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Adversative Structure in Chrétien's *Yvain*: The Role of the Conjunction *mes*

Whosoever attempts to translate even a small portion of the romances of Chrétien de Troyes cannot but note with sorrow how much of the beauty and complexity of the original poetry is thereby lost. As Jean Frappier amply demonstrated, Chrétien showed unusual virtuosity in his handling of the octosyllabic couplet; the effects he achieved are proof that poetry was for him much more than simply the consecrated medium for telling tales in his day [1]. It is surprising, then, that so little critical attention has been focused on the philological dimension of Chrétien's art, on the singular use he made of the lexical and syntactical resources of Old French [2].

This study explores one of the most striking features of Chrétien's language, the frequent use of the conjunction *mes* 'but', often in concert with the verb *cuidier* 'to believe', to establish the fundamentally adversative rhythm underlying *Le Chevalier au Lion* (*Yvain*), a romance widely viewed as a mature expression of this poet's art [3]. Of the 6806 verses comprising the Roques edition of *Yvain*, approximately 250 begin with *mes* [4]. The con-

[1] See Chap. VI of Frappier's classic *Etude sur «Yvain» ou le «Chevalier au lion» de Chrétien de Troyes*, Paris 1969, one of the first and still one of the best studies of Chrétien's work as poetry.

[2] Hence, the interest of recent work by Marie-Louise Ollier, *e.g.*, her essay «Le Roman au douzième siècle: vers et narrativité», in *The Nature of Medieval Narrative*, ed. by Minnette Grunmann-Gaudet and Robin F. Jones, Lexington (Ky.) 1980, pp. 123-44.

[3] The use of the adversative conjunction seems particularly characteristic of Chrétien who uses it much more frequently than either his predecessors or his contemporaries. The use of *mes* is striking both in *Yvain* and the *Charrette*, and even more so in *Cligés* where it structures the elaborately argumentative monologues and dialogues.

[4] All textual references to *Yvain* are from Mario Roques' CFMA edition (Paris 1971), but I have checked the incidence of *mes* in Reid's reproduction of Foerster's critical edition which does not vary significantly on this question. In both texts, moreover, the incidence of *mes* appears at first glance even more striking, since the possessive adjective of the same form is seen at least 60 times at the beginning of the verse as part of a term of respect which, as Lucien Foulet observed, is used to honor both Yvain and Gauvain; cf. «Sire, Messire», *Romania* 71 (1950): 1-48. It is easy to imagine how someone reciting

stant repetition of the adversative term, which generally marks either a break or a reversal in the story, suggests that the narrative thread of this work is characterized both by numerous plot modulations and by repeated changes in the characters' attitudes[5]. I hope to show how this recurrent structural pattern supports a continuing dialectical process that involves the reader in these reversals and in the experience by which perception is gradually refined[6].

The initial *mes*, as used by Chrétien, indicates breaks of several types corresponding roughly to those covered by the modern French equivalent *mais* which, according to Paul Robert. either (1) marks a transition, or (2) introduces an idea contrary to that previously expressed. In the latter case, it either signals an opposition, introduces a restriction, correction, addition or indispensable detail, or indicates an objection[7].

Since this first, somewhat neutral, category includes a variety of occurrences in which the adversative force of *mes* is barely felt, it will not detain us long. It is sufficient to characterize briefly the different uses and cite verses which provide examples of each. Chrétien uses *mes* to effect a return to the narrative thread following a digression involving elaborate description or narrator comment (5391 ff.), to mark a modulation in the tone of a scene (1415 ff.), to set off a character's entrance (1545 ff.), to draw attention to a particular detail of a scene (1178 ff.), and to indicate overlapping actions (4312 ff.) or episodes (4697 ff.). Although these

the poem might have enjoyed playing on the dual grammatical function of *mes* by marking a slight pause between the two syllables of *messire* in order to create in his audience the temporary expectation of a reversal.

[5] Chrétien has recourse to other devices to establish the adversative pattern. Often simple juxtaposition is sufficient, set off or not by words like *or* and *et* used adversatively; in some MSS they are variants for initial *mes*. *Ainz* 'rather', which occurs about 45 times, usually introduces a positive reformulation of the negative phrase directly preceding, as in the following example which contrasts its use with that of *mes*: «An ce panser a atendu | jusque tant que ele revint; | *mes* onques desfansse n'en tint, | *einz* li redit tot maintenant» (1666-9).

[6] While the adversative conjunction is commonplace in critical discourse where it serves to nuance and refine one's thought, it is less so in narrative. I am grateful to Donald Hoffman for drawing my attention to Judith Grossman's suggestive article on the use of 'but' by two late 14th c. writers to refine conventional schema used in descriptive portrayal, «The Correction of a Descriptive Schema: Some 'Buts' in Barbour and Chaucer», in *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* I, Norman (Ok.) 1979, pp. 41-54.

[7] *Dictionnaire alphabétique et analogique de la langue française*, Paris 1951-64, 30: 371.

are rather pedestrian occurrences of *mes*, the conjunction nonetheless signals a break in the narrative and contributes thus to the overall pattern.

Sometimes *mes*, while marking a transition, serves essentially to underscore a significant innovation with regard to preceding action or previously expressed ideas. An excellent example occurs in the opening scene to which we now turn as we begin to examine portions of the romance that involve major reversal and to observe the role of *mes* in preparing and effecting them.

The adversative movement is in place from the very beginning of the romance. It even structures the rather anomalous «prologue» (vv. 1-41), as can be seen both from the opposition set up between the good old days (*lor*) and the poet's time (*or*) and from the interlacing of narrative and commentary [8]. These two patterns are highlighted by the use of the adversative conjunction. Although the narrative begins *in medias res* with the statement that King Arthur was holding court at Pentecost, it is interrupted by numerous asides. The most lengthy of these compares the faithful lovers of old with their contemporary counterparts who are guilty of insincere declarations of love: «or est Amors tornee a fable | por ce que cil qui rien n'en santent | dïent qu'il aiment, *mes* il mantent» (24-6). The narrator, who began his lament at v. 18 with «*mes or*», abruptly cuts it short by means of the same device and states his intention to concentrate on praiseworthy characters, those who lived in Arthur's time. The change in tone announces somewhat belatedly the forthcoming narrative which had begun without preamble at v. 1.

The story seems about to begin in earnest at v. 42 as the narrator launches into an account of the King's retreat to his bedroom, behavior without precedent at such an important feast. The verse introducing this section («*Mes* cel jor molt se merveillierent») is cleverly calculated both to remind us of the laudatory remarks that have preceded and to alert us that what follows is in sharp contrast. It is in contrast to the court's as well as to our own expectations; these are based on Arthur's glorious reputation *hors texte* and have been reinforced by the narrator's apparent insistence on the validity of that reputation.

[8] These two terms were recently discussed in this context by Karl D. Uitti, «Narrative and Commentary: Chrétien's Devious Narrator in *Yvains*», *RPh* 33 (1979): 160-7.

There is no need to enumerate here the various elements in the opening scene that seem designed to undermine the notion that Arthur and his knights exemplify courtesy and prowess; several excellent studies have been devoted to the paradoxical aspects of the prologue and the court scene [9]. I should like simply to underscore the fact that Chrétien's narrator uses *mes* to punctuate this initial reversal concerning the Arthurian myth, just as he has used it in the preceding verses to set us up by pretending to subscribe to that myth. Not until one-third of the way through the romance do we discover that the hero, though Arthurian, is more faithless than faithful, and if we have been unsuspecting, it is largely because we have been led astray by the prologue.

Yet in retrospect, it seems that very same rhetoric should have forewarned us, for it is certainly striking that in the space of forty-two verses the adversative conjunction appears four times, three at the beginning of the verse where it stands out for both ear and eye. It is particularly significant that this phenomenon occurs in the opening verses of the poem where traditionally an author takes pains to establish his credibility. Chrétien seems to be alerting us that his work will demand the greatest attention, a 'reading' of the most active sort [10].

In the prologue, then, the narrator creates (or reinforces) in us high expectations regarding both Arthur and the hero of the poem. While it does not take long for the celebrated king to belie by his discourteous behavior his fine reputation, in the case of Yvain the demystification process is much more complex. Since the hero's fall from favor constitutes the pivotal reversal, the role played by *mes* in structuring it merits our close attention.

Almost from his first appearance in the story, Yvain seems bent on proving himself. After having emerged victorious from the fountain adventure — contrary to Keu's expectations — he pursues the mortally-wounded Esclados into the latter's castle

[9] See esp. Peter Haidu, *Lion-Queue-Coupée*, Genève 1972, pp. 35-7; Tony Hunt, «The Dialectic of *Yvain*», *Modern Language Review* 22 (1977): 285-99; Karl D. Uitti, «Chrétien de Troyes' *Yvain*: Fiction and Sense», *RPh* 22 (1969): 471-83, and *Story, Myth, and Celebration in Old French Narrative Poetry 1050-1200*, Princeton (N.J.) 1973, pp. 153-6.

[10] The warning is echoed in the little prologue to Calogrenant's tale. See Tony Hunt, «The Rhetorical Background to the Arthurian Prologue: Tradition and the Old French Vernacular Prologues», in *Arthurian Romance: Seven Essays*, ed. by D. D. R. Owen, New York 1970, pp. 10-5.

and ends up trapped in the space between the two doors of the entry. From the window of his 'cell', Yvain observes the burial of his victim, bitterly deploring the loss of tangible evidence by which he could prove to Keu that his promise to avenge his cousin was more than an idle boast. Suddenly, a freshly-conceived love for the hapless widow makes him forget his former preoccupation and instills in him a new concern, that of winning Laudine's love: «*Mes* de son çucre et de ses bresches | li radolcist novele amors» (1360-1). The passage that marks this abrupt change serves to graft onto the knightly adventure which ended with Yvain's internment the love intrigue which will deliver him by virtue only of his willingness to be Love's captive.

The lengthy discourse here begun reminds us of the opposition established in the prologue between faithful and faithless lovers and reinforces our belief that the hero is among the former. The narrator remarks that although sometimes *Amor* lodges in a dwelling place unworthy of her, where she is badly received and attended, this is not the case with Yvain: «*Mes or* est ele bien venue, | ci iert ele bien maintenue | et ci li fet boen sejorner» (1395-7). At this point we are unaware that this is a patent lie, and the narrator delights in aggravating our deception, for he goes on to wonder aloud that Love should ever choose an inhospitable abode and ends by reiterating his claim: «*Mes or* n'a ele pas fet ceu, | logiee s'est an franc aleu, | dom nus ne li puet feire tort» (1407-9).

That we have been duped is not clear until much later, but in recounting Yvain's marriage to Laudine, the narrator gives us a clue that something is amiss in this precipitous union of the widow with her husband's slayer. After having worked diligently alongside Lunete to assure us that this state of affairs is perfectly normal, the narrator nevertheless cannot refrain from voicing doubts about the propriety of such a reversal:

> *Mes or* est mes sire Yvains sire,
> et li morz est toz oblïez;
> cil qui l'ocist est marïez;
> sa fame a, et ensanble gisent;
> et les genz ainment plus et prisent
> le vif c'onques le mort ne firent.
>
> (2166-71)

If the reader is alert, he will understand this remark as a discreet allusion to the proverb contained in the prologue («car molt valt

mialz, ce m'est a vis, | uns cortois morz c'uns vilains vis» — 31-2) which was calculated to convince us that Yvain was among the courteous dead rather than the villainous living [11]. Since there is no doubt that the *vif* here designates Yvain, if we have kept the proverb in mind we should not be surprised when the hero turns out to be *vilain* as well. Thus, the above commentary both points towards Yvain's imminent betrayal and serves as a reminder of an earlier moment in the narrative when we were led to believe in his worth. By means of the formula *mes or* the narrator marks a pause, thereby breaking the lively rhythm which characterizes the whole series of events from Laudine's burial of her first husband to her marriage with the second. This moment of respite, which has us looking both forward and back, is a time for reflection, although we are not likely to realize it until we are confronted with Yvain's faithlessness.

I have jumped ahead from Yvain's amorous yearning to his betrayal in order to highlight the pattern of disappointed expectations experienced by both the characters and the reader. Some of these have been set up from the opening lines of the romance and reinforced by the narrator only to be jettisoned at the proper moment by a strategically-placed *mes*. Such a rhythm presupposes a two-part structure comprising a period of belief followed by presentation of evidence which reverses or invalidates that belief. We have seen that *mes* is used to mark the reversal stage. In the same way, the verb *cuidier* often signals the belief stage. Let us examine a few instances where these two terms serve to underscore the pattern. At the same time we will consider three important aspects of the reversal process: the interval separating the two stages in the narrative, dramatic irony, and the degree of emphasis put on the transformation.

The time element varies considerably. Sometimes the two stages are closely juxtaposed as, for example, when Yvain tries unsuccessfully to stand up after having been cured of his madness

[11] When the proverb appears in the prologue, it seems to reflect the generally nostalgic tenor of the opening lines. Since the narrator, after criticizing the insincere lovers of his time, proposes to speak of «cez qui furent» in the context of an uplifting tale, we assume the hero of the romance, though presently *morz*, was in any case *cortois*. It does not occur to us that the *morz/vis* contrast could correspond to any other temporal opposition than that of *lors/or* (Arthur's *vs.* Chrétien's time) on which the prologue appears initially to be structured. This view finds confirmation in Hunt, «The Dialectic of *Yvain*», pp. 285-6.

by the Lady of Noroison's ointment: «Lever *se cuide* et sostenir, | *mes* ne puet tant qu'aler s'an puisse» (3032-3). In the episode which relates the struggle between the lion and the serpent, the belief stage is sustained a bit longer, and greater emphasis is put on the reversal. Although Yvain assumes that once he has freed the lion he will have to fight him, he nonetheless resolves to help the distressed animal: «*mes* que qu'il l'en aveingne aprés, | eidier li voldra il adés» (3367-8). Here *mes* does not signal a reversal of Yvain's belief, it only underscores that same fear since it signifies a redoubling of the hero's resolution in the face of such grave danger. As it turns out, of course, he has nothing to fear from the lion who, on the contrary, does everything in its power to demonstrate its gratitude. In order to bring out the knight's subsequent astonishment, the narrator reminds us of the earlier apprehension and reiterates the reversal: «Quant le lÿon delivré ot, | si *cuida* qu'il li covenist | conbatre, et que sus li venist; | *mes* il ne le se pansa onques» (3384-7). By closing the interval separating these two contrasting stages and reminding us of the predominate emotion of each (anxiety, then relief), Chrétien exposes the underlying mechanism.

I have said that the reader also participates in these reversals, although the extent to which he shares the surprise of the character involved is variable. In the example just cited, the reader experiences the reversal at the same time and to the same degree as the hero. In other cases, the narrator intervenes to inform us that things are not as they seem. For example, when Yvain prepares to leave the Château de Pesme Aventure after a night's rest in great comfort, the narrator informs us that he is to be detained: «... il *cuida* qu'il s'an deüst | aler, que rien ne li neüst; | *mes* ne pot mie estre a son chois» (5453-5). This time we do not enjoy for long our advantage over the hero who learns almost immediately from his host that he cannot leave until he has fought the demons.

In cases where we have enough information to foresee long in advance a reversal that a character scarcely suspects, the narrator often intervenes nonetheless, to no other purpose, apparently, than to rejoice with us in the privileged position we share at such moments. In the quarrel between the daughters of Noire Espine at the point where the narrator describes the elder girl's belief that her sister will fail to find a champion within the required time, we already know her sister will soon arrive at court

with Yvain. The elder daughter is not in the least worried, confident that no knight is capable of defeating her own champion, Gauvain. The narrator notes with undeniable gaiety: «*Mes* plus i a afeire assez | qu'ele ne *cuide* ne ne *croit*» (5854-5). The use here of the synonymous binomials *cuidier* and *croire* seems to widen even further the gap existing between the girl's firmly misguided belief and the forthcoming disappointment [12]. Here the narrator's anticipation betrays his intention to savor the reversal.

I have used isolated examples above to delineate several key elements in the belief/reversal process. Let us now return to Yvain in his château prison and see how the pattern operates in a more sustained fashion as we observe how it structures the entire episode from Yvain's internment up to his marriage. One of the most brilliant examples of the reversal pattern occurs in the scene in which Laudine's men search the castle for the man who slayed their lord. They have no trouble deducing that the culprit must be trapped between the two sliding doors at the castle's entrance: having found half of Yvain's horse in front of one door, they conclude that on the other side they will find both the other half and the murderer: «Lors si *cuidoient* estre cert, | quant li huis seroient overt, | que dedanz celui troveroient | que il por ocirre queroient» (1095-8). But upon entering, they fail to perceive Yvain, rendered invisible by Lunete's ring: «*mes* onques entr'ax n'orent oel | don mon seignor Yvain veïssent | que molt volontiers oceïssent» (1106-8).

At first glance this would appear to be a case of rapid reversal, for the men's expectations have indeed been disappointed. Why then does the search go on? It is no doubt because the men simply refuse to believe their eyes (and in that respect, at least, they are right). They are confronted with a real enigma, *Le Mystère de la Chambre Jaune* in medieval dress: the state of the unfortunate horse is proof that the knight entered the room, a closed space with but a single window too small to permit escape [13]. Thus, the belief stage is sustained despite eye-witness evi-

[12] Although these two OF verbs are derived from two different Latin verbs (*cogitare* 'to think' and *credere* 'to believe' respectively), they had become synonymous in Old French and their use in this binomial construction serves essentialy as stylistic emphasis. See Peter F. Dembowski, «Les Binomes synonymiques en ancien français», *Kwartalnik Neofilologiczny* 23 (1976): 81-90.

[13] In Gaston Leroux's celebrated mytery novel, the problem confronting the police is how the criminal managed to enter and leave the victim's room since the door was locked from the inside both before and after the crime.

dence to the contrary. In fact, the search party affirms in chorus its stubborn and unanimous belief that the murderer is within, theorizing that if they cannot see him it is because either a spell has been cast over them or the devil has spirited him away: «" . . . ancor est il ceanz, ce *cuit*, | ou nos somes anchanté tuit, | ou tolu le nos ont maufé"» (1129-31). Just as they are about to give up, their lord's corpse is brought into the room, and the wounds instantly begin to bleed anew, proof positive that the man who inflicted them is present [14]. Reconfirmed thus in their original belief, the men redouble their efforts until at last obliged to admit defeat.

This episode is framed by conversations that Yvain and Lunete have directly before and after the search, a clever device that both emphasizes the reversal aspects and plays on the element of dramatic irony. In bestowing upon Yvain the magic ring, Lunete foresees the pattern of disappointed expectations that it will provoke and anticipates the pleasure the hero will derive from his privileged perspective. As it turns out, the latter expectation remains somewhat unfulfilled, for Yvain, though well-protected, is too frightened to enjoy the abortive efforts of the lynching mob. When Lunete inquires afterwards if he experienced any fear, he replies: «"ja si grant ne *cuidai* avoir"» (1270). Nevertheless, the ordeal seems to have afforded Yvain at least some enjoyment, if only in retrospect, for we are told that after Lunete leaves, he takes pleasure in his recollection of it (1588-92). It is on this curious note that this episode of the romance closes.

Our attention is turned next to the emotional states of the main protagonists — the evolution of Laudine's anger and grief and that of Yvain's despair and yearning. Although both involve major reversals, the two threads of the narrative are interwoven with such skill as to downplay the abruptness of the changes. As a result, we are tricked into believing — at least for a time — both in the acceptability of Laudine's behavior and in the authenticity of Yvain's commitment.

Laudine's change of heart results mainly from Lunete's skilful efforts, although her own enflamed desire and Yvain's exaggerated promises are also instrumental. When the lady first appears,

[14] Chrétien alludes here to the phenomenon of 'cruentation', the belief, widespread at the time, that the wounds of a recently-slain man would begin to bleed anew if the murderer approached the corpse (Frappier, *Etude sur «Yvain»*, p. 32, n. 1).

she is in the throes of frenzied grief. It is Yvain, watching from his prison window, who describes her for us, detailing her traits in the conventional order and deploring the manner in which her lovely features are deformed by her emotion [15]. Crazed with anguish, she cries out, tugs at her hair, tears her clothes, scratches her skin, and faints with every step. She cannot conceive that she will ever find comfort («. . . ja ne *cuide* avoir confort» — 1164), observes the narrator; that she might find it in the man she hates most is, of course, unthinkable. No wonder then that she severely castigates Lunete for the impertinent suggestion that she guarantee the defense of her domain by marrying her husband's slayer. Eventually, though, the clever girl brings her mistress around, using a highly sophisticated mode of argumentation in which she proceeds by stages, posing insidious questions which admit of none but the desired response and building gradually on each successive victory until she has demonstrated with implacable logic the necessity of a change of heart.

In effecting this monumental change, which involves a number of smaller reversals, Lunete makes liberal use of both *cuidier* and *mes*. Feeling that it is time to put a stop to Laudine's excessive display of grief, she asks her if her lady imagines that such a demonstration will bring back her lord: «"Dame, *cuidiez* vos recovrer | vostre seignor por vostre duel?"» (1604-5). When Laudine expresses the desire to join her husband in death, Lunete dares hope that God might provide another lord equally as, if not more worthy than, the one she has just lost. Scandalized, Laudine orders her to keep silent, and the servent obediently abandons this approach, only to take up a more devious route to the same end. She inquires who is to defend the domain when King Arthur arrives to challenge the magic fountain: «"*Mes or* dites, si ne vos griet, | vostre terre, qui desfandra | quant li rois Artus i vendra"» (1618-20).

At the second interview, Lunete appeals to her lady's high station and the responsibilities it entails, including defense of the land. Adopting a fresh line of attack, which tends towards the same goal as her previous argument, she asks Laudine if she truly believes all prowess died with her lord: «"*Cuidiez* vos que tote proesce | soit morte avec vostre seignor?"» (1678-9). Once

[15] See Alice Mary Colby, *The Portrait in Twelfth-Century French Literature*, Genève 1965, pp. 159-64.

again she suggests that there exist other knights equal or superior to Esclados, and this time Laudine is amenable enough to ask for proof. Lunete, foreseeing a violent reaction to what she is about to demonstrate, proceeds as prudently as possible, claiming that in any battle between two knights, the victor is necessarily the more valorous:

> "Vos me tanroiz ja por estoute,
> *mes* bien puis dire, ce me sanble,
> quant dui chevalier sont ansanble
> venu a armes en bataille,
> li quex *cuidiez* vos qui mialz vaille,
> quant li uns a l'autre conquis?"
>
> (1696-701)

Although the argument is on target, it is a bold one, and Lunete tries to attenuate its impact by appearing to feel her way, using little phrases like «you might call me foolish, but...», «it seems to me», and «which do you think...?» The point is not lost on Laudine who senses a trap and flares up again. When Lunete protests that she has proven her case, she is ordered to withdraw.

Nevertheless, Laudine spends a sleepless night pondering her situation and, upon reflexion, gradually manages a complete about-face, recognizing the merit of both her loyal confidante and the courageous knight on whom she had until then heaped only abuse. Never content with half-measures, she even goes so far as to acquit Yvain of the murder in a mock trial of her own invention, demonstrating a skill equal to Lunete's in posing to the defendant questions that can only elicit the 'correct' response. Thus it is, as the narrator notes, that she herself fans the flame of desire lit by Lunete such that by the time Yvain is brought before her she hardly needs convincing.

While Laudine is seeing the object of her hatred being transformed into that of desire, Yvain is experiencing a reversal of his own. We have already seen how the sight of Laudine causes him to abandon his preoccupation with obtaining proof of his victory over Esclados. Struck by the widow's beauty and pierced by Love's arrow, he realizes he is enamored of one who despises him. Oscillating between love and despair as he watches his beloved from his prison window, he burns to speak with her:

> *Mes* de son voloir se despoire,
> car il ne puet *cuidier* ne *croire*
> que ses voloirs puisse avenir,

et dit: "Por fos me puis tenir,
quant je vuel ce que ja n'avrai;
son seignor a mort li navrai
et je *cuit* a li pes avoir!
Par foi, je ne *cuit* pas savoir,
qu'ele me het plus or en droit
que nule rien, et si a droit.
D'or en droit ai ge dit que sages,
que fame a plus de cent corages.
Celui corage qu'ele a ore,
espoir, changera ele ancore;
ainz le changera sanz espoir;
molt sui fos quant je m'an despoir..."

(1429-44)

This long passage deserves our attention because it provides a fine example of the kind of circular, manipulative reasoning favored by Chrétien's characters, including the narrator. At the beginning, the adversative conjunction introduces into Yvain's revery the feeling of despair that invades him when he remembers how much Laudine hates him. The use of *cuidier*, reinforced by *croire* in v. 1430, underscores his belief that he must be deluded to think he can make peace with her. But in v. 1436 he experiences a sudden surge of hope when he realizes he is not certain of her hatred, a thought that utterly transforms his point of view. The inversion of his own feeling, encouraged by the reversal he now anticipates in Laudine, is concretely illustrated by the repeated use of chiasmus (three times in vv. 1437-43). The last use of this striking figure is a paradox that depends on the triple sense of the word *espoir* (the verb 'I hope', the noun 'hope', and the adverb 'perhaps'). This cunning wordplay erases in the hero any remaining doubts of a reversal. It is thus that Yvain concludes he is deluded rather in his despair, an assertion that transforms the entire passage into chiasmus: the terms *despoire* (1429), *fos* (1432), and *cuit* (1435), used in the first seven verses to support the first belief, are taken up again in reverse order in the following verses (*cuit* — 1436; *fos* and *despoir* — 1444) to buttress the opposite conclusion.

With verbal skills like these, it is not hard to understand how Yvain manages to convince Laudine to marry him. Although most of the work of persuasion has already been accomplished when he appears, he pleads his case well, cleverly appealing both to Laudine's desire and to her reason. But it is clearly Lunete's

advice and prompting, coupled with the force of Yvain's romantic yearning, that causes him to grovel before the lady and to make the unconditional promises of loyal service that will only make his later betrayal more painful and puzzling.

The discussion of the belief/reversal pattern has brought to the fore the manipulative role of rhetoric, desire, and theatrics in bringing about change. If this role needs more ample illustration, it can be seen in the manner in which the newly-reconciled trio next combines its efforts with the barons' collective desire (fueled by cowardice) in order to win approval for Yvain as the new lord and defender of the domain. Although these are the same men who were so bent on Yvain's death a little earlier, it may not seem quite accurate to count their sudden approval as a reversal, for Yvain is presented simply as a knight from Arthur's court. Yet their inclusion in the narrator's sarcastic commentary on Laudine's remarriage [16] highlights the irony involved. It should be noted, too, that this kind of 'relabeling', whereby a change in perspective allows one to be seen in a new light, plays a role in Lunete's manipulation of Laudine's feelings both in the reversal just discussed and in the final reconciliation at the end of the romance.

After gaining the barons' approval, all that remains is the wedding itself which is dispatched with great alacrity. No doubt we should be alarmed at the expedient treatment the ceremony receives from the narrator who devotes a mere fourteen lines to it before employing the ineffability topos as pretext to cut short his account. More disturbing still, as we have seen, is the sarcastic note on which this portion of the romance ends.

Much has been written regarding the propriety of Laudine's sudden change of heart. It is Frappier's claim that Chrétien manages to make an otherwise unthinkable situation plausible by insisting on the importance of defending the domain [17]. One could object that if that were truly the issue, it would make little sense to allow Yvain to leave so soon after his solemn acceptance of this responsibility, especially when, presumably, he would have ample opportunity to prove his valor simply by guarding the fountain. But since appealing to logic is a questionable approach

[16] Vv. 2166-71 quoted *supra*, p. 31.

[17] Cf. Frappier's analysis of this episode in *Chrétien de Troyes: l'homme et l'oeuvre*, Paris 1968, pp. 157-59.

in romance criticism, a more cogent argument can be made based on Chrétien's orchestration of events. If one considers the amount of space devoted to the widow's grief, the hero's amorous yearning, Lunete's ingenious manipulation, Yvain's pledge of faith, and Laudine's subsequent enthralled capitulation, it does indeed seem that Chrétien is striving to persuade the audience that Laudine's decision is a most logical and acceptable outcome. But if this were true, why would he wish to destroy in the space of six short lines all this excellent work of persuasion? By means of the narrator's malicious commentary, the poet juxtaposes closely the two segments of the episode he has worked so diligently to keep separate. In reflecting retrospectively on the events leading from the grief and hatred felt by the widow to the joy and love felt by the bride, the two extreme states seem to cancel each other out, and the intensity of each is thereby diminished. In the same way, the zealous declarations of the suitor later yield to the sublime indifference of the husband which in turn provokes another reversal: as Laudine's hatred is reawakened, her revenge plunges Yvain into deep pain and even madness.

One use of the adversative conjunction that becomes increasingly important as the romance evolves is that which conveys a restrictive sense. Two striking examples of this use are found early in the poem. When Laudine agrees to accept Yvain, it is on condition that she not be thought of as a woman who would marry her husband's murderer: «"*Mes* il le covanra si fere, | qu'an ne puisse de moi retrere | ne dire: 'C'est cele qui prist | celui qui son seignor ocist' "» (1809-12). More significant still is the châtelaine's stipulation upon granting Yvain a leave of absence that he must return within a year's time, else her love will turn to hate: «"*Mes* l'amors devanra haïne, | que j'ai en vos, toz an soiez | seürs, se vos trespassïez | le terme que je vos dirai"» (2566-9). Thus formulated, the condition both prefigures the reversal to come and reminds us of the one Laudine's heart has just experienced. She might just as well have said: «Mes l'amors *re*devanra haïne».

Curiously, Yvain's response to this condition also anticipates his forthcoming defection. While protesting that a year's separation seems inordinately long for his enraptured heart, he nevertheless foresees the possibility that he might fail to return in time, since he cannot know what is in store for him: «"*Mes* tex *cuide* tost revenir | qui ne set qu'est a avenir"» (2589-90). This seems an oddly sensible, if not cynical, observation from one so impet-

uous who has always resolutely followed the dictates of his heart Nor is Yvain the only one to imagine obstacles that might preclude making good on his promise: the narrator, for his part, fears that Gauvain's influence might prove decisive in this regard.

Yet, even all these forebodings are not enough to buffer us against our astonishment at Yvain's forgetfulness and the narrator's summary treatment of the event: barely ten lines are devoted to the year-long tournament activity, and not a single clue is given to the hero's decidedly unheroic behavior, although the diatribe of Laudine's messenger underscores dramatically her lady's rude awakening as to the knight's character. This long speech, doubly adversative in that it contrasts Yvain's faithlessness both with Laudine's loyalty and with her expectations of his loyalty, refers us back to at least three points in the narrative: the farewell scene above, the scene in which Laudine yields to Yvain's ardent declarations of love, and, once again, the deceptive rhetoric of the prologue. It seems designed to make us share the châtelaine's sense of outrage and disappointment at being deceived, but it does not explain the reversal. Laudine's furor is unleashed against Lunete as well, as Yvain discovers upon returning to the fountain sometime later to find his friend imprisoned in the nearby chapel awaiting the death to which she has been condemned for treachery. Lunete's attitude echoes that of her lady, her belief that it was in Laudine's interest to marry Yvain («"plus por son preu que por le vostre | le *cuidai* feire et *cuit* ancor"» — 3650-1) and her distress at Yvain's failure to keep faith: «"*Mes* quant ç'avint que vos eüstes | l'an trespassé que vos deüstes | revenir a ma dame ça, | tantost a moi se correça | et molt se tint a *deceüe* | de ce qu'ele m'avoit *creüe*"» (3655-60). The hero's faithlessness has thus set off a kind of chain reaction that seems to unravel the narrative.

It is hardly surprising that the first third of the romance has received so much critical attention, for it is a masterful example of Chrétien's breathless virtuosity, a skill that is grounded in his adversative art, as the foregoing analysis has shown. But we are mindful of Frappier's *caveat* to refrain from judging the tone (and thereby the significance) of an entire work on the basis of a single episode [18]. In fact, few critics would dispute the contention

[18] Frappier's comment (*Etude sur «Yvain»*, p. 297) is directed primarily towards F. Whitehead's suggestion that the main attraction of the work may well lie in the pure «virtuosity with which Chrétien manages an almost unmanageable

that the first part of the romance is characterized by a rhythm of reversal. Most feel, however, that following Yvain's betrayal and from the point that he begins his rehabilitation, the rhythm changes, the only important reversal being the final one, the inevitable result of the hero's patient struggle to win back his lady's love [19].

Yet, if the uninterrupted recurrence of *mes* is any indication, it is not unreasonable to claim that the adversative pattern continues to structure the poem, albeit in a somewhat attenuated form. Indeed, the string of smaller reversals in the later episodes furnishes important clues to the meaning of the earlier reversals in the context of the entire work. The articulation of the latter part of the romance, punctuated by *mes*, provides the only insights towards understanding the character flaw that caused Yvain's defection.

The close links between the belief/reversal structure and the appearance/reality dichotomy are reinforced by the use that Chrétien makes of *cuidier/mes* in all the 'expiatory' episodes. But since limitations of space preclude lengthy analysis, I shall confine my discussion to the role of *mes* in the main thread of Yvain's rehabilitation [20]. Here, as above, the restrictive sense of the conjunction is particularly instructive.

When Yvain commits himself to saving Lunete from the stake, he poses the condition that he not be identified: «"*Mes* de conter ne de retreire | as genz qui je sui ne vos chaille!"» (3722-3). Since it is easy to see why the fallen hero insists on anonymity at this juncture, this stipulation seems significant only in that it prolongs the romance [21]; it contributes little to our understanding of the rehabilitation process.

story». See «Yvain's Wooing», in *Medieval Miscellany Presented to Eugène Vinaver*, Manchester 1965, pp. 326-7. Uitti's analysis of the episode (*Story, Myth*, pp. 183-201) confirms Frappier's view.

[19] Critics who disagree with this view are principally those who see *Yvain* essentially as a light-hearted comedy, such as Walther Küchler, «Über den sentimentalen Gehalt der Haupthandlung in Chretiens *Erec* und *Ivain*», *ZRPh* 40 (1920): 83-99, and Paul R. Lonigan, *Chrétien's «Yvain»: A Study of Meaning Through Style*, Ann Arbor 1978.

[20] The uses of *mes* in all these episodes are discussed fully in chapter 3 of my dissertation, «La Poétique de l'ambiguïté: Etude sur le *Chevalier au lion* de Chrétien de Troyes», Chicago, 1981.

[21] In the version of this romance found in *The Mabinogion, Owein and Lunet*, the hero identifies himself immediately after saving Lunete from the stake and is forthwith reconciled with the lady of the fountain.

More is to be gained by turning our attention to Gauvain whose attitude and conduct remain consistent throughout the romance, making him a perfect foil for the changing Yvain. Unlike in the above case, it is difficult to see much honor in Gauvain's demand for secrecy when he agrees to defend the elder daughter of Noire Espine in her attempt to defraud her sister of the latter's faire share of the heritage: «*Mes* tel covant entr'ax avoit | que se nus par li le savoit, | ja puis ne s'armeroit por li; | et ele l'otroia ensi» (4727-30). The fact that he espouses the wrong side is no doubt due to a certain rashness or lack of gravity which this supposed model of prowess and courtesy reveals increasingly in Chrétien's works, particularly in contrast to the hero proper of each romance [22]. This becomes clear when, following the duel in which Gauvain is pitted against Yvain, champion of the younger sister, he admits to Arthur that he was defending an unjust cause.

This is a surprising admission by the King's celebrated nephew. In general, one must rely on much more discreet evidence that Gauvain's conduct falls short of what we have been led to expect, given his glorious reputation and the narrator's pains to reinforce it. In two episodes he is remarkable only by his absence: the defence of Lunete and that if his relatives threatened by Harpin. In both cases, the party requesting Yvain's aid affirms its belief that Gauvain would surely have provided the necessary aid had he been available. Of course, he has an excellent alibi, since he has gone off in pursuit of the Queen and her abductor. But, considering the amount of emphasis Chrétien puts on Gauvain's absence, it is quite probable the celebrated knight's absence at the very moment that his girlfriend and relatives need him most is designed to reveal the same kind of character flaw apparent in his decision to champion the wrong cause [23]. As

[22] The most recent formulation of this view regarding Gauvain's function is in Keith Busby's study on the evolution of the Gauvain character in Old French literature, in which it emerges clearly that «an increasingly critical attitude on Chrétien's part towards Gauvain is expressed by means of inviting comparison between him and the hero proper of the romance» (*Gauvain in Old French Literature*, Amsterdam 1980, pp. 77-8).

[23] Norris J. Lacy, «Organic Structure of Yvain's Expiation», *Romanic Review* 61 (1970): 82, notes that Gauvain is «a constant reminder of Yvain's offense». Like his friend, he forgets his obligations towards those to whom he owes allegiance and who deserve and expect his aid. «Without condemning Gauvain's quest [the Queen's rescue], Chrétien calls attention to his basically frivolous nature, in order to remind the reader that this had been Yvain's failing».

Laudine remarks towards the end of the romance, a friend in need is a friend indeed (6590-1). Gauvain may well be the most courageous of knights, one who would not fail to aid either his *amie* or his sister, if only he knew of their plight, «"*mes* il nel set..."» (3929). Here the adversative conjunction sets up an opposition that is kinder to Gauvain than he deserves, for surely the issue is not whether he knows, or even whether he has an alibi, but whether he provides aid. He does not; Yvain is obliged to fill in. Thus, *mes* implicitly points up a yawning gap between expectation and fulfillment.

When Lunete bemoans her failure to find support in any court, Yvain asks why she has not secured the help of Gauvain who is reputed to have never refused any woman in distress. Lunete replies:

> "— Cil me feïst joiant et liee,
> se je a cort trové l'eüsse;
> ja requerre ne li seüsse
> riens nule qui me fust vehee;
> *mes* la reïne en a menee
> uns chevaliers, ce me dit an..."
>
> (3696-701)

Everything in this earnest little speech is significant: not only the subjunctive used in the conditional sense, the hypothetical *se*, and the restrictive *mes*, but also the unshakable faith that Lunete and Yvain show in their renowned friend. All seem to believe — and some say so explicitly — that Gauvain is the quintessence of chivalry, but the fact remains that he is rarely available when needed. The close juxtaposition here of the fine reputation of Gauvain and the absence of acts to support it brings out a contrast that is even more glaring when one remembers that in the attempt to rescue the Queen, Gauvain cuts a sorry figure indeed, especially alongside the hero of that romance, Lancelot.

While some persevere in their belief in Gauvain's reliability, others wisely end up rejecting the myth. When the younger sister of Noire Espine fails to enlist the aid of either Gauvain or anyone else at court, she sets off in pursuit of the Knight of the Lion who, though cloaked in anonymity, has left in his wake a trail clearly marked by tangible evidence of acts that prove his growing reputation is well-founded. The girl who replaces the younger daughter (fallen sick early in the quest) informs those who

serve as guides — and, virtually, as historical markers — along her path that she has never met the knight, she knows only that he is accompanied by a lion and that she can trust him: «"*mes* un lÿon a avoec lui | et an me dit, se je le truis, | que an lui molt fïer me puis"» (4896-8). Here, unlike in the passages concerning Gauvain, the adversative conjunction underscores the reputation for reliability that characterizes the Knight of the Lion.

At this stage in the romance it is clear that, when compared with Gauvain, Yvain demonstrates his superiority, however subtle. But the point of the contrast (which remains discreet) is less to lower Gauvain in our estimation than to reveal the hero's original flaw which, as the narrator feared, seems to have been exacerbated by excessive exposure to a role model like Gauvain. The Gauvain/Yvain comparison is at the service of a more important contrast: that of the Knight of the Lion with Yvain, *i.e.*, the hero of the latter part of the romance with his former self. This view receives support from the fact that the girl pursuing the Knight of the Lion is not unaware of the discrepancy that can materialize between one's reputation and one's will to live up to it. Although the girl has been told she can count on the mysterious knight, she nevertheless envisages the possibility that he might actually demur: «"*Mes* se jel chaz et jel ataing, | que me valdra, se je nel praing?"» (5037-8). The same fear is reiterated in the plea she makes upon catching up with him. She claims that it is his great renown that caused her friend to seek his aid, adding darkly that if he should refuse to help her, he will have failed to live up to his reputation: «"*mes* se ele est a vos faillanz | donc l'a vostre renons traïe"» (5066-7). Such threats would seem oddly tactless from one requesting a favor if they were not expressly conceived to recall the hero's earlier shortcomings. As it is, Yvain can hardly refuse another chance to demonstrate he has learned to bring his actions into line with his reputation.

When the younger daughter returns to Arthur's court, she presents her champion in a manner that further enhances the contrast between him and his peers. She declares (with some exaggeration) that he had many matters to attend to elsewhere but took such pity on her that he dropped everything: «"*mes* de moi li prist tex pitiez | qu'il a arrieres dos gitiez | toz ses afeires por le mien"» (5945-7). Here finally is a *mes* that proves a knight's actions are consistent with his reputation.

It is in the light of the preceding discussion that one must

approach the subsequent duel between Gauvain and Yvain in which the two seem so evenly-matched that the struggle, taken out of context, might seem designed to prove simply that Yvain has attained the level of his illustrious friend. Actually, nothing could be more misleading, for the point of this episode is to stress Yvain's moral superiority over Gauvain and the shallow model of courtesy and prowess he represents [24].

But a larger question is at issue here, for the intermittent account of the combat is accompanied, if not obscured, by the lively debate the narrator holds with himself on the difficulty of making truthful statements, given the discrepancy between appearance and reality. Here, more than ever, the adversative rhythm highlights a paradoxical situation that is extremely illuminating. The narrator begins by remarking that if the two adversaries knew each other's identity, they would never be fighting, for actually they love each other dearly: «*Mes* ne s'antreconurent mie | cil qui conbatre se voloient, | qui molt entr'amer se soloient» (5992-4). Next, he addresses the thorny problem of how Love and Hate can possibly take up residence together and surmises that their abode would have to have both rooms and balconies so that one emotion might hide inside whenever the other chose to show itself: «*Mes* en un chas a plusors manbres, | que l'en i fet loges et chanbres» (6027-8). Deploring the momentary preeminence of Hate in this duel, he pleads with Love to come forward, for as it is, these loving friends are bent on killing each other. And yet, he muses, can this really be their will? «Oïl», he affirms, only to contradict himself: «nenil», for neither would ever wish to harm the other. Then, in another reversal, he claims he has told an outrageous lie, for one can see openly that they truly want to hurt each other: «*Or* ai manti molt leidemant, | que l'*en voit bien apertemant* | que li uns vialt envaïr l'autre» (6075-7).

Here, then, is a concrete illustration of what Chrétien has been trying to point out: one cannot rely exclusively on the

[24] Both Busby (*loc. cit.*) and Frappier (*Etude sur «Yvain»*, p. 212) state that Chrétien brings out Yvain's moral superiority over Gauvain, in contrast to Daniel M. Murtaugh who claims that with this duel the two friends have become virtually identical: «They both represent perfect knighthood, and their fight is the last figure of Yvain's worthiness of his lady» («*Oïr et Entandre*: Figuralism and Narrative Structure in Chrétien's *Yvain*», *Romanic Review* 64 [1973]: 173).

authority of what one sees or hears. One approaches truth by looking beyond the surface, by weighing and comparing all available bits of evidence, by synthesizing one's knowledge, and by constantly refining one's understanding. It is a dialectical process, and it never ends.

The occurrence here of such a long and elaborate commentary, and the mere mention of opposite emotions such as Love and Hate warring within two hearts, suggests that this episode has implications that point well beyond the knightly friendship that the narrator is at such pains to characterize. Clearly, the duel is a figure for Yvain's and Laudine's relationship, where Love is both hidden (*reposte*) and blinded (*avuglee*) [25]. It is a prefiguration of the final reconciliation and a throwback to earlier events: the original antagonism and ensuing accord, followed by Yvain's betrayal and the subsequent renewed hostilities. These early reversals were all achieved through the blindness of either Laudine or Yvain, their temperamental natures making them easy prey to the dictates of desire and their own self-interest, not to mention the persuasive rhetoric of their devious confidants, Lunete and Gauvain.

The latter characters both display considerable skill in manipulating the protagonists. We have seen how Lunete argues with Laudine using a two-step process in which she first verbalizes her mistress's belief, then shows it to be untenable, a stratagem she repeats in order to effect the final reconciliation. Gauvain's verbal skills are brought to the fore in the specious logic he uses to persuade Yvain that he must leave his new bride to indulge in a year's tournament activities which will help him prove his worth [26]. Although Lunete and Gauvain have similar talents and both use them in a manner that points up the appearance/reality dichotomy, the respective functions of these two in the romance are in other aspects quite different. Of all the characters Lunete is the most lucid, and though she is playful, she is neither frivolous nor superficial. Though her schemes depend on the skilful use of the play of appearances, she always has the best interests of the community at heart.

[25] Cf. Frappier, *Etude sur «Yvain»*, pp. 194-8.

[26] This speech is analyzed in illuminating detail in Marie-Louise Ollier's article «Proverbe et sentence: le discours d'autorité chez Chrétien de Troyes», *Revue des Sciences Humaines* 41 (1976): 329-57.

While Lunete's sleight-of-hand performances are among the poem's greatest delights, they seem more suited to the first part where victories are won with more ease than in the latter part. So the fact that Chrétien calls upon her to contrive the final reconciliation has long been a source of bewilderment and uneasiness to critics. A careful study of Chrétien's orchestration of the closing segments of the poem only reinforces the feeling that this is an ambiguous resolution at best. Yet if we follow the path the poet has traced from the duel up to the finale, paying particular attention to the adversative rhythm that structures the narrative to the end, we will see how this strange resolution brings out the importance of the appearance/reality opposition in understanding Yvain's original flaw and Chrétien's meaning.

The duel between Yvain and Gauvain, undertaken and carried out in inexplicable oblivion and blindness, ends when the two knights, drained by their day-long struggle, decide to stop for the night. Each inquires anxiously about the other's identity, and the revelation plunges them into despair over their blindness. The two knights who as adversaries demonstrated equal abilities and an equal will to win now reveal themselves as equally determined to declare themselves vanquished. The verbal sparring in which they next engage, featuring increasingly briefer and more emphatic protestations, is liberally punctuated with the adversative conjunction used here to convey objection. Eventually, in fact, each side is reduced to sputtering little more than that: «"— *Mes* ge. — *Mes* ge, fet cil et cil"» (6351), reports the narrator.

At this point Arthur steps in to settle the dispute and, by means of a ruse worthy of Lunete, tricks the elder sister into admitting she was in the wrong. Though she angrily protests this deceit, she sees no alternative to giving in, but she makes it clear she is not pleased, adding sulkily: «"*mes* molt en ai le cuer dolant"» (6426).

This is one of the most troubling occurrences of *mes* to be found in the poem because it foreshadows the tone of the final reconciliation between Laudine and Yvain. As we leave the scene of the duel, we take with us two very different models for reconciliation: against the backdrop provided by the ecstatic reunion of the two knights who 'embrace each other lovingly as equals' (6448) is set the forced alliance of the two sisters who warily accept the contrived settlement. The former peace was achieved by removing blinders, the latter by putting them on. Which is

the model on which the reconciliation of Yvain and Laudine is patterned?

The lovers' reunion seems to draw on both. Lunete tricks her lady into forgiving Yvain by convincing her to engage the Knight of the Lion to defend the fountain in exchange for which Laudine solemnly swears to help him make peace with his estranged lady. Upon discovering the unknown knight is none other than Yvain, Laudine rages against such deceit, and while she agrees to be reconciled so as to avoid perjury, she claims she is acting against her will. Although this sounds suspiciously like what went on between Arthur and the elder sister, we feel reasonably certain Laudine really loves Yvain and realizes he has earned her pardon. But if that is the case and if Yvain has truly changed, why should Chrétien resort to verbal trickery so reminiscent of the first ill-fated peace and run the risk of somehow trivializing the hero's transformation? And why, for that matter, should he have had Arthur stoop to ruse in the inheritance settlement?

Clearly, the tension created by these contrived reconciliations and by the *mes* that implicitly structures them is designed both as a lesson and as a warning. In many ways, the final reversal, the final shock to our sensibilities, is hardly in the reconciliation itself, for this is romance, and we never doubted the lovers would be reunited. It is not the *fact* of the union that has disappointed our expectations, it is the *manner* in which it was effected. In the end, it is not so much love that triumphs in this romance, nor even the struggle to prove worthy of that love; it is the poet's enduring appreciation of the play between appearance and reality, and it leaves us uncertain, deprived of the resolution that would assure us the rhythm of reversal has at last been stopped.

But this does not mean that Yvain's quest was in vain or that he has not, in fact, changed significantly; he would not have won Laudine's pardon if he had not learned good faith, just as the younger sister would not have won her case if justice had not been on her side. The adversative structure of the second part of the romance comprises smaller, less spectacular, but no less important, reversals that underscore the necessity of constant vigilance in one's perception and behavior, given the discrepancy between how things seem and how they really are, between what is said and what is truly felt or actually done. Doubtless Chrétien thinks the lesson learned by Yvain is significant enough to bear reinforcement as we take leave of the lovers. One must keep

faith: a declaration of love, a promise of aid, a fine reputation are nothing but empty rhetoric if not backed up by corresponding acts. But it is not enough simply to close the gap between appearance and reality; we must also be aware that this discrepancy can and will be used for good as well as for mischief. The only guarantee of lucidity is the will to see clearly what lies beyond the façades thrown up by the various forms of rhetoric that structure our social existence.

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