

Lancelot, the knight of the cart essay example

[Life](#), [Love](#)



Introduction

“Lancelot, the Knight of the Cart,” is a fascinating story written by Chrétien de Troyes that explores the themes of courtly love and knightly valor. The story tells the story of the famous Arthurian knight, Lancelot and his love affair with Guinevere. The main action of this classic tale centers on the abduction of Guinevere by the evil Meleagant and the various conquests of Lancelot as he attempts to rescue his lover. A revolving theme of the tale is the struggle that Lancelot faces in trying to balance his duties as a lover and as a knighted warrior. Throughout the tale, the two acts of love and knighthood clash with each other and Lancelot faces a hard time deciding how to act, as a warrior or as a lover who is deeply bound and committed to courtly love. There are two specific incidences where the two aspects clash and where Lancelot has to make a choice on how to act. These two occur when Lancelot has to get into a cart, and the other occurs when he is crossing the sword bridge. This paper aims to show that the hesitation of Lancelot in getting to the cart and his ultimate decision to cross the Sword Bridge without any hesitation reveals that although Lancelot holds the values of a knight deep to his heart, he is however totally devoted to his lover, Guinevere.

The first half of this tale explores the attempts of Lancelot to rescue his lover Guinevere, who has been taken captive by the evil Meleagant. Meleagant visits Arthur in his court and informs him that he has taken captive many of the king's ladies, knights and maidens, and they are now his prisoners. He boasts to Arthur that as long as he lives, the king is powerless to flee the captured individuals (Troyes, 24). However, Meleagant tells Arthur

that he will flee all the captured prisoners if one of Author's trusted knights is able to defeat him in a fight. Queen Guinevere is to accompany this knight to the forest where the fight is to take place. Arthur is tricked by Kay to allow him to be the challenger, and they set off with Guinevere to the forest.

Launcelot later learns of this and together with Gawain sets off to rescue his secret lover. Unfortunately, Kya has already been defeated, and Meleagant has abducted Guinevere (Troyes, 54).

It is in this conquest of rescuing Guinevere that Lancelot, the knight of a king faces a critical decision making point. The decision and actions that he takes at this point will reveal a great deal about his character and emotional state. The horse that Launcelot has been riding dies, and he is consequently left without a horse. However, he comes across a dwarf who he starts asking about the direction that has been taken by Guinevere's captors. The dwarf does not stop but tells Launcelot that if he rides in his cart, he will tell him the whereabouts of the queen (Lacy and Grimbart 55). At this moment, Lancelot hesitates, but after a moment he makes the ultimate choice and enters the cart to ride with the dwarf. Gawain who is at this point accompanying him soon catches up and also asks about whereabouts but when the dwarf invites him to ride in the cart, he refuses.

Lancelot hesitation to enter reveals a lot about his character and nature. First, it reveals just how high he holds his knighthood values. Knights were among the most respected people in the land. They were ranked in the upper class of the society and were respected by all citizens. The Knights were all expected to follow a certain rule of conduct. They were not supposed to demean themselves or to stoop to the level of lower class

members. In fact, interacting with lower class members was almost a taboo. Launcelot is clearly aware of these unspoken rules, and this is why he hesitates to enter the cart owned by the dwarf.

Riding on a cart was act of demeaning or degrading himself. Carts were, usually, for transporting criminals. In fact, the riding of a cart by a knight is deemed shameful because of two primary reasons with the one mentioned above being one of them. The second reason was that the cart was believed to be a source of misfortune, and anyone who encountered it was supposed to cross themselves (Lacy and Grimbart 56). No high-ranking member of the King's court ever degrade himself by riding on one. The dwarf clearly knows this and by inviting a king's knight to ride on a cart, he is perhaps taunting him.

Launcelot is an individual who deeply valued his knighthood values. This is what makes him hesitate. He is an almost perfect knight, and he knew that if he proceeds to bode the cart, his image and may be even his respect might forever be dented. As a perfect knight, he wants to preserve his honor and respect, and he, therefore, understands that he decides to board the cart, his perfect stature would be no longer (Lacy and Grimbart 57). He has to make an ultimate and immediate decision because as revealed earlier, his horse had perished and if he has any hope of catching up with the abductors of Guinevere let alone knowing where or which direction they had taken, he has to take the dwarf's word, ride with him and hope for the best.

When the offer is made to Gawain to ride in the cart, he promptly refuses. He does not even contemplate getting into the cart as he cannot not bring himself to do what in his world would be considered to be a very shameful

act. This is a conclusive suggestion that Gawain is an even more perfect knight than Launcelot. On the other hand, however, it can be argued that Sir Gawain refuses to enter the cart because unlike Launcelot, he still has a horse. This is perhaps a reminder to Launcelot that knights do not ride carts but instead ride horses.

Although Launcelot hesitates in getting into the cart, he however decides to get into the cart finally. This shows that although he understands his position as a knight, he is however totally devoted to Guinevere and the love that he has for her is what motivates him to enter the cart. He is willing to stoop down even to the lowest levels if this means that he will save his queen. He sets aside his knightly status by agreeing to ride with dwarf. Ultimately, his decision is not an easy one, and this is why he shows initial hesitation. In the end, he chooses to go with love and forfeits the honor of knighthood. His performs the act for love sake showing he is indeed a lover before he is a knight (Lacy and Grimbart 59).

Another incidence that gives an insight into the character of Launcelot occurs at the Sword Bridge. His actions here are only a little different from those at the cart, but they once again reveal a more solid character in him. As Gawain and Launcelot continue with their endeavor to rescue the queen who is also the secret lover of Launcelot, they are informed that the only way that they can successfully enter then the county where the queen us being held is by either using the Sword Bridge or an underwater bridge (Lacy and Grimbart 70). Gawain decides to use the latter and therefore sets off. At this instant, the two knights separate. Launcelot continues with his journey and finally reaches the Sword Bridge, which is comprised of a giant sword blade.

The bridge is scary in nature. Its waters are described as wicked due their turbulent raging and in addition, it looks bottomless and anything that falls over would ultimately perish since at the bottom of the bridge ice cold water (Troyes, 94). Launcelot is urged by his companions not to use the bridge citing factors such as the wind, danger and lions. Launcelot however tells them that he trusts God to keep him safe and the companions at once apologize for having questioned him. The blade terribly injures him as he crosses, but he perseveres the immense pain and makes it to the other side and exclaims that love has turned his pain into pleasure (Lacy and Grimbart 70).

Unlike the hesitation shown when getting into the cart, Launcelot does not hesitate when it comes to crossing the Sword Bridge. This is a clear indication that he is totally devoted to love and nothing, not even his knighthood can now stand in his way. His devotion to love mean that he is willing to endure immense pain to rescue his lover. As he states, love has essentially turned his pain into pleasure. He could have chosen to go with Gawain and use the underwater bridge which was relatively safer. However, this bridge was a long distance away but because he wants to rescue his lover as soon as possible, he chooses the alternative course that is filled with a lot of danger. Once he reaches the bridge, his eyes are only set at rescuing the bride and he is, therefore, oblivious to the huge danger that lies ahead. In simple terms, he is now totally devoted to love, and everything he does is for love.

Conclusion

Lancelot's hesitation in getting into the cart and his decision to cross the Sword Bridge reveals a lot about his character. At the cart, he is still committed to his knighthood status but at the same time, he loves the abducted queen, and hence, there is a clash between knighthood and love. Ultimately he chooses the latter, albeit after some hesitation. The hesitation is a sign of his respect to knighthood. This hesitation is however not exhibited at the Sword bridge where crosses without even thinking twice and in spite of the immense danger that lies before him. The first incident shows that although he still has respect for the principles of knighthood, he is totally devoted to love. The second incident exhibits this devotion and removes any previous doubts about his commitment and devotion to love.

References

Troyes, Chrétien, and Burton Raffel. *Lancelot: The Knight of the Cart*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1997. Print.

Lacy, Norris J., and Joan T. Grimbert. *A companion to Chrétien de Troyes*. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2005. Print.