

Chretien's Lancelot

Study Questions

As you read Chretien's Lancelot, choose one of the following as your primary focus. Work closely with the texts, and point out specific passages that you can discuss with the class. You do not need to respond to every aspect of these questions. Rather, you may want to focus narrowly. Though not (at this point) a formal paper, your responses should be written or typed.

1. Discuss the portrayals of the nobility. In addition to the main characters, you may also want to discuss the portrayals of knights and ladies who appear as foils. It would be especially useful to compare the actions and behavior of Gawain and Malyageant to Lancelot. Also, you may want to discuss the appearance and function of non-courtly characters (peasants, dwarfs, clergy).
2. Although the romance incorporates love, battle scenes are still prominent in the course of the narrative. Focus upon scenes of fighting and descriptions of battle. What can you discern about medieval battling techniques as they are portrayed in this work? You may wish to compare details of battles in this text to those in Geoffrey of Monmouth's History. What differences and similarities do you notice? You may also explore those scenes in which battling is an obvious metaphor for lovemaking.
3. Obviously, love is a central concern, and the knights in the romance must obey the rules of love. Explore several scenes which depict the strictly codified behavior of knight and lady (i.e., lovesickness, wooing, lovemaking, etc.). Here, it would be useful to look at Andreas Cappalanus' list of rules for courtly love (handout distributed in class). How does the character Lancelot conform to these rules?
4. The role of women in the romance is a hotly debated topic. You may view the lady as quite powerful for her manipulation of the knight, or you may view her as simply an object to be won as proof of the knight's prowess. Consider the portrayal of several women, and draw your own conclusions. It would be helpful here to trace the ladies in the text (in addition to Guenevere). How many are there? What is their function?
5. Because the Arthurian romances incorporate Celtic mythology and folklore, magic and supernatural events are common in the genre. Explore the appearance of magic and the supernatural in these romances. How do these elements contribute to the romance theme? What is their function? Are they reconciled with the obvious Christian allusions in the text.
6. Hospitality is an essential characteristic of the romance. Explore scenes which portray hospitality, examining the topical details and the function of such scenes in the context of the narrative.