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THE TOURNAMENT AND CHIVALRY AS REPRESENTED BY CHRÉTIEN DE  
TROYES, MARIE DE FRANCE, AND GEOFFREY CHAUCER

By  
Hailey Michelle Brangers  
B.A. University of Louisville, 2017

A Thesis  
Submitted to the Faculty of  
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for the Degree of

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in History

Department of History  
University of Louisville  
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A Thesis Approved on

November 13, 2019

by the following Thesis Committee:

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Blake Beattie

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## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to Scarlett.

May you always follow your dreams!

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, I would like to formally thank the chair of my committee, Dr. Blake Beattie, for all of the guidance he has provided me with this project and for always helping guide me towards my interests. More importantly, thank you for always having encouraging, constructive feedback on any of my writing projects. I am eternally grateful I had the opportunity to learn from you over the past six years!

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I cannot end this without acknowledging the love and support of my parents, Lisa and Joe. Thank you, Mom, for always encouraging me to pursue my dreams. Thank you, Kirstie and Corie, Michael and John and all of my friends, for listening to my complaints when the writing got stressful, the feedback, and the welcomed laughs along the way. I could not have done this without you all!

## ABSTRACT

### THE TOURNAMENT AND CHIVALRY AS REPRESENTED BY CHRÉTIEN DE TROYES, MARIE DE FRANCE, AND GEOFFREY CHAUCER

Hailey Michelle Brangers

November 13, 2019

It is a common belief among historians that the tournament was the ultimate expression of chivalry, as a place where knights could openly display their prowess, courtoisie, and largesse. A knight's relationship with ladies was also crucial to measuring his chivalrousness. Despite the importance of both within chivalric knighthood, little has been done to explore their interrelation. With romance literature being the most tangible source for understanding both the tournament and a lady's role in it, this thesis explores the relationship between the two. I begin with a brief introductory history of the tournament, establishing its war-centric foundations and touching on its prohibitions. In Chapter Two, I construct the literary tournament by presenting its common descriptions in popular medieval literature, often comparing them with historical reality. I conclude my analysis focusing on the female presence within these literary tournaments, giving special attention to their roles in constructing a knight's identity.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	iv
ABSTRACT .....	v
INTRODUCTION.....	1
HISTORIOGRAPHY .....	7
GENERAL HISTORY OF THE TOURNAMENT.....	14
THE LITERARY TOURNAMENT.....	26
WOMEN AND THE LITERARY TOURNAMENT .....	45
CONCLUSION.....	72
REFERENCES .....	75
CURRICULUM VITA.....	78



## INTRODUCTION

***“A knight who has little talent, I would remind you, cannot hide it when he rides in the joust.” - Sarrazin, 1278***

The tournament is among the most familiar aspects of medieval culture. Tournaments been a long-imitated art in Renaissance Fairs and among medieval interpreters. Though often confused with the associated activity of jousting, tournaments were in fact much more than that. Jousting was only one of the many activities that took place at tournaments. In the initial tournaments, two opposing teams charged at one another as though on a battlefield of war. This happened in a general free-for-all, or a *mêlée*. Early tournaments were ferocious, bloody, and unintentionally deadly. The joust, an event that took place at tournaments, refers to single combats, in which two mounted knights charged at one another with lances. Jousting did not become the main attraction of tournaments until the fourteenth century, when tournaments shifted from training for war into what became more of a ceremonial spectacle. Physical strength and military ability were glorified in both the tournament and joust. Thus, they provided an arena in which knights could proudly display their talents and value in front of those who employed them in an attempt to achieve a higher social rank or receive gifts. Additionally, the later tournaments offered a chance for knights to

socialize with prominent lords and ladies, in the hope of increasing their social capital.<sup>1</sup>

Knighthood, at the time of the early tournaments, was a social class suspended somewhere between the lesser nobility and the commoners, from which mounted warriors derived. These men were typically vassals that had been trained in martial combat, who existed as professional soldiers.<sup>2</sup> Knighthood transitioned around the twelfth century into a social rank of its own, associated with a set of martial skills and attitudes in which practitioners of mounted combat were schooled; they were brought up to believe in this “order of chivalry,” with a set of rules and behaviors to strive to live by, initiating the rise to chivalric knighthood. Young knights in training were told tales of great deeds done by historical figures like Alexander the Great and Charlemagne, further convincing them that chivalry was a timeless code that the best knights lived by.<sup>3</sup> Courage was one of the most important qualities for a knight to have. To prove his courage, he would have to complete a great “feat of arms” on the battlefield. It was difficult or nearly impossible for a knight to display his courage or prowess on the battlefields of war.<sup>4</sup> The tournament was the solution to this problem; it provided a much-needed arena to openly flaunt one’s individual prowess and gallantry.

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<sup>1</sup> Phyllis Jestice, *The Medieval Knight: The Noble Warriors of the Golden Age of Chivalry* (London, United Kingdom: Amber Books Ltd., 2018), 97.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Coss, *The Knight in Medieval England: 1000-1400* (Conshohocken, Pennsylvania: Combined Books Inc., 1993), 7.

<sup>3</sup> Jestice, *The Medieval Knight*, 36.

<sup>4</sup> Richard Barber, *Tournaments* (Harmondsworth, United Kingdom: Penguin Books Limited, 1978) introduction.

Because of its importance in chivalric society, the tournament tradition lasted well over six centuries. Though its precise origin is not known, it is believed to have started some time about the mid-eleventh or twelfth century in France, with the last official tournament being held in 1620.<sup>5</sup> Encompassing such a vast timeframe, it is not surprising that the tournament went through tremendous transformations throughout the years to better fit the needs of the communities in which it thrived. The tournament, which started as a mix of war and sport, transformed into an extravagant spectacle for consumption by a new audience. By the fourteenth century, it had transformed into an activity that was reserved for nobility; participating in these tournaments was intrinsically a display of one's noble status.<sup>6</sup>

While previous historians of the tournament believe women were only present as passive spectators, I argue that their role in tournaments, specifically those of literature, was actually much more dynamic. Not only that, but women are crucial to understanding chivalric knighthood. In this thesis, I analyze their presence at the tournaments described in chivalric literature in general, and in Arthurian romances in particular. In the process of this analysis, I explore the literary construction of the tournament, discussing how these literary tournaments sometimes reflect and sometimes contrast what we know of the historical reality of these spectacles.

Women represented a large part of the audience that the later tournaments were meant to entertain. Furthermore, they provided a source of

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>6</sup> Jestice, *The Medieval Knight*, 97.

inspiration for many knights to perform admirably both on the tournament field and in everyday life. Women were essential to the process of earning social capital—not necessarily for the success in obtaining the woman’s love or interest, but as a tool to achieve an accepted social status that knights strived toward. Despite women’s key role in the tournament festivities, little has been done to fully explore their presence there.

Women played an important role within this chivalric society. One of the principal duties of a knight was to defend women and their honor.<sup>7</sup> Women had a sort of responsibility to the men, ensuring they did not stray from the path of chivalry. The ideal knight in the chivalric world would not only perform great deeds of honor, but also knew how to associate at court, particularly with women. The stories of the legendary knights most certainly would not hold the same weight in medieval society if the women were omitted—they were essential to the popularity and influence of the romance stories as both patrons and readers.<sup>8</sup> The women of these stories act as inspiration for the knights to not only perform better in battle but also to strive to completing his role as a chivalrous knight. Women, then, played active roles in both the reality of pageantry life and the tournaments of romances.

The values associated with chivalry—prowess, largesse, courtoisie, loyalty, generosity—were already implied in the romances of Chrétien de Troyes (writing ca. 1160-1191), establishing an archetype of an ideal knight that would

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<sup>7</sup> Ramon Llull, *The Book of the Order of Chivalry*, trans. Noel Fallows (Woodbridge, Suffolk, United Kingdom: The Boydell Press, 2013), 50.

<sup>8</sup> See below for more on women patronage in courtly literature and the tournament; 66-7.

be carried on and remembered throughout centuries.<sup>9</sup> Historians have come to accept this idealized version of chivalry as just that—an ideal. In reality, chivalry was not epitomized by the stereotypical romantic description of the “knight in shining armor,” succeeding at deeds of arms against his odds. But that does not mean the social historian cannot learn something from the knights of the romances, particularly about the ideals and customs within a society that praised these qualities so highly and enshrined them in their popular literature.

The tales of these legendary knights clearly had their effects on medieval society. This is attested by the fact that, by the later Middle Ages, the tournament had developed into a ceremonial affair, accompanied by theatre, feasts and dancing, inspired in part by stories from the romances. The impact of the romances is most apparent when we begin to see knights imitating the knights of the romances in their own round table tournaments, modeled on the legendary Arthur’s Round Table.<sup>10</sup> Knights emulated their romance heroes, striving to advance their reputations. Reputation was key in medieval society for the construction of identities and the establishment of social classes. With knights representing much of the audience for chivalric stories, these stories inspired

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<sup>9</sup> Chivalry was used to describe knights starting in the eleventh century. The word chivalry derives from *chevalier*, which means “fighter on horseback.” In the twelfth century, the term indicated a set of ideals a knight was expected to believe in and how he was expected to behave in society; For further reading see: Maurice Keen, *Chivalry* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005), 21.

<sup>10</sup> In Arthurian legend, Arthur’s round table was essentially the culmination of becoming an exemplary knight. Only those with all of the chivalric values were permitted to sit at Arthur’s round table, where they were all deemed equal with one another and no one could claim precedence. Arthur’s round table was the quintessential model of a chivalric order. The round tables held by kings like Edward III were perhaps the most distinct display of the influence of the romances on knightly society.

them to better themselves by providing a standard of accepted behaviors around which they could construct their identities.

Chivalric literature reflects truths about the culture in medieval society. Tournaments would not be engraved in the social memory the way they are today without the associated pageantry brought about by both the romance literature, and the presence of women in the historical and literary tournament. The romance literature is a valuable resource to study how medieval society oftentimes mimicked the art that flourished within their world.

## HISTORIOGRAPHY

Prior to the 1980s, there were few serious academic publications concerning the tournament or joust. The two earliest studies of the tournament both focused on creating a narrative based time-line of the most basic concepts of the tournament, documenting its technicalities and transformations but failing to analyze its social importance.<sup>11</sup> A study by Ruth Huff Cline in 1945 reintroduced the tournament into historical scholarship, focusing on the tournament from the late thirteenth century onward, and giving special attention to the round table tournaments that occurred during the later Middle Ages.<sup>12</sup> Cline's article provides a comparison of the historical tourney-goers and the Arthurian legends, displaying how the "real-life" competitors had been inspired by the romance heroes. Cline's essay is just a rudimentary study of the influence romances had on the historical tournament but provides a basis argument for the effects romance literature had within the reality of medieval society.

After largely neglecting the subject for several decades, historians in the later twentieth century became interested anew in the tournament. They were

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<sup>11</sup> F.H. Cripps-Day, *The History of the Tournament in England and in France* (London: B. Quaritch, 1918); and R.C. Clephan, *The Tournaments: Its Periods and Phases* (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1919) both have a general narrative of the tournament, heavily using romance literature as factual historical evidence with little in-depth analysis of these sources.

<sup>12</sup> Ruth Huff Cline, "The Influence of Romances on Tournaments of the Middle Ages." *Speculum* 20, no. 2 (1945): 204-11. doi:10.2307/2854595.

specifically interested in the tournament's association with chivalry. Maurice Keen dedicates an entire chapter to the tournament in his book *Chivalry* (1984), arguing that the tournament was the formal expression of chivalry.<sup>13</sup> Though Keen uses mostly romance literature to support his claim, there is little analysis of the specificities of the tournament. Instead, Keen focuses mainly on its association with the knight errant and explaining how the tournament was the ultimate expression of chivalry because it provided knights with the chance to proudly display their prowess. Historians of the late twenty-first century focused on analyzing the development of the tournament using historical records, largely discrediting the use of the romances as a viable source for discussing the tournament because of the idealization that oftentimes happened with fiction. Richard Barber's *Tournaments* (1978) covers a wide range of tournament history, developing a timeline of the transformation of the tournament from a war-sport to a spectacle, and was the first source to finally include the pageantry associated with the later jousts.<sup>14</sup> Like much of the scholarship produced prior to the development of the field of women's history, Barber gives little attention to women in the tournament's history, despite the fact that they were a huge component to the pageantry of the tournament.

Other scholars of the twenty-first century like David Crouch and Juliet Barker begin dismissing the use of romances as historical sources. Using mostly historical records and prior scholarship, they begin trying to tie together the

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<sup>13</sup> Keen, *Chivalry*, 83-101.

<sup>14</sup> Barber, *Tournaments*, 11.



pieces of previously studied scholarship.<sup>15</sup> Crouch discusses the tournament proper, arguing that most historians of the tournament actually write about the joust, using the word tournament as a catch-all phrase. His intent in writing *Tournaments* is to discuss the tournaments proper and all of the events involved in them, distinguishing them from the joust. Crouch follows the development of the tournament proper into the joust, documenting the details of the tournament such as the heraldry involved, the stands, and the martial combats featured at them. Crouch strongly dismisses the use of romances as serious evidence for understanding the tournament.

Barker has similar opinions on the use of romance literature as a historical source. She argues previous studies are too general and rely too often on romance literature as source material, often focusing on one aspect or piece of literature but never tying the pieces together. Baker's aim is to do just that by using references to tournaments found in chronicles, financial and administrative records and heraldic manuscripts. She leaves off her narrative in 1400, arguing that it is when the tournament went through its most dramatic transformation with the introduction of the tilt and joust, therefore an altogether different subject of interest. Barker's aim of her book is to put the tournament at the center of chivalric culture, though I argue that it is impossible without giving the romances the proper recognition of the influences they had within chivalric culture.

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<sup>15</sup> David Crouch. *Tournament* (London, United Kingdom: Hambledon and London, 2005); Juliet R.V. Barker, *The Tournament in England 1100-1400* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, United Kingdom: The Boydell Press, 2008);

With the development of gender history in the 1980s, historians began to analyze the way gender roles developed within already studied histories. With an increase in the analysis of stereotypical gender roles, historians of the tournament, though minimally, began including women in their narratives. Barber and Barker, in their collaborative study, *Tournaments: Jousts, Chivalry, and Pageants*, briefly mention women's roles within the tournament, drawing on their roles as inspirational tokens for the participating knights.<sup>16</sup> As women are (understandably) not discussed in detail in many of the historical chronicles, financial records or heraldic manuscripts that are typically used as source material, romance literature is the most tangible source for analyzing their involvement in the tournament.

Historians, however, have been hesitant to use romance literature as a historical source itself because of the idealization that often happens in literature. For this reason, women are often left out of the historical narrative. There have been several studies on women and chivalry—there is no doubt that courtly love was a necessary component to chivalry.<sup>17</sup> These studies, however, are more of a reflection of the period they were written in than of the period these women lived in. We know that women were present at tournaments, but little has been done to fully explore their place there. Women were key to the tournament, especially in

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<sup>16</sup> Richard Barber and Juliet Barker, *Tournaments: Jousts, Chivalry and Pageants in the Middle Ages* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, United Kingdom: Boydell Press, 2000).

<sup>17</sup> The definition of *chivalry* and its relation to women have changed throughout the years. For more on the relationship between women and chivalry see: Ruth Mazo Karras, *From Boys to Men: Formations of Masculinity in Late Medieval Europe* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003); Maurice Keen, *Chivalry* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2005); Richard W. Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe* (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 1999).

its transformation from martial training to participatory spectacle; women were a majority of the audience at the tournaments. As they increasingly became involved in the accompanying festivities, hosts began including feasts, dancing and singing after the tournament play. Women were also the “transmitters of social memory” for many reasons, the most obvious being that the pageantry most associated in the modern mind with the tournament came about because of women’s influence, as the desire to impress them as spectators became more prominent.<sup>18</sup> Despite women’s importance in the tournament and to the construction of knightly identities in the romance stories, there have not been any full analyses on the relationship of the two within literary sources.<sup>19</sup>

While the earliest scholarship on the tournament used romances as their only source, more modern studies are hesitant to include the romances at all. These historians are right about the danger of using literature as factual historical evidence—taking fiction as fact and believing the romances to be literal is not a credible historical analysis of the tournament. It is not historically accurate to interpret these romances as literal truth because these authors often glorified what they were writing about for symbolic purposes. The stories also featured

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<sup>18</sup> David Crouch refers to Elisabeth van Hout’s *Medieval Memories: Men, Women and the Past, 700-1300* (London: Routledge, 2001) when regarding women’s roles as spectators as an act of social memory, arguing that women would discuss the past tournaments and knights’ successes while watching from the stands and circulating that information into society; Crouch, *Tournaments*, 57.

<sup>19</sup> Ruth Mazo Karras, *From Boys to Men: Formations of Masculinity in Late Medieval Europe*; Karras does a good job analyzing how women played a role in chivalry and discusses their importance in constructing a knight’s identity. Karras also discusses the token-giving tradition that was common at the tournament, while including minor literary analysis of women in courtly literature. Karras’ analysis focuses strongly on women’s roles in measuring a knight’s masculinity. Though Karras’ work is vital for studying gender roles and sexuality in medieval Europe, it is not necessarily an extended study on women’s roles in the tournament.

legendary figures that likely would be impossible to emulate. As we know, literature is also open to the interpretation of the reader by nature, yet another reason we cannot take it at face value. What we are able to do, however, is analyze and understand the society stories were composed in by reading them.

Similar to relying on only romance literature, using only the historical records—religious and secular documents and laws—overlooks the tournament's importance within medieval material culture, specifically in the later years when the tournament was more of a social spectacle than a war-sport. Though the studies done via historical source material are pertinent to the narrative history of the tournament, they lack a discussion of how members of medieval society interacted with and understood the tournament. By denying the credibility of the romance literature in their narratives, historians like Crouch, Barber, and Barker fall short in the same way their predecessors do by discounting essential sources for understanding medieval culture.

Using romance and Arthurian literature supplements what is known about the tournament through other kinds of historical evidence by displaying different customs and attitudes, illuminating in particular the role of both the tournament and chivalry in aristocratic society. Romance literature is also the most tangible source for analyzing the way women are portrayed as historical figures and participants within the tournament because of the lack of documentation within historical records.<sup>20</sup> Thus, using romance literature as credible historical source

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<sup>20</sup> Refer to my last chapter, "Women and the Literary Tournament," for more on using romances to analyze gender roles of the tournament; 50-80.

material fills a gap in historical scholarship and leads to a better understanding of the gender distinctions in the tournament of the Middle Ages.<sup>21</sup>

The survival and flourishing of the tournament can be directly attributed to the romance literature that was circulated through society, as well as the presence of women in the audience as active spectators. Without these tales of valiant knights fighting for their mistresses, and the inspiration they invoked within the reality, the tournament would have faded away more quickly since its sole purpose would be training for war. Romances aided in the transformation of the tournament from military exercise to entertainment by painting vivid, lively pictures of the splendor associated with pageantry and motivating knights to perform as gallantly as their romance heroes, even during a time when chivalry was in its decline. The tournament was a celebration of the chivalric values that were essential in an aristocratic society. Courtly love, prowess, and largesse, three of the most important components of the order of chivalry, were directly represented in the tournament.

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<sup>21</sup> Dorsey Armstrong has successfully analyzed the role of gender in the Arthurian romance of Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* in *Gender and the Chivalric Community in Malory's Morte d'Arthur* (Gainesville, Florida: University Press of Florida, 2003). Gender studies have also been performed extensively in many of Chaucer's tales. For examples, see; Catherine Cox, *Gender and Language in Chaucer* (Gainesville, Florida: University Press of Florida, 1997); Susan Crane, *Gender and Romance in the Canterbury Tales* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2014); Carolyn Dinshaw, *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989).

## GENERAL HISTORY OF THE TOURNAMENT

Being a knight differed greatly from being a foot soldier—warriors who carried simple weapons and wore basic armor. Foot soldiers needed little training, apart from those who practiced archery, who practiced in the village greens and held competitions to test their skills. Knights, however, required much more complicated skills; they needed to be well-versed in managing a horse in heavy armor, while simultaneously handling an edged weapon like a sword or a spear.<sup>22</sup> Like the archers, knights held competitions to test and practice these skills. Thus, the tournament was born. Though the exact origin is unknown, tournaments most likely originated out of France in the later eleventh or early twelfth century.<sup>23</sup>

The tournament was, initially, an extremely dangerous and tumultuous event. The *mêlée* primarily consisted of group combat aimed at replicating the chaotic and violent conditions that knights would encounter on the battlefield. It was comprised of two or more mounted teams charging at one another in full war-armor, fully armed with swords, maces, spears, and axes. Though blunted weapons were used, there were essentially no rules or regulations within the *mêlée*. This would typically consist of three or four teams of knights fighting on their own account, often switching alliances and loyalties mid-battle. Local

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<sup>22</sup> Barber, *Tournaments*, 2.

<sup>23</sup> Barber and Barker, *Tournaments*, 2.

princes or nobles organized the teams, as they were the ones who led the armies in real battle.<sup>24</sup> In the earlier tournaments of the twelfth century, these teams also involved foot soldiers as crossbowmen or archers, though these projectile weapons would be banned from tournament use by the mid-thirteenth century.<sup>25</sup> Early tournaments were typically fought in limited areas between villages, though knights would often exceed these borders, chasing their opponents into the nearby towns. There was a fenced-in, designated retreat area set aside where fighting was prohibited; knights could repair their armor or tend to their horses in this area without worry of attack from an opponent.<sup>26</sup>

These inherently violent tournaments increased in popularity throughout the twelfth century as a dangerous training for war, providing knights the opportunity to practice together as a cooperating group, perfecting both their horsemanship and the handling of their weapons simultaneously.<sup>27</sup> These tournaments were essentially mock battles that mimicked almost everything about real battle. Killing one's opponent was not the goal in the *mêlée*. Rather, the main objective of a *mêlée* was to capture opposing knights and hold them, and all of their accoutrements, for ransom. This way, knights were able to make a healthy amount of money by participating in tournaments. This can be seen in the biography of English nobleman William Marshal, who made his fortune by traveling and participating in tournaments for more than twenty years.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Tobias Capwell, *Arms and Armour of the Medieval Joust* (Leeds, United Kingdom: Royal Armouries Museum, 2018), 5.

<sup>26</sup> Barber, *Tournaments*, 2.

<sup>27</sup> Keen, *Chivalry*, 88.

<sup>28</sup> See below for more on William Marshal; 61-63.

To serve their purposes as training for war, tournaments needed to be dangerous. In order to perform successfully, knights required great skill and strength. The violence of the tournament in the twelfth century differed greatly from the courtly encounters that featured jousts that started becoming prominent around the thirteenth century. Subsequently, the tournaments of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries were a place where the knights of the upper class could reinforce their chivalric attributes, and the knights from lower backgrounds could advance in society. It was around the fourteenth century that knighthood transitioned from a social class that any man of wealth and skillful fighting ability was able to partake in, to a prestige class in which proof of lineage or knightly birth was necessary.<sup>29</sup>

As the tournament transitioned into a spectator sport, the desire to impress the spectators grew, leading to the advancement of the joust as the main event of the tournament. Whereas in the early tournaments, it was difficult to distinguish individual knights on the heavily wooded battleground, the joust was designed to be performed in a less chaotic environment, allowing knights to work at building their reputation with an audience observing their every move. Reputations won at the tournament could lead to prominent men taking a knight into their company, which was often a motivating factor to the growing prominence of the one-on-one jousting combats.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Stephen H. Hardy, "The Medieval Tournament: A Functional Sport of the Upper Class.," *Journal of Sport History* 1, no. 2 (1974): 104.

<sup>30</sup> Keen, *Chivalry*, 89.



A joust was an armed contest between two mounted individuals and involved a series of charges with a couched lance. As in the early tournaments, the knight wore full war armor.<sup>31</sup> The goal of this one-on-one combat was to strike one's opponent on either their shield or helmet as hard as possible. The best possible result was the breaking of one's own lance, showing the knight had delivered the strongest possible blow to his opponent.<sup>32</sup> In contrast to the tournament, the joust was fought in a very organized and specific environment. It was strictly regulated, allowing the jouster to encounter just one opponent per day. Like knights in the *mêlée*, jousters had their squires present to help with tasks that needed doing during the contest, such as armor adjustment.<sup>33</sup> In earlier tournaments, the joust primarily featured as a predecessor to the main battle, but in the thirteenth century, it began to exist as a highly-preferred independent activity.<sup>34</sup>

It was in the thirteenth century that we see the introduction of courtesy weapons in the joust, making distinctions between the jousts *à plaisance* and jousts *à l'outrance*.<sup>35</sup> The main difference between the two was the use of rebated lances and padded armor in the jousts of peace. The growing emphasis on safety within the joust led to the establishment of a fence located down the center of where the knights charged at each other, added to prevent the knights

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<sup>31</sup> Capwell, *Arms and Armour*, 6.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>35</sup> Jousts *à plaisance*, or jousts of peace; jousts *à l'outrance*, or "to the utmost," later called jousts of war; Capwell, *Arms and Armour*, 29.

from crashing into each other in full force.<sup>36</sup> The introduction of the coronal was another safety measure. The coronal was an attachment that was fastened to the end of the lance that had three blunted prongs on the tip, allowing the lance either to catch hold of the opponent's shield or to shatter. The coronal was unable to pierce armor, lessening the severity of the jousting blows.<sup>37</sup> The joust was relatively easy to judge because the victor was more easily identified than in the mêlée, with a clear point-system method of scoring.

The joust was an incontestable way of measuring a knight's chivalric deeds as he publicly displayed his "manliness." Surviving jousting cheques from the fifteenth century provide us with the exact method judges used to document a knight's success in the tournament. The most common method of scoring was to reward a point for every lance a knight broke on his opponent, with certain actions resulting in the loss of points.<sup>38</sup> Knights could easily gain in social capital by performing well at the joust, often performing in front of prominent lords and kings. Relatedly, jousts offered the perfect opportunity for knights to reenact the one-on-one combats that featured so heavily in courtly romances and poetry, allowing them to imitate their literary heroes.<sup>39</sup>

Due to the highly dangerous nature of tournaments and jousts, they often faced harsh criticism by both the Church and secular authorities. Pope Innocent

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<sup>36</sup> Alan R Young, *Tudor and Jacobean Tournaments* (Dobbs Ferry, New York: Sheridan House, 1987, 14.

<sup>37</sup> Capwell, *Arms and Armour*, 26.

<sup>38</sup> For example, a knight would lose a point for hitting his opponent's horse with his lance; Emma Levitt, "Scoring Masculinity: The English Tournament and the Jousting Cheques of the Early Sixteenth Century", *Postgraduate Perspectives on the Past*. 1(1), 2014, doi: <https://doi.org/10.5920/pph.2014.1153>

<sup>39</sup> Capwell, *Arms and Armour*, 10.

II made the Church's position on tournaments clear in the ninth canon of the Council of Clermont in 1130:

We condemn absolutely those detestable jousts or tournaments in which the knights usually come together by agreement and, to make a show of their strength and boldness, rashly engage in contests which are frequently the cause of death to men and of danger to souls. If anyone taking part in them should meet his death, though penance and the Viaticum shall not be denied him if he asks for them, he shall, however, be deprived of Christian burial.<sup>40</sup>

The prohibition of the tournament by the Church was justified by the argument that crusade was imminent, and therefore knights who wanted to fight should focus on attempts to capture the Holy Land from the Muslims. Tournaments were always banned before and during war. They were prohibited during crusades so that the "entertaining military sports" did not distract knights from the impending fighting.<sup>41</sup> Ecclesiastical prohibitions were repeatedly enforced by Pope Innocent II's successors with increasing fervor over the years until 1316, when Pope John XXII finally lifted all bans against tournaments because of the knights' unanimous disregard for the prohibitions. Based on the numerous tournaments documented while these prohibitions were in effect, it is clear that knights often ignored the bans and continued tourneying.<sup>42</sup>

Inspiration from females at the tournament was also one of the rationales for the ecclesiastical prohibitions, as church authorities claimed the tournament promoted all of the seven deadly sins, including lust.<sup>43</sup> Similar to the way knights

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<sup>40</sup> H. J. Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees of the General Councils: Text, Translation and Commentary*, (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1937), 195-213.

<sup>41</sup> Barker, *The Tournament in England*, 76.

<sup>42</sup> Young, *Tudor and Jacobean Tournaments*, 12.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

were inspired by ladies in the tournament, church authorities argued that knights were inspired to go on crusade in the hopes of obtaining rewards from their ladies, rather than pursuing the heavenly rewards promised by the church.<sup>44</sup> This is perhaps one of the most direct examples of the negative influences the romances had in real life, where women's rewards in the tournaments potentially influenced the Church's opinions. This argument also reveals an attitude that was common in a society in which women were often blamed for men's sins.

The tournament faced harsh criticism from secular authorities as well. With the tournament's growing popularity in the twelfth century, Henry II Plantagenet (r.1154-1189) saw the danger of having so many knights gathered in one place to practice their arms in competition; he responded by forbidding the sport in England. The main argument for initial bans on the tournament was the fear of able-bodied knights being injured participating in the sport, and thus being unable to perform their knightly duties in war for their king. Additionally, there was a great risk involved in the congregation of like-minded individuals with potentially dangerous ideas, causing great paranoia among kings.

Not all kings were as strict as Henry II, however. Henry's son, Richard I (r.1189-1199), modified his father's ban on tournaments shortly after coming to power, ending the prohibition but adding regulations intended to lessen the severity of injuries that could be sustained by the participants. Richard I set the foundation for the regulation of tournaments by enacting (and enforcing) the Tournament Decree of 1194 that both established the principle of licensing

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 107.

tournaments, and set rules and regulations concerning the number of tournaments and the locations where they would be permitted. Richard's decree was mostly concerned with controlling and containing the violence that would frequently happen within towns and villages near tournaments. He gave five locations licenses for tournaments: between Salisbury and Wilton, Warwick and Kenilwoth, Stanford and Warinford, Brackley and Mixbury, and Blyth and Tickhill.<sup>45</sup> Richard required fees from those wishing to participate in the tournament— "twenty marks for an earl, ten for a baron, four for a landed knight and two marks for a knight without land."<sup>46</sup> This way, Richard received a substantial income by simply allowing tournaments to take place in his kingdom.

Richard's decree did not interfere directly with the actual conduct of the tournament, however. It was primarily implemented to prevent trouble in towns on the way to and from the fields. It is said that the main reason that Richard lifted his father's ban was that he had observed how much better trained the French were for war, and he did not want to see the French humiliate English knights as a result of their lack of skill or experience on the field.<sup>47</sup> Hosting a tournament was an easy way to give English knights the opportunity to learn new techniques from traveling knights from across Europe. Unfortunately, the tournament also allowed men to assemble together for common causes; this was something that proved worrying to the kings. For example, it was under the guise of gathering for a tournament that King John's (r. 1199-1216) enemies were able

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<sup>45</sup> Barker, *The Tournament in England*, 54.

<sup>46</sup> Keen, *Chivalry*, 86.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

to reassemble against him after his sealing of the Magna Carta. His son Henry III (r.1216-1272) unsuccessfully attempted to forbid tournaments again because of this royal fear of factious movements that had potential to develop at tourneys.<sup>48</sup> The tournaments that took place in Henry III's reign reflected the political tensions that echoed throughout his lands, with many private feuds disguised as the military games.<sup>49</sup>

A century later in 1292, the tournament was further regulated with the publication of Edward I's (r. 1272-1307) "Statuta Armorum," or "Statutes of Arms." Edward built upon Richard's restrictions, in addition to attempting to control the conduct within the tournament. Summarized, Edward's statute limited the number of squires aiding a knight and required them to wear a cap of their lord's coat of arms for easy recognition by the heralds and ladies watching. Only a knight's squires could help him when he fell during the tournament proper. The statute prohibited the use of pointed swords, daggers, maces and staffs, allowing only the use of the broad sword. It made the tournament safer, requiring squires and heralds to wear minor, padded armor. Failure to comply with the statute's regulations resulted in the confiscation of one's horse and harness, along with jail-time anywhere from one to seven years. Additionally, the statute prohibited any weapons or armor within the audience.<sup>50</sup> Despite these safety regulations, fatal incidents were still fairly common.<sup>51</sup> Nevertheless, the tournament lived on.

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>49</sup> Barker, *The Tournament in England*, 49.

<sup>50</sup> A. Luders, ed., *The Statutes of the Realm: Printed by Command of His Majesty King George the Third, in Pursuance of an Address of the House of Commons of Great Britain, From Original Records and Authentic Manuscripts*, 11 vols., (London: Record Commission, 1810-1828), Vol. I, pp. 230-231

<sup>51</sup> Keen, *Chivalry*, 87.

The oppositions to the tournaments faced critiques of their own. Authors like Ramon Llull (1232-1315) openly disagreed with the prohibitions of tournaments, regarding them as an essential component of a knight's life, and more importantly, the Order of Chivalry as a whole. Written in his treatise, *Book of the Order of Chivalry* (ca. 1272-5), Llull argues:

Riding a horse, participating in behourds, tilting lances against the quintain, going about armed, taking part in tournaments, holding Round Tables, fencing, hunting deer, bears, wild boar, lions and other things similar to these are the office of a knight, for by all these things knights are trained for feats of arms and for upholding the Order of Chivalry. Hence, to scorn the training and the usage of that which better prepares the knight to practise his office is to scorn the Order of Chivalry.<sup>52</sup>

Llull's defense is that just as other tradesmen needed to practice in order to improve their skills, the tournament was crucial if a knight was to improve the skills of his vocation. Not only does this support the necessity of the tournament as a training ground for knights, it also acknowledges that being a knight was an occupation in the time that Llull was writing. As a knight himself, Llull would have been familiar with the life of chivalry. Therefore, he was able to disseminate the ideals closely associated with chivalric knighthood into medieval society. Moreover, as this was an instructional book, Llull was writing to an audience of young knights to introduce them to the responsibilities that come with being a knight.<sup>53</sup> Being that Llull composed his book in the thirteenth century, it is not

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<sup>52</sup> Llull, *The Book of the Order of Chivalry*, 47.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

surprising that he was inspired by the romance stories, even using them as models to shape his instructional manual.<sup>54</sup>

The French herald Sarrazin also condemned the prohibition of the tournament by King Philip III of France, arguing that prowess had been exiled from his realm and that knights were traveling abroad to proudly flaunt their prowess. Sarrazin notes that the banning of the tournament distressed a lot of people who relied on it for their financial survival—the herald, the harness-maker, the farrier and the saddler, as well as those who opened their doors to lodge the tourneying knights—declaring: ‘Forbid the tournament and you forbid everything that goes with it!’ in his attack on King Philip’s ban.<sup>55</sup> Statements like this make it clear that the tournament did not solely affect the knights; it could be considered a vital part of the economy in the Middle Ages, particularly in the villages closest to the tournament grounds. Sarrazin goes on to note that the banning of the tournament had increased violence in the villages because the knights had become idle, thus picking fights and causing trouble. Sarrazin openly praised Edward for being “committed to the deeds of knighthood” and upholding tournaments, unlike his own King Philip III.<sup>56</sup>

Despite many secular criticisms and ecclesiastical prohibitions, the tournament flourished for over six centuries as the most direct physical expression of chivalry. It glorified the ideology of knighthood and praised the

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<sup>54</sup> Richard Kaeuper, “The societal role of chivalry in romance,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance*, ed. Roberta Krueger, (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 98.

<sup>55</sup> Crouch, *Tournaments*, 199.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.



knightly class' skills and virtues. With the royal regulations came the distinct transitioning of the tournament from violent training for war to an entertaining, lavish spectacle. Its importance in medieval society is hard to ignore.

## THE LITERARY TOURNAMENT

In the second half of the twelfth century, the tournament began making appearances in chivalric literature. As a result, we have descriptive accounts of the tournament, composed predominantly by men, who experienced them at court and understood their functions. Chivalric literature, on the one hand, displays the prominence of the tournament in a knight's everyday life with how often the tournament is featured in the stories. On the other hand, the stories beautify the tournament and romanticize the role of the knight by exaggerating his performance. It is for this reason that we cannot take chivalric literature at face value. It did, however, inspire knights to perform great deeds modeled on the idealized version of the romance heroes that were featured so prominently in the stories.

The tournament also provided an opportunity for knights to display acts of courtly love, making it an essential component of the medieval romances, Arthurian legends, and courtly love poetry. Though the romances most likely overdramatized the tournaments in their stories, they provide the most vivid depictions of what a tournament was probably like in the Middle Ages. As the primary form of secular literature in later medieval England and France, these

romances provide scholars and enthusiasts with contemporary insight into medieval thought and culture.

Chrétien de Troyes is regarded as one of the greatest and most well-known authors of courtly romance literature. He composed in the French vernacular in the later twelfth century. Though not much about his life is known, it is believed that Chrétien spent time at the courts of Marie de Champagne and King Henry II Plantagenet, allowing him to experience the everyday reality of a noble life.<sup>57</sup> Chrétien's work reflects a shift in literary genre that some scholars identify as beginning in the 1170s. His accounts of Arthurian subjects are the most extensively studied of all Arthurian authors, with many scholarly books and hundreds of articles analyzing his romances.<sup>58</sup> Chrétien's legacy is hard to ignore—he popularized the Arthurian characters, creating a continuous romance that followed along on their chivalric adventures.<sup>59</sup>

His tales of Arthurian legends and fantasies offered a romantic reconstruction of the tournament.<sup>60</sup> He created several imaginary tournaments, drawing on contemporary examples for inspiration while adding extravagant color and detail to his descriptions. These Arthurian stories featured brave, gallant knights taking on great challenges, and represented a newer type of romance called the roman d'aventure.<sup>61</sup> The characters in most of Chrétien's tales make their names and reputations by their prowess on the tournament field and in

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<sup>57</sup> Chrétien de Troyes, *Arthurian Romances*, trans. William W. Kibler and Carleton W. Carroll (London: Penguin Books Limited, 1991), introduction.

<sup>58</sup> For an extensive list of Arthurian studies, see; Norris J. Lacy and Joan Tasker Grimbert, *A Companion to Chrétien de Troyes* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK: The Boydell Press, 2005).

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, introduction.

<sup>60</sup> Crouch, *Tournaments*, 13.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

chivalric deeds, in a way similar to real historical knights, such as Ulrich von Liechtenstein and William Marshal.

English kings in particular were incredibly interested in the chivalric stories of King Arthur and his renowned knights. This growing interest sparked early in Edward I's reign (1272-1307), and few kings were more fascinated by these stories than he was. This could be a result of a cleric—Geoffrey of Monmouth—including a “historic” account of Arthur's life in his popular book, *The History of the Kings of Britain* (c. 1136). Monmouth writes that, at the time of Arthur's reign:

Britain had arrived at such a pitch of grandeur, that in abundance of riches, luxury of ornaments, and politeness of inhabitants, it far surpassed all other kingdoms. The knights in it that were famous for feats of chivalry, wore their clothes and arms all of the same color and fashion: and the women also no less celebrated for their wit, wore all the same kind of apparel; and esteemed none worthy of their love, but as such as had given a proof of their valour in several battles. Thus was the valour of the men an encouragement for the women's chastity, and the love of the women a spur to the soldier's bravery.<sup>62</sup>

It is not surprising that Edward was intrigued and inspired by Arthur's kingship and the state of his realm, using it as a sort of model for how he wanted his reign to be. Not only kings, but many barons, knights and ladies found great appeal in the stories of Arthur.<sup>63</sup> With Arthur's renowned knights as models for chivalry, it is no wonder that Edward would be eager to let his own knights train and improve their own chivalrousness through tournaments.

The influence of Arthurian literature on the historical tournament is most notable with the development of the round table tournaments. The round table

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<sup>62</sup> Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain*, trans. Aaron Thompson (Cambridge, Ontario: In Parenthesis, 1999), 164.

<sup>63</sup> Dan Jones, *The Plantagenets: The Warrior Kings and Queens Who Made England* (New York: Penguin Books, 2013) 251.

tournaments flourished in the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The round tables were festivities that included banquets, revelry and tournaments, with a strong emphasis on the feasting and dancing. A distinct feature of these events, distinguishing them from the earlier tournaments, was the use of disguises during the festivities. More specifically, knights often disguised themselves in Arthurian dress and imitated the Arthurian romances. For example, Ulrich von Liechtenstein dressed as King Arthur in a tournament in 1240 and competed against other knights dressed in the arms of Lancelot, Yvaine, Tristan, Erec, and Perceval.<sup>64</sup> By appearing as King Arthur, Ulrich von Liechtenstein publicly declared his self-imposed association with the most chivalrous knight in literature. Those attending the tournament would have recognized these characters as the highly prestigious knights of the round table, thus potentially elevating the reputations of those participating as chivalrous knights.

Like his grandfather (Edward I), Edward III was an Arthurian enthusiast, inspired by the great reputation of Arthur's realm as a chivalrous kingdom with a great military and a famous courteousness for its treatment of women. With a similar mindset of his grandfather's, Edward III wanted his realm to reflect these aspects of Arthur's reign.<sup>65</sup> Not surprisingly, the Arthurian inspired round table tournaments were most prevalent in England during Edward III's reign but continued flourishing throughout the later thirteenth and fourteenth centuries with the transition into social spectacles that had a heavy emphasis on pageantry.

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<sup>64</sup> Young, *Tudor and Jacobean Tournaments*, 20.

<sup>65</sup> Jones, *The Plantagenets*, 406.

In 1344, Edward held a round table at Windsor to imitate chivalry in the way that King Arthur and his knights would have understood it. It was at the end of this festival that Edward ordered the construction of the “house of the round table” to house Arthurian entertainments. Edward planned to create a secular chivalric order, the Order of the Round Table, but abandoned it in 1346 due to concerns with the Battle of Crécy.<sup>66</sup> By the middle of the fourteenth century, it became common for tournaments and round tables to imitate the romance literary traditions.<sup>67</sup>

The tournaments in Chrétien’s stories feature the warlike violence typical of the earlier tournaments designed to provide knights with military training rather than the later, ceremonial events, making them quite similar to the historical accounts. The tournament described in *Erec and Enide* is very reflective of a typical tournament *mêlée*: the knights are divided into two teams, fighting in a field between two towns, and it commences with two knights charging at one another with lances. Swords are drawn and knights are unhorsed and captured for ransom.<sup>68</sup> Those reading Chrétien’s romances would have recognized what he was describing as a tournament. By describing the tournament in such a fashion, Chrétien made his stories more believable to his audience, allowing them to relate to the knights he was writing about.

However, Chrétien’s depictions of the tournament also paint a romanticized picture of the chivalric nature of a knight’s life, promoting important

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<sup>66</sup> Julian Munby, Richard Barber, and Richard Brown, *Edward III’s Round Table at Windsor* (Woodbridge, United Kingdom: Boydell Press, 2007).

<sup>67</sup> Cline, “The Influence of Romances,” 207.

<sup>68</sup> Chrétien de Troyes, *Arthurian Romances*, 63-65.

chivalric virtues such as prowess, honor, courtly love, and largesse. Most importantly, Chrétien includes the tournament as an essential component to knightly life. It seems obvious that actual, historical tournaments of his day influenced the way that Chrétien portrayed them in his stories. On the other hand, it can also be argued that Chrétien's writings had a reciprocal influence on the character of the tournaments as they transitioned into ceremonial affairs.

In both literary and historical sources, tournaments frequently accompanied major celebrations, shaping them into social spectacles as well as contests of military prowess. For example, Edward III was crowned at the age of fourteen with his mother's lover Roger Mortimer ruling as his regent. After successfully organizing a coup d'état against Mortimer at seventeen, Edward was admired throughout his land. Once he turned eighteen years old in 1330, he finally gained control of his Crown and fully intended to celebrate. He did this by commencing his reign with a series of tournaments throughout London and the southeast of England, presenting himself as a knightly king and his court as a place of entertainment and fun.<sup>69</sup>

Edward III and his wife, Philippa of Hainault, were patrons of both the arts and tournaments, further demonstrating that tournaments of the fourteenth century became performance art for knights. Edward and Philippa held monthly tournaments where the men and women of his realm dressed up in costumes and acted out traditional stories from both history and legend. Edward and Philippa lived lavish lives—during their reign, thousands of pounds were spent on

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<sup>69</sup> Jones, *The Plantagenets*, 367.

tournaments, jewels, and fine clothes.<sup>70</sup> Chronicler Sir Thomas Gray wrote about Edward: “This king led a gay life in jousts and tournaments and entertaining ladies.”<sup>71</sup> Moreover, Edward III’s reign offered light, courage and hope for the people in his realm after it had been badly diminished by his father, the unpopular Edward II. By extension, Edward III’s tournaments represented peace in his realm. They offered a celebration marking his ascension to the throne and assumption of political control, showing he had the capability to restore a sense of normality to his people.

Chrétien anticipates these very same ceremonial aspects of tournaments in the story of *Erec and Enide*, in which a tournament is proposed by King Arthur to accompany their wedding. In this story, Erec and Enide’s wedding celebration had already lasted more than two weeks; when the third week came along, everyone at court unanimously agreed to commence with a tournament. Chrétien describes the tournament vividly, showcasing the heraldry that accompanied it. He gives a glimpse of the clamor and clashing of the tournament when he describes how similar the mock battles of the *mêlée* were to real war:

A month after Pentecost the tournament gathered and was engaged in the plain below Edinburgh. There were many bright-red banners, and many blue and many white, and many wimples and many sleeves given as tokens of love. Many lances were brought there, painted azure and red, many gold and silver, many of other colours, many striped, and many variegated. On the day was seen the lacing on of many a helmet, of iron or of steel, some green, some yellow, some bright red, gleaming in the sunlight. There were many coats of arms and many white hauberks, many swords at the left-hand side, many good shields, fresh and new, of azure and fine red, and silver ones with golden bosses. Many fine horses—white-stockinged and sorrel, fawn-coloured and white and black and bay—all came together at a gallop.

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 423.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 367.



The field was entirely covered with armour. On both sides the lines stirred noisily; in the mêlée the tumult grew; great was the shattering of lances. Lances were broken and shields were pierced, hauberks dented and torn apart, saddles were emptied, knights fell, horses sweated and foamed. Swords were drawn above those who fell to the ground with a clatter, some ran to accept the pledges of the defeated and others to resume the mêlée.<sup>72</sup>

Chrétien utilizes Erec's role in the tournament to demonstrate the individual prowess and bravery that was expected of knights. After describing the clashing of the opening scenes of the tournament, Chrétien turns his focus on the individual successes of Erec, a knight of the Round Table compared to whom "no knight had been so highly praised."<sup>73</sup> "Winning" the tournament contributed to Erec's reputation and identity as one of the best knights of the Round Table, instilling within him a sense of accomplishment that was only attainable through great feats of bravery and, of course, prowess. Chrétien declares:

Now such was Erec's renown that people talked of no one else; no man had such exceptional qualities, for he had the face of Absalom and resembled Solomon in his speech. For ferocity he was like a lion, and in giving and spending he was like Alexander.<sup>74</sup>

It is not enough to possess these qualities individually—to be a great knight, one would have to have all of these qualities combined. Chrétien names the many knights that Erec faces and defeats on the field in the tournament, taking special care to note that "all those who saw this combat were filled with wonder."<sup>75</sup> Here, Chrétien reiterates the idea of the tournament as spectacle.

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<sup>72</sup> Chrétien de Troyes, *Arthurian Romances*, 63-64.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>74</sup> Chrétien is aiming to improve Erec's reputation by comparing him to recognizable historical figures: his spending is compared to Alexander the Great; his handsomeness is compared to that of Absalom's. He is described as the most handsome man in the kingdom. Handsomeness was one of many defining factors for chivalrous knights; Chrétien de Troyes, *Arthurian Romances*, 65.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

As part of the real-life spectacle, participants also disguised their appearance by wearing the arms of another knight. By fighting completely incognito, knights could prove to themselves and others that it was their personal strength, prowess, and virtue that won the tournament or prize, not their social rank or reputation.<sup>76</sup> Another of Chrétien's tales, *Cligès*, features a knight who participates in a tournament over a span of four days, changing his coat of arms and horses daily so that he is completely unrecognizable. Cligès easily defeated the best knights—Sagremor, Lancelot, Perceval—prompting great wonder among King Arthur's men and curiosity about who the mysterious knight could be. On the fourth day, many of the knights began to realize that all of these defeats were accomplished by the same knight. In a climactic scene, Cligès faces his uncle Gawain in a joust. With no signs of a winner, Arthur stops the joust and invites Cligès to court. Everyone graciously welcomes him, praising him as their lord and embracing him enthusiastically.<sup>77</sup> In the end, Cligès has succeeded in displaying his prowess through his acts, not merely relying on a previous reputation, and thus exhibited and proved himself as a worthy knight.

The sense of accomplishment and recognition earned by knights who performed well at the tournament contributed to the tournament's rise in popularity and in the context of the aristocratic society that knighthood and chivalry occupied, was an opportunity for many men to impress their lords as well as their potential ladies. A respected reputation in medieval society was vital for shaping and elevating one's social status. Along with validation and respect from

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<sup>76</sup> Chrétien de Troyes, *Arthurian Romances*, 86.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 180-4.

a knight's peers, a better social status also provided access to increased wealth and landholdings.<sup>78</sup>

Deviating from the typical tournament goals, Erec, of *Erec and Enide*, “was not intent upon winning horses or taking prisoners, but on jousting and doing well in order to make evident his prowess.”<sup>79</sup> Erec's courage motivated the knights on the field fighting alongside him, allowing them to defeat the opposing forces. Similarly, in his story, Cligès shows the chivalric traits of prowess and generosity, performing successfully on the tournament field and releasing his captors when invited to court. Although fictional, the tournaments described by Chrétien were definitely related to reality of noble life as it was lived during his time. They also showcased ideals surrounding the chivalric code of living within a believable setting, allowing knights reading the stories to relate to their characters. In the stories of Erec and Cligès, Chrétien established the tournament as the exemplary place for a knight to test his prowess against others.<sup>80</sup> For Chrétien's knights, the tournament was a chance to fight for glory and honor; they are not inspired by the riches they could obtain there, only by the repute they could achieve with a successful performance.

The transition of the tournament from a training-for-war activity to an entertaining spectacle for nobility was largely accomplished throughout the thirteenth century. The later medieval tournaments, as explained above, were

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<sup>78</sup> For more on reputation in medieval society see: Thelma S Fenster and Daniel Lord Smail, *Fama: The Politics of Talk and Reputation in Medieval Europe* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2003).

<sup>79</sup> Chrétien de Troyes, *Arthurian Romances*, 180-4.

<sup>80</sup> Keen, *Chivalry*, 116.

more extravagant and colorful than their predecessors, highlighting the pageantry associated with them. This transition is very apparent in the literature produced during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The authors who succeeded Chrétien increased the detail, color and vivacity of the tournaments that they described in their romance stories, focusing on the pageantry that was associated with the later tournaments. The differences in the splendor of the tournament can be seen easily when analyzing Geoffrey Chaucer's descriptions of the tournaments, written in the mid-fourteenth century.

In the 1340s, Geoffrey Chaucer composed *The Canterbury Tales*, which is now one of the most well-known and studied collections of stories from medieval England. The collection of stories include tales with themes of courtly love and sexuality, extramarital love affairs, marriage, and other themes that were common in courtly love poetry. Anyone who was literate would have had access to, and probably read, Chaucer's tales, as they were widely circulated throughout medieval society. As a result, Chaucer's tales contributed to the ways that men and women behaved in society while also providing entertainment for the literate classes.

As is now well known, the tournament was the ideal setting for authors to display the values associated with chivalric knighthood. The tournament is the setting for a considerable part of Chaucer's *The Knight's Tale*, a story about two Theban knights—Palamon and Arcite—fighting for the love of the same woman, Emily. Initially, Palamon and Arcite duel to decide who "gets Emily." Duke Theseus interrupts the duel, arguing that they are fighting unlawfully. He

proposes, instead, a public and lawful joust with a clear set of rules in which the winner will be granted a marriage with Emily.

Chaucer's construction of the joust lays out the rules and expectations of the tournament as Chaucer would have understood it in the fourteenth century. His account reflects the type of contemporary regulations that would have been enforced by secular leaders:

The prince has, in his prudence and wisdom,  
Concluded that it would be mere destruction  
Of noble blood, if this affair were fought  
In terms of mortal combat, to the death.  
And therefore he desires to modify  
His first proposal, so that none shall die.<sup>81</sup>

Chaucer's writing shows that those hosting tournaments—oftentimes kings—implemented certain regulations so that noble knights would not be killed superfluously. The recreational battles afforded by tournaments presented an unnecessary risk. Courageous knights who could presumably fight in important wars for the king could be killed in tournament “battle.” In *The Knight's Tale*, Chaucer makes it clear that death was not the ultimate goal in the tournament, but an unfortunate result at times:

And should it chance that either of the captains  
Is capture, or else kills his opponent,  
That is the finish of the tournament.<sup>82</sup>

Just as in “real” tournaments weapons were regulated, similar measures were taken in Theseus' tournament to lessen injury and mortality. Arrows, sharp-pointed swords, spears, and un-blunted weapons alike were banned from use in

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<sup>81</sup> Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, trans. David Wright (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) 65.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

Theseus' tournament as an attempt to reduce death. Regulating weaponry, however, did not prevent all injuries and death from happening in both the literary and historical tournaments. Though none of the men fighting in Theseus' tournament were fatally wounded, "some were badly wounded, like the man who'd been thrust with a spear through the breast-bone."<sup>83</sup>

There was also the possibility of men acting upon their grudges and rage towards other knights while participating in a tournament, increasing the injury and mortality rates. It is noted in *The Knight's Tale* that Palamon's thirst for Arcita's blood was his main driving force within the tournament. In the beginning of the tale, Chaucer notes that Palamon feels betrayed by Arcita for his desire to marry Emily, whom Palamon claims as his own love: "Liar! / You foul, black, lying traitor, Arcita! / I've got you, you who love my lady so."<sup>84</sup> Palamon uses his anger and ill-feelings for Arcita as motivation to defeat Arcita in their joust, making the encounter entirely motivated by a personal quarrel. In their encounter on the tournament field, both men are filled with rage as they face one another:

No tiger in the vale of Gargophia  
Reft of its cub and turning on the hunter,  
Could have been crueller than Arcita  
In his jealous rage to Palamon.  
And there's no lion hunted in Benmarin  
More fell, more hunger-frenzied for its prey  
And thirty for its blood, than Palamon  
Out to kill Arcita, his enemy.<sup>85</sup>

This was true in the historical tournaments, as well, contributing to the high mortality and injury rate during the early years. The tournament was an easy

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 67.

cover up for the quarrels between already established rivalries. Because of personal feudal wars, tournaments frequently became violent and uncontrollable, leading to problems within the nearby towns and villages. This was one of the main reasons for its varying regulations, specifically prohibitions and regulations by Richard I and Edward I.<sup>86</sup>

Chaucer's tale shines a light on an important aspect of the tournament that had previously not been well documented or described in the romances—the physical space of the tournament. Chaucer carefully constructs the physicality of the tournament, allowing readers to envision the appearance of the arena. The arena that Theseus constructed in the narrative is extravagant, indeed. “And nowhere in the world, I dare aver, was to be seen a finer amphitheatre.”<sup>87</sup> Chaucer describes the amphitheater as being a mile in radius, completely lined with stone, and as round as a circle. The round amphitheater is delineated by a ditch and had a seating area that reached sixty feet high—so that wherever a spectator sat their view would not be obstructed. These stands were lavishly decorated with tapestries and cloth curtains with canopies over them, so women and other spectators were protected from the outside elements during the action.<sup>88</sup> As the popularity of the tournament increased with patronages from kings, barons and other members of nobility, the desire to entertain spectators increased with it, further transforming it into a social spectacle. Historical tournaments followed suit with Chaucer's tournament, increasingly adding stands

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<sup>86</sup> Keen, *Chivalry*, 86.

<sup>87</sup> Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, 69.

<sup>88</sup> Crouch, *Tournaments*, 81-2.

that towered over the fenced-in areas, allowing spectators to observe their favorite knights from a comfortable setting.

Everything about Chaucer's tournament was attractive and showy. Guests and spectators entered through a decorative, white, marble gate. There were carvings, sculptures, and pictures decorating his amphitheater, as well as altars dedicated to both Venus and Mars, that Chaucer describes as costing a wagonload of gold each.<sup>89</sup> Theseus, as an ideal knightly king, displays his largesse through the construction of his amphitheater—he hires experts in every craft to create such a lavish arena that no other arena could compare to it.

The “real” tournament itself became an extravagant affair, both to participate in and to host. From the mid-fourteenth century and on, knights were responsible for purchasing their own specialty jousting armor that would be fitted to their physique. They would also have the expense of supplying their own weaponry and horses. Naturally, this made the tournament an event that was open primarily to men of nobility, and participation in the tournament was strictly reserved to knights. Because of this, the later tournaments became a social gathering for the elite class and a marker of social identity—to participate in them after the thirteenth century demonstrated a man's right to mingle with a highly specific noble class.<sup>90</sup>

Chaucer's construction of the tournament in *The Knight's Tale* is reflective of this transformation into a social spectacle. He describes music, gift-giving, and

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<sup>89</sup> Venus, the goddess of love and Mars, the god of war. Combining these two gods, Chaucer is symbolizing the tournament as a place for both courtly love and war, further confirming its essentiality to chivalry.

<sup>90</sup> Keen, *Chivalry*, 90.



feasting. There is a competition to judge which of the lovely ladies can sing best, dance best, and love with the most feelings.<sup>91</sup> Not only is this indicative of the social spectacle that began to accompany tournaments; it is also reflective of the necessity men felt to impress others in aristocratic society. In Chaucer's story, Theseus' main concern is to create such a gathering that no others compare to it. He labors vigorously to accomplish this, housing and feeding many knights and erecting a stadium that was sure to impress everybody who attended, as well as everybody who would only hear tell of his illustrious occasion.

Even later historical accounts of the tournament increasingly began describing them as extravagant and social affairs. A contemporary of Chaucer, Jean Froissart, reveals a similar interest in the social distinctions that were apparent in tournaments. Froissart is known best for his descriptions of warfare and is sometimes referred to as a historian of the Hundred Years' War for his work *Chroniques*, or *Chronicles*. Froissart's goal was to record all the important events happening in western Europe within his lifetime.<sup>92</sup> Though he came from a money-lending family of businessmen, Froissart's talents with poetry landed him in many noble houses and courts like those of John of Hainault, King Edward III of England, and Robert de Namur of Flanders, where he began writing his *Chronicles* around 1369 or shortly after.<sup>93</sup> Froissart may have gotten his start entertaining Queen Philippa with love poetry and courtly literature, but his

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<sup>91</sup> Chaucer, *The Knights Tale*, 56.

<sup>92</sup> Jean Froissart, *Chronicles*, trans. Geoffrey Brereton (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1978), 14.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 10-13.

chronicles documenting the early years of the Hundred Years' War are written in prose.

In his chronicles, Froissart includes tales of tournament play, specifically the details of jousting at a tournament held by three French knights at Saint-Ingelvert, near Calais, shortly after a truce was made between England and France. Froissart writes:

...and we beg all those noble knights and foreign squires who are willing to come not to imagine for a moment that we are doing this out of pride, hatred, or malice, but in order to have the honour of their company and to get to know them better, a thing which we desire with our whole hearts. And none of our shields shall be covered with iron or steel, nor shall the shields of those who come to joust against us. Nor shall there be any other unfair advantage, fraud, trickery or evil design, nor anything not approved by those appointed by both sides to guard the lists.<sup>94</sup>

Perhaps most importantly, Froissart's description reiterates the idea that the tournaments of the fourteenth century have shifted from events providing training for war into social events. In Froissart's account, the French knights quickly state that their main impetus for holding a tournament was to get to know their opponents better, revealing the socialization that was anticipated to happen at such an event. Froissart's *Chronicles* support the contention that tournaments of the fourteenth century had become carefully planned festivals accompanied by feasts, dancing, and other sorts of entertainment. For example, a tournament held in 1390 by Richard II at Smithfield lasted three days with feasts and dancing after each day of jousting. Richard II gave out prizes to the lady who danced the best at his festivities.<sup>95</sup> The festivities accompanying tournaments offered a time

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<sup>94</sup> Froissart, *Chronicles*, 373.

<sup>95</sup> Sheila Lindenbaum, 'The Smithfield Tournament of 1390', *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, vol. 20 (1990), 1-21.

and place where knights and noble ladies could come together for an entertaining night full of food, drinking and dancing. Additionally, the grand ceremonial and banqueting halls that housed these festivities reflected the status of their owners, allowing another opportunity for hosts to impress their guests.<sup>96</sup>

Feasting, like knighthood, was a marker of social status and was an important part of the life of a knight. The feasts were an event that signified wealth and power, where knights exchanged gifts and partook in the entertainment of the night. As a social gathering, the feasts were an occasion for those participating to display their roles as lords, vassals, and ladies appropriately.<sup>97</sup> To be a guest at a feast, one would have had to attain a high enough social status. The accompanying tournaments were a chance for knights to publicly showcase their power and social status within a social gathering that was already reserved for a higher class.

Apart from the social aspect of the tournament, Froissart describes, in detail, what the standard joust encounters looked like, demonstrating why the introduction of the barrier between knights was needed. The most important reason for the barrier fence was perhaps the frequency of horses crossing into each other's path when knights charged at one another; such misfortunes are a common occurrence in Froissart's documented jousts. Without the fences, after a couple of encounters the knights would not have the opportunity to prove themselves because of the horses becoming agitated. The introduction of the

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<sup>96</sup> Coss, *The Knight*, 137.

<sup>97</sup> Constance Brittain Bouchard, *The Book of Knights: Heraldry, Chivalry and Combat in History and Legend* (Hove, United Kingdom: Global Book Publishing, 2009), 58.

fence improved the overall success of the joust as a place for knights to compete against one another to increase their reputation, thus contributing to its continuation even during the decline of chivalry.

The later rules and regulations of the tournament, more specifically the joust, are apparent in Froissart's account of the tournament at Saint-Inglevert. More importantly, in this text we also see Froissart's thoughts about a knight, Herr Hans, who performed an illegal blow that was unanimously condemned by all participating knights. Hans struck Boucicaut's helmet in a sideways maneuver, an improper thrust. Despite the offensive blow, the French knights decided to excuse him because he was a knight from the Queen of England's personal guard, demonstrating their own chivalric behavior. After begging to be allowed one more run, Hans jousted against Sir Regnault de Roye and this time, he was defeated, bringing much joy to the English.<sup>98</sup> Froissart's description of the incidents involving Herr Hans proves how serious following the rules of chivalry was for the knightly class. The English were pleased with Hans' defeat because he displayed unchivalrous acts by breaking the rules of the tournament, therefore neglecting his oath to the order of chivalry.

It is clear that by the fourteenth century, the literary description of the tournament became increasingly colorful and extravagant, focusing on the socialization aspect that was bound to occur. As part of this social spectacle, ladies observed eagerly from the stands as they watched their favorite knights compete for honor.

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<sup>98</sup> Froissart, *Chronicles*, 378-381.

## WOMEN AND THE LITERARY TOURNAMENT

**“For love and the advance of chivalry.”<sup>99</sup>**

Although the tournament was primarily a masculine activity, noblewomen participated in the tournament activities primarily through their attendance, which inspired and motivated knights. These women involved in the tournament have been acknowledged in passing as spectators of the tournament, but a thorough analysis of their presence at the tournament based on the way their attendance is represented in literary sources has yet been undertaken. With a deeper look into these sources, it is clear that women had a much more dynamic role within the tournaments of literature. Analyzing women in literary tournaments allows us to understand how writers, oftentimes men, viewed the women of aristocratic society. Women are essential for understanding courtly love and the relationships between men and women because of their active roles within the storylines of these romances. It can be argued that the tournaments of literature simply would not happen without a woman's influence, whether she is the inspiration behind a jousting duel or crucial for the construction a knight's identity. Furthermore, a

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<sup>99</sup> Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, 56.

female audience added to the courtly presentation of the tournaments of the fourteenth century, as they increasingly became ceremonial affairs.

Though women's involvement in the tournament was predominantly as a spectator, David Crouch observed, "the role of the spectator is not necessarily a passive one."<sup>100</sup> Women would have been expected to behave like spectators at any modern sporting event—loudly supporting their knights and commenting on the performances of the day. Through both literary and artistic sources, we see stands erected for spectators going back as far as the 1170s, which would have been built for women and heralds.<sup>101</sup> These stands were made so that women could easily look over the lists and observe the activities below. Together, women and heralds played an extremely vital role for the survival of the tournament, as they circulated information through society after the tournaments.<sup>102</sup> Women are mentioned as spectators at Chrétien's tournaments in *Knight of the Cart*, *Erec and Enide* and *Perceval*, even acting as organizers for the first-mentioned.<sup>103</sup>

Particularly influential regarding the presence of women at the tournaments could have been the works of the previously mentioned French author, Chrétien de Troyes. Chrétien was the first to include women at a tournament in his romances, *Knight of the Cart* (ca. 1170-80), including Queen Guinevere and her ladies at the tournament, with the ladies of Noauz and

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<sup>100</sup> Crouch, *Tournaments*, 157.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> See below for more on women as organizers for *Knight of the Cart*, 54-5.

Pomelegloi as patronesses.<sup>104</sup> Before *Knight of the Cart*, there was no evidence of ladies attending the events or accompanying activities, and spectators were hardly mentioned in the early sources of the tournament.<sup>105</sup>

Fighting for the love of a lady, a source of inspiration behind many literary tournaments, is illustrated in Chrétien's *Knight of the Cart*, more commonly known as *Lancelot. Knight of the Cart* follows the adulterous relationship between Lancelot, a renowned knight, and Queen Guinevere, King Arthur's wife. The first half of the story tells of Lancelot's journey to rescue Guinevere, who has been taken hostage by the evil prince Méléagant. Lancelot encounters many obstacles on his quest; he runs his horses to exhaustion, is tempted by lustful women, and faces many knightly duel encounters along the way. Lancelot, an ideal lover, is entirely inspired and motivated by his love for Guinevere, allowing him to face these obstacles with success. Lancelot is even willing to disgrace himself for this love— he risks his reputation as a valiant knight for the sake of love by riding in a cart<sup>106</sup> when his horse becomes exhausted in order to save his beloved, arguing introspectively between love and reason:

But Reason, who does not follow Love's command, told him to beware of getting in, and admonished and counselled him not to do anything for which he might incur disgrace or reproach. Reason, who dared tell him this, spoke from the lips, not from the heart; but Love, who held sway within his heart, urged and commanded him to climb into the cart at once. Because Love ordered and wished it, he jumped in; since Love ruled his action, the disgrace did not matter.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Keen, *Chivalry*, 91.

<sup>105</sup> Barker, *The Tournament in England*, 101.

<sup>106</sup> Carts were typically used to transport criminals in the Middle Ages. Lancelot's decision to ride in the cart damaged his reputation, thus leading to ridicule for majority of the narrative.

<sup>107</sup> Chrétien de Troyes, *Arthurian Romances*, 212.

Chrétien's use of love as a motivating factor for Lancelot shows both its positive and negative aspects regarding chivalric life. On one hand, Lancelot is greatly motivated to confront and succeed in any obstacles he encounters with the thought and therefore motivation of his lady on his mind. He has no fear for the knights he encounters on his way and meets all challenges presented to him with bravery and strength, traditional qualities associated with the chivalrous knight. With love for Guinevere consuming the entirety of his thoughts, Lancelot is not dissuaded or tempted by the obstacles he faces along his journey to save Guinevere. His lack of distractions leads him to success in rescuing his beloved lady.

On the other hand, Lancelot's dedication to Guinevere makes him behave foolishly. Early in the story, he becomes distracted with thoughts of her and risks his life by watching her in her window, thus leading him to his first challenge from a knight. Lancelot also risks his reputation as a respected knight, behaving mindlessly in these scenarios and causing disgrace to his reputation, a fate worse than death. Though his love for Guinevere drives his success in his endeavors, it also puts him in danger countless times throughout the narrative and threatens his reputation as a knight. In this way, Chrétien is reflecting the traits of courtly love, where passion engulfs Lancelot's body and soul and causes him to forget all reason because of his lovesickness for Guinevere.

Lancelot and Guinevere share a passionate night with each other when they reunite in Méléagant's kingdom. Guinevere is accused of adultery and Lancelot, being the chivalrous knight, declares he will fight for Guinevere's honor



in a year's time. Méléagant, however, kidnaps Lancelot and the second half of the narrative is focused around Lancelot as a prisoner of Méléagant. While incarcerated, Lancelot hears talk of a tournament being held at Noauz which the Queen Guinevere was rumored to attend. After befriendng the guard's wife, he convinces her to allow him to go participate in this tournament by promising that he will return to her as soon as the tournament has ended. She gives Lancelot her husband's armor and horse and he leaves for the tournament at Noauz. As a disguised knight, Lancelot performs extremely well at the tournament and nobody could take their eyes off him. Though he is disguised, Guinevere immediately recognizes Lancelot from his great prowess on the tournament field. To confirm that the disguised knight is Lancelot, Guinevere sends a messenger to instruct him to "do his worst."<sup>108</sup> Lancelot, risking his reputation and credibility as a chivalrous knight, follows her commands and performs very poorly.

Those participating in and watching the tournament spend the following day commenting on the anonymous knight's cowardice as he fled the attacks during the tournament: "Cowardice owns him completely. She has found a host who loves and serves her so faithfully that he has lost all his honour for her sake."<sup>109</sup> But Lancelot did not care what others said about him—his only desire was to please Guinevere, whether that be through performing poorly or magnificently according to her requests. Lancelot's disregard for his reputation is caused by his blind love and devotion for Guinevere. By giving Lancelot these traits, Chrétien reflects another trait of courtly love poetry; Lancelot, out of

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 276.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 278.

devotion and lovesickness, behaves as Guinevere's servant to prove his valor.

After the tournament Lancelot returns to Méléagant, keeping his promise to the seneschal's wife. Méléagant locks Lancelot up in a stone tower.

Méléagant's sister, for whom Lancelot did a favor in the beginning of the story, rescues him from the tower. Lancelot stays with her until he is back to full health and then sets off to return to King Arthur's court, just in time for his rematch with Méléagant. Everybody at Arthur's court is ecstatic to see Lancelot, especially Queen Guinevere, who finds it hard to not act upon her joy at seeing Lancelot again. Chrétien writes:

And was the Queen not there amid all this joy? Indeed she was, and among the first. Heavens, where else would she be? Never had she experienced greater joy than what she felt now at his return—how could she have stayed away? To tell the truth, she was so near him that she could scarcely restrain her body (and nearly didn't!) from following her heart to him. Where then was her heart?<sup>110</sup>

It is important here to point out that in many of the scenarios found in this romance, love causes Lancelot to behave blindly and foolishly, completely disregarding all sound reason out of desire for Guinevere. In contrast, however, Guinevere behaves quite reasonably regarding her display of love, suppressing both her emotions and physical affections. Revisiting the dichotomy between love and reason, Chrétien has Guinevere restrain from expressing her feelings:

No indeed, not in the least; rather, she hesitated because the others present would immediately perceive her love if, in sight of all, she were to do everything her heart desired. And if Reason had not subdued these foolish thoughts and this love-madness, everyone present would have understood her feelings. O, height of folly! In this way Reason encompassed and bound her foolish heart and thoughts, and brought her to her senses, postponing the full display of affections until she could find

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 291.

a better and more private place where they might reach a safer harbor than they would have now.<sup>111</sup>

Chrétien portraying Guinevere as the rational, sensible one in the relationship is a direct inversion of what would have been the social norm of the period.

Although Guinevere ultimately commits adultery with Lancelot, she is careful to hide her feelings for him in front of others, knowing that it would undeniably ruin her reputation.

Chrétien's representation of Guinevere and Lancelot regarding their outward expressions of love runs counter to the contemporaneous ideas about women and love. It appears that perhaps Chrétien holds Guinevere to a higher standard than Lancelot regarding the suppression of emotional expression, either because she is the queen or simply because she is a woman. Showing Guinevere's rationality over foolish love would have been very progressive for the twelfth century. Courtly love stories often contradicted contemporary ideas about marriage, sexuality and love by featuring stories about strong, assertive women who threatened the typical patriarchal ideas about male supremacy and dominance.

More than likely influencing Chrétien's decision to include such a strong woman—Guinevere—was the patronage of Countess Marie de Champagne, to whom Chrétien dedicates *Knight of the Cart* to in the introduction. After Marie's husband died, she encountered many obstacles because of her sex; she was unable to collect tolls or enforce marriage agreements her husband had made for

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

their children.<sup>112</sup> The relationship between patron and author is clear with *The Knight of the Cart*; Chrétien states that he is simply elaborating both the material and interpretation that Marie wanted. Perhaps by patronizing stories that featured strong women, Marie was hopeful of increasing women's autonomy and reputations within society.<sup>113</sup>

Chrétien's stories also contradict an understood concept of courtly love by showing the negative effects that love for a woman can have on a knight, countering the idea that a woman's love improves a knight's chivalrousness. Love was meant to greatly improve the ambitions of a knight, inspiring him to be an honorable man through his actions. The stories of romance literature involved knights on great adventures, fighting in the names of their ladies. Chrétien's stories, however, also include the perils of women's influence on a knight's actions. His stories often examine the dichotomy between love and reason, perhaps in an attempt to expose the dangers that could be associated with allowing one's heart to rule one's actions.

For example, in *Erec and Enide*, Erec becomes uninterested in regard to feats of arms and knighthood because he is so infatuated with his new bride, Enide, that he would rather spend all of his time with her, thus neglecting his duties within the order of chivalry. Erec was "so in love with her that he cared no more for arms, nor did he go to tournaments. He no longer cared for tourneying..."<sup>114</sup> The other knights grieved at what had become of Erec. Enide is

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<sup>112</sup> June Hall McCash, "Cultural Patronage: An Overview," in *The Cultural Patronage of Medieval Women*, ed. June Hall McCash (Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 1996), 18.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>114</sup> Chrétien de Troyes, *Arthurian Romances*, 67.

very distressed when she hears talk of what the people say about her husband, privately lamenting and blaming herself for what had become of Erec. Chrétien has her say:

Wretch...unhappy me! Why did I come here from my land? The earth should truly swallow me up, since the very best of knights—the boldest and the bravest, the most loyal, the most courteous that was ever count or king—has completely abandoned all chivalry because of me.<sup>115</sup>

Per Chrétien, tournaments were clearly a vital component of chivalry. Erec's reputation is diminished simply because he no longer partakes in arms competitions due to his devotion for Enide. Lack of participation in the tournaments significantly impacts Erec's reputation as a chivalrous knight, which in turn embarrasses his wife Enide. Though he still exemplifies his courtly love for Enide and his largesse by supplying his knight's with arms, clothing, and deniers for tournaments, making them "the most richly appareled and equipped,"<sup>116</sup> knights still looked upon Erec shamefully for his lack of participation himself. His renown had greatly declined, causing distress to both him and Enide. By not participating in the tournament, Erec had destroyed the reputation he built up through successful deeds of arms, but the blame is still put on Enide. It is through these deeds and one-on-one combats that his reputation is regained in the conclusion of the story.

It is heavily implied through Chrétien's romances that enhancing one's reputation was one of the main motivators for performing well at the tournament. Another of Chrétien's romances, *Cligès*, makes this same point. What is different

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 67.

in this romance, however, is that Cligès hopes to increase his reputation in the tournament not to climb a social ladder, but to impress the woman he has fallen in love with: “And he, for love of her, fought bravely for all to see, so that she might hear tell only of his strength and skill...”<sup>117</sup> Chrétien describes Cligès’ beloved as “a perfect love for him, since she both feared his death and sought his glory.”<sup>118</sup> The ideal woman, then, was the one who supported her husband in all of his endeavors, cheering him on to success and glory, while also loving him so fiercely that she feared losing him in the battles that she cheered him on in. With this understanding, it could be argued that the ladies attending tournaments were the wives of the participating knights or ladies of the court, who could potentially find husbands among the knights.

In *Knight of the Cart*, Chrétien has the Queen’s ladies and maidens organizing the tournament, in hopes of finding husbands to combat the loneliness they experience with a lack of a comfortable husband. Those organizing the tournament refuse to speak to the participants who perform poorly in the tournament, and like in the already established literary tradition, grant their love to those who performed well. Performance at a tournament, then, was a deciding factor for Chrétien’s ladies in when choosing to favor a specific knight. The ladies, however, reject marriage from any of the knights and desire Lancelot instead. With this, Chrétien is also portraying Lancelot as a chivalrous knight, showing that he is desirable by the ladies observing and thus displaying his courteousness. A knight’s masculinity would have been partially determined by

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 158.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 169.

his interactions with women, particularly how he treated them.<sup>119</sup> The ideal man would be not only be a good fighter but also one who knew how to behave appropriately at court. Since one of the principal duties of the knight, according to the order of chivalry, was to protect the weaker members of society (women, children, and the sickly), a knight's behavior towards women at court was a defining factor for measuring his chivalrousness.<sup>120</sup> The knight who attracted the attention and favor of a lady simultaneously demonstrated to other knights his ability to behave properly with women. Without a lady's favor, a knight would have been believed to be lesser than his companions, regardless of his military strength and prowess.<sup>121</sup>

Chrétien's tale also appears to give autonomy to the ladies, implying that they would have had the ability to choose a lover when, in reality, marriages in medieval society were typically arranged by a woman's male guardians and the woman would not have a choice in the matter.<sup>122</sup> The agency depicted in Chrétien's women when it comes to choosing a husband, again, could have been inspired by Marie's desire to include strong women in the narrative.

A contemporaneous author of Chrétien's—Marie de France—gives us a female perspective on the subject of marriage, love, and adultery in her *Lais*. Marie was a French poet and noblewoman living at an English court. Though the exact court she resided in is unknown, Marie's works were openly dedicated to a

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<sup>119</sup> Karras, *From Boys to Men*, 25.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>122</sup> For more on medieval marriage traditions see; Emilie Amt, *Women's Lives in Medieval Europe* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

king, largely thought by modern scholars to be King Henry II of England.<sup>123</sup> Marie de France's *Lais* are filled with numerous examples women and their unique roles in courtly romances. Marie de France is the first female author of romance literature that we know of, making an analysis of a woman's view of chivalry in her work indispensable. Her writings about chivalry and romance, along with her portrayal of female characters, are somewhat different from those written by contemporaneous male authors, such as Chrétien de Troyes. Marie de France gives her female characters active roles in her stories; the women are often resourceful and central to developing the plots and resolving the conflicts in the narratives. Analyzing these short stories on romantic themes, we can see the societal roles and expectations of noblewomen in both the tournament setting and courtly love literary tradition.

Like many of her tales, *lai Chaitivel* (*The Unfortunate One*), documents women's roles in chivalry. Paying special attention to the way women participated in courtly love, Marie specifically includes a woman as inspiration for a tournament in this story. *Chaitivel* is about a lady of great nobility who was admired for her beauty, social grace, and education, leading her to have many willing suitors. The narrative of this story claims that there was no knight in the region that met her and "did not fall in love with her and woo her."<sup>124</sup> The beautiful lady is loved by and returns love for four knights, all "worthy and valiant knights, generous, courtly, and liberal with their money."<sup>125</sup> The worthiness of the

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<sup>123</sup> Marie de France, *The Lais of Marie de France*, trans. Edward J Gallagher (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company Inc., 2010), Introduction.

<sup>124</sup> Marie de France, *The Lais*, 65.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*



knights causes the lady much distress, for she finds herself unable to choose the best one of the four. The notion of a lady being the inspiration for knightly combat is evident here: “In knightly combat, each one wanted to be first in fighting well, if he could, in order to please the lady.”<sup>126</sup> The noblewoman allows each knight to believe that she loves him, motivating them all to perform courageously at the tournament. This can be interpreted several ways. Having been written by a woman, it is possible to interpret this in a way that glorifies the woman of the story and gives her autonomy within the story’s development. This is countering to the social norm— Marie gives the woman a very active role in the story, which is regularly done within her *lais*. In *Chaitivel*, the noblewoman has power over the four men, causing them to fight to win her love. Somewhat unique for Marie’s tale is that the woman is not being awarded as a prize to the best competitor. Rather, it is a chance for her to observe the knights and decide which one she deems is the worthiest of her love. Marie gives the noblewoman a sense of agency in choosing their own fate regarding her love or marital partners.

Through Marie’s *Chaitivel* we can also observe the token-giving tradition that was common for both real and literary tournaments. All considering the beautiful lady their beloved, each knight “wore the love tokens she had given him—a ring, or a sleeve, or a pennon,” all “[invoking] her name.”<sup>127</sup> Knights who participated in the tournament followed this tradition of wearing tokens of their beloved ladies while performing, shown in the literature, art, and historical sources. Token granting in the tournament was representative of the granting of

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 66.

a lady's favor. These tokens were often intimate and personal items such as veils, sleeves, chemises, hats, and other clothing.<sup>128</sup> This tradition was perhaps the most apparent and direct presence of ladies in the tournament play, intertwining with their roles as spectators. Women held an active role in the tournament tradition, publicly declaring their favor to a certain knight before the tournament started. Young people in medieval society often exchanged personal love gifts, promising intimacy to one another. It was believed that these exchanged gifts could have magical connotations and protection for their loved ones.<sup>129</sup> Thus, knights went into the tournament carrying the sleeves or inscribed gifts of their lady's, knowing that they would be protected by their beloved during the events. This directly flips the stereotypical belief that knights were the protectors; in the token-giving tradition, women were the protectors of their knights as they went off to battle.

Knights often wore tokens from several different ladies simultaneously. For example, in his biography, Jacques de Lalaing (1421-1453), an exemplary Burgundian knight, participated in a joust before the King of France, wearing tokens from both the duchess of Orleans and Calabria. Jacques caught the ladies' attention by being courageous and courteous.<sup>130</sup> As part of courtly love tradition, it was customary for knights to be flirtatious with the ladies without compromising their honor and eligibility to marry by "taking" their maidenhood.

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<sup>128</sup> Barker, *The Tournament in England*, 107.

<sup>129</sup> Roberta Gilchrist, *Medieval Life: Archaeology and the Life Course* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK: The Boydell Press, 2016), 110.

<sup>130</sup> Keen, *Chivalry*, 201; *Le livre des faits de Jacques de Lalaing*, in *Oeuvres de Chastellain*, ed. K. de Lettenhove, VIII (Brussels), 1866), 48-55.

Wearing their tokens was an accepted method of flirtatious behavior because it did not ruin a lady's honor.<sup>131</sup>

A lady whose knight performed well at the tournament or joust was honored by her knight wearing her tokens.<sup>132</sup> This shows a reciprocal relationship between a knight and his lady, in which both parties could advance socially by his performance. A knight's prowess and a lady's love existed in a cyclical fashion; a knight performed great deeds, which stimulated a lady's favor and tokens, which then motivated him to perform better.<sup>133</sup> A lady was necessary for symbolizing a knight's prowess on the tournament fields.

The essentiality for a woman in constructing a knight's identity is presented in Marie de France's *lai Guigemar*, which unsurprisingly includes the romantic theme of knights fighting in a jousting competition in order to win a lady's love. *Guigemar* follows the tale of a knight who embodies all of the necessary traits of a chivalrous knight apart from his failure to love. In the story, Guigemar goes for a hunt and shoots an arrow at a hind, which rebounds and punctures him in his own thigh. The hind tells Guigemar that his wound will only be healed when he meets a woman with whom he will share a mutual love that causes them both to suffer. Guigemar gets onto a ship and falls asleep; he is awoken in a foreign land by an unhappily married queen and her maid, who nurse him back to health. Shortly after, Guigemar finds himself troubled because of his love for the Queen, who, unbeknownst to him, reciprocates his love. He is

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<sup>131</sup> Christine Sciacca, *Illuminating Women in the Medieval World* (Los Angeles: J Paul Getty Museum, 2017), 62.

<sup>132</sup> Karras, *From Boys to Men*, 49.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

invited to join the Queen at her court where they have an affair for a year. To prove their loyalty, Guigemar puts a special belt on the Queen only he can undo, and she ties his shirt in a knot only she can undo. The King discovers their affair and sends Guigemar away and locks the Queen up in a tower, where she contemplates suicide for two years. Finally, the Queen escapes and boards a ship she recognizes as the one Guigemar was sent away on. The boat delivers the Queen to Brittany, where she is held captive by the Lord Meriaduc. Meriaduc falls in love with the Queen, but because of Guigemar's belt he is unsuccessful in any advancements towards her. Later in the story, Guigemar is invited to a jousting tournament hosted by Meriaduc, who is aware of the knots between the two lovers and assumes their association with one another.

After they successfully untie one another's knots, Meriaduc challenges Guigemar in a joust for the lady: "I found her, I will keep her, and against you I shall fight for her,"<sup>134</sup> representing the woman as an object over which a battle is fought. Guigemar organizes a tournament with the intention of recruiting allies to fight with him in his forthcoming war against Meriaduc. In the fashion of courtly poetry, Guigemar defeats every knight that he encounters that comes to joust at the tournament. Each defeated knight swears his allegiance to Guigemar, ultimately leading to the successful siege of Meriaduc's castle and Meriaduc's death. Thus, Guigemar was successful both in proving his love for his lady during the tournament and in releasing her from her suffering by killing her captor. Not only is Guigemar able to free the Queen, he also improves his status as a knight

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 15.

by opening his heart to love, thus fulfilling the final component to complete his chivalrousness.

Although the woman in the story of *Guigemar* is still objectified as property eligible to be won by martial competition, Marie gives her an essentiality to the culmination of the story. In particular, she is key to the resolution of the conflict—Guigemar’s neglect of his knightly duties to love a woman. The reciprocal love between Guigemar and the woman is ultimately what heals him in the end. Without her, Guigemar would have suffered a life a misery from his illness. Not only that, but the Queen is responsible for guiding Guigemar through his advance into chivalric knighthood.

An interesting element to Marie de France’s *lais* is that the tournament is often the culminating event leading to the ending theme of her story, reflecting the Arthurian motif of the knight in shining armor coming to rescue the damsel in distress. Contrasting to the tournaments of both Chrétien de Troyes, which are typically just passing scenes of the stories (though pertinent nonetheless), the tournaments in Marie’s stories are the settings for the peak of the story’s plotlines, often leading to the resolution of the conflict and the conclusion of the story. They are essential to the narrative Marie tells, and essential to the ideas she is trying to convey.

The presence of ladies at a historical tournament is confirmed in William Marshal’s biography, composed in the 1220s and commissioned by his son.<sup>135</sup> Marshal started out as a penniless knight in the reign of King Henry II

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<sup>135</sup> Nigel Bryant, trans. *The Biography of William Marshal* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK: The Boydell Press, 2016), introduction.

Plantagenet (1154-1189). He made an early career out of fighting in tournaments in the 1160-70s. His success led him to a life of financial comfort, and he even ended up as regent of England in King Henry III's reign in the early 1200s.<sup>136</sup> Marshal's biography is the earliest surviving biography of a knight. Written in the vernacular, Marshal's biography was highly accessible to the literate members of society. The biography is undoubtedly heavily biased, revealing only the positive attributes of Marshal as a knight. That does not, however, destroy its credibility as an important source for studying medieval culture. Rather, this alone can reveal a lot about society's ideology of the exemplary knight by analyzing what Marshal's biographer chose to include.

The biography includes some of the most descriptive accounts of a knight's life, including tournaments and the crusades. Marshal's biography reveals fundamental knowledge about the perceptions and attitudes of the time. The fact that this biography contains exaggerated traits of the knight, in fact, supports the notion that it was a knight's aspiration to behave like their romance heroes, as William Marshal was described as being the greatest knight of all time. This biography was written to further acknowledge the chivalric values that William Marshal displayed, adding to his reputation and creating an eternal memory of him that comes from a biography. Marshal's biography is also an indispensable source when it comes to studying the history of women's involvement within the tournament.

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<sup>136</sup> Barber, *Tournaments*, 2.

William Marshal's biographer gives special attention to the ladies attending the tournament at Joigny in 1180. William and his knights were waiting outside the lists for their opponents when the countess and her company of ladies "of flawless beauty and gorgeous attire and the utmost wit and charm" joined them.<sup>137</sup> The knights, having been informed that their opponents outnumbered them greatly, were much relieved after hearing of the ladies' arrival. It is said "the ladies redoubled their strength, the spirit, the courage and the heart of every knight present."<sup>138</sup>

This passage from the account of the Joigny tournament seems as though it was written explicitly to demonstrate that the knights who had been engaged with the ladies prior to the start of the tournament did much better than their opponents, regardless of them being outnumbered. The outcome of the contest, as it was reported in the biography, supports this:

And those who'd been dancing with the ladies put their all into it—body, heart and soul—and performed so magnificently that their opponents were in awe....

It was a brilliant contest, with many fine deeds of arms that day, but the knights who'd enjoyed the company of the ladies overcame all opposition.<sup>139</sup>

The excerpt presents the ladies as a source of inspiration for knights to perform greater feats of arms since, according to the chivalric literature, a lady would bestow her favor upon the most valiant knight. The account of the Joigny tournament encouraged the presence of women at the tournament under the rationalization that knights performed better when they attended. It is interesting

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<sup>137</sup> Bryant, *The Biography of William Marshal*, 63.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

that the most deliberate inclusion of women's influence on the knights' performances comes from a historical biography; perhaps Marshal's biographer was influenced by the romance stories and wanted to portray his knight in the same fashion as a romance hero. Moreover, what it does confirm is that by the thirteenth century, ladies as spectators of the tournaments was a documented tradition that was increasing in popularity, shortly after the composition of Chrétien's romance stories.

This ideals and courtly love traditions continue on into the literature of the fourteenth century. Reflecting the Arthurian romances, fighting for the attention of a lady was the central theme in Chaucer's *The Knight's Tale*. Having Emily as a prize for the winner of the joust reinforces the idea that a woman's role in the literary tournament or jousting is essentially to reward the winner. This, however, was probably not a completely accurate representation of reality. Though women are described as the object to reward the winner of a tournament, there is no evidence that a marriage with a woman was ever awarded to the winner of the tournaments; this was very much a courtly love tradition inspired by the troubadours. In reality, knights would have been gifted precious jewels as prizes for performing the most valiantly in the tournament competition.<sup>140</sup> Aside from the tangible products won at tournaments, knights were mostly concerned with winning honor and renown by performing admirably.

Nonetheless, even if marriage were not the result of such a contest, jousting and the tournament were both closely associated with fighting for the

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<sup>140</sup> Barber, *Tournaments*, 11.



favor of or attention from a lady, a strong element of chivalry that is frequently depicted in the medieval courtly romances, allowing women a unique role in the tournament and chivalry. Since women played such an active role in the romances as the mistress or the damsel in distress, it is not surprising that this translated into a growing involvement in the tournament and chivalric activities of the day. It comes as no surprise that it was during the reign of Edward III and Philippa of Hainault that ladies were most regularly mentioned as spectators at the tournament.<sup>141</sup>

Edward III was known to order the presence of ladies at his tournament. In 1342, five hundred ladies from high lineage came to attend a joust he held in honor of the Countess of Salisbury. While the King and his knights feasted, the Queen and the ladies banqueted in the great hall at Windsor Castle.<sup>142</sup> So, Barker suggests that although ladies were an essential inclusion in the tournament and its accompanying events, the two sexes remained separate during the festivities due to the concerns about lustful intermingling and the possibilities of damaging a lady's reputation. This practice also reiterates the courtly love ethos that was central to both the tournament and chivalry.

The intermingling of sexes at the tournament could be detrimental to a woman's reputation. Within a book of moral instruction written in 1371, a French knight—Geoffrey de La Tour Landry—warns his three daughters about the dangers associated with the jousts, mostly echoing the church's concerns about

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<sup>141</sup> Barker makes special note that this could potentially be due to the increase in chroniclers' interest in the tournament, not necessarily that they did not enjoy the spectacle prior to Edward's reign, it was only just then being recorded; *The Tournament in England*, 102.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

lustful sinning.<sup>143</sup> As a book of moral instruction, *The Book of the Knight of the Tower* was copied many times throughout the following centuries. Much like the romances, it presents an idealized picture of how young noblewomen in medieval society should behave. Still, it reveals the values and daily concerns for a family within the nobility. Geoffrey de La Tour Landry tells his daughters not to be “over-desirous” of going to jousts and their associated feasts because it is where many “good ladies and gentle-women lose their reputations.”<sup>144</sup> However, if a woman’s husband insisted she go, she must obey. In this case, he warns his daughters to stay away from the dancing and singing that accompanies the tournaments because that is where the reputations get ruined. By staying with her relatives or servants, a lady will “keep her honor, her name, and her good reputation against liars who will always say evil things and forget the good.”<sup>145</sup> So while knights were strongly encouraged to attend jousting and the tournament festivities to increase their reputations, we see the potentiality for women to be discouraged from participating in the events because they could potentially ruin or diminish their reputations, thus making themselves unmarriageable.

Even so, the splendor of the tournament increased with the desire to entertain a female audience. Perhaps more importantly was the patronage of both Queens Philippa and Isabella, who supported courtly literature as well as the tournament. The cultural patronage of women provided the opportunity for noblewomen to have their voices heard and their interests expressed. With what

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<sup>143</sup> Refer above to “General History of the Tournament” for an overview of the church’s concerns.

<sup>144</sup> Emilie Amt, *Women’s Lives*, 129.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*

we know about literary patronage, we can assume that both the tournament, and more specifically courtly love literature, were both things that these women were interested in, based on the argument that authors wrote about what interested their patrons. As is well known, Chrétien dedicated his infamous story of Lancelot and Guinevere to Marie de Champagne. By patronizing Chrétien's story, Marie had the ability to choose what she wanted to be disseminated into society; it is in this form that she aimed at increasing the reputation of women.

Chroniclers began inserting women into their descriptions of tournaments, showing that this was a real tradition. Specifically, inspiration from female spectators is briefly mentioned in Froissart's *Chronicles* with his documentation of the tournament held at Saint-Inglevert. Froissart's *Chronicles* document one hundred and thirty-six jousting encounters against the three French knights. One of these encounters is between an English knight, Sir Godfrey Seton, and a French knight, Sir Regnault de Roye. Froissart describes them both as being gallant knights and great jousters. Froissart expressed a little favoritism towards Regnault, however, describing him as the strongest and toughest jouster in France. The reason for this was that Regnault was "truly in love with a gay and beautiful young lady," and this "contributed greatly to his success" in every joust and knightly encounter he faced.<sup>146</sup> So, even in the historical chronicles about tournaments, we see the influence a woman's love had on knight's ability to perform successfully. More importantly, we see that even the men writing chronicles felt that this was an important component to add, greatly increasing

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<sup>146</sup> Froissart, *Chronicles*, 377.

the relevance of courtly love within the chivalric knightly lifestyle. This tradition was a commonly occurring theme for the romances, inspiring knights to find love not out of romantic feelings and desire, but out of necessity within knightly culture.<sup>147</sup>

Not only are women almost always included as a component of the tournament in romances and eventually, chronicles, they are also featured prominently in the illuminated manuscripts that artfully illustrate these stories. Keeping in mind that the manuscripts were the exact texts for the owners and readers to experience these stories, we can see exactly how those people would have received them, providing insight primarily on the perceptions of literature in medieval society.<sup>148</sup> Illuminated manuscripts offer additional commentary for the texts they accompany, and it was common for the artists of the manuscripts to depict favorite scenes of the stories.<sup>149</sup> The illuminated illustrations of the tournaments in romance stories and chronicles almost always include women as spectators in the background, further attesting that the inclusion of women in the stories and portrayals was essential for the imagination of the tournament.

For example, in this fifteenth century illumination of Froissart's documentation of the tournament at Saint-Ingelvert, women and courtiers are colorfully portrayed in the audience as enthusiastic spectators:

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<sup>147</sup> Karras, *From Boys to Men*, 50.

<sup>148</sup> Sylvia Huot, "The manuscript context of medieval romance," in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance* ed. Roberta L Krueger (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 75.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.



Figure 1: London, British Library, Harley MS 4379 f. 43

<https://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&IllID=28394>

As a social gathering, the festivities accompanying the tournaments were a chance for lords and ladies to gather to socialize with and impress other members of the nobility. Anticipating the social networking that was typical at a gathering of this kind, the ladies and courtiers are dressed in formal attire in the hope of increasing their personal social status. While Froissart's written account of the tournament does not blatantly include women as spectators, this artistic illumination of it eighty years after he wrote his chronicles confirms that at least by the late fifteenth century, it was understood that women were a necessary and regular component in the audience of a tournament. Not only that, but it is obvious that, by this time, the tournament tradition was undergoing its transition into a social gathering that accompanied a competition of military prowess.

Sometimes, it is not the artistic renditions of the narratives that provide insight into medieval thought and culture but the bizarre imagery that appears in the margins of the illuminations of certain stories. For example, in the margins of

an Arthurian romance drawn sometime between 1270 and 1290 is a drawing featuring a woman jousting a knight on horseback. Instead of a lance, however, the woman is using a distaff as a weapon as she charges at the knight:



Figure 2: Paris, France, la Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Département des Manuscrits, MS Français 95, f. 226r.  
<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b6000108b/f459.image.r=estoire.langFR?lang=EN>

This image could be interpreted several ways. Although the women of Arthurian romances are given somewhat less oppressed positions in the stories, the depictions of them in medieval marginal art has misogynistic undertones. It is known that the margins of manuscripts depict the marginalized members of medieval society, featuring grotesques and satirical images.<sup>150</sup> In this case, the artist responsible for creating these images could have been making a parody of the knightly class itself, perhaps showing a parody of chivalry by having a knight face someone weaker than him that he could undoubtedly defeat—a woman. Thus, showing a knight's true cowardice but using images of his recreational habits of jousting and hunting.<sup>151</sup> Also possible, the artist could have been presenting the woman as committing an unchivalrous act, as the knight she faces

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<sup>150</sup> Michael Camille, *Image on the Edge: The Margins of Medieval Art* (London, United Kingdom: Reaktion Books, 1992), Kindle Edition, 1336.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

is weaponless. In this way, the artist both satirizes the knightly class while also depicting the woman in a negative way. Hesitant to use such an inappropriate weapon—a lance—for a woman, the artist instead chose to portray her with a distaff, a common cultural symbol of a woman's traditional work of spinning wool, which most women would have been familiar and comfortable with.

## CONCLUSION

In reality, it is naive to believe that knights lived up to all of the values encompassed in the ideology of chivalry. Nevertheless, their lives were undoubtedly shaped by the chivalric expectations displayed through the literature produced and circulated within society. Knights were exposed to the stories of great knights from early childhood as authors painted vivid pictures of what it meant to be chivalrous. The authors of the romance literature always included the way knights honored and treated ladies as a major component of their stories. Literature explored the relationships between knights and ladies as part of the romance tradition, promoting the idea that ladies needed protecting, and that knights should always honor and respect them. The romances were immensely popular. They were copied and circulated widely, reaching various audiences and spreading their ideals. These romances were useful in educating conventional customs to their contemporaneous readers. They are additionally useful for helping later generations understand the important ideals of those living in medieval society.

Chivalry was what differentiated knights from the average foot-soldier. The tournament, as the ideal place for the representation of courtly love, was central to chivalric literature. There is a strong correlation between the romance and



courtly love literature and the reality of the later tournaments and jousts, and chivalric literature provided a framework for the culture and society of the Middle Ages. Women were necessary in the literary depiction of the tournament, acting as not only inspiration to perform better, but also as symbolic protection for the knights tourneying. For many of these stories, the women were also essential for the creation of a knight's identity, as well as to the plot's storyline.

The presence of ladies at tournament was vital for the survival of the tournament, allowing it to continue even centuries past its role as a training for war. With an increase in a female audience, the tournament transitioned into entertainment for members of an elite class. Women were the witnesses of chivalric behavior of the knights—they were vital for the memory of the tournament both contemporarily with medieval society and for those looking retrospectively. Perhaps most importantly, women were essential for completing a knight's identity. The romance literature is filled with social commentaries about a society in which they valued a code of conduct to live by.

As one can see, women had a much more active role in the literary tournament than as previously believed and are often essential to the plotlines. Not only were they oftentimes the sole motivation behind holding jousts, they also inspired knights to perform more successfully in combat. The tradition of token-giving symbolically protected a knight in his endeavors, while also increasing the success of his performance in the tournament competitions. The fact that the most deliberate mentioning of the advantages of having women at a tournament was in the historical biography of William Marshal concludes that it

was a real tradition and that many authors (and knights) believed that women brought about inspiration and motivation for knight to perform their chivalric duties more successfully.

Combining new analyses of these romances and discoveries in the field of medieval history through changes in interpretations, we can challenge previous assumptions about medieval society and culture and move toward a more complete idea of how their society functioned, with an increased understanding of their cultural ethics. Through the analysis of the role of women in chivalric knighthood and in the tournament of medieval romance literature, scholars can better understand the culture and customs of knightly society. Given the popularity of the romances and the quantity that have survived over the centuries, there is always ample opportunity to examine them with new interpretations.

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