RICE UNIVERSITY STUDIES

MONOGRAPH IN COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

STUDIES IN THE LANCELOT LEGEND

ERNST SOUDEK

Vol. 58, No. 1

Winter 1972
RICE UNIVERSITY STUDIES

published by

WILLIAM MARSH RICE UNIVERSITY

RICE UNIVERSITY STUDIES, successor to the RICE INSTITUTE PAMPHLET, is issued quarterly and contains writings in all scholarly disciplines by staff members and other persons associated with Rice University.

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Second class postage paid at Houston, Texas.
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INTRODUCTION

What is he? I do not mean the force alone—
The grace and versatility of the man!
Is it not Lancelot?

—Tennyson, *The Idylls of the King.*

There is scarcely anyone in our time to whom the name “Lancelot” does not have a familiar sound. The average person’s acquaintance with the deeds of this noble knight is likely to come from motion pictures that, while trying to portray the impossible, have such promising titles as “The Sword of Lancelot,” “The Knights of the Round Table,” and “Camelot,” this last being an insipid version of T. H. White’s enormously successful and still widely read *The Once and Future King.* It is only the more serious student of English letters who derives his knowledge of Lancelot and Guinevere from the reading of Malory’s *Le Morte Darthur* or Tennyson’s *The Idylls of the King.* Among these readers, Lancelot is generally recognized as King Arthur’s most gallant knight and the unswerving but secret lover of Queen Guinevere, an austere and almost saintly man whom passion stirs only when he is in the direct service of his love.

Lancelot’s prominence throughout the last centuries is a strange phenomenon, especially when we consider that another great Arthurian lover, Tristan, whose philosophy of love corresponds much more to our modern ideal, would most likely be forgotten if it were not for the music of Wagner. And who would seriously believe that Lancelot, the foreigner, barely eked out an existence in the literature of late medieval England while the figure of the indigenous Gawain towered gigantically over the literary horizon of that era?

Perhaps it would be even more startling to discover that Lancelot as a knight of the Round Table and as a lover of Queen Guinevere is a comparatively late addition to the Arthurian legend. Yet scholars are in general agreement that this is indeed the case. Lancelot is not mentioned in the earliest Arthurian texts; he does not appear in Welsh literature or in Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia Regum Britanniae.* The earliest description of an abduction of Guinevere, chiseled in the form of a bas-relief on the Porta della Pescharia of the Cathedral at Modena, does not depict Lancelot. He
is not mentioned until centuries after the Welshman Nennius described the deeds of a certain *dux bellorum* named Arthur in his *Historia Britonum* (ca. A.D. 800). The compiler of the *Annales Cambriae* (ca. A.D. 950) did not know Lancelot either although he mentions a battle at Camlan in the year 537 at which Arthur and Medrawt fell. The Welsh poet Caradoc of Llancarvan, while furnishing posterity with the earliest extant account of Guinevere’s abduction by the otherworldly character Melwas in his *Vita Gildae* (ca. A.D. 1129), does not mention Lancelot, nor do the authors who based their works on Geoffrey’s *Historia*, the Anglo-Norman Wace who composed his *Brut* at about A.D. 1155, and Layomon who translated this work into English vernacular shortly thereafter.

The first time the name “Lanczlot” appears in extant literature is in a list of warriors enumerated in what is believed to be Chrétien de Troyes’ earliest Arthurian romance, the *Erec*. There it is stated (in my translation) that “among all the noble knights Gauvain is the first, Erec li fiz Lac the second, and Lanceloz del Lac the third.” But although our hero is listed in third place among Arthur’s knights, he is of no consequence to the plot of the romance; he is, in the words of Miss Jessie L. Weston, “a name, and nought else.” The assigning of such a prominent place within the hierarchy of the Arthurian order of knighthood and the concurrent failure to attribute to Lancelot even one important deed within the story has puzzled many a scholar although it is quite obvious that Chrétien, before he composed the *Erec*, must have encountered a story, or a body of stories, either written or orally transmitted, in which Lancelot already figured prominently.

It is, therefore, on the continent that the knight who was destined to become known throughout the world as Queen Guinevere’s lover first achieved a standing of some prominence. The name “Lancelot” itself is something of a puzzle. Gaston Paris, one of the most eminent nineteenth-century Arthurian scholars, claimed that “Lancelot” and such similar names as “Lancelin” and “Lancelet” “might be diminutives of ‘Lanzo,’ ‘Lantbert,’ etc. . . .” Miss Weston, with her all-encompassing knowledge of the Arthurian material, concurred with Paris’ findings and concluded therefrom that Lancelot “did not belong to the original ‘stoff’ of the cycle; the entire silence of Welsh literature, and the practical silence of English vernacular romances, seemed to show that he formed no part of the insular Arthurian tradition.” Contrary to this opinion, Roger S. Loomis expressed the theory that the name Lancelot du Lac goes back through the Welsh “Llwch Lleminawc” to the Irish god “Lugh Loinnbheimionach.” Loomis insists that “Lac,” as part of a name in the French romances, was a translation of the Welsh “Llwch” which in turn derived from the Irish “Lug,” and that “it was probably the Bretons who, knowing that ‘Llwch’ in Welsh place names means ‘lake,’ came to the conclusion that ‘Llwch Lleminawc’
must mean Llawynauoe of the Lake. This name, in turn, felt the attraction of the French name ‘Lancelin’ which occurs early in Brittany and became Lanceloc of the Lake. Written down in manuscript, the final c was read as t, and so at last appeared Lancelot du Lac.” The British scholar then goes on to the logical conclusion of his theory, that is, that the development of the name Lancelot du Lake in all likelihood suggested the story that the hero was fostered by the mysterious Lady of the Lake.

Professor Loomis’ theory of the origin of the name “Lancelot” has not been disputed much although it always was, and still is, a theory with no literary sources to back it up. The name “Lancelot” is, in consequence, thought to be essentially a Germanic derivative, while the “du Lac,” “being either a cause or a consequence of some element in Lancelot’s original role, probably too is Breton.” Consequently, although oral diffusion works rather quickly, we must view Miss Weston’s statement that “Arthurian tradition knew nothing of Lancelot till the latter half of the 12th [century]” with caution. Stories about the hero, such as the one that led Chrétien to mention Lancelot as third in stature at the court of King Arthur, may have circled the rounds of the Bretons a dozen or more years before the “Father of Arthurian Romance” put the name down in his tale of Erec. Still, the fact remains that there is no story that gives a detailed account of even one of Lancelot’s adventures prior to Chrétien’s Le Chevalier de la Charrette. The hero is briefly mentioned in Chrétien’s Cligés, which most likely followed Erec but antedated the Charrette. In Cligés, Lancelot’s appearance is very brief: together with Segramor, Perceval, and others, he is overcome in jousting by Cligés. It is striking that the Motif of the Cligés-story is the love of the hero for the young wife of his uncle and sovereign and that the loves of Tristan and Iseult are occasionally referred to while there is never any mention of Lancelot and Guinevere. “It seems clear,” states Miss Weston, “that when Chrétien wrote this poem he did not know Lancelot as the lover of Arthur’s queen and the chief of Arthur’s knights.”

In Le Chevalier de la Charrette (written about 1170), on the other hand, Lancelot emerges as the glorious protagonist, as the greatest of all Arthurian knights, and, above all, as the devoted lover and rescuer of Queen Guinevere. The function and traits displayed by Lancelot in this romance are essentially those which he carries into most of later Arthurian literature. In order to understand how he obtained many of these characteristics in later works it is necessary to understand his function and traits in the first extant romance of which he is the protagonist. What follows is a brief summary of the action in Le Chevalier de la Charrette.

On Ascension Day a stranger knight appears at Camelot, boasting that he has many of Arthur’s subjects in captivity. He dares Arthur to entrust Guinevere to a champion
who shall defend her against himself in single combat. Should the champion win, the captives shall go free; should the challenger win, then the Queen shall be his prize. Kay, by a ruse, obtains permission to be the Queen’s champion. He is vanquished by his powerful opponent and, together with Guinevere, taken away as prisoner. Pursuing the abductor, Gawain overtakes another knight who is on foot. Gawain lends him a horse, whereupon the anonymous knight speeds away. Gawain soon finds the horse dead and, shortly thereafter, the knight walking in full armor, trying to overtake a cart such as was used to transport criminals. Upon the Knight’s inquiry about the Queen, the carter, a dwarf, merely answers that if he stepped into the cart he would learn her whereabouts on the following morrow. The Knight, faced with a choice between love and reason, hesitates for two steps before love conquers. Gawain, meanwhile, rides behind the cart. Towards nightfall they arrive at a castle and take up lodging. In the night a flaming lance descends upon the bed in which the Knight is resting, barely missing him while piercing the bed.

In the morning, the Knight witnesses from a window a procession and recognizes the Queen escorted by her captor. When he can no longer follow her with his eyes, he nearly throws himself out. The damsel who has lodged the knights then informs them that the abductor is called Meliagant, and that he is the son of Baudemagus, king of Goirre. From this realm no foreigner has ever returned. There are only two means of entry into this kingdom: one over a sword-bridge, the other over a water-bridge. Seeking to free the Queen, Gawain chooses the water-bridge and the Knight the sword-bridge.

While the Knight rides toward the bridge, he is lost in reflection of Guinevere and in this condition arrives at a ford where another knight warns him not to enter. Deaf to the challenge, the Knight is knocked into the cold water. Now thoroughly aroused, he recovers and forces his opponent to beg for mercy.

At another castle, a damsel offers the Knight lodging if he will sleep with her. Though others would have welcomed such a proposition, the Knight refuses at first, but, having no choice because of the desolate country, finally consents. At night, however, he resists the temptations of the flesh and, though lying beside the damsel, thinks all the time of the Queen. Travelling on, he finds a gilded comb with some hair in it. On learning that the golden tresses are Guinevere’s, he adores them with religious fervor. During the next adventure, which takes place in a cemetery, Lancelot raises a heavy stone lid from a tomb and thereby is proclaimed as the future liberator of the captives in Goirre.

After meeting some of these prisoners and aiding them in a battle against their oppressors, the Knight arrives at the sword-bridge, which separates him from Meliagant’s stronghold. Enduring great pain, he successfully crosses this obstacle. Baudemagus, Meliagant’s noble-minded father, welcomes the Knight who, in spite of his wounds, insists upon fighting the Queen’s abductor on the next morning. In his weakened state he is getting the worst of the combat until a damsel calls his attention to the Queen. The sight of her renew’s his strength and causes him to press Meliagant so hard that Baudemagus feels obliged to interfere by asking the Queen to stop the fight. Meliagant, unwilling to concede defeat, insists upon another combat at a later date. The Knight, by now revealed as Lancelot, readily consents.

The Queen, all the while watching the combat, surprises her liberator by treating him haughtily and with scorn. Lancelot, leaving Baudemagus’s castle in search of Gawain, hears false rumors of her death and tries to commit suicide. She, in turn, also hears rumors that he was killed and, regretting her haughtiness, brings herself
in her remorse to the brink of death. When all the rumors are proved false, the
Queen receives Lancelot full of joy. She explains that her earlier anger was caused
by his momentary hesitation in mounting the odious cart. A rendezvous is arranged
for the same night at her window. With her consent he breaks the iron window bars,
enters the bedchamber, and enjoys her favors to the fullest. In his eagerness he is
insensitive to the wounds which he sustained while pulling on the bars. In the morn-
ing Lancelot sets the window bars into their old place and, while continuing to adore
the Queen, returns to his own quarters.

A few hours later, Meliagant finds Guinevere's bed stained with blood. His suspic-
ions, however, are directed toward the wounded Kay, and not toward Lancelot.
Lancelot once more defends the Queen and once more spares his opponent's life upon
Baudemagu's and the Queen's intercession. He then departs again to seek Gawain.
He is ambushed and imprisoned by Meliagant's henchmen while Gawain is rescued
at the water-bridge and saved from drowning by Baudemagu's people. Gawain now
proceeds to search for Lancelot. This quest is soon abandoned and Gawain is ac-
corded the honor of leading Guinevere back to Arthur.

During Lancelot's imprisonment, his jailoress becomes enamored of him and per-
mits him to partake in a tournament which Guinevere is attending. At first, main-
taining his incognito, he eclipses all other participants but, upon the Queen's request,
starts acting the coward. Later, the Queen commands him to do his best and Lancelot
carries off the honors of the day. Imprisoned again, he is freed by Meliagant's sister
in time to arrive at Arthur's court for the prearranged single combat with Meliagant.
This time the battle is shorter and when Meliagant refuses to beg for mercy, Lancelot
hews off his head. He is then hailed by Arthur and his court as the liberator of the
Queen and many of Arthur's subjects.

To all those familiar with subsequent treatments of the Lancelot legend
it must be obvious how greatly Chrétien influenced this particular branch
of Arthurian literature. What Lancelot is in the Charrette, he is essentially
in the Old French Prose Lancelot, in Malory, Tennyson, Masefield, and
T. H. White. The more apparent this fact becomes, the more surprising
it must be to discover that while Chrétien put his lasting stamp on the
characterization of Lancelot, there also existed a literary tradition that de-
picted the hero as anything but the type of man that emerges from the
Charrette. Of this tradition we have but one extant piece of evidence,
Ulrich von Zatzikhoven's Lanzelet. Whereas Chrétien's story tells of a
specific group of adventures in Lancelot's career, this Middle High German
romance is essentially a biographical account, that is, it narrates the hero's
life from infancy to old age and death. The Lanzelet, consisting of 9444
lines of fluent verse, has never received the scholarly attention that it de-
serves. The first of the following studies is an attempt to arrive at a better
appreciation of this work and to rehabilitate a poet of considerable skill.
Since the most important passages are analyzed in this study, a plot sum-
mary does not seem to be necessary.

In the second study, an attempt is made to demonstrate how much a
different Zeitgeist and a strong individualistic artistic personality influenced
the presentation of one of Lancelot's most famous adventures, the rescue of Guinevere after her abduction by Méliaigant. Sir Thomas Malory, writing three centuries after Chrétien de Troyes and Ulrich von Zatzikhoven, presents us with a hero who has many of the essential features of the Lancelot of the Charrette but who now emerges as a more manly and independent character than his predecessor.

In the last section of this monograph, a hitherto ignored aspect of the Charrette is examined. Chrétien's work has aroused more scholarly interest than perhaps any other Arthurian romance. Yet, to my knowledge, nobody has until now taken under close scrutiny Chrétien's characterization of Guinevere and Méliaigant. It is hoped that this study succeeds in showing that Chrétien was not only a poet of great ingenuity and polish, but also that he had a dramatic skill that was unusual for an artist of his day.

Each of the three studies in this collection is developed as an independent unit. I have tried to avoid overlapping and repetition of information in order to preserve the independent nature of each section, except in places where it has appeared absolutely necessary. Together, these essays should aid the reader to gain a better understanding of the many-faceted depiction of a hero whom literary audiences throughout the history of Arthurian romance have cherished more than any other.

NOTES

1. Chrétien de Troyes, Erec, edited by W. Foerster (Halle, 1890), vs. 1691 ff.
6. Ibid., p. 94 ff.
9. Ibid., p. 5.
SUSPENSE IN THE EARLY ARTHURIAN EPIC:

AN INTRODUCTION TO

ULRICH VON ZATZIKHOVEN'S LANZELET

To a reader conditioned by Agatha Christie's novels and Alfred Hitchcock's horror movies, the term “suspense” will imply a certain spine-chilling, glued-to-the-seat quality which, in the context of art, appears to be a fairly recent product of our culture. In the modern suspense story, the reader approaches the subject of the narrative in an objective manner: the situation created by the author does not usually stand in a personal relationship to the reader's life, his mental and physical environment. Suspense, in this way, is the result of an autonomous creation by the writer which owes its existence solely to his imagination. The reader's participation is voluntary and the success of the story depends heavily upon his ability to complement the writer's imagination. Thus a reader who, to use Samuel Johnson's delightful phrase, “is given to wild flights of fancy,” will be able to experience as much horror by just reading about a given situation as if he were actually present. And it does not matter whether this hypothetical situation is drawn from the tangible world or from a completely fictional one.

In the Middle Ages, the situation was quite different since contemporary authors rarely transgressed the limits of the comprehensible: Beowulf, Roland, Arthur, Gawain, Lancelot, and others are types developed to perfection who, in spite of their super-human characteristics, act the way any medieval man would have acted had he possessed the physical and mental qualities of these heroes. The physical environment, including the various and sundry fairyland kingdoms in which especially Arthurian Romance abounds, is always one that draws from and duplicates the artist's and the audience's reservoir of geographic and topographic knowledge. Given the technological limitations of that age, it is only natural that an author was ordinarily bound to local features, unless the material was transmitted from the Orient via crusading knights or marchands au long cours. Such places as India, the Holy Land, Africa, or King Arthur's realm of Logres, were usually characterized by features which were common to most of Europe. Oriental knights such as, for instance, Wolfram's famous “noble heathen” Feirefiz, resembled contemporary German knights much as Lucas Cra-
nach’s biblical characters later resembled sixteenth-century German peasants and noblemen.

It seems clear, then, that a medieval author was not able to create suspense in all the ways allowed to a modern writer. Whatever in his work resembles suspense in the modern sense of the word must be the result of a *Wechselwirkung*, the reciprocity between the narrative and the physical and mental conditions existing in his day. A close scrutiny of the era during which Arthurian Romance flourished reveals that the knightly class—to whom this kind of literature belonged—lived in a constant *Spannungszustand*, a condition of general conscious or unconscious stress. Around A.D. 1000, feudalism, as the only practical means of defense against the invaders from Africa, from northern Europe, and from Asia, had achieved its purpose. With the danger of foreign invasions abated, the knightly class found itself deprived of its *raison de vivre*, that is, defense of the fatherland and the Christian faith against the infidels. As economic pressures mounted in proportion to a decline in social significance, knighthood sought to create an illusory system of values that would justify its existence as an *ordo.* As a consequence, the genuine self-respect of the early knights became supplanted by an artificially constructed self-esteem, a formalized code of ethics, an insistence upon birthright rather than achievement.

This trend is reflected in the many-faceted aspects of contemporary life but it is nowhere as clearly expressed as in the literature of the late twelfth century. The poets of this era were especially eager to depict idealized situations rather than unpleasant reality. Their works exhibit a feature typical of societies which are afflicted by economic and social turmoil. In such an era, an age when history and myth were closely connected, the poets of the various courts turned towards the legends of an apparently glorious past and, true to their didactic purpose, modified them according to the needs of their audiences, first in the *chansons de geste* and *Spielmannsepen*, then in the romances of the *Matière de Bretagne*. The secular verse romances of this era were, in consequence, all syntheses of the conditions found in the real world and of those longed for by the poets. These poets were, to borrow G. Ehrismann’s fitting phrase, “Idealbilder einer aristokratischen Wunschswelt.”

The most typical exponent of this development in literature was the knight-errant, the noble warrior who, in endless pursuit of physical and spiritual perfection, strove for *aventüre*, roaming through a never-never land, always ready to defend the cause of the good and just. During the relatively peaceful time in which Ulrich von Zatzikhoven wrote his poem, an era interrupted only by petty feuds and the Third Crusade, an involuntarily idle knight, beset by economic and social difficulties, could dream of a more purposeful life by identifying with such literary heroes as Parzival,
Iwein, Erek, and Lanzelet. It is very likely that the knight who heard the court poet recite a tale of the Round Table derived much more from this story than just entertainment or moral gratification. Rather, it appears that Arthurian Romance produced in its audience an effect quite similar to that of classical catharsis. The listener could alleviate his Spannungszustand by immersing himself in the adventures of the fictional hero, the knight-errant who roamed through the world in much the same manner that his real-life counterpart moved through life. The repeated identification with the fictional hero, the immersion in his countless adventures, the dangers and the inevitable happy ending, all helped an audience comprised of members of the nobility to come to better grips with reality.

The hero in the Arthurian romances of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries always represents the sublime values of a Christian society; he is ennobled by his service for a lady (Erek, Iwein), or, on a more elevated level, by his dedication to religious goals (Galahad, Parzival). In opposition to him stand the forces of evil: miscreant knights, giants, dwarfs, magicians, sorceresses, and monsters of all sorts. The hero as the symbolic representative of real-life knightly society performs the deeds that the real-life knight cannot perform because the framework of his society has changed and simply has no need for such deeds.

If we fail to acknowledge the existence of a Spannungszustand, the condition of stress already there before the actual confrontation between the artist and his audience, and if we do not recognize the subsequent release of emotion into harmless channels, we shall fail to find one of the keys to a deeper understanding of Arthurian Romance. And if we fail to perceive the underlying ennobling purpose of this genre, we shall reduce the works of such poets as Chrétien, Hartmann, Wolfram, and Gottfried to the level of ordinary adventure stories, written for no other purpose than to elicit admiration from an audience of ruffians and half-wits. Thus, one can hardly avoid the suspicion that certain scholars criticized Lanzelet for its alleged "Mangel an Beseelung" because they did not genuinely understand the ideological currents that dominated the era of Ulrich's creativity. It simply will not suffice to approach this poem as one would approach a modern play or novel. Rather, one must apply to it what Matthew Arnold called "the historical estimate." In forming a just historical estimate, we shall obtain valuable help by paying attention to the available critical remarks of Ulrich's contemporaries about this work. In regard to most medieval romances there is a paucity of such criticism, the popularity of a certain work being calculated by the number of surviving manuscripts that contain it. In the case of Lanzelet, however, we are more fortunate. Such a noted literary figure as Rudolf von Ems—a man whom Ehrismann called "einen der gelehresten mittelhochdeutschen Dichter"—praised Ulrich in his Alexan-
der, a poem written only thirty-five years after the probable composition of Lanzelet. Two centuries later, Pütterich von Reichertshausen, a collector of important German literary works, noted in surveying a library that, among other items, it contained “fünfe Lancelunt.” He stated furthermore that he was not familiar with the content of these books although he himself owned a book about Lancelot. Scholars are unanimous in the assumption that the book in his possession was a copy of Ulrich’s Lanzelet and that amongst the five volumes of unknown content there was at least one version of the Middle High German Prosa-Lancelot. If one were to take seriously the derisive remarks about Lanzelet found in some German literary histories, one should be truly amazed at the fact that Pütterich knew the supposedly “geistlose” Lanzelet, while he was ignorant of the Prosa-Lancelot, a work highly acclaimed by some noted modern scholars.

Pütterich’s comment, however, is only additional evidence to support the claim that Ulrich’s poem was widely known throughout the later Middle Ages. Careful analysis of the work shows why this was the case. An audience that rejoiced in swiftly flowing action must have been delighted by the skillfully narrated plot. In Lanzelet, there seems to be just the right balance between action-packed adventures and slow moving interludes. Suspense, a condition of apprehension and anxiety, results from the interlacing of four major thematic strands:

1. Lanzelet’s search for his identity.
2. The adventure at Ploris.
3. Lanzelet’s battles with illustrious knights.
4. The abduction and rescue of Queen Ginover.

In addition, there are a number of lesser episodes which aid the development of suspense, such as, for instance, the Dragon’s Kiss, but these appear to be inserted into the plot only to satisfy the audience’s craving for the spectacular and unusual. Throughout the following pages, the important thematic divisions that make up the main body of suspenseful material will be discussed in detail.

Lanzelet’s Search for His Identity

Ulrich’s poem is divided into two parts, the first one ending with the revelation of the hero’s name at almost exactly the half-point of the romance (V. 4706). Throughout this part, one question must constantly have been in the mind of Ulrich’s audience: What is the name of the hero? This question arises at the very beginning of the poem when Ulrich speaks of certain nīdære who could not bear to have good fortune come to a knight who always strove for the “stăten tugenden” and who for many years of his life did not know
In a proleptic statement typical of this era, the poet then reveals that the hero did not discover his name and lineage until he himself had discovered them through proof of his *manheit* (V. 35).

After reviewing the hero's childhood, the author states that when the youth was fifteen he craved permission to depart from the fairyland behind the lake to which he was brought by the *merfeine* after the death of his parents. The young man implores his foster mother to reveal his name but she refuses. When asked why she does not want to provide him with this information, she replies that it was because of her "schamen und manecvalt not" (V. 322). The youth is content for the moment: his eagerness to discover his name is offset by the desire to alleviate the sorrow of the woman who took his mother's place. The mermaid tells him that he can remedy both his and her discontent by gaining the upper hand over a certain knight named *Iweret*, a man whom she calls the "besten ritter der ie wart" (V. 329ff.). At this point of the narrative, the reader or listener is left puzzled as to the exact cause of the fairy-woman's sorrow and shame and it is not until much later that he discovers what it is all about. Without a name, the hero goes forth into the world. The fact that he is ignorant of his identity becomes his most immediate concern; nothing can distract him from the search for his name. Whatever happens,

\[
\text{sich bedachte der helt balt} \\
\text{durch waz er uz was geriten.}
\]

(V. 1362 ff.)

After the adventure at the castle of Galgandreiz during which the hero kills the host in a peculiarly unsporting manner that reveals him as *dörperlich* (V. 743-1356), the news of his feat is brought to Kardigan, King Artus' castle. The two knights who relate the story explain that they could not discover the newcomer's identity because "ern wil sich nieman nennen" (V. 1349). Meanwhile, this nameless knight, our young hero, journeys on and, arriving at another castle, demonstrates that he is not only ignorant of his identity but also of the custom that requires everyone approaching this castle to carry an olive branch as a sign "daz er vride wolte reichen" (V. 1382). His ignorance causes the youth much hardship since he was immediately attacked by a band of knights. Although he kills most of them, he is saved in the end only through the intervention of Ade, one of the four magnificent women of importance in his life. The uncle of this young lady rules the land which our hero has unwittingly entered. Unlike his niece, he does not possess a kind heart. He orders the captive hero before him and,
in a storm of rage, asks him his name and from whence he comes. Woe betide, the fearless but naive youngster answers:

"ich wil iu sagen ungelogen
ich bin mit vrowen hie vor erzogen
und enweiz nu wer ich bin!"

(V. 1673 ff.)

Linier, the captor, naturally believes that the young man is jesting. He flies into a paroxysm of rage and throws the hero into a dungeon. Fortunately for the anonymous knight, Linier is a very competitive man who prides himself on never having been overcome in a certain contest during which the condemned person must first oppose a giant, then fight two lions, and finally face Linier himself. The imprisoned youth soon considers this contest as his only chance to escape from the tower. Via the faithful Ade, he asks permission from Linier to try his luck. Linier happily accedes to this request. He announces a great festival to which he invites all the nobles from near and far, proclaiming

"er ist namelos,
der ritter, der da vehten wil.
er nimpt ez allez zeime spil,
swaz man redet oder tuot."

(V. 1880 ff.)

Linier simply cannot accept the fact that the hero always speaks the truth. Consequently, he attributes his unusual behavior not to courage but to "grozer kintheit" (V. 1885 f.). The young knight, however, quickly proves that Linier should have taken him more seriously. Wasting little time, he swiftly disposes of the giant, the hungry lions, and finally Linier himself.

This episode was probably intended as an illustration of how a good man can incur unwanted trouble if he lacks complete knowledge of himself. The audience which just a while ago followed the hero into this trying adventure, all the time hoping for the best outcome but nevertheless wondering how such a relatively inexperienced knight as Lanzelot could possibly hold his ground against such formidable opposition, must now be twice as anxious to find out how many more difficulties our hero will have to encounter before the discovery of his name.

After the adventure at Linier's stronghold, news of the deeds of this marvelous young knight again reach the ears of King Artus. At court, Erec requests that someone inform the assembly about the identity of this valiant warrior. A certain Orphilet suspects that the knight is the one "der selbe niht sinds namen weiz" (V. 2269). King Artus then requests that one of his knights go on a quest for the hero and, upon finding him, induce him to join the nobles gathered at Kardigan. It is his greatest desire, Artus pro-
claims, to meet the “stolze degen vonme së” (V. 2294). The assembled company chooses Wålwein (Gawain) for the quest.11

Wålwein, after riding many days, finally encounters a knight who bears a golden eagle on his shield. Recognizing the emblem, Wålwein knows that he has found the object of his search. To his great disappointment, however, no entreaty whatsoever avails to persuade the nameless hero to return with him to Kardigan. After a lengthy and fruitless dialogue, the youth exclaims that he does not even know the name of the man who so courteously invites him, whereupon Wålwein calls himself a man “der sich iu nennet âne schame” (V. 2490 ff.). The implication of this statement is, of course, that anyone who does not want to reveal his name must have good reason for doing so.12 Contrary to Wålwein’s (and the audience’s) expectations, the revelation of Wålwein’s name has the effect upon the young hero of making him feel that fate has provided him with an opportunity to do battle with a really renowned knight. He hurls a veiled accusation of cowardice at Wålwein, whereupon a furious, albeit indecisive, combat ensues. The description of this duel is again masterful and of such a quality that Ulrich’s audience must have been full of excitement and anticipation. However, the excitement of this episode comes to an almost abrupt halt when the confrontation between the knights is stopped.13 Wålwein is constrained to return to Artus with his task unfinished while the nameless hero continues his search for Iweret and for his own identity.

The tempo of the action picks up again with the description of the hero’s feats during a tournament where he appears on one day in green armor, on the next day in white accoutrement, and on the third day in a red disguise.14 On the second day, just before the jousting, he declares

\[
sît nieman weiz, wer ich bin, 
sö ist daz harte wol mën sin,  
daz ich mën gewerp nieman sage.  
\]

(V. 3077 ff.)

During the fighting on this day, our hero excells above all others and all those present are eager to discover his identity. Lanzelet, however, being unable to tell his name, swiftly disappears from the jousting grounds. At this point, a very significant one in the narrative, the author inserts the remark that the hero did this not for concealment but because

\[
wan daz in duhte ein schande  
daz ern selbe niht erkande.  
\]

(V. 3226 ff.)

Here we see that the hero considers his anonymity a spot on his knightly honor, a stigma that makes him a social outcast. He seems to think that he cannot be considered a worthy member of Artus’ court, a symbol of knighthood’s highest aspirations, until he has gained knowledge of his identity
and the concurrent deeper knowledge of his own self that goes with the revelation of his lineage. In order to emerge from his state of limbo, Lanzelot must press on with his quest. Also, from a narrative point of view, Ulrich must have realized at this point that his audience’s patience was wearing thin and that relief in the form of revealing the hero’s name must come soon. Thus, after a few minor travails along the way, none of which pose a serious challenge to the hero, Lanzelot reaches Iweret’s stronghold. From that moment on, the supreme adventure of the whole story unfolds.

Following the custom of all those who desire to challenge the great Iweret, the anonymous hero strikes a cymbal near a fountain whereupon Iblis appears, Iweret’s lovely daughter, and then Iweret himself. The night before the hero’s arrival, this beautiful maiden had a dream in which she saw the young knight and promptly fell in love with him. Riding ahead of her father after the first sounds of the cymbal, she is driven only by a desire to warn her love and to persuade him to flee with her, rather than to fight her seemingly invincible father. The hero, however, though obviously taking great delight in her good looks and noble demeanor, is determined to fight her father and to win her honestly; he is determined as well to avenge the grief of his foster mother and to discover his long-sought-for identity. Upon the arrival of her father, the maiden falls into a swoon, unable to resolve the conflict of loyalties thrust upon her by fate. In the rugged battle that follows, youthful vigor wins out over experience and our nameless knight, who just shortly before had called himself a man “der niht wol vliehen kan” (V. 4344), defeats his mighty opponent by cutting off his head. Iblis, reacting quite like Laudine in Iwein, quickly adjusts to this fait accompli and decides to accompany the still nameless knight on his future adventures. Behind her she leaves a number of disconsolate vassals who have lost both their lord and his daughter without even knowing the name of the knight who has brought all this misfortune upon their heads.

The reader now knows that the hero’s state of anonymity must soon come to an end. While the young warrior embraces Iblis under a sheltering linden tree, a comely personage comes riding towards them on a white mule. The hero recognizes her as one of the maidens-in-waiting of his foster mother, the mermaid. For the last time in the story, the poet refers to his hero as der ellende (“the stranger,” V. 4693). After joining the lovers and thanking God for permitting the hero to accomplish for her lady what she desired him to do, the maiden-in-waiting states:

“ir sint geheizen Lanziletet,
von gebürte sällic unde gröz.
ich weiz nienâ iweren genôz.
iwer vater der hiez Pant.”

(V. 4706 ff.)
In addition to telling Lanzelet his name and lineage and the name of the lands which through his birthright are his, she also announces that so long as he lives, no man will ever conquer him.

From here on, the hero is referred to as "her Lanzelet" or simply as "Lanzelet." Knowing his name and lineage, as well as the fact that he is King Artus' nephew, he is very eager to get to his uncle's court and to find Wålwein,

\[
\text{wan er in baz quotes gunde} \\
\text{danne deheim sîn mâge.} \\
(V. 4962 f.)
\]

He no longer has to flee the company of noble men and women because the blemish is removed from his honor and he knows that he belongs amongst the pedigreed fellowship of Artus' court. The stage is set for Part II of the story, the account of Lanzelet's exploits as an Arthurian knight and the assumption of his inherited crown.

The Adventure at Plùris

Just as the first part of this romance is dominated by Lanzelet's need to discover his identity, most of the second part is characterized by the hero's desire to avenge an insult he suffered at an early stage in his career. The incident referred to is the one where, after having departed from the realm of the mermaid, Lanzelet is approached by a dwarf who first strikes the hero's horse and then Lanzelet himself. Lanzelet, oddly enough, apparently takes the insult lightly and refrains from retaliating. Instead, he contents himself with inquiring from bystanders the name of the castle and its owner, the apparent master of the dwarf. He is told

\[
\text{"diu burc heizet Plùris"} \\
(V. 448 ff.)
\]

This seemingly incidental episode assumes great importance in the later parts of the poem, a development that is of credit to Ulrich's artistic craftsmanship and to his well-conceived organization of the romance. Also in the first part of the poem, during Lanzelet's first encounter with Wålwein, the hero assures the latter that he cannot accompany him to Kardigan because of some unfinished affairs:

\[
\text{"geloubt mir einer geschih:} \\
\text{ich enmac ze Britân nimmer komen} \\
\text{ê ich andriu mære habe vernomen!"} \\
(V. 2480 ff.)
\]
A little later, he states

"ob ir mirs gelouben weilt,
so enmac ich ze disen ziten
mit iu niht geriten."

(V. 2706 ff.)

He assures Wälwein of his goodwill and friendship, but he insists upon going his own way:

"ob ich min dinc hêtre
dar nach gesetzet als ich sol,
so enmoht mir nimmer só wol
geschehen als daz ich mit iu rite
unde niht des vermite,
des ir an mich mooten."

(V. 2718 ff.)

At this point, nobody in the audience can know for certain what "unfinished" business Lanzelet has in mind. He could be speaking of the matter of his unresolved identity, but, judged from an a posteriori point of view, he may also have in mind the revenge of the insult he received at Plûris. That he is bent on revenge in this matter does not become clear until another conversation with Wälwein after the tournament:

"sin geselle elaget ouch im daz,
waz im ze Plûris was geschehen,
er begunde im öffentlichen jehen,
daz er durch daz dar wollte warn."

(V. 3502 ff.)

Thus Ulrich makes it quite clear by a number of direct hints that the audience can expect an interesting adventure in connection with Lanzelet's determination to return to Plûris as an avenger. And indeed, after having settled the matter of his identity and after having overcome King Valerin in a duel at Artus' court, Lanzelet sets out for this castle. At once the episode which at first appeared rather insignificant now assumes new proportions. Lanzelet receives the information that Plûris belongs to a queen who has promised never to take a husband unless he has won his reputation at the expense of a hundred knights, all of whom he must overcome in jousting on a single day. To remind his audience that this is the castle where the hero was struck by the dwarf, Ulrich puts in the remark

\[\text{der schilte rüerunge} \]
\[\text{pflac daz getwerc, dem è vertruoc} \]
\[\text{Lanzelet, daz es in sluoc,} \]
\[\text{do er zem ersten üz reit.} \]

(V. 5468 ff.)
Lanzelet, as expected, easily overcomes his one hundred opponents and our author then somewhat scrupulously states:

\[
\text{dō muose aber brüten} \\
\text{der wīpsēdīge Lanzelet.} \\
(V. 5529 f.)
\]

In a more ponderous fashion, Ulrich begins to speculate about the hero’s feelings in matters of love, not at all surprisingly since this is the fourth woman in the story with whom Lanzelet has some kind of an affair:

\[
\text{ich enweiz, ob erz ungerne tat} \\
\text{wan dīu kūnegin was eine schoene maget} \\
\text{sie müste wol sīn behaget} \\
\text{eim man der halbtōt wērē}.
\]

(V. 5530 ff.)

Physical attraction, he concludes, is obviously a strong factor in the relationship between a man and a woman.

Up to this point, the Plūris episode lacks genuine suspense because it is clear that a hundred “run-of-the-mill” knights could not seriously threaten the best knight in the world. However, the situation changes when it appears that the hero’s most recent conquest is far more possessive than his former mistresses. Sensing the valiant man’s tendency to seek new adventures, she assures herself of his continued presence by surrounding him with forty of her best knights while prohibiting him from wearing even the smallest dagger. Thus Lanzelet, who all the while longs to be at his uncle’s court and in the arms of his friundin Iblis, has to remain in his new kingdom as a virtual prisoner. Finally, when everything else fails, he conspires to gain his freedom by a ruse. He urges the queen to reestablish the custom of the hundred knights, pretending that this will heighten his and her prestige abroad, but secretly hoping that the jousts on the wide open field will provide him with a chance to escape. Although this is not openly implied, one surmises that Lanzelet’s plan calls for himself to be one of the hundred knights jousting for the queen. Once on horseback and armed with a lance, he could easily make good his escape. This stratagem, apparently, did not sufficiently appeal to Ulrich and he presented his audience with a more sophisticated denouement. While Lanzelet awaits the coming of a hero who will dare to challenge the hundred knights, the mermaid’s messenger ventures forth to King Artus’ court. There she informs the assembled fellowship of Lanzelet’s plight. Hearing that their friend is still alive, Wālwein, Karyet, Erec, and Tristant immediately issue forth “in recken wīs” to liberate Lanzelet (V. 6237 ff.).

Arriving at Plūris, the four knights are welcomed by the queen and Lanzelet with whom they secretly devise a plan for his liberation. This plan
calls first of all for the four knights to challenge successively the queen’s hundred knights while Lanzelet looks on. In the jousting that ensues, the knights from Artus’ court fare extremely well although not even Wälwein can match Lanzelet’s earlier feat of throwing all of the hundred knights out of the saddle. Nevertheless, Lanzelet’s friends are successful enough that the hero can pretend indignation to the queen at the shame which King Artus’ knights have inflicted upon her. Unsuspectingly, the lady calls upon him to avenge the insult and he gleefully swears an oath, promising

\[
\text{daz er iså wider kârme}
\]
\[
\text{als er eine just genâème}
\]
\[
\text{wider ir deheinen dier dâ sach.}
\]

(V. 6485 ff.)

The poet assures his audience that Lanzelet never broke his oath although he did not care to be host at Plüris any longer:

\[
\text{siñe triuwe er niht enbrach,}
\]
\[
\text{wan erz biz an siñen töt vermeit:}
\]
\[
\text{alsus behielt er siñen eit.}
\]

(V. 6488 ff.)

Feigning pursuit of the collaborating Tristant, Lanzelet disappears beyond the next hill, leaving a swooning queen behind and bringing an end to a delightful and suspenseful episode.

**Lanzelet’s Contrastive Battles with Illustrious Knights**

Much of the suspense in the narrative of Lanzelet is due to the skillful manner in which the duels between the protagonist and a number of antagonists are arranged. It is probable that Ulrich’s audience delighted in these action-packed confrontations because they are well told and carefully devised even when judged by modern standards of narrative technique. On the surface, one can easily get the impression that Lanzelet simply disposes of a series of random knights; in reality, however, there is a careful plan according to which the hero is brought face to face with knights who range from pure villainy to the highest degree of chivalrous excellence.

During the hero’s first armed confrontation with another man, he kills his opponent in an ingenious, albeit rather unconventional, manner. Although having been described as much gebezzert in his conduct a short time before (V. 667), Lanzelet appears ignorant of the rules of knightly behavior during his deadly game of knife-throwing with the mad Galgandreiz. After his enemy misses his first throw, Lanzelet acts swiftly:

\[
\text{er lie daz werfen und daz boln}
\]
\[
\text{unde lief hin an den schalch}
\]
\[
\text{mit dem mezzer ern bevalch}
\]
\[
\text{einen vreislîchen stich}
\]
daz er viel üf den esterich
unde nie kein wort ersprach.
(V. 1178 ff.)

Disposing of Galgandreiz in this unsporting manner, Lanzelet proves that he can take an advantage where he sees one but also that he is unaware of the knightly code of ethics that binds even the worst of enemies. In this way Ulrich intimates that his hero is still an unfinished product who, after the many years in the care of women, perhaps needs exposure to the formative values of a man’s world.

Lanzelet’s next duel is of a more testing nature than the one with Galgandreiz. After the surrender to Ade, her uncle Linier subjects the hero to the ordeal mentioned earlier. In this test, the giant poses the least problem. Lanzelet proves that a clumsy Goliath is no match for a swift David. Even the last desperate attempt by the mortally wounded giant to fulfill his duty fails: instead of crushing Lanzelet with the weight of his body, he misses the youth badly. Linier, cursing his *ungeliicke* (V. 1951), quickly leads the youth to the lions’ den. The beasts appear eager to prove that they are of tougher mettle than the giant. They rip such a deep wound into the hero that

\[
daz blut dâ nider schöz
als ez ein brunne wäre.
(V. 1966 ff.)
\]

Ulrich hastens at this point of the narrative to assure his audience that there is no reason to be concerned: Lanzelet’s speed is so extraordinary that both lions soon succumb to his sword. Then, however, the poet warns his already concerned listeners:

\[
dô giene ez érst an die nöt.
(V. 1978)
\]

Leaving the dead lions behind, the young hero is pale and wan, weak from the loss of blood. This does not detain Linier who immediately orders his armor and war horse to be brought to him. A vicious battle ensues, in the course of which Ulrich notes that

\[
Linier grôzer künste pflac
wan er niht wan ze staten sluoc.
der junge, der den arm truoc,
der vâht ane liste,
wan er wol wiste,
waz ime ze leide was getân.
(V. 2034 ff.)
\]

This duel is construed as a confrontation between youth and age, speed and skill. The description of every phase of the battle, a description that must
have elicited sheer delight from Ulrich's audience, constitutes one of the longest and most vivid accounts of a duel in Middle High German literature. In the end, youth wins over age: Lanzelet, ready to swoon at any moment, gathers all his strength into a single blow, the deadly force of which sends Lünier stumbling to the ground. Noting Lanzelet's prowess, it is nevertheless significant to realize that Ulrich at one point refers to the hero as "der namenlose tumbe" (V. 2045). This is important inasmuch as such an epithet, meaning "the rash simpleton," considered together with Lanzelet's mode of fighting, illustrates that just as Lanzelet has not yet discovered his identity, so also he has not yet discovered the greater refinements of the knightly art.16

The test which is perhaps the most significant for Lanzelet occurs when he encounters Wálwcin whom, as we may recall, Artus had sent out to search for the anonymous hero. For reasons discussed earlier, Lanzelet refuses to accompany Wálwcin and a duel between the two knights ensues.

The purpose of this confrontation is clear and it cannot have escaped Ulrich's captivated audience. Wálwcin is as much a fixture and a symbol of the Arthurian order as King Artus himself. Never the principal hero of a twelfth- or thirteenth-century romance himself, he is nevertheless always regarded as the epitome of Arthurian knighthood.17 It is against his chivalric achievements that the deeds of all other knights are measured. "Gauvain ist als der edelste, tapferste und höfischte Ritter der Tafelrunde deren typischer und erster Vertreter," says Erich Köhler,18 and W. A. Nitze refers to Gauvain as "the standard bearer of the Arthurian order."19 In Ulrich's poem, Wálwcin is adorned with the epithet der reine (V. 5177) and he is placed on the Stone of Honor (der even steine, V. 5175 f.), a seat traditionally reserved in Arthurian literature for the best of all knights at the Round Table.20 In Lanzelet, just as in Chrétien's Le Chevalier de la Charrette and Wolfram's Parzival, Wálwcin-Gawain is used as a contrastive figure with the specific purpose of illuminating the hero's rise to the pinnacle of knighthood. At the commencement of the duel, Ulrich's audience must have wondered how Lanzelet could possibly hold his ground against the greatest of King Artus' knights because the kintliche hero, though already battle-hardened, is still a tumber, a simpleton. The manner in which he induces the noble Wálwcin to fight illustrates that he is alien to such standard concepts of medieval knightly bearing as zühlt, måze, and hoveschet. In the hands of a great dramatist or epic poet, Lanzelet could at this point of the narrative easily learn the deeper meaning of diemnute, but Arthurian Romance worked along different guidelines. The change in the character of a certain hero is in this genre almost never the result of a tragic incident.21 Where there is character development, the hero usually evolves through a long chain of adventures and his metamorphosis is de-
picted in allegories and symbols. Also, it appears that medieval secular authors could not conceive of sacrificing a hero’s unbroken fighting record—and with it the notion of “the best knight in the world”—to the development of character. Consequently, Lanzelot cannot lose the fight to Wälwein, just as the immaculate Wälwein cannot succumb to Lanzelot. Ulrich contents himself with a hint that his hero might have been the eventual winner of the duel had it been permitted to continue to the end:

\begin{verbatim}
Wälwein der tugende riche
der gevorchte nie sö sëre
sîner weltlichen ère:
er vaht ein teil mit zwiefelslegen.
\end{verbatim}

(V. 2582 ff.)

However, just as the young hero picks up in strength while Wälwein weakens, the poet introduces a page into the action who stops the duel by calling the warriors’ attention to an impending great tourney.

It is clear that the indecisiveness of this duel has only one purpose: to raise Lanzelot symbolically to the level of Wälwein, King Artus’ greatest hero. Suddenly, *der timerbe* appears to have acquired all the refinements of twelfth-century noble breeding. The resolution

\begin{verbatim}
“swas min her Wälwein tuot,
der ist sö hübsch und sö guot,
des volge ich, wan daz ist reht”
\end{verbatim}

(V. 2659 ff.)

seems to guide him through his future adventures. As if to show that his great stance against Wälwein is no accident, Lanzelot behaves most valiantly during the Great Tournament and easily defeats such Arthurian stalwarts as Keïn (Kay), Iwan (Yvain), and Erec.

In this manner Lanzelot establishes himself in a very brief time and at an early age as the best of all Arthurian knights except for Wälwein, who is his peer. The final task that elevates the youth to the absolute pinnacle of worldly chivalry is the combat with Iweret, the prince whom Lanzelot’s fairy foster mother called “the best of all knights.”

The Iweret episode could serve as an example *par excellence* of Ulrich’s mastery in creating suspense. On his way to Iweret’s domain, the hero is imprisoned by Mabuz, the mermaid’s craven son. Mabuz’ castle is of such a kind that anyone who enters its premises immediately turns into a coward. This, the author explains, was the doing of the mermaid who had been foretold of her son’s prospective cowardice. By casting a spell on his castle, she wanted to protect him from his enemies. Lanzelot inadvertently falls victim to this spell and turns into the most disgusting wretch of all of Mabuz’ prisoners. He does not regain his former stature until Mabuz, hard pressed by
Iweret’s raiding parties, places him outside the castle so that he may pursue the hostile bands.

The otherworldly characteristics of Mabuz as well as the magic to which Lanzelet succumbs illustrate the point that the hero can overcome any human knight but that there are certain things against which even he is powerless. Ulrich’s audience must have wondered at this point how Lanzelet could be successful against Iweret, a man who apparently was immune to the magic powers of the mermaid, while Lanzelet had indirectly become the easy prey of one of her spells. The anticipation of the audience must have increased even more throughout the account of Lanzelet’s stay at a monastery which conspicuously is called “der jameliche urbor” (V. 3828) since its cemetery harbors the graves of Iweret’s victims. Fearing for Lanzelet’s life, the abbot of this monastery tries to talk the hero out of challenging Iweret. Failing in this endeavor, he assures the young hero that if Iweret kills him, he can at least count on his, the abbot’s, “gebet und vaterlichen segen” (V. 3918 ff.). Undeterred by the monk’s preventive negativism, Lanzelet forge ahead,

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{wan er was ûz geriten} \\
\text{sò daz er niht erwunde} \\
\text{è er Iwereten funde,} \\
\text{durh der merfeine clage.}
\end{align*}
\]

(V. 3932 ff.)

This Iweret is indeed no ordinary man. Ulrich tells us that his stronghold, a castle named Dodone, is situated in the middle of a wondrous forest, the “Schoenen wald” (V. 3887). Iweret’s domain is described as a kind of medieval Schlaraffenland with all the positive characteristics attached to it that a cold and hungry twelfth-century knight could possibly dream of. The trees in the forest are always green; they bear ripe fruit all year long. What is more important, the fruit has certain virtues:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{swes iemen was ze muote} \\
\text{das man solt ezen,} \\
\text{... ... ... ... ... .} \\
\text{dar nach smahte daz obst.}
\end{align*}
\]

(V. 3948 ff.)

Also, as long as a person has enough strength to move one of his limbs, this fruit can heal even the most severe of his wounds.

The forest abounds in other marvels: whatever the weather outside, the meadow and the wood encircling Iweret’s castle are always like summer; a person traversing these places cannot feel grief. The reasons for Iweret’s incredible strength are the following:
in earlier versions of this material, this “vegetarian” prince must have symbolized a nature force similar to that of the Green Knight in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. In the context of Lanzelet, he completes a triangle of feuding, interacting, and supernatural characters (the mermaid, Mabuz, and Iweret), all of whom have a certain influence upon Lanzelet’s career. It is through Lanzelet that the mermaid and her son get their revenge; by overcoming Iweret, the hero fulfills his original mission. Attached to Lanzelet’s victory is the audience’s relief as well as the certainty that the young man was indeed the greatest of all living knights.

Unlike his other accounts of Lanzelet’s duels, Ulrich spends more time elaborating the preamble to this confrontation than with the description of the actual duel, thereby providing a retarding element that heightens the audience’s expectation and curiosity. The long dialogue between Lanzelet and Iblis also contains some of Ulrich’s best psychological insights. The hero, while being entreated by the maid to abstain from fighting and to take her love instead, utters a statement of classical magnitude:

“ich bin der niht wol vliehen kan.”

(V. 4344)

Iblis’ answer, in turn, contains much of the casuistry of Minne that moved the poetic minds of the late twelfth century:

“durh wip man dicke wencen sol.”

(V. 4345)

To Ulrich, however, just as to Wolfram and to Hartmann in his earlier poems, but contrary to the Tristan-poets Gottfried and Thomas, it appears to be an accepted conclusion that Minne must be earned by knightly deeds. Thus Lanzelet answers Iblis’ entreaties in this manner:

“joch erwilbe ich iuch ze rehte wol.
swaz ir mir danne liebes tuot,
des vreut sich lip und ouch mtn muot.
ob ir mich minnet, als ir jehent
sô ist mir liep, das ir gesehent,
daz ich durch iuch getar wol
bestân swaz ein ritter sol.”

(V. 4346 ff.)

Thus, when the battle with Iweret is over, Lanzelet reaps the reward for his arebeit: he can now take possession of Iblis because he has “earned”
her favors. The poet's audience, on the other hand, brought down to earth by a skillful narrator, can rejoice in the good fortune of the hero, and throughout the elaborate description of the mermaid's present to Lanzelet and Iblis which follows the revelation of Lanzelet's name, it can gather new energy for the suspense of Lanzelet's last great adventures.24

From the adventures described up to this point, a clear pattern emerges which illustrates the hero's development as a knight. In his endeavor to discover his identity, Lanzelet slays Galgandreiz, Linier, Iweret, and a number of lesser knights. The deaths of Galgandreiz and Linier are more or less accidental by-products of Lanzelet's success because all along he directs his energies only towards the encounter with Iweret. By overcoming this knight, as well as by dueling Wälwein to a draw, Lanzelet reaches the pinnacle of knightly esteem. All the while, however, although the desire to alleviate the mermaid's sorrow appears a noble one, Lanzelet seems to pay little attention to one of the most important concepts of twelfth-century knightly ethics, that is, to aid persons who are in distress. Lanzelet's endeavors are all directed by his urgent need to discover his identity. It has been intimated above that it was necessary for Lanzelet to discover his identity because only the complete knowledge of his own self could warrant his full integration into knightly society. With the completion of this task, the path is open to Lanzelet's further improvement as a knight, the implication being that although he has become the best of all knights, he is still far from perfect. Thus Part II, which on the surface seems to be an unnecessary appendix, assumes a very important function within the romance as a whole. It illustrates, above all, Lanzelet's role as a liberator and protector of helpless persons, a feature that was of great importance in an era that gave preeminence to the concept of caritas. Furthermore, while Part I depicted the hero as a rather carefree lover, Part II shows the evolution of the würsälige Lanzelet into an individual who acts and feels according to the important Middle High German concept of strete.25 The aspect of Lanzelet's constancy as a lover is revealed in his relationship to Ibis. In as far as this relationship is an aspect of suspense, it has already been discussed in the context of the Plüris-adventure. Lanzelet's role as a liberator and protector is illustrated by his participation in the expedition to King Valerin's domain, as well as by his assumption of his inherited duties as the king of various lands. For the development of suspense, only the former is of significance.

Ginover's Abduction and Rescue

Lanzelet, eager to join King Artus and Wälwein at Kardigan, learns from a squire that a certain King Valerin desires possession of Queen
Ginover. Valerin had come to King Artus’ court and, on being assured safe conduct, had demanded the Queen, claiming that she had been promised to him before she was of marriageable age. The people at Kardigan were stunned, most of all Artus and Ginover who denied any knowledge of such a bargain. Artus, nevertheless, consented to a trial by combat which was to take place a week from the moment the challenge was issued. Lanzelet, upon hearing this, is eager to offer himself to Ginover as her champion but time is an element of utmost consideration since he is still far away from Kardigan. Asking the messenger

“möht ich enzit dar iner komen?”

he receives the answer that he can arrive at court in time if he travels both night and day (V. 5026 ff.). The necessity for a quick journey becomes even more apparent when the squire lists a number of attributes which give Valerin an air of otherworldliness. With the audience wondering whether Lanzelet will reach the court in time, the pace of the narrative picks up considerably. Not without luck, the hero arrives at Kardigan on the seventh day, just as Wälwein readies himself for the combat with Valerin. Reminding his friend of the boon which he had promised him earlier, Lanzelet reveals his desire to be accepted as the Queen’s champion in his place. The hero’s suit goes well in spite of Wälwein’s objections:

Lanzelet beredete ez dar
daz in der künec zer selben stat
und al sün massenfe bat,
daz er vëchte für die künegin.
(V. 5230 ff.)

In the arduous battle that follows, Valerin grows weaker and weaker until he finally succumbs to the young hero. He promises

daz er nimer mère
der künegin leit getëete,
(V. 5338 ff.)

whereupon Lanzelet spares his life “wand er niht mortgire was” (V. 5342). It would seem now as if the matter of Valerin’s challenge were settled. Actually, the Queen’s troubles have not yet even started.

In a proleptic statement, Ulrich intimates that Lanzelet later sorely regretted having spared Valerin’s life:

wan Falerin tet då nách
künec Artus einen leiden schâch
dar an er sîne triwe brach.
(V. 5353 ff.)
Consequently, while King Artus and his fellowship, including Lanzelet, rest assured that Valerin will cause no further trouble, the reader is already curious as to the nature of the mischief to be wrought by the villain.

From the time of Valerin’s challenge to Lanzelet’s escape from Plûris, little more than a year elapses, time enough for Valerin to forget his oath. Just as Lanzelet and his liberators return to Kardigan, they receive the news that Valerin has carried Ginover off to his unconquerable stronghold. The companions eagerly join the army which Artus is assembling for the siege but all their valor is in vain: although Walwein and Lanzelet cannot be matched in man-to-man combat, they too are helpless in view of the serpent-infested thicket which encircles Valerin’s castle. Good advice is needed. Finally, after many tears have been shed by the valiant heroes, the cunning Tristant devises a scheme which calls for the help of Malduc the magician. When the latter is found, he agrees to aid Artus but then he adds the condition that Wålwein and Erec, who in the past have done him great harm, be turned over to him. Artus and the two knights decide to take things one at a time; at the moment it appears most pressing to free the Queen from her plight. Therefore, they all agree to Malduc’s stipulation.

With the aid of his books of black magic, the wizard soon finds the spells that will lull the poisonous inhabitants of Valerin’s hedge to sleep. Thereafter, it is a free-for-all. With the slaying of Valerin and his men, the Queen is freed and Lanzelet’s first participation in an adventure that concerns a person other than himself appears to have come to an end. However, the problem now arises as to what should be done about Wålwein and Erec whose knightly honor commands them to turn themselves over to the magician. Malduc, in turn, shows his more villainous side. He puts the two noble warriors in chains and has them thrown into a tower.

Amidst the inaction of all the others, Lanzelet moves; he assembles a band of one hundred knights who are willing to accompany him against Malduc. Amongst these men there is a young knight who has an outstanding characteristic:

> er was gewahsen alsō höch
daz er verre langer schein
danne türne dehein.

(V. 7548 ff.)

The young giant proves an invaluable asset in this undertaking: two at a time, he lifts the fully armored Lanzelet and his followers over the walls of Malduc’s castle. Inside, the knights find Wålwein and Erec “in swere boyen versmidet” (V. 7625), a fact that enrages them to such a degree that

> si ersluogen alle gar
den wirt und daz gesinde
With the freeing of Wälwein and Erec, another mission by Lanzelet as a liberator comes to an end.27 The conclusion of this episode also brings the suspense in Lanzelet to an end. From here on, the narrative continues to flow in an easy, leisurely manner, most of it being dedicated to the description of various festivities.

In the course of this story, Ulrich’s hero evolved as a knight of superior qualities who proved his excellence in every aspect of knightly endeavors. Starting his career as an ignorant, somewhat self-centered turner who lacked genuine knightly virtue as well as constancy in love, he gradually acquired the noble characteristics that made him a valuable member of society and a permanent fixture of the Arthurian order. In the end, it is not “der wipselige Lanzelet” who returns to his inherited lands, but “Lanzelet der stete” (V. 8430) and “Lanzelet der wigant” (V. 8320 and 8935), a man who is full of wisen fürgedanc and hohen pris (V. 8852 and 8853).

Thus Ulrich’s poem ends in “wohlwollendem Selbstgefallen,” but the audience, after having participated in the suspense of the four major actions described above, glides with the poet through the last 1500 verses, rejoicing in the wisdom of the Almighty who permitted a child of malediction to come to good fortune.

In the above article, an attempt has been made to show that suspense in Lanzelet results primarily from a series of adventures that are carefully interwoven and arranged in accordance with the poet’s artistic purpose. This body of adventures can be subdivided into four major strands, each of which retains unity through a distinctive underlying theme. Combined with one another, these thematic strands tie the narrative together and give unity to the whole romance.

By presenting plot outlines of the four major adventures, and by analyzing the contents thereof, it has been shown that there is in Lanzelet a continuous rise and fall of suspense, a well-executed interlacing of action and relaxation. Instead of one or two major climaxes as in a modern suspense story, there is in Lanzelet a series of smaller peaks which must have kept Ulrich’s audience in a state of constant excitement.

It has also been shown in this paper that some of the success of Lanzelet, as well as that of many other Arthurian romances, may well have depended upon a preexisting condition of stress, a Spannungszustand caused by economic and social pressures exerted upon the knightly class during the
twelfth century. Interacting with the suspense drawn directly from the narrative, this Spannungszustand contributed to making Lanzelet a successful work of art and a worthy example of an exciting genre.

NOTES


2. According to Marc Bloch, the origin of courtly romance coincided with the consolidation of knighthood into a classe de droit (*La société féodale*, Paris 1939, vol. II, p. 15 ff.).

3. The general deterioration of morale and idealism was temporarily halted by the crusades which gave rise to the ideal of the miles Christi. St. Bernard de Clairvaux, in his famous oration *ad milites Templi*, wanted to redirect the knightly class in its strivings but he was subject to ultimate failure. Léon Gautier limits the applicability of his famous “decalogue of chivalry” to the period ending with the Second Crusade and the composition of the *chansons de geste* (*Chivalry*, London, 1891, p. 60 ff.).


6. On a broader basis, the increasingly popular tournaments probably served a similar purpose as fictional literature.


13. The implication of this indecisive duel will be discussed further below.

14. One can easily recognize in this tournament the famous “Three Days’ Tournament” of the *Prosa Lancelot* and Malory’s *Morte Darthur*. 
15. Thus it becomes clear that the whole motif of the dwarf is inserted for no other reason than to give Lanzelet a chance to return to Plurus and to tie the action of Part I of the romance with that of Part II.

16. Up to this point, Lanzelet's experiences bear great resemblance to those of Parzival in Wolfram's poem. Lanzelet's earlier knifing of Galgandreiz is as unknighthly an act as Parzival's darting a javelin at Ither.

17. During the alliterative revival of English literature in the 14th and 15th century, Gawain enjoyed great eminence amongst literary heroes. He became the hero of one of the greatest Arthurian romances, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, as well as of such a mediocre one as *Sir Gawain and the Tale of Carlisle*.


20. The *Erne steine* can be easily recognized as *la siège périlleuse* of the *Prose Lancelot*, the seat that is reserved for Galahad, Lancelot's son, the most magnificent and perfect knight who ever lived.

21. W. P. Ker considers the lack of character development the major flaw of secular medieval literature (*Epic and Romance*, New York, 1957, p. 354 ff.).

22. A noteworthy exception is Parzival who, after his "moment of triumph" during which he learns true humility and acceptance of his fate, is a genuinely changed person.

23. Concerning Iweret's supernatural features, as well as the fairyland characteristics of his stronghold, see footnotes 128 and 131 of K. G. T. Webster's [unsatisfactory] translation of *Lanzelet* (New York, 1951).

24. It seems reasonable to assume that Ulrich sent his audience off to a good night's rest after the revelation of Lanzelet's name, that is, before the long and detailed description of the mermaid's gift.

25. In *Der Wölsche Gast*, Thomasin von Zirkhier places *staete* on one level with *môze*. These two virtues are diametrically opposed to *unnôze*, the mother of the seven deadly sins (cf. V. 9895 ff.).

26. For a complete treatment of Guinevere's abductions, as well as their relationship to Ancient Irish *aitheda* (abduction tales), consult T. P. Cross and W. A. Nitze, *Lancelot and Guinevere* (Chicago, 1930).

27. Unlike Chrétien's *Chevalier de la Charrette*, where Lancelot's rescue of Guenièvre and other persons appears to contain definite allusions to Christ's "Harrowing of Hell," the hero's rescue missions in Ulrich's poem are not of an allegorical nature.
CHIVALRY AND SIR THOMAS MALORY’S “KNIGHT OF THE CART” TALE

The motif of Guinevere’s abduction by a knight to his strange domain is probably as old as the *Matière de Bretagne* itself. Thus Caradoc of Llancarvan, the Welsh poet, reported as early as 1129 in his *Vita Gildæ* that Arthur’s wife Guennuvar was forcibly taken by a certain Melwas to the watery recesses of the City of Glass (Glastonbury), whence Arthur delivered her after a long siege.¹ The typical situation in Arthurian literature, however, where the role of the Queen’s rescuer is assumed by her lover Lancelot, cannot be found in material antedating Chrétien de Troyes’ *Chevalier de la Charrette* (1170-80) and seems to have been the invention of the French court poet.² It is through this account that the abduction-and-rescue theme of Guinevere in connection with Meliagant and Lancelot achieved its first popularity and much of its present literary significance. Chrétien not only changed what was originally simply a biographical account into a complicated roman à thèse, but also transformed it into a moving story of human passion controlled by the most noble of all courtly ideals, love and honor. *Le Chevalier de la Charrette* had such an impact upon courtly society that Lancelot immediately became its favorite fictional hero, supereceding such a stalwart knight as Gauvain, “the flower of chivalry.”³

From a historical perspective, however, the most important step in the diffusion of the Lancelot-Guinevere-Meliagant theme appears to have been its inclusion in a thirteenth-century collection of Old French Arthurian prose romances, commonly referred to as the Vulgate Cycle.⁴ A significant portion of this compilation has come to be known as the Old French *Prose Lancelot*, since Lancelot plays an important part throughout its action.⁵ It is in this work that Sir Thomas Malory discovered much of the subject matter that makes up the most famous of all fifteenth-century English books, the series of romances which the printer Caxton entitled *Le Morte Darthur*.⁶ One of the portions of the *Prose Lancelot* that seems to have attracted Malory’s special attention was the account of Guinevere’s abduction and rescue. His rendition of this incident constitutes only one of five tales that make up *The Book of Sir Lancelot and Queen Guinevere*. It has the title “The Knight of the Cart” and covers pages 1119-1140 of Professor Eugene Vinaver’s critical edition.⁷ Quite apparently, it is the product
of Malory's conscious effort to telescope the narrative of his source. The excision of some peripheral features of "The Knight of the Cart" leaves the following plot:

In the month of May Queen Guinevere is abducted by the enamored knight Meliagant who takes her to his castle. Lancelot pursues the abductor and, after overcoming a number of obstacles, enters the knight's castle and frees the Queen. He has a nocturnal rendezvous with the Queen and, while climbing into her bed-chamber, hurts his hands on the broken iron bars of the window. In his eagerness to embrace Guinevere, he pays no attention to these wounds and does not notice the stains which they leave on the bed-linen. Meliagant, upon discovering the blood-stained bed, accuses the Queen of infidelity to her husband, Arthur. Lancelot, by means of a ruse, can rightfully assume the role of the defender of the Queen's honor. After a series of delaying adventures, amongst them Lancelot's falling victim to Meliagant's trap and being imprisoned by his enemy, the single combat between the two antagonists finally takes place at Arthur's court. This duel ends with Lancelot's swift victory over Guinevere's abductor.

It is at once clear that Malory's story constitutes an enormous oversimplification of the accounts found in Chrétien's Charrette and in the Prose Lancelot, the so-called "Charrette en prose." There can be little doubt, however, that the above outline represents what probably constituted the matière that Marie de Champagne gave to her court poet Chrétien who, in turn, vastly expanded and interpolated it in order to obtain the thematic essence, the sens, of the Charrette. The author of the Prose Lancelot, some sixty years later, adopted Chrétien's expanded plot in an almost complete manner. Malory, on the other hand, telescoped the account of his source in such a skillful manner that he never lost sight of its underlying subject matter, the original matière. The compression in length of his account is quite purposefully executed; it amply reflects Malory's different artistic purpose which, in turn, was caused by a different Weltanschauung in general, and a radically changed attitude toward the ideal of chivalry in particular. In order to understand the forces that controlled Malory's pen while working on the "Knight of the Cart" tale, it is necessary to understand the changes which time wrought upon chivalry in the two and a half centuries separating the Englishman from his source.

"Chivalry," says J. A. Symonds, "though rarely realized outside the songs of poets and the fictions of romances, was the spiritual force which gave its values to the institutions and deeds of feudalism." It is obvious that Malory, when speaking of "chivalry," meant something quite different than the anonymous author of the Prose Lancelot or Chrétien de Troyes. According to the prologue of Chrétien's Cligés, France inherited chivalry from the ancients:

Ce nos ont notre livre apris
Que Grece ot de chevalerie
This passage makes it quite clear that chivalry in Chrétien’s days was interlocked with another concept mentioned by the poet, that is, clergie, a concept that apparently implied knowledge of the ethical and esthetic principles underlying civilized man’s society. It is self-explanatory that this concept in Chrétien’s days included a close affinity with the religious ideals of the time. Chrétien’s heroes are not yet the Christian saints which they become in some of the later Arthurian romances, as, for instance, Parzival in Wolfram von Eschenbach’s epic, but they are more spiritualized characters than the heroes of the precourly era. However, the aspect in which they most radically differ from their predecessors in the romans d’aventure, chansons de geste, and the Spielmannsepen, is their attitude towards women and love. It is not by accident that the rise of the Matière de Bretagne with its romantic possibilities coincided with the emergence of a strong feminine influence upon the cultural life of the courts and castles. This influence would naturally grow strongest in an era of relative peace such as the one experienced by western Europe between the Second and Third Crusade. Courtly love could thus easily find its way through the portals of the baronial fortresses which had slowly become centers of home life, and could leave its indelible imprint on three generations of nobly-born people.

It would go beyond the scope of this essay to comment on the various theories about the origin of courtly love but it is important to realize that the literature of the precourly era was destined for an audience of men. In the era of courtly poetry, however, the poets addressed their songs mainly to women, to such patronesses as Eleanor d’Aquitaine, Ermengarde de Narbonne, and Marie de Champagne, as well as to the ladies-in-waiting of their courts. These patronesses were not satisfied just to listen to their poets; they usually made them their mouthpiece (as we can clearly perceive in the case of Chrétien and Marie de Champagne). The audiences that heard these poets—the pages and young squires, but also the knights and ladies of the court—were thus exposed to, and educated by, an ideology fashioned by women and for women. We must remember, on the other hand, that the knights of the early crusades, as well as their fictional counterparts in the chansons de geste, were not submissive to female charms and that their concept of chivalry did not include the element of gallantry. The virtues and vices of these early knights were those of Homeric heroes—the wholehearted seeking of military glory, a reckless valor, and often a passionate hatred of the enemy—mingled with an unfailing fidelity to the Church. But from the middle of the twelfth century on, the exalta-
tion of gallantry caused the conception of chivalry to become inseparable from courtesy. The advent of Arthurian Romance marked the beginning of what should be called “courtly” chivalry (as opposed to the “feudal” chivalry of earlier literature). According to the new code of knightly ethics, “the knight who was faithful to his mistress was deemed sure of salvation in the theology of castles though not of cloisters.”

Chrétien’s romances reflect in toto this change in knightly ethics. In his work the intoxicating love of the knight for God is supplanted by a passionate love for his mistress. To be sure, his heroes perform great military deeds but the motivation behind their aggressiveness is usually the desire to prove themselves worthy of their mistress’ love. They are always courteous and generous; they engage only in just battles and never break their word of honor; they act nobly for the love of noblesse and protect the poor and helpless; above all, however, they serve their lady. They are capable of tender caresses in the embrace of their beloved, but they are also the fiercest of warriors who unhesitatingly oppose a hundred adversaries to prove their love. The idea of love and fidelity has penetrated their soul to such an extent that they are liable to lose their mind if they believe themselves guilty of a violation of these principles. They also attend mass regularly and frequently call upon God for help, but they are never in the direct service of God. These feminine and masculine chimerical ideals are much closer to our concepts of “gentleman” and “gentlewoman” than to the heroes of Roncevalles or Aliscans. Unfortunately, however, their greatness and splendor did not extend into reality where they had even fewer counterparts than their predecessors, the heroes of the Matière de France.

In 1200 the fashion of courtly love as we know it from poetry had spent nearly all of its former strength. Born of the individual’s desire to achieve perfection through self-discipline and never-ending striving in the service of his lady, courtly love could not satisfy the needs of the individual, the literary hero and his real-life counterpart who became aware of the contradiction in the dual objective of service in courtly ethics, the service to God on one hand, and to a lady on the other. He slowly tried to break away from the fetters of tradition. Even Chrétien de Troyes, thirty years earlier, had envisioned the ultimate defeat of an artificial ideal which he had helped to popularize and which he had hoped would enlarge man, would make him courtois, preux, and enorable.

Three decades later courtly love had indeed become ordinary fable and mensonge. Arthur’s kingdom no longer served as the symbol of an idealized present but was, once and for all, relegated to the shrines of the past. While this change was taking place, chivalry was also undergoing a further transformation. From the end of the 12th century on, it became a game of brilliant pretensions. “In order to forget the painful imperfections of reality,”
states Huizinga, “the nobles turn to the continual illusion of a high and heroic life.” Now the formal elements of chivalry received utmost attention. Arnold Hauser, speaking about a somewhat different subject, points out that the members of a privileged class will automatically stress the formal elements of an ideology once they have lost their natural inclination towards it. In the era of the Prose Lancelot, excessive attention was already being given to all kinds of ceremonies and rituals. A strained concern for social conventions had developed, with the result that chivalrous behavior was displayed in public but quickly forgotten in private.

To counteract this development, the author of the Prose Lancelot tried to revive the principles which he found in earlier courtly literature, as for instance, in Chrétien’s Charrette. Since he was a more pious man than his illustrious predecessor, however, he was not quite satisfied with the ideals of his grandfathers. He clearly perceived how they had lost the inspiration of religion and how the evil had spread down to his own time. Thus he revived in his work the spirit of religion and restored to chivalry the element of faith which was its possession a hundred years earlier, during the days of the pure milites Christi, but which thereafter had become diminished. To be sure that his idea of the perfect knight—the man who combined the qualities of the miles Christi with those of the “courtly” knight—was clearly understood, he inserted into the early parts of his voluminous work a long Ritterspiegel, a knightly code of ethics in which are gathered the noblest aspirations of the middle ages. It is the young Lancelot, a squire destined to become one of the greatest heroes of the Round Table, who eagerly absorbed the code and adhered to it throughout his life. The message behind this code of ethics is clear. It was directed toward the young generation of pages and squires who, with all the hero-worship of their age, indulged in dreaming of the famous deeds of Arthur and his knights. It was also directed toward the older men who had forgotten those duties of the true knight which alone justified his existence. In the Prose Lancelot the author advised his readers or listeners to be brave, generous, compassionate, obedient to God’s laws, and to protect the Church. If they followed his advice, their reward was that of a true Christian soldier, a place in heaven near God.

It is clear that the French prose writer’s greater religious intensity would bring profound changes in his depiction of Lancelot’s journey into Goirre, the land where Guinevere was held prisoner. In the Prose Lancelot, the hero’s aventure is interpreted strictly along Christian lines and appears to be an allegory of Christ’s Harrowing of Hell. The love theme that binds the story together in Chrétien’s poem is still present in the “Charrette en prose,” but the passages that explicate the lovers’ complex behavioral code in the source are treated with much less enthusiasm in the prose version.
Thus the Lancelot of the “Charrette en prose” appears to a modern reader more dignified than his predecessor in Chrétien’s work, but he still abides by the rules of courtly love. It is small wonder that a number of features in his characterization did not appeal to the more prosaic and, at the same time, religiously less intense Malory when he read the *Prose Lancelot* two hundred and fifty years later.

Malory, whose life spanned the whole turbulent career of Henry VI, was a man who looked to the past to find inspiration for the present. What attracted him most about knighthood was its moral significance. Caxton’s Preface to the *Morte Darthur* shows that he considered the work primarily one of moral edification:

> And I, accordyng to my copye, have done sette it in enprynte to the entente that noble men may see and lerne the noble acts of chyvalrye, the jentyl and vertuous dedes that some knyghtes used in the dayes, by whych they came to honour, and how they that were vycious were pynysshed and ofte put to shame and rebuke..."

Although these words represent the printer’s opinion, it is probable that they also reflect the purpose behind Malory’s composition of the *Morte Darthur*. After all, the years that separate his work from the days when the *Prose Lancelot* was written down witnessed the steady decline of chivalry. After the disasters at Courtrai (1302), Crécy (1346), and Agincourt (1415), the military inadequacy of the knightly class had become painfully obvious to its members. In these battles cavalry was rendered obsolete by a series of tactical blunders but also through the emergence of organized companies of archers. After these defeats, cavalry, formerly the main body of an army, was reduced to a subsidiary role in the late medieval battle order. Hand in hand with this development, the moral fibre of the knightly class began to weaken: “When the heavy-armed knight became a mere trooper and rode to war side by side with paid men-at-arms as well accoutred, horsed, and trained as himself, he began to lose his prestige in war and society.”

R. Kilgour, in his profound study of the decline of chivalry, lists many examples of “empty form devoid of the true inspiration of chivalry” during this era, such as the widely spread cruelty toward wives while publicly the husbands paraded devotion to the fair sex, or the feuds of secular lords with monasteries and cathedrals while the former were officially still the protectors of the Church. Much of the blame for these abuses rested with the Church itself; the nobility was, in the words of Kilgour, “dragged into the decline of religion by the clergy.” In this era the Church already displayed much of the corruption that later caused the lonely monk of Wittenberg to raise his voice in protest. The unchivalrous character of the knightly class during this time only reflected the worldly ambition, pride, greed, ignorance, and evil life of the clergy.
With the inspiration of religion gone, the mainstay of chivalry had disappeared and the noble ideals were more and more confined to idealizing chronicles and romances. Some of the literary productions of this era effuse a spirit of chivalry because it was the only key by which the authors could unlock the *mysterium* of history. A work of this kind is Froissart's *Chroniques*. Froissart apparently had a genuine belief that chivalry was greater in his time than ever before, while in reality the brave deeds narrated in his work were manifestations of the pompous spirit that had replaced the genuine chivalric code of ethics. Other works of this era, however, represent a conscious effort on behalf of the authors to castigate the lack of ethical principle of their contemporaries by pointing to the behavior of idealized heroes. A book of this kind is Malory's *Morte Darthur*.

The chivalrous spirit of France had come to England shortly before 1300. The first extant representative of this twelfth-century French spirit in English letters is *Guy of Warwick* (about 1300). While the works of the preceding period, amongst them Layamon's *Brut*, still reflect the Anglo-Saxon warrior ideal, Guy is already a knight-lover in the courtly tradition. He is "trewe and wise," gentle, strong, beautiful; his love is love at first sight; his sorrow, on the other hand, brings him near death when his lady denies him her love. He is, overall, a much more chivalrous character than Alexander in the earlier *Kyng Alisaundre* (1275?), of whom it is said that he slew his foes "without pite," or Horn in *King Horn* who mercilessly kills his enemies because they are "hethene hunde." However, he is still a long step away from the perfection of Gawain in *Sir Gawayne and the Grene Knyght*, or of Chaucer's knight in the *Canterbury Tales*. While Gawain represents the most elevated ideal of English chivalry, Chaucer's knight, though scarcely less perfect, represents in all probability more accurately the ideal knight from the point of view of a fourteenth-century political man, a courtier, soldier, and public servant. Chaucer's description of the knight in the Prologue to the *Tales* is too well known to be repeated here. He has all the qualities of a *preud homme*, a worthy man, and many of the characteristics of the *miles Christi*, and it is with full justification that the poet places him first amongst the pilgrims. Schofield points out that chivalry to Chaucer was a religion and that he was a pronounced moralist in matters of chivalrous sentiment. The poet knew only too well that knights in his time were generally not like this specimen but he "chose to portray him as without a flaw, and in his own sympathy he has made him so appealing that we feel that all knights are, or should be, like him."

The ideal of chivalry held, as we have pointed out above, a prominent place in the literature of the era immediately preceding Malory's own time. But the romantic picture outlined in fiction almost never corresponded
with reality. Thus the chief attraction for the international knights who flocked to the court of Edward III was not the enunciation of high moral goals, but the splendor and grandeur of the court. Yet politically, at least, the Hundred Years’ War was an era of great glory for England. The socio-political system of that country was at that time far advanced over that of any continental nation. From the middle of the thirteenth century on, the English knights, as well as many men of wealth and repute (both Chaucer and his Franklin), had served their kings as so-called “knights of the shires” and had become important links between the royal court and the people. Of course, as a result of the medieval notion that the noble was a man and the peasant a beast, the nobility always felt contempt for the common people. Yet, as Trevelyan puts it, “Piers Plowman was in better plight than Jacques Bonhomme across the Channel.” In England, even the commoners were relatively well fed and prosperous and, by act of the Plantagenet Kings, forced to participate in military training. While the French chivalry persistently refused the military services of the common people, the English aristocracy was appreciative of the English longbowmen.

Unfortunately, however, the ill-governed fifteenth century brought a reversal in the external and internal affairs of England. In 1453 Charles VII had little difficulty in driving the last English soldiers out of France after he had given the francs archers a prominent place in his reorganized armies. The War of the Roses, the sorry aftermath of the Hundred Years’ War, started only two years later. This war tore England to pieces. Historians have elaborated on the revival of anarchy, the combination of legal chicanery and military violence which haunted this century. It is little wonder that Malory—in his younger years quite a controversial political figure himself—and some of his contemporaries, amongst them Caxton, raised their voices in lament for bygone days. What Malory apparently wanted with his Morte Darthur was to remind his contemporaries of the old spirit of chivalry, and he achieved it by presenting a contrasting scheme of good and evil knights in competition with one another. His idea of the perfect knight is deducible from all of his romances at nearly any point in their narrative, but it is most effectively expressed in Ector’s threnody before the body of Lancelot at the end of the Morte Darthur:

A. Launcelot! Thou were the hede of al Crysten knyghtes! And now I dare say, thou sir Launcelot, there thou liest, that thou were never matched of erethely knyghtes hande. And thou were the curtest knyght that ever bare shelde! And thou were the truest frende to thy lovar that ever bare shelde! And thou were the truest lovar, of a synful man, that ever loved woman, and thou were the kyndest man that ever strake with swerde. And thou were the godlyest persone that ever cam emonge prees of knyghtes, and thou was the mekest man and the jentyllest that ever ete in halde among ladyes, and thou were the sternest knyght to thy mortal foo that ever put spere in the reeste.
Malory's code of chivalry is a simple creed. It involves loyalty "fyrst unto God and next unto the joye of them that he promysed his feythe unto," bravery in a righteous quarrel but kindness and courtesy to all. Malory's ideal of chivalry incorporates many of the virtues that graced Chrétien's heroes, or those of the author of the Prose Lancelot, but it is at the same time void of the powerful spirit of love or the intoxicating power of religious conviction that characterized the earlier stages of chivalry. "His [Malory's] was not a crusading chivalry raised to its highest energy by the reunion of the knightly and monastic ideals of service, love, and sacrifice. What he advocated were the comfortable virtues of the righteous gentleman who 'does after the good and leaves the evil,' but whose spiritual attainments are limited to social discipline and gentle manner." It is with this in mind that we are going to analyze the "Knight of the Cart" Tale and its sources throughout the following pages.

The story of Guinevere's abduction and rescue has, even in its most rudimentary form, the inherent potential of being recast as a symbolical depiction of a trip to the otherworld. The correct translation into Christian terminology of Lancelot's trip to Meliagant's realm would almost inevitably lead to the reproduction of Christ's Harrowing of Hell as found in the Apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus. While Chrétien undoubtedly recognized this latent potential of his material, he chose to ignore it in favor of another thematic possibility, the development of an adulterous love between the Queen and her rescuer. Chrétien concentrated upon his task apparently under the influence of his young patroness Marie de Champagne whose opinion on the feasibility of love in marriage is well preserved in Andreas Capellanus' De Amore. Consequently, Chrétien put all his skill to the task of showing that Lancelot and Guinevere were typical representatives of a peculiar kind of courtly love, one that displays many characteristics of the German hohe Minne but also offers physical reward. As the servant of love, Lancelot readily neglects the dictates of common sense and willingly endures trials of shame and humiliation if these are to benefit Guinevere or even if they are simply dictated by her. As a consequence, all the major incidents in Le Chevalier de la Charrette serve only one purpose: to embellish Lancelot's enthrallment by Guinevere.

In the "Charrette en prose," the abduction-and-rescue theme became subject to an entirely different controlling purpose. The pious author of this work fashioned his version of Chrétien's story in such a manner that it completely agreed with the overall tone of the Prose Lancelot. He apparently inserted this account in his work because he realized its potential as a stage in the evolution of a nearly perfect but still sinful person toward sainthood. In the "Charrette en prose," there is no longer an emphasis on descriptive passages of courtly love; rather, emphasis has shifted to a number
of incidents whose religious potential the author must have recognized. By expanding and embellishing these incidents, he presented his audience with a perfect allegorical rendition of the apocryphal Harrowing of Hell. This theme was a very popular one in the late middle ages. The first source telling of Christ's final victory over Satan was the Evangelium Nicodemi, the oldest versions of which date back to the fifth century A.D.\textsuperscript{34} Nicodemus states that on the third day after His ascension, Christ descended upon Hell and, shattering its gates and dashing Satan to the ground, led the souls of the just to their reward.\textsuperscript{35} The action in the Prose Lancelot parallels that of the Apocrypha. Meliagant, prince of the outer realm Goirre, abducts King Arthur's wife and takes her to his stronghold where he holds many of Arthur's subjects in captivity. Lancelot and Gauvain take up the pursuit of the miscreant knight and his victim. When the two heroes part at a crossroad, attention focuses solely upon Lancelot.

In the course of his pursuit, Lancelot displays his determination to free the Queen and Meliagant's other prisoners by mounting an odious cart. Of this cart the author states that it was used for only one purpose, the transport of malefactors to the gallows. In those days, he says, a knight would never mount a cart because it was tantamount to losing his honor.\textsuperscript{36} At this point in the narrative, it is not difficult to see the parallel between Lancelot's readiness to lose his knightly honor and to burden himself with shame for the sake of the prisoners and Christ's carrying of the Cross to Golgotha.

As Lancelot progresses in his quest, he overcomes numerous adversaries and accomplishes two feats that proclaim him the future liberator of Meliagant's captives. First, he successfully raises an enormously heavy lid of a tomb and then, in an even more climactic incident, crosses a razor-sharp, swordlike bridge, one of the only two means of ingress into Meliagant's stronghold. Since the author has at this point exhausted nearly all the proleptic devices available to a medieval writer, the outcome of the ensuing battle between Lancelot and Meliagant does not, and probably should not, come as a surprise. It is quite logical, if we keep in mind the religious allegory, that Lancelot spares the life of his treacherous enemy. After the hero's victory, the prisoners are free to return to their blissful state in King Artus' realm.

For a reader familiar with any account of Christ's Harrowing of Hell, it cannot be difficult at all to see in Lancelot's journey to Goirre and in his victory over Meliagant an allegorical depiction of Christ's descent into Hell and His victory over Satan. In the Prose Lancelot we have a situation that complements Nicodemus' story of salvation almost perfectly. In the land of Goirre we have the spectacle of a people who are in the grip of a powerful and fiendish man. These people can do nothing to free themselves although
they are not bound by fetters. Goirre is simply closed off from the rest of the world. Then, in the person of Lancelot, a savior, sent by God from the outside, comes to them, a savior who has both the desire and the power to free them from their plight. To a knowledgeable reader all that would be necessary to identify the rape-and-rescue theme in the “Charrette en prose” with the Harrowing of Hell, would be a clue. The author, however, provided not just one, but many such clues. Meliagant, for instance, is constantly linked to the powers of evil. Throughout the entire narrative, this knight is portrayed as completely base and as opposed to any virtue. The code of chivalry is anathema to him. Treachery, guile, and deception are the means which he employs to achieve his goals; Lancelot’s natural goodness makes him cringe and fills his heart with irrevocable hatred.

The land which Meliagant dominates with his evil schemes is described in terms that give it an otherworldly appearance. There are such topographical features as crags and wild rivers that make travel difficult, but these are not unusual in any medieval tale. But in addition to these topographical features and the forests that are haunted by demoniac creatures, Goirre is called “la Terre Foraine.” The author also characterizes it as a realm from which none who entered could ever hope to return. Ever since the Odyssey, where Nestor describes distant Troy in similar terms, such remarks have evoked otherworldly images. In the “Charrette en prose,” it takes just a short stretch of the imagination for a reader with an innate taste for the allegorical and for puzzles in general to see in Meliagant and his domain an allegorization of Satan and Hell. However, what contributes most to the parallelism between this account and the Harrowing of Hell theme is the characterization of Lancelot. The French writer adorned his hero with many easily recognizable features of the Savior. Lancelot is raised to the rank of a defending, protecting, and redeeming being who, if we exclude his fated passion for Guinevere, appears blameless in thought and deed. Throughout the whole narrative, Lancelot is surrounded by an air of religious ecstasy, a characteristic first exhibited in a confrontation with a wily temptress, and thereafter building up from incident to incident until the climactic crossing of the sword bridge. Most important of all these incidents is perhaps the one at a cemetery where a monk leads the hero to the tomb of a certain Galaad. He tells Lancelot that by raising the lid of Galaad’s tomb he could assure that he would be successful in the task of freeing the prisoners. Galaad, of course, is the son of Joseph of Arimathea whose connection with the Holy Grail and, ultimately, with Jesus Christ, was well-known to a medieval audience. The insertion of grail history at the point where Lancelot by virtue of the raising of the tomb is proclaimed the deliverer of the prisoners, can only heighten the already religious atmosphere of the situation. Yet in his effort to depict Lancelot in
this episode as Christ-like as possible, the author went even further in as far as he put the blame for Lancelot's sinful relationship with Guinevere upon another person. For when the hero assails a burning casket next to Galaad's tomb, he is rebuffed by the heat of the flames. A voice from inside the casket tells him that he would have succeeded in raising the lid of this tomb too if it had not been for his fleshly sin which, in turn, was caused by his father's lust for a young virgin. The emphasis on inherited sin tends to lessen Lancelot's individual guilt and even gives him an air of martyrdom. Lancelot's role as the Savior, already well defined after this incident, obtains its final touches with the description of the crossing of the sword bridge.

This episode is also included in Chrétien's *Charrette* but there it is merely a test of Lancelot's courage and of his love for Guinevere who is imprisoned on the other side of the razor-sharp implement. In the Old French poem, Lancelot succeeds in his task because, as Chrétien states, Amor pushes him on. In the "Charrette en prose," on the other hand, it is not Amor but the Christian God who is responsible for the hero's success. The crossing of the bridge is a sacred act committed under the sign of the cross which Lancelot casts upon himself before assailing the dreadful obstacle. In experiencing the severest pain while pulling himself along the blade, Lancelot relives the suffering of Christ and, in effect, becomes Christ on the Cross. When the hero climbs off at the other side of the sword bridge, he has deep cuts on his hands and feet. These wounds, it must be clear, are not ordinary wounds. Rather, they are the stigmata of the crucified God.

Lancelot's recuperation after this feat symbolizes the resurrection of Christ. As in the apocryphal account, Lancelot is victorious in his battle against the representative of evil. And just as in the apocrypha, the hero spares the life of his foe, contenting himself with having accomplished the liberation of the prisoners. The "Charrette en prose" does not end at this point although the allegory of salvation has come to a conclusion. Lancelot's remaining adventures, for instance, his imprisonment by Meliagant, his participation in the tournament, the love tryst with Guinevere, and the final victory over Meliagant are essentially similar in both the *Charrette* and the "Charrette en prose" although the prose writer diligently toned down the bathos of the purple passages which he found in Chrétien's poem.

The account which Malory used for his "Knight of the Cart" Tale consisted, therefore, of a peculiar blend of worldly and deeply religious values. The same characteristic is noticeable in the *Morte Darthur* if it is viewed as a unified work. It is quite obvious, however, that Malory, when writing *The Book of Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere*, was only interested in the heroic deeds of unsurpassable knights. In this section of his work, as in
all others outside of the *Sankgreal* and *The Most Piteous Tale of the Morte Arthur Saunz Guerdon*, he cared little for the exploitation of the emotions and had absolutely no sympathy with the conventions of courtly love. At the same time, however, he did not seem to share any particularly strong religious convictions. Though certainly a Christian, he nevertheless appeared capable of separating the religious aspect of man’s existence from its worldly tangent, and vice versa. Accordingly, six of the eight sections of the *Morte Dartur* are strictly concerned with terrestrial ideals, while the remaining ones, mentioned above, amount to an apotheosis of the spiritual ideals of Christianity. A synthesis of the two opposing orientations never occurs throughout the entire *Morte Dartur*. Malory is either strictly worldly or strictly religious.

*The Book of Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere* develops along the terrestrial tangent of Malory’s ideology. It is a loosely amalgamated conglomerate of worldly adventures circling around the love relationship between Lancelot and Guinevere. Its primary purpose is to glorify Lancelot.41

“The Knight of the Cart” Tale, the fourth of five subdivisions in this romance, is an independent unit which is only superficially connected with the other subdivisions. In telescoping the account of Guinevere’s abduction and subsequent rescue, Malory retained the original subject matter of his source but not its thematic essence. The French writer put heavy stress upon the first part of his account, Lancelot’s cart-ride and the many obstacles which he has to overcome, while Malory preferred to stress the latter part of the episode, the bloodstained bed and the jeopardy in which the Queen is placed after her love tryst with Lancelot. The reason for this change of emphasis was, as we have already intimated in the introductory section of this essay, a different controlling purpose. In the *Prose Lancelot*, the author’s primary purpose behind the inclusion of the rape-and-rescue theme seems to have been its suitability for the recasting of a well-known religious theme. Behind the “Knight of the Cart” no other motivation is detectable than the depiction of Lancelot’s terrible strength, his determination, and his irresistibility. The episode is stripped of all details concerning courtly love. Malory seems to have been completely ignorant of the old courtly ways. In addition, the episode is also bare of any insinuation that Lancelot’s trip to Meliagant’s country may represent a messianic mission. What the “Knight of the Cart” does depict is a very mundane account of the abduction of a worldly queen and her ensuing tryst with her lover, an account that speaks for itself and obviates symbolic interpretation.42

Malory begins his version of Guinevere’s abduction and rescue with one of the most quoted passages in all of Middle English literature, the discourse on the nature of love. Caxton entitled this passage “How true love is likened unto summer,” because of Malory’s statement “wherefore I lyken
love nowadays unto summer and wynter.”

Professor E. Vinaver calls this discourse not a comparison of love with the seasons but Malory’s way of elaborating the reawakening of nature. It is not entirely clear how this great student of Malory’s works can assert that this prologue is “Malory’s counterpart to the idealistic doctrine of courtly romance, and his most successful escape from the oppressive atmosphere of courtly love into a world of comfortable realities.” The theme of the passage is love and not the “cowering and sitting fast by the fire.” It is the product of one of Malory’s rare romantic moments and stands in stark contrast to the rather realistic attitude towards love exhibited throughout the rest of the tale. In Malory’s words rings again the eternal ubi sunt lament for the ideals of times bygone. When he states that “nowadays man cannot love sevenyght but they must have all their desires,” and then explains that “the olde love was not so,” we are led back over centuries to the idealistic world of Chrétien’s Charrette, to a time when love was not like summer and winter, now hot, now cold, “for men and women could love togethers seven yerys, and no ly-coures lustis betwyxte them, and than was love trouthe and faythefulnes.”

The apparent inconsistency between these words and Malory’s otherwise sober attitude towards love may conceivably be explained as a yearning for the ideal situation of courtly love without the adulterous taint that mars the love of Lancelot and Guinevere.

After the prologue, the transition to the rape-and-rescue theme in “The Knight of the Cart” appears a bit clumsy. Malory bids all lovers to call to their attention the “monthe of May, lyke as ded quene Gwyenyver, for whom I make here a lyttly mencioun, that whyle she lyved she was a trew lover and therefore she had a good ende.” Malory justifies Guinevere’s good end on the ground that she was a true lover. In all of Malory’s romances where the Queen is of consequence, she is, above all, faithful to Lancelot. However, she is also faithful to Arthur, if exception is taken to the fact of her adulterous relationship with Lancelot. The question is actually never clarified whether she resists Meliagant and, later, Modred, as Arthur’s wife or as Lancelot’s faithful lover. It nevertheless appears likely that the attribute “true lover,” in the context of “The Knight of the Cart,” refers to her relationship with Lancelot. If, as a number of scholars assert, Malory’s intent in the Morte Darthur was to blame the lovers for the downfall of the Round Table, then the justification of Guinevere’s “good” end on the grounds of her qualities as a lover would seem to contradict this claim. It seems, on the contrary, that Malory never condemned either one of the lovers, that he accepted their relationship without any direct or indirect negative comments.

The few episodes which Malory took over from his source hardly resemble their counterparts in the original. The cart ride is no longer a test of
Lancelot’s love of Guinevere or of his fellow men in general. His horse has been smitten to the ground by men in ambush and he is tired from walking through ditches and hedges when “by fortune there cam by hym a chariot that cam that day to feche wood.” The two cart drivers refuse to bring Lancelot to Maelgant’s castle, whereupon he throws one man off the cart in such a manner that he is “stark dede.” He then leaps into the cart, not showing any sign of hesitation or shame as in the “Charrette en prose.” There is obviously no loss of honor attached to this feat because the cart is not portrayed as the odious thing of the earlier version where it is clearly stated that no honorable knight would mount such a vehicle. The reader of Malory’s account finds out later that the cart served the transportation of criminals, but he does so more by mental association than by actual textual evidence: the Queen and a damsel are looking out of a window when they espy Lancelot in the cart; the damsel shouts, “Ah se, madam, where rydys a goodly armed knyght, and we suppose he rydys unto hangerge.” The Queen, recognizing Lancelot by his shield, angrily reprimands the damsel, “Forsothe hit was fowle-mowthed...and eyll lykened, so for to lyken the most noble knyght of the worlde unto such a shameful dethe.” For all practical purposes, there is no derogatory meaning attached to Lancelot’s epithet “the knight of the cart.”

It is typical of Malory’s attitude towards his source that Lancelot’s cart-ride in “The Knight of the Cart” tale is bare of a conflict between love and honor. The Arthurian stories were, from Malory’s point of view, only monuments to the glory of worldly chivalry and its virtuous deeds and none of the knights of the Round Table seemed to him more representative of this chivalrous spirit than Lancelot:

But in especiall hit was prevyd on sir Launcelot de Lake, for in all turnemente, justys, and dedys of armys, both for lyf and deth, he passed all other knykhes, and at no tyne was he overcome but of hit were by treson other enchantment. So this Sir Launcelot encreased so marvayously in worship and honoure; therefor he is the fyrste knyght that the Frynshe booke maketh mencion of aftir kyng Arthure com frome Rome.

In the light of this attitude towards Lancelot, it is strange that none of the romances which comprise the Morte Darthur contain a detailed description of the hero’s mental or physical qualities. In all the other sections of Malory’s book devoted to an individual hero, there are long introductory passages about the hero’s boyhood experiences, his talents, and his idiosyncrasies. But when Lancelot first appears, he is already fully grown and armed with the superior qualities that make him the “floure of all knykhes.” It is only through the tedious accumulation of scattered components that the reader of the Morte Darthur gains a deeper insight into the hero’s personality. Malory must have considered his audience familiar
with Lancelot's life, just as he probably considered it acquainted with the role of Gawain at the Round Table, because both these knights appear almost randomly in a number of romances without ever being properly introduced. There is also no character development in the presentation of Lancelot until the very end of the tale of Arthur's death. In "The Knight of the Cart," Lancelot is essentially the same as he is at the beginning of The Book of Sir Lancelot du Lake, the third of the eight romances that comprise the Morte Darthur, although Guinevere's abduction and rescue takes place after the grail-quest. At the beginning of The Book of Sir Lancelot and Queen Guinevere, Malory states that Lancelot began to resort to his old ways with the Queen and that he "forgat the promyse and perfection that he made in the queste." Thus the reader must necessarily know that the Lancelot of Malory's abduction-and-rescue account is much older than his counterpart in the "Charrette en prose." He is also informed early in The Book of Sir Lancelot and Queen Guinevere that Lancelot could have succeeded in the grail quest had he not been "in his prevy thoughtes and in hys myndis so sette inwardly to the quene as he was in semynge outwarde to God." Some parts of The Book of Sir Lancelot and Queen Guinevere preceding "The Knight of the Cart"—which, by itself, is very poor in characterization—depict Lancelot as keenly aware of his occasional leanings towards superbia, but they also show him possessed by a fatalistic outlook toward life. These traits are the characteristics of a more mature man than the one presented in the "Charrette en prose." It is necessary to keep these elements in mind in order to do justice to Malory's portrait of Lancelot in "The Knight of the Cart" tale because there the hero is not much more than a rather boorish fifteenth-century Achilles, a man of great physical prowess but little sensitivity. Lancelot, at the walls of Meliagant's castle, behaves like Achilles at the Scaean gates, and there can be little doubt that Malory was thinking of the great Hellene when he depicted Lancelot roaring in defiance at his enemy. Unlike the victim of Paris' arrow, however, Lancelot flings the gate wide open and, with one blow of his gauntlet, breaks the porter's neck in two. After this feat the castle is his and Meliagant cringes at his feet.

Lancelot's superhuman strength must be considered with Malory's artistic purpose in mind which was to demonstrate the hero's invincibility. Most of the emphasis in "The Knight of the Cart" is, therefore, on Lancelot's physical prowess. Such events as the breaking of the iron bars of Guinevere's window and the combat with Meliagant at the end of the tale, in the course of which Lancelot disarms himself but still remains invincible, create a herculean air about him which, due to the narrow confines of Malory's abduction story, completely dominates his characterization. The degree of imbalance between the physical and the emotional is shown, time and
again, in Lancelot’s sober approach towards love. In Chrétien’s *Charrette*, Lancelot reveals himself as the abject slave of Guinevere; in the “Charrette en prose,” he is still obedient to her every whim. In “The Knight of the Cart,” however, Lancelot’s hour of emancipation has arrived. When he has conquered the castle and Guinevere asks him to reconcile himself with Meliagant, he plainly shows displeasure and submits to her wish not as her lover but as her vassal, and this only after she gives him a reasonable explanation. Malory apparently considered the love between Lancelot and Guinevere a predestined relationship on an equal basis between the most accomplished knight and the greatest lady of Arthur’s time and could not, in consequence, tolerate the abuse of Lancelot’s love that is still noticeable in the “Charrette en prose.” In Malory’s version, love does not render Lancelot the Queen’s subject without a mind and will of his own. It constitutes, instead, at least from a modern point of view, “a definite evolution towards a more admirable manliness.” This attitude is quite obvious in the episode that attracted Malory’s attention after Lancelot’s conquest of Meliagant’s castle, the love tryst between the hero and Guinevere and the predicament of the lovers.

In Chrétien’s *Charrette*, the description of the reunion between the Queen and her knight constitutes one of the great purple passages of courtly love. Lancelot emerges from it as a martyr of love who raises the Queen to the level of a sanctified object:

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et plus vint au lit la reine,
si l’aore et se li ancline,
car an nul cors saint ne croit tant
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and

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A enviz passe a la fenestre
a’t antra il molt volantiers;
n’avoit mie les doiz antiers,
que molt fort s’i estoit bieciez.
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The same passage in the “Charrette en prose” tells of a more earthy relationship between the lovers: “si fu la joie assees grans qu’il s’entretirent. Et quant li jors aprocha, si se departent.” There is here no trace of religious adulation in Lancelot’s attitude towards the Queen.

In Malory’s version of this incident, the reunion of the Queen and her lover is also a happy one, unmarred by the initial rebuffs that are still present in the “Charrette en prose.” However, there is still another marked difference in the description of this incident in the “Charrette en prose” and “The Knight of the Cart”: at night, after breaking the iron window-bars, “sir Launcelot wente to bedde with the quene and toke no force of hys hurte honde, but toke hys pleasaunce and hys lykinge until hit was the
dawning of the day.” Here the emphasis is not on the mutual enjoyment of the physical reunion as in the “Charrette en prose,” but entirely upon Lancelot’s pleasure, a fact that is in complete agreement with the male-oriented tone of The Book of Sir Launcest and Queen Guinevere.

The brevity of the love tryst in Malory’s version is not surprising because the Englishman seems to have wanted to use this incident only as the preamble to the renewed conflict between Lancelot and Meliagant. The discovery of the bloodied sheets and the ensuing events appear to constitute the climax of Malory’s abduction-and-rescue story. After Meliagant accuses the Queen of infidelity to Arthur, Lancelot immediately announces his readiness to defend her honor. Meliagant, who suspects one of the wounded knights sleeping nearby to be Guinevere’s lover, believes that the bloodstains are ample proof of the Queen’s guilt and warns Lancelot to abstain from interference in this matter because “God woll have a stroke in every batayle.” Lancelot knows this full well but he can trust that God’s stroke will hit his enemy. His confidence is strengthened by a simple ruse: he swears that “thys nyght there lay none of thes ten knyghtes wounded with my lady, quene Gwennyver.” The fact that he conceals his own wounds behind gloves helps his deception of Meliagant considerably. Meliagant falls for the ruse, swearing “that thys nyght one of the wounded knyghtes lay with her.” Here, as in the “Charrette en prose” and the Charrette where Kex was under suspicion, as well as in the case of Iseod’s “false” oath in Tristan, it becomes evident that medieval men regarded an oath only at its face value. It is apparent that the hero out-tricks not only his opponent but also the one who “has a stroke in every batayle.” This, however, does not seem to have disturbed a medieval audience, probably because it was always the evil antagonist who was deceived and also because the good were presumably always considered morally right.

Malory’s interest after Meliagant’s accusation centers solely upon the culminating combat between Lancelot and his foe. The hero is again depicted as a supreme fighter. After a short struggle, Meliagant succumbs to him and begs for his life. Lancelot, however, notices Guinevere’s sign not to spare her abductor. To solve the conflict, Lancelot offers to have his left side and his head disarmed and to fight Meliagant with this disadvantage. His craven adversary accepts these terms but, needless to say, is again no match for Lancelot who now unhesitatingly decapitates him.

The above presentation seems to make it obvious that Malory’s single purpose for including the abduction-and-rescue theme into The Book of Sir Launcest and Queen Guinevere was to furnish his reader with more evidence glorifying his favorite hero. The possibility of giving “The Knight of the Cart” a symbolical or allegorical meaning apparently never struck
Malory although he undoubtedly recognized the allegory of salvation depicted in his source. It appears safe to assume that he wrote this tale at a point of his life when he had not yet completely tied together the various threads that give unity to Lancelot’s life in the Prose Lancelot. As it stands, “The Knight of the Cart” fulfills its purpose as a story that amply illustrates Lancelot’s might but it lacks the ethical depth that marks the “Charrette en prose.” Yet, it is peculiar to notice that within this rather anaemic thematic derivat of the “Charrette en prose,” Malory succeeded in providing ample proof of his artistic craftsmanship. Although he cut the original at all points and shifted his attention to different episodes, he retained a balanced narrative with a well-conceived structure. Due to his different controlling purpose, the “Knight of the Cart” tale focuses upon Guinevere’s abduction, her love tryst with Lancelot, Meliagant’s discovery of the bloodstained sheets, and the final duel between Lancelot and Meliagant. Each of these events grows out of the preceding one. The remaining incidents function solely as connecting links for the major episodes. Malory left out all the adventures and episodes in his source which he could not tie directly to the main course of the action. The most noticeable victims of this process of elimination are Gauvain, Lancelot’s companion during the early stages of the aventure in the “Charrette en prose,” and King Baudemagu, Meliagant’s virtuous father who protects the Queen in her captivity. Visibly absent are also those episodes which in the “Charrette en prose” are directly concerned with either Lancelot’s missionary role or with courtly love, e.g., his temptation by a wily young damsel, the incident at the cemetery that proclaims him the future liberator of the captives in Goirre, and the crossing of the sword-bridge.

Since the standards of courtly love no longer apply to Malory’s tale, Lancelot’s search for the Queen is, technically speaking, no longer a quest. The whole framework which justifies the applicability of this term to a given enterprise is not present in “The Knight of the Cart.” Malory’s version of Lancelot’s search for Guinevere is simply a rescue adventure whose structure is determined not by the two-part pattern of the typical Arthurian romance (e.g., Erec, Yvain, Cligés, Le Chevalier de la Charrette, and the “Charrette en prose”) but by a number of major episodes around which the other events cluster. The first cluster, consisting of the Maying, the Abduction, and the Escape of Guinevere’s child-messenger, attracted slightly more of Malory’s attention than the sections concerning Meliagant’s “false” accusation and the final duel between him and Lancelot. Overall, however, the textual distribution of these three groups is very well balanced. It is also noticeable that Malory’s treatment of his source up to Lancelot’s entry into Meliagant’s castle takes up just slightly more space than the following parts although the first part of the “Charrette en prose,” that is, the events
leading up to Guinevere's liberation, suffered more from Malory's telescoping than the second part. If we transfer the thematic division of the "Charrette en prose" to "The Knight of the Cart," that is, if Guinevere's abduction and rescue constitutes Part I and Lancelot's adventure series and final reintegration into Arthur's fellowship Part II, we notice that Malory's narrative both before and after the division line (the conversation between Lancelot and Guinevere that prevents a duel between the hero and Meliagant at this point of the narrative) contains seven subdivisions:

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The geographic unity of the work is here, as in the "Charrette en prose," set by the Round Table where the adventure begins and ends.70 Malory gives his readers an accurate account of the chronology of Lancelot's exploits. "The Knight of the Cart" spans ten days. The events from the Maying until the love tryst take up one day.71 From Meliagant's "false" accusation until Guinevere's return to Arthur another day elapses. On this very day Lancelot is imprisoned and not released until eight days later. He is liberated in time, however, to be able to return to Arthur's court on the tenth day, whereupon he slays Meliagant. It is obvious, then, that in the process of becoming a brief adventure story, Malory's version of Guinevere's abduction and rescue not only lost its original ethical flavoring, but also its original spatial and temporal extent.
NOTES


2. In Ulrich von Zatzikhoven’s Lanzelet, written down around 1194 but going back to an earlier source, the hero also fights a duel as the champion of the Queen, but there is no hint of an adulterous love affair. Lanzelet, as a matter of fact, is not even the primary agent of Guinevere’s recovery, and he has none of the character traits which gave Chrétien’s hero his popularity.

3. The Vulgate Version of the Arthurian Romances, edited by Oskar Sommer, 7 volumes (Washington, 1911).

4. The Prose Lancelot consists of three romances, the Lancelot Proper, the Queste del Sainte Graal, and the Mort Artu (Sommer, Vols. III-V).

5. The coining of this title appears to have been Caxton’s single doing. While using it in this article, we do not want to imply that Malory created this work as a unified cycle. The problem of unity in the Morte Darthur has always been the subject of vigorous discussion. For recent contributions, see R. Lumiansky, ed., Malory’s Originality (Baltimore, 1964), and Charles Moorman, The Book of Kyng Arthur (Lexington, 1965).


8. J. A. Symonds, An Introduction to the Study of Dante (London, 1899), chapter VIII.


12. On a symbolic level, these knights were of course in the service of God, since they represented the Good in the world, but, unlike some of the precourtly heroes (e.g., Roland, Guillaume), no Arthurian knight is ever mentioned as the specific defender of his faith, not even Galahad when he is relegated to a distant place in the Orient after having completed the quest of the holy grail. Also, there is no Arthurian Romance that advocates a Christian missionary spirit in the outright manner of the chansons de geste.

13. In the courtly ethics of the late 12th century, a knight’s duty consisted of serving 1) God, 2) his lady, and 3) his people. The perfect combination of all three components represented the ideal of mesure (MHG, māze) and was rarely achieved in reality. Failure in one (or preference of one over the other) resulted in demesure (MHG ummāze). This was more common in real life. It appears almost natural that some of the greatest exponents of courtly love and Minne would turn away from the service to their lady when old age encroached upon them and fear for their souls began to haunt them. We can see this development, the change in priorities or, if
we may call it such, the exchange of one kind of demesure for another, in the famous Minnesingers Hartmann von Aue, Friderich von Husen, and Walther von der Vogelweide (cf. their Kreuzlieder and various Absagen an die Minne).


16. It appears worthwhile within the context of this study to reproduce portions of this remarkable monument of knightly ethics. The following translation is by Lucy Allen Paton, in \textit{Sir Lancelot of the Lake} (London, 1929), pp. 96 ff.

And to take upon them the defence [of the weak] there were appointed those that were the most worthy in the eyes of the assembly of people, and these were the big and the strong and the fair and the nimble and the loyal and the valiant and the hardy, they that were full of the virtues of the heart and of the body. But knighthood was not given as a jest or for naught, but many great charges were laid upon them . . . it was ordained . . . he should be courteous without villainy, debonair without felony, pitiful toward the suffering, and bountiful of his gifts, prepared to confound robbers and murderers, a just judge without love and without hate, and without desire to favour injustice at the expense of righteousness. A knight from fear of death should do naught wherein dishonor may be seen or perceived, but he should fear dishonor more than the pains of death.

Moreover, the knight was created to protect Holy Church, for she may not further her by means of arms, or render evil for evil. And therefore was the knight created that he might protect her that turneth the left cheek, when she hath been smitten on the right. . . . And if Holy Church is assailed or in peril of receiving strokes, the knight should place himself before her to endure the stroke even as her son. . . . And the hauberk wherewith the knight is clothed and protected in all parts signifies that even so should Holy Church be covered and surrounded by the defence of the knight. . . . The two edges [of his sword] signify that the knight should be the servant of our Lord and of His people in all respects. And he should be the servant of God, for he should protect and maintain Holy Church. . . . And even as the people maintain the knight on the earth and purvey to him that whereof he hath need, so should Holy Church maintain him spiritually and procure for him the life that will never end . . . that God may be his savior forevermore, even as he is the protector and the defender of Holy Church on earth.


21. Ibid., p. 11.

22. In the prologue to this work, Froissart declares that it is his purpose to record for all times the great marvels and the fair feats of arms occurring in the wars between France and England, for never, since the beginning of the world, could one find in any history so many wondrous deeds as in the aforesaid wars. These deeds
should encourage the young men who read about them and spur their valor, “for it is the heroic achievement of the past which incites the hearts of young knights to prowess, which is the foundation of honor.” (The Chronicles of England, France and Spain, translated by Thomas Johnes [New York, 1961], p. 1 ff.)


26. Ibid., p. 36.


30. Ibid., p. 69.

31. Stories about the violent abduction of a woman to an otherworldly “land of no return” have always been a favorite of audiences. The tale of Pluto’s rape of Proserpina is as much a thematic antecedent of Malory’s “Knight of the Cart” as is the account of Orpheus’ descent into Hades in order to regain Euridice. Comparison between the abduction of Helen in the Iliad and Guenièvre in Le Chevalier de la Charrette has led C. B. Lewis to suspect a classical source for Chrétien’s poem, a theory that is now no longer considered valid (C. B. Lewis, Classical Mythology and Arthurian Romance [Oxford, 1932]).

32. De Amore, edited by Amadeu Pages (Castello de la Plana, 1930), p. 28 f. It is interesting to note that Marie’s conviction that conjugal love was an impossibility seems to have represented the consensus of opinion of the ladies at the court of Troyes (De Amore, cf. p. 90 f.: “Hoc igitur nostrum iudicium cum nimia moderatione prolatatum et aliarum quam plurimarum dominarum consilio roboratum pro indubitabili vobis sit ac veritate constante”).

33. Gaston Paris, in his monumental essays on the Charrette, characterized the relationship between Lancelot and Guenièvre as amour courtois, a term which has since been widely accepted (Gaston Paris, “Études sur les romans de la Table Ronde. Lancelot du Lac,” Romania, X (1881), pp. 465-496 and XII (1883), pp. 459-534). A more accurate term for this relationship was supplied by Myrrha Lot-Borrodine who called it service d’amour (see footnote 2 in Section III of this book).

34. Cf. R. P. Wilker, Das Evangelium Nicodemi in der abendländischen Literatur (Marburg, 1872), p. 3. For the popularity of Nicodemus’ account in 12th and 13th century France, see pp. 23 ff.

35. Artists from the 10th century on were caught by the magnetism of this particular scene. On enamel and stained glass and, between the 12th and 16th centuries, in oil painting, victorious Christ is depicted with the banner of the cross in one hand...
treading the shattered gates of hell and Satan underfoot, while mercifully extending the other hand to Adam, Eve, the patriarchs, and prophets and bidding them to ascend with him to heaven. This particular scene inspired, amongst others, some of the most beautiful work of Fra Angelico, Taddeo Gaddi, and Albrecht Dürer. "Indeed," states W. H. Hulme, "there is no branch of medieval and Renaissance art which does not give evidence of the strong hold the story had acquired on the minds and hearts of men throughout Christendom" (The Harrowing of Hell, London, 1907, lxv).

36. "A celui tans estoit si leide chose charete que nus ne seist dedenz qui toutes lois et toutes honneurs n'aiist perdues. Et quant l'en voloit aucun home tolir la vie, si le faisoit l'en monter en une charete et le menoient parmi la vile, si i estoit tant que de toz estoit veit" (Le Conte de la Charete, edited by Gweneth Hutchings [Paris, 1938], p. 16).

37. Ibid., p. 18.

38. "Si ont tante ale que dei chaste1 sont liz. Et li chastiax avoit non l'Entree Galesche, si commencoit ilec la terre au roi Baudemagu [Meliagant's father], cele que l'en clamoit Terre Forraine. En cele terre estoient li emprisonne, non mie en forteresces, mes en viles sanz fermetes. Et la terre estoit toute close d'une grant iaue parfonde et roide, et grant mares qui estoit mol et crollant que nus homs n'i puet entrer a force, si comme li contes l'a devize" (ibid., p. 49). Oskar Sommer's earlier and less reliable edition of a later manuscript has a slightly different wording but retains the essential features (The Vulgate Version, Vol. IV, p. 163).


40. "Et d'autre part j a tu failli poir un pechié, que li rois Banz, tes peres, fist; car puis qu'il ot espousee ta mere, qui encore vit, jut il a une damoisele, et de la vient une grant partie de ton meschief" (ibid., p. 49).

41. This opinion is also maintained by E. Vinaver in his various essays on the topic (cf. Introduction, The Works of Sir Thomas Malory, Vol. I). R. Lumiansky and a score of his followers adhere to a different theory (cf. Lumiansky in Malory's Originality).

42. It has been claimed that Malory's version of the abduction-and-rescue theme is closer to the Celtic aithedas (abduction stories antedating Chrétien's poems) than the Charrette or the "Charrette en prose" (cf. G. T. Webster, Guinevere: A Study of her Abductions, p. 105 f.). This is certainly true if the basic outline of the action is considered. However, Malory's desire for realistic description of geographic details in his story, such as the enumeration of many localities in the vicinity of London (amongst others, he places Meliagant's castle seven miles beyond the Thames!), makes it unlikely that he had any intention of making this episode representative of either a trip to the Celtic fairyland or to the Christian hell.


44. Ibid., I, xxii.

45. Ibid., III, p. 1120.

46. Ibid., III, p. 1120.

47. Marie de France, it may be remembered, said that love and marriage were not compatible (De Amore, ed. A. Pages, p. 90). Since "love" and "faithfulness" belong to one and the same category, a "true wife" would be an absurdity.
48. It is not too unlikely that Malory inserted this episode only because he had to justify Lancelot's pseudonym, "Le Shyvalere de la Charyotte."


50. Ibid., III, p. 1126.

51. Ibid., III, p. 1127.

52. Ibid., III, p. 1127.

53. Ibid., I, p. 253.

54. This is perhaps the strongest (albeit until now neglected) argument against the proponents of a "unified" Morte Darthur. Lancelot is without doubt Malory's chief hero. If the Morte Darthur were composed as a unit, would not Malory have devoted at least part of it to the narration of Lancelot's early life as he did with Tristan, Arthur, Gareth, and others?


56. Careful study of the chronology in the Prose Lancelot reveals that Lancelot's age at the time of Guinevere's abduction is twenty-five. This is before the begetting of his son Galahad upon Elaine. Galahad himself is knighted at age fifteen, just before the grail-quest. The duration of the grail-quest cannot be deduced from the text but it seems safe to assume that it took at least a year, the standard length of the typical aventure in Arthurian Romance. Thus, Lancelot's age after the completion of the grail-quest, which in the Morte Darthur precedes Guinevere's abduction, is possibly near fifty, but at least beyond forty.


58. Cf. ibid., II, p. 1084 ("...for I wolde with pryde have overcome you all" and "...for thys that ys done may nat be undone").

59. With all of Malory's fondness for physical feats, there is in his works very little mention of Lancelot's physical proportions. In The Book of Sir Launcelot du Lake, Tarquin, a mighty knight, addresses Lancelot as "the byggest man that ever I mette wihall" (Works, I p. 266), but it is not clear whether this "bygge" is a qualitative or quantitative attribute. In The Fair Maid of Astolat, Malory states that Gawain seems to recognize Lancelot by "hys ryndge and his buffetis" (II, p. 1071). Lancelot's almost mythical strength becomes apparent through his victory over an "orryble and fyendly dragon" (II, p. 793). Yet he is nowhere described in such detailed terms as in the Prose Lancelot (cf. Sommer, The Vulgate Version, Vol. III, pp. 34 ff.)

60. A. App, Lancelot in English Literature (Washington, 1929), p. 79.


62. Ibid., vss. 4706-4709.

63. Hutchings, Le Conte de la Charrete, p. 94.

64. The Works of Sir Thomas Malory, III, p. 1131.

65. Ibid., III, p. 1133.

66. Ibid., III, p. 1133.
67. Ibid., III, p. 1133.

68. At the same time it is interesting to note that the clever author of the *Prose Lancelot* avoided a decision by battle after this confrontation. In the "Charrette en prose," the two opponents fare rather evenly in their duel after the oaths until Baudemagu asks Guinevere to intercede. The writer, apparently, followed Chrétien's account in the *Charrette* closely in order to leave a loophole for the conscience of the more alert readers or listeners who could not accept Lancelot's deception of God.

69. Guinevere orders a boy in her retinue to ride to Lancelot and to inform him of her captivity at the hands of Meliagant. It is interesting that the Queen desires her lover to be informed of her plight and not her husband Arthur who, after all, is the ruler over these lands and has considerably more power than Lancelot.

70. Malory places the Round Table at Westminster (*Works*, III, 1120, line 17 ff. and p. 1121, line 6 ff.). Camelot, on the other hand, is at Winchester (II, p. 1065, line 4).

71. The "Charrette en prose," on the other hand, lasts a little over a year. However, the events leading up to the love tryst take up no more than thirteen days.
The romances of the twelfth century have occasionally been subjected to criticism because of their failure to portray strong characters.\(^1\) This criticism is essentially justified if the standards of classical drama are applied to the courtly poets. However, the creative genius of Chrétien and his followers was guided by the needs of the time and not by timeless standards. Chrétien was keenly aware of the decaying ideals of the nobility and created a set of heroes and heroines who could serve as exemplars to the members of the knightly class. From a modern point of view, this poet’s genius seems never brighter than when, in the midst of their stylized behavior, his people suddenly start acting like human beings. By applying the historical estimate, however, his greatest achievement was the creation of a number of characters whose behavior amply reflects the ideals and aspirations of “toz li biens del mont” (Charrette, vs. 5450). The hero of the Charrette, for instance, represents a highly artificial ideal that may have dominated the court of Champagne during the marriage of Henri I to Marie, but which was probably never popular in other parts of northern France. The relatively short span of popularity of this model in all of France is seen by the paucity of literary material dealing with it while there is an abundance of literary monuments eulogizing the emancipated love-relationship between Tristan and Isold. It is clear, then, that later times had little understanding for the peculiar behavior of the characters in the Charrette and subjected these to certain changes (e.g., Sir Thomas Malory in his adaption of the “Charrette en prose” in the Morte Darthur).

Radical excision of some of the peripheral features of Chrétien’s poem demonstrates that its major thematic tangents unfold along the triangular relationship between a good knight, his lady, and an evil abductor. In addition to these characters, the Charrette has a number of other very interesting persons, such as, for instance, the villain’s father Baudemagü who is a magnanimous and well-bred man. But however attractive, these characters are of only peripheral importance to the plot. They serve contrasting purposes and are included mainly to enhance the milieu of the stories. In the following essay we shall, therefore, limit our analysis to the characters of Lancelot, Guenièvre, and the abductor Meliagant.
The Charrette is a typical *roman à thèse*. As such, its main objective is to present in concise form a thesis, a central idea. In the Charrette, this idea is *service d'amour* and it expresses itself reciprocally in Lancelot's actions and in his personality. Jean Frappier's assertion that the hero of the Charrette is a "well-defined, clearly individualized character, in which courtesy and chivalry are touched with ecstasy," must be viewed with some reservation. Undoubtedly, there is a great difference between Lancelot and, for instance, the characters of the *Roman de la Rose*, who are only symbols, but Lancelot's individuality is more the result of the singularity of his life than of a precise character portrait. It is as true of Lancelot as it is of Yvain, Erec, Cligés, or Perceval, "dass nicht so sehr das Einzelwesen, als der Fall dieses Einzelwesens interessiert." One of the major purposes of the author of the Charrette was, after all, to have Lancelot emerge as a model lover in the sense of *service d'amour*, as the exponent of an idea that does not recur in any of Chrétien's other romances. Following Aristotle, most medieval writers professed to believe that men imitated not the character of other men, but their actions. The many medieval *vitae* always emphasize action, never character presentation. In the Charrette, the hero's long monologues are deceptive in so far as they mislead the careless reader into believing that in them Lancelot reveals himself. On the contrary, although these monologues are saturated with the sentiment that underlines the general tone of the romance, they contain very little information concerning Lancelot's personality. The hero's various traits are shown mainly in his actions. It is in these that he presents himself as a faithful and unswerving lover who spares no effort and hardship to obtain the favor of his lady.

The original Lancelot tradition, probably best represented in Ulrich von Zatzikhoven's *Lanzelet* (ca. 1194), knew Lancelot as a conventional knight who married a number of times and who, in general, was a pretty jolly fellow. It was Chrétien's single doing to transform this ordinary Arthurian knight into a hero endowed with all the virtues of twelfth-century gentle breeding—valor, largesse, generosity, grace of speech, and manners—as well as with great physical courage and, above all, the ability to endure shame, torture, and humiliation on his lady's behalf. The most outstanding characteristic of this extraordinary person is his devotion to the Queen. This trait is developed throughout the whole romance, and it is bit by bit that the reader accumulates a complete picture of its extent. The matter that prompts our curiosity first, however, is not this particular idea but the fact that throughout half of the Charrette the hero is completely shrouded in mysterious anonymity. Lancelot is first introduced as "un chevalier" (vs. 271); after the cart-ride, he is given the pseudonym "li chevalier de la charrete" (vs. 867). He is so obsessed with the desire to preserve the secret of his name that the *châtelaine* of the temptation scene finds it nec-
essary to send a damsel after him to discover his identity. After this girl has been in his company for a while, she dares to ask for his name, whereupon he angrily rebuffs her:

Foi que doi Deu et sa vertu
de mon non ne savroiz vos point.

(2006-07)

The anonymous knight's fame spreads before him, and many acclaim his prowess without naming him:

Et li uns d'ax a l'autre dit
c' onques tel chevalier ne vit,
me nus a lui ne s'aparoille.

(2239-41)

The people of Logres, captives in Goirre, give him a hero's welcome but are also unsuccessful in depriving him of his anonymity. He is introduced to them as the one

qui nos gitera toz d'essil
et de la grant maleîrté....

(2414 ff.)

The recurrence of such episodes must have aroused in Chrétien's audience a great eagerness to hear, finally, the hero's name, but the moment does not arrive until the climactic battle with Meliagant, at a point where the reader has already become familiar with nearly all of his traits. Fittingly, his name is revealed by Guenièvre:

Lanceloz del Lac a a non
Li chevaliers, mien esçiant.

(3660-61)

And immediately the damsel who asked the name from the Queen, to revive the hero's sagging fighting spirit, shouts it across the combat area:

Lancelot!
Trestorne toi et si esgarde
qui est qui de toi se prant garde!

(3666-68)

With this the matter of anonymity rests. Although there must be another reason for this intricate scheme of secrecy besides the creation of suspense and curiosity in the audience, there is no real certainty as to its nature because neither Lancelot nor Chrétien give an explanation. The hero in Zatzikhoven's Lanzelet enters into knightly life unaware of his identity. The water-fay who fostered him refuses to reveal it because of the "scharnen unt manevelt not" afflicted upon her through a mighty knight named
Iweret. When Lanzelet overcomes this man, the best knight in the world, the water-fay's distress is over and she tells Lanzelet his name and lineage. The revelation of the name coincides with the hero's elevation to the pinnacle of knighthood. It is possible that Chrétien was fond of this episode in Lancelot's life and, by assuming his audience's familiarity with the Lancelot legend, incorporated it into his romance in a slightly modified manner, thereby attributing great symbolic significance to the first battle between Lancelot and Meliagant.

In the Charrette, the fact that Lancelot establishes himself as the supreme Arthurian knight is never clearly spelled out. It is possible—and even probable—that Chrétien intended the revelation of the name at the height of the battle with Meliagant as a symbolic device to indicate that Lancelot was on the verge of becoming the paragon of all knights, a fact that achieves greater emphasis through Gawain's concurrent failure in his own quest, that is, the crossing of the water bridge.

At the point of the revelation of Lancelot's identity, the audience has already obtained a good idea of his major characteristics. It has become apparent that he is governed by the desire to succeed in anything he undertakes and that this desire is nurtured by his love for the queen. As the romance progresses, more and more stress is put on the love-relationship between the knight and Guenïèvre and upon the code which dominates this relationship. Lancelot's portrait as a lover is completed with the termination of the great tournament. The features which render him unique among all the knights of Arthur's fellowship, are here summarized:

1. He is always sad when not in the presence of the Queen.
2. He is a perfect model of faithfulness.6
3. His thoughts are always with Guenïèvre.7
4. He does not like to talk but likes to think.
5. He engages in long soliloquies concerning his love.
6. When he encounters one of Guenïèvre's belongings, he is unable to speak and loses his color.8
7. He has no regard for the dictates of common sense and is ready to sacrifice his honor to further the cause of Guenîèvre’s rescue.
8. He adores the Queen with religious fervor.
9. He is meek when the Queen rebuffs him and answers her haughtiness with tears.
10. He is unaware of the bleeding wounds sustained during the bending of the iron window-bars because the Queen beckons him into her arms.
11. He experiences a martyr's agony while leaving the Queen after the love-tryst.

12. He is ready to commit suicide when falsely informed of Guenièvre's death.

13. He never questions a command of the Queen, no matter how whimsical or capricious.

14. He always tries to preserve the secret nature of his love-relationship with Guenièvre.

15. He is always ready to meet head-on any obstacle to the successful completion of his quest, thereby proving that the difficulty of his adventures enhances the value of his love.

16. In order to preserve the honor of the Queen, he is willing to trick his enemy with a ruse.

Lancelot is the only individual at the Round Table in whom all the virtues of "courtly" chivalry and a pre-Petrarchan love-sickness are combined. His sadness is actually uncourtly and very near the limits of acedia, a deadly sin in the Middle Ages. It is a unique trait and the sole possession of Lancelot, who falls completely out of the established pattern of the knight errant.

Throughout the Charrette, Chrétien does not supply his audience with a physical description of his hero. The medieval reluctance to describe faces is here amply illustrated. At one point Lancelot reveals that he is in the bloom of health:

Ha! Morz! Con m'as or augeitité,
que tot sain me fez desheïté!
(4263 f.)

The poet also remarks once that Lancelot has to be included in the list of the fair and brave because of his posture on horse (vss. 2660-2676). Other than that, no conclusion can be drawn from the Charrette concerning Lancelot's physical appearance. It seems as though Chrétien purposely refrained from working on this aspect in accordance with the general pattern of the Charrette which stressed action and sentiment over character presentation. The various damsels, for instance, who pursue Lancelot in quest of his love always mention that their passion is inflamed by his prowess at arms and his courteous behavior, not because of his physical appearance. Physical strength naturally plays an important part in Lancelot's life.

He is tremendously strong and well aware of it. His most herculean feat is the bending of the window bars; scarcely less impressive is the raising of the lid of the tomb in the cemetery, a feat which, judged by the size of the lid in contemporary drawings, would indeed warrant help from "above."
Lancelot dominates the action in the various versions of the cart-episode to such an extent that all the other characters are relegated to the background. This is most noticeable in the case of Arthur who in older versions of the abduction-and-rescue theme probably redeemed the queen himself. It seems as though Chrétien in his treatment of the king in the Charrette unconsciously paralleled a folkloristic development generally referred to as "the decline of the hero." Although there is amongst Chrétien's romances none which deals specifically with the exploits of Arthur, the work preceding the Charrette, i.e., Cligés, still depicts the king as a very formidable warrior who is far from being the cuckold and pathetic figure of the Charrette. Guenièvre, though seldom in the foreground, fares much better than her husband because she is essential to the abduction-and-rescue theme of the poem. In the Charrette, the queen is introduced as Arthur's obedient wife who is trying to dissuade Kay from leaving the Round Table. After Arthur has granted Kay a (rash) boon and the seneschal is declared the queen's champion, she obediently follows him into his encounter with the fierce Meliagant, but she laments in a low voice,

\begin{verbatim}
Ha! rois, se vos ce seussiez
ja, ce croi, ne l'otroiesiez,
que Kez me menast un seul pas.
\end{verbatim}

This short exclamation throws a special light upon Guenièvre. As Arthur's wife she obeys his command; as a woman, however, she wishes the presence of a man more concerned with her safety than with his word of honor. Chrétien's awareness of Guenièvre's basic dilemma is revealed here: because she is the queen she has to subdue her personal feelings, she has to subordinate her innermost yearnings to the demands of her social position. This aspect of her character, so clearly expressed in Chrétien's story, seems to have been overlooked by Chrétien's successors who all too easily made her out to be "la belle dame sans merci." In Le Chevalier de la Charrette, Guenièvre is always successful in preserving her immaculate image as the queen, while she also tries to satisfy her individual needs as a woman although this, at times, proves quite difficult. After Gauvain's rescue from the pont evage, for instance, she has to show excessive joy although her heart is grief-stricken at the loss of Lancelot (vss. 5190 ff.).

It seems as though Chrétien's characterization of Guenièvre constituted his subtle attempt to point out the unresolved contradiction of service d'amour. As the object of Lancelot's love, Guenièvre is haughty and capricious. At the same time, however, she is capable of real passion and rueful self-accusation. The contrast between Guenièvre as a "natural" lover and as the mistress of service d'amour is so pronounced that it cannot be acci-
As the representative of this artificial ideal of love, the queen does the expected when Lancelot approaches her after his first combat with Meliagant: she rises with clouded brow and turns away from him in spite of the humiliations and trials which he has endured for her. The irony of the situation is that Lancelot—who himself is the ideal representative of the male lover of *service d'amour*—does not expect Guenivre’s reaction because he anticipates the woman in her and not the ideal which she represents. This woman emerges shortly after this event when the queen is so distressed about the false rumors of Lancelot’s death that she brings herself to the very brink of death (vss. 4107). Then she engages in long, self-accusatory monologues and judges herself guilty of grievous wrong toward her lover. Later, during the Tournament at Noauz when Guenivre sends Lancelot word to act the coward, she again does this to a certain degree as the willful mistress of *service d'amour* but there is also a very natural motivation behind her seemingly unreasonable command: she wants to be confirmed in her hope that the disguised invincible knight is her lover. There is no evidence that her behavior is motivated by the desire to disgrace Lancelot in the eyes of the spectators. This could be the case only if Lancelot’s identity were known at the tournament. On the second day, when the damsel informs the queen of Lancelot’s readiness again to perform as a coward, she immediately urges the maid to hasten back and command the hero to do his “best” because she no longer has any doubts that the anonymous knight is he “cui ele est tote” (vss. 5874 ff.). Consequently, it is not her motivations that render Guenivre culpable of capriciousness, but the means by which she assures herself of Lancelot’s identity. The subtleness with which Chrétien treated his heroine in these episodes illustrates that the poet, regardless of his personal opinions of *service d'amour*, could see her as a woman trapped between her social duties and her passion, and not just as the flint-hearted Circe whom many critics have made her out to be.

The most interesting character in *Le Chevalier de la Charrette* is perhaps Meliagant, the abductor of the queen. There is a certain resemblance between this man and the most famous villains of Shakespeare, all being portrayed as extremely wicked men who are aware of their wickedness as their most dominant trait. Meliagant is a superb warrior who fears no man, no matter how strong and formidable. The complexity of his character becomes apparent when he rebuffs the good King Baudemagu, his father, with the impassioned plea not to intercede between himself and Lancelot and to permit him, Meliagant, to remain as cruel as he desires to be:

*Tant con vos plest, soiez prodon,*  
et moi lessiez estre cruel.*  
*(3294-95)*
A modern psychiatrist might diagnose this reaction as that of a frustrated son whose rebellion against a magnanimous father leads him to a religion of evil. Chrétien, however, unaware of the subtle possibilities of post-Freudian psychology, may have wanted to portray Meliagant as nothing more than a complex but foolish son in disagreement with his wise father, but in doing this he went far beyond the character-depiction of the traditional chastoiement. Meliagant’s self-knowledge has no apparent effect upon him and there is no excuse for his wickedness, thus he fails to evoke much sympathy in the reader. Unlike Richard III, who could not “caper nimbly in a lady’s chamber” because he was “cheated of feature by dissembling nature,” Meliagant is described as very graceful, alert, and shapely (vss. 3540 ff.). His handsome appearance stands in stark contrast to a personality that makes him the exact opposite of both Lancelot and Bau-demagu. After his initial anonymous appearance at the Round Table, Meliagant is reintroduced by name after Lancelot’s conquest of the pont de l’espee.\textsuperscript{15} Chrétien states at this point that Meliagant always did the opposite of his noble father and that he never weari ed of villainy and treason (vss. 3148 ff.). Lancelot’s success at the sword-bridge causes Meliagant to break into a rage that becomes intensified to the degree of madness when his father praises the accomplishment of the strange knight. Instead of acknowledging Lancelot’s superiority, Meliagant insists upon fighting the hero in single combat and defies his father with a pompous harangue (vss. 3454 ff.).

This behavior reveals a certain tragic quality in the relationship between Meliagant and his father, a characteristic that may have escaped the notice of Chrétien’s audience since it was the general tendency of the medieval chastoiement to portray the son all in black.\textsuperscript{16} It appears as though Meliagant wants to prove to his father even more than to himself that he is a better knight than Lancelot. One cannot help but feel the intense pain which accompanies Meliagant’s invidious outpourings whenever Baudemagu praises Lancelot, or when his father expresses the fear that the champion from the Round Table might vanquish him in combat. Once the whole story is known, it becomes quite apparent that Meliagant’s ulterior reason for challenging the Round Table is to engender in his father more respect for his physical prowess. This desire is superimposed on the obvious one: to be acclaimed as the best knight in the world. It is still present in Meliagant after he has convinced himself that to defeat Lancelot constitutes too great an obstacle for him. After his second trip to Arthur’s court, he apparently still considers himself superior to Gauvain who in Lancelot’s absence has taken up Meliagant’s challenge. The villain’s first wish after returning from his expedition is to impress his father with his accomplishments. He hurries to tell him of the new development but Bau-
demagu reacts contrary to his expectations. Instead of lauding his son, the king rejects his boastfulness, curses his pitiless heart, and condemns his foolishness (vss. 6311 ff.). Meliagant then accuses his father of having broken the family-ties between them, but Baudemagu retorts that if this is the case, then it is only because of Meliagant’s folly and wrath (vss. 6346 ff.). This explanation satisfies the reader who has witnessed Meliagant’s wickedness throughout the romance, but not Meliagant himself who is guided by abnormal ethical standards and whose primary desire it is to prove to the world and, above all, to his father, that he is superior to any of Arthur’s knights. Meliagant wants to have in his father an accomplice in his unethical ambitions but what he finds is a prudent and honest man. The repeated rejection by his father causes Meliagant to stiffen his own attitude and to blind himself towards his father’s ideals until his bitter end at Arthur’s court.

The tragic element in Meliagant’s character is supported by yet another factor: his love of Guenièvre. Meliagant’s true feelings for the queen are revealed when his father urges him to deliver her honorably to Lancelot. He scorches this suggestion and ridicules his father’s standards of honor:

\[
\text{je ne sui mie si hermites,}
\text{si prodon ne si charitables,}
\text{ne tant ne voel estre enorables}
\text{que la rien que plus aim li doigne.}
\]  
(3276-79)

Being rejected not just by his father, but also by the queen, Meliagant soon reaches the height of his perfidy. Thus he has poisonous salves applied to the wounds of Kex and leads the unsuspecting Lancelot into a trap to have him imprisoned in a remote tower. Using any means to achieve his goals, he also forges a letter to mollify his father, the queen, and Gauvain concerning the disappearance of Lancelot. All these events only lead to the completion of an already magnificent portrait of a man who fails in his aspirations not through unfavorable circumstances but through the adversity of his own nature.

NOTES


2. For a detailed discussion of this ideal, see Myrrha Lot-Borrodine, *Trois essais sur le roman de Lancelot du Lac et la Queste du Saint Graal* (Paris, 1919), pp. 18 ff.


5. All quotations are from Mario Roques' edition of *Le Chevalier de la Charrette* (Paris, 1963).

6. Although the *Charrette* does not contain any "rules" of love, a number of the features in Lancelot's character correspond with those of the ideal lover in Andreas Capellanus' *De Amore* (edited by Amadeu Pages [Castello de la Plana, 1930], pp. 178-79). In this particular instance, cf. regula XII: Verus amans alterius nisi sui coamantis ex affectus non cupit amplexus.

7. *De Amore*, regula XXX: Verus amans assidua sine intermissione coamantis imaginacione detinetur.

8. *De Amore*, regula XV: Omnis consvestit amans in coamantis aspectu pallescere.


10. *De Amore*, regula XIV: Facilis perceptio contemptibilem reddit amorem, difficilis eum carum facit haberi.

11. Concerning the importance of the physical aspect in the life of a knight Arnold Hauser reasons: "Keine der ritterlichen Tugenden ist ohne körperliche Kraft und Zucht oder gar wie die urchristlichen Tugenden im Gegensatz zu diesen körperlichen Vorzügen denkbar" (Sozialgeschichte der Kunst und Literatur, p. 216).


14. The hero, after having established his literary role, declines in prowess and is put aside in favor of a formerly inferior underling. If we are to assume with Lord Raglan that there is a correlation in the career of most heroes, and especially the mythical ones, then Arthur must have once completely dominated the phase of oral transmission of the Arthuriad (cf. F-RS. Raglan, *The Hero, a Study in Tradition, Myth, and Drama* [London, 1936], especially chapters XVI-XVIII). A literary remnant of this domination can still be found in the conception of Arthur as propagated by Layamon, Geoffrey of Monmouth, and in the alliterative *Morte Arthur*. Arthur's fate in literature is shared by such heroes as Charlemagne or Robin Hood. The great deeds in the *gestes du roi* are all performed by Oliver and Roland, while Robin Hood evolves from an invincible chieftain to a usually beaten (by Scatlock, Little John, Friar Tuck) hero.

15. Meliagant's anonymity during his first challenge at Arthur's court is an obvious parallel to Lancelot's incognito throughout the first parts of the romance.

16. This tendency is very obvious, for instance, in the most famous of all *chas- tolements*, the Middle High German *Meier Helmbrecht* by Wernher the Gardner (ca. 1235).