4144), and thus cannot, surely, be standing in for this *color* in the manner of a part standing in for a whole. Yet the blood drops do succeed in making Perceval’s *amie* present to him, at least in a limited way.

She is present to him both mentally—“*[e]t panse tant que toz s’oblie*” (v. 4136)—and visibly—for, as he gazes, “*[I]i est avis [...] / Qu’il veüst la color novele / De s’amie qui tant est bele*” (vv. 4142-4144). Perceval’s encounter, here, with a person who is bodily absent is, at the level of the romance’s characters, rather intensely private. Neither Sagremors nor Keu recognizes the presence of Perceval’s *amie* in the drops of blood in the snow; nor does the text give us any particular reason why they should. Gauvain, for his part, does propose, as one of the possible causes for Perceval’s reverie, that perhaps

⁵⁴⁷ See entry for *semblance* in Van Daele. It is possible that Lancelot may be on the verge of this kind of recognition when the *dameisele* tells him that the hairs are Guenièvre’s (*Charrette*, vv. 1392-1423); this is not stated explicitly, though.

⁵⁴⁸ For Méla, “*métaphore*” is at work here (see preface to *Le Conte du Graal ou le Roman de Perceval*, ed. Charles Méla, Paris: Le Livre de Poche, 1990, p. 10). I am grateful to Mimi Zhou for leading me to Méla’s preface (see Zhou, “‘Le Senestre Chemin’: Aporia, Paradox, and the Ritual Act of the Search in Chretien [sic] de Troyes’ Conte du Graal,” *UCB Comparative Literature Undergraduate Journal* 2.3, Summer 2012, notes 12 and 13).

his “[...] *amie li est forstraite*” (v. 4294);⁵⁴⁹ still, he does not actually find out why Perceval is abstracted until Perceval tells him the reason (vv. 4378-4388). And even at this point, Gauvain—although he may sympathize with Perceval (vv. 4389-4393)—does not participate, with him, in his encounter with his *amie*.⁵⁵⁰ If she is present to Perceval by means of the drops of blood, she does not seem to be present to anyone else in the romance by this means. Her presence to him depends on his previous acquaintance with her, on some—presumably real—resemblance that the blood and the snow bear to her face,⁵⁵¹ and on a sort of cognitive leap on the part of Perceval himself,⁵⁵² such that he sees Blanchefleur even where she is not.

His mental abstraction seems to entail, for Perceval, a withdrawal from his physical surroundings:

*Et [Sagremors] vait tant qu'au chevalier vient.
 'Sire, fait il, il vos covient
 Venir au roi.' Et cil ne mot,
 Ainz fait senblant que il ne l'ot,*

⁵⁴⁹ “[B]eloved had been stolen from him.”

⁵⁵⁰ I would suggest that Gauvain does not fully understand what Perceval is doing (on this point, I think I have very probably been influenced by speaking, in the past, with K. Sarah-Jane Murray).

⁵⁵¹ Notice the nearly exact repetition, in verse 4138, of verse 1782, which describes the colors of Blanchefleur’s face as “[*I*] *vermaus sor le blanc assis*” (“the crimson hue set on the white”). Poirion points this out (see Chrétien, *Oeuvres complètes*, note 2 for p. 730 on p. 1340). See also, on this scene’s importance to Perceval’s story as a whole, Grace Armstrong, “The Scene of the Blood Drops on the Snow: A Crucial Narrative Moment in the Conte du graal,” *Kentucky Romance Quarterly* 19 (1972), pp. 127-147 (cited in Debora B. Schwartz, “‘A la guise de Gales l’atorna:’ Maternal Influence in Chrétien’s *Conte du Graal*,” *Essays in Medieval Studies*, 12, 1996, article published online at <http://www.illinoismedieval.org/ems/VOL12/schwartz.html>, note 29 on p. 15, in online text).

⁵⁵² Or an imaginative leap, if we follow Peggy McCracken, who, writing about this scene, suggests that “[f]orgetting oneself is a state of contemplation, a state of thinking, that is, a thinking through the imagination” (“Forgetting to Conclude,” in *Thinking through Chrétien de Troyes*, p. 152).

*Et cil li recomance a dire,
Et il se taist [...] (vv. 4177-4182)⁵⁵³*

He is absorbed, once again, in the drops of blood, as Keu begins to ride towards him:

*Armez est et montez, va s'an
A celui qui tant antandoit
As .III. gotes qu'il esgardoit
Qu'il n'avoit d'autre chose soig. (vv. 4222-4225)⁵⁵⁴*

True, Perceval is conscious enough of his surroundings to defend himself against both Sagremors and Keu. Still, it is not until two of the blood drops have melted that Perceval begins to emerge more permanently from his thoughts:⁵⁵⁵ “*Por ce ne pansoit mie tant / Li chevaliers com il ot fait*” (vv. 4362-4363).⁵⁵⁶ Perceval’s absorption in the blood in the snow recalls that of Lancelot in the hairs. Both knights are at least somewhat absent, in mind, from what is taking place around them—or would like to be, at any rate; both, too, are loath to engage in conversation.⁵⁵⁷

⁵⁵³ “[A]nd [Sagremors] rode on until he reached the knight. ‘Sir,’ he declared, ‘you must come to court.’”

The youth did not stir, acting as though he had not heard him. Sagremor began again to address him, and still the youth did not stir.”

⁵⁵⁴ “Once equipped, he mounted and rode off toward the youth, who, so absorbed in contemplating the three drops, noticed nothing else.”

⁵⁵⁵ I am grateful again to Méla, whose translation of verses 4358 through 4359 helped me to understand them (Chrétien, *Romans*, p. 1071), and to Van Daele, whose entry for *remetre* helped me to understand the word *remises* (v. 4359), which I take to be a past participle of *remetre*.

⁵⁵⁶ “As a consequence, the knight was not so absorbed in his thought as he had been.”

⁵⁵⁷ I am certainly not the first to make a comparison between these two scenes. See, for instance, Guerreau-Jalabert, who refers to both scenes as examples of “[l]a perte de conscience du temps et du monde alentour” that is “une des composantes constantes des représentations romanesques de l’amour” (“L’amour courtois dans le ‘Lancelot’ de Chrétien,” in *Amour et Chevalerie dans les Romans de Chrétien de Troyes*, note 6 on p. 248). Guerreau-Jalabert also cites Jean Frappier on “l’ensongement” (*ib.*, note 6 on p. 248; her reference seems to be to Frappier, *Amour courtois et Table Ronde*, Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1973, pp. 86-87). Nykrog, on the other hand, draws a contrast between Perceval’s lack of direction, prior to the scene with the blood drops, and Lancelot’s awareness of his mission, despite his lapses into “un *penser* qui lui

I have argued that the connection Lancelot makes between the hairs and the queen is not merely subjective. But what about the connection Perceval makes between the blood drops in the snow, on the one hand, and his *amie*, on the other? Is the mediation performed by the blood drops and the snow available to others besides Perceval? It would seem that it is not available to the first two knights who interrupt him, and who are focused on drawing him out of his thoughts. His *amie*'s presence, such as it is—and note that the subject of Perceval's thoughts is, at least at first, "*lo fresche color*" of her face (v. 4386)—would seem to be inaccessible to anybody who has not either shared his history or been told of it. Gauvain, who does not possess the same memories that Perceval does, is in fact given the opportunity to understand, if not to enter into, Perceval's contemplation, when Perceval explains it to him (vv. 4374-4388); it is not clear, however, that he takes this opportunity, preoccupied as he is with bringing Perceval back to the court, and thus achieving something that Keu and Sagremors have failed to achieve.⁵⁵⁸ If anyone else is capable of entering into Perceval's encounter with Blanchefleur, it may not be Arthur's knights so much as those who have been privy to his earlier meeting with her—*viz.*, the members of the poem's audience. As listeners or readers of the *Conte*, we are in a privileged position to notice the *sanblance* between the inanimate objects of this passage, on the one hand, and Blanchefleur's appearance, on the other. We are invited, by the narrator's explanation (vv. 4133-4144) and by our knowledge of Perceval's story, to let

fait oublier tout ce qui est autour de lui" (*Chrétien de Troyes: Romancier discutabile*, note 29 on p. 201); "en revenant à ses sens," explains Nykrog, "[Lancelot] sait très bien ce qu'il est en train de faire, où il va et ce qu'il cherche" (*ib.*).

⁵⁵⁸ My language, here, echoes Keu's own words to Lancelot in the *Charrette* (vv. 4010-4012). See also María Rosa Menocal on the difficulty of understanding lyric poetry (*Shards of Love: Exile and the Origins of the Lyric*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1994, pp. 85-90).

ourselves be drawn out of ourselves, and thereby to see, with Perceval's eyes, Blanchefleur in the blood drops and the snow.⁵⁵⁹

The passage permits, and indeed encourages, a higher level of recognition and contemplation from its audience than does the passage from the *Charrette* in which Lancelot finds the hair in the comb. Both Perceval and Lancelot occupy themselves, in some way, by musing on an object,⁵⁶⁰ but while Lancelot's delight (*Charrette*, v. 1498) takes him, in a sense, away from us (as it takes his attention away from the *dameisele*), Perceval's *panser* is described in such a way that we can enter into it (*Conte*, vv. 4098-4146).⁵⁶¹ In other words, Lancelot's encounter with the queen in the hair, if encounter it be, is mysterious in a way that Perceval's encounter with Blanchefleur in the blood drops in the snow is not.

At the same time, the drops of blood in the snow have a limited capacity to mediate personal presence. They may make Perceval's *amie* present to him—and may even make her present to us, the members of the *Conte*'s audience—but what they do not do is make two persons present to one another. Perceval recognizes and contemplates another person, in the drops of blood, but the drops permit him neither to communicate

⁵⁵⁹ By inviting us into Perceval's meditation, the *Conte* plays a role something like that of María Rosa Menocal's Dante, who, she writes, "will build from [vernacular poets'] lyrical solipcism and make it narratable, turn their personal revelations into public ones" (*Shards of Love*, p. 136). See, too, McCracken's description of "a reading [of this scene that] emphasizes recall, it references Perceval's memory of Blanchefleur and of his mother, and it depends on the reader's memory, since it posits narrative coherence as a product of the audience's ability to recall earlier episodes and to imagine them in relation to the three drops of blood on the snow" ("Forgetting to Conclude," in *Thinking through Chrétien de Troyes*, pp. 151-152).

⁵⁶⁰ Perceval "[...] *sor les goutes muse*" (*Conte*, v. 4145), and Lancelot "[...] *se delite et deporte / Es chevox qu'il a en son saing*" (vv. 1498-1499).

⁵⁶¹ Again, see McCracken, "Forgetting to Conclude," in *Thinking through Chrétien de Troyes*, pp. 151-152.

nor to commune with her; they do not mediate a two-way encounter. This limitation distinguishes the drops, as a medium, from at least some of the human mediators—Guenièvre, Lunete, and Enide, for example—whom we saw in the last chapter. In light of this same limitation, it is interesting to note that, for Méla, “[l]’extase de Perceval, enfin digne de Lancelot, réfléchit, au contraire, une expérience de l’absence et une représentation de la perte.”⁵⁶² The blood drops remind Perceval of Blanchefleur’s beauty without—apparently—reminding him of his promise to return to her.⁵⁶³ In fact, they seem to make no ethical demands on Perceval whatsoever, beyond his contemplation of them; in this they differ from the ring given to Yvain by his wife in the *Lion* (*Lion*, vv. 2600-2613), a ring that I will discuss later on in this chapter.

If we are looking to objects to perform the kind of mediation or reconciliation afforded by human peacemakers in the last chapter, the body parts discussed in this section seem to have little to offer us. Although the hair from the comb may help Lancelot to concentrate his thoughts on the queen, neither it nor his enjoyment of it ensures him an outwardly warm welcome from her (*Charrette*, vv. 3937-3969). In the case of Lancelot’s blood in the bed, Guenièvre and Méléagant do not even get as far as

⁵⁶² Méla, *Blanchefleur et le saint homme ou la semblance des reliques*, Paris: Seuil (1979), p. 39.

⁵⁶³ See *Conte*, vv. 2867-2877 (Méla’s translation has helped me to understand these verses) and v. 2898. I was inspired to this realization by, I believe, a number of influences, among them Douglas Kelly, “Le lieu du temps, le temps du lieu,” in *Le Nombre du temps: en hommage à Paul Zumthor*, Paris: Librairie Honoré Champion (1988), pp. 125-126; I was directed to Kelly’s article by Jacques Ribard, “Amour et oubli dans les romans de Chrétien de Troyes,” in *Amour et chevalerie dans les romans de Chrétien de Troyes*, note 6 on p. 90. I am very much indebted, too, to Nykrog and to Ribard himself (see Nykrog, *Chrétien de Troyes: Romancier discutabile*, p. 201 and pp. 207-208; and Ribard, “Amour et oubli dans les romans de Chrétien de Troyes,” in *Amour et chevalerie dans les romans de Chrétien de Troyes*, pp. 89-90). The problem of Perceval’s forgetting is discussed by McCracken (“Forgetting to Conclude,” in *Thinking through Chrétien de Troyes*, pp. 150-161), and will return in my fourth chapter.

recognizing it to be his. Finally, the blood drops in the snow mediate a vision, to Perceval, of Blanchefleur as “[...] *s’amie qui tant est bele*” (v. 4144), but this vision is seemingly unaccompanied by an understanding of Blanchefleur as a person to whom he has a responsibility. In none of these three examples, moreover, is it clear that the body part in question permits two or more of Chrétien’s characters to be fully and mutually present to one another.⁵⁶⁴

Two distinctions are in order before we end this section. First, while the *Charrette* makes it plain that the blood in the bed is seized upon by Méléagant as an excuse for his jealousy, a weapon against those he wishes to accuse (*Charrette*, vv. 4744-4774), I want to emphasize that Lancelot’s and Perceval’s responses to the other two media I have examined, here, ought not necessarily to be understood as merely subjective. Rather, through the words of the *dameisele* and of the narrator, in the case of the hairs from the comb (*Charrette*, vv. 1408-1418, vv. 1422-1423, and vv. 1487-1494), and through a textual echo, in the case of the blood drops in the snow (*Conte*, v. 1782 and v. 4138), Chrétien suggests that his protagonists’ connection of these media to Guenièvre and to Blanchefleur, respectively, has some external grounds. Lancelot’s love for the queen prepares him, in a sense, to recognize her in the hairs, yet it is not until they are identified by the *dameisele* that he seems fully to accept them as Guenièvre’s (*Charrette*, vv. 1419-1427). Meanwhile, the narrator, without confirming this identification outright, emphasizes that there is in fact something extraordinary about these particular hairs (*Charrette*, vv. 1487-1494). Similarly, the *Conte* echoes the narrator’s earlier description

⁵⁶⁴ Lancelot and the *dameisele* (not Lancelot and the queen) may actually come the closest to this. After all, in the scene of the hairs in the comb, they are bodily present to one another and are also mentally present to one another insofar as they come to share, seemingly, the same understanding of the hairs (if not the same emotional attachment to them).

of Blanchefleur in the scene of the blood drops in the snow, thus supporting the connection Perceval makes between them (*Conte*, v. 1782 and v. 4138). Both Lancelot and Perceval, then, ought to be put in a different category from Méléagant.

This does not mean, though, that they are the same in every respect. And here we come to the second distinction. Lancelot's and Perceval's reactions to what could be called metonymic interruptions involve, for both characters, an attempt to withdraw, at least mentally, from their surroundings. Unlike Méléagant, trapped in the immanence of his own suspicions and of what he can literally see, Lancelot and Perceval allow themselves to be taken—not literally, but none the less really—to another place.⁵⁶⁵ We may think, here, of *ecstasy*, which Ribard calls a “sortie de soi-même.”⁵⁶⁶ Yet if it is true, in both the case of the hairs and the case of the blood drops in the snow, that a door is opened for the protagonist to enter, and if, in both cases, the given protagonist walks through the door, this seems only in Lancelot's case to be in keeping with subsequent actions on his part. In other words, the incident of the blood drops in the snow seems to have very little effect on Perceval, once it is over.⁵⁶⁷ The remainder of Perceval's story,

⁵⁶⁵ The medium itself remains important, especially in Perceval's case; Haidu is right in suggesting that Perceval is not “free[...] from the world of the senses” (*Aesthetic Distance*, p. 193).

⁵⁶⁶ Ribard, “Amour et oubli dans les romans de Chrétien de Troyes,” in *Amour et chevalerie dans les romans de Chrétien de Troyes*, p. 84. Others have used the word *ecstasy* (or *extase*, or *ecstatic*) in connection with one or both of these scenes; see the remark from Méla that I have already cited (*Blanchefleur et le saint homme ou la semblance des reliques*, Paris: Seuil, 1979, p. 39); Bruckner, “Le Chevalier de la Charrette (Lancelot),” in *The Romances of Chrétien de Troyes: A Symposium*, ed. Kelly, p. 155; Guerreau-Jalabert, “L'amour courtois dans le ‘Lancelot’ de Chrétien,” in *Amour et chevalerie dans les romans de Chrétien de Troyes*, note 6 on p. 248;

⁵⁶⁷ Again, I am indebted here to Kelly, to Nykrog, and to Ribard (see, respectively, Kelly, “Le lieu du temps, le temps du lieu,” pp. 125-126; Nykrog, *Chrétien de Troyes: Romancier discutabile*, p. 201 and pp. 207-208; and Ribard, “Amour et oubli dans les romans de Chrétien de Troyes,” in *Amour et chevalerie dans les romans de Chrétien de Troyes*, pp. 89-90).

in the (unfinished) *Conte*, demonstrates that ecstatic experience does not suffice, on its own, to ensure (or restore) commitment to another person. This is not to say that there can be no relation between ecstasy and commitment—recall that Lancelot’s enjoyment of the hairs takes place in the context of his journey to free the queen—rather, it is to suggest that ecstasy must be supported by action if the presence-in-absence that it affords is not to evaporate like drops of blood in the sun (*Conte*, vv. 4356-4363).

Backdoor presence: Two windows

As media, windows seem to be more neutral than body parts. They are simply tools, offering a means to see beyond a barrier. As such, they do not seemingly demand, as did the hair and blood, to be interpreted. For what could be more ordinary than a window, and less worthy of note? Rather than drawing attention to themselves as media, windows efface themselves. This neutrality could be seen as a virtue. On the other hand, a window’s capacity to mediate the presence of any particular person is tenuous, and dependent on the factors of time and place, as well as, sometimes, a supplementary medium (it is Lunete who guides Yvain to the window). Certainly they are neither relics nor relic-like: aside from their lack of a fixed connection to any particular person, they are also far from portable.

When Lancelot and Gauvain are being hosted by the *dameisele de la tor*, whose presence to her guests we looked at in chapter one, it is through a window that, for the first time in the *Charrette*, Lancelot sees the queen:

*As fenestres devers la pree
S’an vint li chevaliers pansis,
Cil qui sor la charrete ot sis,
Et esgardoit aval les prez.
A l’autre fenestre delez*

*Estoit la pucele venue,
 Si l'i ot a consoil tenue
 Mes sire Gauvains an requoi,
 Une piece, ne sai de quoi,
 Ne sai don les paroles furent,
 Mes tant sor las fenestre jurent
 Qu'aval les prez, lez la riviere,
 An virent porter une biere. [...]
 Après la biere venir voient
 Une rote et devant venoit
 Uns granz chevaliers qui menoit
 Une bele dame a senestre.
 Li chevaliers de la fenestre
 Conut que c'estoit la reïne,
 De l'esgarder onques ne fine
 Molt antentis, et molt li plot,
 Au plus longuement que il pot.
 Et quant il ne la pot veoir,
 Si se vost jus lessier cheoir
 Et trebuchier aval son cors,
 Et ja estoit demis defors
 Quant mes sire Gauvains le vit,
 Sel trait arrieres [...] (vv. 540-552; vv. 556-570)⁵⁶⁸*

This scene, like that of the finding of the comb,⁵⁶⁹ portrays Lancelot as engaged in thought even before his mediated encounter with the queen. The text separates him from Gauvain and from the *dameisele* not only by its reference to his pensiveness (v. 541) but

⁵⁶⁸ “[T]he knight who had sat in the cart walked pensively to the windows overlooking the meadow and gazed down on the fields below. The young lady had come to the neighboring window, where she talked in private a while with Sir Gawain. I do not know the matter of the conversation, nor have I any idea of the words they exchanged. But while they were leaning on the window ledge, they saw a bier being carried beside the river through the fields below. [...] They also noticed a crowd of people following the bier and a tall knight in front escorting a beautiful lady on his left.

From the window, the knight recognized the queen. He did not cease to gaze on her most attentively, happy to do this as long as possible. When he could not see her, he wished to hurl himself out onto the ground below. He was already sliding out the window when Sir Gawain noticed him. Pulling him back [...]

⁵⁶⁹ Bruckner notes “parallels” between Lancelot’s stay with the *dameisele de la tor* and his stay with the Lovesome Damsel, remarking that “both lead to a glimpse of the Queen, either directly in person or indirectly through her comb” (“An Interpreter’s Dilemma: Why Are There So Many Interpretations of Chrétien’s *Chevalier de la Charrette*?” in *Lancelot and Guinevere: A Casebook*, p. 57).

also by its description of him as “[c]il qui sor la charrete ot sis” (v. 542).⁵⁷⁰ Lancelot—who has not yet been identified, in the poem, by his name⁵⁷¹—has already differentiated himself, in choosing to get into the cart, from Gauvain, and here it is Gauvain who speaks to the *dameisele* (vv. 544-549),⁵⁷² while Lancelot’s attention is, apparently, concentrated on what is taking place outside (v. 543). In other words, Gauvain is immanently present, seemingly in both mind and body, to the *dameisele*; Lancelot, on the other hand, is somewhere else—mentally engaged in a reality from which he is physically insulated, by a window.

Guenièvre’s presence to Lancelot, even at a distance—she is “[...] *aval les prez, lez la riviere*”⁵⁷³—makes him even less present, to those who are actually around him, than he was before. Before seeing and recognizing her, he was *pansis* (v. 541); now, he is “[m]olt *antentis*” (v. 563),⁵⁷⁴ so very *antentis*—and so removed, mentally, from his immediate surroundings—that he desires for the rest of his body to follow where his eyes

⁵⁷⁰ “[T]he [one] who had sat in the cart” (I have substituted “one” for “knight” in Staines’s translation).

⁵⁷¹ Of Lancelot’s entry into the romance, Virginie Greene writes that he “is as free as a character can be of predeterminations, whether social or philosophical” (“Imagination,” in *Thinking through Chrétien de Troyes*, p. 56). Saly, on the other hand, has made a good case for linking this entry to Guenièvre’s previous words in *Charrette*, verses 209-211 (in Hult’s edition): “Comment ne pas établir un rapport de cause à effet entre cette plainte et cette venue?” (“Motifs folkloriques dans le *Lancelot* de Chrétien de Troyes,” in Saly, *Image, Structure et Sens : Études arthuriennes*, p. 39).

⁵⁷² Here is Méla’s translation of these verses: “À la fenêtre voisine était venue la jeune fille. Elle y écoutait les propos que lui tenait discrètement, dans un coin, monseigneur Gauvain” (Chrétien, *Romans*, p. 516).

⁵⁷³ Méla translates this as “le long de la rivière, dans la descente de la prairie” (*ib.*, p. 516).

⁵⁷⁴ Van Daele’s entry for *ententif*, of which I suppose *antentis* to be a variation, reads “*attentif, appliqué, occupé, soigneux*.”

have gone:⁵⁷⁵ “*Si se vost jus lessier cheoir / Et tresbuchier aval son cors*” (vv. 566-567).⁵⁷⁶ So great is Lancelot’s longing to transcend the medium allowing him to see Guenièvre that his attempt to achieve this transcendence is indistinguishable, at least in the eyes of an observer, from a suicide attempt,⁵⁷⁷ success at which would seem, paradoxically, to entail immediate separation not only from the queen, but also from Gauvain and the *dameisele*.

The window provides Lancelot with visual access to the queen. However, this access is temporary, leaving him unsatisfied and possibly despondent. There is a paradox even in the bodily quality of the queen’s presence, here, which is evident especially if we compare this scene to that of the hairs in the comb. For in the latter scene, the queen’s body is not made visible, as a whole, to Lancelot, as it is when he sees her through the window. Yet he is seemingly much happier—“*[e]t cil se delite et deporté*” (v. 1498)⁵⁷⁸—following his finding of the hairs, which, after all, he can keep *en son saing* (v. 1499), than he is following his sight of Guenièvre herself. The queen’s presence, as mediated through the window, is fleeting, while her presence in the hairs can be prolonged through Lancelot’s retention, or possession, of the hairs themselves.

⁵⁷⁵ My words echo the description the poem will later give of how Lancelot’s eyes long to accompany his heart in following the queen (vv. 3970-3980), as she leaves the room where she has pretended to be angry with him (vv. 3940-3941).

⁵⁷⁶ “[H]e wished to hurl himself out onto the ground below.” Méla translates these lines as, “[I] eut le désir de se laisser tomber, de laisser son corps basculer dans le vide.”

⁵⁷⁷ After pulling him back in from the window, Gauvain tells Lancelot that he is wrong to hate his life (vv. 568-574). Marie-Noëlle Lefay-Toury suggests that Lancelot’s “geste est celui d’un homme égaré par l’extase où l’a plongé la vue de la reine” (*La tentation du suicide dans le roman français du XIIe siècle*, Paris: Honoré Champion, 1979, p. 109), but also notes that “son acte est [...], sinon réfléchi, du moins voulu” (*ib.*, p. 109).

⁵⁷⁸ “[A]nd the knight felt pleasure and ecstasy[.]”

Its temporary nature is not the only limitation belonging to this mode of presence: for we are dealing, once again, with an example of personal presence that is mediated in only one direction. As was the case for the hairs in the comb, the window permits Guenièvre to be present to Lancelot, but does not, so far as we know, permit him to be present to her. We are not told that Guenièvre is aware of being watched. Her presence to Lancelot here resembles the presence of the *Charrette*'s characters to the members of Chrétien's audience: it is presence in an aesthetic mode, and can thus be observed and even enjoyed, but not reciprocated in kind.

Similar limitations attend the mode of presence in which Laudine is present to Yvain when he watches her through a window, in the *Lion*. Yvain is, at this point, secretly present in Laudine's castle, and, while invisible,⁵⁷⁹ has already observed her and heard her expression of grief for her husband (*Lion*, vv. 1144-1253). After this, he tells Lunete that he wants to see “[*I*]a prochession et le cors” (v. 1274),⁵⁸⁰ when in fact he wants to see “[...] la dame de la vile” (v. 1280).⁵⁸¹ Lunete obliges him:

*Et la dameisele le mist
A une fenestre petite.
Quant qu'ele puet, ver li s'aquite
De l'honor qu'il li avoit faite.
Par chele fenestrë agaite
Mesire Yvains la bele dame, (vv. 1282-1287)⁵⁸²*

⁵⁷⁹ Unless I am mistaken, the *Lion* does not explicitly say that Yvain puts on the ring of invisibility that is given him by Lunete, but this seems to be a reasonable reading of *Lion*, verses 1103ff. I will come back to this point later on in the chapter.

⁵⁸⁰ “[T]he procession and the corpse.”

⁵⁸¹ “[T]he lady of [the] town” (I have substituted “the” for “that,” in Staines's translation). I am grateful to Tony Hunt for pointing out Yvain's disingenuousness, here (“*Le Chevalier au Lion: Yvain Lionheart*,” in *A Companion to Chrétien de Troyes*, p. 158).

⁵⁸² “The young lady placed him at a small window, repaying him as best she could for the honor he had done her.”

As I suggested in chapter two, Laudine's presence, here, is mediated not only *par chele fenestrë*, but also by Lunete herself. But what distinguishes the window itself as a medium of presence, here? The verb used to describe Yvain's observation is *agaitier*: among the translations offered by Van Daele for this verb are "*guetter, épier—rechercher, examiner—voir*." And indeed to think of Yvain as spying on Laudine is not farfetched, in context. This window, like the one we saw in the *Charrette*, serves as a medium through which one may see someone else without being seen. This observation thus takes place without the observed's consent or knowledge. Moreover, the observer in this case, Yvain, is responsible for the death of the observed's husband, which may make us even less comfortable with his secret watching of Laudine, evidence perhaps of what Tony Hunt has called "a voyeuristic trait," and Saly "un certain goût de voyeurisme."⁵⁸³ Yet Yvain himself is far from content with either maintaining this secret or keeping his distance: "*A mout grant peine se detient / Mesire Yvains, a quoi que tort, / Que les mains tenir ne li cort*" (vv. 1302-1304).⁵⁸⁴

Recall Lancelot's desire to plunge his body from the window through which he sees Guenièvre; Yvain is similar to Lancelot in that he, too, finds it difficult to maintain an aesthetic posture in regard to what he sees. Both Lancelot's and Yvain's reluctance to stay where they are suggests their awareness of the limitations of windows, as media.

⁵⁸³ Hunt, "*Le Chevalier au Lion: Yvain Lionheart*," in *A Companion to Chrétien de Troyes*, p. 158; and Saly, "*Le Chevalier au Lion: Un jeu de cache-cache ?*," in *Saly, Image, Structure et Sens: Études arthuriennes*, p. 26. It is through Hunt that I was directed to Saly's very helpful piece (see "*Le Chevalier au Lion: Yvain Lionheart*," in *A Companion to Chrétien de Troyes*, note 11 on p. 158). Both Hunt and Saly connect the window scene to voyeurism.

⁵⁸⁴ "Sir Yvain could scarcely stop himself from running out to restrain her hands, whatever the consequences."

Lancelot, after all, wants to go through the window. Is this, for him, a means of becoming closer to the queen? Or is it a means of ending his life? Even though the text does not necessarily supply answers to the problem of Lancelot's motivation, it certainly gives us hints. Note, for example, that Gauvain, for one, chooses the second of these two interpretations (vv. 569-574). We also see that it is only after the queen is no longer visible that the text signals Lancelot's desire to let himself fall from the window.⁵⁸⁵ His desire thus seems to come as a reaction against the passivity to which his position as an observer consigns him, a passivity manifested chiefly in his inability to follow Guenièvre, any more, with his eyes: "[...] *il ne la pot veoir*" (*Charrette*, v. 565).⁵⁸⁶ No longer presenting him with a view of a particular person, the window changes from a medium of personal presence into a medium of escape *tout court*. There is no inherent relation, here, between the window and the queen. As for Yvain, his position at the window protects him from danger (as Lunete points out, advising him to avoid translating his *folie* into action, *Lion*, vv. 1305-1336),⁵⁸⁷ while making it possible for Laudine to be present to him, yet it also bars him from taking an active part in the scene he observes.

In what mode are Guenièvre and Laudine present to their observers, here? Are they present solely as bodies? Or are they, rather, present as whole persons, with bodies and souls? Guenièvre, as she is seen through a window by Gauvain and the *dameisele de*

⁵⁸⁵ This passage stands in contrast to the passage, later on in the romance, when Lancelot will indeed go through a window (vv. 4594-4649). In the later passage, Lancelot's motivation is clear: he wants to be closer to Guenièvre (see *ib.*, vv. 4594-4596).

⁵⁸⁶ "[H]e could not see her[.]"

⁵⁸⁷ "[...] *Vous estes chi mout bien*," she tells him (*Lion*, v. 1309, "You are well off here").

la tor, is described as “[u]ne bele dame” (*Charrette*, v. 559).⁵⁸⁸ Lancelot recognizes her as *la reine*, but shows no immediate desire to do anything in reaction to this recognition beyond looking at her. It is the sight of her that pleases him (v. 563). The relative innocence of Lancelot’s contemplation, here—passive as it may be—is plain when we compare it to Yvain’s contemplation of Laudine through the window. For this latter contemplation takes place in the context of Yvain’s concealment of himself in Laudine’s castle; not only is she unaware of his presence as a spectator, but she is also unaware of his presence as an intruder. It is harder to make the case that Yvain encounters Laudine as a whole person—again, as body and soul—than it is to make a similar case on behalf of Lancelot. For even though Yvain is a witness to Laudine’s grief over her husband—which ought to be a sign to him that she is more than a pretty face—he seems to be interested in it chiefly as it pertains to her beauty: “[...] [*N*]e fust che merveilles fine,” he asks, “*A esgarder s’ele fust lie, / Quant ele est si tres bele irie?*” (*Lion*, vv. 1492-1494).⁵⁸⁹

Yvain’s vision of Laudine, and thus her presence to him, is colored by *Amours*—but of what variety? His love resembles in at least one regard Christian charity, a love that seeks the other’s good—Yvain expresses, after all, his desire that Laudine stop hurting herself (*Lion*, vv. 1466-1491)—still, his words give us reason to suspect that the main reason for his concern is not so much that she herself is being hurt, but rather that her beauty is being marred:

*Grant duel ai de ses biax chevax
Qui fin or passent, tant reluisent ;
D’ire m’esprennent et aguisent*

⁵⁸⁸ “[A] beautiful lady[.]”

⁵⁸⁹ “Would she not be amazingly beautiful to behold were she happy? After all, she is, even now in her fury, so fair.”

*Quant je li voi rompre et trenchier, (Lion, vv. 1466-1469)*⁵⁹⁰

Laudine is present to Yvain mainly as a *bele dame* (*Lion*, v. 1287); these are the same words used to describe Guenièvre in the *Charrette* (v. 559). But while in the context of the *Charrette* as a whole, it is possible to identify Lancelot's gaze as part and parcel of his devotion to the queen, it seems likely that the window in the *Lion* is serving rather a different purpose, as it permits Yvain to discover another person's charms outside the context of the kind of personal encounter that would bring with it responsibility. If both windows lend themselves to what I have called backdoor presence, they do not dictate the nature of this presence in every respect. We must also take into account differences between the two characters in question. Thus Lancelot, in gazing at the queen through the window, allows himself to be taken out of himself; it is not at all clear that this is true for Yvain.

Metonymy and memory: Rings

Like windows, in their apparent capacity to mediate more than one kind of presence, are rings. I want, eventually, to look at the ring that Laudine gives to Yvain, in the *Lion*, but will first discuss another ring that appears in the same romance. If the fullness of Laudine's presence to Yvain through the window was diminished by his failure to recognize the motivations behind her grief (except, perhaps, insofar as these motivations might affect her feelings toward him⁵⁹¹), let us see whether something

⁵⁹⁰ "I lament so deeply her beautiful hair, which shines more brightly than pure gold. I am tormented with anger and rage to see her tear and pull it out." Yvain continues in this vein for a while longer (see *Lion*, vv. 1470-1494).

⁵⁹¹ See vv. 1460-1462.

similar may be true of her presence to him when he sees her for the first time.⁵⁹² Before this first time, Lunete has given him a ring, the virtue of which she has explained to him:

*Si li a dit qu'il a tel forche
Comme a li fus desous l'escorche
Qui le keuvre, c'on n'en voit point.
Mais il couvient quë on l'enpoint,
Si qu'el poing soit la pierre enclose,
Puis n'a garde de nule chose,
Tant soit entre ses anemis.
Ja par eux ne sera maumis
Chil qui l'anel en son doit a,
Que ja veoir ne le porra
Nuz hom, tant ait les iex ouvers,
Ne que li fus qui est couvers
De l'escorche qui seur li naist ; (vv. 1025-1037)⁵⁹³*

The ring is supposed to hide Yvain from his *anemis*, just as bark covers the wood on the inside of a tree. Lunete's description of the situation in which one might wear the ring emphasizes its use as a means of protecting oneself: "*Ja par eux ne sera maumis*" (v. 1032).⁵⁹⁴ Invisibility brings with it bodily invulnerability, and thus freedom from worry.⁵⁹⁵

⁵⁹² I am assuming he sees her at some point during vv. 1146-1253; but see, *contra*, Nykrog, *Chrétien de Troyes: Romancier discutabile*, p. 159.

⁵⁹³ "[T]elling him that it had the same power as the bark that covers the wood and prevents it from being seen. But the ring had to be worn with the stone facing the palm. Then whoever had the ring on his finger need fear nothing, [not even if he is among his enemies. Never by them will he be hurt.] [F]or no man could see him, however open his eyes, any more than he could see the wood beneath the bark." (Within brackets are my changes to Staines's translation.)

⁵⁹⁴ "Never by them will he be hurt" (my translation). Greimas's dictionary has helped me, here and in the last footnote. On the manner in which one is to wear the ring, see Saly, "Le *Chevalier au Lion* : Un jeu de cache-cache ?," in *Image, Structure et Sens : Études arthuriennes*, p. 24; I am indebted to Saly in my own understanding of this point.

⁵⁹⁵ Among the translations offered by Greimas for *garde* (v. 1030) are "[s]ujet de crainte, peur," and "[s]ouci."

Thus far the ring is a tool, and, more specifically, a kind of defensive weapon. Yet Lunete will later suggest, as well, the potential it holds for amusement, telling Yvain that the spectacle of people looking for him and failing to find him would be “[...] *soulas et delis / A homme qui paour n’aroit*” (vv. 1074-1075).⁵⁹⁶ She describes these people as *maté* (v. 1078), the infinitive of which verb means, according to Greimas, “[f]aire mat,” or “[d]ompter, vaincre.” The members of Laudine’s household will be conquered, *maté*, by Yvain’s use of the ring, and as such, they will be a source of consolation (*soulas*), and pleasure (*delis*), for him.⁵⁹⁷ The ring, like the windows we saw earlier, permits a sort of “aesthetic distance,” to use Peter Haidu’s expression,⁵⁹⁸ between observer and observed, and Lunete encourages this distance on Yvain’s part—a distance, here, that would allow him to laugh, from his privileged, hidden position, at *gent si avoele* (v. 1076).⁵⁹⁹

How hidden is Yvain, really, in the scene that follows? Should we assume, first of all, that it is actually by means of the ring that he is hidden? This is never said explicitly in the text, but the assumption seems warranted by passages like *Lion*, vv. 1106-1108, vv. 1136-1138, and vv. 1186-1194, and by Lunete’s description of the ring’s *forche* (*Lion*, vv. 1025-1037). Other critics who seem to make this assumption include Haidu, Hunt, and Saly.⁶⁰⁰ For Nykrog, Yvain is “tapi [...] sous les couvertures d’un

⁵⁹⁶ “Consolation and pleasure to a man having no fear” (my translation).

⁵⁹⁷ Greimas’s dictionary has been a great help to me in my understanding of vv. 1025-1037 and vv. 1074-1078.

⁵⁹⁸ See Haidu’s *Aesthetic Distance*.

⁵⁹⁹ “People so blind” (my translation, aided by Greimas).

⁶⁰⁰ See Haidu, *Lion-Queue-Coupée: l’écart symbolique chez Chrétien de Troyes*, Geneva: Librairie Droz (1972), pp. 27-29; Hunt, “The Dialectic of ‘Yvain,’” *The Modern Language*

lit,”⁶⁰¹ but he also speaks of the protagonist as having been “rendu invisible,”⁶⁰² and of Lunete having “sauvé la vie [d’Yvain] avec sa bague.”⁶⁰³

Whatever the source of Yvain’s concealment, those who are searching for him have good evidence of his presence in the castle. First of all, part of his dead horse remains outside the *porte de fer* (v. 941), the iron door, that killed it by cutting it into two pieces. As they have found part of the horse’s body outside, the people seeking Yvain believe that its rider must be inside. Beyond this piece of evidence, we also see that, when Esclados’s corpse is brought into the room, it bleeds (vv. 1178-1181). This is, the narrator explains,

[...] *prouvanche bien vraie*
Qu’encor iert chil laiens sans faille
Qui avoit faite le bataille
Et qui l’avoit mort et conquis. (vv. 1182-1185)⁶⁰⁴

We see, here, the intersection—or, at the least, a juxtaposition—of two media. The first, the ring, makes it possible for a killer to put limits on his personal presence such that he can see others without being seen by them. The second, the dead man’s blood, is a sign, or *prouvanche*, that reveals the personal presence of this killer. The ring permits Yvain

Review 72.2 (1977), p. 289; Saly, “Le Chevalier au Lion : Un jeu de cache-cache ?,” in Saly, *Image, Structure et Sens : Études arthuriennes*, pp. 24-25.

⁶⁰¹ *Chrétien de Troyes: Romancier discutabile*, p. 159.

⁶⁰² *Ib.*, p. 158.

⁶⁰³ *Ib.*, p. 159. Cf Frappier, who also describes Yvain as “[...]invisible” (*Étude sur Yvain ou le Chevalier au Lion de Chrétien de Troyes*, Paris: Société d’Édition d’Enseignement Supérieur, 1969, p. 31), and Gretchen Mieszkowski, who writes that “Lunete saves [Yvain’s] life with a magic ring that makes him invisible” (*Medieval Go-Betweens and Chaucer’s Pandarus*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, p. 116).

⁶⁰⁴ “Very true evidence that the one who had fought the battle and who had killed and defeated him was without a doubt still inside” (my translation, aided by Greimas).

to evade responsibility for what he has done,⁶⁰⁵ whereas Esclados's blood points to this responsibility. It is the frustration of the *prouvanche*'s effects by Yvain's invisibility that leads directly to Laudine's hypothesis that her husband has been killed by a *fantosme* (v. 1226).⁶⁰⁶

In fact, Laudine's speech (vv. 1206-1242) contains several hypotheses as to the nature of Yvain's ability to conceal himself. First, she entertains the possibility that it is God who "*le m'embles a veüe*" (*Lion*, v. 1213).⁶⁰⁷ She seems just as confident, however, about the likelihood of her next hypothesis—namely, that "[...] *entre nous chi s'est chaiens mis / Ou fantosmes ou anemis*" (vv. 1219-1220).⁶⁰⁸ The statement is ambiguous: it is not plain whether, in speaking of *fanstosmes ou anemis*, Laudine is making a reference, directly, to her husband's killer, or whether, instead, it is to *fantosmes ou anemis* that she is attributing the killer's concealment. Ruth Harwood Cline preserves this ambiguity in her translation of the lines in question, writing "[S]ome devil or some phantom's come among us,"⁶⁰⁹ while Burton Raffel interprets *fantosmes ou anemis* as referring to the obstruction that keeps Laudine from seeing the man responsible for her

⁶⁰⁵ All of this, again, is to assume that it is actually by means of the ring that Yvain is hidden from the searchers.

⁶⁰⁶ See Haidu's very helpful treatment of this scene in *Lion-Queue-Coupée: l'écart symbolique chez Chrétien de Troyes* (pp. 27-29).

⁶⁰⁷ "[H]ide him from my sight."

⁶⁰⁸ "Some phantom or evil spirit has come among us." Hult translates these lines as, "[...] dans cette salle parmi nous s'est introduit un fantôme ou un démon" (Chrétien, *Romans*, p. 751).

⁶⁰⁹ Cline, *Yvain; Or, The Knight with the Lion*, Athens: The University of Georgia Press (1975), p. 34.

husband's death: "I claim that some phantom, some demon, [h]as placed himself between us."⁶¹⁰

Nor, interestingly, does a consultation of Greimas's dictionary make things much clearer. For Greimas translates *fantosme* as "[a]pparition de l'autre monde," as "[i]llusion, enchantement," and as "[r]êverie, fantaisie, racontars," and although it seems best to understand the word as it is used, here, in either the first or the second of these three senses, this still leaves the interpreter with at least two different possibilities for understanding what Laudine is saying. We may understand her to say that a ghost, an "[a]pparition," has made its way into the castle, a ghost that is perhaps itself the killer—an interpretation supported by vv. 1226-1228, in which Laudine seems to blame the *fantosme* (v. 1226) for Esclados's death. But we may also understand her to say that a kind of magic ("[i]llusion, enchantement") is preventing her from seeing someone who is certainly present. As for the word *anemis*, this means, according to Greimas, simply "[e]nnemi;" however, he includes, as part of the same entry, a definition for "[a]nemi Dieu, anemi de l'ome," terms that refer, he suggests, to the "diable," the devil. Perhaps Laudine is speaking, here, simply of a human enemy; on the other hand, Raffel, Cline, and Hult all interpret *anemis* to mean a supernatural foe.⁶¹¹ This leaves us with a

⁶¹⁰ Raffel, *Yvain, the Knight of the Lion*, New Haven: Yale University Press (1987), p. 38. Part of the problem would seem to come from the difficulty of translating the word *entre*—does it mean "between," here, or does it mean "among?" According to Greimas, *entre* has both these meanings in Old French. It is not clear to me on which edition of the *Lion* Cline's translation is based (it may be that she relies directly on Paris B.N. 794). However, in Mario Roques's edition, which Cline mentions in her introduction (*Yvain*, p. xvi), the verses in question read as follows: "*que antre nos s'est ceanz mis / ou fantosmes ou anemis*," for which see Chrétien, *Le Chevalier au Lion (Yvain)*, ed. Roques, Paris: Honoré Champion (1971), p. 38; this does not rid us of the problem of the word *antre*.

⁶¹¹ Raffel, *Yvain: The Knight of the Lion*, p. 38; Cline, *Yvain; Or, The Knight with the Lion*, p. 34; for Hult's translation, see Chrétien, *Romans*, p. 751.

surprisingly long list of candidates proposed to explain Yvain’s unseen presence. Even if we leave off this list Laudine’s first hypothesis, that God is hiding the killer from her sight, it may be the case either that Yvain himself is a ghost (that is, a disembodied spirit), that he is being protected through enchantment, that he is simply a clever human *anemis*, that some other human *anemis* is harboring him, that he is a devil, or that he is being aided by the devil.

None of these hypotheses is incompatible with her last, that Yvain is afraid of her:⁶¹²

*Ou il est couars, si me doute.
De grant couardise li vient!
Mout est couars quant il me crient
Et devant mi moustrer ne s’ose. (vv. 1222-1225)⁶¹³*

For whether Yvain were ghost, man, or devil—and whether he were being concealed by magical, by human, or by demonic means—he would in any case remain capable of cowardice, it would seem. In the rest of her speech, Laudine develops this accusation: Yvain is a *couarde chose* (v. 1226) who was able to defeat Esclados only by *traïson* (v. 1234)—only, that is, because he was invisible to his opponent (vv. 1235-1236), and not a mortal man (vv. 1240-1242). She also calls him a *chose vaine* and a *chose faillie* (v. 1229), a weak and cowardly thing.⁶¹⁴ These two adjectives turn out to be complex, as well, though, as each of them is related to a substantive used to signify a kind of absence:

⁶¹² See Staines’s translation in next footnote.

⁶¹³ “Or else he is a coward and afraid of me. And what cowardice on his part not to dare appear before me.”

⁶¹⁴ Among Greimas’s proposed translations for *vain* is “[f]aible, épuisé:” for *failli*, he suggests both “[t]erminé, fini” and “[f]aible, lâche, perfide.”

vaineté, after all, may mean either “[f]aiblesse, défaillance” or “[v]anité”—that is, emptiness—and *faillance* means “[m]anque, privation,” as well as “[m]anquement, faute.”⁶¹⁵ Laudine’s words suggest that Yvain’s seeming absence in body manifests a corresponding lack of courage, or virtue.

Might this parsing of Laudine’s speech help us to understand the nature of Yvain’s presence—or absence—in this scene? Some of her hypotheses are not far from the truth. First of all, Yvain is indeed present, here, to the people around him, as something akin to a disembodied spirit. And he is—apparently, at any rate—under the protection of the ring, which certainly seems to be magical. He himself acknowledges, later on, that Laudine is in some sense his *anemie* (vv. 1461-1462), even though he is unwilling to admit that he is, for all that, her *anemis*: “*Et dont sui je ses anemis? / Nenil, chertes, mais ses amis, / C’onques mais tant amer ne vauz*” (vv. 1463-1465).⁶¹⁶ Not only this, but he owes his invisibility, finally, to Lunete, who, while she is not truly her lady’s enemy, does commit what could be seen as a treasonous act, when she hides Yvain in the castle. As for Laudine’s charge of cowardice, the listener or reader may be tempted to disregard it, remembering that Yvain was not in fact invisible when fighting with Esclados, and that he did not actually kill him by *traïson* (v. 1234). We may also see his obedience to Lunete’s advice as indicating his wisdom.⁶¹⁷ Nonetheless, it remains true

⁶¹⁵ Definitions are Greimas’s.

⁶¹⁶ “Am I then her enemy? No, I am not, but rather her lover, for I never desired to love anyone so much.”

⁶¹⁷ See Lunete’s later counsel to him in vv. 1305-1336.

that, in failing to reveal himself, here, Yvain also fails, at least at this stage, to take responsibility for his actions.⁶¹⁸

The people themselves believe (rightly) that “[e]ntre nous est chil qui l’ochist” (v. 1200),⁶¹⁹ and thus interpret Yvain’s invisible presence as the result of “*merveilles et diable*” (v. 1202).⁶²⁰ And we should think twice before dismissing their interpretations out of hand. For even though the poem does not tell us the source of the ring’s *forche* (v. 1025), it does, seemingly, give us a picture of its effects. And the effects of being concealed, for Yvain, are that he fails both to be present as a whole human person—for human persons have bodies—and to confess to what he has done in a way that could lead either to justice or reconciliation. What is even more troubling is that he seems, elsewhere, to be unconcerned about having killed a man; rather, he is concerned about having proof of his victory (vv. 1344-1359). We get the sense that Yvain is indeed a *chose vaine* (v. 1229), in the moral sense; he is vain and frivolous where he should be somber—if for no other reason than that he has caused suffering to someone else. Even if we do not attribute Yvain’s invisibility to the work of *diable*, we may note that the *merveilles*, whatever its source,⁶²¹ through which he avoids being seen, is itself problematic in its mediation of a kind of presence that is less than fully human.

What about the people who are searching for Yvain? In what sense are they present to him? Before their entrance, they have been described to him, by Lunete, as

⁶¹⁸ As Haidu points out (see *Lion-Queue-Coupée*, p. 29).

⁶¹⁹ “The murderer is among us[.]”

⁶²⁰ “[A]stonishing, the work of the devil.”

⁶²¹ On *merveilles*, see Zrinka Stahuljak, “Adventures in Wonderland: Between Experience and Knowledge,” in *Thinking through Chrétien de Troyes*, pp. 75-109.

“[...] *gent mout enuieuse et male*” (v. 1068);⁶²² her description of the ring also suggests, without being explicit on this point, that they are Yvain’s *anemis* (v. 1031). This leads to the question of whether Yvain’s invisible presence, such as it is, has any effect on the state of hostility that seems to exist between him and these people. On their side, his invisibility does not seem, certainly, to diminish their hostility towards him—rather, it makes them angry (vv. 1109-1110; v. 1132)⁶²³—but what about on his side? To Yvain, and to Chrétien’s audience along with him, the searchers are present as “[...] *aveule qui a tastons / Va aucune chose querant*” (vv. 1142-1143).⁶²⁴ Just as the words *fantosmes*, *vaine*, and *faillie* suggested a (possibly moral) lack on Yvain’s part, so the word *aveule* suggests a physical lack on the part of the searchers. They are, of course, visibly present to Yvain, yet he remains unmoved by their presence, and even by their touch: “*Si fu mout ferus et boutés / Mesire Yvains la ou il jut, / Mais ains pour che ne se remut*” (vv. 1192-1194).⁶²⁵ Once they are gone and Lunete has returned, she will remark,

*Mout ont par chaiens tempesté
Et reversé tous ches cachez
Plus menuement que brachés
Ne va trachant pertris ne kaille.* (vv. 1264-1267)⁶²⁶

⁶²² “[I]ll-disposed and malicious people[.]”

⁶²³ As Lunete has predicted, saying that they will be “[...] *tuit si avoelé / Si desconfit et si maté, / Quē il errageront tuit d’ire*” (vv. 1077-1079, “[S]o sightless, so upset, and so deluded that they will go mad with rage”).

⁶²⁴ “[B]lind men groping in search of something.”

⁶²⁵ “Sir Yvain was hit and jostled a great deal where he lay, but he did not budge.”

⁶²⁶ “They have stormed about searching every corner with more scrutiny than a hunting dog tracking down a partridge or a quail.”

And indeed, for Yvain, the people's presence is something to be weathered, as one might weather a storm. Rather than being present to him as persons, they are present to him as things—the weather, hunting dogs—that are not only hostile but also impersonal.⁶²⁷

But surely Laudine is present to Yvain? Let us look at the way in which the text describes her. She is “[...] *une des plus beles dames / C'onques veïst riens terrienne* (vv. 1146-1147),⁶²⁸ and she is nearly suicidal with grief (vv. 1150-1151). She is at least potentially present both to Yvain and to Chrétien's audience as a human person who manifests both beauty and suffering—but in what way is she actually present to Yvain? We are told that Yvain hears Laudine's *cris* (v. 1173), but, as we know from the character Calogrenant's speech, towards the beginning of the *Lion*,

[...] *y a tix que che qu'il oent
N'entendent pas, et si le loent ;
Et chil n'en ont fors que l'oïe,
Puis que li cuers n'i entent mie.* (vv. 153-156)⁶²⁹

This distinction between hearing with one's ears and listening with one's heart is made in the context of an admonition to those about to hear a story; yet it seems to me to be pertinent to Yvain's hearing, here, too. Is Laudine present to him as a suffering person?

⁶²⁷ A *brache* or *braque*, says Greimas, is a “[c]hien de chasse.” For that matter, Yvain himself, at least according to Lunete's image, is also like an animal: a *caille* is, in modern French, a “[p]etit oiseau migrateur des champs et des prés [...], voisin de la perdrix” (Paul Robert, *Le Nouveau Petit Robert 2009*, ed. Josette Rey-Debove and Alain Rey, Paris: Le Robert, 2009).

⁶²⁸ “[A] lady, one of the most beautiful a mortal has ever seen[.]”

⁶²⁹ “There are people who hear but do not understand, although they praise what they hear. Now they are capable only of hearing because their heart does not understand.” “Le discours de Calogrenant,” writes Joan Tasker Grimbert, “sur la physiologie de la compréhension selon laquelle la parole entre par l'oreille pour gagner ensuite le coeur (dans des conditions propices) va de pair avec la physiologie de l'amour dont on trouve dans l'*Yvain* des rappels, sinon l'exposition détaillée qui figure dans *Cligés*” (*Yvain dans le miroir: Une Poétique de la réflexion dans le Chevalier au lion de Chrétien de Troyes*, Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1988, p. 26).

After she and the others have gone away, the text tells us that he wants to see her (vv. 1279-1280); in the window scene that follows and that we have already examined,⁶³⁰ it quickly becomes plain that his motives come more from an interest in her physical beauty than from an understanding of her grief (vv. 1460-1510).

If I have concentrated, here, more on Yvain's presence to those around him than on their presence to him, this is because, whether we concentrate our attention on the ring as a medium or on the corpse's blood as a sign, it is Yvain's presence that is in question in this scene. However, it was important to look at least briefly at the nature of others' presence to Yvain, for this has served as further evidence that there is no real meeting, here, no real encounter between Yvain and anyone else. Although, as we have seen, Laudine does speak to her husband's killer, both she and Yvain are lacking in the kind of understanding that would permit them to be fully present to one another. In Laudine's case, this is due partly to her grief and partly to the handicap of not being able to see Yvain. Yvain's own lack of understanding, on the other hand, is more serious, as it is born of an unwillingness or incapacity to take seriously Laudine's suffering; later he will remind himself that "[...] *femme a plus de chent courages*" (v. 1440).⁶³¹ Laudine may be present to him in body, both when he is invisible and when he is watching her from the window, but she is not necessarily present to him as a whole person.

McLuhan has suggested that, as human beings, we become like the media, or tools, that we use:

⁶³⁰ On the importance of analyzing specific scenes more than once, see Grimbart, *Yvain dans le miroir*, p. 9.

⁶³¹ "[A] woman has more than a hundred moods."

The concept of ‘idol’ for the Hebrew Psalmist is much like that of Narcissus for the Greek mythmaker. And the Psalmist insists that the *beholding* of idols, or the use of technology, conforms men to them. ‘They that make them shall be like unto them.’ This is a simple fact of sense ‘closure.’⁶³²

“By continuously embracing technologies,” writes McLuhan, “we relate ourselves to them as servomechanisms.”⁶³³ Does such a thing occur in any of the examples we have explored in this chapter, up to this point? It does seem that, for Lancelot and for Yvain, their use of windows is what McLuhan would call, I think, an “extension” of their visual sense, more so than of their other senses; this is true whether we think of Lancelot, who “[d]e l’esgarder onques ne fine / Molt atentis” (*Charrette*, vv. 562-563),⁶³⁴ or of Yvain, who “[p]ar chele fenestrë agaitte / [...] la bele dame” (*Lion*, vv. 1286-1287).⁶³⁵

If the function of these windows is to amplify Lancelot’s and Yvain’s visual sense, the function of Lunete’s ring is to hide Yvain from the eyes of others. In other words, it is supposed to close off (to echo McLuhan) the visual sense not of its wearer, but of other people. Thus McLuhan’s statement, that “we relate ourselves to [technologies] as servomechanisms[.]”⁶³⁶ would seem at first to have little relevance to the situation. For surely the ring is serving Yvain, and not the other way around. Yet it is

⁶³² McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, p. 45.

⁶³³ *Ib.*, p. 46.

⁶³⁴ “[D]id not cease to gaze on her most attentively[.]”

⁶³⁵ “Through this window, [...] watched the beautiful lady[.]” Note that it is *par les iex*, through the eyes, that *Amours* strikes Yvain’s heart (*Lion*, v. 1372). Although Yvain may also be able to hear Laudine, as she “[...] list en .i. sautier ses siaumes” (*Lion*, v. 1418), his attention is focused on her visible beauty (see especially vv. 1466-1510). As for the audible evidence of her grief (see, in the window scene, vv. 1288-1299 and v. 1418, as well as, in the ring scene, vv. 1152-1153, v. 1165, vv. 1173-1176, and vv. 1203-1247), he is able to discount it fairly easily by telling himself that women are inconstant and that his own desire to love has never been so great (vv. 1432-1465).

⁶³⁶ *Understanding Media*, p. 46.

important, at this point, to remember the other extraordinary⁶³⁷ medium at work in this scene: the dead man's blood. Other analyses of this scene have suggested, variously, that “le pouvoir surnaturel de l’anneau magique est combattu par un autre pouvoir également surnaturel et bien plus saisissant,”⁶³⁸ and that “le coup de théâtre de la cruentation [...] redouble la tension et l’angoisse.”⁶³⁹ As Haidu has noted, the scene pits the two media (or the two powers, to echo his description) against one another.⁶⁴⁰ Based on the failure of the searchers to find Yvain, Haidu observes that “[d]ans le conflit des deux symboles de la plaie et de l’anneau, c’est bien ce dernier qui semble remporter la victoire.”⁶⁴¹ He then points out, though, that this is “une victoire à demi trompeuse,” for “[s]i Yvain est bien protégé de tout danger sérieux, il n’est pas à l’abri d’un ridicule littéraire” that includes both “l’humiliation corporelle” and “l’humiliation morale.”⁶⁴² Under the protection of the ring, Yvain seems to be physically invulnerable, but through the bleeding of the dead man, he is morally exposed. The ring protects him from physical

⁶³⁷ Or wondrous; see Zrinka Stahuljak, “Adventures in Wonderland: Between Experience and Knowledge,” in *Thinking through Chrétien de Troyes*, pp. 75-109.

⁶³⁸ Haidu, *Lion-Queue-Coupée: l’écart symbolique chez Chrétien de Troyes*, p. 28.

⁶³⁹ Saly, “Le Chevalier au Lion : Un jeu de cache-cache ?,” in Saly, *Image, Structure et Sens : Études arthuriennes*, p. 25. Again, I am grateful to Hunt for bringing this piece to my attention (“*Le Chevalier au Lion: Yvain Lionheart*,” in *A Companion to Chrétien de Troyes*, note 11 on p. 158).

⁶⁴⁰ Haidu, *Lion-Queue-Coupée*, p. 28. Haidu speaks of the “pouvoir surnaturel de l’anneau,” and of the “pouvoir également surnaturel” of the body. It may well be through Haidu’s study that I was led to notice the simultaneous workings of the ring and of the body in this scene.

⁶⁴¹ Haidu, *ib.*, p. 29.

⁶⁴² Haidu, *ib.*, p. 29.

harm, but does not protect him from Laudine's words. It conceals his body, but does not conceal his guilt.

What is more, by following Lunete's advice that he stay still while others are searching for him (vv. 1060-1066; v. 1194),⁶⁴³ Yvain does, in a way, serve the ring. Remember that the poem compares the searchers to "[...] *aveule qui a tastons / Va aucune chose querant*" (vv. 1142-1143).⁶⁴⁴ Yvain may very well feel *soulas et delis* at these people's expense (vv. 1074-1079), but his invulnerability itself comes at a price: if the searchers are comparable to blind people, he himself has become comparable to a *chose*, a thing. The word will return in Laudine's speech, when Yvain is called a "*couarde chose*" (v. 1226), and also a "[c]hose vaine, chose faillie" (v. 1229). Having protected himself by means of a thing, Yvain will be treated as a thing by others. At first neither "*ferus ne touchiés*" (v. 1138),⁶⁴⁵ later on he is "*ferus et boutés*" (v. 1192).⁶⁴⁶ Not only this, but Saly shows how he has indeed become like the particular thing he uses; he is "caché [...] comme la pierre d'anneau retourné dans sa main."⁶⁴⁷ No more than in either of the window scenes does the protagonist participate, here, in a fully human encounter with another person.

⁶⁴³ Hult's translation of the *Lion* has helped me confirm my understanding of these verses (Chrétien, *Romans*, p. 746 and p. 750).

⁶⁴⁴ "[B]ind men groping in search of something."

⁶⁴⁵ "[Hit] or [touched]." I have reversed the order of the two adjectives in Staines's translation.

⁶⁴⁶ "[H]it and jostled[.]" See Haidu's description of "l'humiliation corporelle" to which Yvain is subjected (*Lion-Queue-Coupée*, p. 29).

⁶⁴⁷ Saly, "Le Chevalier au Lion : Un jeu de cache-cache ?," in *Image, Structure et Sens : Études arthuriennes*, p. 24.

Lunete's ring separates its possessor from other persons, making these other persons into objects of aesthetic enjoyment. It stands in contrast with another ring that plays a part in the *Chevalier au lion*: the ring that Laudine gives to Yvain, now her husband, before he leaves her to attend and participate in tournaments with Gauvain.⁶⁴⁸ This ring, Laudine explains, will keep him safe from prison and from the loss of blood (v. 2604) as long as he is *verais* and *loiaus* (v. 2605), “[...]il le port et chier le tiegne” (v. 2607),⁶⁴⁹ and “[...] de s'amie li souviengne” (v. 2608).⁶⁵⁰ The ring does not ensure, in and of itself, that Laudine will remain present to Yvain's memory; instead, any virtue that it has—and note that this virtue is not the virtue of rendering someone present, but rather the virtue of keeping its possessor safe—depends on Yvain's human ability to keep his wife in his mind.

If this ring serves as a magic talisman, its magic differs considerably from that of the other ring, the ring of invisibility. For if Laudine's ring were in the same category as the one bestowed on Yvain by her servant—if it were simply a tool—then surely it would perform its magic regardless of whether the person wearing it remembered his beloved or not. Yet Laudine's ring can perform its magic only while Yvain is exercising the virtue of fidelity in regard to her. The ring cannot be alienated from the one who gave it without ceasing to accomplish its proper function. It does not, itself, necessarily mediate

⁶⁴⁸ For a comparison of the two rings, see Uitti, “*Le Chevalier au Lion (Yvain)*,” in *The Romances of Chrétien de Troyes: A Symposium*, ed. Kelly, pp. 193-194. For Uitti, the ring of invisibility is, or is part of, a “Celtic motif [that] is essentially a device of plot,” while Laudine's ring is “emblematic, as it is made out to be, of faithful love” (*ib.*, p. 193).

⁶⁴⁹ “[H]e wears and cherishes the ring[.]”

⁶⁵⁰ “[R]emembers his beloved.” Or perhaps it is the stone (v. 2602) that will accomplish this. In the discussion that follows, I will speak of the ring rather than of the stone, but will keep in mind the former's capacity to stand for the latter by means of metonymy.

presence. Recall that all Yvain had to do, in order for Lunete's ring to protect him from being seen, was to hold it in his hand: "*Mais il couvient quë on l'enpoint, / Si qu'el poing soit la pierre enclose, / Puis n'a garde de nule chose*" (vv. 1028-1030).⁶⁵¹ Laudine's ring, on the other hand, will not function as it is supposed to unless Yvain remembers her.⁶⁵²

Although Laudine never says so, explicitly, it seems that the ring is a visible token of her favor: why else would she, in the person of her messenger, require him to return it to her once he has broken his promise to her (*Lion*, vv. 2767-2773)? Notice exactly what the messenger says, when she announces to Yvain that the ring must be sent back to her mistress:

*Yvain, n'a maïs cure de toi
Ma dame, ains te mande par moi
Que jammais a li ne revienngnes
Ne son anel plus ne detiengnes.
Par moi que chi en present vois
Te mande que tu li envois :
Rent li, car rendre le t'estuet.* (vv. 2767-2773)⁶⁵³

⁶⁵¹ "But the ring had to be worn with the stone facing the palm. Then [he] need fear nothing[.]" Hult's translation reads, "Seulement il faut qu'on le prenne en sa main de manière à enfermer la pierre dans son poing ; alors on n'a plus rien à craindre" (Chrétien, *Romans*, p. 745). I suspect that I am much indebted to Saly on this point (see "Le *Chevalier au Lion* : Un jeu de cache-cache ?," in *Image, Structure et Sens : Études arthuriennes*, p. 24).

⁶⁵² Remembrance is also a precondition for the fulfillment of his responsibility to her. "[...] [*M*]out fus or oublians," Laudine's messenger will tell him ("You were greatly forgetful," v. 2746, my translation; I have also consulted those of Staines and of Hult). "[...] [*T*]u l'eüs en tel despit," she says, a few verses later, "*Quë onques puis ne t'en membra*" ("[Y]ou respected her so little that you never again gave mind to the agreement," vv. 2752-2753; Staines's translation, which I cite, here, has been helpful to my understanding of verse 2752).

⁶⁵³ "Yvain, my lady no longer has care for you. Through me she sends you word to return to her never and to keep her ring no more. She commands you to send it back to her with me, whom you see here before you. Give it back to her, for you are bound to return it."

The speech establishes an opposition between Laudine's *cure*, or care,⁶⁵⁴ for Yvain—a *cure* that no longer exists—and her present command that he never return to her. Her *cure* stands in parallel to the ring: both are being withdrawn from Yvain. Is the ring, then, symbolic of Laudine's *cure*? Certainly this is one way to read the relation between them; yet I want to suggest that there is another possible way to read it. Recall that the ring has the capacity to protect its bearer (*Lion*, vv. 2604-2613). Although this capacity could be regarded as being inherent in the object itself, it might also be regarded as somehow connected to a capacity that Laudine possesses. Nor would such a reading be unsupported by the context of Laudine's explanation of what the ring can do (vv. 2600-2613), for just before she gives this explanation—indeed, before she has made any mention of the ring at all—she tells Yvain that “[*n*]us ensoines ne vous atent / Tant com vous souvenra de moi” (vv. 2598-2599).⁶⁵⁵ I would like, then, to propose that the ring may not simply assure protection to Yvain, but that it may in fact mediate Laudine's own protection, her *cure* for him. Such a reading would explain why this protection has conditions placed on it—if the ring's mediation of her protection is contingent on Yvain's remembrance of her, this is because her promise of protection (vv. 2598-2599) was already contingent on such remembrance on his part.

If I understand him correctly, Nykrog is speaking of Yvain's lion when he writes that “le coeur est extériorisé, devenu matériellement visible, quoique soumis à la raison

⁶⁵⁴ “[C]are” seems to be Staines's translation of *cure*. Among various translations for *cure*, Greimas offers “soin, souci;” as a translation for the expression “[*a*]voir *cure*,” he offers “se soucier de.”

⁶⁵⁵ “[N]othing will prevent your return so long as you remember me.” Greimas offers the following translations for *ensoine*: “[e]mpêchement, retard,” and “[e]xcuse.”

retrouvée, et la raison est partout accompagnée par le coeur, soit doux, soit terrible.”⁶⁵⁶ It is perhaps in this sense—“extériorisé[e], devenu[e] matériellement visible”⁶⁵⁷—that Laudine’s *cure* is present to her husband in the ring. Such an exteriorization (from Nykrog’s “extériorisé”) would put the ring not into a merely symbolic relation with Laudine—at least at the level of the romance’s characters⁶⁵⁸—but, rather, into what is almost a sacramental relation. The text remains ambiguous as to the source of the ring’s protective effects—parts of Laudine’s speech even imply that it could be used to the same effect by any “*amans verais [et] loiaus*” (v. 2605)—so I want simply to note that it is possible to understand the ring itself, as well as its power, as connected inherently to Laudine, and thus as what Nykrog might call an exteriorization, and McLuhan an extension, of her person.

Let us look once again at Laudine’s instructions to Yvain, in giving him the ring: “*Mais il couvient quë on l’enpoint, / Si qu’el poing soit la pierre enclose, / Puis n’a garde de nule chose*” (vv. 1028-1030).⁶⁵⁹ Note both the similarity and the difference between these instructions and Laudine’s instructions regarding her ring: Yvain is told in both cases to put the ring on his finger (*en son doit*, v. 1033; *en vostre doi*, v. 2600), but only in the case of Lunete’s ring, the ring of invisibility, is he told to enclose the ring’s stone in his fist (*poing*). Saly’s remark, to the effect that Yvain is “caché [...] comme la pierre

⁶⁵⁶ *Chrétien de Troyes: Romancier discutabile*, pp. 168-169.

⁶⁵⁷ Greimas lists *cure* as a feminine noun.

⁶⁵⁸ A mere symbol would not be capable of protecting its owner from harm.

⁶⁵⁹ “But the ring had to be worn with the stone facing the palm. Then [he] need fear nothing[.]”

d'anneau retourné dans sa main[.]”⁶⁶⁰ is again helpful: the ring of invisibility hides its wearer and is itself hidden by him, whereas Laudine’s ring, which could be called a ring of fidelity, protects its wearer (“[c]hil vous iert escus et haubers[.]”⁶⁶¹ v. 2610) and is supposed to be protected by him (“[m]ais qu’il le port et chier le tiegne[.]”⁶⁶² v. 2607).

Both rings offer themselves as a kind of armor for Yvain, but armor of two very different kinds. The first ring, Lunete’s ring, offers to its bearer certain privileges belonging to bodily presence (the bearer can see and hear other people) without the vulnerability it may entail (he himself cannot be seen, so he is safe from being held accountable for his past actions). As a medium, it puts limitations on its bearer’s own personal presence to the persons around him, in such a way as to bar a full encounter with those persons from taking place. The second ring, on the other hand, may, if it is used properly, be the medium through which one person keeps another safe. It is in the nature of this second ring to make it possible for two persons to be reunited—remember, for instance, that it is supposed to keep Yvain from being detained in prison (v. 2604)—while it is in the nature of Lunete’s ring to keep its bearer separated from others.

Conclusion

I want to distinguish between three different ways that an object may serve as a medium of presence. It is necessary, first, to distinguish all of these understandings of the objects in question from an understanding of them as symbols: even though, for a

⁶⁶⁰ Saly, “Le Chevalier au Lion : Un jeu de cache-cache ?,” in *Image, Structure et Sens : Études arthuriennes*, p. 24.

⁶⁶¹ “This will be your shield and hauberk.”

⁶⁶² “Provided he wears and cherishes the ring[.]”

modern reader, it might be easy to understand Lunete's ring as symbolic of Yvain's irresponsibility, for example, or the window in the *Charrette* as symbolic of Lancelot's masculine gaze, this is not exactly what I am trying to get at.⁶⁶³ While I do not mean to discount out of hand this kind of symbolic understanding, I am interested in what the objects actually do—in their functions, particularly in regard to personal presence. In one category, there are objects that are used as tools, mediating specific kinds of personal presence, each with its specific limitations. These objects, whether magical or not, have the capacity, the *forche* (*Lion*, v. 1025), to mediate between any two persons: their essential functions are independent of the person who uses them. Good examples are the window, and the ring of invisibility, in the *Chevalier au lion*, both of which work to Yvain's *grant avantage*, as indeed Lunete tells him in regard to his position at the window (*Lion*, v. 1321). They provide him with the ability to be only partly present—the ability, specifically, to be present without responsibility.

This kind of use of objects, as tools or shortcuts for one's own (material) advantage, stands in contrast to another kind of mediation in which a person's faculty of reason or of memory is affected by an object in such a way that he or she becomes conscious of another person. Objects that function in this way include the golden hairs in the *Chevalier de la Charrette* and the blood drops in the snow in the *Conte du Graal*.⁶⁶⁴ The hairs and the blood drops, although they, too, could be seen as shortcuts in time or space, are not sought out, as such, by the persons who encounter them; instead, they

⁶⁶³ Natalie Grinnell sees “the motif of a magic fountain” (or perhaps the fountain itself) as “a symbol,” in the *Lion* (“The Other Woman in Chrétien de Troyes's *Yvain*,” *Critical Matrix* 10.2, Sept. 1996, p. 2) and also speaks of the fountain's “symbolic value” (*ib.*, p. 3). Page numbers refer to a full text version, downloaded from ProQuest, of this article (5 July 2014).

⁶⁶⁴ Also the *graal* itself, although I have not discussed it in this chapter.

come as interruptions, or even invitations, from another place. Lancelot may already be thinking of the queen when he comes upon the hairs, but he does not use them as a means to gain access to her so much as he reveres them because of the connection to her that they seem already to possess. And it does not seem that Perceval was looking for Blancheflor, before he sees the *gente* wounded by the *faucon*, any more than he was looking for the Fisher King's father, before he sees the *graal*. As he gazes at the blood drops in the snow, "[...] *panse tant que toz s'oblie*" (*Conte*, v. 4136).⁶⁶⁵ In all of these cases, the object in question arrives as an unexpected revelation, a door to another place.⁶⁶⁶

The window through which Lancelot sees the queen, in the *Charrette*, is harder to categorize, proof that typologies of this sort are helpful only to a certain degree; the window seems to be in one way a tool, and in another way a revelation. Note, first, that Lancelot may be capable of a different kind of seeing, when he is at the window, than is Yvain, when he is at the window or (apparently, at any rate) under the protection of Lunete's ring. Moreover, the *Charrette* presents Lancelot as unlike Yvain in that Lancelot does not actively set out to spy on the queen so much as he is passively drawn

⁶⁶⁵ "[H]e mused until he forgot himself." Nykrog has noted that Perceval does not maintain this stance once the drops of blood have evaporated ("Un instant après," Nykrog writes, "il est tout à sa joie d'être devenu l'*acointe* du grand Gauvain [...]—toute autre pensée s'est évanouie en lui," *Chrétien de Troyes: Romancier discutabile*, p. 201); and this certainly seems to be true. Yet he has demonstrated his capacity not only to recognize a person in a thing, but also to give this person his attention—at least while the thing itself is present. This is evidence of growth, on Perceval's part, since his silence about the *graal*, and may help to prepare him for the moment when he will be "[...] *comeniez* / [...] *molt dignement*" ("given communion very worthily," *Conte*, vv. 6432-6433; my translation, affected probably by that of Staines).

⁶⁶⁶ This remains true even when this person does not accept it as such: Perceval, after all, at the Fisher King's house, declines—at least temporarily—to go through the door opened to him by the *graal*'s appearance.

away from his physical circumstances by his vision of her. Romantic mystification that this may be, on Chrétien's part,⁶⁶⁷ it nevertheless sets Lancelot's gazing through the window apart from Yvain's: Lancelot is not looking for a shortcut, but rather accepting a gift. This is true at least for as long as he can still see the queen; when he can no longer see her (*Charrette*, v. 565), though, he begins to treat the window as a tool, a means of escape, possibly *via* suicide. Here, there is a tension between opening oneself to the gift of another's presence as it is mediated through an object, and seeking to manipulate an object for one's own ends. Lancelot is given the possibility of encountering the queen through the window, and indeed he is content with this for a spell. However, he eventually resorts to violence—or something like it—in his frustration with this medium's limitations. The distance between him and the queen becomes so intolerable as to lead him to turn the window into a tool.

Different from the objects in both the category of medium-as-tool and the category of medium-as-revelation is the ring Laudine gives Yvain. Here, Chrétien gives his audience a glimpse of what a medium that runs in two directions might look like. This ring, as described by Laudine, is a possible aid to mutual presence through mutual care and shared memory. It is meant to keep Yvain safe, allowing him to return to his

⁶⁶⁷ Having suggested that “rape [...] constitutes one of the episodic units used in the construction of a romance” (*Ravishing Maidens*, p. 43), Gravdal writes, of “Old French romance after the work of Chrétien[.]” that “[w]ithin this new strain of romance, the representation of male violence against women becomes more explicit, exposing what was idealized and mystified in earlier narratives, such as the Arthurian romances of Chrétien” (*ib.*, p. 68). Elsewhere she writes that “[a] close reading of female sensuality and male brutality in Chrétien discloses the essence of the power play behind ‘romantic love’” (*ib.*, p. 15). For a point of view very different from Gravdal's in its lack of sympathy for Chrétien's female characters, but similar to hers in its deconstruction of romantic love in Chrétien's romances, see Yves Ferroul, “La dérision de l'amour,” in *Amour et Chevalerie dans les Romans de Chrétien de Troyes*, pp. 149-159 (in fact, for Ferroul, “[les] romans apparaissent comme une déconstruction systématique des mythes de l'amour chevaleresque,” *ib.*, p. 151). I do not fully agree with either Gravdal or Ferroul, but cite them as examples of critics who question the value of romantic love in Chrétien.

wife. It is more than a tool, however, as it demands of Yvain a certain ethical cooperation: it will protect him, but he, in turn, is to stay faithful to Laudine and remember her. And rather than serving as a revelation, in the manner of the window and the hairs in the *Charrette*, or the blood drops in the *Conte*, it serves—or is supposed to serve—as a confirmation and an extension of an already existing bond between two persons. At the same time, the ring leaves room for human free will, as is shown by Yvain's failure to return by the appointed time. Out of the examples in this chapter, Laudine's ring seems to have the greatest capacity to mediate in two directions between two persons who are bodily separated from one another. Yet the events surrounding its possession and loss by Yvain suggest that, through forgetfulness, one may cut oneself off from the effects of such mediation. The importance of memory to personal presence will arise again in the next and final chapter.

CHAPTER IV

PRESENCE IN LANGUAGE

In studying the modes through which persons are present to one another in bodies, through representatives, and through material things, I have not, up to this point, devoted much space to the subject of what Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht calls “[p]resence achieved in language.”⁶⁶⁸ In a way I have been dealing indirectly with this subject all along, given that Chrétien’s romances are, after all, romances, and that if his characters are present to us at all, surely it is in language that they are present to us.⁶⁶⁹ Yet in my previous three chapters, I tried to concentrate mainly on the presence of the romances’ characters *to one another*, rather than—explicitly, in any case—on the presence of these characters to Chrétien’s *audience*. I will attempt to maintain this distinction in this fourth chapter.

How, then, might Chrétien’s characters become present to one another through language? Since Gumbrecht offers, in his article, “Presence Achieved in Language (With

⁶⁶⁸ See Gumbrecht, “Presence Achieved in Language (With Special Attention Given to the Presence of the Past),” *History and Theory* 45.3 (2006). See also Gumbrecht, *Production of Presence: What Meaning Cannot Convey*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press (2004).

⁶⁶⁹ I realize that, in speaking of how Chrétien’s characters are present *to us*, I run the risk of eliding the differences between twelfth and twenty-first century receptions of the poet’s oeuvre, as well as the differences between, to use the words of Evelyn Birge Vitz, “the oral and the written, the minstrel and the clerical” (*Orality and Performance in Early French Romance*, Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1999, p. xi; note that, here, Vitz does not so much set these categories in opposition to one another as she aims to point out intersections between them). I acknowledge and indeed am convinced by the point Vitz makes when she says that “[w]e cannot [...] just study romances as though they were books intended for private readers” (*ib.*, p. xii). It would be, however, beyond the scope of this chapter to consider, in depth, how the encounters of Chrétien’s contemporaries with his characters would have diverged from encounters with them today.

Special Attention Given to the Presence of the Past),” both a definition of presence and a list of possible ways that language may convey it, I will begin by looking at his definition and his list, in order to try to discern whether either of them will help us to understand Chrétien. Here is Gumbrecht’s definition of presence:

Things can be ‘present’ or ‘absent’ to us, and if they are ‘present’ they are either closer to or farther away from our bodies. By calling them ‘present,’ then, in the very original sense of the Latin ‘prae-esse,’ we are saying that things are ‘in front’ of us and thereby tangible.

“There are no further implications,” he continues, “that I associate with this concept.”⁶⁷⁰

It seems, then, that, when Gumbrecht speaks of something being present to us, he means that it is present to us in the sense that the chair I am sitting on is present to me. If the title of his article itself seems to suggest that this is not quite the case (insofar as, if something is going to be present to us “in [l]anguage,” it seems that it is going to be present to us in a not-quite-tangible way), it is important to realize that Gumbrecht means exactly what he says. He is proposing that language does indeed put things in front of us, “that language may become [...] the medium of a proximity to the things of the world[.]”⁶⁷¹ It is this kind of presence, presence as physical proximity, that interests Gumbrecht in his article. Will such a definition of presence help us to understand the ways that Chrétien’s characters are present to each other through language, if, indeed, they are present to each other in this mode at all? Perhaps. I will note, simply, for now, though, that, on the face of it, language seems to make things or persons present to our minds more often than it does to our bodies. Gumbrecht does not mention mental

⁶⁷⁰ Gumbrecht, “Presence Achieved in Language (With Special Attention Given to the Presence of the Past),” p. 319. For a parallel passage, see Gumbrecht, *Production of Presence: What Meaning Cannot Convey*, p. 17.

⁶⁷¹ *Ib.*, p. 327.

presence as such, in his article, yet he comes close to mentioning it under other names, as when he mentions the relationship between “rhythmic language” and memory,⁶⁷² or the relationship between “mystical language” and “imagination.”⁶⁷³

As for Gumbrecht’s list of “seven types of ‘amalgamation’ between language and presence,”⁶⁷⁴ those that seem to me most relevant to a discussion of the characters in Chrétien’s romances are the two he calls “*language being open toward the world of things*”⁶⁷⁵ and “*language [that] make[s] the past tangibly present.*”⁶⁷⁶ The first of these types “includes texts that switch from the semiotic paradigm of representation to a deictic attitude where words are experienced as pointing to things rather than standing ‘for them.’” Even more interesting, “[n]ouns then turn into names [...] and become individually attached, for some time at least, with individual objects.”⁶⁷⁷ This concept, of nouns turning into names, may be helpful as I seek to discern how Chrétien’s characters are present to one another precisely through names, whether these are “given” names like Yvain and Lancelot, sobriquets like the *chevaliers au lion*, or simply deictic

⁶⁷² *Ib.*, p. 320.

⁶⁷³ *Ib.*, p. 321. I realize that, in using the word presence to describe not only literal, spatial presence, as Gumbrecht does, but also mental presence, I run the risk of making it mean too many different things, yet I am not sure that Gumbrecht himself manages to avoid ever using the term in the second sense (see his discussion of what happens when “a mostly spontaneous act of ‘presentification’ takes place *in the recipient’s psyche*,” “Presence Achieved in Language,” p. 325, my italics).

⁶⁷⁴ *Ib.*, p. 320.

⁶⁷⁵ *Ib.*, p. 322, Gumbrecht’s italics.

⁶⁷⁶ *Ib.*, p. 323, Gumbrecht’s italics.

⁶⁷⁷ *Ib.*, p. 322.

constructions like “[l]i vallez”⁶⁷⁸ or “cist chevaliers.”⁶⁷⁹ I will keep in mind, as I continue this chapter, the possibility that these kinds of references may have a special capacity to suggest the reality of that to which they refer.⁶⁸⁰ I will also return to the second type that I cited, above, which Gumbrecht also calls the “[p]resentification of the past.”⁶⁸¹ In describing this type, he writes that fragments of the past, in language,⁶⁸² “will only be registered as parts of a past made present if a mostly spontaneous act of ‘presentification’ takes place in the recipient’s psyche.”⁶⁸³ The converse of this is that the past may be

⁶⁷⁸ *Le Conte du Graal*, *passim*.

⁶⁷⁹ *Le Chevalier de la charrette*, v. 411 and v. 439. On Lancelot’s anonymity, see Ernst Soudek, “The Origin and Function of Lancelot’s Anonymity in Chrétien’s ‘Le Chevalier de la Charrette,’” *The South Central Bulletin* 30.4 (Winter 1970); Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner, *Shaping Romance: Interpretation, Truth, and Closure in Twelfth-Century French Fictions*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press (1993), pp. 70-77; Daniel Poirion, introduction to Chrétien, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Poirion et al., Paris: Gallimard (1994), p. xi; Debora B. Schwartz, “The Horseman Before the Cart: Intertextual Theory and the ‘Chevalier de la Charrette,’” *Arthuriana* 6.2, Chrétien’s ‘Knight of the Cart’ and Critical Theory (Summer 1996); Bruckner, “*Le Chevalier de la Charrette*: That Obscure Object of Desire, Lancelot,” in *A Companion to Chrétien de Troyes*, ed. Lacy and Grimberty, Rochester, NY: D.S. Brewer (2005), p. 142; and Rupert T. Pickens, “*Le Conte du Graal*: Chrétien’s Unfinished Last Romance,” in *A Companion to Chrétien de Troyes*, p. 169. Also relevant, although it does not confine itself to the *Charrette*, is Sarah E. Gordon, “The Man with No Name: Identity in French Arthurian Verse Romance,” *Arthuriana* 18.2, Lagniappe Festschrift in honor of Norris J. Lacy (Summer 2008). On the use of what Bruckner calls “circumlocutions” to refer to Lancelot in the *Charrette*, see *Shaping Romance*, p. 71, as well as Soudek, “The Origin and Function of Lancelot’s Anonymity in Chrétien’s ‘Le Chevalier de la Charrette,’” pp. 220-221, and Schwartz, “The Horseman Before the Cart,” esp. p. 17.

⁶⁸⁰ It may be that suggesting the reality of something through language is not very far removed from *representing* it through language (i.e. from mimesis). But see Eelco Runia on the difference between presenting something and representing it (“Presence,” *History and Theory* 45.1, 2006, pp. 1-29); interestingly, Runia mentions “the naming of names,” in monuments, as an example of what he calls “transfer of presence” (*ib.*, p. 17).

⁶⁸¹ *Ib.*, p. 323.

⁶⁸² One example he gives is “[t]he cadence of the Alexandrine, the predominant verse form of seventeenth-century French drama” (*ib.*, p. 325).

⁶⁸³ *Ib.*, p. 325.

made present to a person without his or her noticing it. If the personal act of presentification to that Gumbrecht describes is to occur, on the other hand, the person in question must recognize the past for what it is, distinguishing it from “the everyday average objects of perception to which [he or she is] exposed.”⁶⁸⁴ It will be part of the project of this chapter to investigate whether something similar may happen when a person who is absent is referred to, especially when such a reference is unexpected.⁶⁸⁵

I will treat spoken language in the first section of this chapter and written language in the second. As a hypothesis, setting out, I want to suggest that one function of language, as a medium of personal presence, might be to draw someone’s attention to characteristics of another person that have escaped his or her notice when this person was bodily present.⁶⁸⁶ What do I mean by this? Simply that the mere fact of another human being’s presence to us, in body, does not ensure that we recognize him or her as a person, first of all, and, second of all, that we recognize him or her as a *particular* person, distinguishable from other persons. That it is quite possible to see someone without actually allowing him or her to be fully present to us is clear from Arthur’s statement to Gauvain, in the *Conte du Graal*, after the *Orgueilleus de la Lande* has delivered news of the one who has defeated him in battle (*Conte*, vv. 3936-4019): “*Biaux niés, je ne lo conois mie / [...] et si l’ai veü,*” says the king, in reference to Perceval (vv. 4030-

⁶⁸⁴ *Ib.*, p. 325.

⁶⁸⁵ In seeking to pay particular attention to unexpected references, I am once again following Gumbrecht, who proposes, while discussing another example of presence in language—“*literature [as] the place of epiphany*” (Gumbrecht’s italics)—that “moments of epiphany [...] occur [...] under the specific temporal conditions that Karl Heinz Bohrer has characterized as those of ‘suddenness’ and ‘irreversible departure’” (*ib.*, p. 322).

⁶⁸⁶ It is possible that this may also be the effect of the media of presence studied in chapters two and three.

4031).⁶⁸⁷ Despite having seen Perceval in person, the king does not decide to set out in search of him until after his presence has been mediated through the *Orgueilleus de la Lande* (vv. 4067-4077). It seems to me that presence in language, even when the language in question belongs to someone who is not as straightforwardly a representative of another person as is the *Orgueilleus*,⁶⁸⁸ may, like the presence of Perceval through his rival, have effects of its own, effects distinct from those produced by overt bodily presence.

Spoken language

Although I have already explored, especially in chapter two, the ways that some of Chrétien's characters are made present through the language of others,⁶⁸⁹ I want to approach this problem again, here, from another angle. In the following section, instead of looking at how persons represent, more or less deliberately,⁶⁹⁰ other persons, I will instead look at how a person may become present through being spoken about—or even just mentioned in passing—by those whom it would be difficult to consider as her

⁶⁸⁷ “Dear nephew, I do not know him, yet I did see him[.]” Méla translates the two subsequent lines of the poem, “*Mais quant jo vi, tant ne m'en fu / Que rien nule li requēisse[...]*” (vv. 4032-4033), as follows: “[M]ais quand je le vis, je n'eus pas à coeur de lui demander quoi que ce fût” (Chrétien, *Romans*, Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1994, p. 1062).

⁶⁸⁸ See my discussion, in my second chapter, of Perceval's defeated opponents as his representatives to the court. Even the *Orgueilleus*'s representation of Perceval is not as straightforward as Laudine's messenger's representation of her mistress.

⁶⁸⁹ For example, I wrote about Laudine's presence in her messenger's language, and about Yvain's presence in Lunete's language.

⁶⁹⁰ For there are variations in the portrayed intentions of the representatives described in chapter two. Arthur's knights, as his representatives, are especially problematic, as it is unclear how often and to what degree they ought to be understood as acting on his behalf.

representatives. Although when we are thinking about presence in spoken language, this language will always be connected to a speaking body (or to speaking bodies) in particular, I will focus, here, on presence as it is conveyed by language itself, rather than on presence as conveyed through a specific person whose representation may be partly verbal. The character whose presence in this mode I have chosen to discuss is Perceval's mother.⁶⁹¹

First, though, I want to call attention, briefly, to the words of Guenièvre, near the beginning of the *Chevalier de la Charrette*, when she is about to be led away from the court by Keu: “*Ha ! amis, se le seüssiez, / Ja, ce croi, ne me lessissiez / Sans chalonge mener un pas!*” (vv. 209-211).⁶⁹² Scholars have noted that the manuscript tradition for the *Charrette* offers several variations for Guenièvre's speech, among them the words “*Ha rois,*” in B.N. fr. 794,⁶⁹³ the manuscript attributed to the scribe Guiot, instead of “*Ha*

⁶⁹¹ I am encouraged in my choice by some words from Bruckner: “Perceval and the reader,” she writes, “need to ask a lot more questions not only about different *semblances* of the same person but the different, contradictory roles of the female person, as she appears in relation to the individual, the family and society, in the romance text as in the world of authors and readers” (“Rewriting Chrétien's Conte du graal: Mothers and Sons: Questions, Contradictions, and Connections,” in *The Medieval Opus: Imitation, Rewriting, and Transmission in the French Tradition*, ed. Douglas Kelly, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996, pp. 238-239). My own examination of the presence of Perceval's mother, here, deals more with what Bruckner calls “different *semblances* of the same person” than with what she calls “the different, contradictory roles of the female person.”

⁶⁹² “Ah, friend, if you knew this, never, I believe, would you let me be led off one step without challenge!” (my translation, which I have compared to that of Méla; see Chrétien, *Romans*, pp. 506-507).

⁶⁹³ See Méla's critical apparatus in Chrétien, *Romans*, at the bottom of page 506. See also Alfred Foulet, “Guenevere's Enigmatic Words: Chrétien's *Lancelot*, vv. 211-213,” in *Jean Misrahi Memorial Volume: Studies in Medieval Literature*, ed. Hans R. Runte et al., Columbia, SC: French Literature Publications Company (1977), pp. 175-176 (note that the verse numbers cited in the title of Foulet's article refer to Wendelin Foerster's edition of the romance, whereas I use Méla's edition); and Per Nykrog, *Chrétien de Troyes: Romancier discutabile*, Geneva: Librairie Droz (1996), footnote 14 on p. 120. I am grateful to Karl Uitti and Alfred Foulet for the

! amis.” In his edition of the *Charrette*, based mainly on Guiot’s manuscript, Charles Méla chooses to substitute the reading of “*Ha ! amis,*” from Chantilly, Condé 472, and makes a couple of suggestions as to the origins of the “*Ha rois*” reading, one of which is that it is a correction, presumably on the part of the scribe, for “*l’inattendu Ha amis ou plus probablement Amis se vos le s.*”⁶⁹⁴ In other words, the scribe, seeing Guenièvre’s mention of an *amis* and not understanding to whom she could be speaking, would have substituted a reference to the king instead.⁶⁹⁵ Various critics have argued for Lancelot’s presence in verse 209.⁶⁹⁶ Distancing herself a bit from this controversy, Virginie Greene

mention of Foulet’s article in their “On Editing Chrétien de Troyes: Lancelot’s Two Steps and Their Context,” *Speculum* 63.2 (April 1988), footnote 6 on p. 272.

⁶⁹⁴ Chrétien, *Romans*, note on bottom of page 506 (Méla’s italics).

⁶⁹⁵ Wendelin Foerster’s 1899 edition of the *Charrette*, as reprinted by Rodopi in 1965, has “*Ha ! ha!* [...],” and not “*Ha ! amis,*” although both “*Ha rois*” and “*Ha amis*” are noted in the critical apparatus; see Christian von Troyes, *Der Karrenritter (Lancelot) und Das Wilhelmsleben (Guillaume d’Angleterre)*, Amsterdam: Rodopi (1965), p. 7. Foulet’s and Uitti’s edition of the romance, although based on Guiot, corrects “*Ha rois*” to “*Ha ! ha!*” (*Le Chevalier de la Charrette [Lancelot]*, ed. Foulet and Uitti, Paris: Bordas, 1989, p. 14; see also p. 401), while Daniel Poirion’s edition, also based on Guiot, substitutes “*Ha ! amis*” (Chrétien, *Oeuvres complètes*, p. 512). Note that it is possible to see images of the extant manuscripts containing this line on Princeton’s *Charrette Project* website (for which, go to <http://www.princeton.edu/~lancelot/ss/>).

⁶⁹⁶ Virginie Greene attributes such an interpretation to Alfred Foulet and Karl Uitti; her reference (“Imagination,” in *Thinking Through Chrétien de Troyes*, Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2011, p. 57) is to a footnote on page 15 of Foulet’s and Uitti’s edition of *Le Chevalier de la Charrette (Lancelot)*. See also the following note to Poirion’s edition of the *Charrette* in Chrétien, *Oeuvres complètes* (ed. Poirion et al): “Qu[e] [Guenièvre] pense à son ami, qui ne peut être que Lancelot, et fasse secrètement appel à lui, est [...] en accord avec ce que l’on pourra savoir par la suite de ses secrètes pensées à l’égard de son ami, et avec l’arrivée de celui-ci au cours de la scène suivante” (note on page 1258); Antoinette Saly, “Motifs folkloriques dans le *Lancelot* de Chrétien de Troyes,” in Saly, *Image, Structure et Sens : Études arthuriennes*, Aix-en-Provence, France: Publications du CUER MA (1994), p. 33 and pp. 36-43; and Peter F. Dembowski, “The *Sens* of the *Charrette*: A General Introduction to the *Charrette* Poem and its Significance,” in *Dame Philology’s Charrette: Approaching Medieval Textuality through Chrétien’s Lancelot: Essays in Memory of Karl D. Uitti*, ed. Greco and Thorington, Tempe: ACMRS (2012), pp. 12-13, as well as footnote on p. 5. For a similar argument, which relies, however, on a reading of verse 209 as “*Ha! Ha! se vos ce sëussiez,*” see K. Sarah-Jane Murray, *From Plato to Lancelot: A Preface to Chrétien de Troyes*, Syracuse: Syracuse University Press,

writes, “Most contemporary editors and readers find the version given by [the Chantilly manuscript] the most satisfying of all since it establishes a pre-history for the love-affair between the queen and the knight (if we grant that ‘friend’ cannot be none other [*sic*] than the knight on the exhausted horse).”⁶⁹⁷ Even if we do accept “*Ha ! amis*” as the preferred reading for the beginning of verse 209, Guenièvre’s words are still moderately mysterious, given that she does not call this *amis* by name. Does Count Guinables, who overhears her speaking (vv. 213-214), know the identity of the person whom she addresses? Does he believe this person to be Lancelot? Or someone else? We do not know, even though it is tempting to think, as some critics have suggested more or less tentatively, that it is through Count Guinables that Lancelot learns of the queen’s possible need for a rescuer.⁶⁹⁸

The interpretation of the *amis* as Lancelot certainly makes sense in the context of the romance as a whole (even if to adopt it means to engage in what Greene calls “a retroactive reading”⁶⁹⁹). Guenièvre’s words reveal her *amis* to be present in her own mind (*ce croi*, v. 210), at the same time that they mourn, explicitly, his unawareness of

2008, pp. 241-242 (my thanks go to Greene, for citing Murray, *From Plato to Lancelot*, p. 242, in “Imagination,” *Thinking Through Chrétien de Troyes*, p. 58). Both Dembowski and Murray use Foulet’s and Uitti’s 1989 edition of the *Charrette*.

⁶⁹⁷ Greene, “Imagination,” in *Thinking Through Chrétien de Troyes*, p. 58.

⁶⁹⁸ See, for instance, Foulet, “Guenevere’s Enigmatic Words,” p. 179; Uitti and Foulet, *Le Chevalier de la Charrette (Lancelot)*, note on p. 15; Greene, “Imagination,” in *Thinking Through Chrétien de Troyes*, p. 59; Poirion, note 1 for p. 512 in Chrétien, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Poirion et al., pp. 1258-1259. Saly offers another possibility (“Motifs folkloriques dans le *Lancelot* de Chrétien de Troyes,” in Saly, *Image, Structure et Sens : Études arthuriennes*, pp. 36-43).

⁶⁹⁹ Greene, “Imagination,” in *Thinking Through Chrétien de Troyes*, p. 57.

her plight (v. 209)⁷⁰⁰ and, implicitly, his bodily absence.⁷⁰¹ In employing the imperfect subjunctive (*seüssiez*, *lessissiez*), the queen clearly situates her remark as an expression of regret for an alternate reality that has not in fact come about—the *amis*, whoever he may be, does not in fact know (*seüssiez*), presumably, about her forced departure with Keu.⁷⁰² Yet these words also leave open the possibility, and indeed the probability, that if, at some later date, the *amis* does find out about this, he will do his best to make up for his earlier ignorance. Her *amis* is thus present to her through memory, I would suggest, as a particular person who, under the right conditions, would care for her bodily welfare.⁷⁰³

And through her words, he becomes potentially present to Count Guinables under this

⁷⁰⁰ The manuscript tradition for the second part of verse 209 is unstable, too; see Greene, who notes that “[manuscript] *E* has [...] ‘if you had believed me’ (*se me creussiez*) while *T* and *G* have ‘if you had known this’ (*se vos le seussiez*)” (“Imagination,” in *Thinking Through Chrétien de Troyes*, p. 57). The spelling in *G* seems to be *seuscies* (I base this on the transcription offered on Princeton’s Charrette Project website, where it is also possible to look at an image of this page of the manuscript itself). Manuscripts *A* (Chantilly, Condé 472) and *C* (Guiot) have *seussiez*, as well (see manuscript images and transcriptions on Princeton’s Charrette Project website).

⁷⁰¹ Why would the *amis* be unaware of what is happening to the queen, unless he is not present to witness it? Such an interpretation, on my part, does depend, admittedly, on an understanding of the pronoun *le* (as per manuscripts *A*, *G*, and *T*), or *ce* (as per manuscript *C*), in verse 209 (see manuscript images and transcriptions on Princeton’s Charrette Project website), as referring to the queen’s predicament.

⁷⁰² I owe my identification of this tense to Mireille Huchon (see *Histoire de la langue française*, Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 2002, p. 108). Méla translates the queen’s remark as “Ami, vous, si vous le saviez, jamais, j’en suis sûre, vous ne me laisseriez, sans vous y opposer, emmener d’un seul pas!” (Chrétien, *Romans*, pp. 506-507). On the use of the imperfect subjunctive in the *Vie de saint Alexis*, see Peter Haidu, “Temps, histoire, subjectivité au XIe et XIIe siècles,” in *Le Nombre du temps : en hommage à Paul Zumthor*, Paris: Champion (1988), p. 113.

⁷⁰³ My suggestion that her *amis* is present to her through memory is similar but slightly different from Greene’s statement that “[t]he queen imagines a rescuer, whether she has met him before or is making a wish” (“Imagination,” in *Thinking Through Chrétien de Troyes*, p. 59). If we accept the Chantilly manuscript’s *Ha! amis* (which, granted, is far from being the only available reading), it seems reasonable to deduce that Guenièvre is speaking to a person with whom she is already acquainted.

identity, as well—note that this is possible regardless of whether Count Guinables has ever heard of the *amis* in question, or is able to name him.

It will perhaps be helpful to remember the foregoing example, from the *Charrette*, of mental presence communicated in language, as we turn our attention to Perceval's mother. The woman whom the *Conte du Graal*'s narrator calls the "[...] *veve dame / De la gaste forest soutaine*" (vv. 72-73) is, unlike his father, very much present in body to Perceval himself in the romance.⁷⁰⁴ She runs to meet him when he returns from his seminal encounter with the knights (*Conte*, v. 346), she faints at hearing him speak of "[c]hevalier" (vv. 374-376), and she attempts to prepare him, both physically and morally, for his departure from home (vv. 462-469;⁷⁰⁵ vv. 491-558; vv. 572-575). After this departure, she makes no further bodily appearance in the story. The last glimpse we have of her is when Perceval is riding away, turns back, "[...] *et voit chaüe / Sa mere au chief do pont arriere, / Et gist pasmee an tel meniere / Con c'ele fust chaüe morte*" (vv. 586-589).⁷⁰⁶ Yet we have certainly not heard the last of her. As Matilda Tomaryn

⁷⁰⁴ "[W]idowed lady of the remote Desolate Forest[.]" On the absence of Perceval's father, see Irit Ruth Kleiman, "X Marks the Spot: The Place of the Father in Chrétien de Troyes's *Conte du Graal*," *Modern Language Review* 103.4 (2008).

⁷⁰⁵ For my understanding of the preceding verse, verse 461, I am indebted to Méla, who translates the verbe *sejorne*, as "faire rester" (Chrétien, *Romans*, p. 957), and to Godefroy, who uses this verse from the *Conte*, in his dictionary, as an example of how *sojerner* may be used in the sense of the Modern French "[r]etenir, retarder."

⁷⁰⁶ "[A]nd saw that his mother had fallen unconscious at the end of the bridge, lying as if she had dropped dead." We never really *see* her, as readers, of course. I am making a distinction between her presence at the level of the principal narrative, and her presence in reported speech and thought.

Bruckner writes, “If the mother’s presence in the narrative is short, her absence remains present throughout Perceval’s adventures.”⁷⁰⁷

Might the mentions made of Perceval’s mother, in the parts of the *Conte* where she is bodily absent to her son, turn out to be similar, in some way, to the queen’s mention of her *amis* in the *Charrette*?⁷⁰⁸ I will keep this question in mind as I continue. We may note, first of all, that Perceval’s mother is already present, in the story, through the remarks of the narrator (vv. 72-73; v. 78; v. 80; v. 152; vv. 313-316) as well as through Perceval’s own remarks (vv. 110-114; vv. 136-139; vv. 144-146; vv. 294-295), before she is present in body beginning in verse 340. Focusing our attention on what Perceval says about her before he begins to speak to one of the knights, we see that she has taught him both how he ought to understand the world (vv. 110-112; vv. 136-139) and how he ought to behave in the world (vv. 113-114; vv. 144-146). What is interesting about Perceval’s remarks, here, is, first, that he is not describing his mother so much as he is citing, or reciting, her teaching—teaching that he has so internalized as to let it shape how he interprets these beings, *chevalier*, of whom he has no previous knowledge

⁷⁰⁷ Bruckner, “Rewriting Chrétien’s Conte du graal: Mothers and Sons: Questions, Contradictions, and Connections,” in *The Medieval Opus: Imitation, Rewriting, and Transmission in the French Tradition*, p. 225. In fact, for Bruckner, this “absence [...] casts its spell on Gauvain’s [adventures] as well” (*ib.*, p. 225).

⁷⁰⁸ For work on Perceval’s mother, see Bruckner, “Rewriting Chrétien’s Conte du graal: Mothers and Sons: Questions, Contradictions, and Connections,” in *The Medieval Opus: Imitation, Rewriting, and Transmission in the French Tradition*; Debora B. Schwartz, “‘A la guise de Gales l’atorna:’ Maternal Influence in Chrétien’s *Conte du Graal*,” *Essays in Medieval Studies*, 12 (1996), article published online at <http://www.illinoismedieval.org/ems/VOL12/schwartz.html>; Ewa Słojka, “Escape from Paradox: Perceval’s Upbringing in the ‘Conte du Graal,’” *Arthuriana* 18.4, In Memoriam: Elisabeth Brewer, Derek Brewer (Winter 2008). I am indebted to Pickens for his reference to Schwartz’s article (see Pickens, “*Le Conte du Graal*: Chrétien’s Unfinished Last Romance,” *A Companion to Chrétien de Troyes*, footnote 24 on p. 178). Bruckner’s and Schwartz’s pieces were published in the same year.

(v. 170)⁷⁰⁹—and, second, that he is speaking only to himself.⁷¹⁰ His words about devils, about angels, and about God, are his own words, but they were presumably his mother’s words before they were his. At this stage, Perceval’s mother is present to her son through her own words in regards to the supernatural world and the proper human reaction to it. In repeating his mother’s words (whether silently or aloud), Perceval reinforces their presence—and hers—in his own memory.⁷¹¹

It will not be the last time, in the *Conte*, that he does such a thing. For after Perceval leaves home in search of Arthur, his mother belongs to his past. If she is going to be present to him henceforth, she is going to be present to him, surely, through memory—through memory as a human faculty, as well as through particular memories that this faculty has stored, and that may be brought out of storage, so to speak, whether by Perceval himself or by someone else.⁷¹² In an article on “Amour et oubli dans les romans de Chrétien de Troyes,” Jacques Ribard claims that “l’homme apparaît dans les oeuvres médiévales qui nous intéressent ici [...] comme continuellement menacé par cet

⁷⁰⁹ Cf his failure to internalize the Tent Maiden’s words: “*Li vallez a son cuer ne met / Rien nule de ce que il oï*” (“The youth took to heart nothing he heard[.]” *Conte*, vv. 696-697). On the other hand, we may note his successful internalization of Gornemant’s words, later on (vv. 3184-3185); again, it is Perceval’s heart (*cuer*, v. 3184) that is in question.

⁷¹⁰ Later on he will speak of her—this time as a landowner (v. 295) and employer of *ercheor* (v. 294; according to Greimas’s dictionary, an *herceor* is a “[g]arçon qui conduit la herse”)—to a third party, the knight with whom he is conversing (vv. 294-295).

⁷¹¹ On the place given to memorization in Bernard of Chartres’s method of teaching, see John of Salisbury, *Metalogicon* I.24 (for an English translation, see John of Salisbury, *Metalogicon*, trans. J. B. Hall, Turnhout: Brepols, 2013, p. 175 and p. 177).

⁷¹² John of Salisbury refers to “the guardroom and treasury of the memory” (“*custodia et thesauro memoriae*,” *Metalogicon* I.11, ed. J. B. Hall, Turnhout: Brepols, 1991, p. 29; Eng. trans. Hall, p. 146).

oubli qui est l'expression même de son échec et de son impuissance."⁷¹³ If he is right about this, then it should not surprise us to see Perceval "allant d'oubli en oubli tout au long du *Conte du Graal*."⁷¹⁴ However, I want to suggest (and I do not believe I am all that much at odds, here, with Ribard, unless it is in taking a stance that is slightly less fatalistic than his, vis-à-vis the battle between forgetfulness and love in the *Conte*⁷¹⁵) that Perceval not only goes from "oubli" to "oubli," in this story, but also from memory to memory.⁷¹⁶ In the following remarks on Perceval's mother, I will first follow his story chronologically,⁷¹⁷ but will then take a step back in order to consider this story as a whole, and the place that his memory of his mother occupies within it.

I begin, then, with Perceval's mother as she is present beginning with his first mention of her since leaving her behind (*Conte*, v. 622), and ending with the last time that he cites her as an authority, in the naïve fashion discouraged by Gornemant (v. 1632). In my analysis of this "first stage" of her presence, I will leave out Perceval's words to Gornemant in verses 1538 through 1550, as I contend that with them, there

⁷¹³ Ribard, "Amour et oubli dans les romans de Chrétien de Troyes," in *Amour et chevalerie dans les romans de Chrétien de Troyes*, Paris: Les Belles Lettres (1995).

⁷¹⁴ Ribard uses these words in reference to Perceval as he is described on pages 125 and 126 of Douglas Kelly's article, "Le lieu du temps, le temps du lieu," in *Le Nombre du temps : en hommage à Paul Zumthor*, Paris: Champion (1988); Ribard cites these pages in "Amour et oubli" (note 6 on p. 90). I am indebted to Ribard for the reference to Kelly's article, which discusses helpfully Chrétien's use of "le topos du temps" ("Le lieu du temps, le temps du lieu," p. 123).

⁷¹⁵ See Ribard, "Amour et oubli," pp. 88-91.

⁷¹⁶ Cf Peggy McCracken, "Forgetting to Conclude," in *Thinking through Chrétien de Troyes*, p. 139 and pp. 144-161.

⁷¹⁷ In referring to Perceval's "story," I am referring to those portions of the *Conte* that follow him (verses 1-4676 and verses 6143-6438), as opposed to those that follow Gauvain (verses 4677-6142 and verses 6439-9067).

commences, in some sense, a second stage, at least when it comes to Perceval's mother's presence to him, a second stage that overlaps with the first. I intend to analyze this second stage, below. As was already true during Perceval's conversation with the knight in the forest, his mother tends to be present to his thoughts, during this first stage, both in association with material things and through his literal interpretations of her teaching. As evidence of her presence in his memory as connected to material things, we may cite his references to her house, when he is speaking to the Tent Maiden (*la maison ma mere*, v. 689) and to Gornemant (*la maison ma mere*, v. 1337; [*c*]hiés *ma mere*, v. 1491), as well as his explanations, to Ivonez⁷¹⁸ and to Gornemant, that she has made his clothes (vv. 1114-1116; vv. 1569-1570).⁷¹⁹ Just as Perceval will interpret literally his mother's advice to him, so his memories of her are closely wrapped up with the literal, historical details of his upbringing—her *chanberiere* (v. 688), his *chaceor* (v. 1336), and the *borrés* and *talevaz* with which he practiced using a sword (v. 1490).⁷²⁰

⁷¹⁸ This character's name is also spelled *Yonez* (for example, in verse 1100) and *Ionez* (for example, in verse 1167).

⁷¹⁹ Perceval speaks of "*mes bons dras*" in verse 1114 and of "[*l*]i *drap que ma mere me fist*" in verse 1569; Godefroy's definition of *drap* is "vêtement, habit." As for *fist*, it is, it would seem, the third person singular form, in the perfect tense, of *faire* (see Van Daele for this conjugation, and Huchon, *Histoire de la langue française*, pp. 103-104, for an example of a similar conjugation).

⁷²⁰ According to Godefroy, a *chaceor* is a "cheval de course, cheval de chasse," and a *talevas* is a "sorte de bouclier qui était surtout destiné à garantir contre les flèches des archers et des arbalétriers," while, according to Greimas, a *chanberiere* is a "[c]hambrière, femme de chambre," and a *borrel* is, among other things, a "[b]ourrelet que les chevaliers portaient sur leur casque," and a "[g]arniture rembourrée pour protéger les escrimeurs." It seems to me, based on definitions, in *Le Nouveau Petit Robert 2009*, of BOURRELET, GARNITURE, BOURRER, BOURRE, ESCRIMEUR, ESCRIME, and ESCRIMER (S') that the *borrés* in question, here, could correspond to either of these two definitions from Greimas (Paul Robert, *Le Nouveau Petit Robert 2009*, ed. Josette Rey-Debove and Alain Rey, Paris: Le Robert, 2009). Méla translates verses 1490 through 1492 as "car je n'ai pas manqué, chez ma mère, de plastrons et de gros boucliers contre quoi m'exercer, jusqu'à en être recru de fatigue" (Chrétien, *Romans*, p. 988);

During this same part of the poem (vv. 622-1632), Perceval's mother is also present to his memory, of course, as a teacher. When Perceval arrives at Gornemant's castle, the narrator tells us—not, perhaps, without irony—that the young man “[...] *ot bien retenu / Ce que sa mere li aprist*” (vv. 1308-1309),⁷²¹ thus implying that, at this stage at any rate, he has a good memory. This is all the more apparent in Perceval's habit of reciting, with variations, what his mother has said to him. Many (although not all⁷²²) of his references to her teaching or example occur when he is talking to other human beings, specifically the Tent Maiden and Gornemant. He assures the Tent Maiden that it is in keeping with his mother's counsel for him to greet her (vv. 646-650), kiss her (vv. 657-659), and take her ring from her (vv. 676-678). In speaking to Gornemant, too, he refers multiple times to his mother's teaching (vv. 1310-1311; vv. 1350-1354; vv. 1499-1504), and at least once to her example (vv. 1630-1632).

Beginning in verse 1538, however, Perceval's mother begins to be present to him in a new way (the “second stage” that I mentioned, earlier), as he acknowledges for the first time that she may be dead, and expresses his desire to see her.⁷²³ Although

elsewhere he speaks of “coussins” and “planches” (Méla, *Blanchefleur et le saint homme ou la semblance des reliques*, Paris: Seuil, 1979, p. 30).

⁷²¹ “[R]emembered his mother's teaching[.]”

⁷²² See his words in vv. 622-625, when he is approaching the Tent Maiden's tent. Although vv. 619-621 are apparently directed to God, it seems to me that, in v. 622, Perceval begins to address himself.

⁷²³ Antoinette Saly suggests that Perceval's “premier itinéraire,” up to and including the segment of the story that takes place at Bel Repaire, “est un circuit fermé qui doit le ramener à sa mère,” and that “c'est dans cette perspective qu'il presse Arthur de l'adouber, qu'il quitte Gornemant de Goort, qu'il quitte Blanchefleur” (Saly, “L'itinéraire intérieur dans le *Perceval* de Chrétien de Troyes et la structure de la quête de Gauvain,” in *Voyage, quête, pèlerinage dans la littérature et la civilisation médiévales ; actes du colloque organisé par le C.U.E.R. M.A.*, Aix-en-Provence: Edition CUER MA, 1976, p. 356). As regards Perceval's departure from Gornemant and from Blanchefleur, I agree with Saly; it is not clear to me from the text, however, that

Gornemant wishes to continue teaching him, Perceval—surprisingly, for up to this point he has shown no sign that he is aware of the possible gravity of his mother’s condition—explains that he cannot stay, and that this is because of her:

*‘Sire, ne sai se je sui pres
Do menoir ou ma mere esta,
Mais je pri Deu qu’i[l] me maint la
Tant qu’ancor la paise veoir,
Que pasmee la vi cheoir
El pié do pont devant la porte,
Si ne sai s’ele est vive ou morte.
De doel de moi quant la laisai,
Chai pasmee, bien lo sai,
Et por ce ne porroit pas estre,
Tant que je saüse son estre,
Que je feüsse lonc sejour,
Ainz m’en irai demain au jor.’ (vv. 1538-1550)⁷²⁴*

“Il est remarquable,” writes Méla, “que Perceval s’inquiète enfin d’avoir vu tomber sa mère, le jour où il se dépouille de simplicité.”⁷²⁵ In attributing his mother’s fainting to her *doel* (v. 1545),⁷²⁶ Perceval first shows an ability to imagine that other people may

Perceval’s hope to return home is already formed as early on as his visit to Arthur’s court (*Conte*, vv. 856-1022). I am indebted to Mimi Zhou for the reference to Saly’s article (see Zhou, “Le Senestre Chemin’: Aporia, Paradox, and the Ritual Act of the Search in Chretien [sic] de Troyes’ Conte du Graal,” *UCB Comparative Literature Undergraduate Journal* 2.3, Summer 2012, note 14).

⁷²⁴ “Sir, [...] I don’t know if I am near the manorhouse where my mother lives, yet I pray God that He guide me to her and that I see her again. I saw her fall unconscious at the end of the bridge before her gate. I don’t know if she is living or dead. When I left her, she fell unconscious out of grief for me, I realize that. And so it would be impossible for me to stay here long without knowing her condition. No, I shall set off tomorrow at dawn.”

⁷²⁵ Méla, *Blanchefleur et le saint homme ou la semblance des reliques: Étude comparée de littérature médiévale*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil (1979), p. 30.

⁷²⁶ His interpretation will be echoed later by the hermit, who speaks to Perceval of “[...] *li diels que ta mere ot / De toi, quant tu partis de li, / Que pasmee a terre chai*” (“the grief you caused your mother when you left her. She fell to the ground unconscious[.]” vv. 6320-6322).

have emotions and desires of their own,⁷²⁷ that they may possess a kind of interiority.⁷²⁸

With this new awareness—this new arrival of his mother in his memory not simply as she was in the past (vv. 1542-1543) but also *as she may be in the present* (v. 1544; v. 1548)—there comes an awareness, too, of his responsibility to her. “[...] [*P*]or *ce ne porroit pas estre, / Tant que je saïse son estre, / Que je feïsse lonc sejour*” (v. 1547-1549), says Perceval—the necessity of his departure is due not to physical constraints but to ethical ones.⁷²⁹ Rather than being present to his memory and mind only as source of clothes and advice, his mother is, all of a sudden, present to him as someone to whom he may owe something in return. In other words, she has begun to be present to him as a person.

⁷²⁷ Unless, perhaps, one counts his promise that he will avenge the injury Keu has done to the *pucele* at Arthur’s court as evidence of such imagination on Perceval’s part (see vv. 1149-1153; I owe my understanding of v. 1152 to Méla’s translation in *Romans*, p. 977).

⁷²⁸ By referring to Perceval’s ability to imagine, I am referring to the mental faculty that, according to John of Salisbury, “looks not only on that which is present but also on that which is absent whether in place or in time” (“*et non modo praesentia sed et absentia loco quidem uel tempore [...] intuetur*,” *Metalogicon* IV.10, ed. Hall; Eng. trans. Hall, p. 298). As for interiority, I am using the term to refer to a given character’s particular emotions, intellect, and will (on the importance of the will in post-Augustinian thought, see Alan Jacobs, *A Theology of Reading: The Hermeneutics of Love*, Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2001, pp. 45-48). Helpful for thinking about medieval interiority and the related issue of the individual are Caroline Walker Bynum, “Did the Twelfth Century Discover the Individual?” in *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages*, Berkeley: University of California Press (1982), pp. 82-109; Brigitte Miriam Bedos-Rezak, “Medieval Identity: A Sign and a Concept,” in *The American Historical Review* 105.5 (December 2000), pp. 1489-1533; and Ienje van ‘t Spijker, introduction to *Fictions of the Inner Life: Religious Literature and Formation of the Self in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*, Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, (2004), pp. 1-17.

⁷²⁹ “[S]o it would be impossible for me to stay here long without knowing her condition.” Staines’s translation, which I cite here, has possibly been helpful to my understanding of verse 1547. It would seem that *estre* is being used, in verse 1548, to mean “manière d’être, genre de vie, condition,” which are among the definitions proposed in Godefroy. Méla seems to connect Perceval’s “[...]entrée dans la moralité” to his being knighted by Gornemant (*Blanchefleur et le saint homme ou la semblance des reliques*, p. 30); see also Schwartz, “‘A la guise de Gales l’atorna:’ Maternal Influence in Chrétien’s *Conte du Graal*,” pp. 8-9 (my page numbers are taken from the online edition of this article).

This “new way” of his mother being present to him does not, in and of itself, cancel out the old way; yet the old way is soon to disappear, for another reason. For it is in verse 1632, only shortly after Perceval’s announcement that he must attempt to find his mother (vv. 1538-1550), that he appeals once again to her authority, as is his wont—and is rebuked for this by Gornemant, who explains that, if he continues to say such things, “[a] folie lo tanroit an” (v. 1641).⁷³⁰ Indeed, there is an interesting progression in the remarks that Gornemant makes on the subject of Perceval’s mother, whom, it seems, he does not know. At first he blesses her for teaching Perceval well (vv. 1356-1357); then he asks Perceval to believe “[l]o conseil vostre mere et moi” (v. 1365); finally he advises Perceval not to attribute what he knows to his mother’s teaching (vv. 1633-1642). Critics have remarked that it is Gornemant’s warning against talking too much, as interpreted (or is it misinterpreted?) by Perceval, that later persuades the young man not to ask questions at the Fisher King’s house, and this is true.⁷³¹ Yet I want to suggest that Gornemant does him another disservice in discouraging him from referring to his mother as his teacher.⁷³²

⁷³⁰ “[P]eople would consider you foolish.”

⁷³¹ See, for example, Pickens, “*Le Conte du Graal*: Chrétien’s Unfinished Last Romance,” *A Companion to Chrétien de Troyes*, p. 173, as well as p. 176, where he writes that “Perceval’s acquisition of chivalric manners leads to his failures at the Grail Castle;” see also Nykrog, *Chrétien de Troyes: Romancier discutabile*, p. 192.

⁷³² I agree with Pickens, here: “[W]hen Gornemant knights Perceval, his ‘parole’ [...] replaces that of Perceval’s mother” (*A Companion to Chrétien de Troyes*, p. 181. Pickens also refers to “[s]ubstitution of Gornemant de Gorhaut for [Perceval’s] mother” (*ib.*, p. 181). See, too, Ann McCullough, who writes, “Perceval kills his mother metaphorically by forgetting her and by erasing/muting her voice” (McCullough, “Criminal Naivety: Blind Resistance and the Pain of Knowing in Chrétien de Troyes’s ‘Conte du Graal,’” *The Modern Language Review* 101.1, January 2006, p. 56; see also pp. 60-61); Schwartz, “‘A la guise de Gales l’atorna:’ Maternal Influence in Chrétien’s *Conte du Graal*,” pp. 7-8 (article cited in footnote 24 of Pickens, “*Le Conte du Graal*: Chrétien’s Unfinished Last Romance,” *A Companion to Chrétien de Troyes*, p. 178); and Barbara N. Sargent-Baur, *La Destre et la senestre: Étude sur le Conte du Graal de Chrétien de Troyes*, Amsterdam: Rodopi (2000), p. 63.

For even though, as we will see, Perceval will continue to remember her after his visit to Gornemant, she may not be as likely to remain in his memory as she was before.

“[L]’Oubli est toujours là, insidieusement tapi dans le temps rongeur où s’inscrit le créé et donc la créature,” says Ribard, and if we see Perceval’s “citing” of his mother as a sort of ritual by which she is kept present to his memory, his abandonment of this ritual suggests that it may be only a matter of time before he forgets her.⁷³³

That said, for a while, after this, Perceval’s desire to see his mother seems actually to be growing stronger. Although he is given the opportunity to take possession of Blanchefleur’s land (vv. 2850-2856), the narrator tells us that “[...] *de sa mere li sovient*” (v. 2858),⁷³⁴ and that his desire to go see her is “[*p*]lus grant que de nule autre chose” (v. 2861).⁷³⁵ In keeping with his “second stage” of remembering, begun at Gornemant’s castle, Perceval speaks again, twice, of the possibility that she may be dead (v. 2872; vv. 2902-2909); however, he makes it clear, as well, that he will return to Bel Repaire whether she is dead or alive (vv. 2868-2872). His desire to find her is still apparent, after he has ridden away:

*Et il ne fine de prier
Damedé lo souverain pere
Qu’il li donast trover sa mere
Plaine de vie et de santé, (vv. 2918-2921)⁷³⁶*

⁷³³ Ribard, “Amour et oubli,” p. 91.

⁷³⁴ “[H]e remembered his mother[.]”

⁷³⁵ “[Greater] than [for] anything else” (I have made two changes to Staines’s translation, substituting “[g]reater” for “more,” and adding the word “for”). Méla’s translation has helped me to understand these verses (Chrétien, *Romans*, p. 1027). On Perceval’s apparent sense of “devoir,” here, see Méla, *Blanchefleur et le saint homme ou la semblance des reliques*, pp. 31-32.

⁷³⁶ “He did not cease praying to [God, the Sovereign Father], that He grant him the [finding] of his mother[, full of life and health]” (I have modified Staines’s translation, here; for the variant that Staines seems to have translated, see Chrétien, *Le Roman de Perceval ou Le*

It is unclear whether Perceval's prayer is spoken aloud; yet in any case we are dealing with a sort of speech (whether internal or voiced), which, even if it does not immediately render Perceval's mother present to him in body, nevertheless seeks this presence as its aim. It is not only through searching, but also through prayer, that Perceval makes an effort to be reunited with his mother. That he is not necessarily thereby making God Himself a means to an end is made clear by his qualification in verse 2922, which Méla translates as "si c'est Sa volonté."⁷³⁷ A few verses later, his mother's presence to his mind still appears to be strong, as he expresses his conviction that, were he to cross over the river at which he has arrived, he would find her, "[...] s'ele estoit vive" (v. 2931).⁷³⁸ And yet—*sauf erreur de ma part*—this is the last time, in the *Conte*, that Perceval will mention his mother without doing so in response to someone else's mention of her in conversation.

How ought we to understand this? The poem does not give us an explicit answer to this question, but it does give us hints. We are never told that, at the house of the Fisher King, Perceval ever remembers either his mother or her words. It is as if she has disappeared not only from his physical surroundings (as indeed she did much earlier in the romance), but also from his consciousness. He remembers quite well Gornemant's words concerning the possibility of talking too much (vv. 3144-3150; vv. 3182-3185).⁷³⁹

Conte du Graal: Édition critique d'après tous les manuscrits, ed. Keith Busby, Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1993, p. 126).

⁷³⁷ Chrétien, *Romans*, p. 1029.

⁷³⁸ "[I]f she were alive" (my translation, although I have consulted Staines's).

⁷³⁹ I see verses 3186 through 3189 as giving us the narrator's commentary on Perceval's decision not to speak; see the discussion in my previous chapter.

vv. 3232-3235), while one piece of his mother's advice that might have been particularly helpful, the advice that he ought to ask the name of any longtime *compaignon* (vv. 523-525), is simply neglected; had he followed it, he might at least have learned more about his host (if not the person being served by the *graal*). And while we might expect him, as he leaves the Fisher King's house, to return to his search for his mother, he does not, at that point, have in mind seemingly either his mother or his *amie* (to whom, recall, he has promised, in verses 2867-2874, to return⁷⁴⁰). From now on, it is through the words of others that his mother will be brought back into his story.⁷⁴¹

The first of these other persons is the *pucele* he meets after his stay with the Fisher King, and who explains to him that there is a connection between the adventure he has just had and what she calls “*lo pechié [...] [d]e ta mere*” (vv. 3531-3532) as well as that his mother “[...] *est morte de duel de toi*” (v. 3533); her words confirm both Perceval's earlier sense of responsibility for his mother and his earlier awareness that she may be dead. Insofar as the *pucele* claims to have been an eyewitness to his mother's burial,⁷⁴² one might understand her words as having a special power to make her present to him; at the same time, though, in telling Perceval that his mother is dead, she is revealing to him the impossibility of bodily reunion with her in this life (barring a miracle). When it comes to Perceval's reaction to her news, I want to suggest that, in

⁷⁴⁰ Méla's translation has helped me to understand this passage, esp. vv. 2871-2872.

⁷⁴¹ See vv. 3551-3544; vv. 3553-3555; and vv. 6318-6342.

⁷⁴² It is in this way that I understand verses 3553-3555: “—*Je lo sai, [...] / Si veraiement comme cele / Qui an terre metre la vi*” (“I know it as truly as one who witnessed her burial”). See also Méla's translation (*Romans*, p. 1048): “—Je le sais, dit la demoiselle, avec certitude, pour être moi-même celle qui l'ait vue mettre en terre.”

asking God to have mercy on his mother's soul (vv. 3556-3557), he indicates that—momentarily, at least—she has indeed been made present to him. However, he comes close, almost immediately afterwards, to announcing that it is his intention to forget her: “*Les morz as morz,*” he says, “*les vis as vis!*” (v. 3568).⁷⁴³ And in fact, Perceval seems, from this episode up until we find him, later, [*c*]heminant (v. 6166) in a *desert* (v. 6165), to be more focused, in general, on immanent reality than on either the past or the future. Thus it is that, without a thought, seemingly, for either his promise to return to Bel Repaire (vv. 2867-2872)⁷⁴⁴ or his desire to find answers to his questions about the bleeding lance and about the *graal* (vv. 3335-3339), he proposes that he and the *pucele* go in pursuit of the person who has killed her sweetheart (v. 3572). Thus it is that he remembers the Tent Maiden only when reminded of his attack on her by the *Orgueilleus*'s version of this story (vv. 3765-3844), and that he remembers Blancheflor only briefly, while gazing at the drops of blood in the snow (vv. 4096-4393), and seems afterwards to forget her.⁷⁴⁵ Thus it is, finally, that he must be reminded by the Hideous Damsel of his

⁷⁴³ “The dead with the dead, the living with the living!” “On s’attend,” writes Nykrog, “à des pleurs et à des effusions d’émotions tendres quand celle qui se révèle comme sa cousine lui raconte la mort de sa mère. Il n’en est rien, sa réaction est d’une insensibilité qui frôle le ‘tant pis’: il a autre chose à faire (quoi?) [...] Ce n’est pas seulement ‘la misère de l’homme sans Dieu’, c’est la sécheresse d’un homme rejeté par Dieu” (*Chrétien de Troyes: Romancier discutabile*, p. 199). For an alternate interpretation of Perceval’s reaction, see Schwartz, “‘A la guise de Gales l’atorna:’ Maternal Influence in Chrétien’s *Conte du Graal*,” p. 10.

⁷⁴⁴ This was impressed on me by Ribard’s reference to “la Blanchefleur du *Conte du Graal* qui n’est pas près, semble-t-il, de revoir son chevalier-servant malgré sa promesse” (“Amour et oubli dans les romans de Chrétien de Troyes,” pp. 89-90).

⁷⁴⁵ Here, I am following Nykrog’s reading of this scene: “Perceval,” he says, “ne semble pas avoir pensé à Blancheflor [...] depuis qu’il a quitté Beaurepaire, et aussitôt que la neige a disparu, et les gouttes de sang avec elle, il ne semble plus penser à elle—plus jamais. On dirait un amnésiaque qui s’efforce de ressaisir un souvenir puissant mais qui lui échappe, ou un homme qui cherche à se rappeler un rêve” (*Chrétien de Troyes: Romancier discutabile*, p. 201). See also Kelly, “Le lieu du temps, le temps du lieu,” in *Le Nombre du temps : en hommage à Paul*

failure at the house of the Fisher King, and that, later on, he does not seem, immediately prior to his visit to the hermit, to have made very much progress in finding out the answers to his questions about the *graal* or about the lance.⁷⁴⁶

When we encounter Perceval for the last time (beginning in v. 6143), after we have accompanied Gauvain for a while (vv. 4727-6142), we are told explicitly that, according to *l'estoire* (v. 6143),⁷⁴⁷ he has “[...] *si perdue la memoire / Que de Deu ne li sovient mais*” (vv. 6144-6145).⁷⁴⁸ Might his forgetting of God, however, be not the beginning but rather the culmination of a progressive loss of memory in Perceval? After all, his mother seems to have fallen out of the story after his conversation with the weeping *pucele*, as has Blancheflor after his acquaintance with Gauvain, and the Fisher King after Perceval’s response to the speech of the Hideous Damsel.⁷⁴⁹ Although he

Zumthor, pp. 125-126. Again, Schwartz’s interpretation is different; see “‘A la guise de Gales l’atorna:’ Maternal Influence in Chrétien’s *Conte du Graal*,” p. 10.

⁷⁴⁶ Indeed, according to Kelly, “[l]a défaillance de la mémoire de Perceval s’aggrave après sa dénonciation par la Laide Demoiselle. [...] Le temps s’arrête pour lui dans la répétition” (“Le lieu du temps, le temps du lieu,” in *Le Nombre du temps : en hommage à Paul Zumthor*, p. 123). Later on, Kelly writes that “[p]our Perceval, toutes les promesses s’oublent un certain temps” (*ib.*, p. 126).

⁷⁴⁷ Is the *estoire* to be identified with the *livre* that has been mentioned in verse 65 and with reference to which a note in the Pléiade edition of the *Conte* says that “nous ignorons s’il s’agit d’un texte réel, en latin ou en français” (Chrétien, *Oeuvres complètes*, note on p. 1326)? The answer to this question is unclear. Daniel Poirion suggests that the *livre* is not a real book: “il doit s’agir de la présentation fictive de l’inspiration, puisque le prétendu livre antérieur est un topos rencontré ailleurs, tendant à donner une certaine autorité à l’histoire que l’on raconte” (*ib.*, p. 1300). On Chrétien’s use of the words *estoire* and *livre*, see Marie-Louise Ollier, “The Author in the Text: The Prologues of Chrétien de Troyes,” *Yale French Studies* 51, Approaches to Medieval Romance (1974), p. 28.

⁷⁴⁸ “[S]o lost his memory that he no longer remembered God.”

⁷⁴⁹ I have most likely been influenced to notice these disappearances by Nykrog, who notes that, prior to the episode of the blood drops in the snow, “Perceval chevauchait allègrement [...] Pas question de la mère, pas question de Blancheflor, pas question du Roi Pêcheur: aventure et chevalerie” (*Chrétien de Troyes: Romancier discutabile*, p. 201). Later, Nykrog notes the

continues to send knights back to Arthur's court (vv. 6159-6161), these knights are not named, and Perceval seems to have alienated himself not only from God, but also from his mother, his *amie*, and even Gauvain, at least for any mention of them that he or the story makes.⁷⁵⁰ Nor does his forgetfulness of God necessarily precede his forgetfulness of others, for Perceval does not cease to speak of God after his *séjour* with the Fisher King (v. 3434; vv. 3556-3557; v. 3716; v. 3725; vv. 4519-4523; v. 6233): while three of these references are oaths (v. 3434; v. 3725; v. 6233), three are wishes that God do something for another person (vv. 3556-3557; v. 3716; vv. 4519-4523). Perhaps it is the widening distance between Perceval and other people that leads to a widening of the distance between him and God.

Be this as it may, Perceval's mother's return to his memory, through the words of the hermit, ought to be understood in relation to Perceval's reorientation towards God: it is in the context of being reminded of God that he is also reminded of her—and given new knowledge of her care for him. For according to the hermit, Perceval himself would

parallel between Perceval's seeming forgetfulness, before his encounter with the knights and ladies who have visited the hermit, of his errand, and his earlier forgetfulness of his mother and Blancheflor: "La cousine avait éveillé quelque chose dans son esprit; cela s'était éteint. Les gouttes de sang sur la neige avaient fait surgir un souvenir confus en lui; il s'était évaporé. La diatribe de la demoiselle hideuse avait été un rude réveil, mais on voit maintenant qu'il en avait tiré une conclusion fausse, et qu'il en avait perdu le souvenir" (*ib.*, pp. 207-208). For similar observations, see Kelly, "Le lieu du temps, le temps du lieu," in *Le Nombre du temps : en hommage à Paul Zumthor*, pp. 125-126. As for the Fisher King, Pickens is right when he notes, in his summary of the *Graal*, that, following the Hideous Damsel's speech, "Perceval swears to find out why the lance bleeds and whom the Grail serves" (*Companion to Chrétien de Troyes*, p. 173; see *Conte*, vv. 4657-4670, my understanding of which has been aided by Méla's translation). However, by the time we find Perceval wandering in a *desert* (*Conte*, v. 6165), it is unclear that he has gotten any closer to answering these questions.

⁷⁵⁰ No wonder that Méla speaks of his "amnésie" (*Blanchefleur et le saint homme ou la semblance des reliques*, p. 22). (This said, it is not clear to me exactly what Méla means by this term; if I myself were to refer to Perceval as an amnesic, I would mean it in a literal sense—Perceval forgets, or at least seems to forget, people who are part of his lived personal history.)

not have survived (*duré*, v. 6329) as long as he has, were it not for her having commended him to God (vv. 6329-6334).⁷⁵¹ His *pechiez* (v. 6319) and its harmful consequences, have been, in other words, only part of the story; the hermit now hints, by using the construction “*ne n’* [...]” (v. 6329), that these consequences have been limited, due to the efficacy of his mother’s blessing. Only in retrospect can Perceval, and Chrétien’s audience, see that, even if she has been absent from his memory—and certainly from his speech—since he put her behind him when he was talking with the weeping *pucele*, nevertheless he owes his safety from “*mort et* [...] *prison*” (v. 6334) to God’s honoring of her commendation.⁷⁵² The *parole* mentioned by the hermit (v. 6332) has *vertu* (v. 6332), a word that, according to one of Van Daele’s four definitions, means “*qualité, propriété, efficacité,*”⁷⁵³ and it may be a reference to her parting words to her son, an expression of the desire that God accompany him—or remain present to him—on his travels: “*Filz, fait ele, Dex vos remaint ! / Joie plus qu’il ne me remaint / Vos doint il ou que vos ailliez*” (vv. 581-583).⁷⁵⁴

⁷⁵¹ The definitions offered for *durer* by Hindley et al. are “last; remain, subsist; stand firm, resist; go on living; stretch, last (in space, time).” (Godefroy offers only “s’étendre” and “[r]ésister.”)

⁷⁵² Here, it would seem that my reading rejoins Schwartz’s (see “‘A la guise de Gales l’atorna:’ Maternal Influence in Chrétien’s *Conte du Graal*,” p. 12).

⁷⁵³ His other three definitions are “*puissance, force, vigueur,*” “*courage, exploit,*” and “*miracle.*”

⁷⁵⁴ “[...] [S]on, God grant you, wherever you go, more joy than is left for me,” she said.” Staines precedes the word “son” by the word “darling,” presumably as a translation of “[b]iaux” or “[b]ioux,” for which variant(s), see Chrétien, *Romans*, p. 960, and Chrétien, *Le Roman de Perceval*, ed. Busby, p. 26.

Ribard writes that “l’oubli [...] marque toujours l’échec d’un amour qu’on n’a pas su sauvegarder en le faisant perdurer.”⁷⁵⁵ Even though it is unclear whether Perceval has ever learned to love his mother, Ribard’s remark may still be applicable to her seeming disappearance from the young man’s speech, insofar as it is this very disappearance that shows his lack of love.⁷⁵⁶ Speech, on the other hand—one’s own speech and that of others—provides a possible way to guard against failures of memory, and possibly against failures of love, too. In ceasing to refer to his mother’s teaching, after he is admonished about this by Gornemant, Perceval puts himself in a position to forget it. Now, the poem gives us no guarantee that he will remember his mother after she is recalled to him by the hermit, although she does reappear in Perceval’s own speech when he observes that “[q]uant ma mere fu vostre suer, / Bien me devez neveu clamer / Et je vos oncle, et mieuz amer” (vv. 6362-6364).⁷⁵⁷ If it is truly “comme pour conjurer la menace latente d’un nouvel oubli,” as Ribard proposes,⁷⁵⁸ that the hermit encourages Perceval to go to the *mostier* every day (v. 6369), we are left to wonder whether, when it comes to remembering his mother, Perceval will adopt an analogously regular practice, such as that of praying for her soul—or of asking for her prayers. The romance does not tell us.

⁷⁵⁵ Ribard, “Amour et oubli,” p. 89.

⁷⁵⁶ Van Daele defines *vaslet* as “jeune gentilhomme — écuyer — serviteur, valet.”

⁷⁵⁷ “Since my mother was your sister, you must call me nephew, and I must call you uncle, and love you better” (my translation, which I have compared to Méla’s; see Chrétien, *Romans*, p. 1130).

⁷⁵⁸ Ribard, “Amour et oubli,” p. 88.

Before drawing this section to a conclusion, I want to note that the parts of the *Conte* that recount Perceval's story may be seen as possessing a loosely chiasmic structure.⁷⁵⁹ I say "loosely" because this structure does not account for all the episodes of Perceval's story; yet it is possible to perceive the faint outline of such a form if we look at the romance in terms of the following progression:

- I. Perceval in the *gaste forest* (v. 73).
 - II. Perceval goes to the court, and afterwards is educated by Gornemant.
 - III. Perceval meets Blancheflor.
(Perceval prays to be reunited with his mother)
 - IV. Perceval at the house of the Fisher King.
(Perceval is told of his mother's death)
 - IIIa. Perceval and the blood drops.
 - Iia. Perceval returns to the court.
- Ia. Perceval finds his way to the hermit.

The limitations of this scheme are clear—it leaves out completely both of Perceval's meetings with the Tent Maiden (meetings that do not fall neatly into the progression I have outlined), not to mention having no ability to account for the way in which the *Conte* unexpectedly turns away from Perceval to follow Gauvain, between segments Iia

⁷⁵⁹ I may be influenced, here, by Zhou's reference to "loose categories [...] of topographies" ("Le Senestre Chemin': Aporia, Paradox, and the Ritual Act of the Search in Chretien [sic] de Troyes' Conte du Graal," *UCB Comparative Literature Undergraduate Journal* 2.3, Summer 2012, pp. 12-13; references to page numbers in Zhou's article are to a downloaded MS Word version). On *chiasmus* as a structural device in Chrétien, see Murray, *From Plato to Lancelot*, pp. 186-187 and pp. 238-239, and also Matthieu Boyd and K. Sarah-Jane Murray, "Jumping Off the Cart: The Future of *Charrette* Studies," in *Dame Philology's Charrette*, pp. 235-236 (page 236 cites a relevant passage from Murray's article, "Medieval Scribes, Modern Scholars: Reading *Le Chevalier de la Charrette* in the Twenty-First Century," in *Literatur und Literaturwissenschaft auf dem Weg zu den neuen Medien—Eine Standortbestimmung*, Bern: Germanistik, 2005, p. 152).

and Ia as well as after segment Ia, above.⁷⁶⁰ As a heuristic model, however, this progression helps to make more evident the part played by Perceval's mother in his journey as a whole.⁷⁶¹ Having been present to him at the romance's beginning, she is once again present at his story's "end," when, not long after he is brought back to a remembrance of God by a party of knights and ladies that he meets in a *desert* (v. 6165), he is also brought back to a remembrance of his mother by the hermit (see vv. 6318-

⁷⁶⁰ In "Le Conte du Graal: Chrétien's Unfinished Last Romance" (*A Companion to Chrétien de Troyes*, pp. 169-187), Pickens gives an outline of the *Conte* that consists of "seventeen textual segments following the Prologue" (p. 171). On the structure of the *Conte*, see Mimi Zhou, "Le Senestre Chemin': Aporia, Paradox, and the Ritual Act of the Search in Chretien [sic] de Troyes' Conte du Graal," *UCB Comparative Literature Undergraduate Journal* 2.3 (Summer 2012); Méla, preface to *Le Conte du Graal ou le Roman de Perceval*, ed. Charles Méla, Paris: Le Livre de Poche (1990); and Saly, "L'itinéraire intérieur dans le Perceval de Chrétien de Troyes et la structure de la quête de Gauvain," in *Voyage, quête, pèlerinage dans la littérature et la civilisation médiévales*, pp. 353-360. I am indebted to Mimi Zhou for the references to Méla's preface and to Saly's article (see Zhou, "Le Senestre Chemin': Aporia, Paradox, and the Ritual Act of the Search in Chretien [sic] de Troyes' Conte du Graal," note 12 and note 14, respectively). Méla does in fact speak of the "chiasme du Conte du Graal" as it pertains to the relationship between the Perceval sections and the Gauvain sections of the romance (Méla, preface to the *Conte*, pp. 11-12; Zhou notes this in "Le Senestre Chemin,'" on p. 5), while Saly uses both the word *chiasme* and the word *fugue* to describe this relationship (see, respectively, p. 357 and p. 360 in "L'itinéraire intérieur;" Zhou notes that Saly "comments upon th[e] chiasmic structure of itineraries," "Le Senestre Chemin,'" p. 5). Zhou herself points to the *Conte*'s many aporias ("Le Senestre Chemin,'" pp. 6-11). Again, references to page numbers in Zhou's article are to a downloaded MS Word version. For an alternative outline of the parts of the *Conte* devoted to Perceval, see Méla, *Blanchefleur et le saint homme ou la semblance des reliques*, p. 44.

⁷⁶¹ Thinking about personal presence, as it is mediated through language and memory, gives us another way to understand the role of Perceval's mother in his adventures besides that sketched out by Mimi Zhou, who notes that, "after the fated scene where Perceval fails to ask his questions, he learns that his mother is dead—and so we have a structural aporia in that his quest to return to her can no longer be completed; in that this particular question does not reach an endpoint" ("Le Senestre Chemin,'" pp. 7-8; references to page numbers in Zhou's article are to an MS Word version, downloaded from <http://ucbcluj.wordpress.com/le-senestre-chemin-aporiam-paradox-and-the-ritual-act-of-the-search-in-chretien-de-troyes-conte-du-graal/>). Although it is true that Perceval never achieves a bodily reunion with his mother, in the *Conte*, the words of the hermit do bring her back into his story, in the last of his adventures (see, on this point, Schwartz, "'A la guise de Gales l'atorna:' Maternal Influence in Chrétien's *Conte du Graal*," p. 12).

6364).⁷⁶² Note, too, that the Fisher King segment is preceded by Perceval's prayer that he will find his mother "[p]laine de vie et de santé" (v. 2921) and is followed by the revelation that she is dead. Looking at the story in hindsight, we can see that Perceval's good intentions, prior to his stay with the Fisher King, are not rooted deeply enough to undo completely the consequences of his earlier abandonment of his mother,⁷⁶³ consequences that include both her death and his failure to ask the right questions at the Fisher King's house.⁷⁶⁴ But looking at the story from the perspective provided by the

⁷⁶² Rafal Boryslawski makes a similar observation, writing that "[Perceval's] entire life is literally and metaphorically encompassed by his mother" ("The Laughing Maiden: Feminine Wisdom in Chrétien de Troyes' *Le Conte du Graal*," *Studia Anglica Posnaniensia* 41, 2005, p. 219). See, too, Bruckner, "Rewriting Chrétien's Conte du graal: Mothers and Sons: Questions, Contradictions, and Connections," pp. 226-228.

⁷⁶³ It is this abandonment that I understand to have been Perceval's *pechiez*, for which see vv. 3529-3533 and vv. 6318-6340 (Méla's translation of "[...] *fol sans eûs*," in verse 6340, has helped me to understand these words; he translates them as "tu fus un insensé," Chrétien, *Romans*, p. 1129). Pace Kleiman, who writes that "[i]t is a critical commonplace to explain [Perceval's] failure in relation to the hero's mother" ("X Marks the Spot: The Place of the Father in Chrétien de Troyes's *Conte du Graal*," p. 975), there are variations in how critics have described Perceval's sin: Kathryn Banks blames him for "employ[ing] a universalizing code of interpretation" at the Fisher King's house (Banks, "The Ethics of 'Writing' Enigma: A Reading of Chrétien de Troyes's 'Conte du Graal' and Lévinas's 'Totalité et infini,'" *Comparative Literature* 55.2, Spring 2003, p. 96), and Ann McCullough suggests, as an "aspect of Perceval's crime," that "he does not want to know about pain" (McCullough, "Criminal Naivety: Blind Resistance and the Pain of Knowing in Chrétien de Troyes's 'Conte du Graal,'" p. 54). It should also be noted that some have understood the "*pechié* [...] [*d*]e ta mere" (vv. 3531-3532) to refer to (or to suggest) a sin committed by Perceval's mother, for which see Banks, "The Ethics of 'Writing' Enigma," p. 102; and Ewa Słojka, "Escape from Paradox: Perceval's Upbringing in the 'Conte du Graal,'" *Arthuriana* 18.4, In Memoriam: Elisabeth Brewer, Derek Brewer (Winter 2008), p. 70 (here, Słojka suggests that Perceval's mother's sin may be that of despair).

⁷⁶⁴ For Banks, the explanations of Perceval's cousin (see vv. 3520-3533) and of the hermit (see vv. 6318-6340)—explanations that trace Perceval's failure to ask the questions to his abandonment of his mother—are insufficient ("The Ethics of 'Writing' Enigma," p. 98). Although I grant that, as Banks states, the cousin's and the hermit's "assertion remains enigmatic" (*ib.*, p. 98), I would argue that light is shed on this enigma if we adopt the stance of the hermit, a stance that takes into account both judgment (vv. 6325-6328) and mercy (vv. 6329-6334); note that the latter of these is attributed to *Dex* (v. 6333). Not only this, but if we remember that it is on Gornemant's advice that Perceval both ceases to refer to his mother as authority for his actions and fails to ask questions about the *graal* and the lance at the Fisher

hermit, we can see, too, that the *vertu* of his mother's *parole* is great enough to overcome Perceval's failures of memory and of love. Indeed, his very arrival at the chapel where he finds the hermit can be read as an answer to his mother's wish that God will give him "[j]oie plus qu'il ne me remain / [...] ou que vos ailliez" (vv. 582-583).⁷⁶⁵

It has become clear, in looking at the example of Perceval's mother, that it is very much possible for a character to be present, and in rather a robust way, through the speech of other characters. This example dramatizes the special relationships between speech, memory, and presence, on the one hand, and silence, forgetting, and absence, on the other. Given the seeming tenuousness of Perceval's memory,⁷⁶⁶ it is a relief to notice the hermit's hint that his continued wellbeing has not been, finally, dependent on his own ability to keep in mind the counsel of others, but on God's providence: "[...] *Dex por li t'a regardé*" (v. 6333).⁷⁶⁷ It would be gratifying to know that Perceval had learned to strike a balance between garrulousness and excessive silence, and even more gratifying to know that he had begun anew to pray to God and to speak of his mother, thus strengthening the likelihood that he will remember what the hermit has told him; yet we are not told that any of this has come to pass.

King's house, it is possible to discern a logical progression from Perceval's causing of his mother's *duel* (v. 6324) to his silence about the grail procession.

⁷⁶⁵ "[W]herever you go, more joy than is left for me[.]" Slojka reads this as a prayer, and comments that "[a]rticulating both her pain of losing Perceval and her belief that she will continue to protect him, [Perceval's mother's] final words are paradoxical" (see "Escape from Paradox: Perceval's Upbringing in the 'Conte du Graal,'" p. 82). See also Bruckner, "Rewriting Chrétien's Conte du graal: Mothers and Sons: Questions, Contradictions, and Connections," p. 219.

⁷⁶⁶ I am very much in debt to Nykrog on this point (see *Chrétien de Troyes: Romancier discutable*, p. 201 and pp. 207-208).

⁷⁶⁷ "[F]or her sake God watched over you[.]"

Just one more note, however: if we pay close attention to the list of people whom the hermit tells him to help, we find, after *pucele* (v. 6391) and before *orfenine, veve fame* (v. 6393), or, in Hilka's edition, *veve dame*.⁷⁶⁸ After giving Perceval a long list of things to do for his penance (*penitance*, v. 6359),⁷⁶⁹ the hermit says, "*Ce voil que por tes pechiés faces*" (v. 6395).⁷⁷⁰ The mention of *veve fame*, in the context of penance, is appropriate: if his sin was to abandon one widow, his mother, it will be part of his penance to help other widows. The presence of Perceval's mother to his memory through the hermit's mention of *veve fame* would be aided by Perceval's recognition of the analogy between her situation and theirs, just as her presence to our memories at this juncture is aided by our own recognition of such an analogy.⁷⁷¹

In any case, it is through Perceval's visit to the hermit, and specifically through their conversation,⁷⁷² that his mother is, in a sense, restored to him. The scene demonstrates one way that she may remain present to her son in the future: he may begin

⁷⁶⁸ In Hilka's edition, this is verse 6467 (*Der Percevalroman [Li Contes del graal]*, ed. Hilka, Halle: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1932, p. 288). Both *veve fame* and *veve dame* would seem to be singular forms (see Huchon, *Histoire de la langue française*, p. 77).

⁷⁶⁹ Hindley et al. define *penitence* as "penance, repentance."

⁷⁷⁰ "It is my wish that you do this for your sins[.]"

⁷⁷¹ Kleiman describes the hermit as a "father figure" for Perceval ("X Marks the Spot: The Place of the Father in Chrétien de Troyes's 'Conte du Graal,'" p. 982), but see also Schwartz, who associates the hermit with Perceval's mother ("'A la guise de Gales l'atorna:' Maternal Influence in Chrétien's *Conte du Graal*," pp. 11-12). I would suggest that the hermit's reference to *veve fame* also leaves us with the possibility that the orphaned Perceval may find other mother figures; for some very interesting suggestions along similar lines, see Bruckner, "Rewriting Chrétien's *Conte du graal*: Mothers and Sons: Questions, Contradictions, and Connections," pp. 227-228 and pp. 238-239.

⁷⁷² I am much indebted to Kleiman, here, for her emphasis on the importance of "dialogue" between Perceval and the hermit ("X Marks the Spot: The Place of the Father in Chrétien de Troyes's 'Conte du Graal,'" p. 981).

again to speak of her.⁷⁷³ In fact, he may begin to speak of her as, towards the beginning of the *Charrette*, Guenièvre speaks of her friend.⁷⁷⁴ Guenièvre's words to her *amis* (*Charrette*, vv. 209-211) have given us an example of how someone from a speaker's past, someone who is already known to this speaker, may be drawn up, through speech, into the present. Inspired by Bruckner's reading of a later passage from the *Charrette*,⁷⁷⁵ I want to suggest that Guenièvre's mention of her *amis* at this moment of crisis (as she is about to be led away from the court by Keu) permits the *amis*—whoever he may be—to become a measure of present actions and indeed of the present situation. Those characters—namely the king himself and many others (see *Charrette*, vv. 185-187, vv. 197-198, and vv. 215-219)—who are bodily present for Guenièvre's departure, or for various events leading up to it, and who allow the *seneschax* to lead her away towards Méléagant, are weighed and found wanting by the queen's description of a person who, were he aware of what was happening to her, would have acted quite differently than they. The *amis* is present, here, in language, as a model of love or at least of friendship, a model in relation to which Arthur and others fall short. Perceval's visit to the hermit, in the *Conte du Graal*, leaves open the possibility that, through language, his mother may once again become present to him, and in much the same way: present as a model of love

⁷⁷³ Again, the *Conte* does not tell us whether this will happen.

⁷⁷⁴ In at least one manuscript tradition; see my discussion, above.

⁷⁷⁵ I am referring to her analysis of the herald's announcement of Lancelot (see *Shaping Romance: Interpretation, Truth, and Closure in Twelfth-Century French Fictions*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993, p. 60 and pp. 70-72).

(motherly, this time) that serves as a measure of immanent reality, thus affording the beloved a more just perspective on it.⁷⁷⁶

Written language

Do Chrétien's romances have anything to say about presence in written language? Let us consider, here, a remark from Sylvia Huot: "It must be remembered that, throughout the medieval period, writing retained a certain dimension of orality, being understood as the representation of speech."⁷⁷⁷ Huot's remark would tend to suggest that, in the Middle Ages, written language, as the "representation" of spoken language, was (or was perceived to be) even farther removed, than spoken language, from the mediation of personal presence, as well as that there was (or was perceived to be) no great difference between the mediation performed by each of these manifestations of language.⁷⁷⁸ But is this the case in Chrétien? I want to look, here, at a few examples of written language in the romances, and to do so in hopes of drawing out from these examples the ways that a character—that is, a person-on-the-level-of-the-story-itself—may be present or absent, to other characters, in writing. The examples that I have chosen to explore are letters (in the

⁷⁷⁶ As, indeed, Perceval is given a better understanding of his own journey when he is helped to understand it in relation to what Schwartz refers to as his mother's "blessing" ("A la guise de Gales l'atorna: Maternal Influence in Chrétien's *Conte du Graal*," p. 12).

⁷⁷⁷ Huot, *From Song to Book: The Poetics of Writing in Old French Lyric and Lyrical Narrative Poetry*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press (1987), p. 2.

⁷⁷⁸ Huot goes on: "Not only poets but even rubricators of manuscripts appropriated the language of oral declamation. Even in the late fourteenth century, writing could still be described as the pale imitation of an oral original. [...] As the visual representation of an essentially oral text, the medieval illuminated manuscript has a certain theatrical [...] quality; it does not merely describe events but, rather, stages them" (*From Song to Book*, pp. 2-3).

sense, that is, of epistles);⁷⁷⁹ the writing on the tombs in the *Charrette* (*Charrette*, vv. 1835-1980); and the romance that the *puchele* is reading in the *Lion* (*Lion*, vv. 5358-5369).

Letters

Epistolary communication is scant in Chrétien.⁷⁸⁰ It is not, however, unheard of, as will be shown by the following two examples. In the first, Lunete has approached her lady, to speak to her on Yvain's behalf for the first time, and, after a preliminary exchange, she makes the following argument: Laudine knows, she says, that King Arthur will arrive "*l'autre semaine*" (v. 1637), and therefore she ought to bethink herself for the defense of her fountain. Either this or Arthur "[...] *saisira tout sans deffense*" (v.

⁷⁷⁹ The word *letre*, or *lettre*, in Old French, may refer both to a letter of the alphabet and to an epistle (according to Hindley et al., who note other meanings for it, as well), and may be used in its plural form to refer to the latter (see entry for LETTRE in *Trésor de la Langue Française*, Paris: Éditions du centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1983, which offers v. 110 of Marie de France's *Deus Amanz* as an example of this usage; note that Laurence Harf-Lancner, in her modern French translation of the *Lais*, translates *letres* as "une lettre," *Lais de Marie de France*, trans. Harf-Lancner, ed. Karl Warnke, Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1990, p. 175). Thus when *unes letres* (see Huchon, *Histoire de la langue française*, p. 84, for an explanation of the form *unes*, the plural of the feminine indefinite article *une*) are delivered to King Bademaguz in the *Chevalier de la Charrette* (see *Charrette*, v. 5252), it is most likely a question of only one letter (epistle), which is itself made up, of course, of many letters of the alphabet. See also, on this point, the entry for *letre* in Van Daele. For a similar usage, in Latin, see the entry for *littera* in *Cassell's New Latin Dictionary* (D.P. Simpson, New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1959 [1968 reprint]).

⁷⁸⁰ Vitz, in a discussion of Chrétien, writes that "the court of Arthur [...] contains virtually no reading or writing" (*Orality and Performance in Early French Romance*, p. 113). On the practice of "letter writing," more generally, in the twelfth century, see Julian Haseldine, "Epistolography," in *Medieval Latin: An Introduction and Bibliographical Guide*, ed. F.A.C. Mantello and A.G. Rigg, Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press (1996), p. 653.

1637).⁷⁸¹ It is, apparently, by epistolary means that Laudine has been advised of Arthur's coming:

*Vous en avés eu message
De la damoisele sauvage,
Qui lettres vous en envoia.
Ahi! Com bien les emploia!* (vv. 1619-1622)⁷⁸²

Do these *lettres* make anyone present? If we can speak of the presence of the *damoisele sauvage* herself, here, via the written word, this presence is ephemeral. It seems rather that the person who has become present, in some sense, due to the *lettres* (or letter, in modern day English⁷⁸³)—present inasmuch as now one must take note of him—is Arthur. The status, moreover, of the *lettres* themselves, is ambiguous. One may be tempted, momentarily, to wonder whether they really exist—“really,” at the level of the story—or whether they are the invention of Lunete, mentioned in order to lend support to her argument.⁷⁸⁴

And yet the text leads us to believe that the *lettres* are indeed real, given that, according to Lunete, Laudine herself is their recipient, and given that they turn out to be trustworthy in their foretelling of Arthur's coming. Only a day after Laudine's and Yvain's marriage (v. 2173), the king arrives, with “*si compangnon*” (v. 2176), and

⁷⁸¹ “[W]ill capture everything, without opposition.”

⁷⁸² “You have already heard of this in letters the Damsel of the Wilds sent you. Ah, how [well] she [used them]!” (I have modified Staines's translation for a more literal rendering of the Old French.)

⁷⁸³ Again, see entry for LETTRE in the *TLF*.

⁷⁸⁴ If Vitz can suggest that, in the Middle Ages, it was “inviting for poets and performers to lie” in their “claims to written sources” (*Orality and Performance in Early French Romance*, p. 33) then might we also be entitled to have doubts about the veracity of such claims (within the limits of the story itself) when they are made by romance characters?

although it is not clear that his purpose in coming is to wage war on Laudine, as both Lunete and the *ceneschauz* imply (vv. 1636-1637; vv. 2083-2089),⁷⁸⁵ certainly Arthur—or Keu, at any rate (vv. 2230-2241)—is eager to fight with the fountain’s defender. The *lettres* of the *damoisele sauvage* have thus, by making Arthur present in language before he is present in body, removed the element of surprise from the king’s coming, in such a way that Laudine, like Chrétien’s audience, can expect the new defender of her fountain to be tested very soon.⁷⁸⁶ Like prophecy, the *lettres* permit Laudine to make plans for the future. Arthur’s imminent presence hangs over the entirety of Yvain’s and her courtship, providing her, if not with her private reasons for marrying him (vv. 1773-1780), at least with a public defense of their union (vv. 2083-2106).⁷⁸⁷

Let us now examine the verb used to describe the *damoisele sauvage*’s action in sending—or is it in writing? or both?—the *lettres*: “[...] *Com bien les emploia!*” says Lunete (v. 1622). What does it mean to *emploier* letters (or a letter)? Neither Hult, Walter, nor William W. Kibler attempts a precise rendering of *emploia*, here, in their translations of the *Lion*.⁷⁸⁸ The infinitive *emploier* appears in Van Daele’s dictionary,

⁷⁸⁵ Note that the *ceneschauz* is speaking on Laudine’s behalf to her *baronz* (v. 2041): “*Et de la parole semont / Le seneschal, quē il la die, / Si qu’elle soit de touz oïe*” (“She asked her seneschal to speak out so that everyone could hear[,]” vv. 2078-2080); David F. Hult’s translation, in the Librairie Générale Française edition of the romances, has helped me to understand vv. 2040-2043 and vv. 2078-2080.

⁷⁸⁶ Following Hult’s translation and the entry for *autre* in Hindley et al., I understand *l’autre semaine* (v. 1617) to mean “next week” (for Hult’s translation, see Chrétien, *Romans*, p. 763). Note that, according to Hindley et al., *autre* can, as an adjective, mean “other; second; following, succeeding, next; remaining; additional, extra; opposing, opposite; different,” and that, used twice in succession, it can mean “one ..., another ...”

⁷⁸⁷ Again, note that the *ceneschauz* is speaking on Laudine’s behalf.

⁷⁸⁸ Hult translates Lunete’s exclamation as “[...] *quelle bonne chose elle a fait là !*” (Chrétien, *Romans*, p. 763); Walter as “*comme elle a bien fait !*” (Chrétien, *Oeuvres complètes*, p.

with variations of *emploier* and *ampleer*, and is translated as “*plier dans — employer, occuper.*” Greimas’s dictionary adds the meanings of “[p]lacer” and “[a]ppliquer, assener,” as well as noting the expression “[e]*mploier une faveur, l’adresser, l’accorder.*” The verb would seem to imply, like the modern French *employer*, the use of something as a means to an end. The *damoisele sauvage* has, in Lunete’s view, put her letters to good use—and how has she done this? She has used the *lettres* as a means of warning Laudine about something that Lunete portrays as a threat to her mistress’s *tere* (v. 1615).⁷⁸⁹

The case of the *damoisele sauvage* and her *lettres* seems to illustrate the capacity of writing to point to a future event. Yet why not simply construe the *lettres* as illustrating the capacity of writing to carry information from one person to another? Not only have the *lettres*, according to Lunete’s report, been used (*emploia*, v. 1622) by the *damoisele*—already this would seem to put them in the position of tools—but Lunete herself mentions the *lettres* in the context of her attempt to persuade Laudine that she ought to take action. Two things seem to support such a reading: first, any physicality the

378); and Kibler as “what a fine deed she did for you!” (Chrétien de Troyes, *The Knight with the Lion, or Yvain [Le Chevalier au Lion]*, ed. and trans. Kibler, New York: Garland Publishing, 1985, p. 67). Note that, in both Uitti’s and Kibler’s editions of the *Lion* (Uitti’s edition appears alongside Walter’s modern French translation in the Pléiade version of Chrétien’s works), verse 1622 (verse 1624 in Uitti’s edition and verse 1626 in Kibler’s) reads, “*Ahi ! con bien les anplea !*” (I have preserved Uitti’s spacing, here, instead of Kibler’s), as opposed to the “*Ahi! Com bien les emploia!*” of Hult’s edition. Uitti and Kibler use BN fr. 794 (the Guiot manuscript) as their “manuscrit de base” (Chrétien, *Oeuvres complètes*, p. 1186) and “base MS” (Chrétien, *The Knight with the Lion*, ed. and trans. Kibler, p. xxx), respectively, whereas Hult uses Paris, BN fr. 1433 as his “manuscrit de base” (Chrétien, *Romans*, p. 710). According to Van Daele, *ampleer* is an alternate spelling for *emploier*, and *anp-* an alternate spelling for *emp-*; on these bases as well as that of common sense, I take *anplea* and *emploia* to be different spellings of the same verb.

⁷⁸⁹ We get the sense that, in these *lettres*, Laudine is being given a sort of secret intelligence. Someone else announces Arthur’s coming, someone else who may well be inimical to him—why else (unless the *damoisele sauvage* believed his designs upon the fountain to be peaceful) would she give notice of his plans to Laudine? But this is speculation. And see, *contra* the notion of a letter as vehicle for secret intelligence, Haseldine, “Epistolography,” p. 650.

lettres might have possessed is subordinated, at the time we hear of them, to Lunete's rhetorical aims. Second, it seems to be Lunete's design to draw her mistress's attention to Arthur as an enemy more than to Arthur as a person (vv. 1614-1618; vv. 1636-1637). The *lettres*, already instrumentalized by the *damoisele*, if Lunete is to be believed (and if my reading of *emploia* is right), are reinforced in their status as instruments by Lunete herself, as she uses them as evidence for her case that Laudine is in need of a defender. Understood in this way, the *lettres*, rather than being mediators of personal presence, have become containers for a message (*message*, v. 1619)⁷⁹⁰—as such, they may be contrasted with the drops of blood in the snow in the *Conte* (*Conte*, vv. 4096-4393). The *lettres*, as described by Lunete, do not recall Arthur by analogy, as the drops of blood in the snow recall his *amie*'s face to Perceval (*Conte*, vv. 4128-4144; vv. 4378-4388). Instead, they directly name him (*Lion*, v. 1616), or so it would seem;⁷⁹¹ and on Lunete's lips this naming is taken up, without leaving room for Laudine or for Chrétien's audience to reflect on the person named, into an evocation of this person as challenger (vv. 1614-1618) and invader (vv. 1636-1637).

It appears that we are far, here, from a vision of a letter (an epistle) as the embodiment, at a distance, of a particular person in his or her particularity. *Lettres* are relied upon, by Lunete and seemingly by the *damoisele*, as tools, and tools not so much

⁷⁹⁰ As translations for the Old French *message*, Van Daele offers “*messenger*” and “*message*,” while Greimas offers “[e]nvoiyé, messenger,” as well as “[p]rocureur, intendant” (see Greimas's entry for *mes*). For *message* as “messenger,” see *Lion*, v. 1897. For a more ambiguous case, see *Charrette*, v. 1520; here, Méla translates *messages* as “messengers,” but it is not clear to me that such is the only possible translation. The *message* of *Lion*, v. 1619, could refer to either a missive or a person. Although the former rendering makes more sense to me (and, apparently, to Hult, who translates *message* as “message,” Chrétien, *Romans*, p. 763), a case could also be made for the latter; see my discussion, below.

⁷⁹¹ All we have is Lunete's report of what is in the *lettres*.

for communion as for communication. Nor does Lunete's speech draw our attention to the peculiarities of writing as a medium; rather, it emphasizes the cleverness of the person who has chosen to use writing for a certain purpose (v. 1622). The speech seems to reflect a view of written language as shortcut, as the giver of a possible advantage in the unstable world of political loss and gain. Laudine benefits, in a temporal sense, from the *damoisele*'s proper use of the proper tool at the proper time. The *lettres* themselves, having delivered their information and thus performed their function, can henceforth be disregarded.

Or so it would seem. But might there be another way of understanding this instance of written language? The following claim, from Julian Haseldine, ought perhaps to make us think twice about what exactly these *lettres* are accomplishing: "In the Middle Ages the letter," he writes, "[...] was more or less a public document, intended for a wider audience than the recipient alone."⁷⁹² And indeed, we may note that, although the *lettres* were apparently sent to Laudine (v. 1621), Lunete, too, has at least some acquaintance with them. Even more intriguing is Haseldine's further claim that "[the medieval letter] could be almost anything except a private exchange of confidential information."⁷⁹³ Haseldine goes on to discuss "letter writing[']s [...] associat[ion] with the pursuit of *amicitia*," and notes that "[f]riendship was requested formally, was granted carefully, and carried obligations akin at times to those of formal allegiance."⁷⁹⁴ (Even though Haseldine is presumably speaking of letters in Latin, I believe his remarks are not

⁷⁹² Haseldine, "Epistolography," p. 650.

⁷⁹³ *Ib.*, p. 650.

⁷⁹⁴ *Ib.*, p. 652.

irrelevant to the *lettres* mentioned by Lunete.) It is possible to read the *lettres* of the *damoisele sauvage* as evidence of her friendship with Laudine. Does the *Lion* itself support such a reading? Certainly we should notice that Laudine seems to believe—whether on the strength of the *damoisele*'s *lettres* or on that of Lunete's words—that her fountain may well be in danger (vv. 1734-1738). More pertinently still, we should notice that the warning of the *lettres* turns out to be well-founded: Arthur may or may not arrive within the week (v. 1617), but he certainly does arrive (vv. 2174-2176). Placed within this larger narrative context, the *lettres* may be seen as revelatory not only of information but also of the *damoisele*'s character. Perhaps it is the *damoisele*, after all, and not Arthur, whose personal presence has been mediated, here, through written language.

There may also be another way to understand Lunete's use of the word *emploia* (v. 1622). In a fascinating article about (among other things) the use of sealed charters in the Middle Ages,⁷⁹⁵ Brigitte Miriam Bedos-Rezak reminds us of the vigorous intellectual work, among “prescholastic clerics,” on the nature of signs and their relation to things, and suggests that this work had an influence on conceptions and use of the seal as a sign.⁷⁹⁶ At least one strand of twelfth century thought fostered a new attention to what was called the literal or historical sense of Scripture;⁷⁹⁷ this attention was simultaneous

⁷⁹⁵ “The phenomenon I wish to consider in this essay,” writes Bedos-Rezak, “involves the novel recourse to the written and sealed word by the lay aristocracy of northern France during the eleventh and twelfth centuries” (Bedos-Rezak, “Medieval Identity: A Sign and a Concept,” p. 1490).

⁷⁹⁶ *Ib.*, p. 1490. For an explanation of what is meant by the term “prescholastic clerics,” see *ib.*, pp. 1493-1497. Bedos-Rezak explains that these clerics were responsible for producing charters on behalf of “French nobles,” who, “during the eleventh and centuries [...] were not yet literate” (*ib.*, p. 1490; see also pp. 1505-1516).

⁷⁹⁷ This new attention is generally attributed to the Victorines; famous Victorines include Hugh of Saint Victor, Richard of Saint Victor, and André of Saint Victor. See Bedos-Rezak, *ib.*,

with an increased insistence on the bodily presence of Christ in the Eucharist.⁷⁹⁸ The tendency among at least some twelfth century thinkers to make room for both literal and allegorical readings of Scripture may help us to see that the *use* of language—or language’s ability to point to another thing—does not necessarily indicate that it is merely to be transcended.

Might Chrétien have absorbed some of these ways of thinking? Might it have been natural for him to think that one could use *lettres* without excluding them from the category of what could be enjoyed, even if only in “a transferred sense,” to borrow a concept from St. Augustine?⁷⁹⁹ Might it be possible, insofar as an epistle was understood to stand in for a person,⁸⁰⁰ for the epistle itself to share in the status of that person and thus to become the legitimate object of a certain kind of (limited) appreciation?

note 12 on p. 1494; Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press (1964; orig. pub. 1940), pp. 83-185; Gilbert Dahan, *L'exégèse chrétienne de la Bible en Occident médiéval: XIIe—XIVe siècle*, Paris: Cerf (1999), p. 104, pp. 228-134, and pp. 239-240; Guy Lobrichon, *La Bible au Moyen Age*, Paris: Picard (2003), pp. 65-66. Both Dahan and Lobrichon note that this attention did not represent a complete departure from earlier practices (*L'exégèse chrétienne de la Bible en Occident médiéval*, p. 240; *La Bible au Moyen Age*, note 26 on p. 65).

⁷⁹⁸ See Hugh of St. Victor, *De Sacramentis* II.8.6, ed. Rainer Berndt SJ, Aschendorff: Monasterii Westfalorum (2008), p. 405; for Eng. trans., see *On the Sacraments of the Christian Faith*, Roy J. Deferrari, Cambridge, MA: The Mediaeval Academy of America (1951), p. 308. See, too, Bedos-Rezak, “Medieval Identity,” p. 1499 and pp. 1501-1503; and Émile Mersch, *Le Corps Mystique du Christ: Études de théologie historique, Tome II*, Louvain: Museum Lessianum (1933), p. 136.

⁷⁹⁹ “For when the object of love is present, it inevitably brings with it pleasure as well. If you go beyond this pleasure and relate it to your permanent goal, you are using it, and are said to enjoy it not in the literal sense but in a transferred sense” (“*Cum enim adest quod diligitur, etiam delectationem secum necesse est gerat. Per quam si transieris eamque ad illud ubi permanendum est rettuleris, uteris ea et abusive, non proprie, diceris frui,*” St. Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana* I. 80, ed. and trans. R. P. H. Green, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995, p. 46; Eng. trans., Green, *ib.*, p. 47).

⁸⁰⁰ See Bedos-Rezak, “Medieval Identity,” pp. 1489-1490; Haseldine, “Epistolography,” p. 650.

Haseldine writes that “[l]etters were valued in themselves and were occasionally requested of a writer as a gift.”⁸⁰¹ I take this to mean not so much that any and every letter had inherent value as that letters had value because of their connection to the particular persons who sent them. In a world where letters were both used and “valued,” the *damoisele*’s *lettres* may not be so disposable after all.

We may note, finally, that *emploia* (v. 1622), here, rhymes with *envoia* (v. 1621): according to Lunete, the *damoisele* has both used the *lettres* and sent them. The verb *envoier*⁸⁰² may certainly refer, in Chrétien, to sending a thing, as it does, here,⁸⁰³ yet it may also refer to sending a human messenger.⁸⁰⁴ I do not want to dwell too much on what may be a simple case of analogy in word use—after all, we can speak, too, in English, of sending both people and things—but I do want to return momentarily to Haseldine, here, who explains that

[t]he letter itself was rarely a complete, self-contained document including all the information necessary to its purpose and must be considered in its relation to the spoken word. Not only was the letter written to be read aloud, with an audience as well as readers in mind, but often it contained only reflections on the general moral principles relating to a particular case or issue, the precise details of which, especially if of a delicate or sensitive nature, might be entrusted to the memory of the messenger. The surviving text may therefore be only one part of a complete verbal and written message.⁸⁰⁵

⁸⁰¹ Haseldine, “Epistolography,” p. 651.

⁸⁰² This spelling comes from Van Daele’s dictionary.

⁸⁰³ For other examples, see *Erec et Enide*, v. 1848; *Lion*, v. 2772.

⁸⁰⁴ See *Erec et Enide*, v. 1859; *Lion*, v. 5068.

⁸⁰⁵ Haseldine, “Epistolography,” in *Medieval Latin: An Introduction and Bibliographical Guide*, p. 651.

Haseldine thus characterizes medieval *lettres* as closely bound up, at least much of the time, with spoken interpretation or glossing; his descriptions suggests a world in which *lettres* could complement and aid the work of a human messenger, rather than replacing it.⁸⁰⁶ The letter seems, here, to occupy a kind of intermediate role analogous to that of the messenger himself or herself. To translate Haseldine's terms into McLuhan's, both human messenger and written word serve as extensions of a writer (or author). To return to the *damoisele's lettres*, note that it is not clear whether the *message* of verse 1619 is a thing or a person;⁸⁰⁷ this ambiguity nicely illustrates the continuum that, if Haseldine is right, existed between messengers and (at least some) letters. Within this historical context, it is fair to suggest that Chrétien may have afforded *lettres* a status higher than that of a mere container.⁸⁰⁸

Yet Chrétien would seem to have been aware, too, that *lettres* are potentially tricky: like persons, they may deceive and disappoint. Such is the case, in the *Chevalier*

⁸⁰⁶ The particular mediating work performed by letters may be aided, and indeed insured, so to speak, by persons who are neither their authors (in the sense that we would normally give this word) nor their recipients, but who themselves stand in a mediating role between author and recipient. These persons thus serve as mediators of a medium, in an activity resembling the handing on of a tradition.

⁸⁰⁷ In Hult's translation, the *message* is a thing (Chrétien, *Romans*, p. 763), while in Walter's and in Burton Raffel's, it is not clear whether it is a thing or a person (see, respectively, Chrétien, *Oeuvres complètes*, p. 378; and Chrétien, *Yvain, the Knight of the Lion*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987, p. 50).

⁸⁰⁸ My language is hesitant, here, largely because of the modest attention given to these *lettres* in the *Lion* (Lunete's reference to them occupies four verses, verses 1619-1622). For an interesting example, in one of the *Lais* of Marie de France, of the use of a letter (*letres*), see *Deus Amanz*, v. 110 (*Lais de Marie de France*, trans. Harf-Lancner, p. 174; I was led to this example by the entry for LETTRE in *Trésor de la Langue Française*). As I have already noted, Harf-Lancner, in her modern French translation of the *Lais*, translates *letres* as "une lettre[.]"

de la charrette, when a party including Bademaguz (Mélégant's father),⁸⁰⁹ Guenièvre, Keu, Gauvain, and others at Bademaguz's court, receive what purports to be a letter from Lancelot, who has been—treacherously, it would seem—persuaded to follow a dwarf (vv. 5079-5081), and has been captured, unbeknownst to Bademaguz and company, presumably by Mélégant's henchman (vv. 5082-5085). The letter is delivered by *uns vaslez* (v. 5241); he gives it to Bademaguz, who then has it read in front of everyone (v. 5255). The Lancelot of the letter claims to be “*avoec le roi Artu, / Plains de santé et de vertu*” (vv. 5265-5266), and sends word to Guenièvre, to Gauvain, and to Keu—whether by his own authority or the king's is not clear⁸¹⁰—that they should come to where he and Arthur are.⁸¹¹

⁸⁰⁹ For Bademaguz's name, I am following the spelling that is used in the index of proper names in Chrétien, *Romans* (see pp. 1269-1279).

⁸¹⁰ “*Et dit qu'a la reïne mande / C'or s'an vaigne, se le comande*” (“And says that he sends word to the queen, commanding her that she come there,” *Charrette*, vv. 5267-5268; my translation, although I have also consulted Staines's and Cline's). The Old French verb *mander* can, according to Van Daele, mean “*ordonner, commander,*” “*faire savoir,*” and “*envoyer chercher, mander*” (according to the *Petit Robert*, the modern French verb may mean “[c]ommuniquer, ordonner[,]” Paul Robert, *Le Petit Robert*, Paris: Société du Nouveau Littré, 1970, p. 1035); the second of Van Daele's definitions, “*faire savoir,*” makes the most sense to me in the context of the *letres* (v. 5252). Méla offers the following modern French translation for verses 5267 and 5268: “*et qu'il mande encore à la reine / de s'y rendre, si elle y consent,*” (Chrétien, *Romans*, p. 651). Who is the grammatical subject of *mande*, here? It seems that it could be either Arthur (mentioned in verse 5265) or Lancelot (the ostensible author of the letter).

⁸¹¹ Given that neither Van Daele nor Greimas, as it seems to me, offers any translations for *comander* that correspond to Méla's rendering of *comande* as “*consent,*” I would be tempted to question Méla's translation of “[...] *se le comande*” (*Charrette*, v. 5268) as “[...] *si elle y consent*” (Chrétien, *Romans*, p. 651), were it not that Poirion offers a similar translation (“[...] *si elle veut bien,*” Chrétien, *Oeuvres complètes*, p. 637). I remain puzzled by both scholars' translations.

Let us look at the effects of the letter (v. 5252) on those who hear it read (as well as, perhaps, on the one who reads it aloud).⁸¹² They—the *il* of verse 5275 presumably includes at least Guenièvre, Gauvain, and Keu, and may include the *autres* of verse 5298⁸¹³—announce that they wish to return, and this is what they proceed to do. Like the *lettres* of the *damoisele sauvage* in the *Lion*, this letter seems, to those who receive it, to convey knowledge that is worthy of trust. Unlike the knowledge given by the *damoisele sauvage*'s *lettres*, though, the knowledge seemingly given by the letter, here, in the *Charrette*, appears to concern its author. It can thus more readily be seen as an extension of that author, who (it would seem) is speaking on his own behalf, through the letter, to Bademaguz (vv. 5258-5266), to Guenièvre (vv. 5267-5268), and to Gauvain and Keu (v. 5269).⁸¹⁴ The message of the letter seems thus to be closely tied to its author, in a way that was not the case for the message of the *damoisele*'s *lettres*, which, for all we know, bore no identifying marks—beyond, presumably, her name.⁸¹⁵ The pseudo-Lancelot's letter, on the other hand, “[...] *a entresaignes tes / Qu'il durent croire, et bien le crurent*”

⁸¹² Frank Brandsma sees this “episode” as evidence for “our general idea of the oral delivery of Arthurian verse romance” (Brandsma, “The Presentation of Direct Discourse in Arthurian Romance: Changing Modes of Performance and Reception?” in *The Medieval Opus: Imitation, Rewriting, and Transmission in the French Tradition*, ed. Douglas Kelly, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996, p. 246).

⁸¹³ Méla's translation is helpful in regard to understanding verses 5297 through 5299: “Le roi les recommande à Dieu / et il les salue tous les trois, / puis les autres, et s'en retourne” (Chrétien, *Romans*, p. 652). The *rois* of verse 5297 is Bademaguz. The *autres* of verse 5298 are, it seems to me, the prisoners; my understanding of this point has been helped, I suspect, by Donald Maddox's discussion (*The Arthurian Romances of Chrétien de Troyes: Once and future fictions*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, pp. 45-48).

⁸¹⁴ On “extensions,” see Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, New York: McGraw-Hill (1965), pp. 45-46.

⁸¹⁵ Or perhaps her seal.

(vv. 5270-5271).⁸¹⁶ So convincing are these *entresaignes* that Gauvain, for one, expects to find Lancelot at Arthur's court; later on, when he has arrived at Arthur's court and is asked where Lancelot is, he is surprised by the question: “—*Ou? fait mes sire Gauvains lués, / A la cort [...]! / Don n'i est il?*” (vv. 5332-5334).⁸¹⁷

Why has Gauvain believed the letter? What are *entresaignes*? Translations for *entresaignes* as it appears, here, in the *Charrette*, include “marques d'authenticité” (Poirion) and “détails” (Jean-Claude Aubailly).⁸¹⁸ Greimas defines *entreseigne* as “[s]igne, marque, enseigne,” as “[s]igne, signal,” and as “[é]tendard, bannière.”⁸¹⁹ Meanwhile, Greimas's second definition for *entreseigné*, which he identifies as an adjective, is “[a]rmerié, blasonné;” this suggests to me an association between *entresaignes* and heraldry.⁸²⁰ As a knight's armor could sometimes be distinctive

⁸¹⁶ “[B]ore such seals as to make them accept its authenticity, and they did accept it.” Jacques Merceron sees this “commentaire” as having “en réalité pour fonction de laisser discrètement présager un rebondissement” (Merceron, *Le message et sa fiction: La communication par messenger dans la littérature française des XIIe et XIIIe siècles*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998, p. 157).

⁸¹⁷ ““Where?” Sir Gawain replied at once. ‘At the court [...]. Is he not there?’”

⁸¹⁸ See, respectively, Chrétien, *Oeuvres complètes*, p. 637; and Chrétien, *Lancelot ou le chevalier de la charrette*, trans. Jean-Claude Aubailly, Paris: Flammarion (1991), p. 333.

⁸¹⁹ Greimas lists *entreseigne* as a feminine noun, and, it would seem, traces its first appearance (at least in the Old French texts listed towards the beginning of his dictionary) to Chrétien. Interestingly, Greimas also includes, in the same entry, the word *entreseing*, for which, if I have rightly understood the entry, he finds a usage earlier (by a few years) than the one he cites, by Chrétien, for *entreseigne*. Greimas's translations for this related word (*entreseing*, that is) are “[s]igne, marque, trace, indice” and “[s]igne, signal;” given that he qualifies *entreseing* as a masculine noun, I tend to identify it with the word *entreseign*, in Van Daele's dictionary, which appears there as a masculine noun meaning “*signe de reconnaissance, enseigne — étendard, bannière*” (Van Daele's italics). The semantic range of both the feminine and the masculine noun would seem to be similar, making it difficult to identify which of these words is used in *Charrette*, v. 5270.

⁸²⁰ Note that Bedos-Rezak mentions “the heraldic emblem” as a “new form[...] in the twelfth century” (“Medieval Identity,” p. 1519); see also *ib.*, p. 1529.

enough—note that Greimas’s first definition for *entreseigné* is “[o]rné, distingué”—to identify it as belonging to a certain knight,⁸²¹ so there is something about the letter, here, that identifies it as belonging to Lancelot.⁸²²

Inspired by Bedos-Rezak’s very helpful article on seals, signs, and identity,⁸²³ and encouraged by Ruth Harwood Cline’s translation of the *Charrette*,⁸²⁴ I wonder if the *entresaignes* in question, here, may perhaps be made up, at least partly, by a seal, whether one resembling Lancelot’s own, or one resembling Arthur’s.⁸²⁵ After all, the *entresaignes* make it seem as though the letter carries the authority of Lancelot, has been authored by Lancelot, is in some way an extension of Lancelot.⁸²⁶ And as Bedos-Rezak

⁸²¹ For examples of this kind of recognition, see *Erec et Enide*, v. 3696; *Charrette*, vv. 5771-5802 (this is, at least, how Bruckner, who, I suspect, brought this scene to my attention, understands it, *Shaping Romance*, p. 71); and *Lion*, v. 2245 (I was led to this verse, indirectly, by Maddox, *The Arthurian Romances of Chrétien de Troyes: Once and future fictions*, p. 74). For examples to the contrary, see *Erec et Enide*, vv. 3967-3972 (Jean-Marie Fritz’s translation of verse 3972 has helped me to understand it; see Chrétien, *Romans*, p. 186) and vv. 4992-4996.

⁸²² The lack of an *entresaigne* may prevent identification (*Cligès*, v. 4677).

⁸²³ Part of Bedos-Rezak’s argument seems to me to be that the “lay elite” (see “Medieval Identity,” p. 1490) used seals as representation of their identity, rather than using both seals and style, because they themselves were illiterate. Bedos-Rezak contrasts this with the example of Bernard of Clairvaux, who was able to represent his distinctive personhood, in letters, through his style (see “Medieval Identity,” pp. 1489-1490).

⁸²⁴ It would seem that Ruth Harwood Cline, in her English translation of the *Charrette*, translates *entresaignes* as “seals” (Chrétien, *Lancelot, or, The Knight of the Cart*, trans. Ruth Harwood Cline, Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1990, p. 146). Cline’s translation, here, may very well have been in my mind as I formed my hypothesis as to the meaning, here, of *entresaignes*.

⁸²⁵ See, in the Gallimard edition of Chrétien’s works, Poirion’s note beginning on the bottom of page 1289 and continuing on page 1290; this note not only supports an interpretation of *entresaignes* as referring to a seal, but also observes that “[s]i le sceau se trouve sur une bague, un prisonnier ne peut empêcher son gardien de s’en servir” (Chrétien, *Oeuvres complètes*, p. 1290).

⁸²⁶ See, again, McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, pp. 45-46.

explains, seals were “conceived and created,” in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, “so as to produce a duplicate presence, a presence not actual but nonetheless real.”⁸²⁷ Not only this, but “it seems,” writes Bedos-Rezak, later on in her article, “that seals furthered rather than resulted from literate modes. This suggests that seals played a unique role in fostering, to borrow M. T. Clanchy’s expression, medieval trust in writing.”⁸²⁸ Bedos-Rezak concentrates, in her article, on seals used for medieval charters; according to Haseldine, though, seals were used for letters, too.⁸²⁹

Bedos-Rezak’s suggestion of a connection between seals and trust is surely relevant to the passage from the *Charrette* that we have been examining. Bruckner, who seems to understand the *entresaignes* as “signs,” writes that “[t]he narrator does not specify what these believable signs were, but his phrase emphasizes their believability.” She goes on: “[the narrator] suggests, on the one hand, how important is the role of belief in any interpretation of signs and, on the other, how unreliable credibility per se may be.”⁸³⁰ Bruckner talks about “the role of belief,” here, and this is justified by the poem’s use of the words *croire* and *crurent* (v. 5271). Yet, following Bedos-Rezak, we might also think about the role of trust, which is in turn bound up with the question of

⁸²⁷ Bedos-Rezak, “Medieval Identity,” p. 1505.

⁸²⁸ Bedos-Rezak, “Medieval Identity,” p. 1514.

⁸²⁹ “Authentication could be by some autograph mark, but was usually by seal. Letters could be sealed closed, but were more often sealed open, the seal then remaining intact as a permanent record of the letter’s validity” (Haseldine, “Epistolography,” in *Medieval Latin: An Introduction and Bibliographical Guide*, p. 651).

⁸³⁰ Bruckner, *Shaping Romance*, p. 76.

recognition.⁸³¹ In order to do so, let us return to the letter, which turns out to be false (v. 5339) in more ways than one.⁸³²

First, it holds out a promise, a glimpse, of a state of affairs that, although it has seemed to be imminent, is still far away: Lancelot will come to the court, later on in the *Charrette*,⁸³³ but he is not there, yet (vv. 5320-5341). The letter, then, is false in the sense that its message is not borne out by reality. Second, however—and this is where both recognition and trust come in—this letter has been falsely attributed to Lancelot. Not only does it deceive, at the level of its message, but it is part of a larger project of counterfeit or forgery.⁸³⁴ And the first of these two deceptions is, I would argue, contingent on the latter: it is the *entresaignes*—whether we interpret this word to mean a seal or to mean something else—that guarantee, somehow, the letter’s message. To borrow Bedos-Rezak’s language regarding seals, the *entresaignes* have seemed “to produce a duplicate presence, a presence not actual but nonetheless real.”⁸³⁵ If we understand the *entresaignes* in this way, as permitting a duplication of an author not bodily present, we may then see the true nature of the mistake made by the letter’s

⁸³¹ “[I]n projecting personal distinction,” writes Bedos-Rezak, “seals acted through a system of identification, designation, and recognition in which representational identity rested on an ontological principle of likeness” (“Medieval Identity,” p. 1491).

⁸³² According to Merceron, “[l]e motif de la fausse lettre” appears in other twelfth and thirteenth century works “appartenant aussi bien au genre romanesque qu’*épique*.” He goes on, though, to say that “[c]’est Chrétien de Troyes qui, semble-t-il, en a le premier fait usage dans le *Chevalier de la Charrete*” (Merceron, *Le message et sa fiction: La communication par messenger dans la littérature française des XIIIe et XIIIe siècles*, p. 156).

⁸³³ See *Charrette*, vv. 6785-6787.

⁸³⁴ See Poirion, in Chrétien, *Oeuvres complètes*, note 1 for page 637 on pp. 1289-1290.

⁸³⁵ Bedos-Rezak, “Medieval Identity,” p. 1505.

audience. This mistake does not consist in a failure of interpretation, at the literal level—the poem assures us that the letter’s reader “[...] *lor sot bien dire / Ce qu’il vit escrit an l’alue*” (vv. 5256-5257),⁸³⁶ and there is no reason to suppose that Guenièvre, Gauvain, and the others misunderstand what the reader reads—so much as it consists in a failure of recognition. What we have, here, is a case of mistaken identity. The audience has trusted in “a duplicate presence”⁸³⁷ that is in fact a duplicitous presence.

Later on in the *Charrette*, Chrétien portrays a moment of true recognition, a moment that stands as a counter example to the episode of the false letter. Lancelot has managed to convince the wife of his jailer to allow him a brief reprieve from prison, so that he can go to the tournament of Noauz. When he arrives, he takes lodging that is beneath his station, in order to prevent his being recognized. Yet Lancelot’s identity, despite his precautions, is found out by a herald, who “*L’uis de la meison overt voit, / S’antranz et vit gesir el lit / Lancelot, et puis qu’il le vit / Le conut[.]*”⁸³⁸ This moment is particularly interesting because, in it, Lancelot is *desarmez* (v. 5529). Thus the herald’s recognition of Lancelot is enabled not simply by the knight’s bodily presence, but by his presence *sans* armor. We might see this as an exaggerated mode of bodily presence, for note that armor itself may be a kind of medium.⁸³⁹ In insisting on Lancelot’s relative nakedness, here, a nakedness that reveals the knight to the herald as

⁸³⁶ “[K]new how to speak clearly the words written on the parchment.” The word *alue* does not seem to appear, with an appropriate meaning, in either Greimas or Van Daele.

⁸³⁷ Bedos-Rezak, “Medieval Identity,” p. 1505.

⁸³⁸ “Noticing the door to the house open, he went inside and saw Lancelot lying on the bed. The moment he saw him, he recognized him[.]”

⁸³⁹ Cf McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, pp. 119-122.

not only a *what* (a knight) but also a *who* (Lancelot), the scene emphasizes, by way of contrast, the difficulty of rightly recognizing a person whose immediate presence is removed from us, whether by armor or by the kind of distance that calls for a letter to be sent and received.⁸⁴⁰

Indeed the episode of the false letter, when read in parallel with that of the *demoisele sauvage*'s *lettres*,⁸⁴¹ reminds us that prudence is required in determining whether the promise of presence that *lettres* may appear to hold—the duplication of presence that they may appear to afford⁸⁴²—can be trusted enough to provide the basis for action. Certainly, *lettres* may turn out to be true representations of those whose words they claim to bear, and this would seem to be the case for the *lettres* of the *demoisele sauvage*; but they also open up the possibility for misrepresentation (in the sense of intentional deception), of a kind that at least seems to be relatively easy to achieve: surely it is simpler to fake a letter than to pretend, in one's own body, to be someone else. For in a letter a counterfeiter has not to assume a person's entire body, but merely that

⁸⁴⁰ On this scene, see Bruckner, "Le Chevalier de la Charrette (Lancelot)," in *The Romances of Chrétien de Troyes: A Symposium*, ed. Douglas Kelly, Lexington, KY: French Forum, Publishers (1985), p. 146, as well as *Shaping Romance*, p. 71.

⁸⁴¹ On this kind of reading technique as it pertains to Chrétien, see Bruckner, who speaks of "the network of echoes and analogues [that] typically link the juxtaposed episodes of romance" (*Shaping Romance*, p. 61). According to Bruckner, "Chrétien signals to his readers that we should be prepared to read both backward and forward the linear progression of [a particular] scene" in the *Charrette* (*ib.*, p. 65). Bruckner's treatment of what she calls "the tournament episode" (*ib.*, p. 65), in the *Charrette*, illustrates how parallel reading, within one romance, may help us understand it; I am suggesting that this kind of parallel reading is also helpful at the intertextual level—and Bruckner herself employs it in this way, later on in the same chapter of *Shaping Romance* (see pp. 90-94, on intertextuality as it pertains to the *Charrette* and the *Lion*, and pp. 94-104 on intertextuality as it pertains to the *Charrette* and various Tristan and Iseut stories).

⁸⁴² See Bedos-Rezak, "Medieval Identity," p. 1505.

person's voice.⁸⁴³ And if this counterfeiter should happen to possess, or to be able to appropriate,⁸⁴⁴ convincing *entresaignes* belonging (or seeming to belong) to the person in question, his or her task is rendered all the easier.

What the episode of the false letter reveals to be necessary, on the part of a letter's audience, is interpretation, and interpretation of a particularly discerning kind.⁸⁴⁵ Why particularly discerning? Because in a letter, and in *lettres* in general, words tend to be abstracted from the persons who are their authors. Written words, unlike spoken ones, are not immediately guaranteed by a human body, a body that both speaks and serves as context for its own speech.⁸⁴⁶ The clues that may help us to interpret rightly a given message when this message is delivered by a human person (whether this human person is speaking on his or her own behalf, or on the behalf of another) are not present, at least not in the same way, once the message's content has been delegated to writing. Even in the relatively innocent case of the *damoisele's lettres*, in the *Lion*, Chrétien shows us how the written language of one person may become part of another person's rhetorical strategy—Lunete's, in this case. Now, it would seem that both Lunete and the *damoisele sauvage* are friends to Laudine, and that they are concerned, as friends should be, for her welfare. Yet the example of the false letter makes it plain that the great gift of writing, great because it may permit a person's voice to be present in that person's absence, may

⁸⁴³ I am assuming, here, that Lancelot is literate, his literacy being assted to by an earlier passage in the *Charrette* (vv. 1856-1870), which I will treat, below.

⁸⁴⁴ As Poirion's note in the Gallimard edition of Chrétien's works suggests (see Chrétien, *Oeuvres complètes*, note beginning on the bottom of page 1289 and continuing on page 1290).

⁸⁴⁵ On the exercise of discernment in interpretation, see Jacobs, *A Theology of Reading*, pp. 87-88.

⁸⁴⁶ This is not to suggest that bodies may not also deceive.

also be abused. The medium of the letter seems, then, to require a kind of interpretation that takes into account this possibility of abuse and that is cautious about assuming an equivalence between the ostensible author's voice and the written words that claim to stand in for him or her.

Does this mean that Chrétien is advising the adoption of a hermeneutics of suspicion? I do not think so. For there is another lesson to be drawn from the false letter. “*Par les lettres sont deceü,*” we are told (v. 5341).⁸⁴⁷ Although it is possible to conceive of the *lettres* in this verse as referring to the missive as a whole, and thus including both its message and its *entresaignes* (if indeed I am right in distinguishing between these two things), it is worth examining, at this point, the *lettres* in the more limited sense of words on a page. These *lettres*, even though false, do succeed, in some way, in making Lancelot present to their auditors. They speak as Lancelot would speak, sound as he would sound—at least inasmuch as they do not sway their hearers from the belief inspired in

⁸⁴⁷ Staines translates verses 5340-5341 as “[t]he letter had tricked them, deceived them, and betrayed them.” As modern French equivalents for the old French verb *decevoir*, Greimas offers “[t]romper, trahir.” This is interesting because in modern French the verb *décevoir* does not mean “to deceive” but rather “to disappoint” (*Larousse Mini Dictionnaire Français Anglais*, Paris: Larousse/ VUEF, 2002, entry for *décevoir*). Did the old French *decevoir*, which appears to have been closer in its meaning to our English verb “to deceive” than to the modern French *décevoir*, carry connotations of disappointment as well as of deceit? Greimas’s entry for *decevoir* would seem to give us no reason to think so; nor would Van Daele’s (Van Daele defines *decevoir* as “*tromper*”). Méla translates the verse in question as “Ils ont été dupes de la lettre,” (Chrétien, *Romans*, p. 653).

them by the *entresaignes*.⁸⁴⁸ They are a very convincing imitation, while remaining an imitation.⁸⁴⁹ Yet let us consider what they actually say:

*Et sachiez bien certainnement
Qu'il est avoec le roi Artu,
Plains de santé et de vertu,
Et dit qu'a la reine mande
C'or s'en vaigne, se le comande,
Et mes sire Gauvains et Ques, (vv. 5264-5269)⁸⁵⁰*

If we begin really to think about this message, we may wonder whether the letter's hearers-and-believers really know Lancelot very well at all. Would Lancelot really have proceeded to Arthur's court without the queen he has been so diligent in seeking? Would he have gone there without Gauvain, whom he was so anxious, just a short time before (at the level of the text), to find (vv. 5044-5049)?⁸⁵¹ My own doubts, here, are of course framed by my knowledge that "*les letres fausses furent*" (v. 5339); nevertheless, it seems possible that the text is leading us to ask such questions. If the Lancelot whom the letter makes present (represents) is a different Lancelot, should this not give his friends

⁸⁴⁸ See *Charrette*, v. 5271. What exactly do the listeners believe (*crurent*, v. 5271)? Do they believe the letter's words? Its *entresaignes*? Méla's translation would seem to indicate that he reads the pronoun *le* as referring to the *entresaignes* (Chrétien, *Romans*, p. 651), as does Poirion's (Chrétien, *Oeuvres complètes*, p. 637; see also Poirion's note, in this edition, beginning on the bottom of page 1289 and continuing on page 1290).

⁸⁴⁹ Note that imitation does not, in and of itself, have to be deceitful; see Bynum, "Did the Twelfth Century Discover the Individual?" in *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages*, pp. 82-109; and Bedos-Rezak, "Medieval Identity."

⁸⁵⁰ "Lancelot was strong and healthy, be assured, and residing at King Arthur's court. He asked the queen to come there, and commanded Sir Gawain and Kay to do the same."

⁸⁵¹ Not only this, but Lancelot had not yet found Gauvain before he (Lancelot) was captured (vv. 5048-5109; Méla's translation, for which see Chrétien, *Romans*, p. 645, has been helpful to me, here). Thus the reference to Gauvain, in the letter, is also suspicious.

pause—and this regardless of what Bruckner calls the “believability” of the *entresaignes*?⁸⁵²

The objection could be made, at this point, that what is most centrally in question, in both the episode of the *damoisele*'s *lettres* and in that of the false letter, is not presence (and certainly not personal presence), but simply knowledge, or even information.

Laudine is given knowledge of the king's coming, as Guenièvre and the others are given knowledge—or so they think—of Lancelot's whereabouts. Why not, then, theorize a letter as a container for information or a means of communication rather than as a foretaste of presence? This is a fair critique. Certainly both these letters, or collections of *lettres*, seem to give information and to make it possible to communicate from a distance.⁸⁵³ Yet even as we think about them as modes of communication, we are not so far after all from the question of presence. For one of the virtues of letters (epistles) is that, in the words of John of Salisbury, “often without sound they speak the words of those absent.”⁸⁵⁴ This is, at least, what letters are meant to do. It is what the *lettres* of the *damoisele sauvage* do, and it is what the false letter pretends to do. Letters are expected to make present one aspect of bodily presence: namely, speech. Yet the need for *entresaignes*, not to mention for trustworthy messengers, emphasizes the degree to which presence through written language falls short of full bodily presence. A letter, at its best,

⁸⁵² Bruckner, *Shaping Romance*, p. 76. My point, here, about the difference that knowing a person may make to interpretation, is similar (and probably owes much) to that of Jacobs, in *A Theology of Reading* (pp. 3-8).

⁸⁵³ The distance in question, in the case of the *damoisele sauvage*, can be only speculated upon.

⁸⁵⁴ “[F]requenter absentium dicta sine uoce loquuntur” (*Metalogicon* I.13, ed. Hall, p. 32; Eng. trans. Hall, p. 150). I was directed to this description in the *Metalogicon* by K. Sarah-Jane Murray (*From Plato to Lancelot*, p. 17).

copies a person's voice. And to discern a true copy from a false one, when one is dealing with persons, may require not a hermeneutics of suspicion, but a special kind of knowledge.⁸⁵⁵

Tombs

In one of his adventures, before crossing over the *Pont de l'Espee* in order to find Guenièvre, Lancelot, who is being accompanied by the damsel who is his second host in the *Charrette*, stops to pray at a *mostier* that is near a graveyard (*Charrette*, vv. 1837-1842).⁸⁵⁶ As he is leaving, a monk “*li vient [...] / A l'encontre*” (vv. 1847-1848),⁸⁵⁷ and Lancelot asks him about the place;⁸⁵⁸ in the end, the monk takes him into the graveyard, where he sees tombs with “*letres sor chascune / Qui les nons de ces devoioient / Qui dedanz les tonbes girroient*” (vv. 1860-1862).⁸⁵⁹ According to Méla's editorial note in his edition and translation of the text, the verb in verse 1862 is, in four out of the five manuscripts that include this portion of the romance, *gisoient*, and not *girroient*, which is

⁸⁵⁵ For hints as to how this kind of knowledge could be described, see Martha C. Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature*, New York: Oxford University Press (1990), pp. 261-285; and Jacobs, *A Theology of Reading*, pp. 3-8 and pp. 43-67.

⁸⁵⁶ To be more precise, the graveyard is next to the *mostier's chancel* (vv. 1838-1839). Greimas defines *mostier* as “[c]ouvent, monastère,” as “[é]glise en général,” and as “[t]emple païen;” it seems likely that the *mostier* into which Lancelot enters is a monastery, given that, in verses 1847-1848, he meets a monk. As for a *chancel*, Greimas defines this as a “[c]lôture faite de barreaux,” as a “[b]alustrade, grille de choeur,” as a “[c]hoeur d'église,” and as a “[f]enêtre grillée.” The context of verse 1838 suggests to me that this *chancel* is the monastery's choir (Méla translates it as “choeur,” Chrétien, *Romans*, p. 553).

⁸⁵⁷ “[Came] ahead to greet him.”

⁸⁵⁸ Méla's translation has helped me understand verse 1851, as well as, I suspect, the verses immediately preceding it (Chrétien, *Romans*, p. 553).

⁸⁵⁹ “On each [...] letters forming the names of those who would be buried there.”

found only in Paris, B.N. fr. 794, the “Guiot manuscript.” Méla conserves *girroient*, the conditional, and suggests that *gisoient*, the imperfect, is “meilleur pour la rime, mais non pour le sens.”⁸⁶⁰ As becomes clear when Lancelot begins to read the *letres* on the tombs, these tombs bear the names not of their present, but of their future occupants: “*Ci girra Gauvains*,” (v. 1865), reads one.⁸⁶¹ For Méla, the Guiot manuscript “a peut-être conservé la leçon originale”—*girroient*, that is—“à moins de supposer,” he writes, “que Chrétien ait recherché l’ambiguïté.”⁸⁶²

This writing offers a sort of prophecy,⁸⁶³ and may also serve as a *memoria mortis* for Lancelot. A longer prophecy occupies the *lame*, a word translated by Van Daele as a “*dalle tumulaire*,”⁸⁶⁴ of a tomb that is “[s]or totes autres riche et bele” (v. 1873),⁸⁶⁵ according to the monk, the *letres* read as follows:

[...] *Cil qui levera*
Cele lanme seus par son cors
Gitera ces et celes fors
Qui sont an la terre an prison
Don n’ist ne sers ne gentix hom
Qui ne soit de la entor nez,

⁸⁶⁰ Chrétien, *Romans*, critical apparatus on bottom of p. 553. For a brief discussion of verbs in Old French, see Huchon, *Histoire de la langue française*, pp. 99-108.

⁸⁶¹ “Here Gawain shall lie[.]”

⁸⁶² Chrétien, *Romans*, critical apparatus on bottom of p. 553.

⁸⁶³ Dembowski refers to this “episode” as “offer[ing] a clear prediction of the larger dimensions of Lancelot’s heroic role” (“The *Sens* of the *Charrette*: A General Introduction to the *Charrette* Poem and its Significance,” in *Dame Philology’s Charrette*, p. 7).

⁸⁶⁴ Van Daele also translates it as a “*barre de fer*” (an iron rod); however, a “*dalle*” (a slab), makes more sense to me, here. I have been aided, here, by the entries for *barre* and for *dalle* in the *Pocket Oxford-Hachette French Dictionary* (3rd ed., ed. Marie-Hélène Corréard, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

⁸⁶⁵ “[T]he most beautiful [and richest] of all” (I have modified Staines’s translation, which reads, “the most beautiful work of all”).

*N'ancor n'en est nus retornez.
Les estranges prisons retienent
Et cil del país vont et vienent
Et anz et fors a lor pleisir. (vv. 1900-1909)⁸⁶⁶*

Like the inscriptions on the tombs destined for Gauvain and others, this one establishes itself as prophecy by its use of the future tense. By referring to the *lame* on which it appears (v. 1977) as “[c]ele lanme” (v. 1901), the writing also points directly to the physical place where at least one of the events it foretells will be accomplished. To a knight whom Lancelot has already encountered, and who, with his son, has been following him, the monk will later speak of how he, the father has “*sovant leües [...] Les letres qui sont sor la lame*” (vv. 1976-1977).⁸⁶⁷ The monk, too, has of course read the *letres*, and they have prepared him to be able to identify “[c]il qui levera / Cele lanme seus par son cors” (vv. 1900-1901) as no ordinary knight.⁸⁶⁸ They have not only given him a foretaste of the future, but have given him, specifically, a foretaste of a particular person, a particular person whom he can recognize because that person carries out, before his eyes, a part of what has been foretold about him (vv. 1910-1914); for, in Bruckner’s words, “as soon as the monk stops reciting the inscription, Lancelot goes over and easily lifts the tombstone.”⁸⁶⁹

⁸⁶⁶ “The man who lifts this stone by himself shall be liberator of all men and women imprisoned in the land, whence no one, [serf or] nobleman [...], leaves from the moment he enters. No one has ever returned from there. Foreigners are held captive, while the people of the land come and go as they please” (I have modified Staines’s translation).

⁸⁶⁷ “[O]ften read the inscription on the stone.”

⁸⁶⁸ “The man who lifts this stone by himself[.]”

⁸⁶⁹ Bruckner, “*Le Chevalier de la Charrette (Lancelot)*,” in *The Romances of Chrétien de Troyes: A Symposium*, p. 139.

How does this example of writing differ from the letters we have seen, earlier? Let us return to John of Salisbury's description of letters (*litterae*) as "often without sound [...] speak[ing] the words of those absent."⁸⁷⁰ We may well accept that this description is apt when it comes to the letters of the *demoisele sauvage* and of the pseudo-Lancelot, whose voices are indeed made present in writing; is it apt, however, when it comes to the writing on the *lame*? If the inscription makes the voice of its author present, it does so without telling us anything about that author. For the *letres* on the *lame*, unlike the letters of the *damoisele sauvage* and of the pseudo-Lancelot, are not identified as proceeding from any particular person. This is a voice that speaks, literally, from a grave; and although we do not know whether the person, or persons, responsible for the inscription are dead or living, these persons, in their particularity, would seem to be inaccessible to identification.

There is, then, a mystery surrounding this example of writing that did not surround our examples of epistolary writing. For one thing, this writing guarantees itself neither through the use of *entresaignes* nor through the naming of its author, but rather through the use of the future tense (and perhaps through its place in a graveyard near a monastery). The source of the writing's authority thus remains unclear. Moreover, the exact nature of the writing's prophetic power is ambiguous. It seems indeed to foretell future events, but the poem does not make it plain whether the fulfillment of the writing's prophecies is accomplished through superhuman means, through human means, or through both. After all, does this prophecy bring Lancelot to the graveyard? Perhaps it

⁸⁷⁰ *Metalogicon*, Eng. trans. Hall, p. 150 (see *Metalogicon* I.13, ed. Hall).

does, in a certain sense. Yet Chrétien does not seem to portray Lancelot as lacking in free will.

It may help us, at this point, if we compare this episode to another one in the *Charrette*. Later on, the narrator tells us that Lancelot possesses a ring that, if he looks at it (*Charrette*, v. 2339), will allow him to rid himself of any enchantment (*anchantement*, v. 2353) that may be present (vv. 2335-2355). Like Lancelot's ring, the letters on the *lame* in the graveyard have a particular *force* (v. 2337); we might describe this *force* as that of bestowing clear-sightedness. This analogy will go only so far: after all, the poem tells us who gave Lancelot the ring (vv. 2345-2350), and it is logical to believe that the ring's *force* comes from this person, whereas we do not know who has written the inscription. Besides this, the ring is capable of helping Lancelot not only to detect enchantment but also to defeat it, while the inscription seems to serve the purpose mainly of revelation and not of defense. The analogy is nevertheless helpful insofar as it sheds light on a function shared by ring and inscription, that of revealing truth that had been hidden.

Specifically, the prophecy and his partial fulfillment of it allows Lancelot's identity to be revealed, even though this revelation is limited and enigmatic. Once Lancelot has lifted the *lame*, the monk knows, in a sense, who he is, even if he does not know his name. Note that Lancelot does not fulfill the entire prophecy at once: when he leaves the monastery, he has yet to free the prisoners described in the inscription. Yet there is a way in which his lifting of the *lame* serves as a guarantee that, in the future, he will achieve the rest of what has been prophesied about him. Indeed, there would seem to be a kind of prolepsis at work in any kind of prophecy, a collapsing of past, present, and

future in such a way that what is still to come is made to seem as though it were already accomplished.

The *letres* provide, for the monk and for the father, a framework of expectation in terms of which Lancelot, when present in body, can be recognized. Note, too, though, that Lancelot himself is made privy to this framework, before he lifts the *lame*. That is, it seems that it is possibly in response to hearing the prophecy pronounced that Lancelot performs one of the actions it mentions.⁸⁷¹ While this does not discount the prophetic nature of the *lame*'s words—after all, if the monk is right, it takes a particular kind of strength to perform the feat of lifting the *lame*, a kind of strength that not everyone possesses—it does complicate it. Indeed, there may be room for more than one explanation of the prophetic workings of the writing, here: may it not be possible for them to bear a sort of authority (given to them presumably by their author, whoever this may be), at the same time that they are capable of inspiring someone to carry out the actions they describe?

If the letters of the *damoisele* and the pseudo-Lancelot make absent voices present, this writing mediates, to its audience, both the presence of its author and the presence of the person it describes. It stands between audience and author via duplication of its author (as do the epistles we already studied), but it also stands between audience and *cil qui levera*. It performs, then, not simply the function of “speak[ing] the words of those absent,”⁸⁷² but also the function of introducing a described person to others, as one

⁸⁷¹ Bruckner discusses this scene in “*Le Chevalier de la Charrette (Lancelot)*” (*The Romances of Chrétien de Troyes: A Symposium*, pp. 138-141).

⁸⁷² *Metalogicon*, Eng. trans. Hall, p. 150 (see *Metalogicon* I.13, ed. Hall).

person might introduce his or her friend to another person,⁸⁷³ or as an author might describe a character to his or her audience. This writing bridges spatial distance (its author being, apparently, absent in body), while bridging cognitive distance, as well: Lancelot is present in body, but until he has begun to fulfill the inscription's prophecy, he is not present, to the monk and to the father, as *cil qui levera*, not to mention as the one who “[g]itera ces et celes fors / *Qui sont an la terre an prison*” (vv. 1902-1903).

This episode thus shows the possible limitations of mere bodily presence. Lancelot, though present in body, is anonymous until he is named by the letters—named not as “Lancelot,” to be sure, but named, in a certain way, nonetheless. Recall, here, Arthur's words to Gauvain, in the *Conte*, regarding Perceval: “*Biaux niés, je ne lo conois mie / [...] et si l'ai veü*” (vv. 4030-4031).⁸⁷⁴ Bodily presence may not suffice to ensure recognition; rather, another medium—whether armor, spoken language, or writing—may be necessary. It is as though Lancelot's body needed to be clothed, by the inscription, in order to be (partly) identified.

A romance

At the “*chastel de Pesme Aventure*” (*Lion*, v. 5105), in the *Chevalier au lion*, Yvain, accompanied by his lion and the “*puchele*” (v. 5175) who has sought him out on behalf of the younger sister of the Noire Espine,⁸⁷⁵ comes to a garden, where he sees a

⁸⁷³ Note that letters (epistles) may also have this function: see Marie de France's *Deus Amanz*, v. 110 (*Lais de Marie de France*, trans. Harf-Lancner, p. 174; again, I was led to this example by the entry for LETTRE in *Trésor de la Langue Française*).

⁸⁷⁴ “Dear nephew, I do not know him, yet I did see him[.]”

⁸⁷⁵ Presumably the lion and the *puchele* are the ones being referred to by the term *sa route*, in verse 5357. Van Daele defines *rote*, which he indicates to be an earlier form of *route*,

prodomme (v. 5259), his daughter, and her mother. The poem explains that the daughter is reading “[e]n un rommans, ne sai de cui” (v. 5362),⁸⁷⁶ while her mother is listening (vv. 5363-5365). It is not clear whether we are meant to understand that the father is listening, along with the mother, to the romance, but it seems likely that we are, given that she is reading “devant li” (v. 5361),⁸⁷⁷ and that the text speaks of how both he and her mother “[...] se pooient esjoir / Mout de li veoir et oïr” (vv. 5367-5368)—they are able to rejoice in both seeing and hearing her.⁸⁷⁸

Unlike the other examples of writing in Chrétien’s romances at which we have looked, this one gives no indication of its contents, but only of its genre.⁸⁷⁹ And to make matters more mysterious, the expression “[...] ne sai de cui” (v. 5362) is ambiguous, its interpretation depending on the sense of the preposition *de*. If *de* means “by,” the narrator would be claiming not to know who composed the romance,⁸⁸⁰ while if *de* means

as, among other things, “troupe (*en marche*), détachement, cortège” (Van Daele’s italics); Greimas defines *rote* as “troupe, compagnie, rangée.”

⁸⁷⁶ “[F]rom a romance—I do not know about whom.”

⁸⁷⁷ Greimas lists *li* as a variation both for *lui* (him) and for *lei* (her); the context of verse 5361, however, makes it plain that *li*, here, refers to the girl’s father.

⁸⁷⁸ *Pooir* is the equivalent of “[p]ouvoir,” in modern French, according to Greimas. As translations for the reflexive form of *esjoir*, Van Daele lists “*se réjouir, se livrer à la joie, prendre du plaisir*” (Van Daele’s italics). Huot, who uses the daughter’s reading, here, along with other examples, as evidence for “lay literacy,” describes the girl as reading “to her parents” (*From Song to Book*, p. 7); see also Laurence Harf-Lancner, “Chrétien’s Literary Background,” trans. Amy L. Ingram, in *A Companion to Chrétien de Troyes*, p. 28.

⁸⁷⁹ Brandsma connects this example of reading with that of the false letter, in the *Charrette*; he suggests that the latter “episode [...] corroborates the information in the well-known reading scene in *Le chevalier au lion*” (Brandsma, “The Presentation of Direct Discourse in Arthurian Romance: Changing Modes of Performance and Reception?” in *The Medieval Opus: Imitation, Rewriting, and Transmission in the French Tradition*, p. 246).

⁸⁸⁰ For what seems to me to be an example of *d’* used in this way, see *Cligès*, v. 2.

“about,” he would be claiming not to know who is in the romance.⁸⁸¹ Hult and Walter each choose the latter interpretation in their modern French translations of the *Lion*, as do Kibler, Staines, and Raffel in their English translations.⁸⁸² Moreover, a note in the Gallimard edition of Chrétien’s works explains that “de cui [...] renvoie au sujet du roman,” and compares this usage to that of *Cligès*, v. 1.⁸⁸³ Yet surely the very next verse of *Cligès*, which refers to “[...] les comandemanz d’Ovide,” could be cited as evidence of the use of *de* (here contracted to *d’*) to indicate authorship,⁸⁸⁴ and Bruckner seems to understand the expression from the *Lion* in this way, as meaning ““by I don’t know whom.””⁸⁸⁵ In either case, we, as members of the *Lion*’s audience, are cut off from any relationship either with the author of the romance the girl is reading or with the characters it may contain.

Does this *rommans* make anyone present to its own, fictional audience—that is, to the girl and her parents?⁸⁸⁶ If it makes its characters present to them, this happens

⁸⁸¹ For examples of *de* (or *del*) used in this way, see *Erec et Enide*, v. 19; *Cligès*, v. 1 and v. 9; *Charrette*, v. 24 and v. 7113; *Lion*, v. 6804.

⁸⁸² See, respectively, Chrétien, *Romans*, p. 888; Chrétien, *Oeuvres complètes*, p. 468; Chrétien, *The Knight with the Lion, or Yvain (Le Chevalier au Lion)*, ed. and trans. Kibler, p. 217; *The Complete Romances of Chrétien de Troyes*, trans. Staines, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press (1990), p. 320; and Raffel, *Yvain, the Knight of the Lion*, p. 160.

⁸⁸³ Chrétien, *Oeuvres complètes*, note at bottom of p. 1225.

⁸⁸⁴ In Méla’s and Collet’s translation of *Cligès, les comandemanz d’Ovide (Cligès, v. 2)* is rendered as “les commandements d’Ovide” (Chrétien, *Romans*, p. 291). In Walter’s, it is rendered as “les *Commandements* d’Ovide (Chrétien, *Oeuvres complètes*, p. 173); a note in this edition explains that “[i]l s’agit probablement des *Remèdes d’amour*,” and that “[I]’oeuvre n’est pas parvenue jusqu’à nous” (*ib.*, note 2 on p. 1137).

⁸⁸⁵ Bruckner, “Chrétien de Troyes,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval French Literature*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2008), p. 80.

⁸⁸⁶ I include the daughter herself as a member of the romance’s audience.

unbeknownst to us, as we are not told who these characters may be. Yet coming in succession, as it does, to Yvain's discovery of the three hundred cloth workers (vv. 5184-5342), the reading scene, although it may not give us any hints about who or what is present to the *puchele* and to her parents, as she reads, does give us a fairly good sense of those who are absent to them: namely, the cloth workers described by Yvain as “[*m*]aigres et pales et dolentes” (v. 5229).⁸⁸⁷ In a literal sense, of course, these workers are quite nearby, in a *prael clos* (v. 5187) not far from the *vergier* (v. 5356) where the family is gathered (vv. 5184-5191; vv. 5343-5347).⁸⁸⁸ The family, however, does not seem to be concerned for these workers,⁸⁸⁹ and indeed, if the workers themselves are to be believed, it would seem that the *puchele*'s father is the one whom one cloth worker describes as “[*c*]hil pour qui nous nous traveillons” (v. 5315)⁸⁹⁰ and as the one who “[*s*]’est riches de nostre deserte” (v. 5314).⁸⁹¹

Certainly the *rommans* does not keep the family from attending to Yvain—indeed they jump to their feet (v. 5396) as soon as they see him (v. 5398), in a gesture echoing

⁸⁸⁷ Staines's translation of verses 5227-5229 reads, “But I am disturbed by their thin bodies and the sad expressions on their pale faces.”

⁸⁸⁸ A *prael*, according to Greimas, can be either a “[p]etit pré, prairie” or a “[c]our, préau;” the second of these definitions seems to me to be more helpful, here, even though Greimas dates it to the thirteenth century. Van Daele's definition for *prael*, meanwhile, is “*petit pré*” (Van Daele's italics). Hult's modern French translation of verses 5187-5191 is very helpful, here.

⁸⁸⁹ It seems that the only time either daughter, mother, or father refers to the workers at all is when the *sires* (v. 5692) agrees to let them go free, in v. 5710; note that he does not do this until after they are mentioned to him by Yvain (vv. 5704-5707).

⁸⁹⁰ “[O]ur employer[.]”

⁸⁹¹ “[B]ecomes rich from our earnings.”

that of Calogrenant towards the beginning of the *Lion* (vv. 67-68)—even so, the narrator gives us plenty of suggestions, in the verses that follow, that there is something less than wholehearted, or at least less than completely straightforward, about the welcome they offer him. “*Je ne sai s’il le dechoivent*” (v. 5403),⁸⁹² says the narrator, and, “[...] *font samblant qu’il lor plaise / Que herbergiez soit a grant aise*” (vv. 5405-5406).⁸⁹³ This note is struck again with the description of how Yvain is ashamed and aggrieved because of the extravagant treatment he is receiving (vv. 5426-5427),⁸⁹⁴ and with the statement that the *puchele* “*bien set qu’a sa mere plaist / Que riens a faire ne li laist / Dont ele le cuit losengier*” (vv. 5431-5433).⁸⁹⁵ Besides all this, there is the suggestion, when it comes to the meal Yvain is served, not merely of excess (v. 5435), but of excess that may cause pain (or at least fatigue) to others⁸⁹⁶—the ones explicitly mentioned are the *sergens* (v. 5437) who bring the food, but the abundance of the meal also stands in sharp contrast to the *poverté* (v. 5194) of the cloth workers (vv. 5189-5201).

⁸⁹² “I do not know if they were deceiving him[.]”

⁸⁹³ “[A]cted as though they were happy [for him to be] comfortably lodged” (I have modified Staines’s translation).

⁸⁹⁴ The expression “[...] *mout li poise*” (v. 5427) suggests that Yvain is burdened, or weighed down, by the family’s service (see Greimas’s entry for the verb *peser*).

⁸⁹⁵ “[K]new her mother was pleased that she was not inattentive to anything she thought might flatter him.” The verb *losangier* is defined by Greimas as “[f]latter, parler gentiment,” but also as “[t]romper” (interestingly, it seems that Greimas traces its first appearance, at least in the Old French texts he has drawn from in preparing his dictionary, to Chrétien himself). Notice, too, the presence, in verse 5421, of the noun *losenge*, defined by Greimas as “[é]loge,” “[f]ausse louange, tromperie,” and “[r]use, supercherie.”

⁸⁹⁶ See vv. 5436-5437. Greimas defines the verb *enoier*, or *enuier*, as “[n]uire, contrarier, fâcher,” as “[f]atiguer, épuiser,” and as “[ê]tre importun, chagriner.”

In light of all this, how ought we to understand the *puchele*'s reading? To interpret the family scene interrupted by Yvain as, in its context, an indictment of romance-reading (and listening) *tout court* seems untenable, given the *genre* of the *Lion* itself;⁸⁹⁷ still, this does not keep us from interpreting it as a possible indictment of a certain kind of romance-reading, a kind of romance-reading that implies absorption in the world, or worlds, offered by romance, at the expense of paying attention to the world outside it.⁸⁹⁸ Is it because of this kind of absorption that the father expresses so repeatedly the desire that his daughter be married to Yvain?⁸⁹⁹ This desire appears to be in keeping with the *coustume* (v. 5498) that the father mentions in one of his speeches to Yvain.⁹⁰⁰ At the same time, the portrait Chrétien paints of this family is certainly not altogether complimentary: the girl is a flatterer (v. 5433), her flattery is designed to please her mother (vv. 5431-5433), and the *sires*, along with having to be reminded, after

⁸⁹⁷ See *Lion*, vv. 6804-6805.

⁸⁹⁸ One could draw a parallel between this kind of romance-reading, in a garden, and two other situations in Chrétien's romances both of which are associated with gardens, too. The first is that of Cligès and Fenice, towards the end of *Cligès*, when Cligès has managed, with the help of Johan, to smuggle Fenice into a tower, and the two lovers, in their closed garden ("[...] *vergiers* [...] *clos* [...]," *Cligès*, v. 6339), are absorbed in one another. The second is that of Mabonagrain and his *amie* in the *Joie de la Cort* episode in *Erec et Enide*; this couple, too, is closed up in a garden (see *Erec et Enide*, vv. 6039-6147). I am quite possibly indebted to Haidu for the drawing together of these examples (see *Lion-Queue-Coupée: l'écart symbolique chez Chrétien de Troyes*, Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1972, p. 37). For an interpretation of this scene that is not identical to mine but that has quite possibly influenced it, see Robert W. Hanning, *The Individual in Twelfth-Century Romance*, New Haven: Yale University Press (1977), pp. 136-138.

⁸⁹⁹ For these expressions, see *Lion*, vv. 5470-5474; vv. 5484-5487; vv. 5490-5493; vv. 5498-5501; vv. 5695-5698; vv. 5711-5715; and vv. 5738-5740.

⁹⁰⁰ On this custom, see Maddox, *The Arthurian Romances of Chrétien de Troyes: Once and future fictions*, pp. 65-69.

Yvain's victory over the two *filz a nuitun* (v. 5509),⁹⁰¹ that the *chaitives* are now owed their freedom (vv. 5704-5710), is offended by Yvain's refusal to marry his daughter (vv. 5733-5740; vv. 5752-5766). The *Lion* allows for an interpretation of this episode that calls into question the *coustume* itself and the family's practice of it;⁹⁰² within such an interpretation it makes sense to call into question the praiseworthiness of their romance-reading-and-listening, as well.

Does the *rommans* make this family present to anyone beyond their immediate circle? The visual tableau presented by the girl as she reads occupies more of the narrator's attention than does the actual material she is reading. Thus the *rommans* may well take the girl, her mother, and possibly her father, into another, tertiary world, but if so, it is a totally private one, as far as the members of the *Lion*'s audience, are concerned. Does the *rommans* give its own audience a picture of a possible future, as we have seen in the other examples of writing we have looked at? Perhaps. Certainly the father is insistent on Yvain's marrying his daughter, and we may understand his insistence as a reflection of his expectation that life proceed along the lines of a storybook; yet Chrétien does not connect these particular dots. If the *rommans* serves as a medium of personal presence, it does so by bringing the mother and her daughter together: "*S'i estoit venue acouter / Une dame, et estoit sa mere*" (vv. 5364-5365).⁹⁰³ That the *rommans* was really necessary for this to happen, though, is unclear. We get the sense that it would not

⁹⁰¹ The father calls them, in the version of verse 5467 cited by Maddox, "*deus miens sergenz*" (Maddox, *ib.*, p. 67; Maddox cites the verse in question as verse 5465). Maddox translates this as "two of my armed footsoldiers" (*ib.*, p. 68). I am grateful to Maddox for drawing my attention to this verse.

⁹⁰² See Maddox, *ib.*, pp. 67-69.

⁹⁰³ "A lady had come to recline there and hear the romance."

matter, for these parents, whether their daughter was reading or not, just so long as they could “[...] *li veoir et oïr*” (v. 5368).⁹⁰⁴ The *rommans* is capable, at best, of serving as an excuse for those who are already bound to one another by kinship to come together. What it does not do is to bring together those of disparate economic condition. The *chaitives* are not listening to the story.⁹⁰⁵

The letters and inscriptions—whether true or false—that we looked at, earlier, make their authors, and sometimes others, present in language. The *lettres* of the *damoisele sauvage* make her present, as a friend, to Laudine, Lunete and others. The false letters make a pseudo-Lancelot present to Gauvain, Guenièvre and others. The inscriptions on the tombs make those whose resting places they prophesy present, in a ghostly sort of way, and the inscription on the *lame* makes Lancelot more fully present, to the monk, than he was when present merely in body; as may be the case with armor,⁹⁰⁶ this writing mediates presence that is already corporeal by helping its audience to discern the true identity of an anonymous person. Chrétien does not, on the other hand, show the *rommans* in the *Lion* as making anyone present to its audience beyond the members of this audience themselves.

Thus the *rommans* seems to be in another category. It gives us an example of written language the value of which, as written language, seems to be subordinated to its value as aesthetic detail; it is not automatically clear why the girl is reading, as opposed to sewing, or gazing at herself in a mirror in the manner of the *male pucele* (*Conte*, v.

⁹⁰⁴ “See her and listen to her” (my translation, influenced by that of Staines).

⁹⁰⁵ Maddox seems to question such a reading (*The Arthurian Romances of Chrétien de Troyes: Once and future fictions*, p. 66).

⁹⁰⁶ Armor is capable both of revealing and of concealing identity.

7059) when Gauvain comes upon her in the *Conte*.⁹⁰⁷ If the girl in the *Lion* is reading, instead of engaging in another activity, it is perhaps so that her parents may have the chance not only to see her, but also to listen to her (v. 5368). In other words, what she is reading may not be as important as the fact that she is reading something. If we are given any hint about the *rommans*'s contents, it comes indirectly, in the form of a digression on the narrator's part (vv. 5371-5392). The emphasis remains on the reader rather than on what is being read.

The passage holds out little hope of encountering another person, deeply, through romance-reading, whether this other person is part of the romance's audience, or part of the story itself. If anything, Chrétien seems to be emphasizing the degree to which this reader is herself a work of art (vv. 5371-5380)—and this may well be the way in which she is present to her own parents. Note, however, that Yvain (unlike Cupid) does not fall under her spell. Insofar as the girl and her surroundings seem to embody a romance, the story of Yvain's stay at the *chastel de Pesme Aventure* stands as a warning against allowing just any romance to serve as a mediator between oneself and other people.⁹⁰⁸ Although Yvain himself could presumably have been drawn into the closed circle of romance-readers, this is not what happens. Instead, Yvain follows the *chastel's costume* only up to a certain point, by fighting the *filz a nuitun* (v. 5509). He does not complete

⁹⁰⁷ See *Conte*, vv. 6584-6589. Méla's translation helped confirm my understanding of this scene (Chrétien, *Romans*, p. 1137).

⁹⁰⁸ This episode becomes, then, on my reading, a cautionary tale. The girl and her parents are present to one another, but their presence to one another is not worthy of imitation. For a discussion of how a certain kind of communal reading may be productive of (or perhaps characteristic of) a problematically exclusive kind of community, see Jacobs, *A Theology of Reading*, pp. 40-41; Jacobs leaves room, too, though, for a more praiseworthy kind of communal reading (*A Theology of Reading*, p. 142-144).

the requirements laid upon him by the father, who would have him marry the girl. We are thus provided with an example of what it may look like to distance oneself from a community of readers and reading—a community that, at first glance, is attractive and even seductive, but that, when looked at in a larger context, suggests irresponsibility and perhaps even injustice.

Conclusion

The examples I have explored in this chapter hold out at least two possibilities when it comes to the capacity of language—spoken or written—to mediate personal presence. The first is the possibility demonstrated in the *Conte du Graal* by Perceval's mother's presence to his memory through language. The *Conte* shows that language may possess and exercise an incantatory effect⁹⁰⁹—that it may call up, so to speak, one person to another, such that the past reality of the person being summoned is somehow made to join up with the present.⁹¹⁰ Perceval, when he remembers his mother (see vv. 1657-1660; vv. 2918-2931), is able to live as someone seeking a specific goal; this stands in contrast to his wanderings, his “[e]rrance”⁹¹¹ (see vv. 6143-6163). The romance suggests that continued, or at least recurring, memory of specific persons may be important to finding

⁹⁰⁹ The word “incantatory” is Gumbrecht's (see “Presence Achieved in Language,” p. 320); in using it, I do not mean to draw upon its connection to magic, but rather on its connection to singing. Gumbrecht, similarly, speaks of “rhythmic language” (*ib.*, p. 320).

⁹¹⁰ See Gumbrecht, *ib.*

⁹¹¹ I am indebted for this word to Chrétien, *Romans*, page 1125, which contains verses 6164-6198 of the *Conte* and is entitled “*Errance de Perceval*.”

one's orientation, as well as that spoken language may be an aid—although it is not necessarily the only one⁹¹²—towards maintaining such memory.

A second possibility, related to the first, is demonstrated by some of the examples of writing I have treated in the second part of this chapter. Language may create what I have called a framework of expectation in regard to a person. Both the *lettres* of the *damoisele sauvage* and the *lettres* that are *fausses* (*Charrette*, v. 5339) bring into the present not so much the past, in other words, as they do—or seem to do—the future. Rather than acting as aids to memory, they act as pictures of what, and who, is (at least apparently) to come. This is also the case for the writing on the *lame* and on the tombs, in the *Charrette*. And something similar happens with Guenièvre's words to her *amis* (if indeed this is what they are), towards the beginning of the *Charrette*: these words make her *amis* present as a very particular person, a person whose reaction to her situation may be anticipated by those who overhear her remark—i.e. Count Guinables and the romance's audience. This kind of presence, like that mediated by some of the material things I explored in the previous chapter, is an example of metonymy; the *amis* is present, in Guenièvre's speech, as a shred or fragment of a person, and yet a shred or fragment that gives the listener or reader a foretaste of what a fuller encounter with this person might be like.

⁹¹² We are not told that, directly after leaving Gornemant, Perceval speaks, or is spoken to, of his mother, but simply that “[...] *molt li est tart / Que a sa mere venir puise / Et que sa mere vive truisse*” (“[he is] anxious to reach his mother and find her alive,” *Conte*, vv. 1658-1660; I have added the words “he is” to Staines’s translation, and have omitted the words “and well” after the word “alive”—Staines is presumably translating verse 1660 as it reads in a variant noted by Méla: “sainne et v[ive] la t[ruise],” Chrétien, *Romans*, bottom of p. 992). She has, however, entered into his recent conversation with Gornemant (see vv. 1629-1642).

As for the *rommans* that the girl is reading in the *Lion*, it mediates the girl's and her mother's presence to one another by serving as an extension (to use, yet again, McLuhan's word) of the girl herself as an object of aesthetic enjoyment. She is the object of such enjoyment on the part of both her mother and her father, who "[...] *se pooient esjoïr / Mout de li veoir et oïr*" (*Lion*, vv. 5367-5368), and the aesthetic relationship between her and her parents is abetted by her reading of the *rommans*, which serves as an excuse for them to "[...] *veoir et oïr*" their daughter (v. 5368). Here, language is described as helping its hearers not to remember or to imagine a person who is absent in body, but to contemplate a person whose body is already present. In and of itself, this is not so bad. Recall that, in the graveyard scene in the *Charrette*, written language mediated between an already-bodily-present Lancelot and the monk. Yet the scene with the *rommans* suggests, in its context, that this audience have crossed a line from listening-as-enjoyment to listening-as-distraction. The attention of both is focused on their daughter and away from the "[...] *pucheles jusqu'a trois chens / Qui dyverses oevres faisoient*" (vv. 5190-5191).⁹¹³ If we think back to the example of Lancelot and the golden hairs, discussed in the previous chapter, it is possible to draw a contrast between the protagonist of the *Charrette* and the parents in the *Lion*: Lancelot, although his focus is on the queen, still exercises his responsibility to defend the *dameisele* whom he is accompanying, while the focus of the parents in the *Lion* on their daughter seems to come at the expense of the *pucheles*.

Chrétien shows how language may be abused, whether in the context of impersonation (the false letter in the *Charrette*) or in the context of distraction (the

⁹¹³ "[A]s many as three hundred maidens [...], engaged in different kinds of [work]" (I have modified Staines's translation).

rommans in the *Lion*). Yet he also portrays language as capable of calling a particular person to mind (the mentions of Perceval's mother in the *Conte*), of mediating the love of one person for another (Perceval's mother's words on his behalf), of conveying the voice of someone who is absent (the *lettres* of the *dameisele sauvage* in the *Lion*), and of clothing a person already present so that this person may be better recognized (the inscription on the *lame* in the *Charrette*). Rather than suggesting either that all language is disappointing, or that, as Méla writes, "écrire, c'est effacer,"⁹¹⁴ Chrétien leaves room for use to see language as an aid to maintaining or deepening one person's relationship to another—as an aid, then, to recognition, to friendship, and to love.

⁹¹⁴ Méla, *Blanchefleur et le saint homme ou la semblance des reliques*, p. 19.

CONCLUSION

The disparate modes of personal presence discussed in the last four chapters may be analyzed as more or less adequate ways of responding to problems of distance between the persons depicted in Chrétien's romances. In doing this, it is wise to keep in mind the possibility that the distance in question may not be (only) physical, but also moral (one character has trespassed against another), or intellectual (one character fails to understand another). Allowing for different kinds of distance has the merit of making it possible, in turn, to see even bodies as media that, while permitting two characters to be literally present to one another, may at times be less successful at bridging moral or intellectual distance between those same characters.

In her book *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200-1336*, Caroline Walker Bynum writes that, "in the twelfth century,

[...] theologians generally agreed that body is necessary for personhood. Although certain early thinkers such as Hugh of St. Victor and Robert of Melun used Platonic concepts that made the soul the person, schoolmen after mid-century usually understood 'person' as a composite of body and soul.⁹¹⁵

Against this background, it makes sense to ask whether, and to what degree, the media I have treated allow Chrétien's characters to be present to one another as "composite[s] of body and soul." And now it is possible to return, with greater nuance, to the three broad categories of mediation that I established in chapter two: first, mediation as representation (which may be looked at in terms of either duplication, to echo Brigitte

⁹¹⁵ *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200-1336*, New York: Columbia University Press (1995), p. 135. Footnote 59 on the same page is very interesting, as well.

Miriam Bedos-Rezak,⁹¹⁶ or “extension,” to echo Marshall McLuhan⁹¹⁷); second, mediation as (near) replacement; and third, mediation as intercession, or as a kind of holding (or bringing) together of persons who might otherwise be at odds.⁹¹⁸

The simplest way for a mediator or medium to serve as a representative of one person to another is seemingly for that mediator or medium to be recognized as a duplication of the person being represented.⁹¹⁹ Laudine’s messenger becomes thus recognizable through a proclamation of the authority that has been delegated to her (*Lion*, vv. 2716-2721; vv. 2767-2773). The blood in the snow (*Conte*, vv. 4120-4144) and the *lettres* of the *damoisele sauvage* (*Lion*, vv. 1619-1622) duplicate personal presence in a similar way. When it comes to Laudine’s messenger and to the blood in the snow, Chrétien gives us external confirmation of the faithfulness of these representations,⁹²⁰ whereas when it comes to the *lettres* it is another character, Lunete, who bears witness to the good use to which the medium has been put by the *damoisele* (*Lion*, v. 1622). A more complex case is provided by the inscription on the *lame* in the graveyard (*Charrette*, vv. 1900-1909), which not only speaks with the voice of someone who is

⁹¹⁶ See Brigitte Miriam Bedos-Rezak, “Medieval Identity: A Sign and a Concept,” *The American Historical Review* 105.5 (2000), p. 1505.

⁹¹⁷ See Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, New York: McGraw-Hill (1965), pp. 45-46.

⁹¹⁸ For a helpful distinction between peacemaking and peacekeeping, I am indebted to Monsignor Frank Rossi, whose remark on this point I hope I have not either misremembered or misrepresented.

⁹¹⁹ See Bedos-Rezak, “Medieval Identity,” p. 1505.

⁹²⁰ Laudine’s messenger is right, seemingly, about Laudine’s anger towards Yvain (*Lion*, vv. 6752-6761). And I have already mentioned, in chapter three, the confirmation of Perceval’s poetic perception that is suggested by the *Conte*’s echoing, in verse 4138, of verse 1782.

(presumably) absent,⁹²¹ but helps to clothe Lancelot by revealing a part of his identity to another person.

Things become even more complicated if we open up this first category to include such mediators as the knights defeated by Perceval and sent to the court (*Conte*, vv. 2268-2269; vv. 2660-2673; vv. 3936-3938; vv. 6159-6161), along with such media as the hairs contemplated by Lancelot (*Charrette*, vv. 1392-1499), the windows gazed through by Lancelot (*Charrette*, vv. 540-570) and by Yvain (*Lion*, vv. 1282-1521), and the ring given to Yvain by Lunete (*Lion*, vv. 1021-1037). In these cases, the mediation being accomplished or described can still be seen in terms of representation, but if so, it is a kind of representation via extension⁹²²—and here I abandon Bedos-Rezak’s term in favor of McLuhan’s, which is peculiarly appropriate for describing these modes of presence in that it helps make plain their limitations. Recall that the knights are required to surrender themselves to Arthur in the condition to which they were reduced by their battle with Perceval. They represent Perceval not only by reporting his words (a kind of duplication), but also by showing, or extending, in their bodies, the literal effects of qualities belonging to him: namely, his prowess and clemency.⁹²³ Similarly, the golden hairs act as extensions of the queen’s body. Chrétien portrays these two examples of mediation, the knights and the hairs, as both effective, on their own terms, and limited.

⁹²¹ My language echoes that of John of Salisbury, *Metalogicon* I.13, ed. J. B. Hall, Turnhout: Brepols (1991), p. 32; Eng. trans. J. B. Hall, Turnhout: Brepols (2013), p. 150. I was directed to this description in the *Metalogicon* by K. Sarah-Jane Murray (*From Plato to Lancelot*, p. 17).

⁹²² In other words, it is metonymy as opposed to metaphor.

⁹²³ Here, I am not referring so much to the “*LX. chevaliers*” of *Conte*, v. 6159 as to Aguinguerons, Clamadeu, and the *Orgueilleus de la Lande*.

The defeated knights make present Perceval's chivalry but not his lack of discernment. The hairs make present Guenièvre's beauty but not her will.⁹²⁴

With the windows and with Lunete's ring, Chrétien shows how a medium may serve to bring persons together, in one sense, while cutting them off from each other, in another sense. Thus the window in the *Charrette* makes it possible for Lancelot to see the queen but does not allow him to keep on seeing her (a limitation so frustrating as to lead to his near self-destruction). This basic predicament is repeated in the *Lion*, but is complicated by the addition of Yvain's guilt: the window allows the partial bridging of spatial distance through its extension of Yvain's power of sight and of Laudine's visibility, but it cannot bridge the moral distance that lies between them. The same kinds of limitations are attached to Lunete's ring, through which she guarantees Yvain's literal but hidden presence to Laudine and the searchers.⁹²⁵ Like the window, it is capable, seemingly, of affording him physical proximity to Laudine, without getting him any closer to repentance for the wrong he has done her.⁹²⁶

Here we are already very close to the second category of mediation listed above, mediation as (near) replacement, for Lunete's ring threatens to hide Yvain so well, so

⁹²⁴ Note that the hairs can be appropriated (*Charrette*, vv. 1468-1469; vv. 1498-1499), whereas the real Guenièvre is more elusive (*Charrette*, vv. 3969-3980).

⁹²⁵ On the window and on Lunete's ring, in the *Lion*, see Saly, "Le Chevalier au Lion : Un jeu de cache-cache ?," in *Image, Structure et Sens : Études arthuriennes*, Aix-en-Provence, France: Publications du CUER MA (1994), pp. 24-26. On the search for Yvain, see Haidu, *Lion-Queue-Coupée*, Geneva: Librairie Droz (1972), pp. 27-29.

⁹²⁶ Yvain's retreat into invisibility seems to entail a simultaneous retreat from questions about his moral responsibility to Laudine. (Again, this is to assume that it is indeed by using the ring that Yvain hides himself from the searchers; see my discussion of this question in chapter three).

completely, as to make him into its tool, rather than serving as a tool for him.⁹²⁷ Another problematic mediation arises in the case of Arthur's knights, who, although they tend to remain faithful to the king,⁹²⁸ sometimes come close to overshadowing him. Such potential for overshadowing seems mostly unintentional on the part of the knights themselves, which distinguishes it from the deception practiced in the case of the false letter (*Charrette*, v. 5339). Indeed, the false letter provides an exaggerated example of a medium that masks personal presence rather than mediating it; yet surely this is due to the misuse of the medium rather than to the medium itself.

If we were to stop here, we would have a picture of mediation, in Chrétien's romances, as functioning—when it does not spill over into replacement or usurpation—both by means of duplication (metaphor) and by means of extension (metonymy). However, Chrétien also depicts a special kind of mediation the practice of which requires virtues such as prudence, courage, humility, faithfulness, and love (or friendship). In my earlier list of categories, I have called this “mediation as intercession;” it could also be called “deep” mediation. Into this category fall the kinds of mediation practiced by Lunete, by Guenièvre, and by Enide. Here, the mediator herself stands between, or goes between,⁹²⁹ two other persons, mediating between them by drawing on at least one (and sometimes more than one) of the virtues I have mentioned. Her work requires not only representation but also what could be called interpretation. We see this interpretation at work in Lunete's efforts to reconcile Yvain and her mistress, towards the end of the *Lion*

⁹²⁷ See McLuhan: “By continuously embracing technologies, we relate ourselves to them as servomechanisms” (*Understanding Media*, p. 46).

⁹²⁸ An exception is the “conte Engrés,” in *Cligès* (v. 431), if we see him as a knight.

⁹²⁹ See the title of Gretchen Mieszkowski's *Medieval Go-Betweens and Chaucer's Pandarus* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

(*Lion*, vv. 6546-6803). We see it in Guenièvre's attempt to patch together Keu's and Arthur's friendship (*Charrette*, vv. 128-167). And we see it in Enide's intervention in Erec's and Guivret's fight, in order to bring it to an end (*Erec et Enide*, vv. 5015-5040). This interpretative mediation is not confined to one gender—think of Gauvain's *grant sen*, in *Erec et Enide* (v. 4106)—however, it does seem to be practiced more often by females. Analogous to these examples of mediation, although it is exercised in another sphere, is Perceval's mother's *parole* (*Conte*, v. 6332), which, in the *Conte*, mediates between her son and God.

Chrétien's romances show us a world where bodily presence—the same bodily presence that is so crucial to practices of knighthood—does not always coincide with personal presence, at least if by this we mean presence that is recognizable as that of “a composite of body and soul.” Lunete, Guenièvre, and Enide all act as catalysts for the revelation of personal presence in this sense, as Lunete reveals the *chevalier au lion* to Laudine, Guenièvre reveals Arthur to Keu, and Enide reveals Erec to Guivret. Other media, such as objects and language, may do something similar, to a lesser degree, by calling attention to aspects of a person that had hitherto gone unrecognized or unappreciated. Yet these media will not do this automatically. Rather, if they are to function positively, giving or recalling a real understanding of one person to another, this will have much to do with human practices of discernment, without which the recognition of personal presence is difficult, and friendship, without which it is in danger of descending into practices of voyeurism, suspicion, or escapism.⁹³⁰

⁹³⁰ For examples, see, respectively, Yvain at the window (*Lion*, vv. 1282-1519), Méléagant looking at the queen's sheets (*Charrette*, vv. 4748-4749), and Perceval gazing at the drops of blood in the snow (*Conte*, vv. 4128 ff; Méla's translation of vv. 4128-4129, for which

see Chrétien, *Romans*, Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1994, p. 1065, has helped me to understand them, as has the definition of the modern French *fouler*, on www.wordreference.com).

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