

Chivalric Romance and Chretien de Troyes

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Origins of Chivalry

- Encouraged by Church; Desire to occupy Knights in socially positive and stabilizing pursuits rather than destructive ones.
- Fusion of Church, Court, and Feudal Values. Cult of Mary.
- Poetic expression in S. France, Troubadours (Trobar, to find or compose in verse), and in the court of Eleanor de Aquitaine and her daughter, Marie de Champagne.
- Romance is a mixture of troubadour poetry and themes of love with the narrative qualities and military themes of Chanson de Geste.

Troubadour Poetry

- Jongleurs: traveling minstrels, accompanied their love poetry with instruments. Performed in courts and fairs. Later, Aristocrats.
- **William IX of Aquitaine**, also Guillaume, Duke of Aquitaine (1071-1127); grand-father of Eleanor of Aquitaine
- Arabic Influence?
- S. French, Langue d'oc, troubadours
- N. French, Langue d'oïl, trouveres
- Destroyed by Albigensian Crusade; fled to Spain and Italy and may have influenced the Renaissance (Dante and Boccaccio).



Chivalry and Art of Love

- <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/capellanus.html>
- Knight/Lady parallels Knight/Lord; Christian and Christ
- Medieval Marriage
- Andreas Capellanus' "Art of Love," end of 12th C.; Eleanor of Aquitaine



Principle Points in Chivalric Love

- Love is between a Knight and his Lady, not between husband and wife.
- Love is best kept secret.
- In courtly Love, the man should seek to serve the Lady
- Love is about passion and physical attraction, as well as virtue and other character qualities. However, it starts with what we would call Infatuation.
- Love is initiated through the eyes and the senses.

Chretien de Troyes

- Mid to Late 12th century
- Court of Marie de Champagne
- Wrote in 8 syllable, rhyming couplets
- First literary treatment of Arthurian legends, though there were pseudo-historical precedents (Geoffrey of Monmouth's History of Britain) and an oral tradition.
- Erec and Enide; Knight of the Cart (Lancelot); Knight of the Lion (Yvain); Story of the Grail (Perceval)

Example of the 8 Syllable Verse in Old French

Au matinet sont esvellie
Si resont tuit aparellie
De monter et de
chevauchier.

Erec ot molt son cheval
chier,
Que d'autre chevalchiet
n'ot cure.

In the morning they awoke
And all prepared again
To mount and ride.

Erec greatly prized his
horse,
And would not mount
another.

Erec and Enide

- Stag Hung: Award of the Kiss; Problem of Chivalry – Each Knight must claim his Lady is the Best and Most Beautiful.
- Erec, son of Lac, is the second best Knight after Gawain. Goes on side quest; Sparrow Hawk Contest, He who takes the sparrow hawk down claims to have the most beautiful, wise, and pure lady; if no one opposes him, the hawk is his.
- He marries Enide; Arthur bestows the Kiss of the Stag upon her; Erec is so in love he loses all care of fighting.
- Enide overhears gossip about how Erec is no longer brave and courageous. Weeping, she tells him.
- Goes on quest with her; Prohibition on speech
- Joy of the Court Challenge
- Problem of Chivalric Love: Can one marry one's beloved Lady?

Hunt for White Stag

- Sir Gawain: “Lord,” he said, “this hunt will never bring you pleasure or thanks. We have all known for some time the meaning of the custom of the white stag: whoever can kill the white stag has the right to kiss the most beautiful maiden of your court regardless of the consequences. Great peril could come from this, for there are five hundred young ladies of noble birth here...There is none who does not have a bold and valiant knight for her lover, and each lover would gladly affirm, whether right or wrong, that his beloved is the most charming and the most beautiful.”

Sparrowhawk Competition

- Vavasour to Erec: “Before all the people, a beautiful sparrowhawk of five or six moltings, the finest known, will be set on a silver perch. The man who would own the sparrowhawk must have a wise and beautiful lady who has no trace of baseness. If there is a knight bold enough to claim the honor and title of the most beautiful on behalf of his beloved, then he will bid her take the sparrowhawk from the perch in front of everyone so long as no one else dares interfere. Such is the custom the barons now observe and the reason they come here every year.”

Battle and Supplication

- Erec claims the sparrowhawk and is challenged by a knight.
- God protects Erec and he disarms the knight.
- “Mindful of the dwarf’s disgraceful act in the forest, Erec would have decapitated the knight had he not begged for mercy. ‘Alas, vassal, you have defeated and captured me, honor and renown would never be yours were your next act my murder. That would be too hideous a crime. Take my sword, I surrender it to you.’”
- As penance, he must travel to Arthur’s court and “yield yourself, your maiden, and your dwarf to her [Guinevere] to do her will.”

Erec and Enide Travel to Arthur's Court

- Guinevere gives Enide a dress and welcomes her; she tells Arthur to give the kiss of the white stag to Enide.
- Arthur: “With courtesy, the king kissed her before all his barons. ‘My dear friend,’ he said to her, ‘I give you my love without base intention, dishonesty, or ulterior motive. I shall love you with a fine heart.’”

Erec is Unmanned by His Love of Enide

- “But Erec loved Enide with such love that he cared no more for feats of arms, nor did he attend tournaments. He had no desire to joust. His only wish was to lie beside his wife, whom he made his sweetheart and his mistress. Embracing her and kissing her occupied all his attention, and he longed for no other pleasure.”
- How is this problematic?

Enide is to be Silent

- Enide tells Erec she is ashamed that he refuses to fight and joust; he goes on a quest with her and tells her no matter what she sees, she must not speak.
- She sees three knights approaching and warns Erec. He responds: “What have you said? You have too little respect for me now. I gave you a command, forbidding you to speak. How very bold of you to disobey! This time you will be pardoned, but should it happen again, you will not be forgiven.”

Erec Appears Dead

- Enide faints when she sees Erec apparently dead from combat and regrets ever speaking to him.
- “Alas, sorrowful Enide, I am my lord’s murderer. My folly has killed him. 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. Good silence never hurts anyone, but speech is often harmful. I have put this matter to the test and proven this to be completely true.”

Joy of the Court

- After Erec recovers and saves his wife from being forced to marry a count (they thought he was dead), Erec pledges to pursue the Joy of the Court.
- All other knights have failed and been killed who tried this challenge.
- Nephew of King Evrain guard's a garden at the desire of his beloved. The knight may never leave until another knight defeats him in combat.

Observations on Erec and Enide

- Explores problems and challenges to Chivalry
- Kiss of White Stag: since Chivalry demands each knight support his lady as most beautiful it creates conflict among knights.
- Wife as Beloved: a knight does chivalric deeds to honor his beloved and win her love; if he is married, does he continue to do noble and honorable things?
- Joy of the Court: Conflict and Disruption of Chivalry
- Maxim: Ladies, keep silent.

The Knight of Cart Tale

- Unlike most of Chretien's other poems, this story seems to valorize adulterous love in the characters of Guinevere and Lancelot. They actually consummate their love. Contrasts with *Erec and Enide*.
- Incomplete; some scholars think he was uncomfortable with the theme, given to him by Marie de Champagne, and couldn't finish.

Plot Outline

- Queen Guinevere is stolen by a bad knight, Meleagant
- Pursuit: Losing his horse, Lancelot meets a dwarf with a cart who claims to know Guinevere's whereabouts. After briefly hesitating, Lancelot gets in but Gawain refuses.
- Two Paths: Gawain takes one and Lancelot the other.
- Both Gawain and Lancelot Love Guinevere, but Gawain as a loyal Knight and Lancelot as her lover. Love forces both to do shameful things. Lancelot must lose battles in tournaments because she commands him. Gawain goes in the Cart.

Cart as Dishonorable

- “In those days carts served the function of our pillories...The knight [Lancelot] for just two seconds, hesitated a little before getting in.

Woe that he did this, and woe that he was ashamed of the cart and did not jump in at once, for he would alter confider himself ill-befallen. Reason, which disagrees with Love, told him to refrain from climbing in...but Love, which was enclosed in his heart, urged and commanded him to climb into the cart at once. Love achieve his desire. The knight leapt up without concern for the disgrace because this was Love's will and command.”

Guineve Saved by Lancelot

- Lancelot saves Guinevere but she is angry with him for hesitating even a moment to get into cart for her.
- She demands he do various challenges to earn back her love. He does and they make love.

Metaphor of Window Bars

- “Do you not see these bars?” the queen asked. “They are stout to bend and hard to break. You could never dislodge them. There is no way you can squeeze, pull or wrench them.”
- “Lady, be not concerned,” he said. “I believe these bars to be useless. 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 my entry is impossible.”
- “To be certain, I do want it. My will does not prevent you,” she replied. “Yet you must wait til I am in my bed so that any noise may not cause you harm.”

They make Love

- “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. In the pleasure of loving, he tasted such rapturous happiness by kissing and caressing her that theirs was, without word of lie, a wondrous joy, whose equal has never yet been heard or known. But on this matter I shall always be silent. Every tale should pass it over in silence. The choicest and most pleasurable joys are those the tale keeps from us.”

Conclusion

- Realists believe that Chivalric Love really did occur as it is presented in Capellanus because of the lack of love in marriage. Idealists think that it is just fictional and ironic.
- Erec and Enide valorizes marital love, but shows how it can undermine knightly honor if extreme. In contrast, Knight of the Cart valorizes adulterous love and elevates Love over Reason, no matter the consequences to honor.
- Romance is a genre of the aristocracy and reflects their concerns with Honor and Duty and Courtly Love.
- We see that the exact expectations of Chivalry and Courtly Love were contested and in flux.