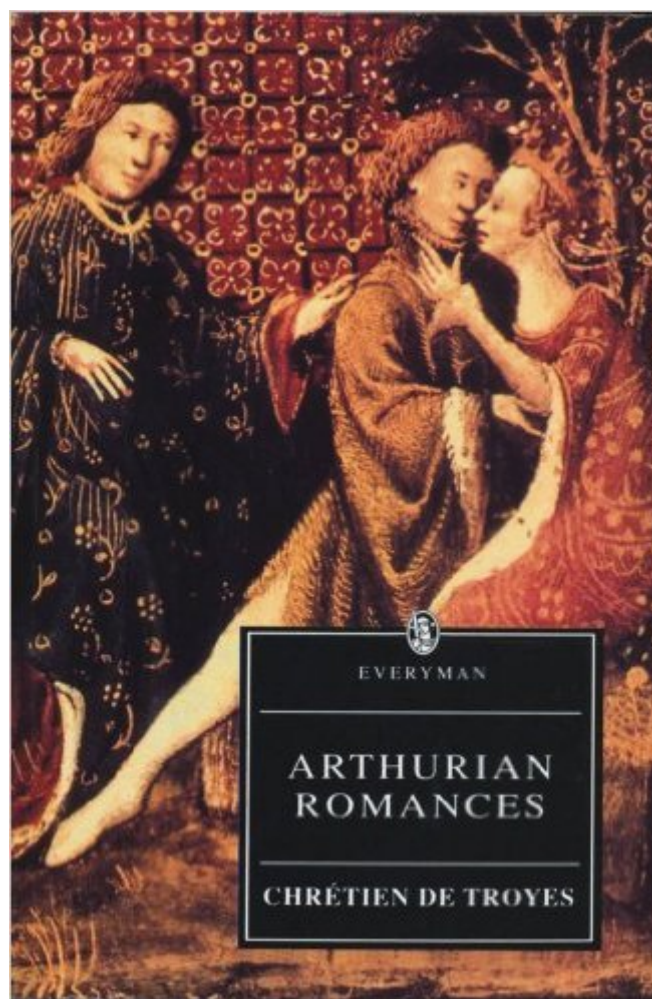


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Arthurian Romances (Everyman S)



Synopsis

Erec and Enide; Cliges; Lancelot; Yvain; Perceval An idyllically happy marriage in which a husband is so involved that he neglects his duties as a knight; love endangered by a husband who is more interested in athletic chivalry than his wife; timorous young love ; and adulterous passion â “together these stories offer the most complete expression of French chivalry and of courtly love. chretien de Troyes did not invent the Arthurian legend: he gave it sophisticated literary form, establishing it as major branch of European literature. Without chretien we might today scarcely have heard of King Arthur and his brave company. The most comprehensive paperback edition available, with introduction , notes and glossary

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Customer Reviews

Chretien de Troyes is an early French romantic writing, who wrote the first known story about the Holy Grail. De Troyes lived in the Champagne region of France during the latter twelfth century. Peripherally attached to courts including that of the famous Eleanor of Aquitaine, de Troyes stories of the Arthurian legends provides a foundation for almost all future Arthurian stories. Chretien's major works include four poems included in this collection: Erec and Enide, Cliges, The Knight of the Cart (Lancelot), and The Knight of the Lion (Yvain). For Grail seekers, the story of most interest will be the unfinished Perceval: The Story of the Grail. Although the tale exists in finished form (in fact, several variations of finished forms), de Troyes in fact only wrote the first 9000 lines of the

approximately 32,000 line text. (De Troyes also was embellished or supplemented by later additions to the tale of Lancelot, perhaps because de Troyes did not want to include an adulterous affair). The story of Erec and Enide is a love story between one of Arthur's knights, Erec, who while out with Guinevere encounters a mean-spirited knight Yder; Erec's pursuit of Yder leads to his meeting Enide, and the two have a stormy relationship (by medieval romantic standards) but ultimately are able to reconcile their love and relationship with public duty. The story of Cliges is one of tricky and forbidden relationships. Cliges, a native of Greece, falls in love with Fenice, his uncle's wife (Cliges' uncle happens to be the emperor). Their love is discovered, but with the aid of King Arthur, their relationship continues in Cliges' home country of Greece.

D.D.R. Owen, late professor emeritus of French in the University of St. Andrews, states of his translation that he kept "the needs of students" in mind. For that reason, Owen tells us, his "renderings...incline towards the literal." In other words Owen's translation of Chrétien of Troyes's "Arthurian Romances" shuns poetic and literary licence. Decide what you want. This is a scholar's book, a dry literal translation from twelfth century French of original tales that were too long to start with. General readers may find it dull. Near the end of his substantive Introduction (which itself makes a useful essay for students of Chrétien's times) Owen comments that "Chrétien has bequeathed to us a brilliant portrait of the society that gave him his livelihood." That's true, but these romances set up portraits that will seem "brilliant" only from a scholar's perspective. Chrétien's productive years spanned 1170 to 1182, the very pinnacle of chivalry -- and of chivalry's unlikely twin, courtly love. Chrétien was an eye-witness, working in the halls of noble patrons, observing and recording the highest values of the culture of his time. He wrote "Lancelot" around 1177, dedicating it to Marie of Champagne (Eleanor of Aquitaine's eldest child), and bringing the world the first mention of Camelot. By 1182, Chrétien was introducing the Holy Grail in "Perceval: the Story of the Grail." Before he won fame under Marie's sponsorship, one wonders if Chrétien had made his observations about the conventions of courtly love and chivalry earlier, at Eleanor's Court of Ladies in Poitiers (1168-'73). Owen was too much the perfect scholar to speculate, but we can.

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