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Weaving Narrative

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CLOTHING AS A STRUCTURING, THEMATIC, AND NARRATIVE DEVICE: THE ART OF WEAVING ROMANCE

THE SYSTEMATIC AND ELABORATE use of clothing in a highly developed signifying system serving the work in a variety of ways and at several levels is characteristic of the courtly literature of the end of the twelfth century. This use of the clothing signifying system is related to the structure of romance and, by extension, of shorter narrative *lais*, in that it is one of the many devices that give romance form.¹ Clothing, as the writers in the twelfth century used it, figures as an element of *conjointure* in that it serves in the process of amplification. The descriptions of clothing are the result of the author's concern for beautifying his or her work through the filling in, or amplification, of certain *topoi* that he or she found to be lacking in the source material.² Amplification for the medieval writer was, as Vinaver notes, "an expansion or unrolling of a number of interlocked themes" (*Form* 12). The relationship of theme to structure in twelfth-century romance is very strong indeed. In fact, the structure is determined by, identical to, and indissociable from the elaboration of central themes of the romance.

The structure of medieval narrative has not always been understood or appreciated by modern (that is, postmedieval) critics who were heavily

1. I am including narrative *lais* in my discussion of romance because of both the fluidity of medieval genre, which is itself difficult for modern scholarship to define satisfactorily, and the fact that the audience, its reception of the literary work, and the conventions of romance seem to be the same as for the narrative *lais*, such as those by Marie de France that I discuss here. I will, however, continue to refer broadly to the conventions of "romance" while including discussions of these conventions in narrative *lais*. Logan E. Whalen, in his study of Marie's *Lais*, suggests that a *lai* such as *Guigemar* is truly "a romance waiting to happen" (2), because of its development and commonality with the conventions of romance.

2. Kelly has treated the issue of amplification as part of *conjointure* extensively throughout his works on medieval rhetoric and its practice by the romancers of the twelfth century. See particularly his discussions in *The Art of Medieval French Romance*, *The Conspiracy of Allusion*, "Rhetoric in French Literature," and "The Scope of the Treatment of Composition."

influenced by Aristotelian definitions of structure.³ For centuries, it was believed that the great medieval works were amorphous masses of narrative with no clear organization. Late twentieth-century scholarship, however, became concerned with the reevaluation of medieval literature, paying special attention to rediscovering its particular aesthetics. Such scholarship yielded a much more satisfactory estimation and definition of composition for medieval narrative than had previous, less favorable studies. To illuminate the overall structure of romance, Vinaver describes medieval romance as a tapestry, a work whose complex arrangement is woven in such a way that “a single cut across it, made at any point, would unravel it all” (*Form* 10).⁴ Lacy elaborates further, calling the form of romance “a loosely-knit but thoroughly composed structure. All the threads will eventually be tied up, and all the themes taken to their completion, but the links between consecutive episodes are often vague or virtually non-existent” (*Craft* 67). The structure of romance, then, is not linear. Rather, its organization is one in which shape is given to the work as a whole “by patterning of different kinds, mostly through the presentation of parallel situations and often associated with the growth of the hero” (Adams 164). This pattern is, in short, analogy, whereby, in Vinaver’s terms, “literary events similar in character but sometimes widely separated in time and space” (*Rise* 99) provide both the content and shape of the text.⁵ Moreover, as Lacy asserts, “analogical composition refers not simply to resemblances between episodes, but specifically to the fashioning of episodes so that their resemblances relate them all to the major theme of the work” (*Craft* 68). Much recent scholarship had focused upon the particular devices used to elaborate structure, such as the quest or the portrait.⁶ Especially interesting for the present work, since they share parallel concerns, are those studies examining motifs and features that have specific, extratextual

3. William W. Ryding’s introduction to his *Structure in Medieval Narrative* traces the scholarship on and its conclusions about narrative structure through the centuries and provides an excellent overview of the issues surrounding the evaluation of narrative.

4. Vinaver, however, is far from the first person to draw this parallel. Jean Renart, in his thirteenth-century romance *Le Roman de la rose, ou de Guillaume de Dole*, stresses the similarities between the process of literary creation and cloth production. He describes his own process of embellishing his text through the addition of songs, first, to the process of dyeing fabric with kermes to increase its worth: “car aussi com l’en met la graine / es dras por avoir los et pris, / ainsi a il chans et sons mis / en cestui *Romans de la Rose*” (For just as one put the kermes in the cloth to create praise and value, thus he puts songs and chants in this *Romance of the Rose*) (vss. 8–11) and then, to the process of embroidery: “et brodez, par lieus, de biaux vers” (And you embroider, in places, pretty verses) (vs. 14).

5. Vinaver treats analogy thoroughly in *The Rise of Romance*. See particularly his chapter “Analogy as the Dominant Form,” from which I am quoting here.

6. See, for example, Lacy’s *Craft* and Colby’s *Portrait*, respectively.

social reference points, including the conventions of hospitality, customs, and jurisprudence.⁷ The conclusions of these studies confirm that romances are highly ordered works of literature that, in part, rely upon the use of such features and motifs to elaborate their themes and develop their plots.

It is my contention that clothing is one of the major devices used by twelfth-century writers of romance to structure and develop their narratives and that these writers use the complex clothing signifying system to inscribe dynamism into their romances at the level of narration. Clothing instances in romance perform a great many different narrative functions and must be interpreted in their unique narrative context. Moreover, each romance tends to use the clothing signifying system in a different way and for different purposes. The meaning and significance of individual clothing acts is therefore contingent rather than absolute. The structure of medieval romance appears to seek this complexity and requires active participation from its readers in order for them to discover it. As Lacy remarks, the poet “adds link to link in a narrative chain,” but since he or she does not explicitly connect those links for the reader, “it is the reader who closes them by assembling the related ones” (“Spatial Form” 167–68). Thus the structure of romance necessitates the very act of interpretation that the clothing system does, and if “form is meaning,” as Lacy suggests (*Craft* 71), then just as meaning is contingent, so is form. Accordingly, the structure of romance is as dynamic as the clothing signifying system it employs to elaborate its themes, form, and meaning. It is through examining the use of clothing at the structural, thematic, and narrative levels that we are able to appreciate and understand the artistry with which the writers of romance wove together the more static, past material into a new and markedly dynamic literary expression of their changing world.

Clothing and Narrative Threads

One important use of clothing in romance is the opening and closing of narrative threads. This kind of narrative function is perhaps best and most simply exemplified by the clothing gift that opens a cycle and thus necessitates

7. Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner discusses the convention of hospitality in her *Narrative Invention in Twelfth-Century Romance*, and Donald Maddox concentrates on customs and their use in the works of Chrétien in his *Arthurian Romances of Chrétien de Troyes*. Peter V. Davies and Angus J. Kennedy have edited a collection of essays titled *Rewards and Punishments in the Arthurian Romances and Lyric Poetry of Mediaeval France*, which treats jurisprudence and other motifs connected with punishment of offenses.

its closing with a countergift, or return in kind, as is the case when a knight gives his protection to the lord who dubbed him and gave him gifts of armor and courtly clothing. Yet many such narrative instances are more complex in nature and use more than clothing gifts to accomplish the articulation of a narrative thread. For example, in Chrétien's *Cligés*, there is a remarkable clothing cycle that opens when Alexandre and his companions come into Arthur's court and that closes with Guenevere's special gift to Alexandre. Upon their arrival in Arthur's court, Alexandre and the Greeks remove their mantles when they first go before Arthur (vss. 306–10), to demonstrate their deference and honor the king and his authority. Several lines later, Chrétien again emphasizes this deference when he describes Alexandre as “Desfublez fu devant le roi” (without his mantle before the king) (vs. 328). Chrétien's insistence here underlines the immense respect that Alexandre bears for this king, and he does so by representing an act of undressing oneself as an honoring gesture. Later, the king will reciprocate this respect when he gives Alexandre his armor (vss. 1121–38). The vestimentary gift is an honoring gesture in which the donor symbolically dresses the recipient. In the same way that Alexandre disrobes to demonstrate deference to the king, Arthur will have Alexandre dressed in armor that is twelve times more valuable than the armor he gives to the other Greeks (vss. 1130–33). The cycle of mutual honoring is completed by the queen's gift of the *chemise* into which Soredamors's hair is sewn (vss. 1144–62). This gesture not only represents the honor that the Arthurian court wishes to bestow upon Alexandre, but also ultimately precipitates the expression and realization of love between Alexandre and Soredamors, thus becoming a plot motivator. The first clothing act, then, opens the narrative thread of the honoring cycle and then requires further articulation of the cycle, in effect requiring the queen's gift, whose value extends far beyond the material, thereby closing the cycle. Alexandre's initial expression of respect is reciprocated by the court's expression of gratitude, through the intermediary of Guenevere's gift. The one act sets the stage for the subsequent acts and thus precipitates the free expression of love, allowing the narrative to continue along the path that the author chooses. Of particular note is the use by Chrétien of several different forms of clothing acts (undressing, gifts, making of clothes) that belong to the same narrative thread and help to articulate its conclusion.

In the same way that the *Cligés* example shows how one honoring clothing act precipitates another in return, the narrative thread in *Erec et Enide* that opens with Erec's refusal (vss. 1353–58), prefigured by her father's repeated refusals (vss. 518–32) to allow Enide to be dressed other than in

her old, tattered dress before going to court, illustrates the same overall pattern. In this instance, however, the refusal of the clothing act, combined with Enide's arrival in court dressed in her rags, occasions and even necessitates that Guenevere dress her. Were Enide to be dressed in "acceptable" attire for court by anyone else, the text implies, the queen's action would be unnecessary and therefore superfluous, and clearly superfluity of this kind defies the conventions and aesthetics of this romance. Enide must simply arrive at court in her "natural" state so that the court may recognize her inherent and natural nobility and beauty and so that none other than the queen, the highest lady in the narrative universe, may herself transform Enide's appearance and being from a poor vavasor's daughter to the wife of a wealthy prince, destined to be king. Only Guenevere has such power, and any other attempts to alter Enide's appearance by anyone else could only result in inferior results and, more important, render unlikely if not impossible the queen's personal transformation of Enide into a being like herself. Guenevere herself insists upon the rectitude of Erec's reasoning when she assures him: "Mout avez bien fait" ("You have done very well") (vs. 1563). In short, only a queen can make a queen. The narrative, then, depends upon the one clothing instance—the refusal of the dressing acts proposed to improve Enide's appearance before her arrival at court—in order for the second clothing transformational instance to occur. This second clothing instance is crucial not simply to the development of Enide's character but also to the continuation of the narrative: Enide must be dressed as (and by) a queen to merit becoming one. Moreover, the narrative thread opens with the description of Enide's ragged clothing and closes with the evocation of the elaborate dressing scene in which Enide's new clothes are described in detail. The two descriptions thus punctuate the narrative thread, and the clothing acts that accompany them reinforce their impact and indicate attitudes and consequences about the two different states in which Enide finds herself. The entire narrative thread elaborates the major theme of the romance: the theme of growing into one's social role, both reflected in and occasioned by the growing into one's clothes.⁸

In *Bisclavret*, Marie uses clothing to perform a more fundamental transformation—the changing of a human character into a werewolf, which, as a greater transformation, also takes up a greater portion of the

8. Sara Sturm-Maddox and Donald Maddox, in their article "Description in Medieval Narrative," examine Chrétien's reliance upon clothing signifiers as emblems of Erec and Enide's progression through life stages.

narrative.⁹ The narrative thread that opens with the transformational clothing act is, in fact, the entire narrative. In this case, as is common in werewolf lore, the werewolf's clothes solidify his rehumanization, just as the removal of them signals his transformation into a beast, the removal of his humanity.¹⁰ Not only is this clothing instrumental, precipitating action in the plot, but, like Guenevere's dressing of Enide, the werewolf's clothing also actually performs the transformation.¹¹ The power of these clothes is revealed by the husband when he refuses to tell his wife where he hides his clothes:

“Dame, ceo ne dirai jeo pas,
kar, si jeo les eüsse perduz
e de ceo feusse aparceüz,
Bisclavret sereie a tuz jors.
Ja nen n'avreie mes sucurs
de si k'il me fussent rendu.
Pur ceo ne voil k'il seit seü.”

(vss. 72–78)

[“Lady, that I will not tell you, for if I were to lose them and thus be discovered, I would be a werewolf forever. Never would I help until they were given back to me. For this reason, I do not wish for it to be known.”]

Eventually, the wife wrestles the truth from her husband and, as he fears, steals his clothes from the hiding place, rendering impossible his transformation back into a human. It is not until those very clothes are returned to him, at the end of the *lai*, that he is able to regain his humanity. In the

9. Gloria Thomas Gilmore points to the tension created in the story through the opposition of two different functions of clothing: one that seeks “to confine in a social role or identity imposed from without,” another that wishes “to express a self-definition, chosen or generated from within” (67). The resulting tension is what occasions the action of the narrative, bringing the darker desires of the werewolf, that is, a being that is half human and half beast, into the light of day and society.

10. Edith Joyce Benkov has examined Marie's use of the werewolf lore in detail and has explored how the poet uses “undressing and dressing metaphors for the multiple layers of *her* text” (29). The layers she describes comprise shifts in the narration and narrators that complicate the reception of the *lai* and make room for the surprisingly sympathetic characterization of the werewolf.

11. Benkov asserts that the werewolf's “unwilling transformation is cyclical and is framed by undressing—removing the outward covering or humanness, and redressing—covering savagery that has been exposed” (28–29).

corpus of the *Lais*, Marie imbues no other clothing with more power. The transformational potential of the werewolf's clothing occasions the entire plot, for without this power, the wife's hiding of the clothing would have no meaning in terms of the story. The eventual recovery of the clothing directly answers the theft and restores the balance necessary to complete the narrative. The narrative development of this *lai* depends specifically on the particular power of these clothes to transform, to remove and restore, not just identity, but also humanity.¹² In this *lai*, the entire narrative is a single thread that opens with what Benkov has called an undressing of the truth by which the wife manages to learn about her husband's strange disappearances (29–30).¹³ The thread continues through the denouement, which itself is the recovery of the werewolf's clothes and his re-dressing, and rehumanizing, act. Once the hiding, or theft, is answered by the re-dressing, the narrative thread closes and the *lai* ends.

In *Eliduc*, two significant clothing acts create and then resolve tension in the plot and elaborate interpersonal relations in a remarkable way.¹⁴ Marie uses clothing as a synecdochic representation of the young lady to occasion the expression of love between her and Eliduc. After she sends him her ring and belt, she tells him that her gift is in fact the gift of her person to him: “Pur ceo li enveiat l’anel / E la ceinturë autresi / Que de sun cors l’aveit seisi” (She gave him her ring and her belt as well because she had ceded her body to him) (vss. 510–12). In turn, this love affair eventually provokes Eliduc's wife into becoming a nun. She decides to “take the veil” to free

12. Gilmore argues that the transformation from human into beast, although made manifest through his removal of clothing, is ultimately a voluntary one: “Reasoning backwards, we may assume that it is the clothing that keeps him from transforming into a werewolf. Hence, it must be a conscious decision on the human hero's part to remove the clothing in the first place, in order to become the ‘savage beast’” (72). This suggestion seems to deny the popularly held notion that the transformation is involuntary for the human aspect of the werewolf. It remains unclear in Marie's *lai* in what order the transformation occurs, that is, whether the werewolf removes his clothes before the transformation begins or at some point after it has begun. It therefore appears futile to speculate, as Gilmore does, on the intentions of the werewolf with regard to the transformation.

13. Benkov also argues that Marie interjects herself into the wife's discourse through indirect discourse and usurps the narrative voice in order to further coerce information from the werewolf (30).

14. Bruckner, in *Shaping Romance*, has argued that *Eliduc* is a kind of counterpoint to the process opened at the beginning of the *Lais* with *Guigemar*. She notes that they are the two longest *lais* and follow a similar episodic structure involving a pattern of departures and returns, as well as a pattern of duplication, in the form of two different worlds. In contrast to the multiplicity of men in *Guigemar*, there is a multiplicity of women in *Eliduc*. But perhaps most important, the goal of both *lais* is the selection of the appropriate mate through the process of substitution, and not simply the substitution of one for another, as in other *lais* (163–77).

her husband so that he can marry his new love (vss. 1093–1102). In this case, her decision to perform a special dressing act indicates the resolution of a difficult situation. The veil here is a powerful image because it evokes the notion of hiding. This wife is going to hide herself and her existence behind a veil, an act that will allow her husband and his new lady to come out of hiding and legitimize their own love. This action is, in every sense, an exchange. The motivation for the wife's dressing act is the same as its narrative function: her taking the veil allows her husband to replace her with a new wife. The wife's hiding herself allows Eliduc to replace her with the young lady he now loves. These two female characters actually commodify themselves in identifying themselves utterly with and through the clothing objects. To give herself to Eliduc, the maiden gives him a clothing representation of herself. Only in doing so is she capable of perceiving his love for her. For their love to become open, however, the wife must conceal herself, and she does so through the metaphor of the veil. The clothing gift, then, precipitates the love that necessitates the later clothing act, the taking of the veil. These two acts therefore punctuate the central tension in the plot, one creating it, the other resolving it.

Marie's *Fresne* dramatizes a more complicated integration of narrative threads that resolves tension in the plot. In this *lai*, a progression of three undressing scenes surrounds the climax of the *lai*, the recognition of Fresne as both the lost twin daughter and the rightful spouse for her lord. Twice Fresne removes her mantle in an honoring gesture: first, to honor the marriage bond between her lover and his new wife (her unrecognized twin sister), then, to show deference toward the new mother-in-law of her lover after she has called for Fresne to come before her (vss. 389–405, 429).¹⁵ Another undressing act, this time by the new wife, whose mother encourages her to disrobe for the wedding night, textually divides and reflects the other two (vss. 411–12). Here, the honor Fresne shows, despite her feelings over losing her lover to another, identifies her character as noble and loving. Once her actual identity becomes clear, her qualities will be rewarded by the annulment of her sister's marriage so that she may wed her lover.¹⁶

15. Van Vleck points out that the scene in which the mother begins to suspect Fresne's true identity proceeds like a series of summonses followed by interrogations, and that, in this way, the textile becomes testimony, accompanying and confirming the verbal depositions given (40–42).

16. According to Bruckner: "The substitution of one sister for another is immediately corrected in *Fresne*, when the mother recognizes the blanket and ring she sent along with her baby daughter: the match that appeared wrong for the barons' point of view turns out to be right for

Fresne, in honoring the first marriage by twice removing her mantle, gains the ability to replicate the other undressing act previously performed by her twin: Fresne, too, will be able to undress, for her own wedding night. Although her motivation in her initial undressing acts is to honor, their narrative function is to precipitate her replacement of her sister as wife by proving her nobility and rightful identity. Conversely, the motivation for the sister's undressing act is to prepare to consummate her marriage, but its function ultimately becomes the honoring of her rediscovered twin sister's status. As these sisters dress and undress at different times and for different reasons that entail both surface and hidden functions, clothing structures and facilitates the larger meaning of the episode—the discovery of Fresne's true identity and birthright—and materializes the significance of the scene.

Plot Structuring Through Analogy

Medieval verse romances are highly structured literary expressions that rely on a variety of devices to accomplish their organization. Formally analogical episodes or features provide the framework within which the details of the plot unfold. Moreover, they may be thematically as well as structurally analogical, and each author uses such episodes and features to construct a sophisticated narrative structure with thematic cohesion. Lacy defines thematic analogy as “a technique of structural elaboration which consists of the reflection of the central theme or intrigue of the work in numerous other episodes” (“Structure” 13). Clothing often interacts with a narrative as just such a structuring device. Clothing is thus linked to the overall structure of narrative works both as formal analogy and as thematic analogy.

In *Lanval*, for example, Marie uses two formally analogical descriptions of one lady and the absence of another lady's portrait to initiate and then resolve the central tension of the plot, as well as to reflect a major theme of the work—Lanval's love for his lady and the efforts each will make to preserve it in the face of adversity. Lanval, rejected and forgotten by Arthur's court, is taken by a magical and beautiful lady as her lover. His change in fortune draws the queen's attention to him at court, but he rejects her, claiming to love a lady whose lowest handmaid is more beautiful than the queen. The queen demands that Lanval prove his claim by producing the

both the lovers and society” (*Shaping* 171). The barons are those who pushed the knight to marry the sister and thus represent social will, as opposed to personal will.

lady, which he believes to be impossible, since he has vowed never to reveal their love to anyone lest she never visit him again. In the end, however, she comes to court, where she is deemed the most beautiful lady ever seen, thereby saving her lover from doom. Lanval's lady is nothing less than a marvelous creature, with the ability to appear and disappear at will. Marie accentuates the lady's magical aspect by depicting her with her entourage of beautiful maidens wearing unusual clothing. The two episodes in which Marie gives us a portrait of the lady function as analogies of each other. The first instance informs the reader that the lady's beauty is beyond compare and allies the reader with Lanval's position relative to the queen's challenge. When Lanval first sees the lady's attendants, they are described thus: "Vestues furent richement, / Laciees mut estreitement / En deus bliauz de purpre bis" (Richly dressed were they, with laces tightly pulled in two *bliauts* of dark *porpre*) (vss. 57–59). Then he sees the lady herself:

Ele jut sur un lit mut bel—
 Li drap valeient un chastel—
 En sa chemise senglement;
 Mut ot le cors bien fait e gent.
 Un chier mantel de blanc hermine,
 Covert de purpre alexandrine,
 Ot pur le chaut sur li geté.
 Tut ot descobert le costé,
 Le vis, le col e la peitrine."

(vss. 97–105)

[She lay on a beautiful bed in only her *chemise*; the bedclothes were worth more than a castle. Her body was well formed and handsome. Because of the heat, she had thrown aside an expensive mantle of white ermine covered with Alexandrian *porpre*. Her side, face, neck, and breast were exposed.]

The second instance, in which her surpassing beauty is confirmed by the Arthurian court, does not derive its tension from the reader's uncertainty about the relative beauty of the lady and the queen. The tension arises, rather, from the reader's knowledge that, in light of Lanval's broken promise to the lady, she is unlikely to make her appearance. We question not that she is more beautiful than the queen, but only that she will come to defend Lanval's claim.

His lady does come, however, and Marie describes her arrival:

Ele iert vestue en itel guise
 De chainse blanc e de chemise,
 Que tuit li costé li pareient,
 Ki de deus parz lacié esteient

 Sis manteus fu de purpre bis,
 Les pans en ot entour li mis

(vss. 559–62, 571–72)

[She was dressed in this manner: in a white *chainse* and *chemise* whose two sides were laced so that her sides were completely revealed. . . . Her mantle was of dark *porpre*; the sides lay around her.]

This second description of the lady, her beauty, and her marvelous clothes is an amplification of the first and derives its narrative power from the circumstances surrounding it. Moreover, the absolute lack of any description of the queen's clothing, or even of her personal appearance, indicates that she offers no competition to the fairy lady either in terms of her beauty or in terms of Lanval's preference.¹⁷ The two descriptions of the lady's clothing thus punctuate the central tension of the plot: the surpassing beauty of the lady, confirmed by the first description is, after all, what offends the queen.¹⁸ The second description of her clothing and her beauty resolves this tension while the conspicuous absence of any analogical description of the queen undermines the notion of threat that the queen proposes, and reinforces the effects of the second portrait of the lady—Lanval's victory over the queen. These three clothing instances provide examples of both formal and thematic analogy within the *lai* and serve both to structure the narrative and to develop and deepen one of the central thematic issues of the work.

In *Le Roman de Thèbes*, there are two dressing scenes that articulate and elaborate the theme of lack in the form of personal loss and offer not only

17. I have argued elsewhere that in Arthurian romance, the clothes of Arthur and those of Guenevere, when she is properly performing her function as queen (and not as Lancelot's lover), are rarely accorded descriptions, because as monarchs they are not in competition with the members of the high nobility that serve them. My contention is that this represents a normalizing tendency with regard to the consolidation of the Capetian monarchy. See my "What Was Arthur Wearing?"

18. Van Vleck suggests that the undressing, the "unwrapping," of the fairy-lady's body in this *lai* constitutes a wordless testimony in a judicial process about beauty (47–49).

structural but also rich thematic analogies to each other. When Polyneices and Tydeus first meet in the night outside Adrastus's palace, they begin to fight each other, and the noise of their activity wakes Adrastus (vss. 773–815). The king dresses himself hastily, and thus improperly, in his hurry to investigate the source of the noise (vss. 815–18). A later scene in which Lycurgus's wife comes to investigate a great noise in the middle of the night and hastily dresses herself (vss. 2519–24) reflects the former scene in its structure. The two scenes are thematically linked insofar as they both involve parental figures learning about their children. Adrastus quickly realizes that the knights who are fighting are destined to become his sons-in-law, while Lycurgus's wife learns that her infant son has been killed. What makes the interplay between these two scenes more compelling, however, is that the latter episode serves as a *mise en abyme* of the larger narrative concerning Adrastus's relationship with Polyneices and Tydeus. Adrastus indeed marries his daughters to these two knights, thereby becoming their surrogate father. But he does not enjoy this relationship for very long before he loses his two new sons in the war between the Greeks and the Thebans. In the same way that Lycurgus's wife grieves the untimely loss of her son, Adrastus will grieve for Polyneices and Tydeus far too soon. The shorter scene involving Lycurgus's wife structurally reflects the first scene in which Adrastus discovers his future sons-in-law, but it also foreshadows Adrastus's grief because of their deaths through a complex thematic analogy. Moreover, these two formally analogical episodes further reinforce the tragic theme of the work as a whole, underlining the tremendous personal cost of the violent war through the depiction of parental mourning.

In Chrétien's *Cligés*, the poet uses clothing to accentuate and elaborate his division of the narrative into two parts—the story of the father and that of the son. These tales inversely mirror each other: the father openly paying respect to the king and secretly longing for his love, the son covertly entering the Arthurian world and ultimately exposing his illicit love, caught in a shameful display of nudity. Chrétien uses clothing to indicate the attitudes of both father and son. Alexandre arrives in Arthur's court and opens an honoring-through-clothing cycle that communicates mutual respect and ends with the queen's gift to him. This gift is, of course, the *chemise* into which Soredamors has sewn her hair, and its giving motivates the plot by precipitating the expression of love between Alexandre and Soredamors. This gift serves a dual function in the text: it is both a sign of appreciation that conforms to other gifts of clothing made in similar situations, and it is an emblematic representation of Soredamors herself, establishing a symbolic

closeness between the two characters that prefigures and finally precipitates their love (once she sees the hair in the shirt and recognizes it). The *chemise*, then, has a double function: it is at once the expression of a sentiment and an emblem whose discovery allows two characters to engage in a relationship. If Alexandre arrives at Arthur's court in a position of deference, Cligés arrives with the intention of confusing the court by neither revealing his identity nor allowing the court to recognize immediately that he is the same knight from day to day. Arthur bestowed the gift of armor upon Cligés's father; now Cligés uses his several suits of armor to confuse Arthur and his knights about his identity. This difference alone reveals the chasm that divides the son from the father.¹⁹ Throughout the rest of the romance Cligés will repeat to a large extent the actions of his father, but he will invert them at many turns. The fact that the father and the son approach life and love so differently is made material through the way the two characters use clothing so differently.

In *Jaufre*, clothing helps to structure the romance with a great deal of irony and generally has an important presence in the different narrative sections of the work as a whole. Each of the textual divisions contains references to clothing that may be considered emblematic of that section and also have structural or thematic similarities with other sections of the text. The poet structures his romance through this interweaving. In the opening episode at King Arthur's court, for example, Arthur and the knights don their armor and set out to seek adventure because none has come to seek them (vss. 165–90). Then, when a large horned beast captures Arthur, the knights can do nothing more than tear and rend their clothing as they express their fear and worry for their king (vss. 350–68). Finally, they remove their clothing to build a pile to cushion the king's landing when the beast lets him fall from a peak (vss. 377–410). These three references to clothing all serve the text in a particular way. First, the donning of armor is a supposedly chivalrous act, but in this case, it is devoid of meaning, for the knights cannot save Arthur by using it. Already, the text has revealed to

19. Peter Haidu discusses at length the parallel between the father and son in *Cligés* in his *Aesthetic Distance in Chrétien de Troyes* (63–70), in which he explains Alexandre's actions in terms of his belonging to a protocourtly generation, whereas Cligés's generation may be viewed as fully courtly. Haidu argues that in many ways the son surpasses the father, particularly with regard to self-confidence within the courtly milieu. I do not disagree with Haidu's analysis; rather, I find his positing of a generational gap that divides the chivalric realm an extremely satisfactory explanation of the reasons for differences between father and son. However, I would characterize the resulting contrast in temperament in another way: whereas I think Alexandre embodies meekness and deference (with the exception of his very early behavior at his father's court), Cligés is, in my estimation, almost brazen in his deeds.

the reader that appearances are not entirely trustworthy in this romance, for the armed knights of the Round Table should be able to save their king through their prowess at arms and not have to embarrass themselves by removing their clothing to help him. Moreover, armor and the misuse or misappropriation of it will prove to be an important device throughout the rest of the romance. This arming scene, then, announces future scenes involving the unusual use of armor. Next, the knights' ripping and tearing of their clothes, as I will discuss in more detail below, is essentially a leitmotif in this romance. Violent lamentation, accompanied by the rending of clothing, structures the romance through a series of scenes in which similar actions function as thematic analogues of one another. Finally, the use of a pile of clothing to cushion a fall again announces the unorthodox way in which the text uses clothing in general. Additionally, in this scene, when the knights remove their clothing they are erasing their individual identities, to save their king. In this first section of the romance, the author gives us an important taste of what is to come. There are a number of scenes involving unusual uses of armor, including the one in which Jaufré sleeps in his armor one night, despite his being in Brunissen's court at the time. Inappropriate responses to situations seem to be the norm: Jaufré refuses to help a damsel in distress, and Jaufré and Mélian arm themselves in response to Fada's coming to thank them with marvelous gifts. The text is replete with scenes of lamentations and violence in which clothing is destroyed, particularly the ones at Monbrun, and generally deceptive or confusing appearances abound. While clothing is certainly not the only device used to create the ironic tone of this romance, it plays a crucial and consistent role in its elaboration.

The destroying of clothing holds a special place, moreover, in the romance of *Jaufré*. The central episode of the romance concerns itself with an entire region whose inhabitants communally lament and grieve at a seemingly excessive number of precise moments of each day (vss. 3151–70). Brunissen's brother Mélian is the captive of an evil, proud knight named Taulat de Rogimon, who also happens to be the knight whom Jaufré seeks to punish for insulting the Arthurian court. Brunissen's people engage in their communal lamenting because of their intense grief at the capture of their lord. In seeking Taulat, Jaufré comes into Brunissen's lands and disturbs the lady's attempts to sleep. Ironically, it is his need to sleep that occasions his stop in Brunissen's garden in the first place. Yet he is terrified by the lamenting, and furthermore, everyone whom he asks about it refuses to explain the situation to him. Ultimately, he goes on his way to seek Taulat, unwittingly becoming the champion of Mélian as well. His liberating Mélian ends the communal lamenting, establishes him as a hero, and wins Brunissen for him as his wife.

This scene of intense grieving is a central, structuring element of the romance, and many other textual moments reflect it by incorporating scenes of lamentation, often accompanied by the ripping and tearing of clothes. In the very first episode of the romance, Arthur's knights worry about him as he is carried off by a beast. Three times, the text relates how first Gauvain, then all the other knights, rip their clothes in reaction to the peril in which they believe their king to be (vss. 320–68). Later in the text, Jaufré encounters a squire who is tearing his clothes and who warns Jaufré to turn back because of the treachery the squire has endured at the hands of a leperous giant (vss. 2204–50). These instances of intense grief occur before Jaufré arrives at Montbrun, Brunissen's land, but once he leaves, in a state of distress because of the communal lamenting that he cannot understand, he continues to encounter similar scenes. Once away from Montbrun, he comes upon a sympathetic herdsman, who shares food with him, but when he inquires about the reason for the lamenting at Montbrun, the herdsman begins violent lamentations himself and threatens to kill Jaufré (vss. 4307–43). Then, when Jaufré parts ways with Augier to seek Taulat, he asks the knight who hosted him the night before about the strange lamentations. Again, he witnesses a violent grief in reaction to his question, but once Augier calms down, he tells Jaufré where to find Taulat and whom to ask about the lamenting (vss. 4693–4874). The next set of lamenting scenes occurs after Jaufré has defeated Taulat: first, Jaufré encounters a young woman grieving, ripping out her hair and shredding her clothes, claiming that a lady is drowning there, and in this way, she lures him to the fountain to push him in (vss. 8387–8453). Once in, Jaufré is transported to a marvelous land in which he recognizes the lady who had asked him to champion her cause and whom he had refused because of his desire to get married quickly. The young woman's lamenting facilitates Jaufré's disappearance, which, in turn, precipitates lamenting among Jaufré's company, which is described in some detail (vss. 8465–8696). All these instances serve to reflect the larger, central lamenting act and therefore are a structuring device of the romance in general through both formal and thematic analogy.

Thematic Structure Articulated Through Clothing

Very often, and almost always in Arthurian romance, the hero's quest is the major organizing principle of the romance (Lacy, *Craft* 1; Hanning 3). It is the quest that provides the greatest thematic coherence to the work,

and therefore, theme becomes a structural feature of the romance. The form and development of the quest, as Lacy argues, provide “the major structural tension of the work: that is the contrast between the conventional, predictable, patterned arrangement of events which points toward a definite conclusion and the open, discursive, indefinitely expandable series of episodes which constitute the typical randomness of the quest” (*Craft* 7). The quest, then, like the clothing signifying system, is used by the writers of romance not merely as a structuring device but also as a means to imbue the work with tension between the opposing poles of stasis and dynamism. Additionally, clothing instances are inextricably linked to the development and articulation of the individual’s quest in these works. Clothing helps to elaborate the quest and the themes surrounding and informing it in multiple ways, both in terms of form—description of clothing as well as clothing acts—and with regard to narrative functions. These clothing instances are multivalent, as we have seen. The result is thematic elaboration that is remarkably complex and infused with the same dynamism visible in the clothing signifying system. Moreover, clothing often figures as a major component of the elaboration and articulation of theme.

Chrétien explores the theme of a lack that must be overcome in *Yvain* through the articulation of character nudity, the lack of clothing, as a shameful state to be surmounted. The theme is thus articulated in part through clothing. The hero’s passage from husband and knight to mad and naked social outcast, and back again to husband and knight is precisely mirrored in his state of dress. His evolution is equally reflected throughout the poem as other characters endure similar passages. In this romance, Chrétien elaborates on nudity, or the lack of proper clothing, by assigning it a place of predominance both as a direct reflection of the major theme of the romance—Yvain’s moral and social devolution and evolution—and as a major plot motivator. Unlike in the *Cligés* example examined earlier, where a single clothing object functions as a plot motivator, in *Yvain* a multivalent clothing act motivates the plot. Yet even before Yvain’s madness and nudity, there are some important clothing instances that are thematically analogous to later episodes in the narrative and thus provide structure as well as thematic elaboration.

When we see Laudine for the first time, she is grieving the death of her husband and is ripping and tearing her clothes: “ses mains detuert et ront ses dras” (she was twisting her hands and rending her garments)

(vs. 1159).²⁰ A brief time later, when King Arthur comes to her land and finds Yvain married to this lady, the poet gives us a description of her clothing, stating that she is “plus bele que nule contesse” (more beautiful than any [other] countess) (vs. 2369). These two passages punctuate the period of time during which Laudine progresses from a loss of social status with no one to defend her fountain to an elevated state in which she has the most valiant knight of the Arthurian court at her side. This passage is an inverted foreshadowing of the progression that Yvain will make from sanity and high social status to madness and outcast status. Yvain’s plight is also represented through vestimentary imagery. Even as the maiden messenger arrives to deliver her message to Yvain, the clothing image is operative. When she approaches the encampment of Arthur’s knights, she removes her mantle. Her undressing can be seen not only as an honoring gesture toward the king, whom she cordially and respectfully greets, but also as a dishonoring gesture toward Yvain, whom she shames publicly with the admonitions that her lady has sent (vss. 2704–72). Immediately upon hearing the news that his lady has reclaimed the ring, the symbol of her love for him, Yvain destroys his clothes, slipping into madness (vs. 2806), his nudity becoming a sign of his insanity and his retreat from society. The three undressing acts—the lady’s removal of her mantle, Yvain’s removal of the ring, and his removal of his clothing—form a short but highly charged series. The same vestimentary act occurs three times in quick succession, each time inching Yvain ever closer to outcast status. The maiden’s appearance in court, accompanied by the removal of her mantle, reminds him of his broken promise and formally prefigures his undressing act; the reclamation of the ring (itself an unclothing act) physically manifests his separation from her; and the removal of his own clothes signals his leaving society. Without his sanity, Yvain has lost his ability to function in society, and without his clothes, he has lost his social identity. The hermit with whom he has his first social contact during his madness recognizes him as mad from the fact that he is nude (vs. 2832), while the ladies who once knew him have a very difficult time recognizing him undressed (vss. 2892–2912). Furthermore, Yvain himself, once he comes back to his senses and recognizes his nudity, is ashamed and quickly dresses himself in the clothing that the damsels have

20. Kelly has identified this description of Laudine as a dynamic one, since, as he explains: “While Laudine quite literally is in the process of tearing apart and corrupting her beauty, Yvain is reconstructing her in his mind, in effect restoring in his imagination the harm Laudine does herself” (“Art” 200).

left for him (vss. 3020–22). Thus, his passage from society to outcast status, from husband to rejected lover, is both reflected and occasioned by a series of undressing acts that progressively confer shame and madness upon him, whereas his rehabilitation is completed and externally signaled by his later self-dressing act.

Yvain is not the only character in the poem for whom shame is linked to the absence of clothing. The giant who menaces Gauvain's relatives threatens that he will take the gentleman's daughter and will reduce her to state of lice-ridden nudity (vs. 4116). The giant himself is described primarily with regard to his poor accoutrements, emphasizing the shameful state of his life (vss. 4086–95). Lunete's fall from grace is characterized by her reduction to near nudity. She is taken to be burned at the stake "trestote nue en sa chemise" (completely naked in her *chemise*) (vs. 4316). However, as the other ladies realize that Lunete has been too harshly judged, they lament the fact that she can no longer provide them with beautiful clothes to wear (vss. 4360–61). In the end, they decide to send a mantle to her to cover herself, thus reducing her shame (vss. 4368–73). Finally, the situation of the three hundred *tisseuses*, as I discussed in Chapter 3, represents a notable irony within the text: these wretched women are forced to toil to make fine clothing but are themselves dressed completely in rags (vss. 5294–96). Their near nudity materially represents and articulates their powerlessness, vulnerability, and lack of social status, while their work provides to others what is denied to them. In all these cases, Yvain provides deliverance from shame and nudity. Yvain has thus come full circle: he first saves Laudine from her grief (after having provoked it, however); then he himself endures madness and nudity but manages with some help to return to sanity and society; and finally he must save others from their shame and nudity, which ultimately wins back the love of Laudine. Yvain's clothing and nudity provide a direct parallel to his changing identity. The development of his identity as a hero and as an individual is his quest, and therefore his clothing both confirms and renders material the achievement of his quest, articulating the major theme of the romance.

In *Lancelot*, Chrétien explores clothing as a marker of an identity that is alternately constant and shifting, calling appearances and motivations into question throughout the romance and reflecting the major theme of the work—Lancelot's quest to be the queen's worthy lover. Almost everyone honors Lancelot, and his seeming ability to suit his task so well as the liberator of the people, through dressing acts, most often in the form of a mantle placed upon his shoulders. The text is replete with references to

his special aptitude for the task. Several episodes accentuate the fact that he fits the requirements of his task so precisely, including the one in which Lancelot borrows armor from one of his hosts to fight the proud knight. The text emphasizes that these arms fit Lancelot extremely well, so well indeed that one would believe he had been born wearing them: “qu’il fu ensi nez et creüz / de ce voldroie estre creüz” (that he had been born and raised [wearing them], on this, I would like to be believed) (vss. 2675–76). Chrétien insists that his readers believe him, and his emphasis serves to identify Lancelot both with the armor and as the obvious savior of the captives. Lancelot fits his armor and his destiny perfectly, unlike Gauvain, who has failed at his mission and is finally found at the Water Bridge, bobbing up and down in the water with his armor spread about on the shore (vss. 5105–28). Obviously, Lancelot has the appropriate tools for the job, whereas Gauvain is decidedly lacking. Yet herein lies an artful subtlety in Chrétien’s text: although all of the poem’s characters conclude that the earlier episodes are signs of Lancelot’s particular aptitude for the task, they do not understand that Lancelot, although well suited for the liberation of the people of Logres, is undertaking the task for very different reasons. Since the people of Logres will be freed from Meleagant along with the queen, Lancelot is only incidentally their liberator. He is the knight worthy of the task of liberation, as is indicated by the repeated gifts of mantles, yet he pursues this task only to fulfill his own desires, thereby subverting the meaning of the clothing acts despite their accumulation.

Lancelot’s single-mindedness with regard to finding the queen is an integral part of his identity. His dedication to his task is never more apparent than when he climbs into the cart to reach her more quickly. In the same way that the cart was only superficially shameful and that the rape scene, discussed in detail in Chapter 3, was staged, his identity as the worthy liberator is only superficial. The queen is indeed the only character in the poem who is consistently capable of determining Lancelot’s identity. She is the one to name him, just as she is the one who can recognize him in any clothes or armor. First and foremost he wishes to save his lady, the queen, and his ability to remain focused on her never wavers—except, of course, for the “two steps” of hesitation for which he must atone throughout the rest of the romance. For Guenevere, Lancelot’s identity, like his attention to the queen, remains constant, regardless of his clothing. Chrétien creates an identity for Lancelot that only one other character is capable of perceiving. For everyone else, Lancelot remains an enigma, and his constantly changing clothes reflect this confusion.

From a structural point of view, the accumulation of dressing acts confers on the protagonist the identity of a hero who is perfectly suited to liberate the people of Logres and the queen, while he is, in fact, truly seeking only the queen, driven by his love to find her. In the same way that his focus remains uniquely on her, she is the only one capable of unconditionally recognizing his true identity, despite shifts in his appearance. The honorific dressing scenes of Lancelot provide contrast to the two notorious disarming scenes of Gauvain, both of which demonstrate Gauvain's inability to complete his task and punctuate the two main divisions of the plot. Once the search for the queen has ended with Lancelot's defeat of Meleagant, the hero finds Gauvain disarmed by the Water Bridge, and after Lancelot returns from imprisonment and self-imposed exile to fight Meleagant at the appointed date, his arrival necessitates the disarming of Gauvain so that the hero may do his work. The repetition of scenes in which other people dress or arm Lancelot establishes their expectation of his heroic act, functioning as a repeated anticipation of the final arming scene. Gauvain's double disarming inversely reflects these scenes and structurally contrasts with them. Yet Chrétien subverts Lancelot's heroic identity that the repetition of the dressing and arming scenes serves to establish, bringing his audience to understand instead that Lancelot's identity is anything but clear. He does this by associating clothing with concealment at a crucial moment in the story. As Lancelot prepares to set out to join the queen for their tryst, the poet evokes the covering quality of the night by using a clothing metaphor:

Tant a au jor vaintre luitié
 que la nuiz molt noire et obscure
 l'ot mis desoz sa couverture
 et desoz sa chape afublé.

(vss. 4543–45)

[In its battle against the day, dark and somber night finally prevailed and covered its light beneath its covering and hid it beneath its cloak.]

In the same way that the *chape* of night cloaks the adultery of Lancelot and Guenevere, the mantles that Lancelot receives along the way and the armor that fits him so perfectly conceal his true motivations and his identity as an adulterer.

In *Perceval*, the hero's evolution as a knight is marked by his clothing, as is his final atonement, with regard both to the Lady of the Tent and to his family. As has been noted by Lacy, Perceval's main problem is that he fails to interpret properly the appearance of objects to arrive at an understanding of them and their place in the world (*Craft* 16–20). This is never more obvious than when he mistakes the knights he sees in his mother's forest first for devils, then for angels (vss. 100–154). Interestingly, when he hears the sound of the noisy armor, he believes the knights to be devils, but when he catches sight of them in their shining armor, he thinks they are angels. Furthermore, it is precisely because of this erroneous perception of them that he sets out to find King Arthur so that he too can be a knight: he is simply attracted to their appearance rather than to their social function. As Lacy points out, "To the naïve youth, armor constitutes identity ("On Armor" 366).²¹ It is also significant that he begins his quest dressed inappropriately for his new calling: he wears the Welsh clothes that his mother has made for him: "A la meniere et a la guise / De Gales fu appareilliez: / Uns revelins ot en ses piez" (In the Welsh fashion he was dressed, with buckskin shoes on his feet) (vss. 602–4), repeatedly refusing to abandon them in favor of a more courtly costume. With Ivonet, he gives reasons for his refusal, citing the inferiority of the clothing that the squire Yonez proposes. Perceval not only refuses these clothes but insults them as well, insisting that the ones that his mother made for him are far superior. However, we know, as the medieval audience would have known, that the clothes he describes as inferior are of the finest materials, and we understand that the notion of dressing the part of a knight is lost upon Perceval. Yet despite his refusal to wear the clothes of a knight, he does manage to acquire a suit of armor, although he has no idea how to use his arms.²²

21. Lacy argues for a distinction between identity, or who a character is, and identification, who one is perceived to be. Perceval is confused by this distinction, failing to make it early in the romance (*Craft* 26–27).

22. In fact, Perceval's very procurement of the set of armor evokes and reinforces his complete misunderstanding of its use and purpose, for once he has killed the Red Knight to take his armor, Perceval believes he must resort to chopping up the knight to bits to remove his armor: "Mais ains avrai par charbonees / Trestot esbrahoné le mort / Que nule des armes en port, / Qu'eles se tienent si au cors / Que ce dedens et che defors / Est trestot un, si com moi samble, / Qu'eles se teinent si ensamble" (But I will have have to cut up this dead man in tiny pieces before being able to wear a single piece of his armor, so well they are held fast to his body that there is no inside or outside but all of a single piece, and it's all holding tightly together) (vss. 1136–42). It is only with the arrival of Yonez that Perceval is instructed in the appropriate removal of armor, although he remains unaware of its use.

At the next stop on Perceval's journey, he encounters Gornemant, who, we learn, is not only a valiant knight but also a perfectly courtly gentleman. It is finally Gornemant who is able, if not entirely to convince Perceval of the superiority of the courtly clothes, at least to persuade him to wear them to please his new mentor and who takes it upon himself to teach Perceval how to use his armor. When he asks Perceval if he knows how to use his arms, the youth replies that the only knowledge he has of his arms and armor is how to put them on and take them off:

“Jes sai bien vestir et retraire,
 Si com li vallé m'en arma
 Qui devant moi en desarma
 Le chevalier qu'avoie mort;
 Et si legierement les port
 Qu'eles ne me grievent de rien” (vss. 1392-97)

[“I know how to put them on and take them off, as the valet (showed me) who armed me and, in front of me, disarmed the knight I had killed, and they are so light to wear that they do not bother me at all.”]

Not only is his knowledge extremely superficial on a practical level, but his understanding that there could be social or relational implications to the acts of arming and disarming is completely absent. Perceval thus both fails to know and fails to understand. These two shortcomings are eloquently brought to our attention in this one short clothing passage.

By the time Perceval reaches Blancheflor's castle, he has almost entirely overcome his shortcomings within the chivalric world. Upon his arrival, he is disarmed by Blancheflor's servants (vss. 1776-80); that is, he is perceived for the first time as a true knight. They further honor him by bringing a fur mantle for him to wear (vss. 1779-80). Perceval is now fully educated in his use of arms and fully courtly, and others treat him as such: he is accepted and respected by everyone he encounters. The two notable exceptions to this general attitude toward the new knight are the lack of attention accorded him as he exits the Grail Castle and the admonition he receives from the pilgrims on Good Friday. These rejections are encoded in vestimentary imagery as well. Although the inhabitants of the Grail Castle receive Perceval with much honoring, bringing him mantles and allowing him to sleep in the bed of the Fisher King, they completely ignore him the following morning;

no one arms him, no one answers his calls, and no one bids him farewell (vss. 3356–91). He has failed the Fisher King and the inhabitants of the Grail Castle in not asking the question he should have asked. They extended great hospitality to Perceval, only to find that his chivalric training had undermined the very reason he had been sent into their midst. Their overwhelming disappointment in him is demonstrated textually by their refusal to dress him, arm him, or answer him, and this rejection is made all the more poignant by the contrast with their warm welcoming of him the night before.

This episode contrasts greatly with Perceval's previous sojourn in Blancheflor's castle. Although he is received in the same fashion—with great hospitality—his subsequent treatment by Blancheflor and her people is vastly different. This difference can only be explained by the fact that in this case, Perceval does not fail to save Blancheflor: he succeeds grandly. In fact, after the night of apparent love between Perceval and the lady, she willfully dresses herself to demonstrate her newfound ability to defend herself against her foe, while Perceval at the Grail Castle is forced to fend for himself as the inhabitants abandon him. In one case, dressing oneself is a positive act of self-sufficiency; in the other, it is a condition imposed upon an individual by those he has disappointed.

The second rejection that Perceval endures is from the pilgrims on Good Friday, when he is admonished for wearing armor on this sacred occasion (vss. 6264–6330). Again, it is Perceval's ignorance—for he does not even know what day it is—combined with his complete subservience to the ideals of the Arthurian universe that has led him astray. Thus it is specifically for becoming too involved in the chivalric world that Perceval suffers this affront, and his armor becomes a sign of shame. At this point in the text, Perceval has forgotten the church, his courtly clothing, and the clothing that his mother made for him. He is presented to us as a chivalric shell. Yet it is at this moment that Perceval remembers these objects, and when he arrives at the home of the hermit, the text indicates that he “si descent et si se desarme” (descends and disarms himself) (vs. 6339), an undressing act that removes shame.²³ Since this is the last reference to the clothing of Perceval and in light of the fact that so much of the early part of the poem was devoted to describing his accoutrements in detail, we

23. Interestingly, in the thirteenth-century *Queste del Saint Graal*, various churchmen admonish knights to don the “armes de Sainte Eglise” (62, line 27) which is not actually armor but ecclesiastical clothing. Perceval seems, at least nominally, to be performing just this sort of disarming (from chain mail) and rearming (in a habit).

may assume that he has lain his arms aside forever, rejecting the Arthurian chivalric world for the religious one that he now seeks with his uncle the hermit.²⁴ Perceval has gone from a youth dressed in the Welsh fashion who confuses the appearance of knights with that of devils, then angels, to a brave and chivalrous knight who sports courtly clothing when not in battle, then to a tired and disillusioned knight who wears nothing but his armor. The confusion with which the romance opens concerning whether the knights are devils or angels seems to announce the estimation Perceval now makes of himself as his part of the romance closes: he is uncertain if, in becoming one of Arthur's knights, he has allied himself with good or evil. He has doubts about whether he has become more of an angel than a devil. Finally he abandons his armor for what we can assume to be the clothes of a religious hermit. In the end, he is not far from where he started, having returned to his religious and familial "roots" and to his natural simplicity after discovering firsthand the shortcomings of Arthurian chivalry. Through the description of Perceval's clothing and clothing acts, Chrétien demonstrates clearly every step he takes on his journey. Perceval's quest and evolution as a hero are thus articulated and materialized by vestimentary references that in turn develop and elaborate the thematic structure of the romance.

Reading a Narrative Through Clothes

Romance writers in the twelfth century used clothing not only to provide shape and contours to their narratives but also to give meaning to a work as a whole. The author "Crestiens," in his *Guillaume d'Angleterre*, and Marie, in her *Guigemar*, for example, employ clothing both to structure the plot and reflect its themes and to provide a parallel, vestimentary narrative. In these two works, it is possible to read the narrative through clothing. In other words, references to it consistently occur at plot junctures, although, as we have seen, each clothing instance may contribute to the elaboration of several different levels of the work. In the following discussion, I provide a detailed analysis of clothing in regard to character, plot, and thematic and

24. Of course, since Chrétien left the romance unfinished, it is unclear what his intentions may have been. It may have been his plan, for example, to form some sort of synthesis between the Arthurian, terrestrial world and the celestial one of religious brotherhood. In the absence of an ending, though, this interpretation remains speculative. My reading of this episode is based on what does appear in the text, and as such, this episode is the last one in which Perceval appears, and this undressing act is his last action in the romance.

narrative development for both works to demonstrate to what extent the audience can read the romance through clothes. My detailed reading of these two particularly illuminating works, lengthier than any other discussion of a single text thus far, functions as a conclusion to my entire study insofar as they illustrate all the principles adduced throughout my study and demonstrate clearly the narrative richness achievable through the use of clothing as a complex signifying system. Without attention to the use of clothing at the narrative level, it is impossible to appreciate fully the interplay between form and meaning in the clothing signifying system and the larger implications of this interplay upon the meaning of the narrative as a whole. I do not mean to suggest that these are the only two twelfth-century works that may be read in this way—indeed many may—but *Guigemar* and *Guillaume d'Angleterre* are exemplary in this capacity.²⁵

Guigemar

Marie's *Guigemar* is the story of a young knight whom, we are told at the beginning of the *lai*, Nature has deprived of the ability to love.²⁶ After an encounter with a speaking, prophesying hind and a ride in the cabin of a magical ship, Guigemar falls in love with a young lady who is married to an old, jealous man. The two manage to live together in her luxurious prison for a time until the old man catches them together and sends Guigemar on his way in his ship. Finally, the lovers are reunited through a recognition rite that only the two of them can perform. What makes this *lai* interesting for a study of the narrative use of clothing is that the audience is able to read the narrative through the clothing references in the text.²⁷

When we first meet the protagonist of our *lai*, he is leaving to serve a king who will dub him a knight. Once he is in the service of the king, the dubbing is represented in the text by the following two lines: "Le reis l'adube richement / Armes li dune a sun talent" (The king dubbed him richly and gave him arms to his liking) (vss. 47–48). The description of the king's

25. Several scholars have, in fact, advanced remarkably similar arguments for two works in particular: *Erec et Enide* and Bérout's *Tristan*. See, for example, Sara Sturm-Maddox and Donald Maddox's "Description in Medieval Narrative," Jacques Le Goff's chapter on *Erec et Enide* in *The Medieval Imagination*, and François Rigolot's "Valeur figurative du vêtement dans le *Tristan* de Bérout."

26. A slightly modified version of this discussion appears in my "*Chemise and Ceinture*."

27. Bruckner analyzes the attraction, separation, and assorting of opposites through the two separate plots of the *lai*, which are "tied together, again separated, and finally reunited through a series of events designed to reduce the difference between Guigemar and the lady. . . . Bipartition and tripartition are not surprisingly coordinated in this effort" (*Shaping* 165).

dressing Guigemar in armor, the clothes of a knight, is what informs us of his new vocation. Therefore, the very first narrative event that engages the protagonist is represented through the clothing that he receives and wears. His identity as a knight is dependent upon his taking on the appearance of a knight, that is, wearing the accouterments of one. Once Guigemar's new social status is established in the text, Marie turns our attention away from the identificatory power of clothing and will henceforth present clothing through its various performative functions.

The first of these functions is dependent upon clothing's material quality. After Guigemar injures the hind and hears her prophesy (that only a woman with whom Guigemar is desperately in love and who suffers as much as he does may heal his wound), he dismisses the prophesy as absurd: "Il set assez e bien le dit / K'unke femme nule ne vit / A ki aturnast s'amur / Ne kil guaresist de dolor" (He knew and said to himself that to no woman he had ever seen had he wanted to offer his love, nor one who could heal his wound) (vss. 129–32). This prophecy is true and, through its veracity, functions here as a prolepsis. Guigemar has his servant take leave of him to seek assistance, but not before the servant attends to his master's wound by dressing it with his shirt. "De sa chemise estreitement / Sa plaie bende fermement" (He firmly and tightly bound his wound with his *chemise*) (vss. 139–40). Clothing here performs the function of a bandage, an entirely natural use for something made of cloth. The first attempt at healing Guigemar's wound is made possible through a normal yet nonvestimentary use of clothing. Nonetheless, the bandage, while not being used as clothing, still envelops a part of Guigemar's body; he is, after all, *wearing* the bandage. This clothing element is therefore both ordinary and exceptional. Marie's use of an article of clothing here has in no way challenged our expectations, for it is not unusual that one would bandage a wound with what is at hand—one's clothes. She has brought to our attention the fact that clothing can perform many functions, an important fact to bear in mind as the hero continues on his journey.

We are, however, forewarned by the hind that this attempt to heal Guigemar's wound cannot be successful. Indeed, bewildered, alone, and in pain, Guigemar wanders about and comes upon a marvelous ship in a harbor. The poet describes the ship as very beautiful, and in fact, the knight cannot resist boarding it. Once aboard, Guigemar is surprised to find no one there. He does, however, find a magnificent bed that is beautifully arrayed. The fact that Marie devotes twelve lines to the description of the bed and its bedclothes signals its importance.

En mi la nef trovat un lit
 Dunt li pecul e li limun
 Furent a l'ovre Salemun
 Taillié a or, tut a triffoire,
 De ciprés e de blanc ivoire.
 D'un drap de seie a or teissu
 Ert la coilte ki desus fu.
 Les altres dras ne sai presier,
 Mes tant vos di de l'oreillier:
 Ki sus eüst sun chief tenu
 Jamais le peil n'avreit chanu.
 Li coverturs de sabelin
 Vols fu de purpre alexandrin.

(vss. 170–82)

[In the middle of the ship he found a bed whose posts and frame were made in the style of Solomon, worked in gold, all inlaid, of cypress and white ivory. The quilt upon it was made from silk woven with gold. For the other bedclothes, I cannot give a value, but I can tell you this about the pillow: whoever rested his head upon it would never have white hair. The sable bedspread was lined with Alexandrian *porpre*.]

It provides a place of rest for Guigemar in his second attempt to heal his wound. The text tells us: “Il s'est sur le lit apuez; / Repose sei, sa plaie doelt” (He lay down on the bed; he rested, but his wound hurt him) (vss. 188–89). Once again, Guigemar envelops his wound (and the rest of his body) in cloth; this time, however, the clothes are those of the magnificent bed. During his slumber, the ship sails itself out to sea, and Guigemar finds that his rest has not been effective in healing his wound: “Kar grant dolur out en sa plaie” (For great pain he had in his wound) (vs. 198). The cloth used to envelop Guigemar while he sleeps in this episode performs a strikingly similar function to the one the bandage performed in the episode before: both represent attempts to heal the wound, and both fail because the woman whom Guigemar must love is missing. Without this element, we know that he cannot be healed, and that any attempt is bound to end in failure. Guigemar's rest between the beautiful sheets has, however, placed him in an advantageous position: the boat has sailed him to the port where he will meet the lady who can heal him. So, while the *chemise* used as a

bandage is an entirely vain attempt to heal the wound, sleeping enveloped in the sheets advances Guigemar's healing. This cloth, along with the magic ship itself, performs the function of physically transporting Guigemar to where he needs to be. Here, the cloth's function is entirely extraordinary while nonetheless seeming ordinary, for nothing is more normal than sheets on a bed. Marie has found a device for transporting her knight to where he must go that in no way shocks the reader but extends and deepens her use of clothing, gradually sustaining the clothing metaphor that she established at the very beginning of the *lai*.

However, whereas the *chemise* used as a bandage and the rest enjoyed between the beautiful sheets have both been ineffective, the ship has brought Guigemar to the port of the lady who will heal his wound. When the ship carrying Guigemar arrives in the harbor beside the lady's prison tower, the lady and her attendant go to meet it. The lady is too fearful to go aboard, so her attendant, her niece, must do so. The young lady removes her mantle when she boards the ship where Guigemar is resting (vss. 277–80). This action indicates the young maiden's peaceful, good intentions as she goes to meet whoever is waiting aboard. She removes a layer of protection from around her body to demonstrate her openness, her fearlessness, and her trust in the good intentions of whoever is on board. Not only does her action represent her attitude in boarding, it also announces the intimacy that Guigemar will enjoy in the company of this maiden and her mistress. The two women will make good on this implicit promise to Guigemar through the maiden's simple act of removing her mantle: they will take him into their private realm. Thus this undressing act illustrates her attitude of friendliness and deference while at the same time foreshadowing the intimacy between Guigemar and the lady. The undressing act also inversely mirrors the two prior wound dressings and therefore formally reverses Guigemar's inability to heal his wound, for the maiden brings him into contact with her lady, his healer. The young maiden will even lend him her bed while her lady nurses him back to health:

En bacins d'or ewe aparterent,
 Sa plaie e sa quisse laverent;
 A un bel drap de cheisil blanc
 Li osterent entour le sanc;
 Puis l'unt estreitement bendé
 Mut le tienent en grant chierté

(vss. 369–74)

[In a golden basin they brought water, his wound and his thigh they washed; with a beautiful piece of white linen, they removed the blood then they bound it tightly, treating him with very great care.]

Guigemar has at last found the woman who can earn his love, thereby healing his wound; she becomes his lover. Jacques Ribard has remarked that the choice of dressing for the wound, “cheisil blanc,” makes reference to the clothes worn at a baptism, which would mean that Guigemar is undergoing a similar rite of passage (138). He is being “baptized” into the realm of love. At this point in the text, cloth has become instrumental, finally healing Guigemar’s wound.²⁸

Unlike prior attempts to dress his wound, this dressing act involves the woman he loves, and therefore it has the curative powers necessary for healing. The hind made it clear that only one person would be capable of successfully dressing his wound, and this exclusivity will immediately appear a second time, doubled. One day the lady has a premonition that they will soon be caught, so she asks Guigemar for an oath.

“Amis, de ceo m’aseürez!
 Vostre chemise me livrez;
 El pan desuz ferai un plait:
 Cungié vus doins, u ke ceo seit,
 D’amer cele kil defferat
 E ki despleier le savrat.”

(vss. 557–62)

[“Lover, of this assure me! Give me your *chemise*; I’ll make a knot in the side: I’ll give you leave to love the woman, whoever she is, who can untie this knot.”]

She forms a knot in Guigemar’s *chemise* that only she can untie, and he places a *ceinture* around her waist that only he can unfasten.

28. Pickens has noted a similar progression in the text but focuses instead solely upon the wound and its centrality to the hero’s passage through “stages representing his growing consciousness of his identity as a man. The stages of his coming to consciousness are indicated by ever more expansive reiterations of symbolic themes” (“Thematic Structure” 330). The stages to which Pickens refers are identical to the clothing stages that I outline.

Le plet i fet en teu mesure,
 Nule femme nel deffereit,
 Si force u cutel n'i meteit.
 La chemise li dune e rent.
 Il la receit par tel covent
 Qu'el le face seür de li;
 Par une ceinture autresi,
 Dunt a sa char nue le ceint,
 Par mi le flanc aukes l'estreint:
 Ki la bucle purrat ovrir
 Sanz depescier e sanz partir,
 Il li prie que celui aint.

(vss. 564–75)

[She made the knot in such a way that no woman could untie it without using scissors or a knife. She gave him back the *chemise*. He received it on the condition that she make a similar pledge to him; by means of a *ceinture* upon her naked flesh he cinched her, tightened it also around her sides: whoever could open the buckle without breaking or severing it, he would ask her to love that man.]

The mutual oaths manifest as representational undressing acts. Before either of the lovers may open him- or herself up to accepting love from another, a clothing obstacle must be overcome. In this way, their clothing is a metonymical representation of the two lovers, who render themselves unattainable to the outside world, at least with regard to love. These complementary undressing acts are just as exclusive as the wound dressing had been, and it is also reciprocal, as is their love.

Later that very day, the husband's chamberlain does indeed see the two together through the window. The husband comes to his wife's chamber with three of his men and, finding the knight with his wife, orders him killed. A scene ensues in which Guigemar defends himself by warding off his would-be attackers with "Une grosse perche de sap / U suleient pendre li drap" (a thick rod of fir where they hung clothes [to dry]) (vss. 595–96). His use of an instrument for drying clothes, that is, an instrument to make them wearable again, to ward off his attackers is what saves his life. Marie's specification here of the device used by Guigemar has a dual function: it divides the text into two parts and reflects the actions immediately before

and after this division. In the same way that the rod restores clothing to its normal function, the lady's care has restored Guigemar to his normal level of functioning—it has healed him. Also, the husband's discovery of the two sends Guigemar away, returning the lady to the solitude, her normal situation, that the husband desires.

After this episode, Guigemar's ship carries him to his home, where he is restored to power over his lands. His people begin to press him again to take a wife, but this time, Guigemar has a foolproof way to refuse—the knot in his *chemise*. The text informs us that every woman in the land tried to untie the knot (vss. 652–54). Meanwhile, the ship has returned for the lady and has brought her into the domain of Mériaduc. He is surprised to find the lady aboard this mysterious ship in his harbor, but when he removes her from the boat, his rudeness in handling her is apparent: “Il la saisit par le mantel, / Od lui l'en meine en sun chastel” (He seized her by the mantle and led her with him into his castle) (vss. 705–6). Although the situation of this disembarkation scene bears a resemblance to the one in which Guigemar arrived as an unknown passenger aboard the mysterious ship, this scene of almost violent force contrasts greatly with the gracious welcome that Guigemar received from the lady and her attendant. The attendant removed her mantle before boarding to show her respect and good intentions to whoever was aboard; Mériaduc, by contrast, tries to force her into loving him, later even attempting to unfasten her *ceinture* after cutting open the laces of her *bliaut*: “Il la receit entre ses braz, / De sun bliaut trenche les laz: / La ceinture voleit ovrir, / Mes n'en poeit a chief venir” (He took her into his arms, and cut the laces of her *bliaut*: he wanted to untie the *ceinture*, but he was not able to do so) (vss. 737–40). Once he realizes his failure, he has all his knights attempt to unfasten the girdle as well.²⁹ Both lovers thus endure many unwanted attempts by others to gain their favor by force, but their clothing oath provides the means to resist the violence and protects their bodies and their love from violation at the hands of others.

Finally, the two lovers reunite and perform the recognition rite, thereby closing the narrative thread commenced as a result of the lady's premonition.

29. Bruckner underlines the importance of repetition in this episode: Meriaduc attempting to untie the *ceinture*, hearing the lady explain what the knot means, and remembering hearing of a knight nearby with a similar story. This repetition is “the key element that allows Meriaduc to discover the link already connecting the lovers. By marking the boundaries that set the couple apart from those who pursue them, repetition and variation each have a role to play in the sorting-out process, each are identified in turn with selection and substitution” (*Shaping* 166).