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Untitled: Deconstruction and Reconstruction of Identity in *Le Chevalier de la Charrette* and the Romance of *Tristran*

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LE CHEVALIER DE LA CHARRETTE AND THE ROMANCE OF *TRISTRAN*

By

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UNTITLED: DECONSTRUCTION AND RECONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY IN *LE CHEVALIER DE LA CHARRETTE* AND THE ROMANCE OF *TRISTRAN*

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Questions of identity are a central source of tension within the genre of the chivalric romances. Even among the large collective that is King Arthur's court, innumerable romances recount the tales of individual knights in search of individual glory and of some way to distinguish their names among the masses of the court and the group of knights across chivalric traditions while simultaneously bound by the confines of that same group and its structures. For most, such a feat is impossible and many knights, though they may earn a name in the course of a single romance, never truly break through the identity of the group enough to merit their individual space within the narrative and the memories of the readers. Yet, for a select few, their names live on past the end of the written word, as new authors pick up their stories, new readers recognize their names, and their deeds are known and remembered by their individual names among the Knights of the Round Table. For Lancelot and Tristan, such a creation of identity is possible through their interactions with an object-moment, which allows them to enter an alternate space where the paradox of chivalric identity is suspended, allowing the knights to pursue individual subversion while simultaneously upholding the group standard. In doing so, they create a name, a role, and a title for themselves that ensures that they will be remembered beyond the limits of written romances.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

From the earliest of ages, audiences have been enthralled by chivalric romances, by stories of knights in their shining armor performing heroic deeds and perhaps none more so than the romances of King Arthur and his knights of the Round Table. Picturing these knights, everyone can easily conjure up a list of characteristics to describe them, such as their devotion to chivalry and their heroic feats. But even among the group dynamic, there are individuals that stand apart: Gauvain, Galaad, Lancelot, and Tristan who remain more present in recollections of the tradition over other important knights such as Keu or Bédoier. Even though there are several easily recognizable knights within the sphere of chivalric romances, there is very little that separates one man from another, save perhaps for the story attached to them, each with strikingly similar –and one might even go so far as to say *identical*— characterizations. All are "good" knights, adhering to the standard of a chivalric figure that does not leave much room for variations and thus, together at Arthur's court, there is not much to separate any of the knights from one another. What descriptions of Gauvain could separate him from Galaad, if not their stories of the Green Knight and the Grail? Even amongst the most famed chivalric figures of legendary chivalric romances, there is an surprising lack of individualism in the identity of even the most distinguished of knightly figures.

How then, in such a setting that inhibits individualism by nature, does a knight separate himself from the chivalric group dynamic?   In considering two of the most recognizable knights of King Arthur's Round Table, Lancelot du Lac and Tristan, and the earliest romances in which they appear in French, *Le Chevalier de la Charrette* and *Tristram* respectively, a pattern emerges as to the formulation and validation of

their respective identities. Through Lancelot and Tristan's fall from grace in the eyes

of the traditional chivalric order of the court, their quests to define themselves as

individuals while simultaneously striving to reintegrate back into the collective

identity, both knights demonstrate a unique technique to discover and create their

individual place in the narrative. In these two romances, readers can witness the

presence of a sort of parallel rift, which allows knights to exist in an alternate

narrative. This allows them to simultaneously subvert the traditional rules of chivalry

while also upholding them in a new way, and leads to the creation of new archetypes

within the romance tradition as well as the formulation of individual identities for the

knights in question, cementing their longevity in the minds and memories of readers.

Both romances that will be considered in this thesis, *Le Chevalier de la Charrette*

[1]and the romance of *Tristran*[2]*,* feature knights who are essential to the corpus of

Arthurian romances and whose lasting identities are memorable even to modern

readers. Put another way, both Tristan and Lancelot are knights who are easily

recognizable for an element of their introductory romances: Lancelot for the *charrette*

and Tristan for the *philtre,* and both for adulterous relationships with Guinevere and

Iseult, respectively. However, in both of these romances, these very objects set the

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[1] For simplicity, I will be shortening this title to *Chevalier.*

[2] For this analysis, I will be dealing primarily with Béroul's version of the Tristan myth, *Tristran,* which is among the earliest French versions of the myth from the 12th century. Due to the fragmented nature of Béroul's *Tristran,* I will also draw upon Eilhart von Oberg's *Tristrant,* written in German but treated with a French translation, which is considered the earliest completed version of the Tristan and Iseult myth. It is likely that von Oberg drew from the same source material for the romance as Béroul, and thus both belong to the same tradition. As such, the missing sections of the Béroul version of the Tristran myth are largely believed to have been similar to the von Béroul myth and I will refer to the von Oberg version when a citation from Béroul is unavailable (see Lacy and Kalinke for further reading). To account for the various titles given to this romance tradition and for consistency with the modern name for the knight, I will refer to the combined romance of the two as *Tristan* or the *Tristan* romances.

knights apart from the others and follow similar patterns that create, destroy, then recreate this brand of identity that lives on. In considering the presence and absence of identity of a knight within the narrative, followed by the disruption and interruption in the narrative that their identity causes, it becomes clear that the creation of identity for both Lancelot du Lac and Tristan presents an interesting problem to the current readings of identity within the genre of the chivalric romance. With their early inclusion in the group of knights in a chivalric court, their subsequent break from that court and discovery of an identity away from court subverts the traditional identity of a knightly figure in a chivalric romance. However, this same subversion ultimately strengthens traditional identity in that each knight, though away from court and behaving in a way that stands in opposition to traditional chivalric rules, also upholds chivalric principals of honor, courtliness, loyalty, and martial ability. By upholding these principles, albeit as a knight performs the chivalric code under different parameters, a knight is able to eventually return to the court, never having broken his chivalric oath and earning himself a name that will last forever.

CHAPTER 2: PARADOXES OF IDENTITY

    Before discussing identity within the medieval genre of the chivalric romance, it is important to determine and frame the role that 'identity' plays within the genre. In this context, the concept of 'identity' refers to a knight's narrotological identity, demonstrated by a complex collection of roles that shape a knight's place within a romance narrative, especially in regards to how he relates himself to and within a group. His relation to the collective gives him prestige, and his separation from the group allows him the means of memorable branding to set himself apart and be remembered outside of the space of the narrative. It should be noted as well that this question of identity is not necessarily a new one, and that there have been numerous attempts to explain and analyze the complexities of identity. Existing scholarship is no stranger to questions of individuality and identity, especially because the notion of 'individual identity' is so hard to pin down. Within the genre, the role of individual identity, an identity that is separated from a group, is intrinsically and inseparably tied to the interconnections amongst the tradition of group identity. As Sarah Gordon describes in her article, "The Man with No Name: Identity in French Arthurian Verse Romance," the concept of individual identity within the genre of the chivalric romance is not the same thing as the modern concept, but rather "[is] about the construction or performance of both individual and group identities" (70) simultaneously. Within the narrative, individuality, or a sense of individual personhood and individual roles, holds no value without the group to support it, and primarily exists within the chivalric narrative as a way to advance the name, reputation, and standing of the group as a whole.

While this line of thinking is certainly not new to the study of chivalric romances, I believe that it suggests a homogeneous nature in all romances that are written about chivalric figures. Certainly, while the group identity is important within the scope of chivalric romances (after all, who is Lancelot if not a Knight of the Round Table and lover of Arthur's wife?), individual identity is still a challenge to the existing order of chivalry that presides over the romances. While individual identities and the deeds knights perform uphold and add to the prestige of the group, they are also fundamentally paradoxical and subversive as the actions of the individual are only acknowledgeable if they are separated from the group. Donald Maddox underlines this paradox in his book, *Fictions in Identity,* where he examines the components of the chivalric quest, describing how there is always a component of a quest that sparks the chivalric hero into action, which he calls an "awakening" (84) that is individual to each knight. Within the context of his own work, Maddox mostly confines this moment of awakening to being the reaction of some specular event, but his moment of "awakening" is very clearly defined as moment of crisis, a time of extreme duress where the hero is forced to act as an individual without any support from the group, where the hero is forced to recognize something about himself that only he is capable of. As such, Maddox's concept of the "awakening" could easily be applied to the idea of the quest where, due to external or internal crisis, a hero is forced into action and onto the path of self-discovery that no other knight, despite their adherence to the same collective, could ever undergo. And I argue that it is in these moments of crisis, these points of rupture within the narrative, that the progression of identity, both with the individual knight, but also within the group dynamic, takes place.

It is also in these moments of rupture within the narrative that the tensions between the need for individual identity and group assimilation become focally

important. For the majority of the literary body the French chivalric romance, the value of a knight is determined by the capacity to which he is able to adhere to the rules set by the court, representing the standard of chivalry and chivalric encounters. A worthy knight, then, is someone who is able to conform to this standard and mold himself to fit the group collective without deviation. With so many knights conforming to the same chivalric values, individual identity within such a conforming group then is determined by a knight's ability to surpass the levels of chivalry that is expected or considered possible by the court. Put another way, a notable chivalric figure is able to gain his own individual identity by first meeting the standard presented and maintained by the group to which he belongs and then "[surpass] all bounds of reasonable human endeavor and [encroach] on the fantastic and supernatural" in his exploits to be better at adhering to the structure than his comrades (Ramsey 45).

The best example of this means of achieving personal identity comes in the figure of Gauvain, King Arthur's nephew and heir, who is easily and objectively distinguishable as the finest of the Knights of the Round Table by the expectations of this pattern. Of all the knights that comprise the court at Camelot, Gauvain is the most present both in terms of his centralization in the narrative body as well as his influence upon other members of the court as "[there] are, in fact, more medieval romances devoted to Gauvain's exploits than to those of any other of Arthur's knights, including Lancelot [and] Tristan," (Heckel, Tristan) and he is often presented early in the romance as a standard by which all other knights should be compared. However, Gauvain is not an immediately recognizable figure once removed from the sphere of the romance corpus. While students of literature and medieval scholars are well familiar with Gauvain and his standing, prowess, and identity, it is knights like

Lancelot, the adulterous example of courtly love, and Tristan, who betrayed his king under the influence of a spell, who are easily recognizable outside of the narrative (see Heckel, <u>Tristan</u>). Clearly, to gain an identity within a chivalric romance, a knight must first conform. But in breaking down that perfection that comes with establishing the group identity, the individual can exist beyond the group that defines him, simultaneously adhering to the rules that govern his behavior within the group setting, and subverting it by distinguishing himself from group setting. In short, while greatness in the sphere of chivalry may be measured by the capacity to adhere to the group standard, it is the ability to deviate from those rules, whilst still following their essence, that makes a chivalric figure remarkable and memorable beyond the narrative sphere.

As such, questions of identity are constantly recurring due to their nature as a paradox of individuality that is only possible by adherence to a collective standard. With such questions consistently present within the genre of the chivalric romance, this fundamental tension can and must be considered as a crucial theme of the genre. Discussing this theme in "Magical Narratives: Romance as Genre," Fredric Jameson outlines the necessity of this tension between the individual and the social collective as the skeleton upon which other narrative devices are able to function and provide social guidance. The ongoing friction between the individual and group dynamic serves "the function of drawing the boundaries of a given social order and providing a powerful internal deterrent against deviancy or subversion" (Jameson 141). But if the bindings of the individual to the social order are so fundamental to maintaining order within the romance, why is the genre so intently focused on the conquests of the individual? Perhaps the answer to such a query lies in the duality of this ever-present paradox of the place of the individual within the group collective. While the tension

is always present between the two, the focus of the romance shifts along with the space that the individual occupies, praising his deeds when he is alone and his adherence to chivalry when he is among the group. In this way, the romance uses this tension both as a means to stop deviancy and maintain order, as Jameson suggests, but also to encourage a knight to become identifiable by his individuality, so long as he eventually comes back into the fold as a satisfying conclusion to his adventures outside of the group. Identity within the chivalric romance, then, becomes a balancing act of maintaining and adhering to the standards and qualities of the group collective, even when the individual knight is away. And such a balance must be found in such a way that upholds the qualities that will allow his reintegration to the group, while simultaneously embracing the space to seek his individual identity by subverting standards, not merely chivalric but also social and literary.

With such high tensions between the individual and group identity of the knights of the Arthurian romances, it seems only natural to wonder why one should see the need to read these two romances. The answer comes in the form of a shared particularity that begins the grand adventure of both of these knights, wherein they encounter a divisive and decisive object that alters their place within the narrative body of chivalric romances. However, it is not simply the object that is important in these romances, but the moment in which they occur and the subsequent impact of the secondary narrative space that results from the knights' interaction with the object in question. With the introduction of the physical object that creates these "object-moments," there is also an interruption to the narrative space of the romances wherein the knights enter into an alternate space that runs parallel to the narration of the romance. In these moments, which Lancelot encounters in climbing into the *charrette* and Tristan in drinking the *philtre,* both knights find themselves in a unique position

to explore their place, role, and thus their identity within their individual romances from a paradoxical and alternative narrative realm. Within the narrative rift of the object-moment, a knight remains bound to the same rules of the chivalric code that governed him before the object-moment, but has shifted his alignment of these values in a way that threatens to undercut the status quo.

As I will show in my analysis of both *Chevalier* and *Tristan*, the parallel narrative that is created for both Lancelot and Tristan by their respective interactions with object-moments within the narrative is crucial in understanding how a knight can simultaneously uphold a group dynamic *whilst undermining it* in order to create his own individual identity that distinguishes him from the group. At these object-moments, the moments when a knight and the object are present together, there is a convergence of the tensions that pull at a knight's identity These object-moments create –as evidenced by the lack of terminology to define this intersection of object, narrative moment, and identity —a new way of considering the concept of identity for an individual knight within a chivalric tradition.

CHAPTER 3: OBJECT-MOMENTS

In *Chevalier,* the role of the *charrette* is presented quite early on in the narrative and its symbolism is clearly defined on a number of levels. Firstly, and perhaps most importantly, there is the distinction of dual shame that accompanies the *charrette*, both from the loss of honor by the standards of chivalry and by the rejection of honor by society. From the perspective of Lancelot's shame as a *chevalier*, the use of a *charrette* demonstrates the failure of a knight's base purpose: to ride a horse. The most basic definition and function of a knight, a *chevalier,* is to be a mounted warrior, literally a fighter on a horse, a *cheval.* Without a mount, there is nothing to differentiate a knight from a common foot soldier[3]. In light of this, the fact that Lancelot is left stranded without a horse so early in the romance, "le chevalier, à pied, et seul, tout en armes, le heaume lace, l'écu à son cou, l'épée ceinte" (Troyes 320) and worse, forced into a *charrette* is a subversion of the most basic idea of the knight as a mounted warrior and posess the question of how a knight can perform the fundamental chivalric functions if he is unable to mount. Moreover, even after losing the option to ride a horse, mounting a *charrette* is an even further dishonor, since he also indicates that he cannot move on his own accord and must instead be carted (pun intended) about like an invalid. Thus, the sudden shift from a horse to *charrette* marks the loss of power and mobility for Lancelot, and such a fall is considered as a

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[3] Certainly, a savvy reader will be quick to point to a knight's honor, social standing, and wealth as things that separate him from a "common" soldier. However, the root of identity of the *chevalier* comes back to his mount. In order for a knight to have a mount, he must first come from a noble family with the time, money, and resources to allow a boy to train to become a knight. So, while those things do all differentiate a knight from his fellow soldiers, they are also the characteristics that allow the knight to be mounted.

mark of shame: "ce serait perdre honteusement au change/ que d'échanger un cheval contre une charrette ! » (389-390)

Outside of his inability to ride, Lancelot's use of and association with the *charrette* is a symbol of his unfitness, or at least his perceived unfitness, to be a part of chivalric, honorable society.   Even when the *charrette* is introduced in the narrative, driven by a *nain*[4] who tempts Lancelot into the ill reputation of the *charrette* and convinces him to ride along to save the queen, it is clear that the *charrette* is not a positive symbol in society:

> Les charrettes servaient à l'époque
>
> Au même usage que les piloris de nos jours.
>
> Dans chaque bonne ville,
>
> Où elles sont à présent plus de trois mille,
>
> Il n'y en avait qu'une en ce temps-là,
>
> Et elle était commune,
>
> Comme le sont nos piloris,
>
> Aux traitres ou aux assassins,
>
> Aux vaincus en champs clos
>
> Et aux voleurs qui ont pris
>
> Le bien d'autrui furtivement
>
> Ou qui s'en emparent de force sur les grands chemins.
>
> Tout criminel pris sur le fait
>
> Était placé sur la charrette. (321-334)

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[4] I have decided to use the word *nain* instead of "dwarf" here in order to maintain the contemporary sense of the *nain* as a trickster and a person who brings mischief within French literature, which the English equivalent does not evoke.

Once Lancelot climbs into the *charrette*, this new object to which he has attached himself brings him further shame within society. As he, the *nain*, and Gauvain on horseback, continue on their travels, people assume that Lancelot is to be punished as a criminal, "Dis-nous, nain, dis, toi qui le traines:/ de quel crime l'a-t-on trouvé coupable?" (414-415), since there is no other reason for a man such as him, a man who clearly holds (or held, as the people assume) the title of *chevalier* to be mounted on a *charrette*. As such, by associating himself with the *charrette*, Lancelot marks himself as incapable, both physically and honorably, as being a member of society and adhering to the chivalric values which are required of him.

For Lancelot, this object becomes integral to his very identity because it is what comes to define him, both in the sense of being a knight who can overcome all obstacles, but also in the presentation of himself as a knight who stands apart from the rest on a fundamental level. Even though Lancelot leaves behind his *charrette*, the object's influence continues to follow him throughout his adventures. Once he starts up again on his adventures, the most stereotypical being the rescue of the young damsel, he is immediately recognized as "le chevalier/ qui fut mené dans la charrette" (1666-7) even though he has long since left his *charrette*, even if not its reputation, behind him. Later on, when he goes to reclaim the queen, she rejects him initially because, even in the face of all his worthy deeds to rescue her, to prove himself a good knight worthy of her love, he failed her when he fell victim to the shame of the *charrette*. Even though he eventually climbed into the *charrette* out of love for the queen, the shame of it outweighed his love for her for a long enough space of time that she doubted him, that:

La charrette ne vous a-t-elle pas

> Fait honte et rempli de crainte ?
>
> Vous y êtes monté à contrecœur,
>
> Quand vous avez tardé l'espace de deux pas !
>
> Voilà pourquoi, en vérité, je n'ai voulu
>
> Ni vous parler ni vous regarder. (4482-4489)

By interacting with the *charrette*, both in climbing into it and hesitating to do so at first, Lancelot is intrinsically tied to its own reputation and connotations that haunt him long after his interactions with the object are finished. Through the continued mention of the *charrette*[5] even once its physical form is separated from Lancelot, the destruction that the object has done to the narrative space, by forcing a chivalric figure to veer away from the standard to which he *should* be adhering (both as a mounted warrior and a brave lover) and further tying itself to a knight as an honorific, follows him throughout the romance.

For all the damage that the *charrette* has done to Lancelot's character, it is also one of the most defining characteristics of his climb to glory. Even though readers are aware that Lancelot did not come to dishonor in a way that is traditional for knights in romances,[6] the introduction of the *charrette* into the narrative has negatively branded him to those around him in the narrative. And thus, when Lancelot is finally able to overcome the negative connotations and associations of the *charrette*, he emerges as an even stronger knight worthy of great respect*:*

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[5] I have chosen to use the French *charrette* here in place of the English "cart" to emphasize the importance of the title "Chevalier de la Charrette" that Lancelot will eventually carry.

[6] Normally, a knight commits some sin against chivalry, such as breaking a promise as seen in *Le Chevalier au lion* and *Lanval* when the title knights respectively fail to keep their oaths to their lovers.

> Celui qui était dans la charrette
>
> A gagné aujourd'hui l'honneur
>
> D'emmener avec lui, sans que notre maître s'y oppose,
>
> L'amie du fils de notre seigneur.
>
> Il faut bien, en vérité, disons-le,
>
> Qu'il pense qu'il y a du bon
>
> En lui, pour lui laisser emmener. (1817-1824)

Even with Guenièvre, Lancelot's determination to overcome the shame of the *charrette*, to stay his hand from suicide and demand forgiveness from his love for his faults, is what eventually allows for them to rekindle their relationship. Once Lancelot admits his shame to his lady, the two are intimate for the first and only time in the romance, clearly tying the triumph over the shame of the *charrette* as the quest to be won for Guenièvre's love, which will, evidently, become the cornerstone for Lancelot's identity in later cycles of the Lancelot myths and the feat for which many readers will recognize him today.

Thus, with the title of "le Chevalier de la Charrette" attributed to Lancelot, a title he later accepts onto himself, the presence of and attachment to the *charrette* creates an oxymoron for the titular knight. He is both an incredible knight, well known for his superb chivalry and martial might, but also tied to the complex, negative reputation that the *charrette* carries as a means to transport criminals and a symbol of the impotence of a knight. In taking his knightly title as both, *le chevalier* but also with the added moniker of *de la charrette*, Lancelot has taken on the tension of the romance and the pull between tradition and creation of archetype unto himself as his moniker. As the "Chevalier de la Charrette", he is the embodiment of the

tradition, which can only be gained by playing within the confines of the group identity of chivalric constructs that already exist, but also the symbol of societal ostracism and dishonor which separates him from this same group to which he claims to belong. This double identity underlines both the oxymoron of a knight in a *charrette*, but also the creation of a new archetype that defies the expectations of everything a knight should be, to become the most well-known and the greatest of them all, a new kind of knight in his own name and right.

The presence of the object-moment in *Chevalier* marks a very clear point of tension within the narrative, introducing the paradox of identity in a way that forces the reader to constantly wrestle with the role and place that Lancelot takes up. Similarly, in the *Tristan* romances, the object-moment is an important point in the creation and longevity of identity within the narrative. Despite never being named, the effects of the object-moment have always been a point of interest for scholars who have attempted to analyze the visibility of the identity paradox that comes to a head at the object-moment. Most scholars refer to these moments where the parallel space is created as "identity shifts," remarking on the changes in the role that Tristan plays that occur within the narrative from a variety of standpoints. These shifts in identity, however, are excellent examples of the appearance of an object-moment, although this object-moment emphasizes two changes that Tristan and Iseult undergo in their search for identity. The first change that occurs for Tristan as a chivalric knight emphasizes an aspect of the narrative that is rarely considered, when it comes to the *Tristan* romance: Tristan had a personal identity outside of his relation to Iseult and before his encounter with the object-moment. This moment of shifting identity within the romance cycle, or rather the emphasis that is placed upon this moment in scholarship, is especially interesting since the majority of the Tristan narrative (at

least in most versions of the romance) focuses quite heavily on the relationship between Tristan and Iseult and only a small fraction of the story focuses solely upon Tristan himself. The second, perhaps more thoroughly considered shift that comes out of the object-moment in this romance, as advocated by scholars like Molly Robinson Kelly in *The Hero's Place : Medieval Literary Traditions of Space and Belonging*, is the change in the roles for both members of the couple after they consume the love potion. This moment, Kelly argues, creates not only a change in the social roles of both Tristan and Iseult, but also a sort of brand, a commodification of the joining of the object-moment and the knight, on this moment in the narrative where Tristan and Iseult become bound to this narrative element. This moment is important to this analysis, as it marks the introduction of a new individual identity archetype for Tristan and Iseult wherein they create a branding of their identity through simultaneous acceptance and reversal of the narrative space. By adhering to the rules of chivalry asked of both of them – to be loyal, to be honest, to be honorable – but restacking the rules to be loyal to each other instead of their traditional lords, their interactions within the object-moment introduce an element that exceeds the limits of acceptable behavior and creates their own identity within the romance narrative.

Just as the *charrette* subverts the neat chivalric order of *Chevalier*, the *philtre* in the *Tristan* romances creates a narrative space of subversion in which the titular character(s)[7] are allowed to exist in multiple spaces at once. Just as the *charrette* was presented as being, in and of itself, a normal object with a designated place within the narrative, the *philtre*, despite its magical properties, is introduced as an object that

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[7] Tristan, for whom the romance is named, but also Iseult who is the other half of the identity created for the pair of them in the *Tristan* tradition. This will be discussed in more detail later.

plays within the rules and parameters set by the romance genre. Brewed by Iseult's mother (also named Iseult in later versions of the myth) to help her daughter love her future husband, the potion at first seems to be a means to coax a rebellious character back into the framework of her role in the narrative that she is hesitant to comply with. However, as with the *charrette*, the *philtre* comes with its own set of rules and implications within the narrative space:

> Le philtre était ainsi fait :
>
> Qui en avaient bu ensemble
>
> Ne pouvaient se séparer
>
> Pendant quatre ans.
>
> Même s'ils éprouvaient le désir d'y renoncer,
>
> Ils ne pouvaient s'empêcher de s'aimer
>
> De tous leurs sens
>
> Le temps qu'il vivraient.
>
> Pendant quatre ans
>
> Leur amour était si fort
>
> Qu'ils ne pouvaient rester séparés,
>
> Même une seule journée
>
> …
>
> Le boire faisait aussi
>
> Que l'un et l'autre tombaient malades et s'affaiblissaient
>
> Si pendant une semaine
>
> Ils ne pouvaient se parler,
>
> Et alors ils devaient mourir tous deux.
>
> Le *philtre* était préparé

De façon à avoir une telle puissance :

De cela vous pourrez vous rendre compte vous-mêmes[8]. (Oberg 2280-2299)

The rules of the *philtre*, clearly outlined in its introduction, leave precious little room for resistance for those who partake in the object. These rules, then, even though they are meant as a gift within the narrative, become a thing of wickedness for both Tristan and Iseult – "Il demanda qu'on lui en servit,/ C'était un signe funeste ! /Elle lui apporta le philtre" (Oberg 2345-2347) – because they undermine the very chivalric rules that the *philtre* had meant to uphold to begin with. The direct address to the reader here should be considered as another side-step to the narrative and a reinforcement of the object-moment created by the *philtre*. In detailing the rules of the *philtre* to the reader, Oberg is admitting that the rules he is putting forth (or perhaps that the romance has introduced) are not defaults within the rules of chivalric romance. However, in placing and rooting the *philtre* within the rules of the traditional narrative space –which is to say that they are originally introduced in way that is permissible (as a means to make a woman subject her lord and husband) –and then forcing the reader to acknowledge them makes them by extension accepted rules within the eyes of the reader. Thus, even when the object-moment created by the *philtre* eventually subverts the traditional roles that Tristan and Iseult *should* follow, it is still a permissible subversion grounded in the narrative.

As it is both rooted in and subversive of the rules of the narrative space, the *philtre* resuts in the creation of two parallel chivalric spheres. In the first, the traditional chivalric values reign, which both Tristan and Iseult have distinguished themselves in and proven their ability to adhere to. In the second, they adhere to the

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[8] The "vous" in this citation refers to the audience of the romance.

same rules, but in a reoriented fashion. The best illustration for this shift comes in what is easily one of the most notable features of chivalric quality: the bond between a knight and his lord. For any knight, the relationship between himself and his lord is an almost sacred bond, both for the practical aspect of the economics of the relationship, as it is the king who financially supports and cares for his knights, and for the deep bonds of fraternal love and loyalty that are shared between a knight and lord. In Tristan's case, his bond to Marke is both the familial bond of a nephew to his uncle but also that of a prince to his king. Indeed, the bond between these two men is so strong that Marke "le consid[érait] comme son fils" (Oberg 1341) and intended to bypass his own duties as king to marry and sire an heir in order to pass along his rule and kingdom to Tristan. Tristan's betrayal, then, of his uncle/pseudo-father/lord/and king, in committing adultery with Marke's wedded wife is unforgivable several times over. By taking Marke's wife as a lover, he is undermining the most sacred of bonds in the chivalric narrative, and indeed perhaps even in medieval society.

However, Tristan should not be understood to be a bad vassal and knight just because of his betrayal of Marke, because Tristan, even under the effects of the *philtre,* remains loyal to a new lord: Marke's wife. The object-moment again illustrates the simultaneous subversion and upholding of chivalric values: Tristan maintains his adherence to the rules of chivalry, but exhibits a shift away from Marke to Iseult. As such, the object-moment serves in creating an oxymoron of honor and dishonor that exist together in the same person through the use and connection to an object-moment that defines their story. The fundamental oxymoron of these two versions of Tristan existing at once, especially within the same romance, becomes the crux of the tension represented in this romance, and thus the existence and influence of the *philtre* allows Tristan (and Iseult) to exist in two narrative spheres at once: they

both partake in the cardinal sin of chivalry, betraying one's lord, in order to follow the same rule in another narrative rift, this time with Iseult as the new lord with Tristan as her knight.

Yet, for all the trouble that the *philtre* creates within the narrative space for Tristan and Iseult, causing them to live in an alternate rift of chivalric values that both supports the parallel tradition and undermines it at the same time, it is the existence of the *philtre*, with its rules and consumption, that ultimately fuses the two parallel versions of chivalry back together into one in the final lines of the romance. Once Tristan and Iseult both die of a broken heart,[9] Marke is finally made aware of their love and the thing that has caused it. Upon hearing their fate, Marke is quick to accept the lovers back into his favor and the embrace of the courtly standard they had adhered to in the beginning:

> Dieu le sait bien, j'aurais aimé
>
> Toujours garder amicalement
>
> La reine Isalde
>
> Et mon neveu Tristant,
>
> Pour que l'héros
>
> Restât constamment auprès de moi.
>
> De l'avoir chassé,
>
> J'en aurai à tout jamais grand regret.
>
> Ce fut également grande folie de leur part

---

[9] It should be noted that they do not die from the rules of the *philtre*, which states that they would die if they did not speak to each other for a week, but rather from Tristan's belief that Iseult did not love him anymore and her subsequent heartbreak at finding his corpse. In the end, it was their love for each other, not the *philtre* itself, that caused their deaths.

De ne pas m'avoir dit

Qu'ils avaient bu

Le philtre funeste

Qui les fit s'aimer contre leur volonté

D'un si fort amour.

Ah ! douce reine !

Et Tristant, preux d'exception !

Je vous donnerais pour toujours gens et pays

Et tout mon royaume

En propre

Pour que vous fussiez encore en vie ! (Oberg 9478-9497)

As the *philtre's* rules clearly state, the potion's consumption takes away both Tristan and Iseult's free will – "il leur semble que, sans l'avoir voulu,/ il leur fallait ou s'aimer/ ou perdre la raison" (Oberg 2354-2356) —and creates an ambiguity to their morality. Whereas they had both been established as good chivalric figures before consuming the *philtre*, Tristan as a good knight and Iseult as a good princess and dutiful woman,

La dame commençait à avoir grande honte

D'aimer en si peu de temps,

Le beau Tristan.

Lui aussi, les liens de l'amour

Lui ôtaient les forces de vie. (Oberg 2369-2372b)

As such, the *philtre* gives them both a cheat out of the situation: there is an understanding that even as he sins against his title and she sins against hers, it is

because they are both the victims of an outside influence acting upon them, not of

their own volition. Tristan is both defined and liberated by the object-moment.

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For both Lancelot and Tristan, the object-moment is thus a means of

separating himself from the group identity to which he belongs. This separation

allows for a kind of rift in which each knight can find his respective individual

identity, both within the narrative and within the larger body of chivalric romances.

For Lancelot, the object-moment of the *charrette* allows for a respite from the group

dynamic and a parallel narrative where he is rejected from the group to find his own

identity. Within this space, as I will show, Lancelot redefines the dynamics of

chivalry to create his own commodification as a chivalric archetype to establish and

solidify his place, his name, and his identity within the Arthurian romances. Within

the doubled narrative created by his object-moment, Tristan constructs his own

individual identity and forges a brand to his own story to establish himself within the

tradition.

CHAPTER 4: CREATION OF A NEW NARRATIVE SPACE THROUGH THE OBJECT-MOMENT

In the early lines of *Chevalier*, Lancelot is introduced as a nameless, identity-less knight, unbound to any other literary tale or tradition. Whereas other knights are quickly named and titled, such as Keu as a seneschal and Gauvain as "Monseigneur" and the nephew of the king, Lancelot's distinct lack of both name and title poses two issues with his place within the narrative sphere and the larger narrative space. Firstly, within the realm of the chivalric knights that surround Arthur, Lancelot is clearly unknown. When Gauvain encounters him in his quest to rescue the queen, he does not seem to recognize the unknown hero, referring to him solely as a "chevalier," untitled and without a clear place in relation to Gauvain himself as well as the other knights who form the collective standard that he represents. And yet, simultaneous to this void of identity, there is a fundamental understanding that Lancelot, though unnamed and unknown to the knights, is a present member of Arthur's court. Even though Gauvain is not able to recognize him and knowledge of his place at court is not immediately known within the narrative, the combination of Lancelot's knowledge of Guenièvre's abduction, the speed in his pursuit of her person, and the later revelation that he is the queen's secret lover imply that Lancelot is no stranger to King Arthur's court, even if he holds no individual identity within it, as of yet. In being situated this way within the court, Lancelot is both present and absent within the narrative sphere and the collection of mythos that surrounds Arthur's court. This establishes him, from the beginning of the text, as someone who is caught between conflicting ideals in every part of his chivalric identity: he is both worthy and unworthy, known and unknown, titled and unnamed, and an individual without identity. In existing between these two extremes, Lancelot is poised in between the

tensions of the constructions of identity, both without the support and validation of the group and also without the individual merits to earn a name outside of it.

It is in this grey zone that the formulation of Lancelot's courtly identity, and thus his identity as an individual figure and later archetype within the romantic tradition, can take place. Instead of a recreation and reformulation of Lancelot's identity after some grave error on his own part, Lancelot's tale begins with no immediate fault of his own, but rather the failings of King Arthur and his court. During the scene leading up to Guenièvre's abduction, Lancelot is absent from the court, innocent in any blame that might be cast. The king, however, the head of the court and the pinnacle of chivalry, is not so lucky. Blinded by the necessity to abide by the standards of his court and chivalry, Arthur rises to Méléagant's bait in taunting the honor of his knights, and in doing so causes the crisis that sets the romance into motion:

> Roi, s'il se trouve à ta cour un seul chevalier
>
> à qui tu ferais assez confiance
>
> pour oser lui donner la charge
>
> de mener la reine à ma suite
>
> dans ce bois là-bas ou je vais,
>
> je m'engage à l'y attendre
>
> et à te rendre tous les prisonniers
>
> qui vivent en exile sur mes terres,
>
> s'il est capable contre moi de la conquérir
>
> et s'il réussit à la ramener. (Troyes 70-79)

And yet, it is not Arthur who is called upon to answer for his faults, indicating that it is not a personal, individual fault, but rather a failing of the court as a whole. Such a failing suggests a deeper, perhaps more troublesome criticism of the narrative sphere that makes up Arthurian chivalric romances. Should an individual fail in their chivalric standing, which is an understandable catalyst of the ensuing adventure of the romance, he need only undergo a form of chivalric trial in order to regain his honor, standing, and good name. Such a failing, while certainly not a desirable event to come to pass, is not outside of the accepted course of the constant cycle of rise and fall that comprises the genre of the chivalric romance.[10] Each knight, in order to continue the chain of individual romances that make up the collection of his storyline, will repeatedly fail in some way, only to better himself and return to his former state. However, this individual identity of any particular knight, constantly in a state of flux before ultimately settling down into the stability of the court setting, is afforded a certain liberty that this same courtly body is not permitted. As the standard, a failing on the part of the court, especially of the king (who himself is the ultimate pinnacle of the chivalric standard of Arthurian tradition) represents a monumental upheaval of the existing tradition. Whereas the individual identities that comprise the court are expected to change, continually testing, proving, and glorifying the chivalric tradition both created and upheld by the collective identity that they play into, the group identity as a whole very rarely changes.

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[10] Here, K.S. Whetter touches on this balancing act of the individual court within the scope of the argument for the redefinition of the genre of the Medieval Romance – "the romance hero is motivated by more private ideals" –but at the same time plays into larger implications of socio-political structures, especially within the Arthurian romances with "knights working and fighting together under a great king like Arthur rather than for their own personal notions of honor" (61-62).

Lancelot, then, in coming to rectify the king's mistake in allowing his wife to be taken, finds himself at a focalized point of tension between upholding the group identity that is under scrutiny within the narrative and creating an individual identity that subverts the court. His identity and place within this singular text are established by comparison to that which already exists outside of this individual romance. He is presumed to be known prior to the commencement of this romance, and thus is named and repeated while he himself remains nameless. The focus of the romance shifts instead from the creation of a "new and improved" Lancelot and instead becomes the creation of the "new and improved" Knight of the Round Table. Without any personal identity to rectify, or really any defined or signified personal identity at all, Lancelot's role within the narrative tradition of chivalric romances is not capable of being replaced, and rather his introduction serves to subvert preexisting aspects of chivalric society. His subsequent acceptance into that group serves to rectify, and thus uphold, the new group identity. The role of "the knight of the cart" shifts the narrative to the creation of an individual identity, through a nameless knight who creates his own independent identity that can hold its own place in a group collective precisely because it is not based upon the foundation of the group collective even though his identity ultimately upholds it. Thus, it is this formulation of a new identity that is separated from the group that creates an archetype that changes the whole trajectory of the tradition.

As Maddox has suggested, and is certainly the case in both of the romances under discussion here, in order to build Lancelot's identity within this text, there must first be a moment of crisis, a failure of an individual, and a deconstruction of that corrupted identity before reconstruction and a renewed, improved identity can be created. In Lancelot's case, as he has no established personal identity to destroy, it is

instead the collective identity to which he belongs, as an unnamed member of

Arthur's court, that must be shown to be corruptible, to fail, and then to be

deconstructed. From Lancelot's first appearance, he can be assumed to be

comparable to Gauvain,. However, even as Lancelot and Gauvain embark on the

same quest, ~~but~~ one is significantly more successful than the other. This underlines

the ongoing tensions present between the greatness achieved by adhering to the rules

of chivalry and the individuality that comes from standing apart from the established

traditions of chivalry. Soon after Lancelot's introduction to the story and his

involvement in the quest to rescue the queen, he struggles to keep up with Gauvain.

Whether due to his inability to compare to Gauvain's gallantry or simply his frenzied

state to rescue his love, Lancelot quickly reveals himself incapable of carrying out the

quest before him as things go wrong every step of the way. At first, Lancelot only

stops to borrow Gauvain's spare horse as "mon cheval est tout en eau/ et dans un tel

état qu'il n'est plus d'aucune aide" (280-281), but when Gauvain catches up to him,

the loaned horse is dead. Even though the scene gives early hints of Lancelot's

incredible capabilities, especially since he is surrounded by " toute évidence une

grande bataille/ [qui] avait pris place entre plusieurs chevaliers/ et il regretta,

mécontent,/ de ne pas y avoir lui-même été » (310-313), the loss of his/Gauvain's

horse is an important loss of power to his person. Upon receiving a new horse from

Gauvain, and riding ahead, Lancelot appears to be preparing to outperform his

counterpart, but promptly leads his horse, a symbol of his attachment to the

established narrative sphere with Gauvain's influence, to death, effectively killing the

very symbol that makes him a knight as well as the representation of his attachment to

the court. Even as Lancelot's role, image, and identity have been knocked down from

that of a knight to that of a common soldier at this point, it is not enough to

completely destroy and thus separate him from the connection that ties and confines him to the collective of the chivalric figure represented by Gauvain.

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In the *Tristan* romances, there is once again a clear breakdown of the standard chivalric figure that necessitates the encounter with and growth within the object-moment. In considering Tristan's characterization before his encounter with the object-moment we can see the image of him as an individual without any outside influences upon his person, character, role within chivalric society, and thus identity. Before meeting and beginning his affair with Iseult, Tristan presents himself as an ordinary knight in every respect. Not only is he an acceptable knight by means of his lineage, as a son to King Rivalin of Lohenois and nephew to King Marke of Cornwall, but he also performs admirably from a young age to make a name, and knightly title, for himself from his place within the group dynamic:

> Le jeune garçon acquit grande réputation
>
> Grâce à sa vaillance,
>
> Que d'accroître son renom :
>
> Soir et matin
>
> Il ne s'en abstenait pour rien au monde.
>
> C'est ainsi que le jouvenceau grandit
>
> Dans l'honneur et hautement prisé
>
> A la cour du roi Marke,
>
> Tant et si bien qu'il fut apte
>
> A recevoir l'épée
>
> Quand il voudrait,

Comme c'était son droit. (Oberg 340-350b)

Even into his adult life, Tristan continues to adhere to the standards of chivalry, becoming "un homme hautement estimé pour ses qualités/ toutes les preuves de valeur qu'il donna/ dans les tournois et dans les combats/ lui valurent des éloges loin à la ronde," (Oberg 1334-1336) and performs amazing, chivalric deeds as he defeats powerful enemies, slays dragons, and wins a princess' hand in marriage. However, these deeds are not inherently special or defining of his identity within a larger scope, as (although certainly impressive) his feats do not set him apart, being neither unprecedented nor remarkable in contrast to the other romances. Evidently, there is very little that marks him as memorable within the early parts of the text, even as he carries out incredible feats of chivalry and military prowess; he is rather unidentifiable within the larger scope, which is the say group collective of the chivalric setting, especially to the elite grouping that is King Arthur's court.

I mention this comparison to King Arthur's court because, in many ways within the context of the Tristan romances, Tristan is a similar parallel to Gauvain, held up as a standard of chivalry and regarded as the best of his lord's knights –"on le nommait en tête des meilleurs/ à travers toute la Cornouailles" (Oberg 1336-1336b) – raised from a noble lineage, as a nephew to a king, and so greatly renowned as a standard of chivalric values that he is preferable to his king's own children as an heir:

Le roi avait tant d'affection pour lui

Que par amour pour lui il ne voulut pas

Prendre d'épouse.

Il forma le projet

De le considérer comme son fils

Et de soumettre à son pouvoir

Son royaume. (Oberg 1337-1343)

And yet, even Tristan, in all of his goodness and chivalric merit, does not hold a seat within King Arthur's court, much less a named position. Although not immediately apparent from the onset of the romance, all three early versions of the *Tristan* clearly set him within the same narrative sphere as King Arthur and his court and, later on, this same court is brought to Cornwall to serve as judges in Iseult's trial. In doing so, this underlines two things in regards to Tristan's role and identity within the romance. Firstly, by the simple presence of the court in the narrative, even when they are not in Cornwall, there is a hierarchical shift done unto Tristan. Even for all his heroics, he is still not an active member of King Arthur's court, whether that be his exclusion from its ranks or his own willful separation from it to serve his king and subsequently remain with Iseult, and thus his status within the group dynamic of his knightly brothers is set apart from the other named knights that make up the corpus of chivalric romances. Secondly, this timing of Arthur's arrival marks the reason for the involvement of his court specifically to defend *Iseult*, and not Tristan, who has been exiled from court. While Arthur and his knights do ultimately defend and uphold Tristan's honor, it is only as an extension of their defense of Iseult's identity as a faithful queen.

Compared to his original state of chivalric standing at the beginning of the romance, the role that Tristan fills after drinking the *philtre*, is at once the same and realigned within the scope of the narrative. While Tristan remains the same capable chivalric figure as in the beginning of the romance, his involvement with Iseult and the subsequent shift of the narrative away from his "knightly" actions toward his

affair with her signals that, having met the basis of the standard to be a good knight, his individual identity, that which will mark him as an individual both within the romance and within the larger group dynamic, revolves around her. Put another way, the reality that there is an identity shift, a realignment of his role within the group collective, when he comes to seek Iseult, suggests that his relationship to her is a catalyst that sparks some kind of change in who he is as an individual, but also in how he in turn relates to the group dynamic. Through the relationship that Tristan forges with Iseult as a result of the *philtre*, Tristan also creates a memorable identity for himself through his relationship, as the majority of the narrative of the romances of *Tristan* are merely concerned with their relationship, and not his life previous to her. It is through their bond within the object-moment that the relationship between Tristan and Iseult and their combined identity becomes a subversion to the existing chivalric order and their means to individual, or perhaps dual, identity.

CHAPTER 5: FORGING IDENTITY IN THE OBJECT-MOMENT

The resulting tension of Lancelot's place within the group identity being formed in an untraditional way is again illustrated fairly soon in his quest when he finds himself in the future cemetery. Upon his arrival, Lancelot is met by the future tombs of Arthur's knights, marked with "les noms de ceux/ qui reposeraient dans ces tombes" (1861-1862). In the graveyard, Lancelot finds the tombs of many gallant knights, even those who are not part of Arthur's court, all of them named. In this image, the reader is confronted with the connected nature of individual and group identity within the romantic tradition as each individual name upon a gravestone holds its value as both an individual knight worthy of glory and renown but also the collective identity that gives value to the individual being a part of such a group resting place. This scene serves as a subtle image that recalls the beginning of the romance where, once again, Lancelot is implicitly shown to be in between worlds concerning his identity. As was the case in the court, he clearly has a place in this graveyard, worthy of a position among the elites of chivalric society and a place in this group collective, but not worthy enough to merit his own name and identity. And the subtlety of this repeated idea reinforces that the tension of this romance does not lie in the reinvention of Lancelot's identity, after all he has yet to commit a sin against chivalric values. Instead, the crux of the issue of identity in this scene and ultimately this romance is the establishment of his name in relation to the group from this position of being superior to his fellow knights without earning his named identity by means of the established order of being an outstanding example of the existing chivalric qualities to such super-human extremes.

Once again faced with this tension and without any sort of solution to the problem of his identity, Lancelot's name is not visible upon his own gravestone amongst the groups of named tombs. Instead, his tomb is inscribed with a prophecy of his future acts, how he will save a people that no one else can save:

Celui qui lèvera

Cette dalle par lui seul

Délivrera tous ceux et celles

Qui sont en prison au pays

Dont nul ne sort, ni serf ni noble,

A moins d'y être né.

Personne n'en est jamais revenu.

Les étrangers y sont retenus prisonniers,

Mais les gens du pays vont et viennent

A leur guise, pour entrer ou sortir. (1900-1909)

It is clear that Lancelot is being set apart from the other knights here. He is not comparable to those around him, as his future grave does not yet hold his name, only the actions that will define him as a knight and a chivalric figure. The action, in this case, precedes the name, implying that he will fill the role of a new kind of knight, another individual identity that is not forged from the existing archetype. However, Lancelot's foretold deeds have not come to pass yet, and as he has no concrete deeds to define his person as a separate being from the court, he remains. Even after performing an impossible deed of strength, not unlike Arthur's feat of pulling the sword from the stone, of having his mythological future foretold on the future graves of King Arthur's knights, among which his grave is the most beautiful and splendid,

Lancelot still refuses to give his name to the monk who begs to know. Instead, Lancelot simply declares himself to be lowly and unnamed: "je suis un chevalier" (1929). In doing so, even Lancelot's adherence to chivalric and courtly identity is shown to be comparable to those of Arthur's finest knights, indeed even surpassing them, with his place in the cemetery with such a magnificent tomb, and his individual identity is set apart from them as well, as he is still unnamed and defined solely by his deeds.

Within the confines of the graveyard, it is certainly striking that Lancelot's name is purposefully absent, markedly missing from his own spoken language, as he refuses to give his name up in order to identify himself. Just as importantly, his name has been struck from the narrative space of fate. Clearly, Lancelot's unwillingness to reveal his identity is a continuously present aspect of the story, again highlighting the interdependence of individual and group identity as he, knowing his name, will not allow himself to be named by others until he feels that he deserves his identity and recognition by rescuing the queen. However, in this scene in the cemetery, the matter of identity transcends Lancelot's personal adherence to the recognized patterns of gaining identity and goes beyond any personal emotions or rationalities that he may give, as the supernatural guidance that is intrinsically tied to the Arthurian narrative has not made space to name him yet.

The inseparable connection to the larger context of the romance tradition, especially in the face of Lancelot's distance from the courtly and his role in rectifying its failings, underscores the importance of the means by which Lancelot's identity is finally revealed. From the absence of Lancelot's name from the graveyard, both in vocal acknowledgement from his own person and within the group setting of a name

on a gravestone, it becomes clear that the withholding of Lancelot's name is an honor

to be earned from the greater tradition. Even within the individual space that Lancelot

creates to search for and create his own identity within the object-moment, he cannot

escape the irrefutable basis of the identity paradox of the romance genre: personal

identity is worthless for a knight without the validation of the group. The issue of

being unnamed cannot be easily explained as solely personal choice from Lancelot's

perspective, as some sort of need to prove himself, but rather a duality of the need for

individual identity along with the recognition and acceptance into the larger group of

the literary corpus. If Lancelot is to gain a place within the group identity, both of

Arthur's court and within the written sphere of the chivalric romance, it will not be of

his own volition, but because he successfully returns to and is (re)accepted by the

group from which he was separated, signifying that the tradition has made room for

him.

And indeed, when Lancelot's name is finally revealed, it is not by Lancelot's

own voice or volition, but rather by the queen in response to the pleas of a young

lady, a tactic which Lancelot had resisted in the past. While witnessing the first battle

between Lancelot and Méléagant, Guenièvre is swayed by the claims that "si vous le

savez,/ le nom de ce chevalier,/ afin de lui venir en aide" (3652-3654) and she is

ultimately the means by which the name "Lancelot" enters the narrative realm for the

first time:

> Dans ce que vous me demandez,
>
> Mademoiselle, fait la reine,
>
> Je ne vois rien d'hostile
>
> Ni de méchant, tout au contraire.

Lancelot du Lac, c'est le nom

Du chevalier, que je sache. (3656-3661)

With her justification that she sees no malice or hostility in the demand of the lady, Guenièvre acknowledges his worthiness within the context of the court by vocalizing the merits that make him worthy of the desire of another member of the court to save him. Furthermore, the emphasis placed upon "knowing" the name of the unidentified knight signifies an acceptance into a group identity. By voicing the name "Lancelot," he is granted an individual identity that sets him apart from the group, but by knowing and acknowledging his name, he is accepted into the group. As Ramsey describes, "they want the name –which means they want the man himself" (Ramsey 55), and individual identity is once more tied to the memory and recognition of a name.

Simultaneously, the physical location where Lancelot's name is revealed, both to the reader and the literary corpus, is a challenge to the existing tradition. The setting of the tournament, with its mélange of violence, anonymity, individual, and group, as Gordon suggests, is the perfect atmosphere where "identity is transformed, the familiar becomes strange, and the known unknown" (69). Within the space of the tournament, the figure of the unknown knight, hidden behind his armor and colors, is, for a while at least, nameless. In the case of the simple controlled battlefield of Lancelot and Méléagant, the convention described by Gordon is reversed, and where a named knight dons anonymity to prove himself through victory on the battlefield, Lancelot (at this point nameless) becomes named mid-combat and the recognition "en lui grandissent la force et l'audace,/ car Amour le soutient sans reserve" (Troyes 3720). It is in this space and combat that Lancelot both meets the requirements for meriting his own individual identity and name within the court and visibly reverses

them entirely. This field of combat provides Lancelot a public space, before a pseudo-court in the place of Arthur's court, where he can prove himself in a standard fashion before the court (as captured prisoners within Méléagant's fey court) and accept his identity while they accept him as well. Furthermore, his name is "bestowed" upon him by the queen, or at the very least allowed into the narrative space, which signifies the acceptance of the court, both the one in front of which is he is performing his role of a knight and the human, Arthurian court that the queen metonymically embodies.

However, all of this stands to subvert the standard: by placing this tournament away from Arthur's court, there is a level of reversal of the standard conventions of the tournament. Lancelot has gained an identity through the alternative conduit of the *reine*,[11] who is independent of the current corruption of Arthur's court, and herself a victim of the current negligence, reinforcing once more the alternative means by which identity has been gained for this knight. This reversal emphasizes the tensions of identity that exist within Lancelot. He has followed the pattern of gaining identity in the chivalric world, as adhering to the group standard and then receiving a title within it, but he does so in a way that is subtly but fundamentally in contradiction to the pattern set forth by the tradition of the literary corpus.

This point is ultimately cemented by the ending of the romance, wherein the closing lines permanently tie the identity of Lancelot to that of the object-moment that allowed for his exploration of identity in his very name: "ici prend le roman de Lancelot/ de la charrette" (7113-7114). With this ending, there is once again the

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[11] A common device in chivalric romances where a female character is referred to by her social status, which can be considered as a sort of placeholder for her name in the romance space.

solidification of the progression, from an unknown man to a monikered knight, that

Lancelot has undergone to claim his name. However, in the final moment of

branding, the name of "Lancelot" replaces "le chevalier," and his true name replaces

the phrase which had once been a placeholder for individual identity and signified that

he had been one among the many and not yet worthy of identification. Now, with the

replacement of "le chevalier" with Lancelot, his name becomes synonymous with his

chivalry and the moniker of "de la charrette" becomes an honorific title. What had

been a sense of shame at the beginning of the romance (a knight without a mount, a

dishonored man in a cart who cannot even walk) now marks him as a worthy knight.

As such, Lancelot doesn't follow the same pattern as a Gauvain figure (being known

and notable for following the standards so well that he takes on an inhuman level), but

instead gains identity through the separate means by which he gained that same

identity. His name and moniker mark him as included and excluded, but this time he

is set apart by the fact that he is a knight who operates both within and outside of the

standard. This creates a blank slate on which a new identity, a new archetype, can be

created within the narrative.

Furthermore, this ending to the romance also solidifies the ongoing influence

of the object-moment beyond the limitations of the single romance of *Chevalier*.

With the creation of the Lancelot identity through the object-moment from this

romance, Chrétien de Troyes fashions a character who not only possesses an

individual identity, but does so by a means that allows him to infuse his identity with

the same identity paradox that defines the genre of the romance, ensuring the

longevity of his name throughout the rest of chivalric literature. Incidently, it should

be noted that, although Chrétien de Troyes wrote the majority of the romance and is

responsible for the creation of Lancelot and his development in the romance, he died

before he could finish the romance and thus did not write the ending of *Le Chevalier de la Charrette*, which was finished by another author. As such, within a single text, we see how the formation of identity is stretched beyond a single romance. The idea of Lancelot as a reinvention of archetype through the device of his naming spans across multiple authors now, but ultimately culminates with the same tension (of the individual identity and the group) being embodied within a single figure as he reverses the standard patterns of identity that existed at the time in chivalric tradition, thus setting himself apart not only as an individual within the group context of chivalric order but also as a new archetype of knighthood and knightliness that defies the expectations of the existing tradition.

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Similarly, this rift of the object-moment allows for the reformulation of identity for Tristan and Iseult. As I have previously discussed, the creation of a parallel, alternative textual space as a result of the object-moment allows for a shift in priority from Marke to Iseult, allowing for the couple to subvert the traditional lines of chivalric loyalty yet simultaneously uphold them for another. Within this doubling of themselves, both of them find an opportunity to recreate an identity that is not tied to any group tradition. However, unlike the individual identity that Lancelot is able to create for himself in *Chevalier*, Tristan and Iseult are intrinsically tied together by the *philtre,* which binds them together in love but also in dependence in the narrative. Once Tristan and Iseult encounter the object-moment, the quest that Tristan undergoes to prove his valor, his chivalric value, no longer center around his uncle, who should be his lord, but rather around Iseult. In place of slaying a dragon, Tristan's grand

feats become those of trickery, of leaping over flour to avoid detection and clever

wordplay to wriggle out of lying:

> or escoutez ce que je jure,
>
> …
>
> qu'entre mes cuises n'etra home,
>
> fors le ladre qui fist soi some,
>
> qui me porta outre les guez,
>
> et li rois Marc mes esposez. (Béroul 4199-4208)

While Tristan does still perform "knightly" feats of great valor and prowess, they are

all almost exclusively performed away from Iseult and focused toward the end of the

romance once the *philtre* wears off.[12] As such, they should be considered as elements

of the traditional narrative which Tristan is simultaneously a part of, even as he

engages in the search for individual identity within the object-moment afforded to him

by the *philtre*.

Furthermore, Tristan's identity is marked by the ambiguity that comes with his

placement within the object-moment. Throughout the narrative, the reader of the

romance is acutely aware of the paradox and tension of the object-moment as Tristan

is perpetually honorable to Iseult and dishonorable to all other aspects of chivalry,

constantly wondering if he is justified in his actions or not. In fact, there is a striking

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[12] This appears to be somewhat unique to Béroul's version of the romance and is not

popular in later versions of the romance. However, this quality of the *philtre* poses as

an interesting point of consideration to when, and if, an object-moment ends in a

narrative.

absence of Tristan's character as a chivalric figure in the later parts of the romance, both in his physical presence due to his exiles, but also in his donning of disguise as a leper (Béroul 3715-3740) following Iseult's ordeal at court. In both of these cases, one is struck by the deviation that Tristan exhibits from the traditional chivalric figure, prompting again a reconsideration of the identity that is formed through this object-moment. His identity emerges as not Tristan the knight, as one may expect, but rather as Tristan the lover. The Tristan of the early pages of the romance is no longer suited to the identity that he has fashioned within the object-moment, as Iseult has no need of a militant knight to serve her, only a man who will love her and who will be bound to her for eternity. As such, the identity that Tristan forges throughout the romance is different from that of the other knights of the Round Table. It is distinct, deviant, and defiant, but also upholds the chivalric values of honor, loyalty, and valor that are necessary to hold the title of a knight in the group dynamic. As such, Tristan creates an individual identity that serves as a new archetype and sets him apart from the rest of the group, cementing his place as a memorable knight in Arthurian romance.

In addition to Tristan's individual identity being branded by this object-moment that accompanies the *philtre*, it should be noted that both of the versions of this romance that are considered here, as well as every version of the romance until Bédier's *Le Roman de Tristan et Iseult*, are similarly titled with only the name *Tristan* in some form or another (*the Romance of Tristan*, *Tristran*, *Tristrant*, etc.) but all exclude the name of one of the most important figures of the romance cycle: Iseult herself. While it is certainly true that a reason for the absence of narrative surrounding solely Tristan can be explained by the fragmented nature of the Béroul, the similar limit of Tristan's individual story away from Iseult in von Oberg's version suggests instead that despite

Tristan being the titular character of the romance, neither narrative seems to place much value on his individual identity. I believe that this lack of individual presence in the narrative is due to the fact that, again much like Gauvain, Tristan is a worthy and respectable knight within the group dynamic of the court, but he is unable to distinguish himself from this same group and thus lacks an individual identity and is assimilated to the court and only distinguishable based on his family relation as the nephew of Marke. However, as we have seen with the *philtre*, Tristan is not alone in being influenced by an object-moment within the narrative, as Iseult also shares in his interaction with the *philtre* and finds herself in a parallel rift of upholding and subversion. Like Tristan, Iseult is subject to an alternate version of herself wherein she displays loyalty to her lover, but not the *right* lover. She, too, recognizes that she is failing in her execution of traditional chivalry in her loyalty to her husband in her love for Tristan: "Il ne m'aime pas, ne je lui,/ Fors par un herbé dont je bui/ Et il en but. Ce fu pechiez" (Béroul 1413-1416) but is honorable all the same in maintaining that love within the object-moment.

Moreover, this presence (and indeed necessity) of Iseult within this alternate narrative further highlights the existence and necessity to consider the object-moment within the *Tristan* romances. Iseult is in a very specific position within the narrative, even more privileged than Tristan, in that she shares her name with several characters outside of the object-moment that both she and Tristan are trapped in throughout the *Tristan* romances. Some scholars, such as Kelly, call this use of multiple women with the same name of *Iseult* a "doubling" of female identity. Essentially, this argument presents the idea that the name *Iseult* is so present in the narrative because it serves as a representation of the conflict that plagues Tristan's character. On the one hand, he has his deep, magical, forced, and immoral love affair with Iseult the Blonde that places him, and his honor as a knight, in a questionable situation. On the other, he has

Iseult of the White Hands, who represents the life he could have led, and does indeed try to lead once separated from Iseult the Blonde. Another scholar, Kristine K. Sneeringer, underlines this issue further in *Honor, Love, and Isolde in Gottfried's Tristan* wherein she claims that the name Iseult appears nearly 400 times in Gottfried's version of the Tristan mythos, requiring the use of a moniker to differentiate between Iseult la reine, Iseult aux mains blanches, and Iseult the Elder (Iseult la Belle's mother). All of these scholars, even in the face of such a repetition of Iseult's presence, do not seem to consider Iseult, both as a person and her name, as an archetypal construction. Once again, through this concept of "doubling," the name "Iseult" is considered and presented as merely a personification of opposing ends of chivalric ideals: of honor, of fidelity, of purity, but the name is never considered as a person and character. In previous considerations of the naming of Iseult, her name serves only as a means of displaying Tristan's honor and his personal growth and identity shifts.

However, within the frame of the object-moment, this double naming of Iseult highlights not only Tristan's doubled presence within the narrative, but her own as well. Although omitted from the title of the romance in which she plays a central role, Iseult's name is nevertheless a key presence within the text. Even before the introduction of her counterpart, Iseult aux mains blanches, Iseult[13] is always given a short description following her name. Usually the short description for the main

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[13] Iseult's mother is also named Iseult in other versions of the romance. This analysis does not focus on her name and role within the romance, as it is not immediately relevant to the creation of archetype that is being practiced by Tristan and Iseult (the Blonde, the Belle, the Queen), but it is important to note the plurality of identities that can be represented by a single name. The presence of not two but *three* Iseult's demonstrates a second body that forms a collective group, and Iseult's individuality within it, in addition to her identity within the larger group, marks her. See Sneeringer for further reading.

Iseult, the one who is Tristan's lover, is "la belle" or "la reine," with one instance of "la blonde" in Thomas of Britain's *Tristan.* Although they would be easy to dismiss, the constant presence of the repeated phrase(s), especially in combination with each other, indicate that the phrase is tied to her identity, that they are a kind of title unto her that sets her apart and projects her worth. Just as Iseult of the White Hands represents the traditionally honorable life that Tristan could have had, so too does she represent the role that Iseult could have played within the narrative. By having both present within the narrative, and the need for each to carry a moniker, Iseult la Belle's presence within the object-moment sets her apart from both the identity of who she could have been, but also allows her a description to make her own mark upon the narrative through her relationship to Tristan.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

Questions of identity are a central source of tension within the genre of the chivalric romances. Even among the large collective that is King Arthur's court, innumerable romances recount the tales of individual knights in search of individual glory and of some way to distinguish their names among the masses of the court and the group of knights across chivalric traditions while simultaneously bound by the confines of that same group and its structures. For most, such a feat is impossible and many knights, though they may earn a name in the course of a single romance, never truly break through the identity of the group enough to merit their individual space within the narrative and the memories of the readers. Yet, for a select few, their names live on past the end of the written word, as new authors pick up their stories, new readers recognize their names, and their deeds are known and remembered by their individual names among the Knights of the Round Table. For Lancelot and Tristan, such a creation of identity is possible through their interactions with an object-moment, which allows them to enter an alternate space where the paradox of chivalric identity is suspended, allowing the knights to pursue individual subversion while simultaneously upholding the group standard. In doing so, they create a name, a role, and a title for themselves that ensures that they will be remembered beyond the limits of written romances.

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