

Lizzie Strauss

Karen Cherewatuk

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### Intrigue and Romance in *Lancelot*

Chrétien de Troyes constructs the intrigue of *Lancelot* by giving the audience a very clear idea of who her eventual partner should be. The story is framed as a love-triangle conflict between Lancelot, our literal knight in shining armour, and Meleagant, the evil yet impotent prince who kidnaps the fair Queen Guenivere. But subjectively, the love triangle is not compelling. Lancelot is unable to lose a battle or fail to overcome an obstacle, while Meleagant cannot successfully defend his right Guenivere, or even have sex with her. A compelling conflict contains an element of risk or uncertainty-- who will win the queen's love?-- but in de Troyes' *Lancelot*, the requisite uncertainty is absent. The outcome of Lancelot's quest to win back Guinevere is predictable and un compelling.

Chrétien de Troyes sets up the character of Lancelot as the ideal of the courtly lover. Not only is he unbeatable in combat, he is willing to incur dishonor in the combative realm in order to pursue his love interest. One of the first actions we see Lancelot take is to mount a cart driven by a dwarf, an action that signalled to all who saw him that he was guilty of some crime and dishonored before the court. But de Troyes makes clear that in Lancelot's case, mounting the cart is a virtue, "since Love ruled his action, the disgrace did not matter" (117). Not only is Lancelot the perfect lover though, he is also the perfect knight. On page 132, he single handedly lifts a slab off a tomb, thereby ensuring that he will "free all the men and women who are imprisoned in the land from which no one returns." He also wins in hand-to-hand combat against six knights at once (124), crosses a river on his hands and feet on a sword (143), and defeats

every knight in a single tournament (169). Even his own kidnapping is not due to a fault in his fighting ability or courtly love-- he is tricked (161), which is unfortunate but not shameful, according to the values of the time. His virtually miraculous victories prove to the reader long before the end that Lancelot is guaranteed Guenivere's hand.

Meleagant, on the other hand, is the perfect villain. He is neither a lover or a fighter, and must rely on the help of others to do his work for him. His virility is curbed by his own father, who "has not let even Meleagant see [Guenivere] except in his own presence or with a company of other people" (151), demonstrating his inability to either overcome either the will and power of the elderly or have sex with the woman he himself kidnapped. In addition, he is unable to defeat Lancelot in combat and is kept alive only through his father's intervention (149). He is unable even to capture Lancelot without the help of a dwarf, one of the lowest classes of people (161-162). In all the aspects of knighthood that Lancelot excels, Meleagant fails.

The diametrical opposition of Lancelot and Meleagant is set up from the beginning of the story, making it clear from the outset that one will win and one will lose. And Meleagant's capture of Guinevere sets him up as the villain before Lancelot is even introduced. The inevitability of Meleagant's defeat is obvious to the reader from the beginning, rendering the love triangle unemotional and un compelling.