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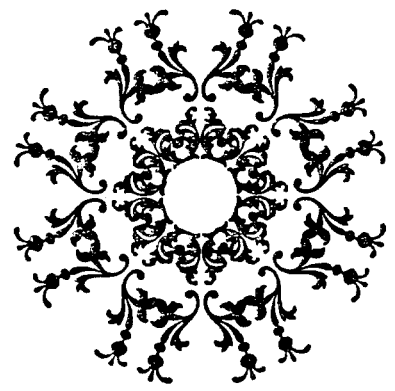
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293

CHRÉTIEN DE TROYES

ARTHURIAN
ROMANCES

TRANSLATED WITH AN INTRODUCTION
AND NOTES BY WILLIAM W. KIBLER.
(*EREC AND ENIDE* TRANSLATED BY
CARLETON W. CARROLL.)



PENGUIN BOOKS

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CONTENTS



Introduction	I
A Note on the Translations	23
Select Bibliography	27
Erec and Enide	37
Cligés	123
The Knight of the Cart (Lancelot)	207
The Knight with the Lion (Yvain)	295
The Story of the Grail (Perceval)	381
Appendix: The Story of the Grail Continuations	495
Glossary of Medieval Terms	501
Notes	505

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INTRODUCTION



WRITING in the second half of the twelfth century, Chrétien de Troyes was the inventor of Arthurian literature as we know it. Drawing from material circulated by itinerant Breton minstrels and legitimized by Geoffrey of Monmouth's pseudo-historical *Historia Regum Britanniae* (History of the Kings of Britain, c. 1136-37), Chrétien fashioned a new form known today as courtly romance. To Geoffrey's bellicose tales of Arthur's conquests, Chrétien added multiple love adventures and a courtly veneer of polished manners. He was the first to speak of Queen Guinevere's affair with Lancelot of the Lake, the first to mention Camelot, and the first to write of the adventures of the Grail – with Perceval, the mysterious procession, and the Fisher King. He may even have been the first to sing of the tragic love of Tristan and Isolde. All of these themes have become staples in the romance of King Arthur, and no treatment of the legend seems complete without some allusion to them.

Yet we know virtually nothing about this incomparable genius, the author of the five earliest Arthurian romances: *Erec and Enide*, *Cligés*, *The Knight of the Cart* (*Lancelot*), *The Knight with the Lion* (*Yvain*), and *The Story of the Grail* (*Perceval*). The few references to a 'Crestien' or 'Christianus' unearthed in archival documents cannot with any certainty be related to our author, so we can know him only through his own writings. And even here we are at some remove from Chrétien himself, for the manuscripts that preserve his works all date from at least a generation after the time he composed them.

The most important manuscripts containing Chrétien's romances date from the thirteenth century. All five of his Arthurian romances are found in MS Bibliothèque Nationale f. fr. 794, known as the Guiot Manuscript after the scribe who copied it in the mid-thirteenth century. The romances appear there in conjunction with four other works, all set in Classical times:

ough the interplay of
es expressive rhetorical
d of rhyming together
but wholly different
several forms of the same
om Erec:

[ll. 5125-29]

to mount and ride. Erec
ur ther.]
c harmonic harmonies, repetition
Knight with the Lion, where
e high vowels u and i
t in a storm in the forest:

[l' 4840-48]

ightedened by the night, but her
heavily as God could make it
es: The night and the forest
he rain than either the night or
r. all the subtlety and magic of
y some measure of his humour
was one of the great artists and
ancer after him had to come to
rankly imitated (today we might
ite or developed motifs, themes

structures and stylistic mannerisms introduced by him; still others continued his stories in ever more vast compilations. Already in the last decade of the twelfth century his *Erec and Enide* had been translated into German as *Erek* by Hartmann von Aue, who in the first years of the thirteenth century also translated *The Knight with the Lion (Iwein)*. At about the same time Ulrich von Zatzikhoven translated *The Knight of the Cart*, also into German (*Lanzelet*). But his greatest German emulator was Wolfram von Eschenbach, who adapted Chrétien's *The Story of the Grail* as *Parzival*, one of the finest of all medieval romances, in the first decade of the thirteenth century. There were also direct adaptations of this romance into Middle Dutch and Old Welsh.

In the fifty years from 1190 to 1240 Arthurian romance was the prevailing vogue in France, and no writer could escape Chrétien's influence. Some, like Gautier d'Arras and Jean Renart, deliberately set out to rival him, fruitlessly attempting to surpass the master. Others – the majority – flattered his memory by their imitations of his work. Among the motifs first introduced by Chrétien that are found in more than one romance after him are the tournament in which the hero fights incognito (*Cligés*), the sparrowhawk contest (*Erec*), the abduction (*The Knight of the Cart*), Sir Kay's disagreeable temperament (*Erec*, *The Knight of the Cart*, *The Story of the Grail*), and the heads of knights impaled on stakes (*Erec*).

His incompleted *The Story of the Grail* sparked by far the greatest interest. In the last decade of the twelfth century two anonymous continuators sought to complete the poem. The first took it up where Chrétien left off, continuing the adventures of Sir Gawain for as many as 19,600 lines in the lengthiest redaction, but never reaching a conclusion. The second continuator returned to the adventures of Perceval for an additional 13,000 lines. In the early thirteenth century the romance was given two independent terminations, one by Manessier in some 10,000 additional lines, and the other by Gerbert de Montreuil in 17,000 lines. (See Appendix).

Meanwhile, also in the late twelfth century, Robert de Boron composed a derivative verse account of the history of the Grail in three related poems – *Joseph d'Armathie*, *Merlin*, *Perceval* – of which only the first survives intact. It tells of the origin of the Grail, associating it for the first time with the cup of the Last Supper, and announces that it will be carried to the West and found there by a knight of the lineage of Joseph of Arimathea. Robert's *Perceval* (now totally lost) would have recounted how this knight found the Grail and thereby put an end to the 'marvels of Britain'. The second poem, now fragmentary, links the others by changing the scene to Britain,

ARTHURIAN ROMANCES

introducing Arthur and having Merlin recall the action of the first and predict that of the second. Robert's poems were soon replaced by prose versions, notably the so-called *Didot-Perceval*. In the early thirteenth century there was a second prose reworking of Chrétien's Grail story, known as the *Perlesvaus*, by an anonymous author who also knew the work of Robert de Boron and both the First and Second Continuations.

Chrétien's influence can still be felt in the vast prose compendium of the mid-thirteenth century known as the *Lancelot-Graal* or the Vulgate Cycle (1225-50), which combined his story of Lancelot's love for the queen (*The Knight of the Cart*) with the Grail quest (*The Story of the Grail*), and was the source of Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*, the fountainhead of Arthurian material in modern English literature. However, the success of the *Lancelot-Graal* ironically marked the decline of Chrétien's direct influence. As prose came to replace verse as the preferred medium for romance and the French language continued to evolve from Chrétien's Old French to a more modern idiom, his poems were forgotten until the rediscovery of their manuscripts in the nineteenth century.

Thanks to Malory, the Arthurian materials were never lost sight of so completely in England, and Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* reflect the vogue for Arthuriana in the Romantic period. Today in both England and America there is a renewed and lively interest in the Arthurian legends that Chrétien was the first to exploit as the subject matter for romance. All those who have celebrated and still celebrate King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table - from the anonymous authors of the *Lancelot-Graal* through Malory and Tennyson to Steinbeck, Boorman and Bradley today - are forever in his debt.

William W. Kibler
June 1989

A NOTE ON

It is acknowledged as fact that the romances on which to base a text are found in more than one manuscript version and the next. Words may be inverted or moved significantly or omitted. It is necessary and to produce a text that is based on Chrétien's romances, Wenzel has taken each poem based on all manuscripts, although highly personal in choice, that could not be found in any other edition as the best overall edition. In editing Chrétien was taken from the editions of *Erec*, *Cligés*, *Lancelot* in the *moyen âge* series. They chose the edition which they believed to be the most accurate usage, and reproduced it as a text. The most flagrant scribal slips. The errors resulted in a text that in many places is the work of a great Champenois poet. While we have used the Foerster edition, all done from new editions of the text and Micha's are based on the text in the middle ground between Foerster and Micha's. A satisfactory solution could be found along with facing-page transcription. Library of Medieval Literature

248

EREC AND ENIDE



THE peasant in his proverb says that one might find oneself holding in contempt something that is worth much more than one believes; therefore a man does well to make good use of his learning according to whatever understanding he has, for he who neglects his learning may easily keep silent something that would later give much pleasure. And so Chrétien de Troyes says that it is reasonable for everyone to think and strive in every way to speak well and to teach well, and from a tale of adventure he draws a beautifully ordered composition that clearly proves that a man does not act intelligently if he does not give free rein to his knowledge for as long as God gives him the grace to do so.

This is the tale of Erec, son of Lac, which those who try to live by storytelling customarily mangle and corrupt before kings and counts. Now I shall begin the story that will be in memory for evermore, as long as Christendom lasts – of this does Chrétien boast.

On Easter day, in springtime, at Cardigan his castle, King Arthur held court. So rich a one was never seen, for there were many good knights, brave and combative and fierce, and rich ladies and maidens, noble and beautiful daughters of kings; but before the court disbanded the king told his knights that he wanted to hunt the white stag in order to revive the tradition.

My lord Gawain was not a bit pleased when he heard this. 'Sire,' said he, 'from this hunt you will gain neither gratitude nor thanks. We have all known for a long time what tradition is attached to the white stag: he who can kill the white stag by right must kiss the most beautiful of the maidens of your court, whatever may happen. Great evil can come from this, for there are easily five hundred damsels of high lineage here, noble and wise daughters of kings; and there is not a one who is not the favourite of some valiant and bold knight, each of whom would want to contend, rightly or

wrongly, that the one who pleases him is the most beautiful and the most noble.'

The king replied: "This I know well, but I will not give up my plan for all that, for the word of a king must not be contravened. Tomorrow morning with great pleasure we shall all go to hunt the white stag in the forest of adventures: this will be a most wondrous hunt."

Thus the hunt was arranged for the morrow at daybreak. The next day, as soon as it was light, the king arose and made ready: to go into the forest he put on a short tunic. He had the hunting-steeds readied, the knights awakened. Carrying their bows and their arrows, they set off to hunt in the forest. Afterwards, the queen mounted, accompanied by an attendant maiden – a king's daughter – who sat upon a good palfrey.

A knight came spurring after them: his name was Erec. He was of the Round Table and had received great honour at court: as long as he had been there no knight had been so highly praised, and he was so handsome that there was no need to seek a man of finer looks anywhere. He was very handsome and valiant and noble, and he was not yet twenty-five years old; never was any man of his youth so accomplished in knighthood. What should I say of his virtues? Mounted on a charger, he came galloping along the road; he was dressed in a fur-lined mantle and a tunic of noble, patterned silk that had been made in Constantinople.¹ He had put on silken stockings, very finely made and tailored; he was well set in his stirrups and was wearing golden spurs; he was unarmed except for his sword.

Spurring his horse, he caught up with the queen at a bend in the road. 'My lady,' said he, 'I would go with you, should it please you, on this road. I have come here for no other reason than to keep you company.'

And the queen thanked him for that: 'Good friend, I greatly like your company; know this truly: I can have none better.'

Then they rode speedily on and went straight into the forest. Those who had gone on ahead had already raised the stag: some blew on horns, others shouted; the dogs went noisily after the stag, running, rushing and barking; the archers were shooting thick and fast. Out in the front of all of them the king was hunting, mounted on a Spanish hunter.

Queen Guinevere was in the woods listening to the dogs; beside her were Erec and her maiden, who was very courtly and beautiful. But those who had raised the stag were so far off that they could hear nothing of them, neither horn nor horse nor hound. All three had stopped in a clearing beside the road in order to listen attentively to see whether they could hear a human voice or the cry of a hound from any side.

They had not been there long when they saw coming towards them an armoured knight on a charger, his shield at his neck, his lance in his hand. The queen saw him from afar: a fine-looking maiden was riding beside him at his right; in front of them, on a big draught horse, a dwarf was riding along, and he carried in his hand a whip with lashes knotted at one end.

Queen Guinevere saw the handsome and elegant knight, and she wanted to know who they were, he and his maiden. She told her maiden to go quickly to speak to him. 'Damsel,' said the queen, 'go and tell that knight riding there to come to me and bring his maiden with him.'

The maiden rode ahead straight towards the knight. The dwarf came to meet her, holding his whip in his hand. 'Halt, damsel!' said the dwarf, who was full of evil. 'What are you looking for here? You have no business in this direction!'

'Dwarf,' said she, 'let me pass: I wish to speak to that knight, for the queen sends me there.'

The evil, baseborn dwarf stood blocking her way: 'You have no business here,' said he. 'Go back! It's not right for you to talk to such a fine knight.'

The maiden moved forward; she wanted to force her way past. She felt great contempt for the dwarf because she saw how little he was. But the dwarf raised his whip when he saw her approaching. He tried to strike her in the face, but she protected herself with her arm; then he took aim again and struck her openly on her bare hand. He struck her on the back of her hand so that it became all blue. Since she could do no more, the maiden was obliged to turn back, whether she wanted to or not. She came back weeping: tears were running from her eyes down her face.

The queen did not know what to do; when she saw her maiden wounded she was very sad and angry. 'Oh! Erec, good friend,' said she, 'I am very upset about my maiden, whom this dwarf has wounded in such a way. That knight is most unchivalrous to have allowed such a freak to strike so beautiful a creature. Good friend Erec, go over to the knight and tell him to come to me without fail: I want to meet both him and his lady.'

Erec spurred his horse, rode in that direction, and came straight to the knight. The despicable dwarf saw him coming and went to meet him. 'Knight,' said he, 'stay back! I don't know what business you have here. I advise you to withdraw.'

'Be gone,' said Erec, 'bothersome dwarf! You're disgusting and hateful. Let me pass!'

'You won't pass!'

'Yes, I will!'