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NARRATIVE TREASON AND SOVEREIGN FORM IN CHRÉTIEN DE TROYES'S *CLIGÉS*

Kristen Lee Over

With a careful and schematic structure common to all of Chrétien de Troyes's romances, *Cligés* is divided into two distinct parts.¹ The focus here will be on the first, which, comprising almost one third of the romance, recounts the love and eventual marriage between Alixandre of Constantinople and Soredamors of King Arthur's court. This alliance not only solidifies a union between kings but also perpetuates the narrative by engendering Cligés, the son of Alixandre and Soredamors and hero of the second part of the romance. Within the first part of Chrétien's binary format, the story of Alixandre and Soredamors itself oscillates between scenes of feudal insurrection and courtly love. As rhythmic alternation between the vassal relationship of Alixandre to King Arthur and the parallel relationships of both Alixandre and Soredamors to the personified figure of Love eventually culminates in the cohesion of marriage, the movement of Chrétien's narrative constructs and rewards successful alliances between feudal, hierarchical couples. Both king and Love honor fidelity and violently punish treason, and the first part of *Cligés* resembles a highly structured, regimented exemplum of submission that valorizes the feudal couple.²

¹ For a discussion of each of Chrétien's romances as fundamentally bipartite, see Roger Dragonetti, *La vie de la lettre au Moyen Age* (Paris: Seuil, 1980), 13-19. See also Donald Maddox, "Trois sur deux: Théories de bipartition et de tripartition des œuvres de Chrétien," *Œuvres et critiques* 5 (1978): 91-102.

² Both King Arthur and Love seem also to provide a rather pointed exemplum of political power, and as such both emphasize Chrétien's own authorial power. By not publically dedicating *Cligés*, Chrétien himself seems to remain outside any feudal contract. Although regionally affiliated with the Capetian dynasty, he is clearly not obliged to flatter the King of France, Louis VII: depicting a king who promptly and succinctly subdues a rebel count, Chrétien calls attention to Louis's inability to exact feudal obligation from his Norman vassal, Henry Plantagenet. On the complexities of the Franco-Norman feudal relationship, see C. Warren Hollister, "Normandy, France

Chrétien's careful attention to formal structure encloses and stabilizes his narrative in much the same way as the feudal contract tied together the relatively autonomous regional principalities of late twelfth-century France. Although conflict between regionally divided powers characterized medieval France, the binding contract of the feudal relationship, which exchanged subordinated service for favor, both ordered and defined the elite ruling class. Chrétien's emphasis on the contract in the first part of *Cligés*—whether in terms of Alixandre's faithful service to the king or the treasonable land-dispute between Arthur and Count Angrès—clearly reinforces the social importance of the hierarchical, feudal contract between king and vassal. Parallel to the figure of King Arthur, personified Love also embodies this sovereign power to construct and enforce his own superior position in a contractual couple: regulating passion, Love commands fealty and avenges felony with an aggression that rivals that of Arthur himself. Indeed, combat against an abrogated contract is the essential event of the first part of the romance, and complete submission to the dominion of both Arthur and Love earns land and marriage. In many ways, then, Chrétien's meticulously constructed form mimics a social effort to achieve order.

Chrétien builds his narrative around an equally meticulous reliance on source material, and recognizable literary conventions stabilize his tale in the same way that his binary structure reflects feudal order. Alixandre's name, for instance, recalls the hero of the Alexander romances, a cycle of poems beginning with the mid-twelfth-century *Roman d'Alexandre*.³ Clearly not Alexander the Great but rather Alixandre of Constantinople, the character of *Cligés* is nonetheless familiar, and Chrétien's use of traditional material provides an ordered background to his tale.⁴ Perhaps equally conventional is Chrétien's association of love and death. Love is sickness and war in *Cligés*, and wartime torture conversely echoes the pain of passionate love. Chrétien's use of classical chiasmus thus introduces a paradox

and the Anglo-Norman *Regnum*," *Speculum* 51 (April 1976): 202-42; and John Gillingham, *The Angevin Empire* (London: Edward Arnold, 1984).

³ For a complete study of the Alexander tradition in medieval literature, see George Cary, *The Medieval Alexander* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1967).

⁴ Chrétien's Alixandre embodies Alexander the Great's dominant thematic trait of unrestrained liberality. See *Cligés*, published by Alexandre Micha (Paris: Champion, 1970), 178-80, 185-212. Line numbers hereafter cited in parentheses. Translations are mine, and meant only to assist a reading of the original.

already regularized, stabilized, and conventionalized in the Latin and vernacular literature of his lifetime.⁵

There is in general, however, a striking difference between the rigid form and traditional material of the narrative and its content, between the story and its language. Although the conventional tale of Alixandre and Soredamors privileges a strict sovereign control over both property and marriage, and thus over political and social alliance, Chrétien's language destabilizes such narrative and feudal organization with the force of excessive meaning. Limitless, ductile, and infinitely transformable, "le langage, dans son état poétique, exige interprétation ardue, glose re-créatrice, exégèse au moins virtuelle...."⁶ Thus, unlike the clear and direct correspondence between members of a feudal couple—in which sovereignty and subservience are indisputably determined—word and meaning of a linguistic couple do not coincide here exclusively. Indeed, "every semiotic device" can be read "in order to actualize further meanings," and as the inherently indirect nature of language questions the feudal formula of social submission, so Chrétien subverts the notion of a determined, neatly defined couple.⁷ As Chrétien's language eschews fealty between sign and single determined meaning, what seems initially a conventional exemplum of the feudal contract proves rather a linguistic demonstration of something resembling treason.

The arduous interpretation thus demanded by Chrétien's language produces meaning only by erasing the linguistic utopia of what

⁵ Often identified as a source for Chrétien's use of internal monologue, the anonymous *Eneas* (c. 1160) equates love to sickness. See the episode of Dido's death, for example, in *Eneas*, ed. J.J. Salverda de Grave (Paris: Champion, 1925), vv. 1955-2144. Thomas d'Angleterre develops a similar theme throughout *Le Roman de Tristan* (c. 1160). See the episode of Tristan's death, for example, in *Tristan et Iseut*, eds. Daniel Lacroix and Philippe Walter (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1989), vv. 1721-1817. Andreas Capellanus, a contemporary of Chrétien at the court of Champagne, defines the destructive yet captivating pull of passionate love by way of false etymology. He derives love (*amor*) from hook (*amus*): "Dicitur autem amor ab amo verbo, quod significat capere vel capi. Nam qui amat captus est cupidinus vinculis aliumque desiderat suo capere hamo." *De Arte (Tratado sobre el amor)*, ed. Inés Creixell Vidal-Quadras (Barcelona: Sirmio, 1990), 62.

⁶ "...la langue n'a pas de fond, elle n'est qu'un matériau très ductile, indéfiniment transformable en vertu de sa structure interne." Paul Zumthor, *Langue, texte, énigme* (Paris: Seuil, 1975), 39.

⁷ Umberto Eco, *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1986), 137.

Joel Fineman has termed "pure diacriticality."⁸ Rather than imitating a regulatory social order, language here ruptures the grammatical couple of word and meaning. Fiction inherently *finçit*—constructs, fabricates, produces—just as its *sens* confers conventional meaning (sense) as well as innovative creation (seed), and Chrétien's language accordingly demonstrates a malleable movement of meaning which seriously questions the sovereign primacy of his social and literary binaries.⁹ The profoundly indirect quality of language undermines the containment of narrative form, replacing the supreme power of the king's contract with unexpected linguistic alliances that both reverse and exceed the codified system of conventional meaning.

In the first line of *Cligés*, Chrétien refers to his first romance—the only one in which he identifies himself as "Chrestiens de Troies" (*Erec et Enide*, 9). Twice in *Cligés* (43, 6664) he names himself simply "Chrestiens." But the very tale of *Cligés* recalls the author's full pseudonym,¹⁰ and the pronoun of line one (the opening "cil" which links the narrator-translator to works of Ovid) anticipates the narrative alliance between Arthur's Christian domain and Alixandre's antique heritage. The Christian of Troyes suggests also a Christianized Trojan, and the baptized, courtly Alixandre supports the notion of a classical hegemony "silenced" by "modern" Christian values (41).¹¹ For although Chrétien acknowledges the notion of *translatio studii*, by which learning reached France from Greece and Rome,

Ce nos ont nostre livre apris
 Qu'an Grece ot de chevalerie
 Le premier los et de clergie.
 Puis vint chevalerie a Rome
 Et de la clergie la some,
 Qui or est an France venue,

⁸ Joel Fineman, "The Structure of Allegorical Desire," in *Allegory and Representation*, ed. Stephen J. Greenblatt (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1986), 43.

⁹ For a discussion of Chrétien's use of the word *sens*, see R. Howard Bloch, *Etymologies and Genealogies: A Literary Anthropology of the French Middle Ages* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1983), 127.

¹⁰ Dragonetti has read "Chrétien de Troyes" as a pseudonym that paradoxically unites Christian and pagan traditions: "N'oublions pas que l'illustre ville d'Enée se rattache, au moyen âge, à une tradition à la fois littéraire et historiographique qui faisait des Francs de France, et pour leur plus grande gloire, les descendants des Troyens." *La vie de la lettre*, 20-21.

¹¹ On the recurring theme in "la matière de Bretagne" of the Trojan origin of the British people, see P. Rickard, *Britain in Medieval French Literature, 1100-1500* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1956), chapter 3.

(28-33)

(Our books have taught us
That chivalry and learning
First flourished in Greece.
Then chivalry came to Rome,
And the height of learning
Which now has come to France,)

he also upsets the issue of propriety, claiming hereditary right to what God only "lent" to the ancients:

Dex doint qu'ele i soit maintenue
Et que li leus li abelisse
Tant que ja mes de France n'isse
L'enors qui s'i est arestee.
Dex l'avoit as altres prestee:
Car des Grezois ne des Romains
Ne dit an mes ne plus ne mains,
D'ax est la parole remese
Et estainte la vive brese.

(34-42)

(May God grant that they [chivalry and learning] be maintained here
And may He be pleased enough,
That the honor now in France
Might never leave.
God lent it to others:
The Greeks or the Romans
Are no longer spoken of,
Their voices are silent
And their bright flames extinguished.)

This territorial alliance reverses previous hierarchy.¹² A new rapport subordinates classical influence, and Chrétien situates the humility of Constantinople before King Arthur even as he asserts his own absolute freedom as author. Renovating literary convention while demonstrating himself a master of classical rhetoric,¹³ Chrétien thus displays his "modernity:" "Le prestige de la tradition heurte le besoin de créer des formes et d'exprimer des idées nouvelles...[l]attitude «mo-

¹² Chrétien's later romances more literally constitute a site of territorial alliance. He presented *Lancelot* to the countess Marie de Champagne and dedicated *Perceval* to the count of Flanders, Philippe d'Alsace. It seems that Philippe sought to marry the widowed Marie, and Chrétien's dual patronage reflects this attempted territorial tie. See Paul Zumthor, *Essai de poétique médiévale* (Paris: Seuil, 1972), 475.

¹³ "...l'ensemble de l'œuvre [de Chrétien] témoigne...d'une bonne connaissance du *trivium* et même du *quadrivium*" (Zumthor, *Essai*, 475).

derne»] tend à exploiter au maximum les ressources du donné traditionnel pour en tirer des effets nouveaux."¹⁴ As his proper name implies political and territorial alliance, Chrétien's pseudonym supplants the regulating control of the king.

Precisely because of this aspect of overdetermination, poetic language here exceeds the sovereign power to form and control feudal couples. The various interpretations of Chrétien's name, for example, transcend categorical meaning and embody the principle of writing itself. His name "s'intègre au texte,"¹⁵ and like Merlin as described by R. Howard Bloch, Chrétien seems a

master of ruse, maneuver, and surprise [whose] special knowledge—inherent in writing—implies the existence of a power distinct from immediately physical, military domination; the kind of power afforded by know-how, technical competence, [and] mastery of the signs of a culture....¹⁶

While perhaps not an exact parallel to the military strategist or shapeshifter of the Merlin legend, Chrétien identifies himself from the beginning of his work with the creative and "tactical" forces of writing. Throughout *Cligés* he revels in pun, paradox, and the fusion of opposites, and his rhetoric contradicts the social aim of an ordered, highly schematic plot-structure. The "special knowledge" of his writing indeed distinguishes the force of linguistic potential from feudal organization.¹⁷

Undermining the format of the couple so emphasized by his narrative, Chrétien strategically translates careful organization into perpetual signification. He inscribes himself into the romance from the opening lines, providing a lengthy résumé of his previous writings:

Cil qui fist d'Erec et d'Enide,
Et les comandemanz d'Ovide
Et l'art d'amors an romans mist,

¹⁴ Zumthor, *Langue*, 98.

¹⁵ Zumthor, *Essai*, 65.

¹⁶ Bloch, *Etymologies*, 3.

¹⁷ In many ways Chrétien resembles the skilled tactician of Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* (trans. Steven Rendall [Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1984], general introduction). "Indirect" and "errant" "trajectories" in Chrétien's writing indeed seem to "trace out the ruses...and desires that are neither determined nor captured by the system[s] in which they develop." In language again similar to Bloch's, Certeau's tactician gains strength through "clever tricks... 'hunter's cunning,' maneuvers, polymorphic simulations, joyful discoveries, poetic as well as warlike" (xviii-xix).

Et le mors de l'espaule fist,
 Del roi Marc et d'Ysalt la blonde,
 Et de la hupe et de l'aronde
 Et del rossignol la muance,
 Un novel conte rancomance
 D'un vaslet qui an Grece fu
 Del linage le roi Artu.

(1-10)

(He who wrote Erec and Enide,
 Who translated the Commandments of Ovid
 And the Art of Love into French,
 Who wrote the Shoulder Bite,
 And wrote of King Marc and Isolde the Blond,
 And of the transformation of the hoopoe,
 The swallow, and the nightingale,
 Begins a new tale
 Of a young Greek
 Of King Arthur's lineage.)

Perhaps as much the parodic boasting suggested by Dragonetti¹⁸ as a true list of Chrétien's work, this opening asserts rhetorical skill, literary prowess, and prolific creativity.¹⁹ Chrétien confidently identifies himself as the accomplished poet of *Erec et Enide*, the translator of Ovid, and the experienced storyteller of several tales. Reflecting the medieval theory that associated genealogy and signification, Chrétien recites a lineage of linguistic possibility, and the propagation of meaning challenges and undermines the sovereign determination of binary structure.²⁰

Claiming to have recovered his story from the library of Saint Peter's church in Beauvais, Chrétien offers *Cligés* as a combination of both composition and transcription:

¹⁸ "On sait que la plupart de ces œuvres ont disparu... La question est de savoir si cette forme spectaculaire d'énumération d'ouvrages correspond à une réalité ou s'il s'agit d'interpréter ce début comme une vantance, dont l'effet consiste à parodier discrètement la captation de bienveillance en usage dans le prologue, où l'auteur - ou le jongleur - est requis de faire valoir son savoir-faire" (Dragonetti, 18-19). For a more traditional reading of this prologue, see Jean Frappier, *Chrétien de Troyes, l'homme et l'œuvre* (Paris: Hatier-Boivin, 1957), 10-11, 19.

¹⁹ Peter Haidu, *Aesthetic Distance in Chrétien de Troyes: Irony and Comedy in "Cligés" and "Perceval"* (Genève: Librairie Droz, 1968), 26.

²⁰ The founder of medieval sign-theory, Augustine concentrates on the relation between meaning and procreation: he makes no distinction between the propagation of men and the propagation of meaning. For a discussion of Augustine, Jerome, and Isidore of Seville, see Bloch, *Etymologies*, 34-37.

Ceste estoire trovons escrite,
 Que conter vos vuel et retraire,
 En un des livres de l'aumaire
 Mon seignor saint Pere a Biauvez;
 De la fu li contes estrez
 Qui tesmoingne l'estoire a voire:
 Por ce fet ele mialz a croire.

(18-24)

(This story I wish to tell and recount to you
 We find written
 In one of the books
 Of my lord Saint Peter's library in Beauvais;
 The story which he tells was found there,
 Which testifies to its truth:
 For this makes it more worthy of belief.)

The inherent ambiguity of this passage exemplifies the ubiquitous power of Chrétien's language to generate multiple meaning from a fixed sign. The verb *trover* (18), for example—related to the rhetorical figure of the trope—suggests invention or composition as well as discovery.²¹ Subtly modifying the twelfth-century literary convention of concealing originality, Chrétien presents his work both as original and as borrowing, as composition and transcription of a preexisting source. In the guise of preserving and reproducing an ancient text, Chrétien's language breaches linear communication between what is written and what is possible. Linguistic ambiguity plays an essential role in this scenario of transcription, as in the rest of the romance in general, for at issue is the possibility of disrupting the accepted sovereignty of static signification. Or, more pertinent to a comparison with King Arthur's control over the feudal couple, from the outset of the romance Chrétien profoundly disputes any claim to a schematic, transcendental unity between separate elements.

The noun modified by *trover* (18)—*estoire*—is equally ripe with potential meaning, and the *estoire* that Chrétien purports to find and invent suggests both narrative story and visible painting, creative representations that no code can constitute. Moreover, imitation, whether written or painted, directly opposes the formal integrity of a claim to truth (*voire*, 23), and Chrétien's use of such "barbarous" or "improper" language playfully yet forcefully problematizes the verbal

²¹ Algirdas Julien Greimas, *Dictionnaire de l'ancien français* (Paris: Larousse, 1992). Definitions are based on this source unless otherwise indicated.

story, the acts of *conter* and *retraire* (19).²² By definition, removed from the authority of Latin prose, the medium of romance (*romanice*) is distinct from the language of exegesis: essentially doubtful, even deceitful, romance encourages variation of interpretation. *Estoire*, for example, occurs twice in these eight lines (18-24), initially modified by both a verb and an adjective of writing—*trover*, *escrite*—and secondly modified by a verb attesting to its truthfulness as well as its visibility—“qui tesmoingne a voire” (23).²³ Equally ambiguous, *voire* suggests sight while simultaneously asserting veracity.²⁴ Chrétien clearly plays with some intent here, and his pun on *voire* invites alternate meaning into his verse. As if acknowledging the impropriety of any given sign to express a single determined meaning, Chrétien’s use of both heteronym and homonym—*trover* (find, compose), *estoire* (story, picture), *voire* (visible, true)—exhibits and exercises the inherent, profound possibilities of language. Whether in the pseudonym of the poet himself, in the equation of his transcription with both the visible (*voire*) and the true (*voire*), or in the constructed alliance between a tale of pagan antiquity and the presumably Latin, Christian text found in a church library, Chrétien’s language profoundly challenges contraries and fuses opposites.

Writing, then, is both the propagation and the site of meaning, and Chrétien’s style provides an apt model of Jacques Derrida’s image of the written mark as a machine of signification.²⁵ With Derridean iterability, Chrétien’s language opens and expands, swells with the possibility of linguistic production, and completely subverts privileged form:

...en raison de son itérabilité essentielle, on peut toujours prélever un syntagme écrit hors de l’enchaînement dans lequel il est pris ou

²² Alexandre Leupin, *Barbarolexis: Medieval Writing and Sexuality*, trans. Kate M. Cooper (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 16: “...barbarous or improper usage becomes the hallmark of the poet’s speech.”

²³ In her article “Histoire, image: Accord et discord des sens à la fin du Moyen Age,” *Littérature* 74 (mai 1989): 111, Jacqueline Cerquiglini has written that, despite the ambiguity of *estoire*, “les mots *hystoire* et *image* ne sont pas...synonymes en ancien français.” Here, however, the modifying verbs allow and even encourage a connection between a written *estoire* and a seen, truthful *estoire*.

²⁴ *Veoir*, from Latin *videre*, shares inflected forms with *voire*, from Latin *verum*. See Frédéric Godefroy, *Dictionnaire de l’ancienne langue française et de tous ses dialectes du IX^e au XV^e siècle* (Paris: Émile Bouillon, 1895).

²⁵ “Ecrire, c’est produire une marque qui constituera une sorte de machine à son tour productrice...” Jacques Derrida, “signature événement contexte,” in *Marges de la philosophie* (Paris: Editions de minuit, 1972), 376.

donné, sans lui faire perdre toute possibilité de fonctionnement, sinon toute possibilité de «communication», précisément. On peut éventuellement lui en reconnaître d'autres en l'inscrivant ou en le greffant dans d'autres chaînes. Aucun contexte ne peut se clore sur lui. Ni aucun code....²⁶

Neither context nor intentionality contains Chrétien's written mark. A word such as *voire*, for example—a mobile link in a chain of communication—encourages the reader to graft new meaning onto form while it emphasizes the perpetual slippage of language, a movement akin to what Dragonetti has termed the twisting “ambages” of Chrétien's text.²⁷

Rather than remain contained within the form of fixed words, signification thus occurs with the forceful rupture of form. Disruption initiates constitutive signification as Chrétien's combination of love, affliction, and sea voyage recalls passages in both the *Roman d'Eneas* and Thomas's *Tristan*. Chrétien's indeed imitates a recognizable and formal background, and his celebrated punning animates familiar material as he conflates seasickness and lovesickness with play between the verb *amer*, the adjective *amer*, and the feminine nouns *mer*, *amor*, and *amer* (538-555). Though the queen mistakenly attributes the lovers' pallor to the sea (*la mer*), dramatic irony has revealed love (*amor*) as the cause of their sickness (533-538). Physical torment thus intertwines with passion, and the mild aggression of *amer* merges with *amor*:

An la mer sont, et d'amer vient,
Et d'amors vient li max ques tient.

(543-544)

(They were on the sea, and pain afflicted them,
And love was their sickness.)

Equal causes of affliction (“et d'amer...et d'amors”), love and pain form a linguistic unit that mimics direct signification even as it collapses semantic boundaries. Pun intensifies the conflation of love and pain, and allows the violence of *amer* as an adjective specific to war to complicate the nascent love of this scene²⁸ Similarly, when an *e* is added to *amor*, a feminine noun of military armament bleeds onto love: *amore*, the blade of a sword or the spearhead of a lance. Violence and pain thus become linguistic instruments of love, and a

²⁶ Derrida, 377.

²⁷ Dragonetti, 36-7.

²⁸ Greimas offers as a definition “impitoyable, en parlant de la guerre.”

range of semantic possibilities serves to rupture the strict delimitation that categorically separates *amer* from *amor*.

Chrétien's writing as a model of force directly opposes the feudal sovereignty of both King Arthur and Love. In opposition to the faithful service of Alixandre to King Arthur, for example, treason propels the action of the first part of *Cligés*. The sovereign power of vengeance combines with military strategy as Arthur tortures captured felons in front of their compatriots:

Et li rois meïsmes esgarde
 Qu'an doit traïtor traïner.
 Lors les comande a amener;
 Amené sont, lier les fet,
 Et dit que il seront detret,
 Tant qu'antor le chastel seront
 Et que cil dedanz le verront.

(1422-1428)

(And the king himself decided
 That the traitors must be quartered.
 Then he commanded that they be brought in;
 They were brought in, he had them bound,
 And said they would be dismembered
 Below the castle
 So that those within would see.)

While Arthur augments Alixandre's battalion with five hundred Welsh knights ("V^c chevaliers galois," 1437) and invests him with the crown of "the best kingdom in Wales" ("meïllor reaume de Gales," 1443), he simultaneously repays insurrectionist vassals with horrible death:

Ençois que nul assaut i ait,
 Li rois antor le chastel fait
 Traïner a quatre chevox
 Les traïtors parmi les vax,
 Et par tertres, et par larriz.
 Li cuens Angré fu molt marriz
 Por itant que traïner voit
 Ces devant lui que chiers avoit.
 Et li autre molt s'an esmaient,
 ... Et bien voient, s'il les tenoit,
 Qu'a honte morir les feroit.

(1481-1496)

(Before leading any attack
 The king had the traitors

Quartered below the castle by four horses
 And dragged through valleys,
 Over hillocks, and across the moors.
 Count Angrès was furious
 To see his dear compatriots
 Quartered in front of him.
 And the others were very dismayed...
 And they well understood that if he [the king] captured them
 He would make them die in shame.)

Here, the supreme powers of reward and punishment reside in the figure of the king, and the violation of corporeal form—the power to assault the body of the felon—characterizes sovereign force. The structure of the narrative accordingly reflects this authority, and the oscillating storylines of war and love revolve around King Arthur and his court.

Personified Love represents a power analogous to the king, and exerts a similar right to vengeance (*bien vangier*, 451). For the felony of disdainng love, Love pierces Soredamors's heart with his *dart ferue* (455). Far from dismembered as the traitors above, Soredamors merely learns how to submit: pale and sweating, she eventually succumbs to the "scalding bath" of passion ("Amors li a chauffé un baing / Qui molt l'eschaufe et molt li nuist," 464-465). Love's vengeance is not limited to metaphorical torment, however:

Tote nuit est an si grand painne
 Qu'ele ne dort ne ne repose;
 Amors li est el cuer anclose,
 Une tançons et une rage
 Qui molt li troble son corage,
 Et qui l'angoisse, et destraint,
 Que tote nuit plore, et se plaint,
 Et se degiete, et si tressaut,
 A po que li cuers ne li faut.

(868-876)

(Each night she endures such great torment
 That she neither sleeps nor rests;
 Love has imprisoned in her heart
 A struggle and a rage
 Which greatly trouble her spirit,
 And so anguish and torture her
 That she weeps all night, laments,

Tosses, and trembles

To such an extent that her heart nearly fails.)²⁹

After struggling, sobbing, gasping, trembling, and sighing (*traveillié, sangloti, baillié, tressailli, sopiré, 877-879*), the *desdaigneuse* gives in completely, to the point of parsing her name as a signifier of love:

Qu'an mon nom a de la color
 A cui li miadres ors s'acorde,
 Et la fine amors me recorde...
 Et l'une mitiez l'autre dore
 De doreüre clere et sore,
 Et autant dit Soredamors
 Come sororee d'amors.
 Doreüre d'or n'est si fine
 Come ceste qui m'anlumine....

(964-974)

(For my name begins with the color
 That recalls the finest gold
 And the end reminds me of love...
 One half gilds the other
 With a brilliant yellow tint of gold
 And so "Soredamors" means
 "Gilded with love."
 The shining tint of gold is not so fine
 As that which illuminates me....)

Finding Love in every aspect of her name, Soredamors subordinates herself completely to his domination. Like the king, then, Love enforces obedience to his authority. Moreover, just as Alixandre's new title as crowned king of Wales (*roi coroné, 1442*) rewards his fidelity to Arthur, so Soredamors's name signals a conferred honor:

Molt m'a donc Amors enoree,
 Quant il de lui m'a sororee....

(975-976)

(Love gave me great honor
 When he himself gilded me with his name....)

As it becomes clear that the alternation between violence and reward favors obedient, subordinated subjects, a significant difference separates Chrétien's authorial control from the sovereign forces of Arthur and Love. Though all three may indeed somehow violate form,

²⁹ Soredamors's metaphorical torture is echoed later in the romance by the very literal torture of her daughter-in-law, Fénice.

Arthur and Love assault the body to delimit a binary couple, while Chrétien's language ruptures integral form precisely to deny such regimented control. Derrida has insisted on the possibility of a language similarly cut away, "coupé" from its "appartenance à un contexte saturable et contraignant."³⁰ Chrétien thus traitorously usurps the sovereign power to cut and dismember in order to call this control constantly into question. Thwarting a death by stagnant meaning, Chrétien becomes the *traitor* who *traine*: cutting away at the discourses of war and love, Chrétien blends significations to replace the sovereignty of Arthur and Love with the ultimate force of language.

Words of writing frequently underlie words of both combat and love, and this ambulatory nature of the sign provides a constant reminder of the poet's presence. Chrétien's self-inscription destabilizes the structure and conventional material of his narrative, and the etching of his pen wounds and opens words, extracting meaning with a linguistic violence that parallels sovereign force.³¹ Introducing Alixandre's *plainte*, Chrétien credits Love with the distraction even as language itself marks Alixandre:

D'Alixandre vos dirai primes
Comant il se plaint et demante.
Amors celi li represante
Por cui se sant si fort grevé,
Que de son cuer l'a eslevé,
Ne nel lesse an lit reposer....

(608-613)

(I will tell you first of Alixandre
How he lamented and grieved.
Love represented her to him,
She who wounded him so severely,
For she tortured his heart,
Allowing him no rest in his bed....)

The action against Alixandre is indeed forceful, and he is *grevé* (scratched, wounded, etched) by the image of Soredamors that Love sets in his mind. More than just tormented by the memory of Soredamors's beauty, Alixandre is engraved, etched by the verb. *Grevier* as

³⁰ Derrida, 381.

³¹ Gilles Deleuze described the process of extraction by which Foucault attacked the form of expression: "Il faut donc fendre, ouvrir les mots, les phrases ou les propositions pour en extraire les énoncés, comme le faisait Raymond Roussel en inventant son «procédé»" (*Foucault* [Paris: Editions de minuit, 1986], 59).

an act of recording recalls not the power of Love but rather the first-person narrator-writer who tells and also engraves the tale.

Alixandre's speech elsewhere recalls Chrétien the narrator-writer. Inventive possibilities of language proliferate just as Alixandre accuses Love of traitorous trickery and ruse:

Je cuidoie que il eüst
 En Amor rien qui boen ne fust,
 Mes je l'ai molt felon trové.
 Nel set qui ne l'a esprové,
 De quex jeus Amors s'antremet.
 Fos est qui devers lui se met,
 Qu'il vialt toz jorz grever les suens.

(661-667)

(I believed that there was
 Nothing about Love that was not good,
 But I found him to be a great traitor.
 Anyone who has not tested them
 Does not know the tricks Love devises:
 Only a fool gets close to him
 Who tries every day to wound his own.)

Every other verb in this passage vibrates with the suggestion of written composition (*trover*, 663; *s'antremetre*, 665; *grever*, 667), and the enunciatory force of verbs of writing announces Chrétien's presence beneath the *plainte*. Disrupting a limited and determined link between word and meaning, Chrétien's language reconfigures the apparent order of linguistic code.

A metaphor of incurable pain further identifies writing and deception as forces that infect the integrity of form. A desperate Alixandre sees no remedy for anything as "written upon" (*grevain*, from *grever*, 638) as he has been by Love's arrows. Chrétien's pen thus becomes an instrument of disease:

Je sant le mien mal si grevain,
 Que ja n'an avrai garison
 Par mecine, ne par poison,
 Ne par herbe, ne par racine.

(638-641)

(I feel my sickness is so advanced
 That I will not be cured
 By medicine, potion,
 Herb, or root.)

The medicine (*mecine*) of grammar here cannot cure (*garir*) such a dangerous (*grevain*) wound (*grever*) to form. By implication, the model of healthy form resembles precisely the structure of the narrative itself. The language within the narrative, however, plagues such structure by denying it the remedy of a semantic limit. Cause and effect collapse within signifiers as *herbe* both phonetically and visually invites a connection with the parsable, conjugable *verbe*, just as the medicinal root here (*racine*) easily recalls linguistic structure and foundation.³² In a similar fashion the *penon* of Love's arrow elsewhere consists of Chrétien's pen (*pene*) and the conflation of etching and pervasive infection exemplifies writing's power to breach and reconstitute a linguistic contract (762-784). While Love's *dart* chronically infects to make an indelible love-match, Chrétien's writing demonstrates invention within convention.

As writing collapses distinctions between fixed definitions of words, this attack on the sign confuses the love between Alixandre and Soredamors. Describing his own heart, for example, Alixandre combines friend and foe, lord and vassal, traitor and lover:

De mon ami sui mal bailliz,
 Qui por mon anemi m'oblie.
 Reter le puis de felonie,
 Car il a molt vers moi mespris.

(742-745)

(I am badly ruled by my friend
 Who forgets me for my enemy.
 I can accuse him [my heart] of treason,
 For he has greatly mistreated me.)

Such chiasmic confusion, blamed on Love's traitorous deception, causes madness. Under Love's control, and thus aching for what proves painful and false, Soredamors repeatedly refers to herself as crazed, *fole* (503, 507, 889, 926, 994). Alixandre likewise calls himself *fos* (666, 677), particularly because no physical wound marks his pain. Multiple meanings of *fole*, however, incorporate wounds, madness, and deception. In this sense, both madwoman and madman represent writing's inherent violation and deception of form. Caught in the interstice of violence and deception, the crazed lover exemplifies writing as the transgression of a limit.

³² For a compelling connection between grammar and lineal kinship, see Bloch's discussion of the Tree of Jesse, *Etymologies*, 87-91.

Confusion and madness also silence the lovers. Unaware that each reciprocate the other's love, they hide their true feelings (604-605): "Estuet chascun que il deçoive / Par faus sanblant totes les genz..." (Both of them deceived everybody / With false semblance). Likewise, (1040): "...li uns vers l'autre se cele..." (...they hid themselves from each other...). Both Alixandre and Soredamors love faithfully but distrust verbal communication. Thus, though a commanding spokesman on the battlefield—(1112): "Alixandre por toz parla" (Alixandre spoke for them all)—Alixandre proves absolutely mute in front of Soredamors (575): "n'ose aparler, ne aresnier" (he dared not speak to her, or address her). Even while sitting next to her he says nothing, "mot ne dist" (1357), and although elated by the discovery of her golden hair woven into his chemise, he remains mute, *amuiz* (1568).

Soredamors proves just as reticent to speak plainly to Alixandre. She resolves instead to communicate her love by insinuation (1032-1033): "...jel porroie metre an voie / Par sanblant et par moz coverz" (I will put him on the right path / With glances and covered words). Later, however, she makes a sharp distinction between subtle *moz coverz* and lies. Arguing with herself, she cannot imagine the thought of calling Alixandre what he is not:

Que dirai ge, fet ele, primes?
Apeleraï le par son non
Ou par ami? Ami? Je non.

(1372-1375)

(What should I say first, she wondered?
Should I call him by his name
Or as beloved? Beloved? Not I.)

Should she call him "Alixandre" or "beloved"? To call him lover indeed presents Soredamors with a problem, for that would entail renaming him, ascribing him with the unmarked and indeterminate noun (*non*, "name") embedded in her emphatic denial—"je non." This possibility launches the obsession with false appellation that dominates the continuation of her monologue:

Se je l'osasse ami clamer...
Ce que je cuit dire mançoenge.
Mançoenge? Ne sai que sera,
Mes se je mant, moi pesera.
Por ce fet bien a consantir,
Car je n'an querroie mantir.
Dex, ja ne mantiroit il mie,

S'il me clamoit sa dolce amie.
 Et je mantiroie de lui?
 Bien devriens voir dire andui,
 Et se je mant, suens iert li torz.

(1378-1389)

(If I dared call him beloved...
 I think I would be telling a lie.
 A lie? I don't know what will happen,
 But if I lie, it will weigh upon me.
 It would be better to admit
 That I would never intentionally lie.
 Goodness, he would not be lying at all
 If he were to call me his sweet beloved.
 Would I by lying about him?
 Both of us ought to speak the truth,
 But if I lie, it is his fault.)

Deception (*mançonge*, *mant*, *mantir*, *mantiroit*, *mantiroie*) appears in seven out of ten lines, and the anguish of not being certain of Alixandre's love seems subordinate to the issue of proper speech.³³ There is no lineage of signification here, and though physically fertile

Soredamors se trova plainne
 De semance d'ome et de grainne;...
 Tant fu la semance an son germe
 Que li fruiz vint an sa nature
 D'anfant;...

(2337-2342)

(Soredamors became pregnant
 By the seed and the grain of her husband...
 The seed took root,
 And the fruit matured
 Into a child...)

the future mother of the hero remains trapped in the linguistically barren code that affixes set meaning to any given sign. Communica-

³³ Soredamors's reluctance to speak falsely provides an endearing exception to both the medieval topos of the garrulous female and its corollary of woman as natural liar. In this respect, she indeed proves the antithesis of her daughter-in-law Fénice, an adept deceiver and accomplished manipulator of language. For a comparison of wife and woman with the inherent deception of language, see R. Howard Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1991), chapter one.

tion between the lovers remains "fruitless," and at the expense of "freed speech" they remain faithful to sovereign form.³⁴

Beneath the anxiety, embarrassment, and discomfiture of social constraint³⁵ lurks an equally uneasy question of the sign. By contrast, Chrétien is neither intimidated nor restrained by tradition, and he indeed usurps the Adamic power to invent names. As King Arthur unhesitatingly dismembers felons in order to enforce adherence to his social code, Chrétien delights in violating and stretching linguistic code. He alone enjoys the authorial privilege to make romance, and he deceives and confounds the structure of the couple. Though Alixandre (and Cligés after him) prove remarkably capable of creative deception on the battlefield, his distrust of inherently malleable language crazes and silences him in the discourse of love. As Chrétien applies force to form, his writing profoundly destabilizes the sovereignty of his carefully structured, binary narrative. Moreover, as language continues to act on and perform his text, Chrétien's writing eludes semantic or hermeneutic definition. In this sense, the content of the first part of *Cligés* becomes the abrogated contract suppressed by the narrative. Far from restrained, language absolutely defies sovereign domination. Indeed, the textual enigmas examined in Zumthor's 1975 work, *Langue, texte, énigme*, resonate with the fluidity of meaning common to the poetry of *Cligés*. With writing that thwarts linear reading and proliferates the possibilities of meaning, Chrétien anticipated and prefigured the "juggling tricks" and "feats of linguistic prestidigitation that proliferate in the fifteenth century."³⁶

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³⁴ (1028-1030): "Donc ai ge en la mer semé, / Ou semance ne puet reprendre / Neant plus qu'el feroit..." (Thus I have sown seeds upon the sea / where seeds cannot take root / There is nothing more to be done...).

³⁵ "Both of them [Alixandre and Soredamors], in their timidity, in their mistaken concern with social rules of behavior quite foreign to their essential being, in their mutual fears of rejection by the other, are perpetually wrapped up in an illusory world whose imaginary borders prevent them from contact with the one being they treasure above all others" (Haidu, 86).

³⁶ Michel de Certeau, with a reference to Zumthor's *Langue*, has compared the work of Nicholas of Cusa with fifteenth-century French writing ("The Gaze Nicholas of Cusa," *Diacritics* 17 [Fall 1987]: 17).