



Four Arthurian Romances active 12th century

Chrétien de Troyes

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Chrétien de Troyes was a late 12th century French poet and trouvère known for his work on Arthurian subjects, and for originating the character Lancelot. This work represents some of the best-regarded of medieval literature. His use of structure, particularly in *Yvain, the Knight of the Lion*, has been seen as a step towards the modern novel. Little is known of his life, but he seems to have been from Troyes, or at least intimately connected with it, and between 1160 and 1172 he served at the court of his patroness Marie of France, Countess of Champagne, daughter of Eleanor of Aquitaine, perhaps as herald-at-arms (as Gaston Paris speculated).

Chrétien's works include five major poems in rhyming eight-syllable couplets. Four of these are complete; *Erec and Enide* (c. 1170); *Cligès* (c. 1176), and *Yvain, the Knight of the Lion* and *Lancelot, the Knight of the Cart*, both written simultaneously between 1177 and 1181. Chrétien's final romance was *Perceval, the Story of the Grail*, written between 1181 and 1190, but left unfinished, though some scholars have disputed this. It is dedicated to Philip, Count of Flanders, to whom Chrétien may have been attached in his last years. He finished only 9,000 lines of the work, but four successors of varying talents added 54,000 additional lines in what are known as the Four Continuations. Similarly, the last thousand lines of *Lancelot* were written by Godefroi de Leigni, apparently by arrangement with Chrétien. In the case of *Perceval*, one continuer says the poet's death prevented him from completing the work, in the case of *Lancelot*, no reason is given. This has not stopped speculation that Chrétien did not approve of *Lancelot's* adulterous subject.

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