Plot Structure and Motivation in Chrétien's Romances

All five of Chrétien's Arthurian romances begin with a typical plot juncture, the sudden departure of the hero from the realm of his origin (Alexander and Cligès, Perceval), or education (Erec, Yvain, Lancelot). Each of these initial departures, with the exception of Lancelot's, who enters the story as a fully formed knight, is followed by a period of development which leads to a plateau of achievement. But the protagonist declines from this eminence, commits a crucial error, suffers its consequences, and has to work his way back to a state of grace.

The recurrence in Chrétien's work of this second typical plot juncture was recognized by William S. Woods. He speaks of a "plot pattern" in four of the romances: *Erec, Yvain, Perceval*, and *William of England*, and sums up his findings as follows:

> The outline can be reduced to the following formula: A hero achieves the realization of his worldly ambitions and desires in an introductory passage. He is then made aware of some error or fault or some less obvious reason which forces him to abandon his lofty pinnacle of happiness. This point in the plot ... serves to motivate the main body of the poem which is a series of adventures concerned with the hero's efforts to recover his former status, presumably through his becoming more deserving of it by the correction of his error or by the expiation of his fault[1].

Woods' view can be contested on an important point. *Cligès* and *Lancelot* can be seen to contain plot junctures which correspond to the ones found, admittedly with greater clarity, in the four works Woods considers.

Our most important point of agreement can best be indicated by further quotations from Woods' article:

> The other three works ... reveal the same structure and the same faulty motivation [as *William of England*] ... It [the initial incident in the plot, the abandonment of the lofty pinnacle of happiness and the motivation stemming therefrom to recover that happiness] is the underlying purpose of the series of adventures undergone by the hero during the main part of the poem (p. 6).

Concerning the problem of finding the full motivation of the plot, Woods writes:

> Apparently the answer does not lie within the plot elements, and one should look to the *sans* for a solution – or concede that the romances are just a series of loosely connected adventures with no overall meaning or thesis (p. 9).

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[1] WILLIAM S. WOODS, *Plot Structures in Four Romances of Chrétien de Troyes, Studies in Philology* 50 (1953), 3.

Woods points to "vague plot elements" and to "ambiguous and hardly comprehensible motivation" which he does not dismiss as faulty writing but rather suspects to be a conscious aspect of the author's style.

The typicality of the behavior of Chrétien's principal characters must be explained by a common principle. We will attempt to show that this principle is Chrétien's implicit conception of the human will, and that this conception reveals itself in the pivotal episodes of his narrative works.

Let us begin by considering those crucial points in Chrétien's plots which, in Woods' words, serve "to motivate the main body of the poem, which is a series of adventures concerned with the hero's efforts to recover his former status, presumably through his becoming more deserving of it by the correction of his error or by the expiation of his fault" (p. 3). What is the "error" or "fault" that the hero has to "expiate" in order to recover his "former status"?

In *Perceval*[2], the Loathly Damsel tells the hero:

> Molt est maleürous qui voit
> Si bel tans que plus ne coviegne,
> S'atent encor que plus biax viegne.
> Che iez tu, li maleüreus,
> Qui veis qu'i[l] fu tans et leus
> De parler et si te teüs (vv. 4662–67).

The key words in this passage are *tans et leus*. Perceval's fault lies in missing an opportunity to act in accordance with the clear demand of a definite moment. It might immediately be objected that the root of Perceval's failing at the Grail castle is an earlier failing, his insensitivity toward his mother at the moment of his departure from her realm. But this initial failing has exactly the same configuration as the resulting later one: there too Perceval has failed to do something, namely to turn back to see what has happened to his mother. It is here crucial to recall that he sees his mother after she has fallen:

> Quant li vallés fu eslongiez
> Le get d'une pierre menue,
> Si se regarde et voit cheüe
> Sa mere al pié del pont arriere,
> Et jut pasmee en tel maniere
> Come s'ele fust cheüe morte.
> Et cil cingle de le roorte
> Son chaceor parmi la croupe,
> Et il s'en va ... (vv. 620–628).

[2] *Le Roman de Perceval ou le Conte du Graal*, ed. WILLIAM ROACH, Genève [2]1959 (*Textes littéraires français 71*). The other editions used: *Les Romans de Chrétien de Troyes édités d'après la copie de Guiot* I: *Erec et Enide*, ed. MARIO ROQUES; II: *Cligès*, ed. ALEXANDRE MICHA; III: *Le Chevalier de la Charrete*, ed. MARIO ROQUES; IV: *Le Chevalier au Lion (Yvain)*, ed. MARIO ROQUES, Paris 1953–60 (CFMA 80, 84, 86, 89) – hereafter cited as *Perceval, Erec, Cligès, Lancelot*, and *Yvain*.

In both instances he consciously stands before a choice of two different courses of action, and both times he decides to do something – continuing on his way in the first case, keeping silent in the second – which will bring him to harm. Both times he refuses to see or is prevented from seeing the appropriate response to the call of the moment. These two actions manifest a single moral indisposition[3].

We may call this indisposition a weakness or a vice, which manifests itself in a certain use of *time*. Time, in Chrétien's works, refers to a character's use or experience of it. When named, time figures as an opportunity to act, as a given moment with a specific demand to perform a well-defined action. At the opposite extreme – as when he describes Erec's *recreantise*, Yvain's year of jousting, Perceval's seven years of wandering – Chrétien conveys the feeling of undifferentiated duration. He indicates such lapses of time with the greatest brevity, as if to transmit the experience of some-one who has lost his grip on time and hence on reality in general.

Crucial opportunities, once passed, never return in their original form. Once a character misses his cue then he will never again have the chance to meet an oppor-tunity that exactly reproduces the conditions of the missed one. He will have to right the wrong he has committed, but his situation (his accumulated experience, his social and moral status, his psychological and intellectual make-up) at the time of his expiation differs from his situation at the time he misses the original "obligatory opportunity." Hence the conditions of his act(s) of expiation differ from those of the moment of his failing; it is in this sense that the original missed moment never returns. The uniqueness of this missed opportunity is summed up by the Loathly Damsel: "Ha! Perchevax, Fortune est cauve / Detriers et devant chavelue" (vv. 4646–47). Fortune resembles a moment of time which, when it is before us, has a lock of hair by which we can get hold of it. But she is bald in back and once past, is out of reach. Fortune clearly functions here as an allegorical representation of time, in the particular sense of time as a unique opportunity, and at the same time an obligation, to perform a certain action[4].

Yvain contains a documentation of the hero's lapse which comes closest in clarity to the *Perceval* episodes. Here too a female messenger explains to the hero how and in what he failed, and, as in *Perceval*, this announcement causes the hero to fall into a profound mental crisis. The messenger says to Yvain:

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[3] In this connection Kellermann speaks of the concatenation (Verknüpfung) of the hero's guilt. Cf. WILHELM KELLERMANN, *Aufbaustil und Weltbild Chrestiens von Troyes im Percevalroman*, Halle a.S. 1937 (*Beih. ZRPh. 88*), p. 137.

[4] Enide addresses Fortune in the following words:
          Fortune, qui m'avoit atreite
          a tost a li sa main retraite (*Erec*, vv. 2781–82).
Enide is ignorant of the true nature of her failing, and sees herself as the victim of, rather than as the offender against, Fortune. Like Perceval she also failed to seize Fortune's forelock.

> Yvain, molt fus or oblianz
> Quant il ne t'an pot sovenir
> Que tu devoies revenir
> A ma dame jusqu'a un an (vv.2748-51).

Yvain has failed to respond to an irrecoverable moment with a definite action, the return to his wife. Even more explicitly than in *Perceval*, the hero's fault here is given as a lack of awareness of time. This is sharply underlined by a contrasting description of Laudine's heightened awareness of time during her husband's absence, as she longingly awaits the day of his return:

> Ma dame en sa chanbre poinz a
> Trestoz les jorz et toz les tans,
>
> . . . .
> Ensi li leal amant font
> Contre le tans et la seison (vv. 2756-57, 2762-63).

Erec et Enide is the remaining one of the five major poems in which Woods sees a central catastrophe in the hero's career caused by "some error or fault or some less obvious reason. . . " (Woods, p. 3). Here too the characteristic fault is a missed opportunity. The hero's failing here is not measured in minutes or hours as in the two previously considered romances, but consists of a more extended if equally well-delimited unit of time, whose most important similarity to the crucial minutes in *Perceval* and the crucial day in *Yvain* lies in the irretrievable opportunity it contains. This opportunity consists of the possibility of being an active knight and virtuous ruler without having to undergo the ordeals of his expiating adventures. After the wrong has been done and he becomes *recreant*, Erec cannot simply start practicing arms and devote more time to his knights in order to be a reproachless knight. The possibility of such relatively simple means of maintaining a spotless reputation are gone forever, and he must embark on the arduous adventures which alone can bring about his rehabilitation.

According to Woods this pivotal moment is lacking in *Cligès* and *Lancelot*. But Lancelot's hesitation before the cart functions in exactly the same way as the three episodes just considered. The appearance of the cart driven by the dwarf presents Lancelot with a unique, unrepeatable opportunity and, within the framework of the adulterous love which is the central theme of the story, with an absolute command to act. The only right thing for him to do is to mount the cart immediately, without a moment's hesitation. But

> mar le fist et mar en ot honte
> que maintenant sus ne sailli,
> qu'il s'an tendra por mal bailli (vv. 362-364).

This is obviously the point in the plot which "serves to motivate the main body of the poem, which is a series of adventures concerned with the hero's efforts to recover

his former status, presumably through his becoming more deserving of it by the correction of his error or by the expiation of his fault" (p. 3). His former status is being in the good graces of the queen. He has to expiate his fault of hesitation, and his efforts to recover the favor of the queen form the narrative backbone of the remaining part of the plot. It is true that he does not find out about his offense for a while in the poem, but the queen's disfavor mysteriously operates from the moment of his failing (we do not know how she learned about it). All the trials he undergoes even before meeting her in Bademagu's castle already serve to rehabilitate him in *her* eyes.

We lastly turn to *Cligès*, to see whether this romance contains the kind of plot juncture we are discussing. The onslaught of the lovesickness which Chrétien describes here for the first time in his long narrative works serves this function in the plot[5]. Here too the missed opportunity is present, though it does not resemble the related moments in the other romances in clarity and directness. We can still, however, speak of an irretrievably missed moment of opportunity: Alexander and Soredamors let the chance slip by of ever avowing their love for each other without help from a third party; they reach an emotional state where only the intervention of the queen can bring a resolution to their predicament. Similarly, the hesitations of Cligès and Fénice make it impossible for them to realize their mutual love without the complication of the false Tristan situation. The hesitations of the latter couple, clearly the main protagonists of the romance, serve to move the greater part of the plot, at least the section in which they figure. Chrétien uses the same words to describe the failure of Cligès and Fénice to express their love as the ones with which the Loathly Damsel castigates Perceval for his silence at the Grail castle. In *Perceval* we read:

> Che iez tu, li maleüreus,
> Qui veïs qu'i[l] fu tans et leus
> De parler et si te teüs (vv. 4665–67).

In *Cligès* the narrator comments:

> Por coi ç'avient a fins amanz
> Que sens lor faut et hardemanz
> A dire ce qu'il ont an pans,
> Quant il ont eise, et leu, et tans (vv. 3815-18).

But the most important point of resemblance between the missed opportunities in *Cligès* and corresponding parts of the other romances occurs on another level, that of the role of codified situations or codes in general, especially as they affect the will.

What force makes a character decide to act contrary to the demands of a situation

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[5] The description of Tereus' love torments in *Philomena* chronologically precedes the passages under discussion. But there we are dealing with a brutal passion which lacks the humane aspects of the lovesickness described in *Cligès*.

or renders him incapable of acting at all? Let us again start with the clearest examples. Before mounting the shameful cart, a debate takes place in Lancelot's mind between Reason and Love. The latter succeeds in persuading him to mount the cart. Reason, however, tries to keep him back:

> mes Reisons, qui d'Amors se part,
> li dit que del monter se gart,
> si le chastie et si l'anseigne
> que rien ne face ne anpreigne
> dom il ait honte ne reproche (vv. 365–69).

Reason, as used in courtly literature, is one of the terms which designates the ethical value system of the knightly class[6]. Therefore Lancelot's hesitation is caused by his chivalric and courtly self-esteem, his concern for his fame, an absolute ethical imperative in every circumstance except before the demands of *fin' amor*. Gauvain, the measure and model of conventional chivalric and courtly perfection, has no second thoughts about refusing to mount the cart[7]. For him, this act would be "grant folie" and "vilain" (vv. 388–90), words designating qualities that stand at the very opposite pole of *reison*. Lancelot therefore commits his sin against love because he is held back by his knightly training. And it is not through a momentary ignorance of the requirements of Love that he hesitates; Love and Reason make their appearance in his mind simultaneously. The step he finally takes against Reason involves for him the overcoming of life-long conditioning, because of which his will lacks a certain spontaneity, an ability to react unhindered to a new situation. The forces that have conditioned him to react negatively at first to the unusual call of the moment can be most generally designated by the word institution. More exactly we are dealing with a code, but the concept of an institution is more basic and will allow us to compare the conditioning of Lancelot's will with corresponding moments in the other romances[8].

From the standpoint of the rigidifying influence of an institution on the will, the case of Perceval is even more revealing. When the irretrievable moment at the Grail castle arrives, Perceval is kept from asking the liberating question by his recent training in courtesy:

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[6] Cf. WILHELM KELLERMANN, *op. cit.*, chapter entitled "Das System der höfischen Werte," p. 156–180. Cf. also ERICH KÖHLER, *Ideal und Wirklichkeit in der höfischen Epik*, Tübingen 1956, p. 157: "Die rationale Beherrschbarkeit der Liebe ... garantiert für Chrestien die sichere Festlegung des Lebenswegs und die sittliche Autonomie des ritterlichen Menschen."

[7] Cf. KELLERMANN, *op. cit.*, p. 150: "Gauvain verkörpert in der Tat die höfischen Werte, die Chr. im Prolog nennt: die justise, die leauté, die largesce und den Hass der vilenie."

[8] An institution is a social organization. A code is the set of rules such an organization imposes on its members. Both of these phenomena imply tradition and public recognition. A "codified situation" usually designates the implementation of institution or code, but may be, wholly or partly, independent of long-established, public tradition. Examples are bad customs and, in certain respects, Erec's *recreantise*.

> Li vallés voit cele merveille
> Qui la nuit ert laiens venus,
> Si s'est de demander tenus
> Coment ceste chose avenoit,
> Que del chasti li sovenoit,
> Celui qui chevalier le fist,
> Qui li ensaigna et aprist
> Que de trop parler se gardast.
> Et crient, se il le demandast,
> Qu'en le tenist a vilonie;
> Por che si nel demanda mie (vv. 3202–12).

Instead of making an independent and spontaneous decision, he immediately thinks of his mentor and hence of the entire code and institution which this authority figure represents.

In *Erec et Enide*, the institution of marriage (and less directly also that of feudal sovereignty) brings about the rigidification of both protagonists' will. They are both entrenched in a "codified situation," kept there by sloth, hedonism, and an all but complete inability to face the full reality around them, their "real" situation, with its unmistakable calls to action.

Yvain, from what we can read in the few lines Chrétien devotes to his year of knightly activities, is so fully absorbed by chivalric routines that his preoccupation makes him forget the deadline laid down by Laudine.

The rigidification of the will can best be described as a single-directedness of a character's whole being which takes on various but basically related forms: monomania in the case of the jousting Yvain and of Perceval at the beginning of his career; a state of conditioned response in the case of Lancelot and, though in less pronounced fashion, in that of Perceval at the Grail castle; and a form of vicious sloth, combined with what again could be called monomania, in the case of Erec. Soon we will also consider the characters of *Cligès*. There is one important similarity which ties all these examples together: the character follows one pattern of behavior within whose framework he pursues one kind of activity, to the exclusion of other activities. This exclusion is not absolute or final: Lancelot is not prevented by his knightly conditioning from mounting the cart, Perceval merely wants to delay his question, Yvain does remember Laudine before being reminded of the deadline, Erec is capable of breaking the spell that binds him after receiving a strong enough impetus from the outside. But a narrowed relationship with the world is obstinately present in every one of our enumerated cases (we will find it also in *Cligès*) and causes the characteristic delay, the inability to seize an opportunity to act at the right moment, with all its undesired consequences. And this lessening of the ability to react spontaneously and immediately to unforeseen or unaccustomed circumstances (to any exigency which would require a step out of a present state of existence) is caused by, and serves the

purposes of, what is ultimately an institution, which holds the character's willpower captive. The institution of marriage cancels out chivalric activities for Erec; the institution of knighthood cancels out the awareness of conjugal duties for Yvain; the code of chivalry and *courtoisie*, which emanates from the institution of knighthood, cancels out the spontaneous response to an unusual call to action for Lancelot and for Perceval.

We now turn to our most problematic case, *Cligès*. The paralyzed will, the missing of opportunities to act, occur here in the framework of the lovesickness of the two pairs of protagonists.

The two pairs of lovers consciously follow a convention in living and giving expression to their loves. That Chrétien does not conceive of the expression of their love as inspired by nature (as opposed to convention) is proved by the fact that it does not exist in *Erec et Enide*, even though there too we have the story of a love. The rhetoric of the lovers in *Cligès* is self-conscious, literary, and careful. Any extract from the long dialogues or interior monologues could prove this point, but three lines addressed by Fénice to Thessala will serve to demonstrate the nature of the love-sickness with which the protagonists are stricken:

> Mes sachiez bien que je n'ai cure
> De garir an nule meniere,
> Car je ai molt la dolor chiere (vv. 3052–54).

One is struck by the bad faith of this statement. In the broadest terms bad faith is self-deception. More specifically it is a project of consciousness, to use Sartrian terms, which contains a blatant contradiction visible from the outside, but whose import the person in bad faith refuses to recognize. Ostensibly the greatest desire of the four lovestricken protagonists is the fulfillment of their love and hence, logically, the termination of their lovesickness. But in reality they prize their torments of un-fulfillment more than the possibilities which could lead to their fulfillment. This is evident in the words of Fénice quoted above, and a brief authorial comment illustrates this point equally well:

> Einsi travaille Amors Fenice,
> Mes cist travauz li est delice,
> Qu'ele ne puet estre lassee (vv. 4527–29).

A long passage preceding this comment describes Fénice as suffering and desperate, but all this is a delight to her of which she cannot tire. We cannot keep resolving this contradiction of sense by claiming that "delight" is a conventional way of designating suffering, and that not being able to tire of something means the opposite of what it says. At some point delight is delight, even if it is the enjoyment of suffering. This contradictory behavior is also apparent in the following circumstance of the plot: love for Fénice still torments Cligès on his return to Constantinople, but she has

already married Alis. He cannot know that she is still intact and that his love for her retains the possibility of being fulfilled in accordance with his, and Chrétien's, moral ideas. He therefore seems to accept his love-torment as a condition which can lead nowhere except to adultery, which he obviously does not desire.

The verbose love torments of Alexander, Soredamors, Cligès and Fénice can be characterized as a "codified situation," a confinement within an institution in the widest sense: they are ensconced in the roles of Provençal lovers. Just as Erec needs a shock from the outside to have his will function again, so the lovers in *Cligès* would also make no progress in the fulfillment of their desires without the intervention of the queen and the nurse Thessala. We find the helping role of others at some stage of the protagonist's moral and mental deterioration in all the romances except *Lancelot*. The cousin and hermit uncle play this role for Perceval, the forest hermit and the lady of Noroison for Yvain. Another circumstance which allows us to compare the lovesickness of the four protagonists with the states of the other protagonists at the time of their failing is that the paralysis of the will results from an achievement. Without the love experience, which for both couples has a successful as well as an unsuccessful phase, they would not attain the maturity and independence they possess at the end of their careers.

In conclusion, all the important elements of the "missed opportunity" can be found in the lovesickness described in *Cligès*. The protagonists are entrenched in a codified situation, caught in a restricting manner of experiencing and acting. Their will is rigidified, and they fail to say certain words and take certain actions which their situation would seem to demand. They miss opportunities to act with the result that their destiny will have to be realized under conditions which are different from the ones which existed when they could have acted *at first*.

Thus all five long romances contain a pivotal episode in the plot which has the following typical characteristics: a segment of time of varying length presents the principal characters with the clear challenge to perform certain actions. The characters in some way miss this opportunity, and this failure motivates the main body of the poem.

As is to be expected, the direct consequences of these moments go far to explain their full import. With varying explicitness the rehabilitating experiences of the principal characters consist of what Dante calls *contrappasso*, which signifies the correction of a vice (a moral debility or more simply a bad habit) by the repeated correct handling of a situation which in some essential way reproduces the situation which served as the occasion for the original failing.

The clearest example of *contrappasso* in Chrétien's work is the scheme of Yvain's adventures which begin after he runs into Lunete, condemned by the badly-advised Laudine to burn at the stake unless she finds a champion to match one of her mistress' men. After leaving her with the promise of returning on the next day, which is to

decide her fate, he runs into the adventure in the course of which he delivers the victims of Harpin's oppression. When the people whom he had delivered importune him to stay with them, he replies:

> C'or m'an estuet aler de ci,
> Et c'est la riens qui plus m'esmaie
> Que je ci trop demoré n'aie;
> Car einz que midis soit passez
> Avrai aillors a feire assez
> Se je i puis venir a ore (vv. 4292–4297).

We observe the keen awareness of time, of a deadline, of a moment which cannot be missed. An hour's delay could mean Lunete's death. The Harpin episode is bracketed by two episodes dealing with Lunete. The very same bracket arrangement of liberating adventures occurs in the section beginning with verse 4697, where the story of the two daughters of the Sire de la Noire Espine first appears. The younger daughter finds Yvain and requests him to be her champion against the partisan of her older sister, who has dispossessed her. Yvain consents and the two continue their way together, soon to find the castle of *Pesme Avanture*, which Yvain decides to liberate from its curse. Again he is urged to stay, even to marry the daughter of the Châtelain, and again he exhibits a perfect sense of his duty and of the moment's urgency:

> Si m'an lessiez an pes a tant
> Que la dameisele m'atant,
> Qui avoec moi est ça venue (vv. 5725–27).

The scheme of *contrappasso* could not be more evident. Both of these episodes exactly reproduce the circumstances in which Yvain originally failed: an irretrievable moment with a definite duty to be performed must be met.

The unimpaired, free operation of a character's will manifests itself in his correct use of time. The connection between time and the will is nowhere so clear in Chrétien's work as in *Yvain* because a deadline operates in this romance as one of the explicit themes. But implicitly the interaction of time and the will in the framework of *contrappasso* is present in the other poems as well. In *Lancelot* the hero blindly and unhesitatingly obeys the commands of his mistress, the queen, who orders him to fight well or badly at a tournament. This situation in essence reproduces the scene before the cart. Lancelot has to show an immediate readiness to answer the demands of love, and in doing so he must go against his chivalric and courtly instincts of honor and self-respect. His will must attain a suppleness enabling him to cut down the time between the commands of love and the execution of these commands, which go against the conditioning of the *institution* and its code by which his character has been formed. His readiness to obey the queen is apparent and contrasts with his hesitation before the cart:

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> "Sire, ma dame la reïne
> par moi vos mande, et jel vos di,
> que 'au noauz'". Quant cil l'oï,
> si li dist que molt volantiers,
> come cil qui est suens antiers (vv. 5652-56).

Cligès contains no lessons or clear-cut obligations designed to correct a previous shortcoming; here the characters are not put in situations which clearly reproduce those situations in which they previously failed. The characters compensate for their earlier weaknesses and failures by themselves, without anyone's command or any highly determined situation. After Cligès' return to Constantinople and a period of torments revealing bad faith and weakness, there occurs an important turn of events: the two protagonists finally avow their love for each other. What Frappier writes concerning Fénice applies to both lovers from their mutual avowal on: "Elle crée les conditions de son bonheur dans l'autonomie de son amour et de sa volonté"[9]. Suddenly, instead of the self-indulgent verbose laments in which they had engaged, we find them using a new language remarkable for its simplicity and directness, a language of decision and action:

> Demain, quant levee serai,
> Venez matin a moi parler,
> Et dira chascuns son pensser
> Et ferons a oevre venir
> Celui que mialz voldrons tenir. (vv. 5216-20).

They are acting in time, they are using time: the night for reflection, the next morning for making decisions. Gone is the *timelessness* of their torments, the eternity of suffering for which each of the lovers declared himself or herself to be ready. Gone also is the florid rhetoric of Provençal love. They are now using the language of the will which indicates an awareness and control of their reality, which is to say, of time. Thus the contrast offered by the solution of their problem sheds light, in the manner of *contrappasso*, on their failing.

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[9] JEAN FRAPPIER, *Chrétien de Troyes*, Paris 1968, p. 113. MOSHÉ LAZAR, *Amour Courtois et "Fin' Amors" dans la littérature du XIIe siècle*, Paris 1964, and LEO POLLMANN, *Die Liebe in der hochmittelalterlichen Literatur Frankreichs*, Frankfurt am Main 1966 (*Analecta Romanica 18*), deal with the theme of courtly love in the medieval literature of Northern France. POLLMANN states that the Provençal idea that indefinite periods of unfulfillment insure lovers with ethical incentives was foreign to the intellectual climate of Northern France, all aspects of whose culture were directed toward the "vita activa" (p. 247). "Für nordfranzösisches Denken ist 'joie' gleich Erfüllung" (p. 317). Concerning the perturbations of love, POLLMANN writes: "Während der Trobador behauptet, durch seine Liebe grundsätzlich und immer zur 'valor' zu kommen, was eine ideologische Fiktion ist, sieht Chrétien de Troyes und mit ihm der ganze nordfranzösische Roman in der unerfüllten Liebe eine seelische Gleichgewichtsstörung" (p. 309). MOSHÉ LAZAR makes similar statements on p. 217-18 of his work.

The scheme of correction and rehabilitation is also very much present in *Erec et Enide*. Erec, like Cligès and Fénice, undertakes to correct his fault through his own initiative (vv. 2572–79).

Perceval is of course unfinished, and the existing portion dealing with the Grail hero only takes us to the very beginning of his recovery from his fall. We do, however, have two valuable passages which contain reflections on his failing and its consequences, which shed light on the full implications of his failure at the Grail castle and the mental state which preceded as well as that which followed that moment. Perceval's way of life after his visit to the Grail is described as follows:

> Ne Dieu ne sa crois n'aora
> Tot einsi cinc aus demora,
> Ne por che ne laissa il mie
> A requerre chevalerie (vv. 6223–26).

It is remarkable that the state described here, though it obviously refers to a special state of fallenness, does not, viewed from a distance, differ from Perceval's way of life before his stay at the Grail castle. Both before and after his crucial failing he practices chivalry. Shortly after this passage occurs the following account of his past, given by Perceval himself to his hermit uncle:

> Si ai puis eü si grant doel
> Que mors eüsse esté mon wel,
> Que Damedieu en oblïai,
> Ne puis merchi ne li crïai
> Ne ne fis rien, que je seüsse,
> Por coi jamais merchi eüsse (vv. 6381–86).

He has done nothing praiseworthy, which is tantamount to saying that he has done nothing at all. But we know that he never ceased to "requerre chevalerie." The activity of pursuing chivalry is somehow made equivalent to nothing, to inactivity. The most important meaning of this implied equivalence must be found in the framework of Chrétien's assumptions about the operation of the will and about the effect that habitual, "codified" activity has on it. These implicit assumptions alone can fully account for the curious logic according to which the practice of chivalry can, under certain conditions, be a blameworthy activity amounting to nothing.

We see that for Chrétien a given institution does not carry a fixed ethical value; its evaluation depends rather on the role it plays in the structure of the entire plot. The ethical inactivity implied by Perceval (vv. 6385–86) has to do rather with the pursuit of *one and the same activity to the exclusion of all other activities*. The repetition of the same activities which emanate from the same ethical core (another term for "institution" which can also be treated as equivalent to the "codified situation" such as Erec's marriage before its crisis), have as their corresponding inner

state of consciousness a restricted and conditioned will. The domination of one set
of activities, and the concurrent limitation of consciousness (hence also of the will)
is apparent in the opening lines of the last section that deals with Perceval:

> Perchevax, ce nos dist l'estoire,
> Ot si perdue la miemoire
> Que de Dieu ne li sovient mais.
> Cinc fois passa avriels et mais,
> Ce sont cinc an trestot entier,
> Ains que il entrast en mostier,
> Ne Dieu ne sa crois n'aora.
> Tot einsi cinc ans demora,
> Ne por che ne laissa il mie
> A requerre chevalerie (vv. 6217–26).

It must be kept in mind that Perceval's case is special because the state described here
is partly the result of a curse or punishment. But this does not change the fact that
his condition shares with related moments in Chrétien's other major romances the
causal relationship between repeated, exclusive activity and a restricted will or *power
to act*, based on a restricted awareness of reality, both spatial and temporal. Perceval's
forgetting of God's existence and, significantly, of time – indicated by his never
entering a church, hence by his unawareness of the liturgy, the most important mani-
festation of time – sums up this restricted perception which underlies his paralyzed
will, capable of nothing but the automatic pursuit of chivalry.

The rehabilitation of Perceval, not described in the completed portion of the
romance, would most certainly have involved, as for all the other characters whose
rehabilitation we can follow, a liberation from his restricted perception of, and reac-
tion to, the reality around him.

After considering the interaction of the will and of institutions in its static aspect,
let us now address ourselves to the dynamic aspect of this relationship, examining
the pattern or "history" of this interaction in the five romances. We observed that
the principal characters always find a more or less radical rupture with this realm
(or institution, or codified situation) necessary for their further development or,
quite simply, the beginning of their career. In this first recurrent point of juncture
in Chrétien's plots, the character seems motivated by the recognition of the negative
effects institutions can have on his will and consequently on his capacity for action.
However, the character always breaks out of the confines of the institution that
formed him for the purpose of attaching himself to another one. Erec and Yvain
set out to establish themselves in their own realms, the two heroes of *Cligès* desire
to go to the court of Arthur, and Perceval wishes to become a knight. The case of
Lancelot is less clear on this point. His leaving the court does however result in what
can be considered as an adherence to a new institution in that he becomes a perfect,

submissive courtly lover; thus his separation from the court brings about his complete integration into a code.

Whether they have a clear-cut, specific goal in mind or not, the protagonists always end up in a codified situation which is the proof and reward of their efforts and accomplishments; and this situation always becomes restrictive in turn.

This brief glance at the pattern of the plots leads us to an important conclusion. In the context of the entire plot, in their dynamic function, codified situations have two distinct and seemingly contradictory aspects. When a character finds himself established in them, they are restrictive; but when they appear as goals they serve a liberating purpose. To Erec, confined by the institution of marriage, the practices of knighthood offer a means of liberating his captive will power. For Yvain, in danger of undergoing the fate of the *recreant* Erec, chivalry plays this same role. The practices of chivalry (let us note: only one aspect of this institution, the "sportive" rather than the charitable, liberating one) become the real cause of the paralysis of his free will. In the end, it is the institution of marriage, the cause of Erec's downfall and a threat to Yvain's knightliness, which inspires the restitution of Yvain's inner freedom. For the protagonists of *Cligès* love, in the last analysis, serves a liberating purpose. Their love experiences provide the main impetus for their development into autonomous political, social and moral agents with free wills. But a phase of their love, which pushes them into highly conventional behavior, paralyzes their wills. They become freed by the attractive force of the institution of marriage, which was shown to have its dangers in *Erec et Enide* and in *Yvain*. Lancelot in one sense becomes freer by following the call of courtly love. He acts independently of the court, and rids himself of the restrictions imposed on his will by his sense of knightly self-respect. But through this step he passes into a new kind of subjugation, as he becomes a completely submissive courtly lover. By breaking away from his mother's realm, Perceval also takes an undeniable step in the direction of freedom in spite of the later developments of his career.

It thus appears that the only life space which assures the characters of free will lies between codified situations. A character can possess a free will only when struggling for something not yet attained. Except for the codified situation in which we first find him (the realm of origin), a character's association with an institution, his establishment in a codified situation, is his own doing, the result of the free operation of his will. The will, then, is defeated by its own achievement, by the result of its own activity. The contradiction goes even deeper: the will is incapacitated by the result of the only activity which assures its free operation. We are confronted with a clear dialectical structure: the conditions of the will's existence bear within them the causes of the will's undoing.

This dialectic explains why an institution has no fixed significance in the sense of a constant influence on its adherents throughout the works of Chrétien. Its beneficial

or harmful effect depends on which of two functions it fulfills in the narrative: whether it acts as a goal, drawing a character's will into action, or whether it acts as a restricting circle in which the character is caught. Marriage, chivalry, courtly love, change their significance within the same romance and from one romance to the other.

We have located the paradoxical behavior of the main characters, especially at the crucial point of the "missed opportunity," in the self-contradictory nature of their will, which can be considered an ingenious fictional representation of human fallenness. This is the common denominator bringing all actions described in Chrétien's fiction into a common relationship. The various individual acts share a common factor: Chrétien's implicit conception of the will.

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