

Looking Back: Medieval French Romance and the Dynamics of Seeing

by

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	ii
Abstract	v
Introduction: “Par contençon”: A Medieval Heroine Looks Back	1
A Medieval Perspective	2
Feminist Medievalist Scholarship	3
Visuality	5
Feminist Film Theory with a Medieval Twist	11
<i>Erec et Enide</i>	14
Chapter One: Steamy Windows in Chrétien de Troyes’s <i>Le Chevalier de la Charrette</i>	20
Medieval Windows	22
“Li chevaliers de la fenestre”	24
The Good King Bademagu and the Bad Son Meleagant	28
Love Is a Battlefield	31
Through the Window	39
Chapter Two: Loving Objects in the <i>Prose Lancelot</i> and the <i>Mort Artu</i>	43
Dream of the Moving Statue	45
Lancelot, an Artist and a Knight	49
Shielded Lovers	59
Chapter Three: “La pucele a la rose”: Seeing and Speaking Bodily Inscription in Jean Renart’s <i>Le Roman de la Rose ou de Guillaume de Dole</i>	74

Love at First Lyric	76
Circulation of the Rose	80
The Rose Strikes Back	89
That Which We Call a Rose	96
Conclusion: Not-So-Courtly Love: The Unwilling Beloved in Chrétien de Troyes's <i>Le Chevalier au Lion</i>	99
Tainted Love	100
Works Consulted	112

ABSTRACT

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This dissertation examines looking in twelfth- and thirteenth-century French romances and argues for its importance in understanding the ways in which the interrelational dynamics between characters are both scripted and subverted through seeing and through the circulation of knowledge about what is seen. Focusing on how medieval love narratives construct sight, and how sight constructs these narratives via the repetition of scenes of looking and in the representation through looking of relationships between characters, this project seeks to understand how seeing in medieval romances complicates the view of female characters objectified by masculine desire.

The first chapter explores the repeated use of windows as a frame in Chrétien de Troyes's *Le Chevalier de la Charrette* for the ways in which characters relate to each other. The second chapter discusses how objects define relationships between male and female characters in the *Prose Lancelot* and the *Mort Artu*, and how the characters act upon the objects and, in turn, how the objects act upon the characters. The third chapter focuses on seeing and on claims to have seen a maiden's birthmark in Jean Renart's *Roman de la Rose*, and the ways that the tension between seeing and speaking turn the

lady and her birthmark into objects of circulation in the narrative. Sight is privileged in the analysis as the primary sense associated with love; as the chapters progress, other senses are at play with seeing. Sight is the most important sense in the first chapter, as characters look upon each other from windows and from the ground. Touch joins seeing in the second chapter, because in the absence of missing lovers, the characters look upon and caress paintings and statues that represent them. Hearing (and speaking) displace touch in the third chapter, and are in constant conflict with seeing. This dissertation builds upon the work of feminist medievalists and other literary and cultural scholars to argue that sight, and objects that are seen, articulate love relationships between characters in medieval romances, and that seeing is frequently a locus of resistance to gender norms the texts both establish and refuse to accept.

Introduction

“Par contençon”: A Medieval Heroine Looks Back

Erec, the titular hero of Chrétien de Troyes's first romance (c. 1170) and a particular favorite of the king, approaches King Arthur's court after a brief absence; he brings with him Enide, the story's heroine and his bride-to-be.¹ Even from a great distance, all the members of the court recognize him after having climbed to the castles' windows to await his expected arrival. The scene is striking in its listing of the many characters who position themselves at the windows: the barons, the queen, who is the only woman mentioned by name at the court, the king, and other Arthurian notables including Gauvain, Keu, and Perceval. The passage sets both Erec and Enide up as the objects of the watchful looks of the entire court, whose members long to see Erec again and his beloved for the first time. This looking, performed by all the members of the court, serves to emphasize the excitement those characters feel about Erec's return and his impending marriage, and it points out Erec's importance to the reader, that the king and queen and knights and barons move (hurriedly, even, in Guenevere's case) to the windows to see his approach. This moment of looking sutures the narrative, and provides the bridge between Erec's absence from the court and his arrival there, focusing on the enumeration of characters who wait and watch, pointing out the great distance from which they are still able to recognize Erec. The watchfulness of the characters, their

¹ Chrétien de Troyes, *Erec et Enide*, Romans, ed. Jean-Marie Fritz (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1994) ll. 1515-30.

recognition of those they look upon, their pleasure at the sight of them, and the narratological work the scene does by uniting two strands in the story—these point to the importance of looking in Chrétien’s narrative, and more generally to medieval romance as a rich site for the analysis of looking.

This passage suggests issues that have interested me since the beginning of this project, especially the importance of looking in medieval romance. How characters look at each other, what this means, if characters’ genders affect the ways in which they look, and if the way they look says something about their gender—these questions have colored my interest in medieval romance since I began reading them. The description of Erec and Enide slowly approaching the court under the watchful eyes of all its members underlines the potential of questions like these for reaching a better understanding of medieval narratives with an analysis of what it means to look in medieval romance, and how that looking constructs the narratives. Erec and Enide’s return to court and movement through the courtly landscape also point to another question that motivates my analysis, that of how circulation contributes, as well, to the construction of narrative in medieval romance. To approach these questions, I have relied on medieval theories of love and vision, and twentieth- and twenty-first-century understandings of those theories and other aspects of visual studies, as well as on feminist perspectives and methodologies, particularly in approaches to the multifaceted roles of gender in French texts from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

A Medieval Perspective

One medieval writer in particular is often cited today for his perspective on looking and loving in medieval texts. For Andreas Capellanus, a cleric who wrote his rules for courtly lovers between 1181-1186, love, particularly of the courtly variety, was inextricably linked to sight, but Andreas's is a markedly gendered perspective.² In *The Art of Courtly Love*, he argues that "Love is an inborn suffering which results from the sight of, and uncontrolled thinking about, the beauty of the other sex" (33). He continues, specifying which lover thinks uncontrollably:

When a man sees a girl ripe for love and fashioned to his liking, he at once begins to desire her inwardly, and whenever subsequently he thinks about her, he burns with love for her more each time, until then he reaches the stage of more detailed reflexion. (35)

Structured around assigned gender roles, Andreas's text speaks only about the role of vision for men in love with women, a limitation which is sometimes sustained and very often problematized in the romances of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. This observation by Andreas is connected to the way in which courtly romances frequently place ladies on a pedestal, to be admired and loved from a distance by a knight who must bow and scrape to earn even her limited attention. This is an idealization of a very specific role of courtly female characters that feminist scholars have shown to be disempowering.

Feminist Medievalist Scholarship

Feminist scholarship on medieval literature has offered many interpretations and analyses of the roles gender plays in twelfth- and thirteenth-century romance, including but certainly not limited to the aforementioned criticism of courtly ladies on

² Andreas Capellanus, *De amore: Andreas Capellanus on Love*, trans. P.G. Walsh (London: Duckworth, 1982).

disempowering pedestals. Jane Burns offers a useful brief history of feminist scholarship on medieval literature.³ She writes,

Raised high atop the metaphorical pedestal of courtliness, the lady reputed to have ultimate control over her suitor's well-being, his life, and even his death actually derives little power, authority, or material gain from this glorified position. (24)

Burns characterizes the interpretation of courtly ladies as glorified but powerless as the work of feminist scholars of the 1980s and 1990s, and then goes on to describe more recent work that has built upon this foundation, adding more nuanced analyses of the medieval texts in question (25). Burns writes that feminist medievalists “show that even courtly accounts that reinforce rigidly gendered stereotypes of the lovestruck suitor and beguiling lady provide a range of alternatives to these pat formulations” (25). The female characters in courtly texts subvert these stereotypes by “deploying varied forms of resistance to [their] misogynistic, hierarchical, and normative paradigms of gendered interaction” (25). It is to this resistance that I point in my own work, as I seek to analyze the female characters who are not simply objects of masculine desire, but who act out in returning or initiating or resisting the act of looking that so often launches and stokes their romantic relationships. Burns writes,

As courtly heroines resist, recast, and manipulate paradigms of femininity, the standard scenarios available for male lovers shift as well [...] esteemed knights cross gender lines with alacrity, moving with ease and no loss of social status into the socially prescribed realm of ‘ladies’ (47-48).

Burns suggests that there are alternative readings that recognize that hierarchies and the binaries on which they depend may not be as secure as they appear. For Burns, the agency of female characters in medieval romance is

³ E. Jane Burns, "Courtly Love: Who Needs It? Recent Feminist Work in the Medieval French Tradition," *Signs* 27.1 (2001).

not conscious, controlled, or full-blown; nor is it an expression of autonomous, individual will. Agency emerges in these revised courtly scenarios, rather, as a relational dynamic between individual protagonists and the social formations surrounding them. [...] any understanding of gendered agency in the contemporary moment must necessarily engage with a broad range of crucial issues that the medieval courtly context does not fully address. (49)

These issues include conceptions of race, sexuality, ethnicity, class, location, and religion (49), many of which were not categories of classification in the Middle Ages and have not yet been treated thoroughly by scholars—perhaps, in part, because they do not feature strongly in courtly romance, as Burns points out. Burns does not suggest that these romances put into question the concept of a social hierarchy that would place men or women above each other. Rather, she suggests a continuum of gender roles enacted in these texts that allows for some freedom from normative gender behavior. This continuum breaks up the formerly conceived binary of masculine and feminine behaviors, threatening the stability of what had previously been determined to be conventional (50).

Visuality

Work on visuality and medieval visual studies also reveal much about the construction of medieval subjectivity and agency, via analyses of the role of medieval vision in texts. Emma Campbell and Robert Mills, in the introduction to their *Troubled Vision: Gender, Sexuality, and Sight in Medieval Text and Image*, emphasize the need to trouble the paradigm of feminine objectification caused by a gazing male subject. They write that that the “troubled” part of their title comes from the work of Judith Butler, and is an appropriation of the term “trouble” in the sense that it valorizes it as a fruitful locus

for the subversion of gender norms.⁴ They characterize Judith Butler's definition of trouble as full of "dynamic possibilities" (1) for the subversion of norms, that "vision designates a relationship in which boundaries are blurred, in which subject and object bleed into one another" (8). They argue that

vision, while implicated in the production of normative structures and paradigms, might also provide opportunities for troubling forms of engagement with power and might therefore be integrated into a more nuanced understanding of gender performativity in medieval culture. (3)

This emphasis on nuance and on vision that both adheres to and troubles gender normativity in medieval culture figures heavily into my analysis of medieval romance, as I argue that seeing points to moments in the text where characters both submit to and resist traditional gender roles. Campbell and Mills make reference to Suzannah Biernoff's 2002 work on medieval sight, which concurs with their suggestions about the mutability of subject and object positions constructed by the medieval gaze.⁵ Basing her arguments on her detailed analysis of medieval optical theory, Biernoff writes that "A medieval definition of vision [...] is clearly incompatible with a methodology that would treat either viewing subjects or visible objects as autonomous entities, or their relationship as unidirectional" (3-4). I rely on this conception of vision throughout this project, as I analyze ways in which objects being looked upon affect those characters doing the looking. This idea is of particular importance in my chapter on the *Prose Lancelot* and the objects that continually affect the characters who look upon them, offering comfort or healing or torment or knowledge. Dana Stewart, as well, provides a history of different concepts of vision as medieval scientists and writers understood it in

⁴ Emma Campbell and Robert Mills, eds., *Troubled Vision: Gender, Sexuality, and Sight in Medieval Text and Image* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004) 3.

⁵ Suzannah Biernoff, *Sight and Embodiment in the Middle Ages* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

her 2003 work on medieval optics, gender, and subjectivity.⁶ She also concludes that “subjectivity and gender roles are constructed through the dynamics of looking” (13). The dynamics of looking also construct love relationships between characters in medieval romance, and the tension between looking and the construction of love and desire is constant throughout these texts and my analyses of them. These critics all explore the relationship between the gaze and subject/object positions, and offer much context on the medieval gaze and subjectivity as well as gender roles. Femininity and masculinity are nebulous terms at best, and ones that invite questioning and continual redefinition. Agency and subjectivity, as well, do not seem to be tied specifically to femininity or masculinity, and can be found in heroines as well as in heroes in these texts.

Art historian Michael Camille, in his 2000 article on medieval seeing, offers a perspective that differs from those of feminist medievalists and visual studies scholars. He emphasizes the importance of understanding how medieval spectators saw.⁷ Criticizing “recent scholars who have tended to associate the invention of one-point perspective with the Lacanian ‘gaze’ and the very foundations of human subjectivity” (198), he suggests countering this simplification by trying to better understand the diverse array of medieval theories of vision, allowing for a better understanding of image creation in medieval art. While his work focuses on images, mine focuses on the ekphrastic representations of images and other objects in medieval texts, and textual representations of characters. Camille describes the medieval understanding of the senses as something translatable into visual representation; medieval theoreticians of vision

⁶ Dana E. Stewart, *The Arrow of Love: Optics, Gender, and Subjectivity in Medieval Love Poetry* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell UP, 2003).

⁷ Michael Camille, "Before the Gaze: The Internal Senses and Late Medieval Practices of Seeing," *Visuality Before and Beyond the Renaissance: Seeing as Others Saw*, ed. Robert S. Nelson (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge UP, 2000).

associated understanding and knowledge directly with the senses and described specific sections of the brain as corresponding to the five senses. He cites the work of Avicenna, an eleventh-century Arabic commentator of Galen, and three influential philosophers of vision who relied upon Avicenna's theories in the following century: Roger Bacon, John Pecham, and Thomas Aquinas (200). Sight, in particular, is privileged by these philosophers, much as it is privileged by the writers of medieval romance.

Understanding the historical context of medieval writers like these philosophers helps make the context of writers of medieval romance clearer, because while it is difficult to speculate on which philosophers the anonymous author(s) of the *Prose Lancelot*, for example, might have been familiar with, if any, it is useful to know what ideas were beginning to circulate when the texts were written.

Visual studies scholar James Elkins brings a twentieth-century perspective to the discussion of sight and subjectivity in his 1996 work on objects that look back.⁸ He writes, "The opposite of a glance [...] is a glimpse: because in a glance, we see only for a second, and in a glimpse, the object shows itself only for a second. [...] Perhaps a glimpse is the glance of an object—it is the way an object glances at us" (207). This "glance of an object" is difficult to seize, and Elkins's wordplay in this passage points to the interrelated nature of those who do the looking and what they see. Working with Lacan's theory of the reciprocal gaze, Elkins discusses gazes that act on each other; as one person looks at another, their gazes interact, the one influencing the other and vice versa. As a person gazes at an object, the object has "a certain presence, [...] a certain force, a certain way of resisting or accepting [the] look and returning that look to [the viewer]" (70). This analysis is particularly suggestive for the third chapter of this project,

⁸ James Elkins, *The Object Stares Back: On the Nature of Seeing* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

in which I analyze a birthmark on a woman's body which, though never actually seen, becomes the object of claims other characters make about seeing within the *Roman de la Rose ou de Guillaume de Dole* (written between 1200-1228). This objectified mark resists the looks of these characters in interesting ways, raising questions about how objects interact with sight. After his discussion of the interaction between seeing subjects and the objects they see, Elkins then turns to Lacan's suggestion that the idea of a unified self is a fiction constructed by people "in order to keep going" (74). He writes, "the object not only looks back at the observer; it *makes* the observer by looking, and the other way around" (74-75). Though Elkins does not make use of gender theory in his analysis of Lacan and reciprocal gazing, his observations connect to Emma Campbell and Robert Mills's take on medieval optics, in which they address the theory that in acting, the eye is acted upon. Campbell and Mills use this observation to suggest that sight is not easily categorized by the gender of the viewer or of the object. I use the work of Campbell and Mills to suggest that the objects that represent absent lovers in my chapter on the *Prose Lancelot*, or the mark upon the beloved's body that circulates through stories told about it in my chapter on the *Rose*, still work to trouble vision and categories of sexual difference by working to construct the way in which the body is looked upon.

Building upon the theory that the unified self is a fiction, Alfred Gell's anthropological study of the agency of images (1998) works to further elaborate the concept of vision as a means of breaking down the subject/object dichotomy.⁹ He writes of "'distributed personhood'—that is, personhood distributed in the milieu, beyond the body-boundary" (104), in relation to parts of bodies that represent the whole and objects that look back. Gell explains that his concept of agency relies on the closing of the

⁹ Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford, Eng.: Clarendon Press, 1998).

subject/object divide, and is not restricted to people: “‘social agency’ is not defined in terms of ‘basic’ biological attributes (such as inanimate thing vs. incarnate person) but is relational—it does not matter, in ascribing ‘social agent’ status, what a thing (or a person) ‘is’ in itself; what matters is where it stands in a network of social relations” (123).

Rather than a strict division between human subjects and inanimate objects, Gell argues that representations of people are permeated with that person’s agency; he writes,

It is not just that the person represented in an image is ‘identified’ with that image via a purely symbolic or conventional linkage; rather, it is because the agency of the person represented is actually impressed on the representation. I am the cause of the form that my representation takes. (102).

This passage is particularly suggestive for the medieval texts in question for this project. Objects like the statue, paintings, and shield referred to in the *Prose Lancelot* as *ymages* stand in for characters who are absent from their lovers except in these representations of them. In spite of the obvious differences between medieval literary figures and the anthropological subjects of Gell’s study, his work offers insight into the question of whether objects can have agency. I think the agency of which Gell writes, fixed as it is upon the representation of the person it embodies, is translatable to objects that represent and bodies in medieval romance, but with some subtle differences. Gell argues that objects are imbued with the agency of the people they represent; in the passages in the *Prose Lancelot*, the characters who look upon the objects—Guenevere and the statue, Lancelot and the paintings—are the ones who bestow agency upon the *ymages*, and it is via the looks of Guenevere and Lancelot that these objects are identified with the absent characters. For Guenevere, the statue becomes Lancelot, and her eyes construct this identity and give the statue agency that allows it to offer her comfort. For Lancelot, as

well, the paintings come to represent Guenevere, and when he looks upon them, he is comforted in his prison. Thinking about objects with agency—agency that is activated, even, by objectifying gazes—works in tandem with thinking about female characters who, though objectified by male characters who look upon them, also have the agency to return the gaze, bringing into question the conventional gender roles evident and yet rejected in medieval romances.

Feminist Film Theory with a Medieval Twist

In addition to the work of anthropologists, feminist medievalists and visual studies scholars, feminist film theory offers much for an analysis of how characters look at each other or at objects that represent the other. While my analysis has moved away from psychoanalytical gaze theory and film theory and into a more historical and narratological analysis of looking in medieval romance, I began my project engaging with the work of Sarah Stanbury. Stanbury, a feminist medievalist whose field is English literature, integrates the work of feminist film theorists into her analyses of medieval romance, investigating female characters' roles as the objects of the desiring male gaze. Stanbury uses these theories to "examine the sight lines of visual desire within medieval culture and medieval texts."¹⁰ She opened the field of medieval literature to the use of gaze and film theory in her 1990 analysis of Chrétien de Troyes's *Erec et Enide*. She discusses a scene of reciprocal, if not equal, gazing between the two title characters, arguing that Enide is a fetishized object of the masculine gaze. She writes that film theorists like Laura Mulvey, Mary Ann Doane, Kaja Silverman, and Teresa de Lauretis

¹⁰ Sarah Stanbury, "Feminist Film Theory: Seeing Chrétien's Enide," *Literature and Psychology* 36.4 (1990): 49.

offer “valuable insights into the psychoanalytic structures of male visual fantasy” (47), and that these critics focus their attention specifically on the portrayal of women as objects of the male gaze in classical Hollywood films. These film theorists characterize images of women in these films as reifying “the male gaze, its lines of desire, its distancing, its materialistic equation of the visible female body with invisible male mastery” (47). Silverman, in a 1980 article on subjectivity, describing Mulvey’s Freudian take on the gaze, writes,

Mulvey describes pleasure as the by-product of a phallogentric system in which woman is the ‘bearer’ and man the ‘maker’ of the gaze. The female subject consequently functions, both at the levels of fiction and enunciation, as a signifier for a radical lack—the lack of the phallus.¹¹

Silverman problematizes Mulvey’s connection of the male’s mastery with his pleasure, and questions Freud’s binary opposition, on which Mulvey relies, of male/active, female/passive qualities (2). Silverman turns to Lacan’s combination of pleasure and pain in his formulation of the mirror stage, in which the subject begins to consider herself from the place of the Other and also begins to desire that which she cannot have—Silverman writes, “since the child will henceforth be both defined by and separated from this ideal image, the pleasurable experience of coherence and plenitude seems predicated on the painful sense of loss” (3). This pleasure, according to Silverman, challenges Mulvey’s use of Freud to define pleasure through mastery in order to define pleasure through passivity, through subjection, through pain (3).

Returning now to Sarah Stanbury, I find her take on the usefulness of feminist film theory as a methodology for the analysis of medieval literature to be particularly suggestive in its comparison of film spectators to readers of medieval romance:

¹¹ Kaja Silverman, “Masochism and Subjectivity,” *Framework* 12 (1980): 2.

what feminist film theory particularly provides for studies of medieval descriptive convention is a methodology, at once materialist and psychoanalytic, for talking about the operations of identification between spectator (reader) and viewer in the movie-house (reader of the text) (48).

The feminist film theory twist on psychoanalytic processes of the objectification of women also, according to Stanbury, “offers a useful set of terms for exploring representations of the bodies of medieval women” (49). She goes on to explain how she uses feminist film theory to analyze descriptions of feminine beauty in medieval texts.

The film theory

presents a methodology for discussing descriptions of the female body in relation to a sociology of representation, one slated for production in a gendered cultural theatre. Film theory can help illuminate representations—and repressions—of female subjectivity by pointing to the tensions, as problematic in the twelfth century as they are today, between a woman’s body and her selfhood, or more exactly by pointing to the operations of spectatorship that make visible those margins of the woman’s body on which selfhood is inscribed. (49)

She offers an analysis of the traditional “top-to-toe,” as she calls it, literary representation of the bodies of heroines, in which, she argues, “the erotic description of [the] body is focused for us through [the hero’s] admiring gaze, a reifying masculine desire that shapes the design and lines of sight of the narrative” (52). Stanbury’s project raised a question for me: if the hero looks, doesn’t the heroine look back? I explore this concept throughout my dissertation, but especially in the first chapter, in which both knights and ladies in Chrétien’s *Le Chevalier de la Charrette* look and look back through the frame of a window.

If Stanbury’s use of feminist film theory offers useful observations about the gaze but does not focus on an analysis of the role of female characters’ sight, returning to the

work of twentieth and twenty-first century visual studies scholars aids in the analysis of gendered medieval vision and the feminine gaze. Suzannah Biernoff's research on sight and embodiment in the Middle Ages offers another level of analysis to the question of heroines looking back. In Biernoff's analysis of Stanbury's work, she argues that Stanbury characterizes the power of the gaze as the "power to look and possess," and describes Stanbury's understanding of the masculine gaze as "a phallic gaze: penetrating, possessive, and sexually potent" (57). Biernoff criticizes Stanbury's interpretation of ladies who do not look back; Biernoff argues that this interpretation emphasizes the ladies' "sanctioned role [...] as passive, chaste objects of the male gaze" (57). Biernoff observes that "the male gaze is by no means always phallic; and ladies' eyes are not always chaste [...]. Both men and woman are capable of inflicting wounds of love with a glance, and men as well as women receive those wounds in their eyes and hearts" (58). Biernoff emphasizes the challenge that vision brings to gender normativity in medieval romance. She points out that contrary to Stanbury's emphasis on male characters as the possessors of the ability to gaze powerfully, the reality in these fictional texts is that the power of the gaze is not necessarily delimited by characters' gender identifications. Biernoff's analysis opens possibilities for the analysis of seeing medieval literature, because she points to complexities in the texts that allow for nuanced readings of passages focused on seeing and the gender roles they present.

Erec et Enide

Turning back, now, to *Erec et Enide*, and using Stanbury's work as a starting point, and the work of Campbell and Mills and Biernoff as a counterpoint to Stanbury's

analysis, I want to investigate whether it is possible to locate Enide's agency (and pleasure) in her gaze even though, as Stanbury argues, her gaze is one that is inhibited by her status as a female character within a gendered narrative structure. The passage in which Erec looks at Enide features, as Stanbury writes, a conventionally lingering and fetishizing description of Enide's body:

Volontiers pres de li se trait,
En li regarder se refait ;
Mout remire son chief le blanc,
Ses iauz rianz et son cler fronc,
Le nes et le vis et la bouche,
Dont granz douceurs au cuer li to[u]che.
Tot remire jusqu'au la hanche,
Le menton et la gueule blanche,
Flans et costez et braz et mains (ll. 1485-93)

Riding beside her brought him gladness, and gazing on her brought him comfort. Long did he stare at her fair head, her laughing eyes, her clear brow, the nose, the face, the mouth. All this touched his heart with deep tenderness. He stared at her down to her hips, gazing on her chin and her white neck, her breasts and her sides, her arms and her hands.¹²

Enide's body, as Erec sees it, is traditionally beautiful. For Erec, the view of his beloved gives him pleasure. Biernoff, basing her analysis on a historical reading of medieval texts as well as her criticism of Stanbury's perspective, suggests that the desire with which Erec gazes mean he looks "like a woman" who desires and seeks pleasure. Focusing on the similarities in the way both Erec and Enide look at each other, I will suggest that the characteristics stereotypically associated with gender become nebulous in this narrative.

In Stanbury's reading of this passage, she focuses on Enide as the object of Erec's gaze. Enide is certainly objectified by the way in which Erec looks lingeringly upon her

¹² Chrétien de Troyes, *The Complete Romances of Chrétien de Troyes*, trans. Donald Staines (Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1990) 19-20. Further citations in text.

body, but she also returns Erec's gaze, albeit in a limited way. Stanbury argues that the limited nature of Enide's looking makes it a non-challenging gaze which does not turn Erec into an object or herself into a subject, because of its brevity and reticence (57). However, this reading undervalues the representation of Enide's gaze. Just as Erec looks with desire, so does Enide:

Mais ne regardoit mie mains
La damoisele le vassal
De bon huil et de cuer leal
Qu'il fesoit le par contençon. (ll. 1494-97)

But with no less interest did the maiden stare with goodwill and a loyal heart at the vassal, as if the two of them were competing with each other. (20)

The description of what Enide sees lacks a protracted appreciation of the beauty of Erec's body. Stanbury observes, "an eroticized top-to-toe dismemberment of *his* body in equivalent terms would seem entirely out of place, in violation of codes of courtly demeanor that program the way visual desire can be shaped" (56). Even though Enide does not dismember Erec's body as she looks at it, she manages to violate the codes of courtly demeanor by challenging his gaze with one of her own. Stanbury writes of this scene, "Even though her reciprocal visual gesture might appear to vest authority in her look, the terms of her look declare its reflexivity rather than its mastery. Even though she looks at him, that look does not take in his face and body feature by feature" (56). I argue that although her gaze is less masterful and the results of it less descriptive, Enide's gaze does exhibit an authority, and this is inherent in the language of competition/contention used to describe the way in which Enide gazes back. She looks at Erec "par contençon," in a competitive way; she is not shrinking back and reflecting his look so much as she is returning it measure for measure. Continuing her analysis of this

passage, Stanbury writes, “even though she looks, her gaze never turns him into an object and is, in fact, marked by its imitative self-reflexivity” (57). However, it is not necessary that she should objectify Erec’s body in order to achieve a subjectivity of her own. She does not inflict pain on him; but he also does not inflict pain on her, and Enide’s gaze, rather than a simple imitation of his, vies with Erec’s competitively and suggests a potential site of troubled vision within *Erec et Enide*.

Also analyzing this passage, French medievalist Jeanne Nightingale, in her 1995 article on the role of Enide as a mirror for Erec’s beauty and chivalry, writes that

the hypnotic repetition of ‘esgarder’, ‘esgarder se refet’, ‘remirer’, ‘regarder’ communicates the intensity of Erec’s fixation upon the perfect anatomy of the one whose beauty mirrors his own, and Enide, as if in playful competition (‘par contançon’), simply returns his gaze with silent assurance of her loyal heart and good nature as if she were challenging him to reciprocate in kind.”¹³

Enide’s gaze, especially as it is marked by the phrase “par contençon,” issues a challenge to Erec; I question, however, whether it is simply a challenge for him to be loyal. Rather, the “bon huil” that she competitively turns on him is suggestive of a shaping of her own visual desire. Enide’s desire to look, though we never see what she sees, opens the narrative up to the possibilities of a female character who looks back, and whose gaze, even if the narrative limits the description of it, is marked by an air of competitive opposition, as well. The brevity of Enide’s gaze points to the literary challenge a gazing female character may embody; Enide gazes only briefly at Erec, and scenes of gazing heroines happen less frequently and generally receive much less detail in medieval romance than descriptions of gazing heroes. Yet even though such narrative instances are

¹³ Jeanne A. Nightingale, “Erec in the Mirror: The Feminization of the Self and the Re-Invention of the Chivalric Hero in Chrétien’s First Romance,” *Arthurian Romance and Gender / Masculin/Féminin dans le roman arthurien médiéval / Geschlechterrollen im mittelalterlichen Artusroman*, ed. Friedrich Wolfzettel (Amsterdam, Neth.: Rodopi, 1995) 133.

few and short-lived, they point to important interruptions in conventional gender roles in these texts. Enide's gaze, even in its brevity, gives her a measure of authority, and the power of assuming a subject position, as she looks back at Erec.

Enide's gaze and the gazes of other characters in medieval texts allow for the analysis of modern critical perspectives as well as of the texts that tell the characters' stories. I question how characters who look and the objects that may represent them trouble conventional gender norms, and how, at the same time, medieval notions of sight may trouble twentieth- and twenty-first century theories. Relying on sources medieval and modern, I offer an analysis of how medieval love narratives construct sight, and how sight constructs these narratives, particularly in the repetition of scenes of looking. I seek to allow the medieval text to look back in order to understand how medieval romances, and particularly the importance of vision in these texts, complicate the view of female characters objectified by masculine desire. My research begins with the work of critics on gender in medieval literature and combines these ideas with other theoretical concepts to move further into the analysis of seeing, arriving at a narratological reading of medieval romance that seeks to contribute to the field of feminist medieval studies. My first chapter explores windows as a locus for looking and loving in *Le Chevalier de la Charrette* by Chrétien de Troyes, with a focus on how the repetition of scenes featuring windows makes meaning in the narrative. The second chapter discusses how love objects (a statue, a roomful of paintings, and a shield) define love relationships between male and female characters in the *Prose Lancelot* and the *Mort Artu*, and the ways in which the characters act upon the objects and, in turn, how the objects act upon the characters. The third chapter focuses on seeing and on claims to have seen a birthmark in Jean Renart's

Roman de la Rose ou de *Guillaume de Dole*, and the ways that the tension between seeing and speaking turn the lady and her birthmark into an object of circulation. Like the medieval texts I analyze, I privilege sight as the primary sense associated with love in my readings of these romances; however, as the chapters progress, I also move into a discussion of the hierarchy of senses. Sight is the most important sense in the first chapter, as characters repeatedly look upon each other both from windows and from the ground. Touch joins seeing in the second chapter, because in the absence of missing lovers, the characters look upon and caress paintings and statues that represent them. Hearing (and speaking) displace touch in the third chapter, and are in constant conflict with seeing. This dissertation builds upon the work of feminist medievalists as well as other literary and cultural scholars to argue that sight, and objects that are seen, articulate love relationships between characters in medieval romance, and that seeing is also frequently a locus of resistance to gender norms the texts both establish and refuse to accept.

Chapter One

Steamy Windows¹ in Chrétien de Troyes's *Le Chevalier de la Charrette*

In the passage from Chrétien de Troyes's *Erec et Enide* discussed in the introduction, all the members of King Arthur's court gather at windows to wait and watch for Erec and Enide's arrival. The scene suggests the importance of the window as a courtly locus and attaches a specific importance to looking and to what can be seen from the often privileged vantage point offered by the windows of a king's castle. Today the narrative description of a character gazing up at his beloved through an open window has become embedded in our collective literary imagination; it portrays the lady in the window as an object of both desire and the male gaze. The classic image of Romeo looking longingly up at Juliet, whose beauty lights up the window that frames her for his desiring gaze, is one that stands out as depiction of the window as a *locus classicus* for telling a love story. However, the image of a lady in a window being gazed upon by her current or would-be lover from below is a contemporary and limited understanding of the role of windows in the construction of love narratives, and Chrétien de Troyes's *Le Chevalier de la Charrette* (c. 1170) is one medieval text that suggests that the function of a window is more complicated than simply presenting a spot from which female characters can be objectified by the gaze of male characters. The windows in this romance serve as openings, objects there and not there, that articulate relationships, and

¹ Metaphorically speaking, because as will become evident, there is no glass in the windows in this romance.

as locations that underline desire and longing between characters. They become framing devices for the story being told. Windows structure the ways in which characters positioned on one side or the other of them look at each other across the space, highlighting their spatial separation as well as their desire to bridge that space. This spatial separation of lovers and others in the courtly love narratives of medieval romance establishes distance and hierarchy between and among characters. Those who look and those who are looked upon have different statuses and occupy different positions both spatially and textually; there is also a potential eroticism created by characters who can look but cannot touch. Varied levels of looking occur as well, particularly when minor characters observe lovers observing each other through windows. These characters act as mediators, much like windows themselves, into the inner thoughts of characters who do not voice these thoughts. Windows serve to both visually unite and physically divide characters, and this inside/outside dichotomy is a fruitful node for thought. The window's various roles in the text shift as the scenes and the meanings of the ways the characters look at each other shift, but windows remain in each scene a location where desires and relationships are articulated. The repetitive appearance of windows as a structure to move the narrative along and to define its meaning is significant. Sarah Melhado White points to the importance of repetition in Chrétien's romances. She writes,

One of the signifiers in Chrétien's romance structure is periodic, cyclical (or spiral) return to a scene visited earlier. [...] There are meaning-laden repetitions of scenes analogous to previous ones. [...] This suggests that we consider the scenes as a group whose elements comment on one another.²

² Sara Melhado White, "Lancelot's Beds: Styles of Courtly Intimacy," *The Sower and His Seed: Essays on Chrétien de Troyes*, ed. Rupert T. Pickens (Lexington, KY: French Forum, 1983) 116.

In Chrétien's romances, meaning results from repetition, and in this chapter, I analyze the repeated descriptions of characters looking through windows as a way that the text makes meaning, especially in relation to the gendering of the characters and the hierarchized relationships between and among them, but also in connection to subversions of the apparent gendered hierarchies that looking would seem to establish.

Medieval Windows

An understanding of what windows were like when Chrétien was writing in the late twelfth century might provide a useful frame of reference for an analysis of the way windows shape his narrative in *Le Chevalier de la Charrette*. When thinking of medieval windows, the first that come to mind are usually the stained glass windows that allowed light to stream into European cathedrals and churches beginning in the eleventh century.³ Made by fusing silica sand with beechwood ash (Mills 122), stained glass windows became more widespread in the twelfth century. They represented Biblical stories and saints and may have been intended for illiterate parishioners who could not understand the Latin mass.⁴ These windows, though, were not often used in living quarters, even those of nobles and kings. Because of the great expense of making them, stained glass windows were reserved for houses of worship (Hayward 100). Though residences generally lacked stained glass windows, the social status and wealth of their owners could be identified in part by how many windows the structures featured.⁵ Glass, in fact, seems

³ Allan A. Mills, "The Conservation and Restoration of Mediaeval Stained Glass Windows by 'Gel-Plating'," *Studies in Conservation* 32.3 (1987): 122.

⁴ Jane Hayward, "Painted Windows," *Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 30.3 (1972): 98. This short article provides a good description of the process used in making stained glass windows during the Middle Ages, including some discussion of how the process changed as centuries passed.

⁵ Jean-Pierre Leguay, "La fenêtre, signe extérieur de richesse, instrument de travail, poste d'observation et de propagation du 'bruyct' dans les villes françaises au Moyen Age," *Par la fenêtre: Études de littérature et*

to have been a less common covering, as opposed to shutters that could be closed or opened according to weather and time of day. So windows of residential structures in the Middle Ages, and in texts written in the Middle Ages, were openings in walls, and especially for the purposes of literary texts, openings that allowed both looks and voices to circulate between interior and exterior spaces.

The varied uses of windows in the Middle Ages are the focus of a volume edited by Chantal Connochie-Bourgne.⁶ Within this volume, scholars offer perspectives on windows from fields as diverse as history, law, medicine, theology, painting, and literature. Windows are described as intermediary spaces, either marking separation of or a passage between characters that allows for looking;⁷ they are also a space specifically tied to the expression of desire.⁸ Looking, however, isn't the only sensory activity that takes place through windows. Windows also provide a locus for the exchange of information via speaking and listening.⁹ In *Le Chevalier de la Charrette* in particular, windows serve to structure the narrative (Gingras 174). The structure that Gingras identifies is, according to Helen Roberts, one that illustrates the downfall of Lancelot as a

de civilisation médiévales: Actes du 27e colloque du CUER MA, 21-22-23 février 2002, ed. Chantal Connochie-Bourgne (Aix-en-Provence, Fr.: Publications de l'Université de Provence, 2003) 275.

⁶Chantal Connochie-Bourgne, ed., *Par la fenestre: Études de littérature et de civilisation médiévales: Actes du 27e colloque du CUER MA, 21-22-23 février 2002* (Aix-en-Provence, Fr.: Publications de l'Université de Provence, 2003).

⁷ Danièle James-Raoul, "A la fenêtre: approche d'un topos textuel dans les romans," *Par la fenestre: Études de littérature et de civilisation médiévales: Actes du 27e colloque du CUER MA, 21-22-23 février 2002*, ed. Chantal Connochie-Bourgne (Aix-en-Provence, Fr.: Publications de l'Université de Provence, 2003) 12-13.

⁸ Francis Gingras, "Par mi une estreite fenestre - L'espace d'une vision et les cadres du désir dans le récit français du XII^e siècle," *Par la fenestre: Études de littérature et de civilisation médiévales: Actes du 27e colloque du CUER MA, 21-22-23 février 2002*, ed. Chantal Connochie-Bourgne (Aix-en-Provence, Fr.: Publications de l'Université de Provence, 2003) 167.

⁹ Michelle Houdeville, "Étude comparée du thème de la fenêtre dans *La Mort Artu* et les *Chansons de toile*," *Par la fenestre: Études de littérature et de civilisation médiévales: Actes du 27e colloque du CUER MA, 21-22-23 février 2002*, ed. Chantal Connochie-Bourgne (Aix-en-Provence, Fr.: Publications de l'Université de Provence, 2003) 243.

knight and the triumph of love over chivalry.¹⁰ Roberts points to several of the passages in *Le Chevalier de la Charrette* that I will discuss in this chapter. We both analyze the scenes in terms of a subversion of gender roles; for Roberts this means a feminization of Lancelot's character and a degradation of his chivalric persona. My perspective differs in that I take the subversion of gender roles to indicate more of a blurring of those roles. Rather than a feminization of Lancelot, I argue that the text questions the ways in which window-related activities connect to the genders of the characters, as characters both male and female look out from and up to windows.

“Li chevaliers de la fenestre”

The first passage in which a window appears features Lancelot, peering from a window, who spies Guenevere just after she has been taken prisoner, in the company of Meleagant, her captor.

Li chevaliers de la fenestre
Conut que c'estoit la reïne,
De l'esgarder onques ne fine
Molt antentis, et molt li plot,
Au plus longuemant que il pot.
Et quant il ne la pot veoir,
Si se vost jus lessier cheoir
Et trebuchier aval son cors,
Et ja estoit demis defors
Quant mes sire Gauvains le vit,
Sel trait arrieres¹¹

From the window, the knight recognized the queen. He did not cease to gaze on her most attentively, happy to do this as long as possible. When

¹⁰ Helen Roberts, "Lancelot par la fenêtre: la dégradation de l'idéal chevaleresque dans *Le Chevalier de la charrette*," *Par la fenestre: Études de littérature et de civilisation médiévales: Actes du 27^e colloque du CUER MA, 21-22-23 février 2002*, ed. Chantal Connochie-Bourgne (Aix-en-Provence, Fr.: Publications de l'Université de Provence, 2003).

¹¹ Chrétien de Troyes, *Le Chevalier de la Charrette*, Romans, ed. Charles Méla (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1994) ll. 560-70. All further citations are in the text.

he could not see her, he wished to hurl himself out onto the ground below. He was already sliding out the window when Sir Gawain noticed him[,] pulling him back¹²

Lancelot remains unnamed until later in the romance, and is identified instead by objects associated with him—the titular cart (*le chevalier de la charrete*), for example, and in this instance, he is the knight of the window (*li chevaliers de la fenestre*). Names carry a specific importance in this romance because Lancelot’s identity remains unknown, even to the reader and certainly to most of the characters, until later in the story. The wording of the passage above lends ambiguity to the meaning; “*Li chevaliers de la fenestre / Conut que c’ estoit la reïne*” could mean either “The knight of the window recognized the queen,” or the translation given by Donald Staines (“From the window, the knight recognized the queen”). In any case, the nominative verse opens the sentence and clearly—in this romance so concerned with naming—suggests the alternative, though apparently temporary, name. Verbs of seeing dominate this passage. Lancelot recognizes the queen and watches her (“*esgarder*”) intently, as long as he can, and when he cannot see her (“*veoir*”), he wants to let himself fall (“*cheoir*”) out the window. The shared rhyme focusing on these two verbs is significant, because it is when Lancelot ceases to see that he almost falls, trying to follow Guenevere with his eyes and even his body as she moves into the distance, out of sight. In this manner, he crosses halfway into the space Guenevere occupies on the other side of the window, saved from falling only by Gauvain who sees him (“*le vit*”) and pulls him back inside, crying “*A grant tort haez vostre vie*” (l. 574) (“You are quite wrong to despise your own life” [177]). In the lines preceding Lancelot’s near-tumble out the window, Gauvain and a young woman look out

¹² Chrétien de Troyes, *The Complete Romances of Chrétien de Troyes*, trans. Donald Staines (Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1990) 177. Further citations in text.

the neighboring window, observing the scene presented by Guenevere, Meleagant, and others below. In fact, it is from their viewpoint that the narrator describes the scene. Lancelot, looking upon the same scene, is described as seeing only the queen (l. 544-559 [176-77]). Gauvain sees the entire scene; that is, both the queen and Meleagant below and Lancelot at the window, but he is unable to identify Lancelot's look of love for Guenevere. Gauvain is a character who sees but does not understand; he thinks Lancelot is trying to commit suicide out of shame at having ridden in the cart. Of course he is mistaken, because Lancelot has not spoken of any shame or hatred for his life at this point in the romance; rather, his distraction while gazing upon his beloved seems to have caused him to become unconscious of his surroundings to the extent that he has no regard for his own life.¹³ The window establishes a space that both unites and separates the lovers. It defines Lancelot as the supplicant, the one who looks and desires. Guenevere on the ground never sees her lover on the brink of disaster, and because she does not see, she cannot express her own desire. The narrative maintains the suspense about Lancelot's identity and about his relationship to Guenevere through Lancelot looking and Guenevere not seeing. If she did see him, she would recognize him, but as she does not, he remains unidentified—the knight of the cart, or, as this passage suggests, the knight of the window.

¹³ For readings that characterize Lancelot's actions as a suicide attempt, see, for example: Jerome Mandel, "Elements in the *Charrette* World: The Father-Son Relationship," *Modern Philology* 62.2 (1964): 103. Sandra Pierson Prior, "The Love That Dares Not Speak Its Name: Displacing and Silencing the Shame of Adultery in *Le Chevalier de la Charrete*," *Romanic Review* 97.2 (2006): 143. Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner, "*Le Chevalier de la Charrette*: That Obscure Object of Desire, Lancelot," *A Companion to Chrétien de Troyes*, eds. Norris J. Lacy and Joan Tasker Grimbert (Cambridge, Eng.: Brewer, 2005) 143. For readings that treat Lancelot's near-tumble as an accident, see: Gary Ferguson, "Symbolic Sexual Inversion and the Construction of Courtly Manhood in Two French Romances," *The Arthurian Yearbook*, III, ed. Keith Busby (New York: Garland, 1993) 204. Joan B. Williamson, "Suicide and Adultery in *Le Chevalier de la Charrette*," *Mélanges de littérature: Du moyen âge au XX^e siècle* (Paris: École Normale Supérieure de Jeunes Filles, 1978) 577. Moshé Lazar, *Amour courtois et "fin' amors" dans la littérature du XIII^e siècle* (Paris: C. Klincksieck, 1964) 236.

Lancelot's longing look on Guenevere reverses what is often defined as the conventional desiring gaze of the male lover on the inactive beloved woman seen through a window. In his work on courtly chronicles, Juan Ruiz Doménec argues that "The most common image in medieval novels consists of a woman seated in a window, expecting something, and above all being closely observed by a knight."¹⁴ He goes on to characterize the window as a border between a male-dominated world outside and a female-dominated one inside:

The woman needs to seat herself in the window in order to represent her role. This is the principle of the courtly game. The presence of the woman in a window demonstrates the recognition of her liberation from domestic control. [...] The window-sitting breaks the oppressive walls, and shows what is inside.¹⁵

Though Ruiz Doménec describes women in windows as hovering on the edge of freedom from domestic control, he valorizes what the scene reveals to the observing knights. The narrative description of a woman sitting by a window reveals what is inside to the male observer, not what is outside to the woman looking in that direction. Ruiz Doménec points to a conventional gendering of inside/outside spaces. The *Charrette* complicates this inside/outside female/male double binary, as Lancelot's gaze on Guenevere demonstrates. Lancelot, inside, looks out the window at Guenevere, outside, below, which suggests that a more complicated reading of the scene, and of the conventional linkage of female/inside and male/outside, is necessary. This romance does not always present female characters as objects of the male gaze, inside a window in a castle or other

¹⁴José Enrique Ruiz Doménec, *La Mujer que mira: Crónicas de la cultura cortés* (Barcelona, Sp.: Quaderns Crema, 1986) 27. My translation; original reads, "la imagen más habitual en las novelas de la época [...] consista en una mujer asomada a una ventana, expectante de algo y sobre todo siendo observada con intención por parte de un caballero."

¹⁵"La mujer necesita 'ventanearse' para representar su papel. Éste es el principio de juego cortés. La presencia de la mujer en una ventana significa el reconocimiento de su liberación del control doméstico. [...] El ventaneo rompe con los muros opresivos, muestra lo que hay dentro." Ruiz Doménec, *La Mujer que mira: Crónicas de la cultura cortés* 27.

enclosure, above the action of the plot. Lancelot plays that role in this particular passage, and his watchfulness of Guenevere from above also revises the spatial hierarchy that Ruiz Doménec points to, because Lancelot is above and Guenevere is below. This romance in particular troubles Ruiz-Doménec's readings of medieval romance in general, and the *Charrette*'s complexity suggests that medieval romances trouble conventional categories of analysis.

The Good King Bademagu and the Bad Son Meleagant

Watching is not an uncommon structure in medieval romance, but the *Charrette* presents it as a complicated one. The repetition of similar scenes carries importance in romance narrative, as Melhado-White has noted for Chrétien's romances, and Chrétien returns again and again to windows, and to characters inside buildings observing those who are outside, and who approach the building and the characters who watch. In the next passage featuring windows in the *Charrette*, the good King Bademagu and his villainous son Meleagant observe Lancelot approaching the castle, preparing to fight Meleagant to free Guenevere, whom Meleagant has imprisoned. As in the Erec story I discussed in my introduction, the observers know who is coming, but in this romance, they have never seen Lancelot and indeed do not know his name. They anticipate the arrival of an extremely talented knight because of a rumor that a man fitting this description follows the queen. The circulation of the rumor precedes Lancelot's own movement, but is created by his movement through Gorre and Logres and the adventures he undertakes along the way, preserving the mystery of his name and adding tension to the narrative as it progresses. That the rumor has reached the king points to the strength

of rumor, and to the power of circulation to move it quickly and effectively—more quickly, even, than Lancelot himself, who, we must imagine after seeing him nearly fall out a window in pursuit of Guenevere, is riding hell-for-leather in order to reach her.

The father and son have two opposing reactions, both connected to desire, to Lancelot's approach and to his prowess. Bademagu commends Lancelot's prowess. Meleagant, on the other hand, realizes that he will now be challenged for Guenevere, and relishes it: the desire in his gaze is for a fight with a powerful opponent, and the glory he stands to gain, and the queen he stands to win. He watches Lancelot's arrival with arrogance. Meleagant considers no one his equal in prowess. The language of the passage focuses on the king and his son's view and discussion of Lancelot crossing the perilous sword bridge, which has different meanings for both. Bademagu speaks first:

Filz, fet il, aventure fu
Quant ci venimes gié et tu
A ceste fenestre apoier,
S'an avons eü tel loier
Que nos avons apertemant
Veü le plus grant hardemant
Qui onques fust mes nes pansez. (ll. 3187-93)

“Son,” he said, “it was by chance we came, you and I, to lean by this window. We have received such a reward in witnessing the greatest deed of daring ever imagined. (209)

King Bademagu's admiring gaze sees no rival capable of defeating Lancelot.

Meleagant's pleasure in keeping the queen is linked to his desire to vanquish Lancelot, as well as to his desire to challenge his father. The son's language in reaction to Lancelot's performance and his father's description is downright aggressive—and, perhaps, defensive—as well as desirous of proving that he is stronger and more *preux* than the knight crossing the bridge. Meleagant responds to his father's praise of Lancelot as the

finest knight in the world with

Que Dex le confonde,
S'ausins boen ou meillor n'i a!
[...]
Assez me loist ore escoter,
Fet Meleaganz, et teisir,
Et vos diroiz vostre pleisir,
Mes po m'est de quanque vos dites
[...]
Ne tant ne voel estre enorables
Que la rien que plus aime li doingne.
N'iert mie faite sa besoigne
Si tost ne si delivremant,
Einçois ira tot autremant
Qu'antre vos et lui ne cuidiez. (ll. 3220-83)

“God confound him [...]if there is not one as good or better! [...] I have listened and kept silent long enough,” Meleagant answered. “Say what you will, your words mean little to me. [...] I don't wish to be so honorable as to give him what I love most. He will not accomplish his task as quickly and as easily as you and he imagine. The opposite will be the case.” (209-10)

The juxtaposition of the reactions of the father and son to Lancelot's demonstrated and presumed abilities emphasizes the difference between the two men, and establishes Meleagant as the villain of the romance.¹⁶ King Bademagu is portrayed as good and honorable, and seeing Lancelot inspires the king's admiration. Seeing Lancelot for Meleagant, on the other hand, inspires feelings of rivalry and anger. Read alongside the first window scene, in which Lancelot almost tumbles out a window while watching and desiring Guenevere, this passage may do more than expose the distinction between the good king and his terrible son. The common structure of seeing from windows, and looking upon an object that does not return the gaze, suggests a common desiring structure. In a subsequent passage, this structure changes, and for the first time in the

¹⁶ For more on the father-son relationship between King Bademagu and Meleagant, see Mandel, "Elements in the *Charrette* World: The Father-Son Relationship." Mandel offers harsh criticism of Meleagant's filial disobedience.

romance, there is evidence of reciprocal seeing both from and up to the window—characters in the window and on the ground see each other, expressing another kind of desire.

Love Is a Battlefield

Meleagant gets his desired fight and meets Lancelot on a battlefield in a challenge to determine Guenevere's fate. Initially without Lancelot's knowledge, Guenevere watches from her position as a prisoner in a tower with a window. She is soon persuaded to reveal her watchful presence to him and once he knows that she sees him, he does not drop her gaze. Lancelot limits his fancy swordplay to the area behind his back so that he can direct his gaze at a watchful Guenevere.¹⁷ In his analysis of the structure of the *Charrette*, Norris Lacy refers to this scene as a pivotal one because of its central placement in relation to other battle scenes.¹⁸ I would argue that it is indeed pivotal, and not just because of its textual placement among battle scenes. This passage also builds upon the use of windows to structure the narrative, offering the first instance of both a woman looking down from a window, and of mutual exchange between two lovers. The action at the window begins when a young, unnamed woman seated near Guenevere sees that Lancelot's strength in battle begins to wane and thinks of the pleasure he would gain from knowing that Guenevere also watches him:

Et pense, se il la savoit

¹⁷ For a brief reading of the textual description as compared to some of the manuscript illuminations of this passage, see Françoise Clier-Colombani, "Des fenêtres ouvertes sur l'imaginaire," *Par la fenêtre: Études de littérature et de civilisation médiévales: Actes du 27e colloque du CUER MA, 21-22-23 février 2002.*, ed. Chantal Connochie-Bourgne (Aix-en-Provence, Fr.: Publications de l'Université de Provence, 2003) 69-70. She argues that while the text allows Lancelot and Guenevere to exchange gazes, the illuminations portray Guenevere as a spectator and Lancelot as a knight concentrating on his knightly endeavors on the battlefield.

¹⁸ Norris J. Lacy, "Spatial Form in Medieval Romance," *Yale French Studies* 51 (1974): 167.

A la fenestre ou ele estoit,
Qu'ele l'esgardast ne veïst,
Force et hardemant an preïst.
Et s'ele son non bien seüst
Molt volantiers dit le eüst
Qu'il se regardast un petit. (ll. 3643-49)

She believed that he would recover his strength and boldness if he knew [that she] was at the window, looking out and watching him. Had she known his name, she would have eagerly called to him to look round a little. (214)

The ambiguity of feminine pronouns in this passage suggests a blurring between the maiden and the queen as subject of these sentences. The “ele” at the window who watches and sees is most probably Guenevere, but the maiden must sit near her, and she certainly watches and sees, as well. The third “ele” likely refers to the maiden, who wants to know the knight’s name and assumes that the other “ele”—the queen—already possesses this knowledge. This assumption on the part of the maiden points to the questions of recognition as well as the circulation of information in the *Charrette*. Lancelot’s shameful ride in the cart and his exceedingly impressive prowess in the adventures that lead to the queen seem to be universal knowledge throughout the text. Word travels faster even than Lancelot himself. As Bademagu expected the arrival of the world’s best knight quickly following the arrival of his son with Guenevere as his prisoner, the maiden in the tower already suspects that Guenevere possesses knowledge of the knight’s identity. The maiden’s foreknowledge of Lancelot’s pleasure in being watched by the queen indicates that the love affair between Lancelot and Guenevere is an open secret among the female characters of this text, according to Matilda Bruckner (“Obscure Object” 142). The repetition throughout the romance of scenes of watching that express desire becomes even more complex in this passage with the intervention of

this minor character. The maiden becomes an intercessor of sorts in the love affair of Guenevere and Lancelot, just as she becomes an intercessor in directing their gazes.¹⁹ Her intercession begins with seeing (and understanding) and effectively directs the gazes of both the queen and the knight by publicizing the knight's name and the fact that the queen is a spectator to the battle. The narrative uses the maiden's manipulation of the gaze to identify the love relationship between the queen and Lancelot. It is not a coincidence that the looking takes place through a window.

The circulation of gazes and the knowledge they bear becomes even more apparent and important as the passage continues. Through the maiden, the reader knows Guenevere watches Lancelot through the window of the tower; the reader also knows that the maiden expects that the knowledge of the queen's gaze will inspire Lancelot to win his battle against Meleagant. The young woman calls Lancelot's attention to his royal observer, whose gaze at Lancelot has remained unmentioned by the narrator. The emphasis on verbs of seeing in this passage points to the importance of looking—Guenevere both watches (“esgardast”) and sees (“veïst”) Lancelot, and the maiden wants Lancelot to look around (“se regardast”). The woman approaches the queen, and upon learning Lancelot's name from her, calls out from the window, “Lancelot, / Trestorne toi

¹⁹ Anonymous maidens play important roles in *Le Chevalier de la Charrette*, as Karl Uitti and Matilda Bruckner, among others, point out. See Karl Uitti, *Story, Myth, and Celebration in Old French Narrative Poetry, 1050-1200* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1973) 178. Uitti focuses his analysis primarily on the Immodest Damsel, who offers Lancelot lodging in exchange for sex. See also Bruckner, “*Le Chevalier de la Charrette*: That Obscure Object of Desire, Lancelot,” 142. For more on mediation by female characters, see Moshé Lazar, “Lancelot et la *mulier mediatrix*: La Quête de soi à travers la femme,” *L'Esprit créateur* IX.4 (1969): 243-46. Lazar argues that these mediating female characters serve to draw attention to the queen and to Lancelot's longing for her. On the other hand, another critic maintains that these characters draw attention away from Guenevere, and that their behavior emphasizes the negative aspects of Guenevere's own comportment. For more on this, see Sally Fullman, “*Le Jeu de miroirs*: The Role of the Secondary Women Characters in *Le Chevalier de la Charrette* of Chrétien de Troyes,” *Indiana Social Studies Quarterly* 31.1 (1978): 18. Fullman also points out that among the eight unnamed female characters in the *Charrette*, the only one known to Guenevere is the young woman in the tower with her during Lancelot's battle with Meleagant (19).

et si esgarde / Qui est qui de toi se prant garde !" (ll. 3666-68). ("Lancelot, turn around and see who watches you!" [215]). This is the first time in the text that any character addresses Lancelot by name. It emphasizes the simultaneous identification of Lancelot to the crowd at the battle and the visual reunion of the lovers for the first time since Guenevere was captured. The knight of the window has become Lancelot, identified once again through a window as he was in the scene where he was watched by Bademagu and Meleagant, though there it was his prowess and not his name that was revealed. Guenevere, through the mediation of the maiden, is responsible for sharing his name with all present. The maiden scripts Lancelot's gaze and, indirectly, his battle, by directing him where to look, and Judith Rothschild has characterized Lancelot in this scene as "a marionette set into motion through verbally manipulative conduct."²⁰ The maiden's verbal manipulation is contingent upon looking: hers, the queen's, and Lancelot's. He does respond, puppet-like, to her commands and suggestions, directing his gaze and his prowess according to the maiden's manipulation.

In the *Charrette*, characters are not just shown to look out of windows. Windows also invite looking—usually, looking out of the window. Ruiz Doménec suggests that in certain contexts, windows also invite looking in. While windows do invite looking out, evident in the passages where Lancelot almost falls out while watching Guenevere and where Bademagu and Meleagant look out as Lancelot crosses the sword bridge, looking in seems to require an invitation. The maiden puts forth the invitation in this passage.²¹ The locus of the window as one that explicitly reveals desire through its encouragement

²⁰ Judith Rice Rothschild, "Empowered Women and Manipulative Behaviors in Chrétien's *Le Chevalier au Lion* and *Le Chevalier de la Charrette*," *Medieval Perspectives* 7 (1992): 181.

²¹ Another invitation to look in appears later in the text, when Guenevere invites Lancelot to look through the window to her bedchamber. I address that passage later in this chapter.

of looking is confirmed by Lancelot's actions following the maiden's announcement. When Lancelot hears his name, he turns quickly, his eyes leaving the battlefield and moving to his beloved at the window. His role of lover both threatens and facilitates his knightly prowess, as his gaze at Guenevere momentarily removes him from the battle at hand.

Trestorne soi et voit amont
La chose de trestot le mont
Que plus desirroito a veoir
As loges de la tor seoir,
Ne puis l'ore qu'il s'aparçut
Ne se torna ne ne se mut
Devers li ses ialz ne sa chiere,
Einz se desfandoit par derriere. (ll. 3671-78)

he turned round promptly. And when he did so, up in the tower galleries he saw seated the one he most desired to see in the entire world. From the moment he caught sight of her, he did not turn or take his eyes or his face from her, but defended himself from the back. (215)

The vocabulary of this passage underlines the importance of vision, and explicitly associates desire with vision. Words expressing sight (“veoir,” “s’apercevoir,” “ses ialz”) combine with words of desire and intimacy (“desirroito,” “sa chiere”) to unite seeing and loving. In a comical move, Lancelot tries to defend himself against Meleagant by fighting behind his back so that his eyes can remain focused on Guenevere.²² In a comparison of the *Charrette* and Andreas Capellanus's *De amore*, Z.P. Zaddy addresses this scene in particular. After referring to Andreas's assertion that seeing one's beloved has a strong effect on a lover, Zaddy argues that “the knowledge that he is fighting in Guenevere's presence makes him lose his head completely. He totally forgets the matter

²² For a discussion of this scene's light mocking of chivalric battle, and of Lancelot, see Fanni Bogdanow, "The Treatment of the Lancelot-Guenevere Theme in the *Prose Lancelot*," *Medium Aevum* 41 (1972): 113. Bogdanow compares the treatment of Lancelot in *Le Chevalier de la Charrette* and the *Prose Lancelot*, pointing to a valorization of the knight in the latter and to Guenevere's tendency to make demands that undermine his chivalry in the former.

he has in hand, and thinks only of keeping his adoring gaze turned towards her until recalled to his senses.”²³ While Lancelot clearly ceases to concentrate fully on his battle with Meleagant, he does not seem to lose his head completely. He continues to defend himself, though it is behind his back. Lancelot’s decreased concentration brings to mind the last time he saw Guenevere, when his attempt at following her with his eyes nearly resulted in his death by falling out the window. The repetition of Lancelot’s loss of concentration, and its connection to both windows and vision, underscores the importance of windows as a locus of looking and making meaning in this narrative.²⁴

The maiden acts for all those in the audience at the battlefield who observe Lancelot trying to win the battle while holding on to Guenevere’s gaze. Again it falls to her to recall Lancelot to his senses. She chides Lancelot for his “foolish” behavior and tells him how he can both see Guenevere and fight valiantly:

“Ha ! Lancelot ! Ce que puet estre
Que si folemant te contiens?
Ja soloit estre toz li biens
Et tote la proesce an toi,
Ne je ne pans mie ne croi
C’onques Dex feïst chevalier
Qui se poïst apareillier
A ta valor ne a ton pris.
Or te veons si antrepris !
Torne toi si que deça soies
Et que adés ceste tor voies,

²³ Z. P. Zaddy, “*Le Chevalier de la Charrete* and the *De amore* of Andreas Capellanus,” *Studies in Medieval Literature and Languages in Memory of Frederick Whitehead*, eds. W. Rothwell, et al. (Manchester, NY: Manchester UP, 1973) 370. I discuss Andreas’s text in more depth in the introduction to this dissertation.

²⁴ Matilda Bruckner mentions the similarities between Lancelot on the battlefield and at the window and in other scenes in terms of Lancelot’s distraction, as she underlines the humorous aspects of one of the best knights in the world forgetting how to fight, or unwittingly riding his horse into water only to fall off, or similarly, nearly falling out of the window while watching Guenevere ride off into the distance. Her analysis focuses on the audience’s view of Lancelot—both the reader of the romance and the implied and sometimes explicit audience in the story itself. Bruckner also analyzes Chrétien’s most famous bumbling knight, Perceval, in relation to Lancelot’s distraction. Bruckner, “*Le Chevalier de la Charrette*: That Obscure Object of Desire, Lancelot,” 142-43.

Que boen veoir et bel la fet.” (ll. 3692-703)

“Oh Lancelot, how can you act so foolishly? You once were the epitome of all valor and excellence. I do not think or believe God ever made a knight equal to you in courage and renown. Now we see you at such a loss. Turn round to the other side where you may always see this tower. Sight of it will help you.” (215)

The maiden looks at Lancelot, who in turn looks upon the queen, whose own gaze remains undescribed by the narrative, though the implication is that she looks down at Lancelot. These three different gazes create a compelling relation of looking, with the maiden as a representative of the entire audience, and the knight and the lady exchanging desiring looks through the frame of the window. This scene is the first in the romance to appear similar to Ruiz Doménec’s characterization of the lady in the window being admired by her lover down below. It is more complicated than the scene he imagines, however, especially when an active audience, figured through the maiden, helps to script the longing look.

Following the maiden’s instructions, Lancelot can both see Guenevere and fight with the prowess the young woman attributes to him. His gaze on Guenevere coordinates all his movements on the battlefield.

Et Lanceloz pas nel menace,
Mes ferant vers la tor le chace
Ou la reïne ert apoiee.
Sovant l’a servie et loiee
De tant que si pres li venoit
Qu’a remenoir li covenoit,
Por ce qu’il ne la veïst pas
Se il alast avant un pas.
Ensi Lanceloz molt sovant
Le menoit arriers et avant
Par tot la ou boen li estoit,
Et totevoies s’arestoit
Devant la reïne sa dame
Qui li a mis el cors la flame,

Por qu'il la va si regardant (ll.3737-51)

Lancelot did not merely threaten him, but with constant attacks chased him toward the tower where the queen reclined. Often had he served her and paid her homage. Directing his opponent now so close to her, he was forced to stop short; had he gone forward another step, she would not have been visible to him. Thus Lancelot continued to drive him back and forth wherever he pleased, always stopping before his lady the queen. She had ignited the flame in his heart, which made him continue to gaze up at her. (215)

This passage again emphasizes seeing, and for Lancelot, seeing combines love and prowess. Lancelot's movements are scripted by his gaze on Guenevere. He cannot step beyond a certain point because he would not be able to see her ("ne la veïst pas"); this does not inhibit him from delivering powerful blows upon his opponent. Desire and chivalry complement each other in this passage. Lancelot "revives at the sight of the Queen and gains the advantage over his foe [...]. Here Chrétien allows us to see something of the ennobling power of love in terms of chivalric prowess," as Gerald Morgan writes.²⁵ Seeing allows love and prowess to work together, as Lancelot serves his beloved by never taking his eyes off her and by defeating Meleagant to gain her freedom. Guenevere's gaze is never described, and the absence of a description of her gaze does in fact fit the mold of the courtly topos of the knightly gazer focusing his eyes on his beloved in a tower as described by Ruiz Doménec. But in spite of the absence of an explicit description, Guenevere's gaze holds Lancelot's gaze. The maiden's first announcement to Lancelot makes it clear that Guenevere first watches Lancelot, before he even knows she is present. This passage puts Lancelot and Guenevere in relation for the first time in this romance, and this relation is described as a mutual looking. The relation is further articulated in the next scene featuring a window; this time, Lancelot

²⁵ Gerald Morgan, "The Conflict of Love and Chivalry in *Le Chevalier de la charrete*," *Romania* 102 (1981): 185.

will manage to physically cross through the window into the interior space of Guenevere's bedchamber.

Through the Window

Le Chevalier de la Charrette constructs meaning through the repetition of passages featuring characters at windows, gazing with desire out from or up to other characters. The meaning constructed by this repetition allows looking to define and shape relationships between characters. Lancelot has been central to all these scenes. At different times he serves as both the object of desire and the desiring subject. As desiring subject, he gazes longingly from a window at Guenevere as she moves into the distance, losing his balance as he leans too far out in an attempt to keep his eyes on a woman who remains unaware that she is the object of his gaze. King Bademagu and his son Meleagant, in turn, make an object of Lancelot as they stand in a window and watch his progress towards their castle and his goal: Guenevere, Meleagant's prisoner. Bademagu's desire is connected to his appreciation of Lancelot as the finest knight he has ever observed, while Meleagant's is tied to the rivalry he feels for a man whose abilities, according to Meleagant's own father, far exceed those of his son. The battle Meleagant desires finally brings about a visual reunion between Lancelot and Guenevere, aided by a maiden who joins Guenevere at the window to watch the battle. For the first time, the characters share a mutual gaze, looking upon one another through the frame of a window.

Now I turn to perhaps the most significant appearance of windows in *Le Chevalier de la Charrette*—the passage in which Lancelot, following the queen's instructions, crosses through a window to enter Guenevere's bedchamber. The window

in this scene serves as a means to their union. They can look and speak and, for the first time in the romance, touch, and it is important to note that Guenevere arranges their meeting in this scene, though initially her plan marks the window as an obstacle Lancelot will not be able to cross:

Et la reine une fenestre
Li mostre a l'uel, non mie au doi,
Et dit: "Venez parler a moi
A cele fenestre anquenuit,
Quant par ceanz dormiront tuit,
Et si vanroiz par cel vergier.
Ceanz antrer ne herbergier
Ne porroiz mie vostre cors,
Je serai anz et vos defors (ll. 4506-14)

With her glance rather than her finger, the queen pointed out a window to him. "Come tonight," she said, "and talk to me at that window when everyone within is asleep. Come through this garden. You will not be able to enter or make your lodging here. I shall be within, you without."
(225)

Guenevere shows Lancelot the window to her bedchamber with her eye ("Li mostre a l'uel") rather than pointing to it. The gaze is instrumental here. It serves as a communicative medium as the lovers convey and understand intentions through a glance on an object—a window.²⁶ Guenevere, through her gaze, extends an invitation to Lancelot to look into the window. This is a different kind of looking than previously present in this romance, because both lovers look together at an object rather than at each other. In some ways this shared gaze is not dissimilar from the shared gaze on the battlefield. Both characters look and express desire as Lancelot fights Meleagant, just as both characters look and express desire as they glance up at Guenevere's window. The difference is that the lovers share a gaze at an object rather than looking at each other. It

²⁶ I will discuss characters expressing desire through looking at objects in much more depth in the next chapter.

is significant that this time, the narrator explicitly describes Guenevere's gaze, while in the battle scene, the maiden intervenes to make Guenevere's gaze known. The window serves to unite their gaze, and to unite their actions as they plan to come together at the window. This scene is an indication of Guenevere's discretion in her love affair with Lancelot, something that unites her comportment with Andreas Capellanus's description of proper behavior among courtly lovers, as Z.P. Zaddy notes (378). In the context of the romance's obsession with looking and windows, it is even more than that. It is Guenevere's discreet declaration of her own desire.

Guenevere's invitation to look in promptly becomes an invitation enter, as Lancelot arrives at the window. The passage immediately focuses on the window bars that seem to impede Lancelot's path to Guenevere: "Lanceloz voit la reine / Qui a la fenestre s'acline, / Qui de gros fers estoit ferree" (ll. 4583-85) ("Lancelot saw the queen leaning against the window behind the thick iron bars" [226]). But these bars, Lancelot boasts, present no obstacle to him, so long as the queen wishes him to enter her room. And "Certes, fete le, jel voel bien" ("To be certain, I do want it[...],' she replied" [226]), so Lancelot proceeds to attack the bars with his bare hands. Guenevere arranges their meeting, to be sure, but Lancelot initiates the final crossing of the window that has both divided them and brought them together repeatedly in this romance. Unlike the lovesick knight who almost tumbled out of a window towards the queen on the ground early in this romance, Lancelot now works with intention aforethought to cross that boundary in the opposite direction—and this time, he does it successfully. And unlike the absence of any description of Guenevere's gaze in the earlier battle scene, here we see her communicate her desire and arrange the clandestine meeting "a l'uel." It is no

coincidence that the path to the consummation of their love is through a window, a locus that has returned repeatedly in *Le Chevalier de la Charrette* to tempt lovers, and to bolster conflict and desire.

Lancelot's loss of himself in his gaze on his desired lady, Bademagu's admiring gaze on Lancelot and Meleagant's arrogant, challenging view, Guenevere's hidden and then sly gaze, the young woman's knowing gaze, and Lancelot's unabashed entry into Guenevere's chamber through the window—all these pivotal scenes in *Le Chevalier de la Charrette* revolve around windows. Lancelot crosses that last barrier, Guenevere's window, to become her physical lover as well as her courtly one—at her request. Repetition creates meaning, and in this romance, it gives importance to windows and to looking. The repetition of scenes featuring windows and looking links the passages together and invites the reader to understand them in relation to each other. These scenes suggest that rather than upholding uniformly scripted gender positions, windows leave gender roles in question. Windows in *Le Chevalier de la Charrette* suggest that looking is a means, perhaps the primary means, of expressing desire in this twelfth-century romance, and male characters as well as female ones frame and express their desires with windows.

Chapter Two

Loving Objects in the *Prose Lancelot* and the *Mort Artu*

The *Prose Lancelot* is an early thirteenth-century French romance that, like *Le Chevalier de la Charrette*, recounts the love story of Lancelot and Guenevere. Separated by circumstances beyond their control, both characters create, either through a dreamlike state or deliberate actions, images that represent to them their absent lovers. These love objects allow the characters to define their relationship in the text, and Guenevere and Lancelot treat the objects as they would treat each other, kissing and caressing a statue and paintings respectively. Guenevere imagines a statue is Lancelot, while a room full of wall paintings created by Lancelot tell, like the romance itself, the story of how Arthur's best knight falls in love with his king's wife. A magical but broken shield also tells this story, mending itself upon the physical consummation of Lancelot and Guenevere's relationship. These powerful objects also affect the characters represented upon them:¹ the shield heals Lancelot during an illness and relieves Guenevere of her greatest suffering. The statue draws Guenevere to it and helps her remember Lancelot when he is absent. The paintings give Lancelot a measure of peace during imprisonment. The objects themselves also experience transformation in this ekphrastic narrative: the statue, an inanimate object, is animated by Guenevere's gaze upon it, at least to her own mind, and she moves to embrace it. Lancelot, inspired by his love for his lady, transforms a

¹ See the introduction to this dissertation for a more detailed discussion of objects that act, especially in the sections on the work of Elkins and Gell.

room into an environment in which he can immerse himself, surrounded by images of Guenevere that he kneels before and caresses, just as Guenevere caresses his statue. The shield, once nearly broken into two pieces, is magically made whole when Lancelot and Guenevere finally consummate their relationship. These characters experience a kind of union via an *ymage*, the word used in this text to describe both the statue and the paintings. The *ymages* created by the other through memory, touch, and especially through looking upon the objects that represent the absent beloved, move the narrative along as their relationship develops. Like the windows discussed in the previous chapter, these objects repeatedly support the articulation of desire, encouraging the development of the love relationship between Lancelot and Guenevere, especially when read together.

Objects that replace the bodies of absent lovers form the focus of Alexandre Leupin's work on simulacra, and he comments on the passage in the *Prose Lancelot* in which Guenevere takes a statue (an *ymage*) for Lancelot: "The absence of the beloved body seems to be here the same condition that opens the space of the simulacra."² And

The subtle *ymage* takes the place here of the body itself; everything happens as if Guenevere's desire is directed towards an object that has always already been disrobed, devoured by the series of its fragments and its substitutes; the representation no longer designates any corporality, but only its simulacra, in a narcissistic circularity: Guenevere, like Lancelot, does not love the other at all, but rather the phantasm that replaces him and which has meaning only for herself: at the origin of desire, there is the *ymage*.³

² Alexandre Leupin, *Le Graal et la littérature : Étude sur la vulgate arthurienne en prose* (Lausanne, Switz.: L'Âge d'Homme, 1982) 120. My translation; original reads, "l'absence du corps aimé semble être ici la condition même par laquelle s'ouvre l'espace du simulacre."

³ "l'*ymage* subtile prend ici [...] le lieu du corps propre; tout se passe comme si le désir de Guenièvre [...] s'adressait à un objet qui a toujours déjà été dérobé, dévoré par la série de ses fragments et de ses substituts; la représentation ne désigne plus aucune corporéité, mais seulement son simulacre, dans une circularité narcissique: Guenièvre, tout comme Lancelot, n'aime point l'autre, mais le fantasme qui le remplace et vaut seulement pour soi: à l'origine du désir, il y a l'*ymage*." Leupin, *Le Graal et la littérature : Étude sur la vulgate arthurienne en prose* 120.

Leupin raises important questions about the connections between desire and the description of a statue that Guenevere's eyes and mind bring to life. It is Lancelot's absence that inspires Guenevere's desire, but I move away from the exploration of this representation through a psychoanalytic framework and focus instead on the animation of images. James Elkins notes that the person represented by an object lends agency to the object; keeping his argument in mind, I suggest that the viewer animates the object. Here, it is Guenevere's desire that bestows "life" on the *ymage*. The statue is not just an object of displaced affection or a narcissistic idealization of love or desire—this object makes absence poignantly, materially present. The absent presence represented by the *ymage* also animates the object, as Guenevere projects her emotions onto the material.

Dream of the Moving Statue

Guenevere's desire for Lancelot manifests itself in a vision in which she takes a statue to be Lancelot. The queen, after waking from a prescient nightmare about Lancelot in bed with another woman, becomes entranced while gazing at a statue lit by the light of candles:

Et quant ele a grant piece mené son duel, si conmanche a penser et en ce penser li monte .I. estordison en la teste si grant que de lui ne li souvient ; si resgarde entor soi et voit .I. image qui ert an guise d'un chevalier armé, si ert de fust ouvree moult soutilment. Ele resgarde l'ymage longuement et ele avoit a ses .II. piez .II. cierges ardanz qui moult randoient grant clarté.

Quant ele a grant piece resgardee l'ymage, si le est avis que ce soit Lanceloz. Lors se dresce en estant et gete sa chemise en son dos et li tant les braz.⁴

After she had lamented a long while, she began to be depressed, and in her depression such a great dizziness overcame her that she completely forgot

⁴ Alexandre Micha, ed., *Lancelot : Roman en prose du XIII^e siècle*, 9 vols. (Geneva, Switz.: Droz, 1978). This section appears in vol. 4, p. 120. Further citations in text.

herself. She looked about and saw a statue of an armed knight, very skillfully carved in wood. She stared a long while at the statue, which had two burning candles at its feet brightly illuminating it. After she had stared a long while at the statue, she began to imagine it was Lancelot. Then she arose, threw her shift over her shoulders [and] held out her arms to it.⁵

The emphasis on Guenevere's state of mind points to the narrator's understanding of this scene as perhaps a result of her dream and resulting discomfort. Like Lancelot in *Le Chevalier de la Charrette*, she has forgotten herself while looking upon an object she takes to be her lover. She is depressed, disoriented, and only barely awake. This passage is particularly suggestive because it seems that the *ymage* takes on Lancelot's form, but the narrator clearly questions whether anyone but Guenevere could see the statue as Lancelot. The candlelight, though it does provide "grant clarté," at the foot of the statue, also suggests that Guenevere's ability to see might be altered by the surrounding darkness. The statue takes on Lancelot's countenance as an effect of Guenevere's lingering gaze upon it, but it is only to Guenevere's eyes that Lancelot appears. Though she is not alone in the room, as the narrator has previously revealed that her cousin shares the bedchamber with the queen, Guenevere's perceptions remain the focus of this passage.

As the episode continues, Guenevere's actions in response to the statue she takes for Lancelot become even more pronounced, as she moves to embrace and speak to the *ymage*. In the same way that her perceptions animate the object, these perceptions that the object is Lancelot inspire Guenevere to move from her bed to the statue. The object elicits emotion and action as she associates it with her lover. The scene invites

⁵ Norris J. Lacy, ed., *Lancelot-Grail: The Old French Arthurian Vulgate and Post-Vulgate in Translation*, 5 vols. (New York: Garland, 1993). This translation is by William Kibler and is located in vol. 3, p. 142. Further citations in text, except when translator changes; I will indicate these changes in footnotes.

interpretation of the gap between Guenevere's perception of the statue as a man and the material reality of the statue. When she speaks in that gap, she reveals her love for

Lancelot. She implores the statue to come to her and comfort her:

“Biaux amis, venez avant. Ou avez vos tant demoré ? Venez ça, biaux amis, et si m’ostez de la mort ou je sui por vos. Getez moi de la greingnor painne et de la greingnor dolor ou gentil dame fust onques por chevalier.” (4:120)

Dear friend, come here. Where have you been so long? Come here, good friend, and restore my life, for I'm dying on account of you. Save me from the greatest pain and the greatest sorrow that ever any gentle woman suffered for a knight.” (3:142)

When the statue does not respond, she continues to speak to it, saying, “Ha, biaux amis, onques mais ne fustes vos vers moi si orgueilleux; mes certes ce ne vos vaut riens; puis que vos ne volez venir a moi, g’irai a vos” (4:120) (“Ah, good friend, you’ve never been so haughty to me before. But you’ll gain nothing by this, because if you won’t come to me, I’ll go to you” [3:142]). She throws her arms around the statue’s neck “et fait autel feste com ele feist de celui por qui amor ele le faisoit. Et tant demora illuec que la pucele sa cousine s’esveilla et ouvri les iaux et vit la roine qui encor tenoit l’ymage acolee” (4:120-21) (“and rejoiced as she would have for the one for whose love she did it. She stayed there so long that her cousin awoke, opened her eyes, and saw the queen still embracing the statue” [3:142]). The queen’s consciousness of her actions here is mediated by her nightmare, her disoriented state, and her forgetting of herself, but I do not think that that lessens its significance. Gazing at “Lancelot” allows her to act, first by creating a lover from a statue, then by expressing her desire for her husband’s knight, an expression Guenevere in her right mind might never make for fear of exposing the affair. This object that she perceives as her lover allows Guenevere to articulate her desire, and

looking at the statue intensely transforms it, at least in her eyes, into the knight she so desperately wants to embrace.

In fact, the threat that her husband is approaching and fear of discovery cause Guenevere to emerge from the trance caused by her imaginings of the statue as Lancelot, putting an end to her mad visions and forcing her back into her bed. The cousin who wakes to find Guenevere with her arms around the statue cries, “Dame, veez ci le roi, fuiez en vostre lit!” (4:121) (“My lady, the king’s coming, get back in bed!” [3:142]). The queen, who “avoit toz jorz moult douté le roi, so ot tel paor de ce qu’ele li ot dit si effreement [...] qu’ele an revint maintenant en son sans” (4:121) (“had always been fearful of the king, was so frightened [of what] her cousin said [...] that she immediately regained her senses” [3:142]). It is unclear from the text exactly what the cousin observes, beyond the queen embracing a statue in the middle of the night. She fears that Guenevere has gone mad, but the narrator does not clarify whether she knows that Guenevere imagines she is embracing her lover, nor is it clear whether the cousin has overheard the queen’s exhortations directed at the statue. However, the cousin’s perceptive reference to Arthur shakes the queen from her trance, and brings her back to her senses. Guenevere’s fear of Arthur is suggestive, and perhaps connected to her visions of Lancelot. She has been speaking openly of her love for Lancelot, and perhaps she fears that Arthur will see what she sees: Lancelot in her bedchamber, in her arms. The king, of course, who does not actually appear in this scene, would most likely not understand what he was looking at if he did happen upon Guenevere and the statue, and Guenevere’s fear is ambiguous. It is, however, a fear of having been seen. This passage, in which Guenevere gazes upon an object and transforms it into the likeness of her absent

lover, creates a scene that questions the norms associated with the behavior that is expected of a queen: namely, to remain faithful to her royal husband. The object serves as both a creation of Guenevere's altered perception and a catalyst of her expression of desire, allowing her to vocalize that desire and even physically act upon it, moving to touch the statue she thinks is Lancelot.

Lancelot, an Artist and a Knight

The attachment of a character to an object recurs when Lancelot paints several likenesses of Guenevere, and caresses the images of his lady as Guenevere does the statue. This is a different kind of repetition from that of windows in *Le Chevalier de la Charrette*, in that the setting changes—these passages are not framed by windows. The repetition also differs because the objects change; rather than windows, or multiple statues, different objects serve similar purposes in the narrative. Though the repetition is different, it is no less important than that of the windows in the *Charrette* in creating meaning, because the similarities between the episodes—objects representing absent lovers activated by looking upon and touching the objects—invite the analysis of the scenes in relation to one another. Read together, the scenes take on added meanings. Lancelot, imprisoned by Morgan Le Fay in her castle, sees a man painting a mural and decides to do the same,⁶ relieving his suffering by expressing his history, and significantly, Guenevere's, by painting it: “moult li plairoit a veoir les biaux contenemenz de sa dame et moult li seroit grant alegement de ses maux” (5:52) (“he would be most pleased to behold the fair deeds of his lady, and this would be a great

⁶For an analysis of how this passage in the *Prose Lancelot* may be a retelling of the *Chambre de Beautés* episode in the *Roman de Troie*, see Paul Rockwell, “Remembering *Troie*: The Implications of *Ymages* in the *Roman de Troie* and the *Prose Lancelot*,” *Arthuriana* 7.3 (1997).

comfort in his sufferings” [3:218]). Guenevere seeks comfort from the statue that she perceives as Lancelot during Lancelot’s absence; Lancelot, as well, wants to see Guenevere during his imprisonment and imagines that just the sight of his paintings of her will bring him consolation.

Lancelot creates *ymages* that are visible to all who look upon them, unlike Guenevere’s “Lancelot,” which exists only in her own perception of what she sees. Lancelot paints a scene that demonstrates how he was “esbahiz de la grant biauté sa dame, quant il la vit premierement” (5:52) (“overwhelmed by the great beauty of his lady, when first he saw her” [3:218]). His emotion is in some ways similar to Guenevere’s altered state of mind when she imagines the statue is Lancelot. Both instances are, of course, tightly linked to vision: Guenevere gazes for a long time at the statue, transforming it in her mind, and Lancelot finds himself overwhelmed by Guenevere’s beauty when he first sees her. However, rather than in a half-awake, somewhat mad state like Guenevere’s, Lancelot works as an artist: “si i furent les ymages si bien faites et si soltivement com s’il eust touz les jorz de sa vie fait cest mestier” (5:52) (“the paintings were as skillfully and well done as if he had practiced this trade all the days of his life” [3:218]). This description of Lancelot seeing and creating painted representations of himself and Guenevere falling in love is striking, intensified by the skill with which he paints. Just as Guenevere moved to wrap her arms around “Lancelot,” here Lancelot himself deliberately entwines his history with Guenevere’s in the images he creates. He paints and repaints representations of them both, surrounding himself with the story of their love, surrounding himself, in a way, in her embrace.

Like his chivalric prowess in *Le Chevalier de la Charrette*, Lancelot’s artistic

skills are enhanced by his love for Guenevere, and his interaction with objects representing Guenevere poses the danger of discovery of their relationship. When Morgan, in love with her prisoner, enters his room to watch him sleep, she says bitterly that Lancelot's painting ability can be attributed to his love for Guenevere: "cest chevalier [...] ja jor de sa vie ne feist si bien ymages, se ne fust destroiz d'amors qui a ce l'out mené" (5:53) ("this knight [...] never in his life would have been able to paint so well had he not been overwhelmed by love, which brought him to this" [3:218-19]). Morgan is able to read the narrative portrayed and understands that it recounts the lovers' betrayal of King Arthur. Before she leaves Lancelot's room, Morgan comments ominously that she will show her brother the king these images, foreshadowing a scene later in the Lancelot-Grail cycle in which Arthur reads Lancelot's representations of his affair with the queen and understands the betrayal. These paintings will serve as proof to Arthur of the affair; the danger of discovery will be fully realized later in the romance cycle when Arthur sees (and "reads") the paintings. In fact, Paul Rockwell characterizes Lancelot's role in this portion of the romance as that of a "type of chronicler who works in a medium of painted *ymages* and who produces a story that corresponds perfectly to the text before the reader."⁷ The visual stories Lancelot creates also turn other characters into readers of his painted texts, and Morgan as well as Arthur can read them.

This articulation of Lancelot's desire takes on a physical component as this episode continues, physicality that resembles the way in which Guenevere moved from her bed to embrace the Lancelot statue. Beyond taking comfort in looking at the paintings of Guenevere, Lancelot "vit l'ymage de sa dame, si l'ancline et la salue et vait

⁷ Rockwell, "Remembering *Troie*: The Implications of *Ymages* in the *Roman de Troie* and the *Prose Lancelot*," 24.

prés et l'ambrace et la baise en la bouche, si se delite assez plus qu'il ne feist en nule autre fame fors en sa dame" (5:54) ("saw the image of his lady, he bowed in front of it, saluted it, came over and kissed it on the mouth, and took much more pleasure in that image than in any woman except his lady" [3:219]). Guenevere, operating under a forgetfulness of self ("de lui ne li souvient") when she approaches the statue she thinks is Lancelot, does not distinguish between the statue and Lancelot himself ("fait autel feste com ele feist de celui por qui amor ele le faisoit"). Guenevere's forgetfulness in comparison to Lancelot's accurate memory is the subject of Rockwell's analysis of the two scenes, in which he argues that the text differentiates between the two by their memories or lack thereof (26). This raises the question of why Guenevere should be characterized as forgetful of herself and Lancelot as highly artistic when there are more similarities than differences in these two passages. While she appears to this modern reader as no more mad than he, as she embraces and speaks to a statue and he kisses and bows before a painting, the text attempts to explain Guenevere's actions, while Lancelot's seem to need no explanation. Perhaps the difference the narrative makes between Guenevere's madness and Lancelot's similar behavior points to a need within the text to disparage Guenevere's interaction with the statue and valorize Lancelot's involvement with the paintings.

The representation of objects filling in for absent lovers draws the scenes featuring the statue and the paintings together. Reading them in relation to one another reveals that the interaction between lovers and objects that remind them of their absent loved ones casts both passages in a light of looking, touching, and loving. Guenevere imagines Lancelot's body overtaking a statue after gazing upon it, and she is as happy

with the representation as she is with the lover it represents. Lancelot paints Guenevere's body and then takes pleasure in the painted representation, as he has done with her body itself. The text identifies the pleasure as located in the image, inspired by seeing the image, for both Lancelot and Guenevere.

Reading these two passages about lovers and objects together allows for a complex understanding of the ways in which desire manifests itself through looking and touching for Lancelot and Guenevere. In his discussion of Lancelot's memory in comparison to Guenevere's, Paul Rockwell writes that

The *ymages* of Lancelot's prison also create a type of *locus amoenus*. Not only do they depict the erotic encounters of the adulterous couple, but in Guenevere's absence, the *ymages* become the object of Lancelot's affection. Lancelot has produced on the walls such faithful portraits of his lady that, in her absence, they become a surrogate for the queen. (25)

Just as Guenevere loves the statue, Lancelot loves the paintings. In spite of this surrogacy, however, Lancelot remains more in control of his imaginings than Guenevere, according to Rockwell. He continues, "Despite Lancelot's fascination with the image of his lady, he is aware that it is *only* an image. He fetishizes a representation of Guenevere and at the same time acknowledges the difference that distinguishes the *ymage* of the queen" (26). This awareness of Lancelot's is not so clear in the passage I cite below, however. After the initial painting and Morgan's interpretation of the images, the text returns to Lancelot incarcerated and his daily ritual with the images:

Quant il estoit levez chascun matin, si venoit a chascunne figure qui estoit pointe en leu de la roine, si les baisoit es ieux et es bouches ausi com se ce fust sa dame la roine ; si plouroit et se demantoit trop durement. Et quant il avoit grant piece dementé et plaint sa mescheance, si revenoit as ymages et les baisoit et lor faisoit la greingnor honor que il pooit et ainsi se reconfortoit par lui meismes, et ce estoit la chose qui plus li avenoit. (5:61)

Each morning after rising, he went to each figure representing the queen

and kissed the eyes and mouth just as if it were his lady the queen, and he wept and lamented most bitterly. And when he had at length lamented and bewailed his ill fortune, he returned to the pictures and kissed them and showed them the greatest honor he could and so consoled himself, and that was the thing that most pleased him.⁸

Lancelot's daily attentions to the representations of Guenevere point to, at the very least, a devotion to an *yimage* that calls into question how fully Lancelot is capable of separating the paintings from his recollections of Guenevere herself. This passage, when read together with Guenevere's encounter with the statue, reemphasizes the idea that both Lancelot and Guenevere are under the influence of their desire, revealed to the reader and to observers within the story by their interactions with objects that represent their lovers.

In an example of reading the scenes together, Alexandre Leupin considers both Lancelot and Guenevere to be seized by a kind of madness, made evident in their reactions to the *yimages* that represent their absent lovers. He writes,

The lover's madness, as with Guenevere, is no longer directed towards the body itself, but to the simulacra; however, for Lancelot it is specified as a perverse 'creation,' a narcissistic phantasm with which the artist or the writer falls in love [...]. What is more, the passion for the image, far from attaching itself to a single body, is scattered among the plurality of the representations. There are multiple figures of Guenevere in the prison, corresponding to various episodes that divide up the narrative; Lancelot celebrates each one, blotting out the uniqueness of the body itself by the increasing number of simulacra.⁹

Leupin's analysis points to repetition within the scene, the repetition of images of Guenevere. The importance of memory emerges from Leupin's discussion, because

⁸ Lacy, ed., *Lancelot-Grail: The Old French Arthurian Vulgate and Post-Vulgate in Translation*. This translation is found in vol. 3, p. 224, and the translator for this section is Carleton Carroll.

⁹ "Le délire amoureux, comme chez Guenièvre, ne s'adresse plus au corps propre, mais au simulacre; cependant, il est spécifié chez Lancelot comme 'création' perverse, fantasme narcissique dont l'artiste ou l'écrivain tombe amoureux [...]. De plus, la passion de l'image, loin de s'attacher à un seul corps, se dissémine dans la pluralité des représentations. Il y a maintes figures de Guenièvre dans la prison, correspondant aux divers épisodes qui découpent le récit; à chacune, Lancelot fait fête, effaçant par la multiplication des simulacres l'unicité du corps propre." Leupin, *Le Graal et la littérature : Étude sur la vulgate arthurienne en prose* 123.

Lancelot has portrayed Guenevere as he remembers her, at different points in their shared relationship. Repetition of *ymages*, both enclosed in the room with Lancelot and between the two different episodes in the romance draws attention to resemblance and variation in how the two characters interact with the *ymages*. The repeated use of *ymages* raises the question of what it means within the text that these surrogate lovers substitute for the lovers themselves. The substitution allows both lovers to express their desires and to gain some comfort in the absence of their beloveds.

The *ymages* come back in the final text of the Lancelot-Grail cycle, the *Mort Artu*, demonstrating a repetition that links two different but connected texts together. The paintings created by Lancelot of Guenevere and the story of their love affair serve to convince Arthur that his wife and his best knight have betrayed him.¹⁰ This is not the first time Arthur has heard about the possibility of such a relationship; it is, however, the first time he believes it.¹¹ Arthur, having stumbled upon Morgan's castle in the woods, is taken by design to sleep "en la chambre meïsmes ou Lancelos avoit jadis tant demoré; en cele chambre avoit il portrete l'amor de lui et de la reïne Guenievre"¹² ("into the very room in which Lancelot had formerly stayed and in which he had painted depictions of his love for Queen Guenevere."¹³ When he awakes the next morning, sunlight illuminates the paintings, and everything about his wife's relationship with his knight is illuminated.

¹⁰ Given the feudal framework of the Lancelot-Grail Cycle, the adulterous relationship between Lancelot and Guenevere has ramifications that go beyond betrayal. For a feminist historicist analysis of queenship and adultery in medieval romance, including the *Prose Lancelot*, see Peggy McCracken, *The Romance of Adultery: Queenship and Sexual Transgression in Old French Literature* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1998). For a discussion of these issues in the *Prose Lancelot*, see Elspeth Kennedy, "Social and Political Ideas in the French *Prose Lancelot*," *Medium Ævum* 26 (1957).

¹¹ Agravain, just a few pages earlier in the *Mort Artu*, has informed Arthur about his suspicions of a liaison between Lancelot and the queen. Arthur refuses to believe him, and says that even if it were true, Lancelot would be acting under the influence of love and would have no power to do differently.

¹² Jean Frappier, ed., *La Mort le roi Artu: Roman du XIIIe siècle* (Geneva, Switz.: Droz, 1964) 59. Arthur does not recognize Morgan, though she is his sister. He thought she was dead.

¹³ Lacy, ed., *Lancelot-Grail: The Old French Arthurian Vulgate and Post-Vulgate in Translation*. This translation by Norris Lacy is found in vol 4, p.106. Further citations in text.

This long passage shows the reader how the *ymages* affect Arthur as well as his ability to “read” them and determine for himself whether they could be true:

si avint que li rois commença a regarder entor lui et vit les peintures et les ymages que Lancelos avoit portretes tandis comme il demora leantz en prison. Li rois Artus savoit bien tant de letres qu’il pooit auques un escrit entendre ; et quant il ot veües les letres des ymages qui devoioient les senefiances des portretures, si les commença a lire, et tant que il connut apertement que cele chambre estoit peinte des oeuvres Lancelot et des chevaleries que il fist tant comme il estoit noviax chevaliers. Si n’i vit onques chose que il ne conneüst a voire par les noveles que l’en li aporloit toute jor a cort des ses chevaleries, si tost comme il avoit fete la proesce.

Einsint commença li rois a lire les oevres Lancelot par les peintures que il veoit ; et quant il voit les ymages qui devoioient l’acointement Galeholt, si en fu touz esbahiz et touz trespansez ; si commence a regarder ceste chose et dist a soi meïsmes tout basset : “Par foi, fet il, se la senefiance de ces letres est veraie, donques m’a Lancelos honni de la reïne, car ge voi tout en apert que il s’en est acointiez ; et se il est veritez einsi com ceste escriture le tesmoigne, ce est la chose qui me metra au greigneur duel que ge onques eüsse, que plus ne me pooit Lancelos avillier que de moi honnir de ma fame.” (61)

it happened that the king began to look around him and saw the pictures and the images that Lancelot had painted while he was imprisoned there. King Arthur could read well enough to decipher a text; and when he saw the letters and images that explained the meaning of the paintings, he began to read them, and he realized that they depicted Lancelot’s deeds and the exploits he had performed since the time he first became a knight. And he saw nothing that he did not recognize as true, because news of Lancelot’s deeds was regularly brought to court as soon as he accomplished them.

Thus the king began to read about Lancelot’s deeds in the paintings he saw; and when he saw the images depicting the meeting arranged by Galehaut, he was astonished and became pensive. He began to look at that and said quietly to himself, “My word, if these letters are telling the truth, Lancelot has dishonored me with the queen, for I see clearly that he was having an affair with her. And if that’s true, as these letters suggest, this causes me more grief than I’ve ever known. Lancelot could not shame me worse than by dishonoring me with my wife.” (4:106)

Arthur’s reaction seems to imply that Lancelot provided, in addition to the *ymages*, a written account of his relationship with Guenevere, that he added rubrics explaining his

illuminations, as would be common in the manuscript version of the book itself where the romance is recounted. The presence of words is not evident in the passages in the *Prose Lancelot* where we first learn of the paintings' existence, but this passage in the *Mort Artu* seems to imply that in addition to the images, Lancelot also described the actions taking place with words. It is equally possible that this passage points to Arthur's ability to read the *ymages*, which I think is a more suggestive interpretation as it underscores the ability of the paintings to influence both characters within the narrative of the Lancelot-Grail cycle and the narrative itself. For Arthur, seeing is believing, and for the first time he acknowledges that the rumors that have become rampant at his court might be valid because he sees them depicted on the walls of Lancelot's former prison. In a way, these paintings circulate in a fashion similar to the circulation of rumors about Lancelot in the *Charrette*. Though the paintings are, of course, stationary, Morgan has planned and even coerced Arthur's presence in the room. Rather than telling Arthur about his wife's betrayal, she lets Lancelot's paintings speak for themselves. The rumors circulating at court do not convince Arthur, but the paintings, visual evidence created by Lancelot's own hand, do.

The strength of images as representations of truth over spoken rumors becomes even clearer when Arthur discusses the paintings with his sister. As Morgan recounts the history of Lancelot's love for Guenevere, Arthur says to her "ge i voi ma honte toute aparissant et la traïson Lancelot" (63) ("I see depicted there my obvious dishonor and Lancelot's treason" [4:107]). In this passage, the king directs his gaze at the paintings, and the longer he looks, the more convinced he becomes that the love affair represented on the walls happened. The repeated emphasis on looking at objects that represent lovers

builds upon the meaning created in *Prose Lancelot* passages, and the love and desire shared by Lancelot and Guenevere emerge from the paintings to convince Arthur of their betrayal.

Moult regarda li rois l'ouvraigne de la chambre et i pensa moult durement, et moult se tient grant piece en tel maniere qu'il ne dist mot. Et quant il ot grant piece pensé, si dist : "Iceste chose me dist avant ier Agravains meïsmes, mes ge ne le creioie mie, einz cuidioie que il se mentist ; mes ceste chose qui ci est meinne mon cuer a greigneur certineté que je n'estoie devant ; por quoi ge vos di que ge n'en serai jamés a ese devant que ge en sache la pure verité. Et se il est einssi comme ces ymages ici le tesmoignent, que Lancelos m'ai fet tel honte comme de moi honnir de ma fame, je me traveilleraï tant que il seront ensemble pris prové. Et lors se ge n'en faz tel joustise qu'il en sera parlé a touz jorz mes, ge otroi que ge ne port jamés coronne." (64-65)

For a long time the king looked at the paintings in the room and pondered these matters without ever saying a word. And at long last he said, "Agravain himself told me this same thing the other day, but I didn't believe him; instead, I thought he was lying. But what I see here makes me more certain than I ever was, and I tell you that I'll never rest until I know the complete truth about it. And if it's true, as these images indicate, that Lancelot has shamed me by dishonoring my wife, I'll pursue this until they are caught together in the act. And then, if I fail to impose a punishment that will be remembered forever, I agree never to wear a crown again." (4:107)

In this passage in the *Mort Artu*, the narrator uses, in Arthur's first-person voice, the verb "tesmoignent," (they witness), to describe what these *ymages* do in terms of Lancelot's actions with Guenevere. They speak to Arthur and Arthur hears a claim of truth regarding Lancelot's dishonoring of the king's wife, and the paintings provoke a promise of vengeance from Arthur. The witnessing images circulate in the narrative, though they remain physically enclosed within the chamber in Morgan's castle.¹⁴ For Guenevere's husband, the images circulate even more effectively than the spoken rumors at court,

¹⁴ This is a theme that the *Mort Artu* has in common with *Le Roman de la Rose ou de Guillaume de Dole*, which I discuss in the next chapter. Lienor, the main female character of that romance, has a birthmark that, while Lienor and her birthmark remain in her bedchamber until the very end of the romance, circulates wildly by word of mouth throughout the romance.

because they reveal a first-person narrative of the affair. The very real danger of discovery of the affair is realized via Arthur's looking at Lancelot's painted *ymages*.

At the end of this episode in the *Mort Artu*, Arthur communicates his fear that if he can read the *ymages*, maybe others will be able to as well, making his dishonor widely known as knowledge of them circulates:

il ne volt que nus entrast en la chambre fors seulement Morgain, tant com il i sejorna, por les peintures qui si apertement devoioient sa honte ; si ne voldrait en nule maniere que autres en seüst la verité que il, car trop doutoit honte et que la parole n'en fust ailleurs portée. (65-66)

he did not want anyone other than Morgan to enter the room as long as he was there, because of the paintings that so openly depicted his shame; and he certainly did not want anyone other than himself to know the truth, for he greatly feared dishonor and was afraid that news of it might be spread everywhere. (4:108)

Morgan, who already knows the significance of the paintings and explained to Arthur that Lancelot had indeed painted them, is the only person Arthur permits to enter the room with him. The danger of discovery continues to surround the affair even though Arthur, whose knowledge of it poses the greatest threat to the lovers, already knows. In this instance, as opposed to the fear of Arthur that Guenevere experiences when her cousin urges her to return to bed because the king is coming, Arthur himself experiences fear of discovery. Fear is transformed from that of the unfaithful queen dreading her husband's wrath to that of the dishonored royal husband, who wants to prevent the public circulation of the knowledge of his wife's betrayal.

Shielded Lovers

Circulation continues to be a key theme in relation to the third and final object I

will discuss in this chapter. In the *Mort Artu*, when Arthur first begins to read the paintings, he sees an *ymage* of the meeting between Lancelot and Guenevere arranged by Galehaut, a friend of Lancelot who is privy to the love Lancelot feels for Guenevere. This passage takes place in the *Prose Lancelot*, and I return to it now to discuss a love object that represents both Lancelot and Guenevere together. The absence of lovers in this text becomes, briefly, a time of plenitude, a notion which is reflected in the magical but broken shield which unites physically when Lancelot and Guenevere do the same.

The passages related to the shield highlight the shield as a truly mobile object that makes the rounds between several characters both minor and major. The shield first appears when a maiden brings it to Guenevere, sent by the Lady of the Lake, the woman who, unbeknownst to Guenevere, raised Lancelot from his early childhood and loves him as a mother. This passage raises the question of who created the object, who gazes upon it, and who can interpret what it means as it circulates throughout the narrative. Guenevere certainly cannot make this interpretation, and finds herself mystified by the shield's meaning, who sent it, and why. The messenger attempts to explain:

“Dame, salus vous mande la plus sage pucele qui orendroit vive et la plus bele que je sache au mien essiant, et si vous mande que vous gardés cest escu por amor de li et de’ autrui que vous plus amés, et si vous mande que ele est la pucele du monde qui plus seit de vos pensés et plus s’i acorde, que ele aime chou que vous amés. Et bien sachiés, se vous cest escu gardés, il vous garira de la grignor dolor que vous eussiés onques et metera en la grignor joie ou vous onques fuissiés.” (8:205)

“My lady, I bring you greetings from the wisest lady now alive, and the most beautiful I know of; she asks that you keep this shield for the love of her and of another, whom you love even more, and she sends you this message: that she knows more about your thoughts and shares them more than anyone else in the world, for she loves the same person you do. And be assured that if you keep this shield, it will cure you of the greatest

sorrow you ever had and will give you your greatest joy.”¹⁵

The messenger sent by the Lady of the Lake uses the same words Guenevere does in the passage with the statue, when Guenevere appeals to the statue to comfort her after she dreamed of Lancelot in bed with another woman. The shield will heal her of “la grignor dolor” (the greatest sorrow) and will go one step further: the shield will also bring her “la grignor joie” (the greatest joy). The association of these strongest of emotions with the love object points to the object’s importance in the narrative, and in the relationship between Guenevere and Lancelot.

As an introduction to the shield, this passage serves more to complicate its meaning than to clarify it. The Lady of the Lake at this point remains unknown to Guenevere and to the reader, so Guenevere must wonder along with the reader about the identity of this wise and beautiful woman who also loves Lancelot. The text invites the contemplation of the greatest pain Guenevere will experience, and how the shield might heal that pain and translate it into her greatest joy. The shield serves as an object given by another lady and a portent, in addition to its status as an object of war most generally used by knights for protection against the blows of other knights in battle. It warns Guenevere of upcoming events, and it will also protect her. The repetition of the superlative “grignor” (greatest) with both “dolor” (pain) and “joie” (joy) points to the power of the shield to heal and bring about pleasure, though the origin of that power is still unknown. The similarity of the language used in this passage and in the passage with the Lancelot statue links the two together by repetition, and encourages the reader to think of Lancelot and wonder how Guenevere’s greatest pain and joy may be connected

¹⁵ Lacy, ed., *Lancelot-Grail: The Old French Arthurian Vulgate and Post-Vulgate in Translation*. This translation by Carleton Carroll is in vol. 2, p. 168.

to her relationship with him.

Guenevere takes the shield from the maiden, and we receive a detailed description of it which points to its function as a representational object:

Lors li oste ele meisme l'escu du col, si le regarde moult et amont et aval et voit que il est tous fendus des le pié jusqu'en la pene amont ne ne tienent les .II. parties a nule rien que eles ne chient fors au bras de la borcle qui moult est et riche et bele, et sont les .II. moitiés si loig l'une de l'autre que l'en puet entre .II. fichier sa main sans touchier as .II. moitiés. En l'une des parties de l'escu avait .I. chevalier si richement armé com chil le sot miex faire qui le fist, fors la teste ; et en l'autre moitié estoit portraite une si bele dame com on la ot plus bele portraire, si estoient par en haut si pres a pres que li uns tenoit ses bras au col a l'autre et s'entrebaisoient, se ne fust la fendeure de l'escu, mais par desous estoient si loing li uns de l'autre com plus pooient. (8:206)

Then the queen herself removed the shield from the maiden's neck, examined it closely, up and down, and saw that it was completely split, from the base right up to the top, and only the cross-piece of the boss, which was both rich and beautiful, kept the two parts from falling apart; they were so far from one another that one could stick one's hand between them without touching either side.

On one of the parts of the shield there was a knight, as richly armed as the artist's skill could make him, except for his head; on the other half was the most beautiful lady ever portrayed. At the top they were so close that he had his arms around her neck, and they would have been kissing had it not been for the split in the shield, and below they were as far from one another as they could be. (2:168)

A split shield would serve no purpose for a knight in battle, and the split marks it as inappropriate as an object of war, which suggests that its purpose is something beyond a shield's most common use. That the description is presented through the eyes of Guenevere is also significant; she "le regarde moult" (examines it closely), and through this looking, the shield takes on a particular meaning, even if Guenevere herself does not immediately realize that she and Lancelot are the couple portrayed on it. Verb tenses and mood refine the explanation of the shield's meaning. Lancelot and Guenevere would be kissing ("s'entrebaisoient") if not for the split in the shield. The use of the imperfect

shows the text imagining a scene that should have been. It did not happen, but the text is curiously vivid in its description of the actions of the couple portrayed on the shield.

This imperfect tense coyly describes what should be. The imperfect subjunctive (“se ne fust la fendeure...”) breaks the description as the split breaks the shield. The language describes not what is on the shield in its undamaged form, but what would be there if the shield were not broken. It attributes an intentionality to the object itself, interrupted only by the shield’s physical imperfection. If the shield were not split, the lovers would be joined.

The subject of recognition, and Guenevere’s failure to recognize the knight and lady portrayed on the shield, is linked to the circulation both of the shield itself and of the knowledge necessary to interpret its meaning. The knight’s lack of a helmet should render him more recognizable to an observer, while also freeing his eyes to look upon the lady on the other half of the shield. This absent helmet is an interesting insertion into the description of a shield. Shields were often used in the Middle Ages, and specifically in medieval literature, to identify knights. In fact, Yoïchi Shimazaki writes that the use of shields spread throughout Europe during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries primarily as a method of identification in battle where knights covered in armor were otherwise difficult to recognize. This custom reached the literary realm and features strongly in the *Prose Lancelot* and other Arthurian romances.¹⁶ The shield represents Lancelot and Guenevere and their mutual love in a public way to those who can interpret the shield’s meaning; as with the *yimages* in Morgan’s castle, not many are able to read the representations on the shield due to the limited circulation of the knowledge necessary to

¹⁶ Yoïchi Shimazaki, "L'Amour d'Hector et le motif de l'écu dans le *Lancelot en prose*," *Études de Langue et Littérature Françaises* 56 (1990): 6-7.

make the identification.

Guenevere herself, in fact, does not manage to recognize the knight on the shield, in spite of his uncovered head. She questions the maiden about the identity of the knight and lady, and the maiden's response is intriguing:

“Dame, chist est uns chevaliers, li mieudres qui orendroit soit au mien quidier. Tant fist li chevaliers que par amor que par oevre que la dame li dona s'amor. Mais plus n'i a encor que de baisier et d'acoler, si com vous veés en cest escu ; et quant il avenra que l'amor sera enterine, si saciés que chis escus que vous veés si desjoints se rejoindra et tenra ensamble les .II. parties ; et sachiés que vous serois lors delivre del gringnour duel qui onques vous avenist et serois en la grignour joie que vous eussiés onques.” (8:207)

“My lady, this is a knight, the best presently alive, who asked for a lady's love, the worthiest presently alive, in my opinion. The knight was so successful, through both his love and his deeds, that the lady gave him her love. But so far there have been only kisses and embraces, as you see on this shield; when it comes to pass that their love is complete, then be assured that this shield, which you see so broken apart, will be whole again, and the two parts will hold together. Then you will be freed from the greatest sorrow that ever befell you, and you will experience the greatest joy you have ever known.” (2:168)

The maiden's speech begins in the third person, referring to a knight and lady who have never consummated their relationship. Only in the last lines does she switch to a second-person address, stressing that “vous”—in reference to Guenevere—will experience joy. The state of the shield is connected to the physical relationship between the knight and the lady represented upon it, and these last lines of the speech encourage the reader and Guenevere herself to identify the characters portrayed on the shield and Lancelot and the queen. Shimazaki attributes three meanings to this shield, all of them linked to Lancelot: first, the cracked shield represents the unconsummated relationship between Lancelot and Guenevere. Second, it represents the state of the soul of its possessor, suffering because of love, and third, Lancelot's need for more experience as a knight, to be gained as he

progresses throughout the narrative (10-11). Most important among these is the lack of consummation of the love relationship between Lancelot and Guenevere, I think, but the idea that the state of the shield reflects the state of the soul of its possessor also raises the question of who exactly possesses the shield. Lancelot does, according to Shimazaki, but at this moment in the text, Guenevere holds the shield, and receives it as a gift from the Lady of the Lake, who shares her love for Lancelot. Shields generally belong to the realm of the chivalric in medieval romance, and it is true that Guenevere holds the shield for Lancelot until he claims it. But the maiden urges her to accept it, and it is Guenevere's happiness that she points to when describing the power of the shield. The shield, while representing Lancelot, represents more than just the knight alone or even his relationship with Guenevere: it also features a painted representation of Guenevere herself and promises that she will soon experience great happiness.

Shields in medieval literature take part in a tradition of characters represented by objects, as Shimazaki elaborates: "a shield is considered by the characters of the romance as an object that can be substituted for its possessor, who is absent or has disappeared from the scene."¹⁷ This characterization of shields connects to other objects in the *Prose Lancelot*, as well, that represent absent characters; namely, the statue and the paintings. The repetitive nature not only of the language used to refer to these objects, but to the theme of objects representing characters marks these objects as surrogates that substitute absent characters. Shields for Shimazaki are specifically objects that were once possessed by an absent owner. In this passage of the *Prose Lancelot*, the shield expands meaning, allowing for interpretations that complement and extend Shimazaki's. Shields

¹⁷Shimazaki, "L'Amour d'Hector et le motif de l'écu dans le *Lancelot en prose*," 7. My translation; the original reads, "un écu est considéré par les personnages du roman comme objet qui se substitue à son possesseur, absent ou disparu de la scène."

differ from objects that are used to represent the absent character but were never possessed by them, as in the case of Guenevere's statue and Lancelot's paintings. Shimazaki points to the shield as a representation of the knight's state of mind, and in the case of the particular shield in question, which bears images of both Lancelot and Guenevere, it portrays Guenevere as well as Lancelot, though she never carries it in battle. The fact that this shield bears representations of both Lancelot and Guenevere suggests that beyond the importance of the individual that Shimazaki attaches to this shield is the importance of the dual representation it provides.

The shield is an object that represents protection and Carol Dover likens it to a religious relic.¹⁸ She comments as well on the presentation of the shield to Guenevere rather than to Lancelot himself, calling it ironic that this presentation seems to imply that Guenevere should protect herself rather than be protected, a more common role for a lady in medieval romance (50). She goes on to provide a brief history of split-shield motifs in medieval heraldry, describing a process called dimidiation in which shields representing married women were divided visually in a vertical line, the right side bearing the coat of arms of the woman herself, the left side bearing the coat of arms of her husband. Dover uses this representational convention to point to the complexity of portraying an unmarried couple in a similar manner, especially when the lady in question already has a husband (52). The portrayal of the adulterous relationship on this shield runs the risk of revealing the truth about the relationship to any observer keen enough to "read" the images, as Arthur reads Lancelot's paintings in Morgan's castle. Indeed, as I will discuss below, a minor character does read and understand the significance not only of the couple

¹⁸ Carol Dover, "The Split-Shield Motif in the Old French *Prose Lancelot*," *The Arthurian Yearbook*, I, ed. Keith Busby (New York: Garland, 1991).

portrayed on the shield, but of the magical mending of the split down its middle.

As the episode continues, touch works with sight to aid characters in their interpretation and confirmation of the love shared by Lancelot and Guenevere. After the knight and the queen consummate their relationship, the shield, as promised, is marvelously mended:

Et endroit la mienuit se lieve la roine et vient a l'escu que la damoisele del Lac li avoit aporté, si taste sans alumer, si le trueve tout entier sans fendure, si en est moult lie, car ore seit ele bien que c'est la miex amee de nule autre amie.

Au matin, .I. poi devant le jor, se lievent li doi chevalier¹⁹ [Lancelot et Galehaut] et s'arment en la cambre la roine. Et la dame de Malahot qui moult fu sage esgarde a l'escu a le clarté as candeilles et voit que li escus est tous rajoins et dist a la roine : « Dame, or veons nos bien que l'amor est enterine. » Puis vient a Lancelot et le prent par le menton ; et il a grant honte de lui, car maint jor avoit esté en son dangier et tos jors s'estoit vers li chelés. Et la roine dist por li rescoure : « Dame, se je sui fille de roi, et il autresi, et se je sui vaillans et bele, et il plus. » Et Galahos demande que chou est et ele li conte de l'escu comment il li fu aportés et que chele del Lac li envia et que il avoit tous jors esté fendus jusc'a ore. Si l'ont a merveilles esgardé et longuement (8:444-45)

At midnight, the queen arose and went to the shield that the maiden from the Lake had brought her. In the darkness she felt it and found it completely whole, without a crack, and she was overjoyed, for now she was certain that she was better loved than any other woman.

In the morning, shortly before daybreak, the two knights [Lancelot and Galehaut] arose and put on their armor in the queen's chamber. And the lady of Malehaut, who was very astute, looked at the shield by the light of the candles, saw that it was whole again, and said to the queen, "My lady, now we can see that the love is complete." Then she went to Lancelot and took him by the chin, and he was deeply ashamed because he had spent many days in her power and had always concealed his true feelings from her.

Then to rescue him the queen said, "My lady, if my father is a king, so too is his, and if I am worthy and fair, he is more so."

Then Galehaut asked what all this meant, and she related how the shield had been brought to her, that the Lady of the Lake had sent it, and

¹⁹ The second knight is Galehaut, who has just spent the night in a neighboring room with the dame de Malahot, also experiencing, presumably, the love of his lady.

that it had always been cracked until that time. For a long time they looked at it with wonder. (2:228)

This passage is rich in its implications about the way knowledge circulates in the *Prose Lancelot* in connection to the shield. Guenevere cannot even see the shield, as she approaches it in the total darkness of midnight, but she touches it and feels that the shield has been mended. Lighting, as in the passage where Guenevere embraces the statue, plays an important role in Guenevere's interaction with the shield. This time, though, she relies entirely on touch and has not even a candle to light her way. It is significant that this discovery, unlike her encounter with the statue, happens when Lancelot is not absent from Guenevere. He is nearby, in Guenevere's bed. She does not need to see this representation of their love to know what has happened. She can instead touch the shield and know what it means, perhaps because she has just been able to touch Lancelot rather than looking at an object that represents him. But rather than tying her joy to her lovemaking with Lancelot, the narrative describes Guenevere as "moult lie" only when she feels the shield. The mending of the shield seems to confirm Lancelot's love to Guenevere, even more than the physical act she just experienced does.²⁰ Touching this object is believing the truth of their love for Guenevere, similar to the way in which seeing Lancelot's paintings proves to Arthur that Lancelot loves the queen. The lady of Malehaut, a minor character in the romance, looks upon the shield in the "clarté as candeilles" (candlelight) and interprets its meaning, much to Lancelot's embarrassment. The narrator explains her perspicacity by describing her as "moult ... sage," (very wise) and Guenevere recounts the story of the shield to Galehaut, the lady of Malehaut's lover,

²⁰ For another interpretation of the mended shield, see Dover, "The Split-Shield Motif in the Old French *Prose Lancelot*," 50. Stacey L. Hahn discusses this passage, as well: Stacey L. Hahn, "Lancelot and the Demoiselle Guérisseuse: Spiritual vs. Physical Love in the *Prose Lancelot*," *Essays in Medieval Studies* 4 (1987): 57.

who evidently is not quite as wise as his lady. His lack of comprehension, read against his lady's knowing gaze upon the shield, raises the question of which characters can interpret meaning and how knowledge circulates in the text. In this passage, the visual, in terms of the lady of Malehaut's ability to visually read the significance of the mended shield, melds with Guenevere's knowing touch upon the shield to reveal and confirm the love the queen shares with Lancelot, allowing knowledge to circulate among characters.

The shield reappears later in the narrative, and its return immediately calls to mind the previous passages in which it and other love objects played an important role, inviting the reader to understand how the passages function together to build upon the meaning of these objects. This time, the shield's magic brings solace to Lancelot when he suffers from madness during and after his imprisonment by the Saxons:²¹ "il ot la teste wide, si li est monté une folie et une rage el chief si durement que nus ne puet a lui durer, ne n'i a nul de ses compaignons qui il n'ait fait .II. plaies ou .III." (8:452). ("His head was empty of thought, and a rage and a madness arose so violently in his head that no one could withstand him, and he had inflicted two or three wounds on every one of his companions" [2:230]).²² The language describing Lancelot's madness here is much more direct than that used to illustrate Guenevere's "malaise" (uneasiness) and "estordison"

²¹ Lancelot is so violent in his madness during his imprisonment that the Saxons release him. He wanders until he arrives at the queen's lodgings, and Guenevere, who sees him coming because she is looking out a window, faints because she sees his companions following behind him in the way people follow someone suffering from madness. The healing of Lancelot takes place in Guenevere's lodgings, while Guenevere is nearby but nearly out of commission from her fright over Lancelot's mental state. This section is in Micha's edition, vol. 8, p. 453, and Carroll's translation is in vol. 2, p. 230. For more on lovers who watch their loved ones from windows, please see the first chapter of this dissertation.

²² John Plummer addresses Lancelot's madness in his essay on madness and masculine subject formation, writing that Lancelot's tenuous grip on sanity "indicates a set of unresolved questions about masculine subjectivity" (46). He connects the episodes of madness to Lancelot's interactions with "powerful, sexually charged and/or magical women" (46). John F. Plummer, "Frenzy and Females: Subject Formation in Opposition to the Other in the *Prose Lancelot*," *Arthuriana* 6.4 (1996). Both Lancelot and Guenevere suffer forms of madness, and both seem to be connected to (and, in fact, healed by) their relationships to the other.

(dizziness) when she awakens in the middle of the night and sees a statue as Lancelot.

Both, though, are comforted by images representing the other. He is cured by the Lady of the Lake with the help of the shield with Guenevere's likeness on it:

Et ele dist que on li aport l'escu et on li aporte. "Ha, fait ele, biax dols amis, tant m'avés traveillié que por vostre delivrance sui venue de moult loing." Puis li met l'escu au col et il soefre quanqu'ele li fait ; et si tost com ele li a mis, si rest en son sens. Et ele le prent, si le met en une couce jesir ; et il le connoist, si commenche a plorer moult durement, et la roine se merveille moult qui ele peut estre. Et quant il est revenus en son sens, si voit l'escu a son col, si dist : "A, dame, ostés moi cest escu, car il m'ochist.—Non ferai, fait ele, ne il ne sera ja ostés tant com je voldrai." (8:458-59)

Then she asked for the shield, and it was brought to her. "Ah," she said, "dear friend, you have so distressed me that I have come from far away to deliver you." Then she placed the shield upon him; he accepted whatever she did, and as soon as she had placed the shield upon him, he regained his senses. Then she took him and made him lie down upon a couch; he recognized her and began to weep most bitterly, and the queen was sorely puzzled as to who she could be.

When he had regained his senses, he saw the shield upon him and he said, "Oh, my lady, remove this shield, for it torments me!"

"No, I won't," she replied, "nor will it be removed as long as I wish it to remain." (2:231).

The Lady of the Lake's messenger promised Guenevere that the shield would serve as a talisman of sorts for her, and would cure her of her greatest pain and give her her greatest joy. She has already experience the joy during the consummation of her relationship with Lancelot; and perhaps Guenevere's greatest pain is seeing Lancelot suffer from madness. The Lady of the Lake, via her messenger, did not mention to Guenevere that the shield would also protect and cure Lancelot, but it does. Though the Lady of the Lake provided the shield and comes to place it on Lancelot's chest to cure him, Stacey Hahn attributes the restoration of his reason to the representation the shield provides of his love for Guenevere (57). The shield's curative powers also figure into Carol Dover's analysis, as

she writes:

the love it emblemizes is to be the protection for his heart [...] It is clear that the magic shield, which depicts not only love between Lancelot and Guinevere but specifically the physical union of the love, operates as his defense against insanity. (53)

Dover refers to the double healing power of the shield, which heals Guenevere of her greatest pain and Lancelot of his madness, an important point that can be pushed even further to assert that the shield is a representational object for both Lancelot and Guenevere, and works to save both of them. It rescues Guenevere from seeing Lancelot suffering in the throes of insanity, and it rescues Lancelot from that insanity. However, Lancelot's reason restored, his reaction to the shield on his body is troubling. The shield bestows upon Guenevere her greatest joy; but for Lancelot, though it does bring him back to his senses, it is also a source of great torment. In fact, when he begs to have it removed it from his chest, he says it is killing him: "il m'ochist." If the shield represents for Lancelot his physical union with Guenevere, then perhaps his torment in wearing it implies that that physical union is dangerous to him, a notion that reappears later in the text.²³

The shield's significance as an object that visually represents and reveals the relationship between Lancelot and Guenevere helps shape the narrative of the *Prose Lancelot*. The shield itself, according to Dover, is

an external object that Lancelot will wear, a visual sign of his identity as lover, as if to state analogically that inside and outside are identical. For the unprivileged viewer, the shield is merely a decorated weapon. For the privileged, private few—including the reader—who know how to read the secret meaning of the split shield, it is a daring declaration of a special/unique love. (56)

The emphasis Dover places on sight and its connections to understanding and to identity

²³ Lancelot's lack of sexual purity prevents him from joining the quest for the Holy Grail.

is suggestive. For Guenevere, feeling the mended shield after she sleeps with Lancelot allows her to experience a joy that the text attributes only to her interactions with the shield, and not to sex with Lancelot. Touch displaces sight in the passage, just as the shield displaces Lancelot, but for all other characters who are able to understand the meaning of the shield, sight is key. The lady of Malehaut, who is not even privy to the details that allow the Lady of the Lake, Guenevere, and Lancelot to interpret the meaning of the shield, examines it by candlelight and understands. The emphasis on what kind of light she uses underscores the importance of seeing in the passage, and links to the candlelight that illuminates the statue Guenevere sees as Lancelot. This reference to the legibility of the shield's meaning is an important one for all the objects: the shield as well as the paintings and the statue—the limitations on which characters can see and understand the significance of each object point to intimate knowledge about their status as symbols of a secret love.

These objects represent lovers to those who love them: a statue that Guenevere sees as Lancelot, a room full of wall paintings created by Lancelot that tell the story of his love for Guenevere, as well as a magical shield that portrays both Lancelot and Guenevere. These objects function as potent representations in that they make an impression upon the character who creates them as well as on other characters. The *ymages* both spring from and fuel the desire each character experiences for the other. The first two objects, the statue and the paintings, come into existence because the two lovers are separated. The shield, on the other hand, seems to draw its power both from the magic of the Lady of the Lake and from the physical union of the two lovers.

These passages in the *Prose Lancelot* are a fruitful location for the analysis of

vision and touch, and how these two senses are at play in the development of love relationships in the romance. Both lovers, stricken by the absence of the other, mourn and suffer the pangs of separation, and both lovers, out of this suffering, create visual representations on which they can bestow their affections. And when they are finally united, the two halves of the broken shield magically unite with them, and the mended shield goes on to bring Guenevere great joy and heal Lancelot from his madness. The repeated references to objects that represent lovers invite the reader to consider the ways in which these scenes overlap and build meaning, circulating knowledge of the love affair among different characters in the romance. In this multivolume work, the three instances of loving objects offer the opportunity to think in more depth about how objects that are seen and touched might define love relationships, framing the story of Lancelot and Guenevere in the context of looking and loving, touch and memory, repetition and circulation.

Chapter Three

“La pucele a la rose”: Seeing and Speaking Bodily Inscription in Jean Renart’s *Roman de la Rose ou de Guillaume de Dole*

In Jean Renart’s early thirteenth-century *Roman de la Rose ou de Guillaume de Dole*, circulation and knowledge drive the narrative.¹ In some ways similar to the circulation of the rumor of Lancelot’s identity in the *Charrette*, but quite different from the circulation of objects that characters look upon in the *Prose Lancelot* and the *Mort Artu*, spoken claims to knowledge that circulate among characters in the *Roman de la Rose* are based on claims to have seen, not on actual sight. The romance tells the tale of a young woman, Lienor, whom Conrad, an emperor, has never seen but with whom he has fallen in love after hearing of her beauty. Though the story Conrad has heard lacks this particularly intimate detail, other characters in the romance come by an important bit of information: the beautiful and desired Lienor has a birthmark. The birthmark, red and rose-shaped, is on the maiden’s “cuisse blanche et tendre” (“tender white thigh” [l. 3365])² of the maiden. The birthmark exists primarily in the stories told about it, and it is seen (and truthfully described) only by the heroine’s mother. And even her sight of it takes place prior to the narrative’s beginning. Various characters tell their versions of the

¹ How early in the thirteenth century is subject to debate, and estimates range from 1201 to about 1228 depending on the source. For a very good history of this debate, see Regina Psaki’s introduction to her edition of the text. She points particularly to the significance of the debate in relation to which came first, Jean Renart’s *Rose* or the more famous one of Guillaume de Lorris. Psaki convincingly contests Michel Zink’s argument that Jean Renart wrote after Guillaume de Lorris, suggesting instead that it is more likely that Jean Renart wrote his *Rose* first. Jean Renart’s *Rose* exists in only one extant manuscript, dating from the late thirteenth century.

² Jean Renart, *Roman de la Rose ou de Guillaume de Dole*, ed. Regina Psaki (New York: Garland, 1995). Translations are hers; further citations in the text.

birthmark description, whether they have seen the birthmark in question or not. In fact, the birthmark comes to be defined by the speeches characters make about it, while it also defines the characters in relation to each other and by how they gained their knowledge of it. It is through these speeches that characters express their desire to see and claims to have seen the rose. The shape comes to name the mark, so that it takes shape as a rose and circulates in the form of a mark, a thing, and primarily, as a story, because characters circulate their claims to have seen the birthmark.

Both circulation and knowledge are explicitly debated in this text, and both explicitly involve a woman's body. Sight in narrative texts is, of course, always mediated by the language of the narrative. But in this romance in particular, the sight of the characters is doubly mediated by language because descriptions of the rose are always at least second-hand: no character looks at it while describing it, and most do not see it at all. The act of seeing, and specifically, of claiming to have seen, Lienor's birthmark forces characters to navigate between seen and unseen, truth and lies, male and female, beholder and beheld, subject and object, and between familial and romantic love. Seeing and claims to have seen objectify this female character, but also provide her with the opportunity to use her body to destabilize that objectification near the end of the romance. Moving from the discussion of objects in the previous chapter, I use the term objectification in this chapter to refer to the ways in which characters turn Lienor's body, and the inscription on it, into the object of their claims to have seen the mark on her thigh as they circulate these claims of looking. Circulation, in the story and in spoken claims to have seen, constitutes and defines the object: a woman's body and the metonymous mark upon it.

The circulation of knowledge is an important aspect of the genre into which the story of Lienor and her birthmark fits. The *Roman de la Rose ou de Guillaume de Dole* is one of several romances that make up what critics refer to as the cycle of wager romances. These types of romances feature a common plot, wherein a male authority figure (husband, brother, or lover) is challenged to make a bet on the chastity or virginity of a woman. The challenger, circulating (false) knowledge, finds a way to provide a false proof of the woman's seduction. She is disgraced, but the truth comes out eventually and her honor is restored, and the woman returns to a happy marriage or enters into one.³ Several critics point to the fact that the *Roman de la Rose* is a wager romance without a wager.⁴ Lienor's body becomes the object of claims to have seen a birthmark located on her thigh; these claims put into question her virginity, which in turn puts into question her suitability to marry the emperor who loves her. There is no offered or accepted wager regarding the test of Lienor's virginity, though characters certainly do scrutinize that virginity or insinuated lack thereof, and the theme of seeing/not seeing and speaking of the rose on Lienor's body circulates throughout the text. The wager-type scenario stages questions that motivate my reading of this romance, especially in terms of speech that circulates among characters and its relationship to the body of the female character the wager confronts.

Love at First Lyric

³ For more on wager romances, as well as a different reading of the *Roman de la Rose* than the one I am about to offer, see Roberta L. Krueger, "Double Jeopardy: The Appropriation of Woman in Four Old French Romances of the 'Cycle de la Gageure,'" *Seeking the Woman in Late Medieval and Renaissance Writings: Essays in Feminist Contextual Criticism*, eds. Sheila Fisher and Janet E. Halley (Knoxville, TN: U of Tennessee P, 1989).

⁴ See, for example, in addition to Roberta Krueger, Norris J. Lacy, "'Amer par oïr dire': *Guillaume de Dole* and the Drama of Language," *French Review* 54.6 (1981). Ben Ramm, "A Rose by Any Other Name?: Queering Desire in Jean Renart's *Le roman de la Rose, ou de Guillaume de Dole*," *Exemplaria* 19.3 (2007).

The audience's introduction to Lienor comes through the character Jouglet, who sings her praises to Conrad, the German emperor. The description of her beauty follows courtly tradition. She is the most exceptionally beautiful woman ever seen, and she remains at a distance, described by a man who once saw her to a man who falls in love with the image Jouglet creates with his lyric. She is a song, a story. In this introduction to Lienor, the text plays with both lyric and courtly traditions, and presents Lienor in the way the narrative will continue to portray her: as a lovely construction of those characters who speak (or sing) about her. This is a text "brodez par lieux" ("embroidered in places" [l. 14]), in Jean Renart's own words, with verses of troubadour poetry. The verses of a jongleur inspire the love of Conrad for his as yet unseen lady, Lienor. Jean recognizes the innovation of his mixing of genres, referring to his romance as "une novele chose" ("something quite new" [l. 12]).⁵ The newness of this technique is the subject of much scholarly analysis. Nearly every critic of this text refers to the following summation by Michel Zink: "This romance is, in all ways, a romance about literature."⁶ This comment by Zink underscores Jean's awareness of his interventions in the writing of romance, and Norris Lacy argues that there is more to it than that:

It is a work in which literature and reality are fused, or merged, and in which words regularly serve both as an impetus to action and as a substitute for it. It is, in a very specific sense, about language; that is, words, songs, and fictions are not only the poem's vehicle, but its subject as well. (780)

⁵ Matilda Bruckner suggests that his "novele chose" might not be quite so new after all; she offers a reading of the *Rose* in relation to *Partonopeu de Blois*, a text she argues might have served as a model, at least in part, for the intertextuality of the *Roman de la Rose*. Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner, "Romancing History and Rewriting the Game of Fiction: Jean Renart's *Rose* through the Looking Glass of *Partonopeu de Blois*," *The World and Its Rival: Essays on Literary Imagination in Honor of Per Nykrog*, eds. Kathryn Karczewska and Tom Conley (Amsterdam, Neth.: Rodopi, 1999).

⁶ Michel Zink, *Roman rose et rose rouge: Le Roman de la Rose ou de Guillaume de Dole de Jean Renart* (Paris: Nizet, 1979) 26. Translation is mine; original reads: "ce roman est, de toutes les façons, un roman sur la littérature."

With the words, songs, and fictions as the subject of the romance, the object, very frequently, is Lienor's body. Jean Renart not only mixes genres; he also mixes the ways in which he expected his text to be transmitted, according to Maureen Boulton. She points to philological evidence in the romance, including repetitions of certain verbs, to argue that the insertion of lyric poetry into the *Roman de la Rose* also implies that some of these insertions might have been sung during readings of the text, thereby disrupting the conventional romance narrative structure.⁷ Zink, though, emphasizes the importance of the textual nature of these lyric insertions: he writes that the songs "are only evocations of songs."⁸ This stylistic choice of Jean Renart connects in interesting ways to the characters and narrative he presents in his text. Lienor, as well, exists first for her future beloved as an evocation of a beautiful woman, and it is through song that she is evoked. Jean Renart's "fragmentary textual construction [...] plays with displacement and disconnectedness," according to Zink ("Suspension" 119), and indeed, this displacement and disconnectedness evident on the level of language also play an important role in a narrative in which a lover both falls in love with and decides to marry a woman he does not see until the very end of the story.

⁷ Maureen Barry McCann Boulton, "Lyric Insertions and the Reversal of Romance Conventions in Jean Renart's *Roman de la rose* or *Guillaume de Dole*," *Jean Renart and the Art of Romance: Essays on Guillaume de Dole*, ed. Nancy Vine Durling (Gainesville, FL: UP of Florida, 1997) 87-88. See also her monograph-length analysis of lyric insertions: Maureen Barry McCann Boulton, *The Song in the Story: Lyric Insertions in French Narrative Fiction, 1200-1400* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1993). For another take on the lyric insertions in Jean Renart's *Roman de la Rose*, see Marc-René Jung, "L'Empereur Conrad chanteur de poésie lyrique: Fiction et vérité dans le *Roman de la Rose* de Jean Renart," *Romania* 101 (1980). Jung summarizes and analyzes each song in the order it appears in the text. For more on intertextuality and realism in the *Roman de la Rose*, see Lydie Louison, "Le Récit de Jouglet: Un Pacte de lecture du *Roman de la Rose*?" *Revue des Langues Romanes* 104.1 (2000). For more on the connection between the lyric insertions and the meaning of the text, see Emmanuèle Baumgartner, "Les Citations lyriques dans le *Roman de la Rose* de Jean Renart," *Romance Philology* 35.1 (1981). For a discussion of the circulation of clothing in relation to the circulation of songs, see Caroline Jewers, "Fabric and Fabrication: Lyric and Narrative in Jean Renart's *Roman de la Rose*," *Speculum* 71.4 (1996).

⁸ Michel Zink, "Suspension and Fall: The Fragmentation and Linkage of Lyric Insertions in *Le roman de la rose* (*Guillaume de Dole*) and *Le roman de la violette*," *Jean Renart and the Art of Romance: Essays on Guillaume de Dole*, ed. Nancy Vine Durling (Gainesville, FL: UP of Florida, 1997) 106.

Falling in love with a beautifully described body is not a rare occurrence in medieval texts.⁹ In this romance, in which the lady's body is both hidden and rendered more desirable by language and distance, this literary conceit allows Lienor's lover to discover her not through his own vision, but through the sung recollection of another who has seen her.¹⁰ After the initial and traditional top-to-toe description of Lienor,¹¹ Jouglet

sap[er]coit m[ou]t bien que cele
Li plesoit ia par oïr dire
et ausamblant que il remire
Li est avis quil laime ia

saw clearly that the girl
pleased him already by hearsay,
and from the look of him
he loved her already (ll. 805-808)

Conrad asks for another description of Lienor, and Jouglet obliges, though the description is not repeated in the text. The rose birthmark, of course, makes no appearance in either of these descriptions of Lienor's body, as Jouglet has had no access to it, either visually or by hearsay. Its absence suggests the intimate nature of the rose, and establishes the terms for makes its later unveiling through the deceitful words of the seneschal. Since the body is song by virtue of being described in this way by Jouglet, and since the body is already materialized through description, the text sets up the terms of Lienor's appearances in the narrative. Further knowledge of Lienor will mean further descriptions of her body. The connection in this passage of "oïr dire" ("having heard said, hearsay"), love, and the verb "remire," which means to look at closely, to examine, is also a deeply

⁹ See the love poetry of Jaufré Rudel as well as the romance *Partonopeu de Blois*, for example.

¹⁰ For more on the physical absence and textual presence of Lienor, see Claude Lachet, "Présence de Liénor dans le *Roman de la Rose* de Jean Renart," *"Et c'est la fin pour quoy sommes ensemble": Hommage à Jean Dufournet professeur à la Sorbonne Nouvelle: Littérature, histoire et langue du Moyen Age*, eds. Jean-Claude Aubailly, et al. (Paris: Champion, 1993) 817.

¹¹ For more on this, see the introduction to this dissertation.

interesting one. Sight is not the way Conrad manages to “see” and, therefore, love Lienor, but Jouglet, looking closely at Conrad, ascertains that Conrad has fallen in love with Lienor. Conrad hears about Lienor and immediately loves her; Jouglet looks at Conrad and realizes how the emperor feels about Lienor. Hearing, then, substitutes for sight for Conrad, and at the same time, lyric supplants the poetry of the romance, and hearing the lyrical description of Lienor’s beautiful body inspires the love Conrad feels for her. Conrad expresses this love he feels plainly on his face, though, and Jouglet is able to read and understand it. The passage mixes sight and hearing in terms of how love is created and expressed, and Conrad’s love for Lienor immediately circulates to Jouglet when he sees the look of love on Conrad’s face.

Circulation of the Rose

Knowledge of the rose circulates among characters in ways very similar to Jouglet’s circulation of knowledge about Lienor’s beauty. Speaking and hearing displace seeing, but remain in tension with it, as the means to share and gain knowledge in this text. The seneschal, jealous of the friendship the emperor has bestowed upon Lienor’s brother and fearing a loss of his own power, undertakes to seduce Lienor in order to make her an unsuitable partner for Conrad, since she would then no longer be a virgin bride. The seduction becomes unnecessary when Lienor’s talkative mother reveals the secret of the rose; it is her spoken description of the rose that sets in motion the circulation of knowledge of its existence. To know of the rose implies an intimate knowledge of Lienor’s body that could only be gained, the seneschal implies, from having known her intimately. On the link between seeing and knowing, Suzanne Conklin Akbari writes that

“vision is a powerful metaphor for the act of knowing: the flash of insight, the thrill of illumination, the dawn of enlightenment.”¹² In this romance, vision is certainly associated with knowing, but the extent of characters’ enlightenment is presented as suspect in the text because they do not actually see what they claim to have glimpsed, either through vivid description (the beloved lady), or through invention (the lie the seneschal circulates) and their knowledge is based on untruths they have heard. What they know is not true, because there is a split between knowledge and truth (and seeing) in this romance. Lienor, in her room when the seneschal arrives at her home, continues to be kept from view, hidden from the seneschal’s sight. The seneschal says to her mother, “sil vos plesoit ge verroie / ma damoisele vostre fille” (“if it pleased you, I would like / to see my lady your daughter” [ll. 3330-3331]). Immediately after this statement by the seneschal, the narrator interjects, “ce cuit ge bien” (“I believe it!” [l. 3332]), humorously, but this intervention by the narrator also emphasizes the seneschal’s desire to look upon Lienor by interrupting the flow of the narrative and drawing the reader’s attention to the previous lines. But as becomes evident, the circulation of knowledge of the rose is not inhibited by his lack of seeing.

Though her mother refuses him visual access to Lienor, her words, like those of Jouglet in the beginning of the text, put Lienor into the position of a desired object. They also give the seneschal the information he needs to circulate his claim of intimate knowledge of her daughter’s body. The story of the rose birthmark on Lienor’s thigh becomes an object of exchange as well as the basis of a political power play for influence at court when her mother describes it. The story circulates between the mother and the

¹² Suzanne Conklin Akbari, *Seeing through the Veil: Optical Theory and Medieval Allegory* (Toronto, ON: U of Toronto P, 2004).

seneschal, as she gives it in return for a gold ring he offers her, an object in exchange for a story that will serve to objectify her daughter. This highly sensual passage calls upon both sight and hearing, with an emphasis on the latter:

uns beaus dons a mout g[ra]nt mecine
Q[ui]l fet maint mal plet dire et fere
Sili a conte tot lafaire
De la rose desor la cuisse
Ia mes nuls ho[m] qui parl[er] puisse
Ne verra si fete m[er]veille
come de la rose vermelle
desor la cuisse blanche et tendre
Il nest merveille ne soit mendre
A oir ce nest nule doute
la g[ra]nt beaute li descrit tote
et la maniere de son grant
M[ou]t en est li lerres en grant
detot enq[ue]rre et encerch[ier]
Q[ua]nt il ni ot mais qempesch[ier]
Qen peust p[ar] reson savoir
P[ar] oïr dire sanz veoir
Lors dit a la dame il est tart
ladamelesse si sen part
et dit quil ert a toz iors soens
Chetive vielle hors dou sens
Simar vit cel ior et cele heure

A handsome gift works wonders,
for it makes people say and do stupid things;
she even told him the whole story
about the rose on her daughter's thigh:
"No man capable of speech
will ever see such a wonder
as the crimson rose
on her tender white thigh.
There is no wonder so extraordinary
to hear, of this there is no doubt."
She described its great beauty to him,
and its shape and size.
The scoundrel was very eager
to question her and find out everything;
when by questioning alone he managed
to find out the whole story
by hearsay, without seeing anything,

he then told the lady, "It is late."
He left her and departed,
saying that he was her servant forever.
Wretched old woman, foolish and mad,
alas that she ever saw that day and hour! (ll. 3358-3379)

The description of "la rose vermeille" ("the crimson rose") and "la cuisse blanche et tendre" ("the tender white thigh") upon which it is inscribed underscores the visual, relying on the contrasting colors of Lienor's white skin and the red of the rose. The "vermeille" of the rose rhymes with the "mervelle" ("marvel") that also describes it; the emphasis provided by the rhyme heightens both the sensuality of the image she constructs, and the awe with which she describes it. Lienor's mother also attaches speaking, seeing, and hearing to the marvel, saying "Ia mes nuls ho[m] qui parl[er] puisse / Ne verra si fete m[er]veille" ("Never will any man who can speak ever see such a marvel") and "Il nest mervelle ne soit mendre / A oir" ("There is no wonder so extraordinary to hear"). The negative constructions are of interest here, because of the verb tenses and moods at play. In the first example, speaking men will never see the rose; a man who can speak could be used to mean all men in general, as most men are capable of speech, but that the focus is deliberately on speaking underlines the connection between seeing and then speaking; perhaps the mother fears that any man who can speak, if presented with a visual encounter with the rose, would immediately speak of it, circulating his knowledge of such a sight. This could explain why she refuses to bring down her daughter when the seneschal asks her to do it. The use of the future tense of the verb "to see" implies an unyielding resolve to prevent men from seeing the rose. Hearing, however, is another story. The verb itself is in the infinitive form, "to hear." The verb that modifies it, "soit", is in the subjunctive mood, used to express doubt or

uncertainty. The mother is not so resolved to prevent a man from hearing about the rose, and hearing is almost as good as seeing for the seneschal's purposes. "Oïr dire" also appears again here; it was by "oïr dire" that Conrad fell in love with Lienor, and it is by "oïr dire sanz veoir" ("hearsay without seeing") that the seneschal plots to unseat Lienor's brother as Conrad's right-hand man by circulating his lie about Lienor. This section emphasizes the importance of hearing and its connection to sight (or to not seeing). As Nancy Vine Durling writes, "his experience of the woman is purely verbal."¹³ Though his experience is limited to the verbal, the verbal allows him to claim that it was physical. Of Lienor's mother's exchange with the seneschal, Laurence de Looze writes, "what never occurs to her is that men's speech might be duplicitous and that language might prove the most powerful key of all to open the door to the *tresor* of Lienor"¹⁴ The emphasis these critics place on speech and words underscores the fact that though the seneschal will soon claim to have seen the rose, he has not. The rose, through Lienor's mother's resistance to the seneschal's request, has not revealed itself except through the mother's speech. This revelation is enough, however: knowledge of rose's existence gained through hearing about it is just as viable as having seen it for the seneschal's purposes, and he will be able to freely circulate his ill-gotten knowledge.

The seneschal wastes no time circulating his knowledge of the rose, using the knowledge to prove his claims to have had sex with Lienor. Though Lienor (and therefore the rose) has not yet left the seclusion of Lienor's chamber, the story of the rose

¹³ Nancy Vine Durling, "The Seal and the Rose: Erotic Exchanges in *Guillaume de Dole*," *Neophilologus* 77.1 (1993): 31. Durling presents a fascinating study on both Lienor's rose and a seal sent on a letter to Guillaume by Conrad, which Guillaume then gives to his sister in exchange for a brooch. This seal is a representation of Conrad, both figuratively in that Lienor refers to it as her very own king in her household, and physically/visually, because it is in the likeness of his body.

¹⁴ Laurence de Looze, "The Gender of Fiction: Womanly Poetics in Jean Renart's *Guillaume de Dole*," *French Review* 64.4 (1991): 600.

circulates rapidly in spoken exchanges among the male characters of the romance. Claims to have seen authorize speaking, either legitimately or not, and having heard a description of the rose enables the seneschal, in his own eyes, to repeat the tale of the rose. As Conrad tells the seneschal how much he wants to marry Guillaume's sister, the seneschal gleefully informs him there is an obstacle to the marriage:

tant la par parole encerchie
Q[ui]lli a dit par son out[ra]ge
Quil aeu son pucelage
et p[or] ce q[ue] croire la[n] puisse
dela rose desor la cuisse
Lia dit m[ou]t veraie ensaigne
Li rois sesbahist et se saigne

The emperor pressed the man until
he told him, outrageously,
that he had taken Lienor's virginity;
and so that he would be believed,
he offered as proof positive
the sign of the rose upon her thigh.
The king was appalled, and crossed himself (ll. 3584-3590)

The proof is on her thigh. The rhyming "puisse" ("can") and "cuisse" imply that Conrad's ability to believe is connected to the mark on Lienor's thigh. Conrad is quick to believe the story; as when he fell in love with Lienor through an image constructed of words, so too does he decide to cast her aside because of another's verbal description of her body. This "veraie ensaigne" ("true sign") is of course a false one, and the narrative's use of the word "veraie" here seems to question the emperor's easy trust in the vision (and speech) of others.

The circulation of knowledge of the rose continues as Conrad repeats the seneschal's claims to Guillaume, Lienor's brother:

Savez qui fet la chose ap[er]te
Q[ue]l a sor la cuisse larose

Nonq[ue]s nule si bele chose
Ne fu en rosier nen escu.
a cest mot la li rois veincu
Si se gete li rois de blasme
M[ou]t p[re]s sen va quil ne se pasme
p[or] la destrece de cest mot
Ilcuidoit nus nen seust mot
Fors samere et il solement

“Do you know what made the thing clear?”
That she has a rose on her thigh,
and nothing so beautiful ever existed
on any rose-bush or shield.”
With these words the king defeated Guillaume,
who no longer blamed him.
Guillaume very nearly fainted
from the anguish these words caused him;
he had thought that no one knew about the rose
except himself and his mother. (ll. 3724-3733)

Guillaume is immediately convinced that his sister has indeed revealed the rose to the seneschal because it has been a family secret up to this point. The reference to an *escu* (shield) is interesting here, and striking for a description of a flower-shaped birthmark on the thigh of a maiden. The inclusion of an object used in warfare, decorated though shields were, in a description of the hidden rose birthmark suggests a register somewhat different from what one might imagine. This reference to a shield, like the passages involving the shield in the *Prose Lancelot* discussed earlier, expands the meaning of shields from objects of warfare to objects of beauty, perhaps even of love.¹⁵ Perhaps this particular reference implies that the rose is a kind of shield, one that Lienor’s mother inadvertently lowers through her words, but one that deflects the inquiring eyes of male

¹⁵ See the second chapter of this dissertation for a discussion of a shield featured in the *Prose Lancelot*. This shield portrays both Lancelot and Guenevere; it is split nearly in half until the two lovers have sex for the first time, at which point it magically joins, bringing the images of their bodies together on the shield which has been rendered whole.

characters and protects the maiden, nonetheless.¹⁶ Guillaume passes the information about Lienor's lost virginity on to his nephew, saying, "Coment le sot il? par la rose / Q[ui]l me dit quel a sor la cuisse" ("How can he be so sure about it" "By the rose / which he told me she has on her thigh" [ll. 3828-3829]). For Lienor's relatives, the seneschal's claims to have seen the rose stand as incontrovertible evidence that the seneschal has had sex with Lienor, no questions asked. The nephew declares that Lienor should die for her transgression, and takes off for the house, ready to mete out justice as he understands it. Through all of these scenes, the rose circulates as if hearing about it is firm proof of Lienor's lost virginity, though only Lienor's mother has actually seen the birthmark. It circulates in an exchange among men after the initial revelation by Lienor's mother, but because the reader knows the truth of the situation, the rose also disrupts that circulation. The reader's own knowledge of the rose makes it clear that what the male characters believe to be true, based on spoken references in which the seneschal claims to have seen the rose, is actually false. Speaking, hearing, and sight are all at play in the construction and circulation of the rose.

The circulation of knowledge of the rose comes full circle when the nephew arrives at Lienor's house to accuse her. He speaks to her mother first, saying

trop par est seue la chose
 A sentresaignes dela rose
 Q[ue]l a devers la destre hanche
 desor la cuisse grasse et blanche
 Q[ue] male flambe puisse ardoir
 Ie fet la mere endoi avoir
 tote lahonte et tot leblasme

"for it is now widely known
 that she has the mark of a rose

¹⁶ Nancy Vine Durling suggests that connecting the rose birthmark to a shield gives it heraldic significance (37).

on her right leg,
on her plump white thigh,
may an evil flame burn it!”
“I,” said her mother, “must take
all the shame and all the blame.” (ll. 3985-3991)

This male relative now knows of the rose, and describes the birthmark in terms as sensual and full of color as those the mother used to describe it to the seneschal. He adds that it is on her right leg, a detail that has not been shared in the text. How the nephew might have come by this extra bit of information remains a mystery, but there is the possibility that he has created the detail. At this point, the story of the rose has been repeated five times, beginning with the mother speaking to the seneschal, who tells Conrad, who shares it with Guillaume, who passes it on to the nephew. As the seneschal’s claims to have slept with Lienor circulate, the story of the rose becomes more and more untrue—or at least more and more baseless, since the nephew’s information comes only from “oïr dire,” and “oïr dire” multiple times removed, at that. When the story of the rose finally makes its way back to Lienor, and she learns of Conrad’s rejection as a result of the rose’s circulation, she is inconsolable. Not because she fears the loss of his love, but because she understands the wealth and elevation that would have accompanied her role as his wife:

Sele pert le g[ra]nt segnorage
Si come destre emp[er]eriz
bien les a toz morz et traiz
p[ar] son engin li seneschaus

If she lost such a great position
as that of empress,
then by this trick the seneschal
had truly betrayed and ruined them all. (ll. 4042-4045)

She regrets the loss of this position of empress. Her disappointment is not about love but

about social position. The rose is established in this scene as an object that has been used to steal a rank Lienor (and her family, implied by “toz”) had nearly claimed. The “se” (“if”) at the beginning of the passage suggests, however, that all is not lost, and as Lienor resolves herself to fight back against the claims of the seneschal, she also resolves to promote a “truth” about her body to claim political advantage, using the seneschal’s methods to reveal the untruths he has spread. She will use her body, which has been in circulation against her will via the stories of the mark inscribed upon it, to fulfill her own political goals.

The Rose Strikes Back

Lienor’s strategy both resists and conforms to the patriarchal structures and values expressed in the narrative, a resistance and confirmation Jane Burns touches upon and I discuss in the introduction to this dissertation. The *Roman de la Rose ou de Guillaume de Dole*, like many thirteenth-century French romances, is male-authored, and the body of the main female character circulates among male characters. This does not preclude, however, an internal resistance within the text to this objectification. In her study of the feminine body as locus of resistant speech in medieval literature, Burns writes of the possibility that “speech issuing from the female body [...] resists and restructures the social and rhetorical conventions used to figure femininity.”¹⁷ Burns’s project is a discussion of speech, but I would like to suggest that her analysis provides a useful and provocative way to think about objects of speech, including inscriptions upon the female body, as well. The narrative describes the inscription on Lienor’s body, a metonymy for

¹⁷ E. Jane Burns, *Bodytalk: When Women Speak in Old French Literature* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1993) 241.

her body itself. And though this narrative makes the rose into an object of discussion and circulation for nearly every character in the text (male and female), it also works to undermine prescribed gender norms by making it clear to the reader that at the very least, the characters discussing the rose and the implications of having seen it are misinformed, if not lying about this alleged seeing. Characters in medieval texts offer abundant examples of both stereotypically gendered behavior and staunch resistance to such classifications. Burns elaborates,

One can point of course to instances where the words of the Arthurian lady or the fabliau wife represent, as if in echo, the voice of the male author who fashioned the heroine's identity according to social convention and individual invention. But that voice remains nonetheless filtered through the female character's anatomy. And, as Ovid has taught us, the echo is not exact. A man's words spoken through a woman's body, however fictive and fabricated, are not perceived or received by the reader as thoroughly male; their valence changes in accordance with the gender of the speaker articulating them. (16)

The kind of speech Burns points to in this passage is dialogue written by a male author for female characters. Taking the male author as a given for the *Roman de la Rose*, I want to think about how Burns offers a way to understand the speech of male characters about a woman's body as echoed, and changed, by the object of their discussion, especially because the initial claim of the seneschal to have seen the body in question is false. While seeing, the primary focus of my earlier chapters, is generally displaced in this narrative by speaking and hearing, seeing also allows the objectified body of Lienor to resist that objectification. This is the case because the seneschal, who attempts and seems to succeed at objectifying her body and its inscription, speaks without having seen the object he claims to have seen. The *Rose* is a text that challenges the primacy of looking by subsuming it into speaking and hearing, ultimately revaluing looking and

seeing. Though the rose, and Lienor's body, are doubly objectified by the male author who writes them and the male characters who pretend to have looked (or circulate the story of the pretender) upon them, looking upon the birthmark is a mediator between truth and untruth. Ovid's inexact echo that Jane Burns points to may be translated here to an untrue reflection, based on seeing that did not happen. Male speech, when reflected on a female character's body through the mediation of untrue speech that claims falsely to have seen, does not objectify fully. Speech by male characters in the *Rose* cannot objectify fully, because of its distance from the object in question, the rose birthmark and Lienor's body, a distance that admits falsification.

Lienor's plan to take back control of her body and her marriage prospects consists of a complex trick that, like the seneschal's, also relies on the tension between speech and seeing. She uses three items that take the place of the rose in circulation, and sets the seneschal up as the object of a look of her own creation. To prepare herself to confront the seneschal, she dresses and arranges her hair, and the narrator describes her preparations in vocabulary that could apply to the preparation for battle, moving once again into a register that is rare for the description of a courtly woman in medieval romance.

Ele haoit tant son solas
Q[ue] neli chaloit de trecier
Mes p[or] seschevols adrecier
ot drecie sa greve au matin
dune branche de porc espin
et si ot fet front deheaumiere

She had been so eager to vindicate herself
that she had not bothered to braid her hair,
rather, to dress her hair that morning
she had straightened her part
with a branch of buckhorn

showing her forehead like an armorer (ll. 4730-4735)

Like the earlier reference to the rose as a shield, this reference to a *deheumiere* suggests warfare or weaponry. Lienor's weapon is her body, and she prepares to circulate herself as an object of sight for the first time in the romance, rather than an object of discussion, and she prepares, as well, to manipulate that sight to her advantage. Though the rose and the body it symbolizes have stayed hidden as stories of them circulated wildly earlier in the text, Lienor and the (covered, of course) rose now emerge into the courtly sphere.

Lienor uses three other objects to represent herself and prove that the rose, though much discussed, has remained unseen. Through a messenger, Lienor sends a belt, a brooch, and a purse, claiming they come from a woman the seneschal loves. She instructs him to tie the belt around his waist and he does so. Lienor arrives at court and implements the rest of her plan, accusing the seneschal of rape and robbery of her belt and purse. She makes the violation of her body's secrets literal through the accusation of rape, and her own speech subtly demands a response for the seneschal's earlier spoken claims.

The seneschal hotly denies Lienor's claims by protesting he has never laid eyes on this woman—one of the few truths he tells in this romance, which underscores the ways in which Jean Renart weaves together the themes of sight and speech and truth.

The seneschal says,

James dex ne me doi[n]t cest sueil
passer se onq[ue]s mes lavi
et sachiez bien q[ue]ge li ni
Q[ue] onq[ue]s noi son pucelage
Ne ses ioiaus a son damage
Ne ceinture ne affichaus.

“May God never let me cross his threshold
again, if I've ever seen her before!
Understand well that I deny it,

for I never took her virginity
or her treasures to her harm,
neither a belt nor a brooch.” (ll. 4806-4811)

That his first reaction is to deny ever having seen Lienor obviously negates his previous story about having had sex with her, and also points to the importance sight plays in the narrative: sight is the equivalent of sex. Lienor addresses the emperor, who, in spite of his previously declared great love for her, does not manage to recognize her from the descriptions he has heard. She says,

mesor alez et si sachiez
Ses draz amont et sa chemise
Si verrez quil la ceinte et mise
tot nuanu emp[re]s sa char

Go now and pull up
his clothing and his shirt:
you will see that he has tied the belt
onto his bare skin, on his very flesh. (ll. 4834-4837)

This passage presents the staging of “a mock defloration, and of a man,” as Helen Solterer writes,¹⁸ and points to Lienor’s ability to “stigmatiz[e] the male body in a way that the seneschal’s figure did not for female sexuality” (228). Lienor’s spoken claims, just as false as those made against her, turn the eyes of the members of the court from her own body to that of the seneschal. The use of “nuanu” (“naked”) and “char” (“flesh”) draws attention to his body, to his naked flesh. He is objectified by her claims as well as by the way those claims direct the sight of the members of Conrad’s court. Lienor’s manipulation of sight and attention away from her own bodily inscription and her redirection of it towards the object decorating the seneschal’s body point to the importance of seeing, as well as the importance of speech in bringing sight to the

¹⁸ Helen Solterer, “At the Bottom of Mirage, a Woman’s Body: *Le Roman de la Rose of Jean Renart*,” *Feminist Approaches to the Body in Medieval Literature*, eds. Linda Lomperis and Sarah Stanbury (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1993) 227.

forefront. Sight, while it has repeatedly fallen behind speech and hearing in the circulation of knowledge in this romance, experiences a resurgence in this passage, because it is only sight that can prove the truth of Lienor's claims. In this case, sight, when combined with speech, demonstrates the truth of claims that are false, which is the same method the seneschal used to claim he had sex with Lienor. Both characters tell lies, but Lienor's visual proof will end up trumping that of the seneschal, emphasizing the instability of visual proof in this narrative. The emperor forces the seneschal to publicly disrobe and expose himself to view, something Lienor escapes in this romance:

uns ch[evalie]rs li tret et sache
larobe amont et lachemise
Q[ue] chas[cun]s vit quil lavoit mise
et cainte estroit a sachar nue
Si fu la chose coneue

a knight took the seneschal and pulled up
his tunic and shirt, so that everyone saw
that he had put on the belt
and girded it tight to his bare skin.
The matter was clear (ll. 4862-4866)

This time the proof of his crimes (in a sense) is displayed on his body in the belt he wears, and as with Lienor, it is again not true. The rhyming "nue" and "coneue" ("known") connect his nakedness with knowledge. The knowledge, of course, is tempered by Lienor's lies. Lienor has turned the scrutiny from herself and her rose birthmark and directed it towards the man she claims has committed crimes against her as well as to the love tokens she sent him as part of her scheme. The manipulative power of vision, as well as of speaking and hearing, is revealed by these parallel scenes of accusation and visible proof of guilt, creating sight that objectifies but does not see the truth, and speech that is telling but does not necessarily reveal the truth. The substitution

of belt for birthmark is a different way Lienor objectifies her body—and also de-objectifies it—but it is a repetition that substitutes a real object for the mark on her skin. At the same time, she transfers the sign to the seneschal's body. Both scenes hinge upon objects that represent Lienor, beginning with the rose on her body and ending with the belt and purse. Of this scene, de Looze writes, "This moment of revelation is of primary importance for it reveals Lienor as the integration oir and veoir, the synthesis we might choose to call veoir" (604), and indeed, this hearing/seeing circulates throughout the entire text, keeping sight and speech in constant tension.

Jean Renart's *Roman de la Rose ou de Guillaume de Dole* repeatedly questions the validity of seeing and of speaking, featuring a male character who uses his ill-gotten knowledge of this intimate bodily sign to prove (untruthfully) that he slept with the woman whose body displays the sign. The woman in question, Lienor, then uses her own body, and his, to disprove those claims. In a romance where claims of having looked are more frequent than actual looking, readers must question the power of sight to highlight truth. In fact, in the words of Patricia Terry, "In *Guillaume de Dole*, hearing, or not seeing, is believing."¹⁹ Terry's construction of hearing as contradictory to seeing is a suggestive one, especially in this romance where both seeing and hearing can both lead to the truth and to lies. Neither seeing nor hearing precludes the ability of some characters to lie, nor do the senses allow other characters to discern whether the information they glean is true or untrue. The primary focus of speech and claims to have seen is the rose, which remains hidden from sight throughout the text, and is never described by a character while looking at it. Descriptions exist only through the eyes of Lienor's

¹⁹ Patricia Terry, "Hearing and Seeing in the Works of Jean Renart or What is Believing," *RLA: Romance Languages Annual* 4 (1992): 156.

mother, who *has* seen it, and describes it later, or through other characters who have heard the descriptions, and offer their own interpretations of them. This temporal and physical veiling of the rose lends to its mystery, and complicates its status as an object circulated among characters. Because the rose is not looked upon, it is not objectified by visual observers, but is instead a story that circulates verbally. It is constantly present in the narrative those would-be observers create.

That Which We Call a Rose

The question of what the rose is is more complicated than it might first appear to be, because in the *Roman de la Rose ou de Guillaume de Dole*, the rose takes on multiple valences, and has different meanings throughout the text. It is, of course, first a birthmark on the heroine's thigh. But it is much more than that. In a formulation I find particularly intriguing, Nancy Vine Durling writes that the rose is "the articulated form of the unspeakable" (33). This is suggestive for a text that places such a high value on speaking and seeing. Analyzing two traditional modes of understanding the female body in medieval texts, Helen Solterer writes, "More than many other figures, the female body has been caught between these two frames of critical vision—the far-reaching scope of allegory and the scrutiny of literalism" (213-14). She argues that allegorical women are often represented as flowers or other abstractions, while the literal frame objectifies and fragments bodies. These two frames unite in her analysis of the rose in the *Roman de la Rose*, in which she stresses that symbolically, the rose clearly represents virginity. Additionally, I would argue, it also represents the implied loss of that virginity, because the seneschal uses his knowledge of it, gained through the speech of her mother, to create

speech of his own about having seen the mark while divesting Lienor of her *pucele*. At the same time, Solterer writes, it is also “a literal, physical mark” (223). She continues,

if the *Rose* traces the conventional pattern of inventing a symbolic feminine, then it also portrays a female protagonist who unconventionally contests this symbolic. It introduces a woman who exercises the prerogative of figuring herself. In so doing, the *Rose* pushes us to consider the gendered terms of representation. (225)

Solterer goes on to present a careful close reading of the different vocabulary used to refer to the rose: Lienor’s mother treats it as “une affaire” (“an affair” [l. 3360]), the seneschal prefers “mehaig” (“wound” [l. 3552]); later, during the scene at court, he calls it a “veraie ensaigne” (“true sign” [l. 3589]); and Conrad refers to it as “une chose aperte” (“an open thing” [l. 3724]), which, according to Solterer, is “a turn of phrase that evokes the dialectic of hiding and disclosing, not seeing and seeing” (224-25). These different meanings and different words used to describe and discuss the rose point to its complexity within the text. The intricacy of the role of the rose is important to Ben Ramm’s analysis as well, as he explores

how the rose can be read as a metaphor for the fluidity of the narrative structures within which desire is inscribed. Jean Renart did not create a story *about* a rose, but rather a rose which is itself a story, or indeed a fiction. The rose is immediately appropriated by and located within a particular discursive framework [...] and as such constitutes a fertile point of departure for an exploration of the ways in which desire assumes narrative form, or indeed how narrative itself shapes desire. (403)

Because the rose does become a symbol of desire: the jealousy and yearning for influence of the seneschal, the desire for a beautiful, virginal wife on the part of Conrad, and for Lienor herself, a symbol of her desire to control the stories told about her body, which she wields when she decides to stop being an object of lying speech and emerges from her seclusion to make a speech of her own, thereby regaining a position she had

feared lost: that of an empress who controls a “grant segnorage.”

By the end of the text, after the seneschal protests that he has never seen Lienor before and proves it by ordeal, the rose again symbolizes her virginity, as she introduces herself to Conrad by saying, “Je sui la pucele a la rose” (“I am the maiden with the rose” [l. 5040]). She has reappropriated the rose and uses it to both identify herself and to emphasize her virginity. She follows a traditional trajectory for a lady in a romance, and a wager romance in particular—she goes on to marry the emperor, and the rose is certainly not a means to Lienor’s liberation from gender norms. But the rose is also not strictly a tool of her objectification, because she takes back control of it before the entire court. Surprisingly, on Lienor’s wedding night, no reference is made to Conrad’s reaction to his first real glimpse of the rose. The rose exists only in second- or third-hand description; it never reaches the reader through a description by a character who looks upon the rose as he or she describes it. The obscurity that surrounds the rose allows it to remain to some degree unobjectified by direct sight, though it is clearly objectified verbally throughout the text by those who are not looking at it. The value of sight in this romance is destabilized by its tendency to untruth, and speaking and hearing emerge as important narrative devices in their own right in the telling of this *Roman de la Rose*.

Conclusion

Not-So-Courtly Love: The Unwilling Beloved in Chrétien de Troyes's *Le Chevalier au Lion*

Courtly lovers who look longingly or long to look at one another have shaped this project, from Enide returning Erec's desiring gaze in *Erec et Enide*; to Lancelot and Guenevere looking and not looking down from and up to windows in *Le Chevalier de la Charrette*; to a continuation of their story in the *Prose Lancelot*, wherein each looks upon love objects representing the other; to the *Roman de la Rose ou de Guillaume de Dole*, in which an emperor loves without seeing and a heroine twists sight to her advantage after the circulation of her birthmark nearly costs her a marital match she refuses to lose. In all these texts, the narrative defines relationships between characters through the ways in which they look upon each other, making meaning through the repetition of scenes that feature repetition of different ways of looking. To return to the scene from *Erec et Enide* with which I began my readings of these medieval romances, the entire court crowds in windows to watch the arrival of Erec and his bride-to-be. In this passage, looking is reciprocal and socially relational, as it is on all the texts I have analyzed. Erec and Enide become the objects of the gazes of the members of the court, and these admiring gazes define Erec and Enide's lofty place within the courtly milieu, where even the king and queen race to watch their arrival. Looking happens in a social web in medieval romances, and it reveals the ways in which the characters relate to each other via vision.

One final text presents a different version of courtly love, and the relationality expressed by looks that pass (and do not) between the characters in question challenges

the desirability of a romantic match between them. In Chrétien de Troyes's *Le Chevalier au Lion* (c. 1180), the possibility of the window as an opening through which lovers gaze is complicated by a would-be lover who, magically hidden from anyone who might glance his way, leans out, seeking to gaze at a woman who would rather see him dead than in her bed—the widow of the man Yvain has just killed. The looking that takes place from this particular window and in passages surrounding it plays upon themes that have marked my previous chapters, including windows as a locus tied to the expression of desire, an object with magical properties that intervenes in looking and loving, as well as bodily inscriptions of a kind that mark the body of the beloved. The unwilling participation of Laudine in this love affair colors the entire narrative, marking this particular courtly relationship as one that might challenge the desirability of courtly love.

Tainted Love

Yvain, to an extent like Guenevere in the tower in *Le Chevalier de la Charrette*, relies on the kindness of a stranger to establish his gaze on the character he loves down below. This scene has a female intercessor, Lunete, a demoiselle who is part of Laudine's household, who hides Yvain from those angry about his killing of the house's master. Lunete brings Yvain to a window at his request.¹ Lunete also intervenes by giving Yvain a gift in the form of a magical, invisibility-inducing ring, telling him,

Ja par eux ne sera maumis
 Chil qui l'anel en son doit a,
 Que ja veoir ne le porra
 Nuz home, tant ait les iex ouvers (ll. 1032-1035)

Then whoever had the ring on his finger need fear nothing, for no man

¹ Chrétien de Troyes, *Le Chevalier au Lion*, Romans, ed. David F. Hult (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1994) ll. 1282-83. Further citations in text.

could see him, however open his eyes.²

This “nuz home” applies to ladies, too, because the ring allows Yvain to remain invisible to Laudine as well as to all others who seek him out, creating a scene that takes the window, a locus where characters communicate desire in the *Charrette*, and translates it into a locus where a would-be lover looks with desire, but makes every effort to hide his admiring gaze from the object of his desire. Via two interventions by Lunete, who both gives Yvain the ring and brings him to the window where he can spy on Laudine as she attends the burial of her husband, Yvain manages to look upon the object of his affection as she mourns. Lunete’s intercessions into Yvain’s pursuit of Laudine take on rather a darker note than those of the unnamed maiden in the *Charrette*, as she strives to facilitate the courtship of a mourning widow by the knight who killed her husband. Lunete allows him both to see and to remain unseen, increasing his love for Laudine by looking upon her and preventing her from having him killed by keeping him hidden. Lunete’s presence and intervention, like the unnamed maiden’s in the *Charrette*, point to the social web of relationality within medieval romance, and the ways in which characters’ relationships come to be expressed through looking and through intervening to allow looking.

What the hidden Yvain sees from his perch above the funeral procession is at odds with the general courtly description of a lady seen through the eyes of a character who loves her. Yvain falls in love with Laudine before the narrative has arrived at a description of her physical beauty; we know that Yvain loves Laudine before the narrative allows us to see her through his eyes. The longer Yvain remains at the window, the more deeply in love he falls with Laudine, and the more description the narrator

² Chrétien de Troyes, *The Complete Romances of Chrétien de Troyes*, trans. Donald Staines (Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1990) 269. Further citations in text.

provides of the object of his gaze:

Et Mesire Yvains est encore
A la fenestre ou il l'esgarde;
Et quant il plus s'en donne garde,
Plus l'aime et plus li abelist. (ll. 1420-23)

And Sir Yvain was still at the window gazing at her. The more he looked at her, the more [he loved her and the more] she delighted him.³ (273)

Looking at his beloved intensifies Yvain's love for her, following the description of how courtly love works established by Andreas Capellanus in his *De amore*, as discussed in my introduction. This passage from *Le Chevalier au Lion* combines verbs of sight and love; as he watches her ("l'esgarde"), he loves her ("l'aime") and she pleases him ("li abelist"). Ironically, this last verb can also mean "to become beautiful;" as the description of Yvain's gaze continues, it becomes clear that rather than the creation of Laudine's beauty, this passage portrays her active destruction of it. Departing from the top-to-toe description of a glowing blonde beauty with pale skin and other marks of medieval-heroine loveliness that Sarah Stanbury points to in her analysis of *Erec et Enide*, Yvain's description of Laudine's body presents itself in terms heavily colored by her grief for her husband. She is indeed blonde, but she rips those golden tresses out; she has beautiful eyes, but they are full of tears; and so on, down her body, attacking that which makes her beautiful to Yvain's eyes: "Ne de riens n'ai si grant destreche / Comme de son vis qu'ele bleche, / Que ne l'eüst pas deservi" (ll. 1477-79) ("Still nothing distresses me more than to see her tear her face, by no means deserving of such treatment" [274]). Rather than a knight in a window distracted by the beauty of his beloved, as in the *Charrette*, Yvain in the window is distressed by Laudine's destruction of her beauty. In a way, these scratches Laudine inflicts on her face serve as bodily

³ My modifications to the translation in brackets.

inscriptions that interfere with Yvain's enjoyment in looking upon her. He relates to Laudine as a character who admires her beauty, but who also must watch silently as she marks her beauty with her distress over the death of her husband. The narrative portrays Yvain, that husband's killer, in a way that distances him both physically and emotionally from Laudine. He spies on a funeral procession from above, clearly disconnected from Laudine's grief and restricted from her presence. This is similar to the passages involving the rose in the *Roman de la Rose ou de Guillaume de Dole* in that marks upon the body are at play with sight in *Le Chevalier au Lion*. The self-inflicted marks on Laudine's body serve to disrupt Yvain's gaze by causing him pain, and to disrupt the narrative, as well, with such an unexpected description of the heroine's beauty.

Similarities between the *Rose*, the *Charrette*, and *Le Chevalier au Lion* continue as the romance draws to a close. Tensions between Lunete and Yvain suggest again that these two lovers do not, as it were, see eye to eye. Again Lunete intercedes in Laudine's relationship with Yvain, who, over the course of the narrative, has forced Laudine to marry him and then betrayed her. This passage highlights once again the ways in which the relationship between Yvain and Laudine is part of a larger social structure within the romance, as Lunete again inserts herself in order to bring about a reconciliation of sorts between the Yvain and Laudine. Lunete constructs a trick via speech, referring to the "chevalier au lion," as Yvain has come to be known, and extracting a verbal oath from Laudine to help this knight earn the forgiveness of his lady, from whom he has been estranged. Unlike Lancelot, who gained his identity as the narrative of the *Charrette* progressed, Yvain's description as the knight with the lion obscures his true identity from Laudine. The manipulative circulation of knowledge in this romance sets Laudine up for

her fall, and when she sees and recognizes her husband, she reacts with dismay, speaking to Lunete: “Bien m’as tes paroles prise; / Que celui qui riens ne me prise / Me feras amer mal gré mien” (ll. 6750-52) (“[Your words have fooled me well] / In spite of myself you will make me love a man who does not love or esteem me”) [337]. Words, in *Le Chevalier au lion* as in the *Rose*, serve to perpetuate the manipulation of the truth. It is too late for Laudine, though, to pursue an ending like Lienor’s that might leave her satisfied with her fate, because Laudine refuses to break her oath. Her statement strikes a hollow note, emphasizing her discontent at her circumstances and casting a shadow on the values of courtly love that led to her current unhappiness. The romance ends with Laudine’s unhappiness, articulating a negative connotation to both speech and sight, and perhaps to courtly love itself, in Chrétien’s romance.

This internal resistance within *Le Chevalier au Lion* to conventional gender roles—for example, the way this narrative details the destruction of Laudine’s beauty rather than describing a courtly lady’s appearance in glowing terms through the gaze of the knight who loves her—raises the question about other ways the romances I have discussed both resist and conform to traditional gender roles. In *Le Chevalier de la Charrette*, both male and female characters position themselves in windows to watch characters they desire. It is only rarely a question of a knight on the ground looking up at a lady in a window; Lancelot himself looks longingly at Guenevere on the ground, Meleagant and Bademagu watch Lancelot, and Lancelot and Guenevere look together at a window as she constructs a plan that results in the consummation of their relationship. Guenevere’s gaze is, at times, described in less detail than Lancelot’s, but she does look at him and return his gaze, expressing desire and challenging the modern idea that ladies are

objects waiting in windows for knights to look at them. Gender in the *Prose Lancelot* is also complex, and critics call attention to the differences between how Guenevere constructs a statue of Lancelot out of a feverish dream state, while Lancelot paints images of Guenevere with great artistry. I think the similarities between the scenes are more telling than the differences, though, and if Guenevere is out of her mind to think a statue is her lover, Lancelot is equally besotted to kiss and bow before paintings of her, making it a more a question of being overcome by love than of how the male and female characters react differently. In the *Rose*, gender takes on a different connotation, as Lienor and the mark on her body circulate throughout the narrative as objects of discussion and desire. Lienor, though she ends up in a conventional courtly marriage at the end of her story, reacts against her objectification and makes her (male) enemy the object of the entire court's gaze, emphasizing the ways in which the character both conforms to and rejects conventional gender roles in this medieval romance.

Desire to regain her chance to be empress motivates Lienor's actions at court in the *Rose*, and in general, desire motivates the way medieval narratives are constructed. In the *Charrette*, windows serve as a locus where characters reveal desire, usually via looking. Windows frame and present that desire to other characters, as well, linking desire explicitly to the interrelational social structures in courtly romance, as Gauvain watches Lancelot watch Guenevere (even if he is unable to interpret the fact that desire is what nearly drives Lancelot out the window). The unnamed maiden in the window is able to interpret Guenevere's love for Lancelot, and uses her knowledge of the queen's desire to inspire Lancelot's battle down below. For the *Prose Lancelot* incarnations of the two lovers, the *yimages* they create are expressions of their desire and longing, and

Lancelot's paintings reveal his desire and the fact that he acted upon it to Arthur. Desire is again tied to the circulation of knowledge, and to looking at a love object, in the passages about the shield, which express the consummation of Lancelot and Guenevere's desire, something the lady of Malehaut understands. Desire is rampant in the *Rose*: Conrad desires Lienor after hearing of her beauty; the seneschal desires the role of Conrad's most influential advisor; Lienor's mother desires the gift given to her by the seneschal, and Lienor herself desires the position of empress and uses sight and speech to make that happen. Desire winds through each of these narratives, moving between characters who feel desire or who are made privy to others' desire, providing a focal point for analysis.

Desire is inextricably tied to looking in all of these romances. Windows frame looking in the *Charrette*, and the ways in which characters look define their relationships as well as shape the narrative. For Lancelot, at different points in the narrative, looking nearly leads to his death, and also finally allows him to see his beloved, which increases his prowess in battle. Looking, discretely directed by Guenevere and immediately understood by Lancelot, also leads to the consummation of their relationship when Guenevere bestows a meaning-laden glance on the window that leads to her bedchamber. For Meleagant and Bademagu, looking conveys admiration and desire for rivalry and battle respectively, and for the unnamed maiden, looking results in the revelation of Lancelot's identity. In the *Prose Lancelot*, looking long enough at a statue shifts the statue into Lancelot, at least to Guenevere's eyes, while longing for Guenevere and for comfort during imprisonment inspires Lancelot to paint—and then look upon, kiss, and bow before—paintings of Guenevere. The paintings take on another role entirely when

Arthur looks upon them in the *Mort Artu*; rather than comfort, Arthur looks at them and reads the meaning of the *ymages* and understands that his wife and his knight are having an affair. The passages in the *Prose Lancelot* featuring the shield, as well, place an importance on looking, especially when the Lady of Malehaut, like Arthur, is able to look at the object and understand the significance (in her case, of the mended state of the shield). Looking plays an important role in the *Rose*, too, even though speech often displaces it in the narrative. It is the claim to have seen, and therefore to know intimately, the heroine's body and the mark on it that drives the story in this romance. It is seeing, as well, that results in Lienor's recuperation of her position as empress-to-be, combined with what she says to dispel the seneschal's claims.

Clearly, speaking, hearing, and touching are also at work in these romances, very often in relation to looking. In the *Charrette*, it is speech combined with looking that identifies Lancelot to the audience when the unnamed maiden asks Guenevere his name and then shouts it out for all to hear. Touch is also important in this romance, because Lancelot crosses through the window, which up to this point has primarily been a locus of looking, in order to touch Guenevere, consummating their relationship. Touch plays a role in the *Prose Lancelot*, as well, because both characters, after looking upon the objects that represent their absent lovers, move to touch the objects in question, caressing them as they would their lovers themselves. When the shield mends, touching it assures Guenevere of Lancelot's love. Speaking takes the place of touch in the *Rose*, and indeed speaking is at times more important even than seeing. Spoken claims to have seen circulate the rose throughout the text, making speech the medium for the transmission of knowledge. Lienor's speech at the end, combined with visual proof of her claims, restore

her reputation and her position.

The primary sense at play in identity and recognition is seeing, though rumors also circulate verbally in the narrative. Identity and recognition are tied to the interrelationality between characters, and the social web that encompasses their stories in medieval romance. In the *Charrette*, Lancelot's identity remains hidden from the other characters in the text as well as from the reader, until the moment when Guenevere reveals his name to the maiden. King Bademagu and Meleagant recognize him as the greatest knight (or at least a worthy opponent, in Meleagant's case) due to rumors that precede his arrival and to his prowess, which they observe as he crosses the sword bridge, but they do not know his identity. His identity is tied to Guenevere, underlined by her role in announcing his identity during the battle scene. Identity and recognition are also at play in the *Prose Lancelot* and the *Mort Artu*, especially in connection to the paintings. When Arthur recognizes Lancelot from the *ymages* he has created that represent his life and his love for Guenevere, Arthur uses his knowledge of Lancelot's identity to read and understand the story he told in his paintings. These objects that represent absent lovers also raise the question of how tied identity is to the body of the loved one, since both Lancelot and Guenevere (Guenevere especially) identify the objects as the other, and treat it as they would the other. Recognition and identity take on a different valence in the *Rose*, because Conrad falls in love with Lienor via a song that describes her beauty, and then fails to recognize her when she appears in his court, pointing to the tension between hearing and seeing.

Identity is one thing that circulates throughout these romances, and the circulation of knowledge marks them all. Lancelot's identity circulates in the *Charrette*, both by

reputation as the greatest knight and as the shameful knight of the cart, amongst those who do not know him. This reputation precedes him wherever he goes. Knowledge of the affair circulates in the *Prose Lancelot* and the *Mort Artu*, and it circulates via characters' interactions with objects. Arthur sees and reads the paintings, and fears that knowledge of his wife's relationship with Lancelot will circulate beyond the room if anyone else sees the paintings. Knowledge of the affair also circulates when the lady of Malehaut sees the mended shield. Circulation is most important, perhaps, in the *Rose*, as the circulation of the seneschal's tale threatens Lienor's social position and even her life, as the story moves to her cousin who decrees that she must die as punishment for having slept with the seneschal. Knowledge of Lienor's body circulates among nearly all the characters in the romance, and in the end, she puts her body into circulation herself by going to Conrad's court and proving that the seneschal has never seen her before. The circulation in the *Rose* takes place via speech, as is the case in the *Charrette*, while the circulation of knowledge of the affair in the *Prose Lancelot* and the *Mort Artu* is primarily based on what characters see.

Finally, the last and perhaps most important theme that comes out of these romances when read in relation to each other is that of repetition, which serves to make meaning in each romance, encouraging readings that consider why certain aspects in each text repeat. In the *Charrette*, the repeated use of windows establishes them as a frame for the expression of longing via looking. Windows structure the narrative, and almost every time Lancelot and Guenevere meet, they do so across or near or through a window. Windows frame their relationship, and the repeated appearances of windows in the narrative underline the importance of this setting that offers a link between interior and

exterior spaces. Repetition in the *Prose Lancelot* and the *Mort Artu* comes through the multiple appearances of objects that represent Lancelot and Guenevere, as well as the repeated threats of discovery these objects bring about. The statue, the paintings, and the shield reveal the characters' desire for one another, and the revelations are available to others who also have visual access to the objects. Considered together, these passages point to the ways in which objects that are looked upon (and touched) interact with characters who love the ones the objects represent—and in fact, seem at times to love the objects themselves. The *Rose's* repetition is present in the verbal telling and retelling of the story of the rose itself, which becomes the object of discussion that shapes the narrative. Through the repetition of the story, it grows in importance as its claims on truth become increasingly more tenuous the further it gets from the source. Objects are also repeatedly used to manipulate truth in this romance, as Lienor deliberately shifts the focus from the discussion of the mark on her body to the visual display of objects she has managed to place on the seneschal's body. Repetition in all these romances invites the grouping together of passages that feature it, allowing for an analysis that considers how they are similar and how different, and how they work together to make meaning in medieval romance.

Returning now to the unfortunate Laudine, whose ending is among the more poignant for medieval heroines in romances of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, it has become increasingly clear that courtly love narratives tell complex stories about characters who look and love (or do not look and do not love). That these romances were written by male authors at a time when women's roles in society were rather less liberated than they are today does not mean that female characters within the texts do not

find a way to resist conventional gender roles, and Laudine's plight emphasizes this. The narrative allows her to express her dismay at the situation she finds herself in, and rather than Yvain here at the end portrayed as a chivalrous hero, he comes across as a manipulative character who is doltishly unaware of his wife's unhappiness. These romances present complicated understandings of the role of courtly love and the characters it affects, and the romances themselves raise questions about how female (and male) characters should behave, and whether these expectations are just or unjust. Through all the themes that have come out in my analysis, courtly love narratives emerge as complicated texts that refuse neat analysis, with characters who do not fit into predetermined roles. Looking back at these texts, and allowing them to look back, as well, points to ways in which the modern and the premodern still have very much to say to each other, as each can illuminate the other on concepts as diverse and as interconnected as gender, desire, looking, speaking and touching, identity and recognition, circulation, and repetition.

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