



Courtly Love and Eroticism: Adapting *Fin'Amors* in the Non-Cyclic *Prose Lancelot*

Amor cortês e erotismo: a adaptação da *fin'amors* no *Lancelot en prose* não cíclico

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ABSTRACT

In the Middle Ages, eroticism emerged as an important subject in both literary works and treatises on love, shaping a culture where sensuality and courtly love (*fin'amors*) were central. The concept of *fin'amors*, prevalent in the courts of 12th-century Europe, celebrated an idealised, restrained relationship between a knight and a noblewoman. This relationship, though filled with desire, was bound by social conventions and hierarchy. Drawing on the tales of Lancelot, particularly *Le Chevalier à la Charrette* and the non-cyclic *Lancelot en prose*, this article examines the dynamic between Lancelot and Queen Guinevere within this framework, highlighting the themes of restraint, devotion, and secrecy inherent in the tradition of courtly love. The study also examines the role of Guinevere, her influence on the knights, and the societal implications of her actions, especially her adulterous relationship with Lancelot. Through this analysis, the article discusses the tension between feudal loyalty, love, and the courtly ideals that governed medieval society, illustrated in the cultural and literary representations of the time.

KEYWORDS

courtly love; Arthurian romance; chivalry; medieval literature; adultery

RESUMO

Na Idade Média, o erotismo emergiu como um tema relevante não apenas nas obras literárias, mas também nos tratados sobre o amor, moldando uma cultura em que a sensualidade e o amor cortês (*fin'amors*) eram centrais. O conceito de *fin'amors*, prevalente nas cortes da Europa do século XII, celebrava uma relação idealizada e contida entre um cavaleiro e uma dama nobre. Esta relação, embora repleta de desejo, era limitada pelas convenções sociais e pela hierarquia. Utilizando as narrativas de Lancelot, particularmente *Le Chevalier à la Charrette* e o *Lancelot en prose* não cíclico, este artigo explora a dinâmica entre Lancelot e a Rainha Guinevere dentro desse contexto, destacando os temas da contenção, devoção e segredo inerentes à tradição do amor cortês. O estudo também analisa o papel de Guinevere, a sua influência sobre os cavaleiros e as implicações sociais das suas ações, sobretudo no que respeita a sua relação adúltera com Lancelot. Por meio desta reflexão, o artigo pretende discutir a tensão entre lealdade feudal, amor e os ideais

cortesês que governavam a sociedade medieval, ilustrados nas representações culturais e literárias da época.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

amor cortês; romance arturiano; cavalaria; literatura medieval; adultério

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In the Middle Ages, contrary to prevailing assumptions, eroticism emerged as a subject of significant cultural and intellectual interest, finding expression not only in literary works but also in treatises devoted to the art of love and the complexities of romantic relationships (Wack, 1990; Classen, 2007; Classen, 2008; Kay, 2001; Gaunt, 1995). This thematic richness attracted scholarly attention and is exemplified in works such as *Viaticum* by Ibn Al-Jazzar (Wack, 1990), translated in the 11th century by Constantine the African, as well as the poetic compositions of Ibn Quzman (Ihmof, 2022) and Yehudah Ha-Levi (Halkin, 2010) in the 11th and 12th centuries. Additionally, the enduring tradition of troubadour songs, which permeated the medieval era, further illustrates the fascination with this theme.

The intrigue surrounding this subject was deeply interwoven with the social structures of the Middle Ages. Courtly life, the celibacy imposed on non-heir knights, and the bonds formed within these societal contexts fostered an atmosphere in which sensuality was expressed and celebrated.¹ The cultural climate of twelfth-century Occitania fostered what modern scholarship designates as *fin'amors*, the refined or 'perfected' love that structures the ethos of troubadour lyric. Rather than constituting an isolated tradition in the strict sense, *fin'amors* refers to a complex literary and social code that shaped poetic production and courtly behaviour, in which love is represented as ennobling yet often unattainable, predicated on desire, service (*servitium amoris*), secrecy, and the moral refinement (*mesura*) of the lover (Köhler, 1976). Appearing in the courts of Occitania in the early twelfth century, these ideals circulated widely through troubadour lyric and later informed French, Iberian, and Italian courtly literature.

At its core, *fin'amors* represents an idealised relationship characterised by restraint and courtly decorum, typically between a noble, unmarried knight and a high-ranking, often married, woman. As Duby (1981: 206) notes: «Au XI^e siècle, la nouvelle mode était, pour les jeunes vassaux, de faire le siège de la dame, de l'épouse de leur patron, feignant par jeu de la lui ravir». In this construct, the knight earnestly seeks the lady's favour, aspiring for sincere and selfless love. According to Duby, this love: «celebrava a abstinência,

1. Regarding the role played by chivalry to the courtly game of seduction, Duby observes: «Os cavaleiros abalançaram-se ao jogo porque as regras deste ajudavam a melhor colocar, senão a resolver, alguns problemas de sociedade, candentes, que na época se punham» (Duby, 1990: 70). The author is referring to the difficulties experienced by the younger sons, who could find in this game a means of climbing the social ladder.

conservando ao mesmo tempo uma coloração carnal e, por isso, agradava à alta nobreza. A exaltação, ao mesmo tempo alegre e casta, do desejo suscitado pela mulher amada tomava uma tonalidade quase mística e saciava facilmente os fantasmas dos mais modestos» (Duby 1998: 109).

Erich Köhler reinforces this interpretation, asserting that «la sensualità, come principio di immanenza, mantiene sempre il suo valore all'interno della civiltà cortese» (Köhler, 1976: 106). This kind of love thrives on the sensual provocation emanating from the lady, which the knight absorbs through contemplation and longing. Therefore, the relationship oscillates between desire and denial, intertwining erotic yearning with spiritual elevation. The knight's devotion manifests in his avoidance of dishonourable actions, instead motivating him to perform deeds that earn him honour, dignity, and recognition; and his dedication compels him to restrain his desires, advancing only as far as the lady permits, that is, she must neither be coerced nor wholly surrendered.

Nonetheless, *fin'amors* imposes limits: the inherently adulterous narrative must not culminate in a consummation that threatens the lady's marital status. Such boundaries preserve the delicate balance of sensuality and decorum in this courtly tradition.

As mentioned before in our text, these manifestations of *eros* in medieval society are evident not only in poetic texts but also in the enduring corpus of chivalric narratives, such as Chrétien de Troyes's *Le Chevalier à la Charrette*. This tale follows a young knight, Lancelot, who, having fallen in love with Guinevere, King Arthur's wife, embarks on a quest to rescue her after her abduction by Méléagant, son of King Bandemagus. Throughout this journey, Lancelot must overcome numerous challenges before reuniting with the queen.

The first and most socially challenging of these trials occurs when Lancelot meets a dwarf who informs him that the only way to discover Guinevere's location is to ride in a cart, a mode of transport symbolising infamy and criminality (Correia, 2009: 158). In that moment, Lancelot hesitates, recognising the humiliation inherent in the act, but ultimately sacrifices his honour for his mission, demonstrating the depth of his devotion. This humility and dedication underscore Lancelot's commitment, as he triumphs over all obstacles and rescues the queen.

This journey, requiring Lancelot to prove his worth through self-sacrifice and valour, aligns closely with the ethos of *fin'amors*, as according to this, knights must demonstrate their merit through courage and devotion, earning both the lady's favour and the respect of their courtly peers. Therefore, Lancelot's trials are proof of the essence of *fin'amors*, where personal sacrifice and public recognition are integral to the knight's pursuit of love.

However, the romantic culmination between Guinevere and Lancelot reflects an adaptation of *fin'amors* within the chivalric framework rather than a strict adherence to the troubadour tradition. The restrained eroticism central to troubadour poetry gives way to consummated adultery, yet the narrative retains the core elements of the *fin'amors* code of conduct. This evolution of romantic intrigue, in which sensuality emerges as a central theme, is evident in *Lancelot, le Chevalier à la Charrette*, and resonates in other works, most notably the non-cyclic *Lancelot en prose*, which will serve as the focus of this article.²

2. See Correia (2010, 2011a, 2011b). It is believed that the work of Chrétien de Troyes, *Lancelot ou le chevalier de la charrette*, may have served as inspiration for a more biographical work, which was the first

The non-cyclic *Lancelot en prose*, which chronicles the life of Lancelot, ailed as the greatest knight, from his childhood until the episode of the False Guinevere,³ illustrates numerous moments that resonate with the principles of *fin'amors*, particularly in the portrayal of Lancelot's relationship with Queen Guinevere. When Lancelot first arrives at King Arthur's court, accompanied by the Lady of the Lake with the intent of being knighted, his reputation precedes him. Guinevere, intrigued by the glowing descriptions of his beauty, expresses her curiosity and requests to see him, and upon their first encounter, Lancelot is immediately enchanted by the queen's beauty.

Although Arthur ends up not knighting him, Lancelot appeals to Guinevere, asking for permission to serve as her knight. She agrees, initiating a relationship that closely mirrors the ideals of *fin'amors*, where a knight of a lower social station becomes enamoured with a noble lady and dedicates himself to her service in the hope of earning her favour. This courtly backdrop sets the stage for the subtle expression of sensuality that often underpins such relationships, and a striking example of this occurs when Lancelot takes leave of the queen before setting off on his first adventure:

«A Deu, fait ele, biax douz amis».

Et il respont entre ses danz:

«Granz merciz, dame, qant il vos plaist que ge lo soie».

Atant l'an lieve la reine par la main sus, et il est mout a eise qant il sant a sa main tochier la soe main et tote nue. (*LP*, T.I: 458)

Guinevere's acceptance of Lancelot as her knight and her physical gesture of taking his hand establish a moment of intimacy between them. Also, the way she addresses him, *biax douz amis*, carries courtly affection with inherent ambiguity, setting the tone for the knight's enduring fidelity to the queen. The emotional intensity of the scene is heightened by Lancelot's response to the touch of her bare hand, appealing to the reader's sensory imagination and infusing the moment with subtle sensuality. While the narrative frames this interaction as a farewell before Lancelot's departure, the queen's actions create an air of ambiguity, balancing maternal benevolence and feminine allure. In fact, the narrator's focus on the tactile experience and the suggestive phrasing marks this as the first instance in the narrative imbued with an erotic charge. Nevertheless, the relationship maintains the virtue of *mesura* (restraint), refraining from crossing into carnal fulfilment.

As in *Le Chevalier à la Charrette*, where similar dynamics are explored, Guinevere is positioned as socially superior to Lancelot, often described as an exemplar of womanly virtues: «Et c'estoit la plus tres bele fame dont onques nus eüst oï parler el pooir lo roi Artu [...]. Mout fu la reine Guenievre de grant biauté, mais rien ne monta la biauté a la valor que ele avoit» (*LP*, t. I: 120-122). Within the framework of *fin'amors*, this hierarchy demands humility, restraint, and vassalic devotion from the knight. Thus, Lancelot's behaviour exemplifies these ideals, as he consistently defers to Guinevere, suppressing

prose *History of Lancelot*. This was a shorter version with no clear narrative connection with the works that were later written, despite the fact that it was expanded to fit those works narrative; consequently, this first prose *History of Lancelot* was considered by scholars to be non-cyclic. See Kennedy, 1986.

3. Despite the outstanding scholarly editions produced by Alexandre Micha and Elspeth Kennedy, for this article we have adopted the edition directed by Michel Zink, based on Ms. 768 of the National Library of France, referred to as *LP* in the quotations.

his desires and accepting the resulting emotional torment. His conduct underscores a deliberate adherence to restraint and contemplative longing, hallmarks of the *fin'amors* tradition.

This interplay is vividly illustrated in two excerpts from the episode where Arthur attempts to enter the Doloreuse Garde, a perilous stronghold whose very name signals its association with suffering and unresolved chivalric trial:

Lors vient a la porte, si apele lo portier. Et il vient a la porte ovrir. Et li chevaliers ne fait s'esgarder non la reine tot a cheval, si com ele vient contramont la roche, si pense tant a li que toz s'en oblie. Li portiers lo semont d'antrer anz. Et li chevaliers regarde tozjorz arrierres, tant que li portiers reclost la porte. (*LP*, t.I: 580)

This excerpt depicts one of the encounters between Lancelot and Guinevere, where the knight falls into a state of contemplative rapture, entirely oblivious to his surroundings. A similar instance occurs in the Doloreuse Garde, with Lancelot inside and Arthur, Guinevere, and their retinue outside, while Arthur appears preoccupied with his own thoughts, unaware of the emotional tension surrounding him. After hearing the news that a brave knight had managed to conquer the Doloreuse Garde, Arthur decides to go there and enter the place himself. To do so, he needs Lancelot, the brave knight, to open the gates. So, after finally reaching an agreement for their entrance in the Doloreuse Garde, Lancelot steps outside to meet the queen and her entourage. However, when fulfilling the request for entry, he allows only the queen to enter, emphasising her unique significance to him.

Li chevaliers apele tantost la gaite et dist: «Oevre la porte». «Volentiers, sire», fait cil. Il oevre la porte et li chevaliers entre anz. Mais il est tant esbahiz de la reine qu'i[1] s'na oblie toz, ne a rien n'entant fors a li veoir. Si est montez an haut desus la porte, et des la l'esgarde. Et la porte refu close si tost com il fu anz. (*LP*, t. I: 560)

Nonetheless, Lancelot's overwhelming contemplation of Guinevere in this scene distracts him from his surroundings and, paradoxically, from the queen herself in such a way that he forgets to order the opening of the gates. This lapse causes him profound sorrow, as he fears that his apparent neglect might lead Guinevere to despise him, thereby severing their connection:

Li contes dit que li Blans Chevaliers chevauche mas et pansis por sa dame la reine qu'il a correece, car il l'amoit de si grant amor des lo premier jor qu'il fu tenuz por chevaliers que il n'amoit tant ne soi ne autrui. Et por ce qu'il dotoit la haïne sa dame a tozjorz mais, si pense en son cuer tant a faire d'armes qu'il ravra monseignor Gauvain, ou il morra. Et par ce, s'il lo puet faire, bee a recovrer l'amor sa dame. (*LP*, t. I: 564)

The gravity of the potential rejection of Lancelot's love by Guinevere becomes evident only when we perceive *fin'amors* not as a purely personal bond but as a profoundly social construct. In this framework, a knight who is denied his lady's love is seen as unworthy of honour. Consequently, his foremost priority is to please her, earn her favour, and, in turn, elevate his social standing.⁴

4. As José Carlos Miranda claims: «só o amor dirigido à mais alta das mulheres é propiciador de

Lancelot's dedication to winning Guinevere's approval is so profound that he goes to great lengths to conceal his vulnerabilities, since only a strong and valiant knight, free from weakness, could be deemed deserving of her love. In this light, Lancelot's actions and thoughts illustrate the social pressures and emotional stakes underpinning their relationship, as well as his relentless pursuit of honour both as a knight and as Guinevere's chosen champion.

For this reason, when Lancelot sustains injuries during a joust, an event that interrupts the combat, and the queen and her entourage come to visit him, he feigns well-being, striving to conceal the severity of his wounds. Yet, his physical state betrays him, as the visible signs of his injuries contradict his words and expose the depth of his suffering despite his attempt to project strength and resilience:

Li chevaliers jut pasmez, et il l'ont desarmé et ses plaies bandees. Et la reine et cil et celes qui avec li furent virent que tot fu remés por ce chevalier qui estoit navrez.

«Alons lo, fait ele, veoir».

Ele monte et vient hors de la porte. Et la noise commence, et dit chascuns: «Tornez vos, veez ci la reine». Il fu assez qui la descendi, et chascuns crie derechief: «Faites ranc, veez ci la reine».

Li chevaliers fu venuz de pasmoisons et oï ce qu'il disoient. Il oeuvre les iauz et voit la reine et il s'esforce tant qu'il se lieve en seant.

«Biax sire, fait la reine, comment vos est?».

«Dame, fait il, mout bien. Ge n'ai nul mal».

Et an ce qu'il disoit ce, et les bandes rompent et ses plaies li escrievent a seignier, et il se repasme. (*LP*, t. I: 622)

It is also noteworthy that Guinevere's behaviour is not exclusively directed towards Lancelot but extends to other knights she deems valuable to the court and the kingdom. This dynamic is exemplified in the following excerpt:

Quant il vint androit les maisons, si esgarde cele part et vit une dame as loges. Et c'estoit la reine qui avoit convoié lo roi, qui an aloit en bois, jusqu'es loges sanz plus, si s'estoit illuec apoiee por ce que ne pooit avoir talant de dormir, si avoit affublé un sorcot et un mantel cort et s'estoit envelopee por lo froit qui já estoit commanciez. Come ele voit lo chevalier, si se desvelope. (*LP*, t. I: 704)

Here, the queen, standing in a gallery, catches the attention of a knight who is not Lancelot. Upon seeing him approach, she lets her mantle fall, a gesture that may be interpreted as a provocation, as its absence would reveal her more intimate attire. So, presenting herself to the knight in such a manner echoes behaviours found in other medieval narratives, such as the *Lais* of Marie de France, particularly in the tale of *Lanval*.⁵

In *Lanval*,⁶ the queen, observing the knight and his companions strolling near the tower where she resides, gathers her most beautiful maidens to join them. While the

prestígio, de *onor* e de aperfeiçoamento interior» (2005: 127).

5. *The Lais* is a work composed of a set of twelve short narratives in verse, written by Marie de France. Originally written in Anglo-Norman in the 12th century, the primary theme of these narratives is courtly love, often referencing King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table.

6. This *lai* tells the story of a knight from King Arthur's court, Lanval, who received nothing from the

others engage in conversation and social interaction, Lanval remains distant, preoccupied with thoughts of his beloved. The queen, noticing his detachment and aware of his esteemed reputation, not for his martial prowess but his generosity, approaches him and boldly offers herself, claiming that his great honour has awakened her love.⁷

This recurring motif of the queen's provocative gestures underscores her active role in the courtly dynamics of power and seduction, reflecting the broader cultural and social expectations placed upon queens in the medieval courtly tradition. By extending her favour to knights beyond Lancelot, Guinevere solidifies alliances and maintains the loyalty of those who serve the kingdom, often blurring the lines between political strategy and personal desire.

In a social context, while adultery was officially condemned, a certain degree of tacit acknowledgement seems to have existed. This acknowledgement stemmed from the belief that love, as an act of free will and desire, could not thrive within the confines of marriage, where the woman was obligated to submit to her husband's demands. As Miranda (2005: 131) argues in his work about *fin'amors* as a representation of the aristocratic society, this perspective created space for expressing affection and passion outside the institutional bounds of matrimony. This may explain, in a certain way, the dynamics between the King, the Queen and the Knight that we see in the non-cyclic prose *Lancelot*, as we believe literature tends to mirror a period's way of thinking and existing, despite its fictional essence.

In the non-cyclic prose *Lancelot*, the initial restraint between Guinevere and Lancelot gradually dissolves, even though their relationship remains concealed from public knowledge. And it is Guinevere herself, with the assistance of Galehot, who orchestrates their first intimate encounter, sealing their relationship with a kiss:

Et lors se leverent antre la reine et Galehot et la dame de Malohaut, si apela Galehoz son compaignon et alerent antr'ax quatre parlant mout longuement tant que il vidrent au chief des aubroisiaus. Et lors si s'asistrent; et mostra la reine a Lancelot la dame qui maint jor l'avoit aü an sa prison; si an fu mout hontous; et li dist la reine tot na riant que cest larrecin li avoit il celé. Illuec demorerent grant piece, ne onques ne tindrent plait ne parole fors de baisier etd'acoler, comme cil qui volantiers lo faisoient. Et qant il orent grant piece sis, si s'na retournerent la o li rois estoit, si na parvindrent a son tref amont. (*LP*, t. I: 910).

Quant li dui furent desarmé, si furent mené en deus chambres et jut chascuns avoc s'amie, que mout s'antramoient, et orent totes les joies que amant puent avoir. Et androit la mienuit se lieve la reine et vient a l'escu que la damoiselle do lac li avoit aporté, si taste sanz alumer, si lo trove sanz fandeüre, tot antier, si en est mout liee, car or set ele bien que ele (*f. 166c*) est miauz amee d'une autre. (*LP*, t. II: 520)

king despite his deeds and assistance. After meeting a maiden, whom we easily identify as a fairy, with whom he falls in love and who provides him with riches that Lanval distributes, he is well received by the others. The queen offers herself to the knight, but he rejects her, as his thoughts are consumed by the maiden, which enrages her. In retaliation, the queen accuses him of making advances and insulting her, which he denies. The proof she demands is that the fairy he is in love with appears, which eventually happens. Lanval's honor is thus preserved, and the knight leaves with the fairy to an unknown fate, and they are never heard from again.

7. «Quand la reine sul le veit, / Al chevaler en va tut dreit; / Lunc lui s'asist, si l'apela, / tut sun curage li mostra: / "Lanval, mut vus ai honoré / E mut cheri e mut amé. / Tute m'amur poëz avoir; / Kar me dites vostre voleir! / Ma drüerie vus otrei; / Mut devez estre lié de mei"» (*Lais* 1975: 160-161).

Thus, Lancelot assumes the role of the queen's lover, initiating a relationship of adultery and betrayal toward both the king and the kingdom.

Closely aligned with the principles of *fin'amors*, Lancelot maintains the secrecy of the woman he loves, as her married status demands discretion. The first instance of this concealment occurs when the Dame de Malohaut, an ally of Arthur, takes Lancelot captive, agreeing to release him only on the condition that he aids Arthur in the battle against Galehot and subsequently returns to captivity, a condition Lancelot fulfils.

Intrigued by the identity of the enigmatic knight, the Dame de Malohaut visits Arthur's court to uncover more information. Unable to obtain the desired details, but recognising the value of her prisoner, she returns to her domain and presents Lancelot with three choices for his release: he must either reveal his identity, disclose the identity of the woman he loves, or declare whether he intends to continue his heroic deeds. For Lancelot, neither of the first two options is acceptable. Instead, he expresses his intention to continue performing great deeds, even surpassing those he has already achieved:

«Dame, ge voi bien que par honteuse raençon m'en covient eschaper, se aler m'en voil. Et puis q'ensinc est, miauz me vient il dire ma honte que l'autrui, car bien sachiez que ge ne vos diroie a nul fuer qui ge sui, ne coment ge ai non. Et se ge amoie par amors, issi voirement m'aïst Dex, vos ne savriez já cui, se ge poie. Don ne covient il l'autre chose a dire, et gel dirai, quel honte que ge an doie avoir. Tant sachiez vos bien de voir que ge cuit ancores plus faire d'armes que ge ne fiz onques, se il m'est comandé». (*LP*, t. I: 792)

Focusing on the knight's discourse and building upon the previous observations about this passage, we may consider that the knight's refusal to confirm his love demonstrates the extent to which he is committed to preserving the queen's anonymity.⁸ Indeed, even the concealment of his identity obscures any potential link between him and Guinevere, further safeguarding their secret bond.

A second instance in which Lancelot, despite his deep suffering for the queen, refrains from revealing the identity of his beloved occurs in an episode involving Galehot. Overcome by sorrow, Lancelot weeps but steadfastly refuses to disclose the source of his despair. His grief, expressed quietly —«Ha! las, chaitis! que porrai faire?» (*LP*, t. I: 856)— continues throughout the night, leaving those around him bewildered by the intensity of his anguish. The following vivid description further emphasises the depth of Lancelot's torment:

Et d'autre part refu Galehoz mout matin levez et fu venuz a son tref veoir son compaignon, si trova les deus rois levez, si lor demanda que faisoit ses compainz. Et il li content lo grant duel que il avoit tote nuit mené. Et quant il l'ot, si an est mout durement esbahiz et mout dolanz. Lors va an la chanbre o il gisoit. Et cil l'oï venir, si tert ses iauz, car il ploroit autresi durement com il avoit miauz ploré la nuit. Et quant Galehoz l'oï, qu'il ne disoit mot, si s'en issi fors, car il cuida que il dormist. Après ce ne demora gaires que li chevaliers se leva. Et quant il fu levez, si vient Galehoz devant lui, si vit que il ot les iauz roiges et anflez, et il meïsmes estoit si anroez que a poines pooit dire mot. Et li drap

8. It is important to note that the knight is tasked with keeping his love a secret to avoid exposing the lady. This is why it is not common to even mention names in troubadour songs, for example, one of the most well-known literary expressions of the so-called fine love. In the words of José Rosa: «O amante dá-se em exclusivo à sua amada, guarda segredo do seu amor ('o amor conhecido por todos dura pouco') e é-lhe absolutamente fiel» (2005: 76).

desoz lui estoient si moillié desoz son chief comme s'il fussient trait de l'aive, car mout avoit ploré. (*LP*, t. I: 856)

This portrayal of Lancelot's state is strikingly evocative. The description of his swollen and reddened eyes, his hoarse voice, and the soaking wet sheets beneath his head, as if they had been immersed in water, paints a poignant picture of a man entirely consumed by grief. Despite his visible suffering, Lancelot refuses to reveal the cause of his despair, even in response to Galehot's repeated inquiries. Galehot's persistent questioning holds particular significance, as Lancelot is at his most emotionally vulnerable moment and might have been expected to confide. Yet, he remains resolutely loyal to Guinevere, honouring her status as queen and married woman by keeping her identity concealed. It can be said, therefore, that the knight's silence is a testament to his fidelity and a reflection of the broader societal expectations of courtly love. By refusing to betray the queen's identity, Lancelot exemplifies the restraint and respect integral to this code of conduct.⁹

Et neporqant mout s'esforce de bele chiere faire et se lieve encontre Galehot. Et cil lo prant par la main, si lo trait sol a sol a une part et li dit:
«Biau compainz, por quoi vos ociez vos ensi? Dont vos vient cist diaus que vos avez tote nuit mené et fait?».

Et cil lo li nie mout et dist que ensi se plaint il sovant an son dormant.

«Certes, fait Galehoz, ainz pert mout bien a vostre cors et a voz iauz que vos avez mout grant diau mené. Mais por Deu vos pri que vos me dites l'achoisson. Et bien sachiez que nule si granz mesestance n'est don ge ne vos ait a giter se nus hom consoil i puet metre». Et qant il l'ot, si est si engoissos que il ne li puet mot dire, si s'aquiaut [*f. 104d*] a plorer si tres durement comme se il veïst la rien morte el monde que il plus amast, et fait tel duel que par un po que il ne se pasme. Et Galehoz lot cort panre entre ses braz, si li baise la boche et les iauz, et lo conforte mout durement, et li dit:

«Biau dolz amis, dites moi vostre mesestance, que il n'a el monde si haut home, se il vos a anui porchacié, que vos n'en aiez vanjance a vostre volenté.» Et il dist que nus ne li a rien forfait. (*LP*, t. I: 856-858)

Despite the institutionalisation of *fin'amors* and the acknowledgement of its adaptation within the chivalric context, which seemingly legitimises the adulterous relationship between Guinevere and Lancelot to some extent, it is essential to highlight that adultery is condemned from the outset. Even before the consummation of their affair, during Lancelot's early adventures following his departure from King Arthur's court, the knight encounters another man who has been taken prisoner. Here, Lancelot's dialogue reflects the chivalric code of honour, as he asserts that it is unworthy for one knight to harm another. However, the captor argues that he does not need to prove anything in court other than his own, as the captured knight had committed adultery with his wife.

The mention of a court indicates that the betrayed knight is likely a lord of some standing, perhaps even a king. Consequently, both the adulterous knight and the lord's wife deserve punishment. The prisoner, already condemned to execution, is accompanied by the severed head of the woman, tied to his neck by her hair. This stark condemnation

9. This episode happens before the sealing of their love with a kiss, under Galehot's patronage, and the carnal consummation.

of illicit relationships, marked by betrayal of one's loyal lord, cannot go unnoticed. The episode serves as a forewarning or omen of the eventual adulterous relationship between Lancelot and Guinevere and its consequences. The parallels are striking: a love triangle comprising a lord (or king), his wife (or queen), and a knight.

The following excerpt from the narrative captures this pivotal moment:

[...] et avoit a la coe de son palefroi atachié un homme par le col a une delie corde. Li hons estoit en chemise et en braies tous descaus, si avoit les iex bendés et les mains liiés deriere le dos; et chou estoit un des plus biax hommes que on peüst trouver. Issi l'en menoit li grans chevaliers, et si li avoit au col pendu une teste de feme par les treches. Li Blans [*J, f. 51b*] Chevaliers voit chelui qui moult est de grant biauté, si l'areste et li demande qui il est.

«Sire, fait il, uns chevaliers madame [la roine] sui, si me heient ceste gent et me mainent a ma mort issi honteusement comme vous veés, car il ne m'osent ochire s'en repost non». Et li Blans Chevaliers li demande de par laquele roine il se reclaime. Et il dist de para chele de Bertaigne.

Lors dist li Blans Chevaliers:

«Chertes, l'en ne deüst mener si honteusement chevalier com vous le menés».

«Si doit, fait li grans chevaliers qui le traine, puis qu'il est traïtes et desloiaus, car puis a il chevalerie renoié».

«Et chestui, fait li Blans Chevaliers, por coi le trainés vous issi? Que vous a il forfait?»

«Il m'a tanta forfait que je l'ai repris de traïson, si en ferai justice selonc che qu'il a forfait».

Et li Blans Chevaliers li dist:

«Biaus sire, il n'afiert mie a chevalier qu'il destruire ensi un chevalier par soi, mais s'il est vostre traïtres, si l'en esprovés bien et en une cort. Et lors en porés avoir venjance a vostre honor.»

«Je ne li ferai já esprover, fait il, en autre cort que en la moie, car je l'ai tout ataint».

«Et de quoi?», fait li Blans Chevaliers.

«De ma feme, fait il, dont il me hounisoit. Et encore en a il la teste pendue au col atout les treches».

Et li chevalier, qui estoit liés, respont et jure moult durement que onques a nul jor nel pensa que il sa honte li porcachast.

«Há ! sire, fait li Blans Chevalier, puis qu'il noie le forfait si durement, vous n'avés droit en li destruire. Et je vous lo que por Dieu et por vostre honor le laisiés aler atant, et por moi qui onques mais ne vous priaï de rien. Et s'il vous a de rien forfait, si en querés la justice issi com je vous ai dit».

Et chil dit et jure que ja en avant n'en ira querre justice, puis qu'il le tient.

«Par foi, fait li Blans Chevaliers, vous mesferés trop [*J, f. 51c*] de li desfaire, puis qu'il est chevaliers madame la roine».

Et li dist que por la roine n'en laira il nient qu'il ne l'ochie.

«Non? Fait li Blans Chevalier; or sachiés qu'il ne moura mais hui par vous, car je le preng envers tous cheus que je voi chi a conduire [et] a garantir». (*LP*, t. I: 596-600)

At this juncture, Lancelot's stance as the «Blanc Chevalier» captures our attention as he defends the captured knight, juxtaposed against the latter's assertion that he has committed no offence against his lord. Lancelot grounds his defence on the principle that the knight deserves to face a proper trial rather than summary punishment. However, this argument fails to sway the lord, who is blinded by his desire for vengeance. Undeterred, Lancelot asserts that the knight's life must not be subject to vigilante justice,

emphasising that the prisoner serves as the queen's knight. When this reasoning also proves ineffective, Lancelot takes a more direct approach, vowing to protect the knight and threatening to kill anyone who attacks him. This ultimatum forces the lord and his entourage to relent, and Lancelot frees the knight.

The knight later departs to inform Queen Guinevere of Lancelot's deeds, bringing her great satisfaction. This episode underscores Lancelot's choice to refrain from immediate condemnation of the knight, perhaps implying that the latter's betrayal, involving the lord's wife, could be mitigated if judged in another setting. Lancelot's actions adhere to the chivalric code espoused earlier in the narrative, but his priorities reveal a clear preference for preserving life over safeguarding the lord's honour.

The woman at the center of the controversy, rendered voiceless in death, further complicates this dynamic. The adulteress is reduced to a lifeless symbol, her severed head representing the crime committed. Although we may consider it a sign of the husband's cruelty, this stark imagery may as well imply her sole culpability, suggesting that her failure to uphold the ideals of restraint and courtliness transformed the relationship into one of betrayal and sin. Yet, the narrative also criticizes the lord's inability to embody the virtues of his rank by not recognising that generosity, even concerning his wife, is intrinsic to his feudal obligations.¹⁰

Arthur's role in this unfolding drama is equally significant. He emerges as a distant king who neglects his duties toward his vassals, as seen when he fails to aid King Ban (Lancelot's father), and towards his wife, often leaving her alone and even engaging in adultery himself. This detachment, however, suggests a tacit permissiveness, as Guinevere's clandestine meetings with Lancelot succeed mainly due to Arthur's negligence or deliberate ignorance. A poignant example occurs when Guinevere and Lancelot consummate their love for the first time. In fact, Arthur facilitates their encounter by informing Guinevere that he will be absent that night, intending to spend the evening with a maiden he admires. This plan backfires disastrously when he falls into a trap and is captured by an enemy, diminishing his regal dignity. Arthur's dual failures—as a betrayed king unaware of his cuckolding and an unlucky adventurer—undermine his authority.

Eventually, Lancelot rescues Arthur, but upon their return to court, the knight, and not the king, receives Guinevere's affection:

Et lors anvoie li rois querre la reine. Et ele vient, si li saut chascuns a l'ancontre an la tor.
 Et ele laisse toz les autres, si giete les braz a Lancelot au col, si lo baise voiant toz cels qui
 laianz estoient, por ce que toz les an voloit decevoir et que nuns n'i pansast ce qu'i est. Ne
 nuns ne la voit qui miauz ne l'an ait prisiee, mais il an est trop hontous. Et ele li dit:
 «Sire chevaliers, ge ne sai qui vos iestes, ce poise moi; ne ge ne vos sai que offrir por
 l'annor mon seignor avant et por la moie après, que vos avez hui maintenue. Mais por
 lui avant et por moi après vos otroi ge moi et m'amor, si comme leiaus dame doit doner
 a leial chevalier».
 Et qant li rois l'ot, si l'am prise mout de ce que ele l'a fait sanz estre anseigniee. (*LP*, t. II:
 576)

If the narrator immediately explains the reasons behind Guinevere's seemingly reckless actions, her words to Lancelot leave no doubt about her cunning and deliberate

10. A more detailed study of this episode can be found in Rabaçal (2016).

intent. Guinevere's behaviour, as we learn, was aimed at deceiving those around her, fulfilling her role as queen and lady naturally, so that no one would suspect the illicit relationship between her and the knight. It is essential to recall that in a society organised around strategic alliances, the queen had a duty to keep the knights of her court content, ensuring their loyalty to the king and continued service. Thus, this context explains Arthur's approval of Guinevere's actions, given that Lancelot had shown his valour by rescuing the king and returning him to safety at court.

When examining Lancelot's trajectory, it becomes evident, as previously discussed, that he adopts a posture of submission toward the queen. In the initial stages, this submission is characterised by the concealment of his feelings, stemming from a combination of apparent timidity, Guinevere's superior social status, and his aspiration to gain chivalric merit. Later, however, Lancelot submits to Guinevere's wishes more tangibly, particularly on the battlefield. One of the principles of this courtly love dynamic, as adapted to the chivalric version of *fin'amors*, dictates that the knight pay homage to his lady through feats of valour that establish him as the greatest knight in the world, thereby making him desirable and worthy of her love. In this narrative, Lancelot epitomises the knight who seeks both recognition and chivalric merit to earn, and subsequently retain, the queen's affection.

To illustrate this dynamic, two excerpts vividly demonstrate Lancelot's submission to Guinevere's wishes in the context of battle, both before and after the consummation of their adulterous relationship:

Ensin devise messire Gauvains. Et la reine dit qu'il mant au chevalier ce qu'il voldra an son non, que ele l'otroie bien. [...] Lors apele messires Gauvains la pucele qui lo message avoit porté, si l'anvoie au chevalier qui pense et li devise tot ensin com il avoit dit a la reine. [...] Atant s'an part la pucele et dit au chevalier ce que messires Gauvains et la reine li mandent, et les pressanz li baille. Et li chevaliers li demande:
 «Damoisele, ou est ele, ma dame?»
 «Sire, fait ele, laïssus en cele bretesche, et dames et damoiseles estre. Et si i gist messires Gauvains malades. Et sachiez que vos seroiz ja mout bien esgardez».
 Et li chevaliers li dist:
 «Damoisele, dites a ma dame que ensi soit come li plaira». [...] (*LP*, t. I: 814)

This first excerpt pertains to the battles involving Galehot. While it is true that the queen and the knight had not yet consummated their adulterous relationship, Lancelot's devotion to Guinevere had already been evident since his arrival at King Arthur's court to be knighted, a moment we have previously described. Despite Guinevere's apparent indifference, of which Lancelot remains unaware, he fights valiantly and performs remarkable feats in her honour. He does so in obedience to her requests and submission to her wishes, motivated by a desire to earn merit and the queen's recognition.

Now, let us see the second excerpt:

Lors s'an reva an haut. Et il remonte an son cheval et fiert des esperons après son seignor atores les lances, si li dit ce que la reine li avoit dit. Mais il est si pensis que il ne puet plus, et respont itant: «Si soit comme ma dame plaira». [...] Et cil li va dire. Et si tost com ele lo voit, si descent. Et qant il li a [ce] dit, ele remonte et dit que ele lo velt.

«Mais bien gart il, fait ele, si tost com il verra mon mantel pandu a ces creniaus, la penne defors, sirevaigne de ça. Et se li rois a domache an la chace, si gart que bien li soit amandé». [...]

Lors esgarde Lanceloz vers la tor et voit lo mantel la reine pandeillier, la penne defors, et dit qe or ont il assez soffert. [...]

Et la reine apele une damoiselle, si li anvoie un hiaume trop riche qui fu lo roi: «Si li dites que ge ne puis mais veoir ceste ocision; qu'i[1] face la chace commancier, car ge le voil». Et cele i va et li baille lo hiaume et li dit ainsi comme la reine li mande. Et il dit que granz merciz. Lors a lo hiaume lacié et lo suen osté. Puis se trait un po arriers et li suen [...]. (LP, t. II: 514)

This second moment, when Lancelot's submission to the queen's desires is evident, occurs during a battle against the Irish and the Saxons. By this point in the narrative, Guinevere and Lancelot had already sealed their love with a kiss following an encounter facilitated by Galehot, who deeply cared for Lancelot and sought to ease his unhappiness. During the battle, the queen, accompanied by the Lady of Malohaut, instructs the knight through Lionel. Lancelot follows her directives without hesitation, once again performing extraordinary feats that astonish all present and cement his status as a knight worthy of the queen's love. That night, Lancelot's efforts are rewarded when he and Guinevere share a bed for the first time.

Finally, another example that points in the direction of courtly love in the non-cyclic prose *Lancelot* are personal gifts. To strengthen the bond between them and evoke a sense of intimacy, Guinevere sends her lover a series of personal items laden with eroticism and sensuality: «Et si li anvoie la reine lo fermail de son col [et un anelet de son doit] et un paigne mout riche, don totes les danz sont plaines de ses chevox, et la çainture que ele avoit cainte et l'aumosciere» (LP, t. II: 464). Beyond these objects, rings hold particular significance in this universe, symbolising courtly love, since they were often given by the lady as a token of her affection.

After what was exposed above, we believe it can be stated that the relationship between Guinevere and Lancelot represents the epitome of *fin'amors*, albeit as a distinct adaptation within the chivalric framework, through the service of the knight towards the lady. However, while adhering to the foundational principles of courtly love – restraint, devotion, and spiritual elevation, their union evolves beyond mere idealisation to encompass the consummation of carnal love. Still, this progression must not be dismissed as a mere act of passion but understood as an essential element of the social dynamics that sustain the kingdom in the non-cyclic prose *Lancelot*, as the service provided by the knight brings honour to the court and even contributes to keeping Arthur alive and on the throne.

Therefore, the narrative positions their love as a force that transcends individual desires, serving to balance the interplay between royalty and chivalry. In this sense, Guinevere's role in fostering the loyalty of knights and Lancelot's unparalleled valour ultimately reinforce the kingdom's prestige. In this context, their relationship is a strong example of how, in medieval times, personal devotion and political necessity intertwined, demonstrating that even within the constraints of medieval morality, love can be a powerful and transformative force for social cohesion.

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