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Article

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The Clerk and the Courtier: Debating the Tristan Problem in Chrétien de Troyes's *Cligès* and *Lancelot*

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The five Arthurian romances of twelfth-century French poet Chrétien de Troyes – *Erec et Enide*, *Cligès*, *Li Chevaliers de la charrete (Lancelot)*, *Li Chevaliers au lyon (Yvain)* and *Li contes del graal (Perceval)* – all have at least one thing in common: they are recounted by a narrator who calls himself ‘Crestiens’.¹ Given that very little is known of the historical Chrétien with any certainty it is tempting to automatically identify the narrating instance with his writing or composing of the texts and so assume that this act of self-reference is used to denote both the first-person narrator and the poet himself. However Douglas Kelly has cautioned against confusing the two, defining the former as ‘the person reading, writing or telling the romance story’, as well as in many cases ‘the interpreter, even critic of that story’.² The latter, on the other hand, he distinguishes as the voice who ‘informs us of the life, thought and avowed intentions of the once living Chrétien de Troyes’.³ Though the question of who is speaking and in what voice still remains one of the thorniest issues in medieval literature, the main problem with unquestioningly equating the Crestiens who speaks with the Chrétien who creates is that it is all too easy to try and divine an overarching moral significance or didacticism in the poet’s narrative art.⁴ It is arguably for this reason that the *romancier* has long been perceived as an apologist for marriage with a strident hostility to the adulterous passion of the Tristan legend.⁵

Having endured largely unchallenged for decades, scholars in the latter half of the twentieth century began to dispute these preconceptions by observing that the Crestiens persona can be seen to perform a variety of roles within the romances to which it is difficult to ascribe a single ideology. In 1980, for example, Norris J. Lacy used Chrétien’s work as a case in point to argue that ‘the romance form favours diversity not only in thematic matter and the attitude taken towards it, but in the point of view chosen to present it’.⁶ In 1987, Roberta L. Krueger similarly asserted that ‘the status of his narrative voice in each romance remains problematic’, and that this cannot be solely attributed to the complexities of manuscript tradition and modern editorial practice.⁷ In short, although they may well have

been composed by the same poet, these texts do not necessarily share a single narratorial voice and it may therefore prove reductive to regard Chrétien's corpus as an ideological whole. Accordingly, this article focuses on analyzing the narratorial voices of Chrétien de Troyes as distinct personas in two of his romances by closely examining how they each respond to that which I have termed the Tristan Problem: the love triangle between a king, his queen and one of his vassals of which the poet is presumed to have been so disdainful.⁸

The selection of *Cligès* for this study should come as no surprise as parallels with the *Tristans* of Béroul and Thomas are numerous and have been exhaustively documented. Prompted by the expressed contempt of the heroine, Fénice, for the Cornish lovers the text has over the years been labelled an 'anti-Tristan', a 'super-Tristan', and a 'Tristan revu et corrigé'.⁹ As for *Lancelot*, Albert Pauphilet has suggested that we might read it as a retraction of *Cligès*, which Chrétien's successors then went on to develop in such a way that by the end of the Middle Ages Lancelot and Guinevere had become established as an incomparable model of *courtoisie*:

Son roman suivant, la *Charrette*, histoire des amours de Lancelot et de la reine Guenièvre, accepte l'adultère et ne pose plus la question du partage de la femme. La *Charrette*, c'est, si l'on peut dire, la palinodie de Chrétien et la revanche de Tristan.¹⁰

For my part, while I agree that *Lancelot* can be regarded as a response to *Cligès*'s treatment of the Tristan material, I disagree that it should be deemed a retraction. But then nor do I believe that *Cligès* was intended to portray a revised, morally superior model of Tristan and Iseut. Rather, I shall be arguing that in fact neither text is supposed to present a solution to the problem they address; they simply provide the poet with the opportunity to showcase his creative flair by approaching the same dilemma from opposing narrative angles.

To this end the self-representation of these two voices as they are articulated in their prologues and in the tales they tell is compared. In *Cligès* Chrétien may be seen to construct his narratorial voice as a clerk, a man of learning, whose pride in his art borders on boastful and who has few dimensions other than his vast scholarly knowledge. In *Lancelot* an antithetical approach can be perceived in the voice of the courtly trouvère who humbles himself before his mistress in such a way as aligns him with his lover-protagonist. These observations are then used to discuss their unique approaches to the Tristan Problem. Where the clerk appears to employ the *savoir* of the Iseut-figure, Fénice, to exploit loopholes in secular and canon law and thereby reinvent the deleterious passion of the Cornish lovers as legitimate, the trouvère playfully attempts to vindicate Lancelot's amorous *folie* by making a scapegoat of the only character who demonstrates less *mesure* or self-discipline than his hero: Meleagant.

It is the striking failure of these endeavours to resolve the problem at hand which is ultimately upheld as evidence against Chrétien's moralist contempt for his subject matter. I suggest instead that these narratorial voices may have been conceived in the spirit of the *jeux-partis* or debate songs – related to but not to be confused with the Occitan *tenso*¹¹ –

whereby one speaker poses a dilemma, often on the subject of love, and offers his opponent the choice of two solutions, taking it upon himself to defend the option rejected by his opponent. Since it was common for the same question to be posed many times by the same poet whilst giving contradictory opinions in different lyrics, this could well have impacted on the way in which the historical Chrétien composed his *Cligès* and *Lancelot* as explorations of, but not answers to, the love triangle dilemma at the heart of the Tristan legend.¹²

The two Crestiens of *Cligès* and *Lancelot* may be recognized as distinct personas firstly through the comparative analysis of the speakers' opening lines in their respective prologues. The narrator of *Cligès* wastes no time in constructing his clerkly identity by prefacing his tale with a bibliography of his own literary achievements, comprising a mixture of Breton, Celtic and classical material:

Cil qui fist d'Erec et d'Enide,
 Et les comandanz d'Ovide
 Et l'art d'amors en romanz mist,
 Et le mors de l'espaule fist,
 Dou roi Marc et d'Iseut la Blonde
 Et de la hupe et de l'aronde
 Et dou rousignol la muance,
 .I. novel conte recomence
 D'un vallet qui en Grece fu
 Dou lignage le roi Artu. (*Cligès*, vv. 1-10)

[The author of *Erec and Enide*, who translated into French Ovid's commands and the Art of Love, composed the Shoulder Bite, the tales of King Mark and the fair-haired Iseut, and of the metamorphosis of the hoopoe, the swallow and the nightingale, begins a new story about a young man who lived in Greece and was a kinsman of King Arthur.]

In so doing, he keenly vaunts the degree of his learning: this speaker is a man whose narrative attests his knowledge of classical rhetoric and poetry, most especially of Ovid, in addition to his familiarity with the Matter of Britain. Moreover, he has reworked them into the vernacular thereby highlighting his translating and transposing skills, which is probably also the case for his 'novel conte', taken from a 'livre ... molt anciens' [a very old book] (v. 24). It would seem, then, that one of the most important aspects of these opening lines is that the narratorial voice opts not to identify himself by name right away – indeed, he does not do so until v. 23 – but instead by his poetic proficiency and previous accomplishments, which in turn has the effect of rendering his voice synonymous with his art.¹³

The narratorial voice of *Lancelot*, on the other hand, could not portray himself more differently as we can see from his *causa scribendi*. Where the Crestiens of *Cligès* proudly foregrounds himself as a man whose clerkly reputation precedes him, Crestiens the

trouvère resides deferentially in the shadow of his lady and patroness, Marie of Champagne, the formidable daughter of Louis VII of France and Eleanor of Aquitaine:

Puis que ma dame de Chanpaigne
 Vialt que romans a feire anpraigne,
 Je l'anprendrai molt volentiers
 Come cil qui est suens antiers
 De quanqu'il puet el monde feire
 Sanz rien de losange avant treire. (*Lancelot*, vv. 1-6)

[Since my lady of Champagne wishes me to undertake the writing of a romance, I shall very gladly do so as one who (and I utter no word of flattery) is entirely at her disposal for the performance of any task in the world.]

In his seminal article on the *Lancelot* prologue Jean Rychner suggests that Chrétien intended his audience to align the narrator with the hero as men submitting gladly to the caprices of their ladies like the *fin amant* in the love lyrics of the trouvères and troubadours.¹⁴ I share Rychner's view that the poet deliberately constructs his poetic persona in accordance with the *idéologie amoureuse* that characterizes the tale itself, at least insofar as the speaker is willing to say anything to keep his patroness happy, regardless of whether it is wise or even true. The fact that he uses the exact same phrase, 'come cil qui est suens antiers', to describe himself *vis-à-vis* Marie and Lancelot *vis-à-vis* Guinevere at v. 5652 is arguably sufficient in itself to bear out a shared spirit of submission between narrator and hero. Just as the Crestiens of *Cligès* insists that he be known exclusively by his work, therefore, the Crestiens of *Lancelot* demands that he be known exclusively by his lady.

Of course this alone does not necessarily prove that in *Lancelot* we are hearing a different voice to that of *Cligès* as the expression of devotion to a patron, the *Auftragstopos*, was a commonplace of medieval prologues.¹⁵ Furthermore the speaker could hardly be expected to express the same bold sentiments of authorship in an encomium if he wished to appear sincere in his humility. However the argument for these separate identities is visibly strengthened by the comparison of the two Crestiens' idiomatic portrayals of love and of the lovers in each of the romances proper. For example, the adoration practised by Alexander and Lancelot of their ladies' golden hair, itself a Tristan motif, lends considerable weight to this reading. Neither Béroul nor Thomas allude to the episode in which King Mark sees two swallows fighting over a golden hair and decides that he shall marry only the woman to whom it belongs: the Irish princess, Iseut.¹⁶ Nevertheless Chrétien's audience would have been all too aware of the hair's Tristan associations. For one thing, Iseut is without doubt the most famous blonde-haired heroine in medieval literature, not least because of the epithet that is so often coupled with her name;¹⁷ and the fact that the dispute between the two birds over their golden prize foreshadows that of the king and his nephew encodes the hair as a symbol of discord and desire. As Myriam Rolland-Perrin astutely observes,

Chrétien exploits this famous motif to create 'l'idole dorée' or 'the golden idol', whereby the hair is worshipped with the fervency one might give to a holy relic, inscribing it as an image of excess.¹⁸

In *Cligès* and *Lancelot* the heroes' amorous conduct as inspired by the hair is again presented very differently. Peter F. Dembowski has remarked of Chrétien's narrative that his authorial voice is 'capable of increasing and decreasing the aesthetic distance between himself and his protagonists according to the needs of his art'.¹⁹ True to his clerkly persona, the *Cligès* narrator may thus be seen to maintain a substantial aesthetic distance in describing the love sickness of Alexander, who, upon discovering that his shirt bears a hair from the head of his beloved Soredamors, lies awake all night kissing and embracing the gift:

Quant il est couchiez en son lit,
A ce ou n'a point de delit
Se delite en vain et soulace.
Toute nuit la chemise enbrace,
Et quant il le chevol remire,
De tout le mont cuide estre sire.
Bien fet Amors de sage fol
Quant cil fet joie d'un chevol. (*Cligès*, vv. 1627-34)

[When he is lying in his bed, he takes a vain delight and consolation in what gives him no true satisfaction, embracing the shirt all night long; and when he gazes at the hair, he thinks himself lord of the whole world. Love truly makes a fool of a wise man when he rejoices over one hair.]

In this passage Crestiens subtly mocks Alexander's histrionic reaction to the hair; for him, there is no rational explanation for an honourable man, a veritable flower of chivalry no less, treating a fundamentally worthless object as if it were a religious artefact. In other words, this *démessure* is not the type of experience that can be gained through the learned study of books and so it is not a feeling he can relate to, nor wishes to be associated with. Accordingly he presents the protagonist's actions as risible and not as an ideal to be taken seriously. This Crestiens is, after all, no lover; he is merely a man of letters writing about love.

Dembowski's observation is clearly borne out as we turn to examine the approach taken by the Crestiens of *Lancelot* in recounting the behaviour of the eponymous hero when he happens upon a comb bearing a few hairs alleged to belong to Queen Guinevere. There is no doubt that the knight comes off as equally ridiculous as he touches the hairs ecstatically to his eyes, mouth and heart, and the speaker is in no way oblivious to the comedy of this affected display. In fact his entire account of the episode is positively tongue-in-cheek. Even so, unlike his *Cligès* counterpart this Crestiens refuses to criticize, preferring

to ostensibly justify Lancelot's melodrama via his own act of exaggeration, hyperbole, which in turn minimizes the aesthetic distance between himself and his subject:

Et, se le voir m'an requerez,
Ors .C.M.. foiz esmerez
Et puis autant foiz recuiz
Fust plus obscurs que n'est la nuiz
Contre le plus bel jor d'esté
Qui ait an tot cest an esté,
Qui l'or et les chevols veïst
Si que l'un lez l'autre meist. (*Lancelot*, vv. 1487-94)

[And if you want the truth from me, gold refined a hundred thousand times and melted down again as often would, when placed against the hairs and seen beside them, be darker than the night compared with the brightest summer day there has been all this year.]

For this shrewd courtier, grinning inwardly as he may be, it seems there is no place for reason or moderation when it comes to desire. Only the heart holds sway here wielding the authority of visceral longing, whether it be for the lady herself or for the prestige of her patronage, an issue to which we will later return. Together, the voices of *Cligès* and *Lancelot* might thus be considered a contribution to contemporary poetic debate on the conflict between the powers of reason and feeling, *savoir* and *folie*.²⁰ With the tensions of this dichotomy in mind, I shall now turn to address exactly how these two personas can be seen to inform their approach to the Tristan Problem in each of the tales they recount.

Arguments for *Cligès* as a backlash against the Tristan legend have been founded upon the belief that Chrétien refashions the romance archetype of Iseut through the *savoir* of his own heroine. Specifically it has been suggested that the removal of the fatalistic perspective created by the love potion allows Fénice to exercise the *mesure* lacking in the Cornish queen, and also that Fénice embodies a purer Iseut insofar as she uses these faculties to evade the charges of adultery.²¹ Superficially these are both valid observations which certainly seem in keeping with the narrator's clerkly ethos. As Joan Tasker Grimbert has also observed, Fénice's so-called resourcefulness is the product of the narrator's ingenious subversion of two famous Tristan motifs: firstly the love potion is reworked as the drug she uses to render her husband, the emperor Alis, impotent; and secondly the tragic death of Tristan and Iseut becomes her feigned death (also achieved by way of a potion), both of which ultimately result in her marriage to Cligès.²² Yet other critics have repeatedly remarked upon the dubious nature of the tale's 'happy ending', in which we are informed that although the pair lived happily ever after, future empresses of Constantinople were kept imprisoned by their example.²³ As we shall see presently this ending exists as the last in a series of ambiguities which undermine Fénice's attempts to challenge the Iseut archetype. Far from seeking to solve the Tristan Problem, as the voice of true *savoir*, the narrator in

fact uses this succession of elaborate schemes and failures to gently ridicule the delusions of his heroine that reason can ever be reconciled with the *folie* of passionate love.

In response to the first claim that Fénice demonstrates greater wisdom and sense than Iseut, the feigned death episode in which she is subjected to bodily mortification by three of Alis's physicians proves an effective counterpoint. Though similarities have been identified with the scriptural account of Christ's Passion and Resurrection,²⁴ less favourable comparisons can also be made with the Old Testament tale of Solomon's wife, who likewise feigned death out of hatred for her husband. To be sure, Crestiens makes an explicit allusion to the biblical tale prior to Fénice's torture:

Lors lor sovint de Salemon
Cui sa femme tant enhaï
Qu'an guise de mort le tr[a]i. (*Cligès*, vv. 5796-8)

[Then the physicians remembered the case of Solomon and how his wife hated him so much that she deceived him by shamming death.]

This analogy has the adverse effect of casting Fénice as an enemy of *savoir*, for Solomon's many wives were depicted throughout the Middle Ages as a negative exemplum of wicked women responsible for the downfall of a man once renowned for his wisdom.²⁵ Let us not forget that Fénice too is indirectly accountable for the demise of not one but three wise men when the doctors are defenestrated by an irate mob of women who witness their bloody pursuit of the truth. What is more, her resurrection into the sanctity of the *locus amoenus*, Jehan's tower, scarcely confirms her superior *mesure*. Quite apart from the fact that the image of the lovers lying entwined beneath the pear tree evokes not only Bérout's portrait of Tristan and Iseut sleeping together in the forest of Morrois but also the rampant sexuality of the twelfth-century Latin fabliau, the *Comœdia Lydiæ*, this kind of social death in the Arthurian world is often equated disparagingly with death itself.²⁶ Bérout's Iseut, for instance, laments in a passionate monologue that to exist apart from society is to endure a living death that cannot be assuaged by her love for Tristan alone.²⁷

In response to the second claim we must address the moral issue of whether the effects of the potion enable Fénice to bypass accusations of adultery according to secular and canon law. On the one hand, Alis's impotence could be seen to violate one of the central requirements for marriage, the *copula carnis*, which would be sufficient to justify the annulment of the Alis-Fénice union and her clandestine liaison with Cligès. As David J. Shirt points out, canon law recognised two categories of *impossibilitas cœundi*, the second of which was known as *impossibilitas accidentalis*, referring to impotence caused by physical injury or by drug.²⁸ However this argument is wholly dependent on whether the historical poet intended his audience to interpret the romance in the light of Peter Lombard's or Gratian's views on marriage, as the period in which Chrétien was writing saw the development of several important legislative practices pertaining to matrimony in Latin Christendom. In brief, Lombard asserted it was the exchange of vows – known as the

sponsalia per verba de praesenti – that legally and doctrinally constituted a binding marriage; Gratian, on the other hand, claimed that this required the *copula carnis* as well. Although Lombardic thought was eventually given the papal seal of approval in the thirteenth century, there is little evidence to prove which view the twelfth-century Chrétien subscribed to. As a result of this ambiguity, the morality of the lovers' tryst in the tower is irredeemably obscured, and so it must be concluded that Fénice fails in her attempt to refashion the Iseut archetype. But then, as aforementioned, to produce a superior Iseut was never the narrator's foremost objective; he is simply a scholar showing coolly, objectively, how love makes fools of the wise.

As for the argument that Chrétien's *Lancelot* might be seen as an attempt to solve the Tristan Problem by reinventing the Cornish lovers as courtly paradigms, this is no less problematized by the speaker's own agenda. Where the *Cligès* narrator champions his conviction that love encumbers the rational faculties, the *Lancelot* narrator cultivates a more subversive ethos in his approach by insisting that when it comes to love all manner of *folie* is justifiable. This goes against the dictates of courtly love according to the renowned troubadour Marcabru in whose ideal of *fin'amors mezure* was indispensable in controlling the irrational oblivion of the lover's desire.³⁹ As we have seen, although Lancelot often appears ridiculous in his devotion the narrator never has a negative word to say about him and habitually jumps in to defend his actions. When Guinevere commands the knight to desist in his battle with Meleagant, for example, Lancelot obeys without a word and the narrator offers his full support in his praise of the hero's stoic compliance:

Molt est qui ainme obeïssanz
 Et molt fet tost et volentiers,
 La ou il est amis antiers,
 Ce qu'a s'amie doie plaïre.
 Donc le dut bien Lanceloz faire,
 Qui plus ama que Piramus,
 S'onques nus hom pot amer plus. (*Lancelot*, vv. 3798-3804)

[One who loves is very obedient; and gladly and with alacrity, if he is the perfect lover, he does whatever might please his beloved. So this indeed Lancelot had to do, loving as he did more than Pyramus, if any man was ever able to love more than he.]

This attitude may be ascribed to his persona as a trouvère at Marie of Champagne's court, who relies not on logic and reason but on obsequiousness and intrigue to realize his desires by tirelessly and sometimes unscrupulously endeavouring to curry favour with his own lofty Guinevere-figure. He applies not *savoir* but stratagem in his reworking of the Tristan legend, manipulating his audience into sympathizing with the lovers' mutual adoration and distracting them from the reality of their joint betrayal of King Arthur. That is not to say that this Crestiens necessarily advocates the couple's treachery or Lancelot's foolish behaviour

(indeed his allusion to Pyramus, a notoriously immoderate lover, was probably intended to bring a knowing smile to the lips of his audience); he simply cannot be seen to overtly question the knight's unqualified submission to the queen without compromising the sincerity of his own submission to Marie.

To further this point we might refer back to the prologue encomium: here Crestiens claims that other poets may seek to flatter their lady by saying that she surpasses all others, but seeks to vouchsafe his own integrity by distancing himself from such conventional expressions of praise. Yet the subtext becomes more ambiguous when he concedes that even though he will not extol the measure of the countess's virtue and beauty, for he is not a flatterer, he would be not be exaggerating if he did. In other words, he does not use logic and reason to alter the facts but pretty, essentially empty turns of phrase that cleverly distort the truth:

Par foi, je ne sui mie cil
 Qui vuelle losangier sa dame;
 Dirai je: tant come une jame
 Vaut de pelles et de sardines,
 Vaut la contesse de reïnes?
 Naie, je n'en dirai [ja] rien,
 S'est il voirs maleoit gré mien. (*Lancelot*, vv. 14-20)

[I am not one, I swear, who would wish to flatter his lady. Shall I say the countess is worth as many queens as a gem is worth pearlys and sards? Certainly not: I shall not mention it; yet it is true, whether I like it or not.]

Thus, through the rhetorical art of *praeteritio* – the oblique art of saying without saying – he distracts his audience from the irony that he is just as much of a sycophant as his rivals by condemning them for committing the very same *folie* he himself is exploiting. Anthime Fourier has suggested that this apparent attack on the trouvère tradition may have subtly targeted the contemporary Gautier d'Arras as there are manifest parallels between Chrétien's prologue and that of *Ille et Galeron*, the one perhaps being a parody of the other.³⁰ Whether or not this is the case it cannot be denied that the speaker ultimately succeeds in his effusive praise of Marie simply by deflecting blame onto others whilst safeguarding his own reputation.

It is this same rhetorical subterfuge that Crestiens later employs in a sly attempt to circumvent the Tristan Problem and obscure the immorality of Lancelot's liaison with Arthur's wife. Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner has rightly discerned that when Meleagant spies the bloodstains on Guinevere's sheets and charges her with infidelity we are diverted from her indiscretion by a similar displacement of blame.³¹ Reconceptualizing the barons' accusation of Iseut as an adulteress in Béroul's *Tristan*, Crestiens has Meleagant wrongly implicate the seneschal Kay when he makes his allegation against the queen, and in this way

her adultery is concealed by deflecting it onto the entirely separate issue of Meleagant's error:

Ele respont: 'Se Dex m'aït,
Onques ne fu neïs de songe
Contee si male mançonge!
Je cuit que Kex li seneschax
Est si cortois et si leax
Que il n'an fet mie a mescroire,
Et je ne regret mie an foire
Mon cors ne n'an faz livreison'. (*Lancelot*, vv. 4836-43)

[She replies: 'So help me God, such a wicked lie was never told, even in a dream! I'm sure Kay the seneschal is so courtly and loyal that he's not to be mistrusted; and I don't put my body up for sale or offer it for the taking in the market-place'.]

In reality this is a lie: she did cuckold her husband, and her lover is consistently depicted as Arthur's worthiest knight, as courteous and loyal in spite of himself. On the other hand, her words are technically truthful because it is not Lancelot but Kay she is referring to. As such, Guinevere's duplicity can be regarded as a play on Iseut's equivocal oaths, again in Bérout's *Tristan*, whereby Iseut swears that only the man who took her virginity has ever had her love (though this, unbeknownst to Mark, was Tristan and not himself);³² and again at Mal Pas when she claims that only the king and the leper that carried her across the ford (Tristan, of course) have ever been between her thighs.³³ Just as *savoir* characterizes the approach of narrator and heroine to the Tristan Problem in *Cligès*, then, both Crestiens and Guinevere may be seen to indulge and excuse their own *folies* by way of the 'falsa razo daurada' (XXV, 24), the 'empty, gilded phrases' that Marcabru so disdained: he flatters without flattering and she deceives without deceiving.³⁴

Nevertheless the *folie* defining Crestiens's narrative in *Lancelot* is no more a solution to the Tristan Problem than the *savoir* of *Cligès*, as this displacement technique is sustainable only up to a point: it can hide or defer the reality of the affair for a while, but it cannot eradicate it altogether. Indeed as Guinevere and Gauvain return to Arthur's court we find ourselves confronted by the greater issue of what is to happen when Lancelot finally joins them there. Until now Arthur has remained a nebulous figure in the background and bringing him directly to the fore can only renew the memory of the queen's infidelity and Lancelot's betrayal. Furthermore, as we may infer from the tournament at Noauz, the dynamic between the adulterous couple has not changed with the physical consummation of their love, she having reverted back to her former coquetry and he to his unquestioning obedience. With the love triangle impasse apparently set to continue it is only the fortuitous arrival of Godefroi de Leigni, the tale's internal continuator, that can provide any kind of resolution. There are many debates surrounding Godefroi – such as the issue of whether he

was in fact a real person or a fictional creation of the poet himself³⁵ – but in the light of this particular study the salient point is this: Godefroi's approach is noticeably more pragmatic and measured than that of his predecessor, providing the courtly riposte that decisively silences Crestiens's narrative *folie*.

Where the *Lancelot* Crestiens proves an unsurpassed master of verbal trickery, Godefroi outlines a very different narrative ethos: he does not wish to 'boceier, | ne corronpre ne forceier' [distort, corrupt or labour] his subject matter, but to 'mener boen chemin et droit' [treat it in a direct, straightforward manner] (*Lancelot*, vv. 6249-51). Godefroi's mention of the 'droit chemin' (literally, 'the right way'), recalls the troubadours' 'dreita via' (the 'Right Path' to Love), and Marcabru's 'dreita carrau' with its connotations of moral strength.³⁶ His allusion to this phenomenon in defining his narrative technique establishes a clear juxtaposition to the *folie* characterizing his predecessor's narrative through deception and exaggeration. As a result he shares far more in common with the clerkly Crestiens of *Cligès*, as we can see from a brief glance at his account of Guinevere's reaction to the hero's return to Arthur's court at vv. 6830-51. In contrast with the trouvère's narrative there is no hyperbole, no repetition, no expressions of professed empathy; Godefroi is objective, matter-of-fact, removed, preferring to employ the understated rhetorical technique of *rationatio*, whereby a question is posed and then, somewhat mechanically, answered. This is also consonant with Guinevere's own more measured comportment: although she still wants to be with Lancelot, she will not allow her body to follow her heart in greeting him in case her husband should discern her guilt. Thus, where Crestiens had shared so rapturously in Lancelot's amorous reveries, Godefroi approves the queen's newfound restraint and propriety with an absence of overblown stylistic flourishes.

But can Godefroi be seen to utilize this narrative *mesure* as a solution to the Tristan Problem? Heinz Klüppelholz has argued that he achieves this through the reintroduction of a relatively minor character, Meleagant's sister, whom Lancelot first met in Crestiens's portion of the text at vv. 2797-2803, and who becomes the new love interest upon his return to Arthur's court.³⁷ In addition to the striking fact that Lancelot does not mention his erstwhile beloved once in the lengthy lament he issues from the tower in which Meleagant has had him imprisoned, there is certainly plenty of evidence to suggest that he has transferred his affections to the lady who comes to his rescue:

Par vos sui de prison estors,
 Por ce poez mon cuer, mon cors
 Et mon servise et mon avoir
 Quant vos pleira prandre et avoir.
 Tant m'avez fet que vostres sui,
 Mes grant piece a que je ne fui
 A la cort Artus mon seignor,
 Qui m'a portee grant enor,
 Et g'i avroie assez a feire.
 Or, douce amie deboneire,

Par amors si vos prierioie
 Congié d'aler, et g'i iroie
 S'il vos pleisoit, molt volantiers.
 - Lanceloz, biax dolz amis chiers,
 Fet la pucele, jel vuel bien,
 Que vostre enor et vostre bien
 Vuel je par tot et ci et la. (*Lancelot*, vv. 6683-99)

[‘You are responsible for my escaping from imprisonment, and for that you may take and keep my heart, my body, my service and my wealth – whatever you wish. You’ve done so much that I am yours. But it’s a long time since I was at the court of my lord King Arthur, who has shown me such great honour; and there’s a great deal I should do there. So now, my sweet, generous friend, I would beg you in love’s name to depart. Then, if it pleased you, I would gladly go there.’ – ‘Lancelot, my good, kind, dear friend,’ says the maiden, ‘I’m very willing, because I’m concerned for your honour and welfare here, there and everywhere.’]

A. H. Diverres remarks of this passage, and of the damsel’s response in particular, that it provides a noticeable contrast with Guinevere’s shocking snub of Lancelot earlier in the text, thereby signalling a departure from the *folie* of the lovers and of our former narrator:

This exchange suggests a *service d’amour* in which there are reciprocal duties, similar to feudal vassalage, and in which the submission of the knight to the lady is not unreasoned and absolute.³⁸

On the other hand, the way in which the queen is hastily and inexplicably written out of the romance at this point is just not believable. Consumed by the *folie* of passionate love for so long, it is not realistic to expect the audience to accept that Lancelot has suddenly lost interest in Guinevere altogether at the prospect of a more convenient match. It seems more helpful to surmise, then, that Godefroi, whether a real person or another of Chrétien’s fascinating personas, was intended as a counterbalance or reply to the voice of Crestiens the *trouvère*, and not as a definitive answer to the principal dilemma.

It may be concluded, therefore, that neither Chrétien’s *Cligès* nor *Lancelot* should be seen as revisionings that reflect or retract the historical poet’s moralist contempt for the Tristan legend, demonstrated by the simple fact that they clearly do not share a single narratorial voice. Rather, they represent a debate which remains fragmented and to which all answers are qualified, perhaps inspired by the troubadour conflict of *savoir* versus *folie* and the emerging *jeu-parti* genre that often tussled with such complexities of desire, rising to the height of its popularity in northern France in the thirteenth century. On the subject of passionate love the voice of *Cligès* embodies reason and the voice of *Lancelot* feeling, though neither of their approaches is intended to offer an adequate answer to the problem

at hand. Yet it is in this irreconcilable dispute that Chrétien the poet may be seen to succeed as an author apart from his peers, destined to become one of the most influential figures in world literature. Indulging the tastes of the courtly intelligentsia, he deftly exploits diversity and juxtapositions of theme, style, mood, and genre with ease, whilst grappling with weighty, unanswerable questions.

Notes

¹ The narratorial voice only gives his name in full at v. 9 of *Erec et Enide* as 'Crestiens de Troies'; we then find it shortened to 'Crestiens' at v. 26. In *Cligès* it appears three times as 'Crestiens', twice in the prologue (v. 23, v. 45) and once to mark the tale's end (v. 6702). In *Lancelot* it also appears three times, though only once (v. 25) is it spoken by Crestiens himself. Following Lancelot's imprisonment in the tower the thread of the narrative is picked up by Godefroi de Leigni, who claims to have completed the story in accordance with Crestiens's wishes, citing the his predecessor's name at v. 7105 and v. 7107. *Yvain* is unusual insofar as it does not have a formal prologue and so Crestiens's name appears only to mark its completion at v. 6805. In the unfinished *Perceval* the name appears twice in the prologue (v. 7, v. 60). All line references and quotations for Chrétien's romances are taken from Michel Zink et al., *Chrétien de Troyes: Romans* (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1994). All translations taken from D. D. R. Owen's edition, *Arthurian Romances: Chrétien de Troyes* (London: Everyman, 1993).

² Douglas Kelly, 'Chrétien de Troyes: The Narrator and His Art', in *The Romances of Chrétien de Troyes: A Symposium*, ed. Douglas Kelly (Lexington, KY: French Forum, 1985) pp. 13-47 (p. 15).

³ Kelly, p. 16.

⁴ In *Textual Subjectivity: The Encoding of Subjectivity in Medieval Narratives and Lyrics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), A. C. Spearing has sought to challenge the assumptions nurtured by narratologists and theorists like Roland Barthes that there can be no narrative without a narrator. In so doing he does not utterly reject Kelly's argument, conceding that while a narrative does not require a narrator 'it is possible for a writer to create a narrator as part of his fiction' (p. 25); he simply warns against going to the other extreme and taking for granted that the voice of the speaker cannot be that of the author.

⁵ In *Amour courtois et table ronde* (Geneva: Droz, 1973), Jean Frappier describes Chrétien as 'un apologiste du mariage et de l'amour dans le mariage' [an apologist for marriage and for love within marriage] (p. 59). Peter Haidu similarly refers to the poet's 'predilection for' and 'prejudice in favour of married love' in *Aesthetic Distance in Chrétien de Troyes: Irony and Comedy in 'Cligès' and 'Perceval'* (Geneva: Droz, 1968), p. 41; and Peter S. Noble also introduces Chrétien as an 'advocate' of love within marriage in *Love and Marriage in Chrétien de Troyes* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1982), p. 7.

⁶ Norris J. Lacy, *The Craft of Chrétien de Troyes: An Essay on Narrative Art* (Leiden: Brill, 1980), p. 38.

⁷ Roberta L. Krueger, 'The Author's Voice: Narrators, Audiences, and the Problem of Interpretation', in *The Legacy of Chrétien de Troyes*, vol. 1, eds Norris J. Lacy, Douglas Kelly and Keith Busby (Amsterdam: Rodolphi, 1987), pp. 115-40 (pp. 119-20).

⁸ On the subject of Chrétien's 'hostility' to the Tristan legend, see Jean Frappier, 'Vues sur les conceptions courtoises dans les littératures d'oc et d'oïl au XIIe siècle', *Cahiers de Civilisation Médiévale*, 2 (1959), 135-56.

⁹ On the subject of the relationship between *Cligès* and the Tristan legend, see W. Foerster's edition of *Cligès*, revised by A. Hilke (Halle, 1921), pp. xxxiv-lii; A. Fourrier, *Le courant réaliste dans le roman courtois, en France, au moyen âge I: Les débuts (XIIe siècle)* (Paris: Nizet, 1960), pp. 124-54; and Alexandre Micha, 'Tristan et Cligès', *Neophilologus*, 36 (1952), 1-10.

¹⁰ 'Chrétien's following romance, the *Charrette*, the love story of Lancelot and Queen Guinevere, accepts the theme of adultery and no longer foregrounds the problem of sharing the lady. The *Charrette* is, one could say, Chrétien's retraction and Tristan reconceptualized'. Albert Pauphilet, *Le legs du Moyen Age: études de littérature médiévale* (Melun: Librairie d'Argences, 1950), p. 161.

¹¹ In the thirteenth-century *Las leys d'amors*, Guihelm Molinier remarked that the two genres were often confused though they differed in several key ways. For example, in the *jeu-parti* genre the participants each defend their theories for the sake of discussion rather than out of personal conviction, an aspect that the historical Chrétien may have found appealing in exploring his Tristan theme.

¹² For further discussion of the *jeu-parti* genre, see: A. Långfors, A. Jeanroy and L. Brandin, *Recueil général des jeux-partis français* (Paris: É. Champion, 1926).

¹³ This literary résumé has engendered a wealth of critical discussion, though they all tend to emphasize in one way or another the richness and diversity of learning expressed by the voice of the Crestiens who speaks. See e.g., Tony Hunt, 'Tradition and Originality in the Prologues of Chrestien de Troyes', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 8 (1972), 320-44 (328); Michelle Freeman, 'Transpositions structurelles et intertextualité: Le *Cligès* de Chrétien', *Littérature*, 41 (1981), 50-61 (53); and Joan Tasker Grimberty, '*Cligès* and the Chansons: A Slave to Love', in *A Companion to Chrétien de Troyes*, eds Norris J. Lacy and Joan Tasker Grimberty (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2005), pp. 120-36 (p. 124).

¹⁴ Jean Rychner, 'Le Prologue du *Chevalier de la charrette*', *Vox Romanica*, 26 (1967), 1-23 (3).

¹⁵ In Chrétien's own *Perceval*, for example, the speaker likewise begins with a long encomium to Philippe d'Alsace, Count of Flanders, in which he asserts that his patron embodies the virtue of chastity more perfectly than the classical Alexander.

¹⁶ That this episode is an integral part of Tristan lore is attested by its presence in the German Eilhart von Oberg's *Tristrant und Isalde*, eds Danielle Buschinger and Wolfgang Spiewok (Griefswald: Rēineke-Verlag, 1993), vv. 1382-96. Translation provided by Neil Thomas upon request:

zu°hand begunden schwalben zwo°
 sich bitten in dem sal nun,
 die zu°aim fenster in flugen.
 zu° ainem fenster sie in zugen.
 deß wart der herr gewar.
 do empfiel in ain ha°r.
 merckt recht, eß ist wa°r.
 er sach ernstlich dar.
 Eß waß schön und langk.
 do nam der künig den gedanck,
 daß er wolt scho°wen.
 eß waß von ainer frowen.
 do sprach er selber wider sich:
 hie mit will ich weren mich:
 der will ich zu° wib begern.
 sie mügend mich ir nit gewern.

[Then two swallows, which had just then flown into the hall, began to fight. They then flew towards a window at which point the King noticed a hair drop to the ground - this account is true - and the King decided to take a hard look at the beautiful, long lock. The King concluded that it must have come from a lady and he said to himself: 'I shall use this hair as my defence. I'll ask for her hand in marriage, and nobody will be able to produce her for me'.]

¹⁷ In the *Cligès* prologue, for example, Crestiens reveals that he wrote a tale about King Mark and 'Isout la blonde' (v. 5), which has not survived.

¹⁸ Myriam Rolland-Perrin, *Blonde comme l'or: La chevelure féminine au Moyen Age*, Senefiance 57 (Université de Provence, 2010), p. 275.

¹⁹ Peter F. Dembowski, 'Author's Monologue and Related Problems in the Romances of Chrétien de Troyes', *Yale French Studies*, 51 (1974), 102-14 (105).

²⁰ On the whole the Provençal doctrine of *fin'amors* reflected the courtly ideal that the mind of the lover must control the disorder of the senses that ultimately led to the deaths of Tristan and Isout. However the love lyrics of Bernart de Ventadorn often went against the grain in this respect. In his 'Bel m'es can eu vei la brolha', for

example, the speaker complains of his lady 'e can eu l'en arazona, | ihl me chamja ma razo' [and when I <argue/reason> with her about it, she changes my <argument/reason> for me] (vv. 31-2); and in his 'Be'm cuidei de chantrar sofrir', the voice similarly reflects 'pero be sai c'uzatges es d'amor | c'om c'ama be, non a gaire de sen' [however, I know well that it is a custom of love that he who loves well has hardly any sense] (vv. 26-7). All quotations, line references and translations taken from *A Bilingual Edition of the Love Songs of Bernart de Ventadorn in Occitan and English: Sugar and Salt*, ed. and trans. Ronnie Apter (Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1999).

²¹ See Jean Pappier, *Chrétien de Troyes: l'homme et l'œuvre* (Paris: Hatier-Boivin, 1957), pp. 112-13.

²² Joan Tasker Grimbert, 'On Félice's Vain Attempts to Revise a Romantic Archetype and on Chrétien de Troyes's Fabled Hostility to the Tristan Legend', in *Reassessing the Heroine in Medieval French Literature*, ed. Kathy M. Krause (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2001), pp. 87-106 (p. 100).

²³ See R. R. Bezzola, *Les origines et la formation de la littérature courtoise en Occident, 500-1200*, vol. iii (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1963), p. 388; Moshé Lazar, *Amour courtois et 'fin'amors' dans la littérature du XII^e siècle* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1964), p. 227.

²⁴ See D. D. R. Owen, 'Profanity and its Purpose in Chrétien's *Cligès* and *Lancelot*', in *Arthurian Romance Seven Essays* (London: Scottish Academic Press, 1970), pp. 37-48.

²⁵ Solomon was a king of Israel, depicted in the Bible as a man of great wealth, power, and wisdom. However his seven-hundred wives worshipped pagan gods and eventually tempted him into committing idolatry and turning away from the Christian God (see esp., 1 Kings 11: 1-3), which brought about the ruin of his kingdom. In the *De amore* of Andreas Capellanus the narrator concludes his third book with a quote from Solomon to support his ostensible argument that women effect the downfall of wise men. The following quotation, line reference and translation is taken from *Andreas Capellanus on Love*, ed. and trans. P. G. Walsh (London: Duckworth Classical, Medieval and Renaissance Editions, 1982), III. 109:

Salomon malitias cunctas et scelera mulieris agnoscens de ipsius vitii et improbitate generali fuit sermon locutus. Ait enim 'femina nulla bona'. Cur igitur quod est malum, Gualteri, tam auide quaeris amare?

[This is why Solomon in his great wisdom, knowing as he did all the wickednesses and crimes of woman, made a general announcement on her vices and depravity. His words are: 'There is no good woman'. So, Walter, why do you seek to love so eagerly what is evil?]

²⁶ For further discussion on the significance of Jehan's garden and the pear tree, see Lucie Polak, 'Cligès, Félice et l'arbre d'amour', *Romania*, 93 (1972), 303-16.

²⁷ All quotations, line references and translations for Béroul's *Tristan* are taken from *Early French Tristan Poems*, vol. i, ed. and trans. Norris J. Lacy (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1998). Iseut's monologue can be found at vv. 2200-16:

Oiez d'Iseut con li estoit!
Sovent disoit: 'Lasse, dolente,
Porqoi eüstes vos jovente?
En bois estes com autre serve,
Petit trovez qui ci vus serve.
Je suis roïne, mais le non
En ai perdu par ma poison
Que nos beümes en la mer. [...]
Les damoiseles des anors,
Les filles as frans vavasors
Deüse ensemble o moi tenir
En mes chanbres, por moi servir,
Et les deüse marier
Et as seignors por bien doner'.

[Now hear how it was with Iseut! She kept repeating to herself, 'Alas, miserable woman! How you have wasted your youth! You are living in the forest like a serf, with no one to serve you here. I am a queen, but I have lost that title because of the potion we drank at sea

... I should have around me well-bred young women, the daughters of worthy vassals, to serve me in my chambers, and I should arrange their marriages and give them to noble men.']

²⁸ David J. Shirt, 'Cligès - A Twelfth-Century Matrimonial Case-Book?', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 18 (1982), 75-89 (82).

²⁹ In 'Fin'amor and the Development of the Courtly *canso*', *The Troubadours: An Introduction*, eds Simon Gaunt and Sarah Kay (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), Linda Paterson defines Marcabru's concept of *mezura* as 'self-discipline, the ability to moderate one's passion with rational control, to avoid extremes or anything that contravenes courtly behaviour' (p. 35).

³⁰ Fourier, pp. 206-7.

³¹ Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner, 'Lancelot', in *The Romances of Chrétien de Troyes: A Symposium*, pp. 132-81 (p. 157).

³² *Tristan*, vv. 20-25:

Li rois pense que par folie,
Sire Tristan, vos aie amé;
Mais Dex plevis ma loiauté,
Qui sor mon cors mete flacle,
S'onques fors cil qui m'ot pucele
Out m'amistié encor nul jor!

[Lord Tristan, the king thinks that I have loved you sinfully; but I pledge my loyalty before God and may he punish me, that no one except the man who took my virginity has ever had my love!]

³³ *Tristan*, vv. 4197-4208:

'Seignors', fet el, 'por Deu merci,
Saintes reliques voi ici.
Or escoutez que je ci jure,
De quoi le roi ci aseüre:
Si m'aît Dex et saint Ylaire,
Ces reliques, cest saintuaire,
Totes celes qui ci ne sont
Et tuit icil de par le mont,
Q'entre mes cuises n'entra home,
Fors le ladre qui fist soi some,
Qui me porta outre les guez,
Et li rois Marc mes esposez;
Ces deus ost de mon soirement'.

['Lords', she said, 'praise be to God, I see holy relics here. Now listen to my oath and may the king be reassured by it: in the name of God and St. Hilaire, on these relics and on this reliquary, and on all those that are not here and on all those throughout the world, no man has ever been between my thighs, except for the leper that carried me over the ford and my husband King Marc. Those two I exclude from my oath'.]

³⁴ Marcabru abhorred the misuse of eloquence that was spun by some troubadours in order to deceive. In XXXVII, vv. 7-12, he overtly condemns it. Quotation and translation taken from Leslie Topsfield, *The Troubadours and Love* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), pp. 72-3:

Trobador, abs en d'enfansa
Moron als pros atahina,
E tomon en disciplina
So que veritatz autreia,
E fant los motz, per esmanssa,
Entrebeschatz de fraichura.

[Troubadours with the mentality of a child will make trouble for men of excellence. They turn into torment what is granted by truth. They compose words intentionally interlaced with fragmentary meaning.]

³⁵ In 'Études sur les romans de la Table Ronde. Lancelot du Lac, II. Le Conte de la Charrette', *Romania*, 12 (1883), 459-534, Gaston Paris famously argued that Chrétien's personal contempt for his subject matter encouraged him to abandon the project to another man, leaving him free to work on *Yvain* (written contemporaneously with *Lancelot*) which was more to his taste. At the other end of the critical spectrum we have David F. Hult who suggests in 'Author/Narrator/Speaker: The Voice of Authority in Chrétien's *Charrette*', in *Discourses of Authority in Medieval and Renaissance Literature*, eds Kevin Brownlee & Walter Stevens (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1989), pp. 76-96, that Godefroi might have been a fictional creation of Chrétien's, designed to deliberately problematize the ending of his romance.

³⁶ On the relationship between Chrétien and the 'droit chemin' of Provençal poetry, see Leslie T. Topsfield, *Chrétien de Troyes: A Study of the Arthurian Romances* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 120-23.

³⁷ Heinz Klüppelholz, 'The Continuation within the Model: Godefroi de Lagny's "Solution" to Chrétien de Troyes's *Chevalier de la Charrette*', *Neophilologus*, 75 (1991), 637-40.

³⁸ A. H. Diverres, 'Some Thoughts on the *sens* of *Le Chevalier de la Charrette*', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 6 (1970), 24-36 (34).