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SIR DEADPOOL: A REVIVAL OF ARTHURIAN MORALS IN MODERN ANTI-HEROES

A Thesis Submitted
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Designation
University Honors with Distinction

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Introduction and Heroism

Superheroes have always been a large part of my world. For too many Halloweens than I'd care to admit, I donned the same pink Power Rangers costume. Watching the costumed heroes never failed to entertain and inspire me as they protected their city and often times the planet. When the Power Rangers were busy, the X-Men took their place alongside Superman and the Justice League. My Saturday morning cartoons were filled with a myriad of characters clothed in brightly colored spandex beating up evil monsters and caring for the innocent who couldn't protect themselves. That's what I most loved and strived for, that selfless compassion and ability to help those in need.

Growing older did not dull my hero obsession; it merely changed with the heroes that were presented to me, though I continued to favor those who spoke for the voiceless and shielded the weak over seeking glory. These heroes, such as Dr. Seuss's Lorax and Marvel's Spider-Man, were also far more complex than the Power Rangers of my childhood. With age also came the realization that I wasn't the only one who loved these and other heroes for different reasons. Heroism became an increasingly amorphous concept for me, but I believe Bruce Meyer said it best when he wrote, "... the broadest statement that can be made about heroes is that they are emanations of what we value and what we find fascinating" (14). As the we of that continues to change, so too do the heroes of each new and varied society. Studying these differences in heroes can help scholars differentiate between regions and time periods.

The Ancient Greeks praised the great Achilles who chose a quick but glory filled life over a peaceful, loving, and long life. The Ancient Romans, however, praised the great Aeneas who fled from Troy, carrying his father on his back and leading his son by the hand towards what would become Rome. Both of these men were not mere mortals and chose a duty (to

himself for the former and to his destiny for the later) over love, but the values of the societies were different so these heroes were examples of different behavior, Achilles the model for individual glory and Aeneas for civic duty. Not all heroes are original products of their own time periods, and some are even amalgamations of different periods as values align with previous ideals before inevitably changing once more. This occurrence can be seen in the character of Deadpool as his comic origins are in villainy, but as I will argue, his cinematic existence is rooted in the chivalric code of the Middle Ages.

In recent years, comic book superheroes have made a tremendous leap in popularity, growing from the occasional film adaptation to multiple films and T.V. shows every year and even claiming the spot of highest-grossing film of all time. These heroes, in keeping with the times, have often been tweaked during their crest in fame. Superman has gone from the never lethal, All-American man filled to the brim with hope to the tortured man who struggles with how different he is from humanity and will kill his enemies. With each new revival, the movies were often praised for keeping close to the source material (or similarly critiqued for straying too far). People felt that their own heroes were being portrayed accurately and in a way that they could still enjoy, the heroes' humor, slang and morality being updated to suit their new audiences. However, a favorite among comic book fans for his specifically non-heroic tendencies became one of my own favorites with his film installments as he strayed from villainy towards the more compassionate and merciful heroism of my childhood.

Within the 2016 film *Deadpool*, the previously solitary and Wade Wilson was given a steady love interest in Vanessa Carlyle (a fleeting romance from the comics). In the 2018 sequel, *Deadpool 2*, the mercenary is given a character arc to complete and ends the story a changed man, sparing the primary antagonist (a proven evil man) whereas before he'd killed

similarly hateful men without thinking or seeming remorse. This change is solely motivated by the love of Vanessa, and has lasting power as he is seen to continue following her instructions after he completes his mission. This marks a stark difference between his film self and his comic self as he first appeared on the page as a supervillain rather than a romantic hero.

His motivations and characterizations have been seen before in literary history, making Wilson an amalgamation of recent history (the American 1990s) and far from recent history (the European 1170s) with a dash of current trends to keep him relevant. Rather than the usual straight reincarnations of King Arthur and his Queen, the merc with a mouth was being remade in the image of an Arthurian romance hero. But what is a romance hero? What exemplifies an Arthurian knight? Perhaps most importantly, what might this mean for us?

In the following pages, I will endeavor to explain what Arthurian romance heroes have been, what values they embody, and how we can witness such values and motivations in Deadpool. This shift towards a more chivalric tone can be felt in other heroic stories, but none are felt as strongly as in the story of Deadpool, the comic book supervillain turned background anti-hero turned chivalric film star.

The Modern Anti-Hero and Deadpool

When Wade Wilson was first created and introduced within the pages of a comic book, he was a supervillain. In issue #98 of *The New Mutants*, released February 1991, Deadpool the supervillain was introduced as the man who had been hired to kill Cable, a time travelling cyborg working with a group of X-Men at the time. The creators had fun with their wise-cracking, spoof of a character. He was named for a villain in a rival comics company, Slade Wilson, and took nothing seriously. The readers loved him, and Deadpool was given his own mini-series, which

was quickly followed by many more. With the pressure of being a leading man, Wade was pushed from villain to anti-hero as audiences found it difficult to sympathize with a supervillain.

Today, an anti-hero is defined as, “a protagonist or notable figure who is consciously lacking in heroic qualities” (Merriam-Webster). Given the definition’s dependence on the defining of the hero, it is not a clearly defined archetype, but it is also not a modern thought. The anti-hero has roots as far back as the aforementioned Greeks and their plays and continues until today, most notably present in many of Shakespeare’s plays, such as *Othello* and *Hamlet*. Both men suffer tragic fates due to their flaws; their flaws which make them ‘consciously lacking in heroic qualities.’ Today’s heroes are already flawed though, which leaves the heroic qualities an anti-hero must lack up for debate. As different versions of heroes are created, everyone can develop their own separate definition for what constitutes a hero.

For Deadpool, this anti-hero status could be reflected in his willingness to kill his adversaries without remorse and his side business of accepting mercenary jobs, or killing random individuals for money. His lacking of heroic qualities could be his irreverence and near constant quipping. He could be an anti-hero simply for never truly stepping into the limelight in most comic book storylines. He has been given many mini-series and background appearances in other full series, but never his own long-running entry in the comic book world. When he does become the focus it is often for dark and/or villainous plots as was the case in 2011 when he featured in the mini-series, *Deadpool Kills the Marvel Universe*, in which he suffers a psychotic break and gleefully kills his friends and other heroes without truly understanding what is happening.

Other anti-heroes can be found in the Marvel graphic novel, *Watchmen* which remains on the New York Time’s list of the greatest books of all time despite its critically panned film adaptation. It tells the story of the aftermath of a group of mere mortals who put on masks, taking

it upon themselves to watch over the poor innocents of New York City. It features flashbacks of their action-filled days and their predecessors who founded the group and coined the name while telling the “current” narrative of one remaining member trying and ultimately failing to stop the villain’s plans to wipe out the city. Here we can see the differences that can occur when you consider the term “anti-hero.” These Watchmen are inherently flawed individuals and often fail to accomplish what they set out for, though they do try to pursue their own individual ideas of what is right. They also pursue their own individual happiness, trying to marry both pursuits and often failing. What makes the novel so successful and the characters so interesting is that they are so painfully human while they each strive for heroism; none of them (outside of Dr. Manhattan) possesses any kind of superpower.

These more modern anti-heroes can swing quite far from the Western heroic tradition. They are untrustworthy and nuanced and entirely fallible, but they also often hide a heart of gold beneath their mistakes. They’re vigilantes. They break the law and disturb the police. They are not the smiling sons of gods helping the helpless commoners; they are commoners themselves that are resented for their god complex. Contemporary conversations about superheroes can be seen straying into this debate of morality; Darian Shump argues that, “[t]he idea that good people, good superheroes don’t kill is outdated. Whether we like it or not, issues of morality can’t be solved by just comparing body counts” (61). Anti-heroes can fall anywhere on a sliding scale from “occasionally disturbs the peace” all the way to “frequently murders bad guys.” Deadpool can be seen swinging on this scale like a pendulum, oscillating between being someone who delights in the killing and someone who attempts to do the right thing, but doesn’t always use the socially correct means to get there.

Due to the nature of comics and their ever-changing authors, the nature of Deadpool has changed within the comic world over his lifetime. Each writer has put their own spin on the mercenary, introducing powers and differing back stories as need be, but they have never made him a hero. In one of the newest comic incarnations of our mercenary, he teams up with Spider-Man and reveals his reasoning behind it: “Something like that [being a hero] isn’t taught. It’s earned. I thought if I hung with you. Doing the next right thing, I could *earn* it...” (Brake 79). In this version, Deadpool acknowledges that he isn’t a hero, but that maybe he’d like to be. However varied Deadpool’s character might be, he is perennially the anti-hero for any number of reasons. He lacks the Western traditional heroic characteristics of noble motivations, true love, a king or country to fight for, and the ability to treat a situation seriously.

In his 2016 cinematic debut, however, Wade Wilson can be seen to begin the slow transition into heroism. Matthew Brake, author of a chapter in the book Deadpool and Philosophy: My Common Sense is Tingling, defines a hero as “someone who commits to a higher ideal, who delays their own gratification and overcomes their own selfishness and discouragement in order to continually do the right thing in the right way,” (73) in an attempt to illustrate exactly why Wade isn’t one. By the end of his first movie, *Deadpool*, Wade has not fully grown into this commitment, but his eventual higher ideal based on his love for Vanessa has begun. This is paired with the introduction of a new moral code for the mercenary, also reminiscent of the chivalric code as his motivation of love is.

He is shown from the beginning as a rough and tumble mercenary taking out a van full of men, but later in the movie, which chronologically takes place before the van, he says, “If I give a guy a pavement facial it’s because he’s earned it” (Deadpool 2016); it is revealed that the men in the van are part of the villain’s organization and are leaving an illegal weapons deal. This

subtle line establishes him as a man who does not inflict pain on those who have not done something corrupt (by his society's standards). Before he's Deadpool, Wade accepts a job to scare off a young stalker. Upon completion of this job, however, he doesn't accept money for it claiming, "I don't take babysitting money" (Deadpool 2016). This would indicate that he takes pity on the young as he doesn't harm the teenage boy. Soon, he meets a girl and through movie montage magic, they spend a happy year together, getting engaged in the end, demonstrating his seriousness and commitment to Vanessa.

Over the course of the movie, a cancerous Wade Wilson becomes the mutant Deadpool, a viciously scarred man who cannot die due to his new ability of inhuman healing. This ability was triggered after various methods of torture, inflicted on him by a man named Francis. Once this ability is triggered and Wade scarred for life, Francis claims that he's the only one who can give Wade his old face back before attempting to kill him, leaving him trapped in a burning building. His scars are the only thing preventing him from returning to Vanessa so he spends the movie hunting Francis down to enact his revenge and get his love back. In the end, despite his aforementioned moral code, or perhaps due to his ability to strike down men who have behaved villainously, Wade kills Francis without remorse.

While the events of his first movie do not end in his becoming a hero, or chivalric knight as I will argue, they do set him up for the transformation in the sequel. He has a moral code, only punishing or killing men which he (and likely most of the audience) deems as deserving and looking out for young people. He remains faithful to his girlfriend and tried to spare her the pain of watching him die from cancer. These are all values not previously found in the mercenary, but have evolved over time as he grows in popularity. His values only grow and will culminate at the end of his sequel, making his journey reflective of one towards Arthurian knighthood.

Chivalry and The Arthurian Knight

To fully understand the changes present in Deadpool, we must first understand the origins of his seemingly new moral code. As Meyer so eloquently put, "...Christian authors of the Middle Ages ... sought to paint their own realities in the Roman manner... The result is Sir Galahad: Christian in virtue, Roman in discipline, and armed to the teeth, both literally and spiritually" (218). We can see even in the defining of an Arthurian knight, the inability to create a truly unique character. However, Meyer's blending serves as a nice way to encapsulate the knight. They possessed the discipline and adherence to the law of the Romans, but did so in Medieval Europe, a thoroughly a Christian nation. Differing from our modern heroes, these heroes do not persevere because it is simply the right thing to do, but rather because it has been decreed by their king or their God.

While Meyer is mostly referring to literary knights (Galahad and the like), they were inspired by true knights in more rusted than shining suits of armor. These knights were originally called *chevaliers*, derived from the French word for horse, *cheval*. *Chevalier* literally means a soldier who fought on horseback. The word chivalry is then derived from this title.

In the 12th century there was an emerging class of knightly men. Due to some strain within rulers in Europe, the new trend of Crusading, and strain between the Church and the rulers, soldiers were in high demand. This explains the presence of the *chevaliers*, but not of their moral code. Chivalry is best described as, "... an ethos in which martial, aristocratic and Christian elements are fused together" (Keen 16). The Christian and the martial elements of this code shouldn't be too hard to imagine as stated above, this was a class of Christian soldiers. However, the aristocratic elements may surprise those not familiar with the Middle Ages.

Anyone who has ever owned a horse can tell you though, that they are not cheap to maintain. In order to be a *chevalier*, or a mounted knight, you needed to first possess the means to train in combat and have a horse to ride around on. Some true knights were lords beforehand and some were able to pledge fealty to a lord and then given some serfs to look over and protect. Further, crusading and participating in jousting tournaments was quite lucrative, if you were good. A big part of crusading was looting small towns along the way and taking what you may want from the large city you were meant to be reclaiming for God and king. Tournaments were not just ways to prove your martial abilities, but to also keep funding your own sense of nobility.

Within the literary tradition, this aristocracy is almost an after-thought as most knights are merely in royal courts or their own manor within the tales. In this way, the romance tales can be seen as a reflection of how life may have been. Their aristocracy was assumed and understood by all contemporary readers; it didn't need to be pointed out to them. In terms of chivalry and chivalric codes, however, it is largely believed that the romance tales were meant to act as the example for men to follow, and not necessarily the example that they did follow. Some true chivalric orders did exist, but did not gain much notoriety when compared to the Arthurian romance tales.

What then is chivalry exactly? Unfortunately, as Maurice Keen writes in her book simply titled *Chivalry*, "Chivalry is an evocative word... a word elusive of definition" (1). Contrary to popular belief, this commonly used term does not have a specific set of rules chiseled into a stone tablet from hundreds of years ago. There are many different poems outlining different processes to become a knight and different oaths that they must take. One outlines the, "... classic virtues of good knighthood: *prouesse*, *loyauté*, *largesse* (generosity), *courtoisie*, and *franchise*..." (Keen 2), and yet another claims they must take an oath with simple

commandments such as, "... the knight must eschew false judgement and treason and must honour and aid womankind..." (Keen 8). The virtues are hardly ever contradictory, but the differences can prove difficult when trying to nail down what exactly a chivalric code dictated for its knights.

Prouesse, translates most clearly to prowess, as in physical might on the battlefield, and constantly proven in tournaments. *Loyauté*, translates easily as well. It simply means loyalty to your king and God. Generosity towards the more common folk and the people who work under you if you (as a knight) are also a small lord. *Courtoisie* merely refers to common courtesy which is also reflected in the commandments found with the poem "*Ordene de Chevalerie*," that order the knight to treat women with honor. *Franchise* is perhaps the least direct of them all. It has been thought to refer to a kind of nobility of the mind and a knowing of one's place in society. A knight should behave as a knight and not try to gain more power, in short. This falls in line with the ideas of divine right to rule, that God has preordained everything and everyone has been born as they are meant to be.

The Arthurian knight then exists within these romances as the amazing man who is capable of all of these things. He is the best on the battlefield, loyal to a fault, generous and merciful to all he meets, polite and honorable towards everyone deserving and every maiden he comes across, and of course goes on quests and competes in tournaments in order to keep up knightly appearances, "... men found a new emphasis on discipline and on training: on the need for the martial *tiro* to keep his physique trim..." (Keen 111). To better understand these values and for the purposes of comparing our modern heroes, let's examine these philosophies in action in one of the most chivalric Arthurian knights of them all - Lancelot.

Lancelot

Lancelot was not one of the original Knights of the Round Table; he was largely created by a Frenchman named Chrétien de Troyes in the 1170s. Before Chrétien, Lancelot had been mentioned in passing in previous tales but none had fully fleshed out the character. Three men were the original focus of the Arthurian tales, “The early Latin chronicles and Welsh triads represent Arthur, Gawain, and Kay...” (Sullivan 148). In his tale, “*Le Chevalier de la Charrette*,” or “The Knight of the Cart,” Chrétien does include Arthur, Gawain, and Kay, but the hero of this story is Sir Lancelot.

Given the Christianization of the continent at the time and Arthur’s Welsh and Pagan origins, some changes had to be made for the sake of Chrétien’s audience. The presence of God is felt throughout the tale as many characters greet each other or commend each other to God when they part ways. It is in this manner that the religion is interwoven into the text rather than specifically signaling to the audience that God is with Lancelot. Instead, Lancelot lives out his life as a God-fearing Christian and acknowledges it in everything he does. In the lore of Lancelot, this is further proven by the scene we see in the poem *Lancelot*, in which his adoptive mother, the Lady of the Lake explains knighthood to him, “All that she has to say is permeated with religious significance and symbolism” (Keen 81). Thus further illustrating the inability to separate the martial from the noble from the religious when talking of knighthood and chivalry. His Christianity is not a plot point for Chrétien, but rather a simple fact of life. Lancelot’s other knightly qualities: prowess, loyalty, generosity, courtesy and franchise are all thoroughly displayed within his original tale of “The Knight of the Cart.”

At the beginning of this and every other tale surrounding the two, Lancelot and Guenevere are already fully in love despite her marriage to King Arthur. However, Lancelot is

not currently in Arthur's court. We meet him already on the road and pursuing the quickly taken Queen. Although we tend to envision Arthur as the best king there ever was, not all of the tales featuring him agree.

In the beginning of this tale, Arthur is holding "a most magnificent court at Camelot" when a knight comes up to him and informs him that, "I hold in captivity knights, ladies and maidens from your land and your household... I wish to tell and inform you that you lack the strength and resources to be able to get them back" (Owen 32, 41-45). The only way to save his people is forfeit Guenevere into the hands of one of knights to battle the messenger. Should Arthur's knight win, Guenevere and his people will be returned. When Kay approaches him to take the Queen and challenge the knight Arthur agrees without much hesitation as he is desperate to keep Kay within his company.

Through a series of unfortunate events, Kay loses the Queen. Gawain is the one who rushes forward while Arthur isn't mentioned again until the end of the tale. From this point forward in the tale, it is all about Lancelot's singular drive to save the lady he loves. Lancelot charges after the Queen, soon leaving Gawain behind. When Gawain catches up to him, Lancelot has caught up with a cart, and "In those days the cart was put to the same use as pillories are now... for all those guilty of treason and murder, for those defeated in judicial combat, and for thieves who had stolen the property of others..." (Owen 323-328). This is the cart of the title as we have not actually been told Lancelot's name up until this point. This incident with the cart will follow him throughout the rest of his tale. It is merely a talking point for some so that they might recognize him as the knight of the cart rather than by his name, but Guenevere is upset by the incident.

It is revealed that she is upset because he hesitated before climbing on, allowing Reason to win out over Love for the briefest of moments. As for the rest of the tale, Lancelot is ruled by Love. When she is angry and won't see him, he watches her leave the room silently, "His heart, with its greater seniority and authority and being far more powerful, did pass through after her while his eyes, full of tears, remained outside with his body" (Owen 3996-3998). When a rumor starts that he has died, Guenever tries to kill herself before deciding that living with the agony of his death is more painful than her own demise, but this starts a rumor that she has died and so Lancelot tries to kill himself in turn. Their love is all consuming and all powerful.

Love is its own character within the tale, always being capitalized and given a great deal of importance and power. When he is fighting Meleagant (the evil prince) he begins to lose the fight until he sees his queen, "Then he grows in strength and courage, being greatly helped by Love" (Owen 3730-3731). Her safety and wishes supercede all else for Lancelot. If she wishes him to lose a tournament, he does so. If she wishes him to win, he does so just as easily. When she wishes to be with him, but there are bars on her window he replies, "I really don't think iron bars could stop me. Your restraint alone can keep me from joining you without difficulty... but without your ready consent... I couldn't possibly get past" (Owen 4618-4622).

While the close of Lancelot's tale is knightly and attributes the great honor he deserves to him, what propels the majority of the tale itself is his love. His single-mindedness on getting to the queen and saving her is what is at the core of this romance. He is empowered by his love for her and her love for him. Throughout his journey, he behaves nobly and mercifully as God and his Queen command of him. This is the landmark of the romance hero, or the chivalric knight. He behaves nobly because he is meant to, but also because of the love of a woman. While Lancelot's love is already married, Chrétien does his best to help the reader ignore it by alluding

to the treason he has committed by putting him in a cart. Arthur is but a footnote on the grand love story between Lancelot and Guenevere. Similarly, the love between Vanessa and Deadpool is the overwhelming center of *Deadpool 2*.

Sir Deadpool

As discussed above, *Deadpool* feels distinctly more heroic than before, but remains true to his anti-hero roots. Benjamin Triana has a fantastic analysis of the first movie and posits that while Deadpool is kept an anti-hero, he is put through the plot of a traditional hero so that he may be read as a hero by the audience members. He has very clear goals and motivations of revenge. By the end of the movie, he has accomplished his goal and has come to no real deeper understanding of himself or life. He is not a hero, and he clearly claims that doesn't want to be, "I may be super, but I'm no hero" (*Deadpool*). A mutant who acts as a foil to him within this installment, Colossus (a giant metal man who carries around a literal handbook on how to be a hero) describes Wade as, "a heavily armed child" (*Deadpool*). The movie concludes with both characters remaining firm in these ideas of the mercenary.

However, the character goes through a kind of metamorphosis within the second movie. The sequel opens with Wade "taking out mass murderers, gangsters, [and] unspeakable monsters" in his own words (*Deadpool 2*). Quickly after this, his apartment is ambushed by villains out for revenge and Vanessa is shot and killed. His mission for this film starts as one of joining Vanessa in the afterlife, but he is prevented from accomplishing it based on a moral reason. She tells him, "Your heart's not in the right place" (*Deadpool 2*) meaning that he has killed himself for selfish reasons and thus cannot join her. If he is to be reunited with his love,

he'll have to figure out how to die the right, or heroic, way. This prompts him to join up with Colossus to try and learn how to be a hero.

His first attempts at heroism are foiled by his old habits of shooting “bad guys” first and asking questions later. When he, Colossus and Negasonic Teenage Warhead (a female X-Man who rivals Wade’s wit with sarcasm and releases energy blasts) are brought out to help contain a young mutant who has become violent just outside the orphanage he lives at, Deadpool attempts to approach the situation peacefully despite his instinct to simply shoot the boy, Russell. However, he soon learns that the people in charge of the orphanage have been abusing the mutants and he fires on an orderly, killing him immediately. He has broken Colossus’ first hero rule, “No killing anyone ever, no matter how bad,” and is taken into custody along with Russell (*Deadpool 2*).

After a fight in the prison with Cable (a time-travelling cyborg on a revenge mission to kill the boy who will become the man who kills his family) and Wade dies again, he sees Vanessa once and she tells him, “Kids give us the chance to be better than we used to be” (*Deadpool 2*). From this, he surmises that he must save Russell who he has been protecting up until this point despite his claiming that he wouldn’t. Following Vanessa’s direction, Wade does everything he can to save Russell from Cable who argues that the boy should die as in the future he kills many families, not just his own. Instead of allowing Cable to kill the boy, which would be the easiest way to save those families, Wade argues that the boy can be saved with love and forgiveness, and at the climax of the film, Wade successfully sacrifices himself, saves Russell and rejoins Vanessa. However, Vanessa tells Wade that it’s not quite his time and that he must rejoin his family in the land of the living, and a tearful Wade goes despite his desire to stay with her.

Here we can see Brake's hero definition at play. Deadpool has delayed his own gratification of being with his true love, overcoming his selfishness and doing the right thing by saving Russell instead of eliminating him. The final lynch pin, signaling that Deadpool has in fact been transformed comes with the end of the movie. The main villain, the headmaster of the orphanage where Russell was raised and abused, reveals himself and Deadpool chooses not to kill him saying, "We're better than that. We're better than him!" (*Deadpool 2*). This is a direct opposite to how he resolved his revenge mission at the end of the first movie. While he has always had a moral code, Wade now follows what others in his world would deem as heroic, self-sacrificial, forgiving and optimistic. The second movie can then be viewed as the process of Wade becoming a chivalric knight following the set up of his first film.

To further prove this theory, let's compare Wade in *Deadpool 2* to the aforementioned list of chivalric virtues previously displayed by Lancelot. Deadpool's *prouesse* is clearly evidenced throughout the movie, and referenced through his time with the Special Forces unit and his "49 confirmed kills" (*Deadpool*). He remains loyal to Vanessa no matter what happens, and transfers that loyalty over to Russell easily. While not a paragon for generosity, it can be inferred that his policy for not always taking the reward for finishing a job still stands, and he gives his life for Russell. He is courteous to Dopinder, his friend and cab driver, and almost all of the women he meets. He remains friendly and playful with Yukio, Teenage Negasonic Warhead's girlfriend, and never touches them aside from high-fives because they have not invited him to do so. Finally, franchise or nobility of the mind. While Wade may not view himself as noble or a hero, he does perform as is expected of him. He takes a skill set that he learned in the service of other men who may have deployed him on less than moral missions, as he alludes to, and uses it to help people.

Wade is motivated by love, just as Lancelot was. Both knights will stop at nothing to get to the object of their affection. Both will do anything that their love commands of them; Lancelot begins losing a tournament because the Queen asks him to whereas Wade continually tries to do the right thing because Vanessa tells him that's the only way they can be together in the afterlife. Both overcome seemingly insurmountable odds in extremely dangerous situations throughout their adventures without fear of death. Both attempt to kill themselves when they either believe that their love has died or their love has actually died. Both have been tainted, Lancelot by his ride in the cart and Wade by his past in the military, "I tried the hero business [Special Forces] and it left a mark" (*Deadpool*). Lancelot frees every person that has been taken from Arthur's court without aiming to do so. Wade saves hundreds of families in the future from the wrath of Russell also without aiming to do so. Their focuses were on one person and one person alone. Funnily enough, both deal with stalkers though Lancelot decapitates the stalker at the behest of the lady he's been stalking and Wade lets his live (also likely at the behest of the lady he's been stalking).

Clearly, Wade as is represented in *Deadpool 2* has more in common with this knight than has been previously seen. Of course, they do have their differences, chiefly the elements of religion that are ever present in "The Knight of the Cart" are quite absent from *Deadpool 2*, though a case could be made that they have been replaced by pop culture references. In the end, Lancelot succeeds in saving his love whereas *Deadpool* does not save her, but succeeds in obeying her as best he can, a precedent set by Lancelot, "One who loves is very obedient" (Owen 3814). Most notable may be that Lancelot's tale is focused on only one of his adventures whereas *Deadpool 2* effectively functions as the origin story for Sir *Deadpool*, the knightly and chivalric version of our favorite mercenary.

Their differences aside, Deadpool has come out of his sequel significantly more heroic than he entered it, "... the hero encounters trials and revelations that cause the hero to become selfless and willing to sacrifice herself for the sake of some greater good" (Vink 56). In the end, Deadpool does not become selfless for the greater good, but the love he holds in his heart for Vanessa. While he may have been an anti-hero for most of his life, it will remain to be seen if Wade retains his chivalric nature in further installments or reverts back to his own brand of heroics, "... he's not even an anti-hero like The Punisher. He's a hero who kills to save others" as Darian Shump has decided (66).

Possible Reasons

Why should Deadpool's change make any sort of difference to the casual hero lover? If heroes are meant to be what specific societies value, is it not worth investigating why our current society would revert to such medieval heroic tenants? Chrétien de Troyes did not write in an entirely peaceful and trusting world. With Germany still becoming Germany as we know it today, Britain constantly fighting within itself between the Church and the Crown for power, and France still with its Northern half and Southern half almost in competition with each other (speaking different languages and practicing different cultures) it is easy to picture a great feeling of unrest, or uncertainty about the future. Likewise, today there seems to be great feelings of uncertainty about the future because of the American president and climate concerns. No one seems to be sure that they're safe, and the media, which is filled with apocalyptic outcomes from zombies to nuclear war and its fallout, doesn't seem to be doing much to help ease these feelings. Perhaps Deadpool and Lancelot are not so different because our social climates are not so different.

In a world that doesn't know if there's even going to be a tomorrow, heroes that do the right things, or make the right choice in the end are sorely needed, but with the rampant mistrust and finger pointing, someone who does the right thing for the sake of the right thing isn't believed. In a society that was founded "under God" that has since eschewed the call to organized religion, what is there to believe in? Lancelot accomplished great deeds for God, king, country, and love. We have no gods, no kings, and our country is currently being torn apart. All that's left is love, and so, perhaps, Wade Wilson becomes a new version of himself. A version that loves fiercely and loyally while still breaking the fourth wall and constantly cracking jokes because this is the 21st century, and our heroes must now be truly human and more relatable than not.

Conclusion

Throughout history, different societies have created and/or modified heroes to fit their purposes. The Greeks made their heroes god-like and capable of accomplishing superhuman feats to inspire, entertain and escape. The Romans made their heroes disciplined and worthy of praise to help illustrate what a good citizen was capable of. The courts of medieval Europe created tales of romance to inspire, entertain, and illustrate what was and wasn't proper behavior, while pushing certain messages of religious superiority, showing and typefying, "... the armored knights of Arthurian legend... who threw themselves into the fray to salvage hope from hopelessness" (Meyer 220). In the American 60s, the X-Men were created as voices for the oppressed, to call out and try to correct the alienation and abuse they felt for being different.

Recently our comic book superheroes have gone through a few metamorphoses. From the golden era of the Superman who had no flaws, always saved the day in the end (even if he had to

turn back time to do it) and every superpower imaginable to the Watchmen who failed to save their city and were steeped in flaws and inadequacies - almost no superpowers between them. *Deadpool 2* can be seen to show a newer trend of making love the focus of the superhero arc, turning the superheroes into protagonists that only need to fully commit to a loving relationship in order to win the day.

This theme can also be seen in a hero of today within *The Lego Batman Movie*. In a modern twist, the message has been queered. Ultimately, Batman must accept his relationship with the Joker to save Gotham and accept the love of Dick Grayson to find happiness once more. Instances of the Joker loving his adversary are spread throughout, the final act that saves Gotham being him and Batman literally joining hands. In *Venom*, a movie about a comic character who also started as a villain and has since made the transition to anti-hero in some iterations, Venom and Eddy must come to accept each other and work together. In order to save the day, Venom sacrifices itself for Eddy after an odd kiss scene between the two, using Eddy's ex-girlfriend as a proxy, perhaps implying that Venom has fallen in love with Eddy and so it gives its life to save him. Love is what saves all these heroes. They come to no greater realization or character growth than to develop a loving relationship.

Deadpool 2, however, is the most concrete example of the trend. Wade was already in a loving relationship when the sequel began, as Lancelot was in his tale. Both of their journeys follow the epic dangers and risks of trying to get to their queens, and both end when they are able to overcome the evil in a hand-to-hand fight with the help of their loved one. As far as the sequel is concerned, Wade is well on his way to becoming a knight of the Marvel Round Table.

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