



Erec and Enide

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Erec and Enide

Chrétien de Troyes

Translated from the Old French by

Burton Raffel

Afterword by Joseph J. Duggan

Yale University Press

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For Isaac Moses Pride

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Translator's Preface

This is the second of Chrétien's great narratives I have translated. The first, *Yvain*, was published by Yale University Press in 1987. The publishers and I plan, over the next several years, to produce versions of the three remaining poems.

Most of what needs to be explained about the technical aspects of this translation has already been set out, in my Translator's Preface to *Yvain*. And as I also said there, "I will be content if this translation allows the modern English reader some reasonably clear view of Chrétien's swift, clear style, his wonderfully inventive story-telling, his perceptive characterizations and sure-handed dialogue, his racy wit and sly irony, and the vividness with which he evokes, for us his twentieth-century audiences, the emotions and values of a flourishing, vibrant world." I need only add that the longer I work with Chrétien, the more "modern" he seems to me, in virtually all his essential characteristics—which may help to explain why, as I said in concluding that prior translator's preface, "Chrétien is a delight to read—and to translate." Not easy, but definitely a delight.

Although it is perhaps more usual to work from a single version of the text to be translated, I have chosen—for *Erec and Enide* and for the three remaining poems as well—to translate

from the two most recent editions of the Old French original, the *Oeuvres complètes* (1994), edited for Gallimard's deservedly famous Pléiade series by Daniel Poirion and five collaborating scholars, *Erec* having been edited by Peter F. Dembowski, and the complete *Romans* (1994), edited for the Le Livre de Poche series, once again, by a team of scholars, *Erec* being edited by Jean-Marie Fritz. Although they have worked with the accumulated scholarship of eight hundred years and have had at their disposal all the tools of contemporary technology, these enormously learned folk have been utterly unable to arrive at a single, solid notion of what Chrétien did and did not write. Accordingly, I have worked with both texts constantly open in front of me, picking and choosing what seemed to me, after years of translating Chrétien, to most accurately represent his style. I have consulted and (of course) shamelessly pillaged the helpful textual, historical, and literary notes in these editions. I mean no disrespect to all those who labored to produce readable modern French prose versions of Chrétien, for both editions, but cannot help noting, finally—with a wry smile that Chrétien might well have echoed—that *neither* of those prose translations seems to me as faithful to, nor as fully representative of, the brilliantly moving poetry of the Old French original as the verse translation that follows.

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Erec and Enide

Chrétien de Troyes

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*Li vilains dit en son respit
Que tel chose a l'an en despit,
Qui mout vaut mieuz que l'en ne cuide.*

Peasants have a proverb:
The thing we think worthless
Is worth more than we know.
Work as hard as you can
For wisdom; the sluggard's way 5
Teaches us, soon enough,
That nothing ventured is nothing
Gained, but something wonderful
Lost. Chrétien, believing
Men should think, and learn, 10
And use their tongues well,
And teach others, has found
This lovely tale of adventure,
Beautifully put together,
Proving beyond a doubt 15
That no one granted wisdom
And grace by the mercy of God

Should ever refuse to use it.
He tells of Erec, son
Of Lac—a story professional 20
Poets usually ruin,
Spinning it out for kings
And counts. And here I begin:
This is a story they'll repeat
Forever, in Christian lands. 25
Chrétien of Troyes says so.

One Easter day, in springtime,
King Arthur was holding court
At Castle Cardigan.
Crowds of bold knights, courageous, 30
Strong, and proud, with noble
Ladies and girls, beautiful
Daughters of kings, made it
The most splendid sight in the world.
But before dismissing court 35
That day, the king declared
He wished to hunt the white stag,
Reviving that custom. And hearing
The king's words, my lord
Gawain was strongly displeased. 40
"Your majesty: you've little
To gain, hunting that beast.
We all know how it works;
We've always known. Whoever's
Able to kill a white stag 45
Wins the right to kiss
The prettiest girl in your court,
No matter who is offended.
Infinite evil may follow:

Hundreds of highborn young women 50
Are here, graceful, modest,
And not a one of them hasn't
Some bold and powerful knight
For a lover, who'd all argue—
Indifferent to right or wrong— 55
That the lady who drew his heart
Was loveliest, best, and most noble."
The king answered: "I'm well
Aware. But I won't change a word,
For once a king has spoken 60
No one's allowed to argue.
Early tomorrow morning
We'll all take our delight
Hunting that stag in the magical
Woods where wonders happen." 65
So the hunt was set for the very
Next day, at dawn. And just
At sunrise the king rose
And made himself ready for riding
In the forest, wearing no armor 70
But only a short coat.
He had his knights awakened
And their horses equipped. When all
Were mounted, off they rode,
Taking their bows and arrows. 75
The queen rode behind them,
Along with one of her ladies,
Young, a king's daughter,
Mounted on a white palfrey.
And spurring his horse, a knight 80
Named Erec hurried after them,

A knight of the Round Table,
Who'd won great favor at court.
From the moment he first appeared—
So striking that nowhere on earth 85
Could you find a handsomer man—
No knight was better loved.
He was beautiful, noble, and brave
But barely twenty-five.
No one at only his age 90
Had proven himself so nobly.
What can I say in his praise?
Wrapped in an ermine cape,
He galloped down the road,
Riding a battle steed. 95
His undercoat was rich
Brocade from Constantinople.
His shoes were woven silk,
Beautifully cut and sewn,
And spurs of hammered gold 100
Were fixed and ready at his heels.
He carried no other arms
Than his sword; it was all he had brought.
He came alongside the queen
Just where the path had branched. 105
"My lady," he said, "if you like,
Wherever you ride I'll ride
Beside you. My only reason
For coming was to keep you company."
The queen thanked him, and said, 110
"Dear friend, believe me, no one's
Company could please me more;
I'd love to have you with me."

So saying, they rode straight on
And were soon into the forest. 115
Those who had gone ahead
Had already begun the chase.
The horns rang out, there were shouts,
Dogs went running after
The stag, leaping, barking. 120
Arrows flew through the air.
And the king, on a Spanish stallion,
Rode in front of them all.
Guinevere, trying to follow
The hounds, was in the woods 125
With Erec and her lady, a girl
Extremely beautiful and gracious.
But they'd gotten so far from the hunters
Chasing after the stag
That they couldn't hear a thing, 130
No horns or men or dogs.
So after trying as hard
As they could to locate some human
Sound, some trace of a hound
Yelping, they stopped beside 135
The road, in a clearing. And then,
Not long after, they saw
A knight approaching, mounted
And fully armored, his shield
Hung from his neck, his lance 140
In his hand. The queen had seen him
In the distance, and riding beside him,
To his right, a wellborn young woman,
And guiding them down the road,
Mounted on a well-worn nag, 145

A dwarf holding a leather
Whip knotted at the end.
And seeing so handsome a knight,
Queen Guinevere longed
To learn who he was, he 150
And the girl who rode beside him.
So she quickly ordered her royal
Maid to approach him. "My dear,"
Said the queen, "tell that knight
Riding toward us to come 155
To me, and bring that girl
With him." The maid turned
Her palfrey toward the knight,
Riding slowly, but the dwarf
Headed her off, waving 160
His whip in her face. "Stop,
Woman!" the creature cried,
As cruel as anyone alive,
"Why are you crossing toward us?
Come no further, I warn you!" 165
"Dwarf," she said, "let me pass.
I wish to speak to that knight,
Because my queen has sent me."
The dwarf, who was low-born, cruel,
And disgusting, blocked her path, 170
Crying, "You can't come here!
Go back where you came! You have
No right to address so good
A knight." The lady rode forward,
Intending to push past him, 175
Offended that a creature so tiny
Should block her way. Seeing her

Riding ahead, the dwarf
Raised his knotted whip,
Meaning to strike her full 180
In the face, and she threw up her arms,
And he struck a fierce blow
Across her uncovered skin,
Hitting so hard that the whole
Back of her hand turned 185
Blue. Like it or not,
The girl was forced to return,
Weeping as she went, tears
Flowing freely from her eyes
And rolling down her face. 190
What was the queen to do,
Seeing her maid so wounded?
Angry, and deeply upset,
She said, "Erec, my friend!
How it pains me, watching 195
My maid beaten by this dwarf.
This knight is a vulgar boor,
Allowing such a scoundrel
To beat this beautiful girl.
Erec, dear friend, go 200
To him, tell him wicked
Behavior must stop, tell him
To come to me, I wish
To know him, and the lady." Erec
Went at once, spurring 205
His horse directly toward
The knight. The malicious dwarf
Quickly barred the way.
"Fellow," he said, "stay back!

Where do you think you're going? 210
Back where you came from, I say!"
"Enough," said Erec, "you ugly
Dwarf, cruel and quarrelsome!
Out of my way!" "Stay there!"
"I'm coming." "No, you're not!" 215
Erec pushed forward, but the dwarf,
Vilest creature alive,
With a violent stroke of his whip
Slashed at Erec's neck.
The young knight's neck and face 220
Were deeply cut, every
Knotted strand leaving
Visible marks all over.
But Erec knew he couldn't
Strike the dwarf, as he wished to, 225
Seeing the other knight's fearsome
Weapons and, knowing his malice,
Sure the knight would kill him
If he struck the dwarf in his presence.
Courage doesn't mean madness, 230
And Erec was more than wise
Enough to know when to stop.
"My lady," he explained, "It gets worse
And worse. This wicked dwarf
Has cut up my face, yet I can't 235
Kill him, I can't touch him.
But no one would blame me, knowing
I have no weapons, no armor,
And this vile, outrageous fellow,
Does, and wouldn't, I think, 240
Take it lightly: he's haughty

Enough to kill me on the spot.
But let me promise you this:
If and when I can,
I'll either revenge myself 245
For these miserable wounds or be shamed
Forever. But I left my armor
And weapons at Cardigan,
This morning, and now they're far
Away, when I need them. If I went 250
To fetch them, I'd probably never
Find this fellow again,
Riding so quickly along.
So I've got to follow behind him,
No matter how far he goes, 255
Until I can buy or borrow
Weapons and armor. If I find
Someone to lend me what I need
Then, soon enough, this knight
Will find himself in combat. 260
And trust me, make no mistake:
Once we're fighting only one
Can win, him or me.
And I'll return, if I can,
Three days from now. You'll see me 265
At the palace, but whether sad
Or happy, I've no idea.
My lady, there's no more time:
I've got to follow that knight.
I'm going. May God bless you." 270
And the queen, too, commended
Him to God, with a thousand
Prayers to keep him from harm.

Then Erec left the queen,
Riding hard behind 275
The knight. And the queen stayed
In that forest where the king was hunting.
Once the stag was caught
The king was the first to join her,
For the stag having been taken 280
And killed, they could head home,
Carrying the dead deer,
And were soon at Cardigan
Again. They dined, and when all
The knights had feasted and were happy, 285
The king, according to custom
(For he had taken the stag),
Declared he had earned a kiss
And would take what tradition offered him.
Whispers went sweeping across 290
The court, everyone sure
That nothing but lances and swords
Would settle the coming quarrel,
Each of the knights too proud
To agree that any woman 295
Could match the one he worshiped:
This was a risky affair.
Believe me, Gawain was not
Happy when he heard what was happening,
And said to the king, "My lord, 300
You can see that all your knights
Are troubled. All they can talk of
Is this cursèd kiss. All of them
Say it will never happen
Without quarreling and combat." 305

And the wise king replied,
"What's your advice, my dear
Nephew, for preserving honor
And my realm? I shouldn't start up
Quarrels." The best barons 310
At court hurried to advise him.
King Ydier was the first
To speak his mind, and then
King Cadovalant, wise
As he was noble and brave. 315
Then Kay, and Girflet, and then
King Amaugin, and many
Many more of his knights
And barons gathered around him.
Discussion went on and on 320
Till finally the queen arrived
And told them the adventure she'd met with
Deep in the forest—how she'd seen
An armored knight, with a savage
Little dwarf, and the dwarf 325
Had struck her lady's maid
On the bare hand with a knotted
Whip and lashed out, even
Harder, at Erec's face.
And Erec, shamed but unarmed, 330
Had followed the knight, hunting
Revenge, saying he'd be back
In three days, were he able to return.
"My lord," said the queen to the king,
"Hear what I have to say: 335
If your knights will give their consent
Hold off your kiss for these

Three days and Erec's return."

None of the knights objected,

And the king himself agreed.

340

Erec galloped along

Behind the armored knight

And the wicked dwarf with his whip,

Until they came to a great

Castle, strong and beautifully

345

Built. They rode right through

The gate. Inside, there were knights

And ladies rejoicing—and that castle

Was filled with beautiful women.

You could see people feeding

350

Molting falcons and hawks;

Others were fetching sparrow

Hawks and peregrines;

Elsewhere they were playing games

Of chance, some rolling dice,

355

Some playing backgammon or chess.

Out in front of the stables

Young men curried and rubbed down

Horses. Ladies primped

In their boudoirs. They'd seen the armored

360

Knight, whom they knew, coming,

Along with his dwarf and his woman,

And three by three they came out,

Glad to salute and greet him.

But Erec, who was simply a stranger,

365

They utterly ignored.

And Erec followed the knight

Straight across the courtyard,

Till he'd shut himself in a room.

Seeing him safely housed, 370
Erec could not have been happier.
Going a little farther,
He saw an elderly man
Of the lower nobility reclining
On the steps of a shabby house, 375
A good, gray-bearded, honorable
Man, fine-featured, courteous.
He was sitting all alone,
Obviously lost in thought.
He had the look of a sensible 380
Man, who'd offer a visitor
Shelter. Erec approached,
And the old knight hurried to meet him.
Before Erec could speak,
The old man bowed in greeting. 385
"Good lord," he said, "be welcome!
And be my guest, if you will:
My house is ready to receive you."
Erec answered, "My thanks.
I come seeking shelter 390
For the night, a bed and a roof."
Erec dismounted, and the old man
Himself took in his horse,
Led it in by the bridle,
Knowing his household honored. 395
And then he summoned his wife,
And his daughter, wonderfully lovely;
They'd been busy, off in a workroom;
I've no idea what they made.
The lady came out, and her daughter 400
With her, wearing a delicate

White chemise, cut wide
And pleated, and over that
A tunic, also white,
But wearing nothing else. 405
The tunic was terribly old,
And her elbows poked clean through.
But wrapped in rags as she was,
The body inside was beautiful.
A truly wellborn girl 410
On whom Nature had lavished every
Blessing and grace she knew,
Until even Nature herself
Wondered a hundred times over
How, just this once, 415
She'd fashioned such a perfect
Thing, for no matter how hard
She tried to match the model
She never could make another.
So Nature herself was proof 420
That no one in the world had ever
Seen such loveliness before.
I tell you, Iseult the Blonde
Couldn't boast such shining, golden
Hair: there was no comparison. 425
Her forehead, her features shone
Brighter and whiter than the lily.
Her skin glowed so fair,
So fresh and roselike, that no one
But Nature could have created it, 430
Lighting up her face.
Her eyes sparkled so clear
They seemed like a pair of stars.

God Himself couldn't make
A more perfect mouth or nose. 435

How describe such beauty?
I can say this much: surely
She was meant to be seen, to be stared at,
For looking at her was like
Seeing yourself in a mirror. 440

Down she'd come from that workroom,
But seeing their guest, a knight
Of whom she knew nothing, she stopped
And carefully drew herself back:
Uncertain just who he was, 445

She turned shy, and her face reddened.
And Erec, seeing such dazzling
Beauty, was overwhelmed.
The old man said to his daughter,
"My sweet good child, take 450

This horse and lead it straight
To the stable where my own are kept.
Make sure it lacks for nothing,
Unbuckle its saddle and bridle,
Set out oats and hay, 455

Curry and brush it well,
See it has all it needs."
The girl then took the horse,
Unlaced its armored breastplate,
Took off its saddle and bridle. 460

The beast was in very good hands:
She devoted herself to its care,
Covering its head with a halter
And a padded collar, curried
And combed it, tied on a feedbag 465

And filled it with plenty of hay
And oats, all clean and fresh.
And then she came back to her father,
Who said, "My dear daughter,
Now take this knight by the hand 470
And honor his presence in our house
By showing him up to his room."
The girl was courtesy
Itself, and never held back.
She led him off by the hand. 475
Her mother had gone up first
To see that the room was readied,
And covered over the bed
With embroidered quilts and blankets,
On which the three of them sat, 480
Erec, his host to one side,
His host's daughter on the other.
A hot, clear fire was burning.
The good old man had only
A single servant, no chamber- 485
Maid, no groom, no boy,
And this servant was in the kitchen,
Cooking meat and fowl
For dinner. She was wonderfully deft,
Able to quickly and carefully 490
Boil beef and roast
Fowl. And when the meal
Was ready, she brought them water
In a pair of basins, laid out
Cloths and napkins, bread 495
And wine, quickly and well.
They seated themselves at the table.

Whatever they wanted and needed
Was waiting ready to hand.
And when they all had dined 500
At their leisure, and risen from the table,
Erec inquired of his host,
Lord and master of the house:
 "Tell me, good host," he said,
 "Why your daughter, so good, 505
 So beautiful a girl, wears
 Such a torn and tattered dress?"
 "My friend," the old man told him,
 "Poverty injures many
 Men, and I am one of them. 510
 It hurts me, seeing my daughter
 Dressed so poorly, but I've no
 Way to make it better.
 Most of my life has been spent
 At war, and I've lost, or sold, 515
 Or mortgaged all my land.
 And still, she'd wear the finest
 Clothes if I'd let her accept
 The gifts they've tried to give her.
 Even the lord of this castle 520
 Would have dressed her in lovely clothes
 And given her whatever she wanted,
 For he's a count and she's
 His niece. And any baron
 In this land, no matter how rich 525
 Or powerful, would be glad to have her
 For his wife, whatever my terms.
 But I want some grander match,
 If God's grace provides it

And He will send us, here, 530
Some mighty king or count,
For could any emperor or king
On earth be shamed, taking
My beautiful daughter, so wonderfully
Lovely that no one's her equal? 535
Her beauty's magical, but her mind
And heart are worth still more.
God has never created
A creature so noble and good.
With her beside me, the rest 540
Of the world means less than a billiard
Ball: she's pleasure, she's joy,
She's solace, she's comfort, she's all
I own and all I treasure.
There's nothing on earth I love more." 545
Then having heard his host's
Story, Erec asked him
Why so many knights
And ladies had congregated
There in that castle, so that every 550
Miserable alley and every
House no matter how poor
Or small was filled with knights
And ladies and squires. And the good
Old man explained it like this: 555
"My friend, these are barons
From all the counties around,
Young and also old,
Come for a celebration
To be held at the castle tomorrow. 560
That's why our houses are packed.

That's why the streets will be seething,
Tomorrow, when everyone's here,
For a silver perch will be set
In front of them all, bearing 565
A splendid sparrow hawk,
Molted five or six times,
The best that's ever been seen.
And whoever would have this hawk
Must have a wise and beautiful 570
Woman totally unstained.
Any knight brave
Enough to risk his lady's
Good name, and her honor, is free
To lift that hawk from its perch 575
And carry it off, with everyone
Watching—at least, if no one
Dares object. We keep
This custom, and everyone comes
Each year to observe it." Erec 580
Replied, pressing him further:
"Good host, I've no wish to annoy you,
But tell me, if you know, that knight's
Name, with arms of blue
And gold, who rode past your door 585
Just now, a charming girl
Close at his side, and riding
Before them a humpbacked dwarf?"
And then the host replied,
"He'll take the hawk, that one, 590
And no one will dare oppose him.
No one will stand and object,
There'll be no fighting, no bloodshed.

He's already taken it twice
In a row, without protest. 595
If he gets it again, this year,
It's his forever more:
He'll have it every year,
Without any quarrel or battle."
Erec responded at once, 600
"I've no affection for this knight!
Indeed, if I'd weapons and armor
I'd challenge his claim to that hawk.
Good host, help me, please:
In the name of all that's noble, 605
And your own kindness, I beg you,
Tell me how I can find
What I need, old or new,
No matter how fine or ugly."
His host answered him openly, 610
"Be calm, young man, don't worry:
I've excellent weapons and armor,
I'll gladly lend what you need.
I've a triple-woven mail shirt,
Chosen one in a thousand, 615
Gleaming leg-armor beautifully
Made, light and handsome,
And a perfect, polished helmet,
And a dazzling brand-new sword.
A horse, a rapier, a lance— 620
I can lend you it all, and I will.
Don't say another word."
"Good sir, a thousand thanks!
But I need no better sword
Than the one I've got, nor any 625

Better horse: these
Will serve me perfectly well.
Lend me the rest, good sir,
And you'll grant my every wish.
Except for one thing more: 630
I've one more request to make,
And it's one for which I'll repay you,
Should God grant me victory."
His host answered in kind,
"Ask whatever you want 635
For your pleasure, whatever it is:
Anything I have is yours."
Then Erec said he wanted
To claim that hawk in his daughter's
Name, for no woman alive 640
Enjoyed a hundredth part
Of her beauty, and taking her with him
Would give him certain right
And reason to show that the hawk
Belonged to her alone. 645
And he added, "Good sir, let
Me tell you what manner of man
I am, my rank, my birth.
I'm the son of a powerful king:
My name among the Bretons 650
Is Erec, son of Lac.
I'm one of the knights of King Arthur,
At whose court I've spent three years.
I've no idea if my father's
Name or mine have ever 655
Reached your ears, but I promise you
This, on my solemn oath:

Lend me your weapons and armor,
Trust your daughter to me,
And tomorrow I'll fight for that hawk, 660
And if God gives me victory
I'll take your daughter to my country
And have her crowned as my queen,
Ruler of three cities."
"Ha! Is this all true? 665
Are you really Erec, Lac's son?"
"Good sir, at your service, in the flesh."
It was easy to see his host's
Happiness. "Of course we've heard
Of you, they talk of you often. 670
I love and respect you still more,
Knowing your courage, your strength.
How could I ever refuse you?
I give you my lovely daughter,
You may have her, body and soul." 675
He took his daughter's hand:
"Take her," he said. "She's yours."
Erec accepted with pleasure:
Now he had all he had wanted.
The entire household was happy, 680
The father as pleased as could be,
The mother weeping for joy,
And the girl herself, though silent,
Delighted by the wonderful luck
God had granted her: wise 685
And noble, she knew he'd be
A king and she his queen,
Honored and royal, wearing
A rich, majestic crown.

They sat up late, that night. 690
White sheets were put on the beds,
And down-soft quilts, and they finally
Stopped talking and all went happily
Off to sleep. But that night
Erec slept little. Next morning, 695
As dawn broke, he rose
And quickly got himself ready,
He and his host together.
And together they went to church
To pray and have a monk 700
Sing them a Mass to the Holy
Spirit, and they left an offering.
And having heard that Mass
Each of them bowed at the altar,
And then they returned to the house. 705
Erec was anxious for battle.
He asked for his armor, which was brought,
And the girl herself armed him,
Employing neither magic
Nor spells, but fastening with deer-hide 710
Thongs his leg armor, putting
The fine-meshed mail around him
And lacing it tightly in place.
With the burnished helmet on his head
He was armed from top to toe. 715
And at last, his sword strapped
To his belt, he called for his horse,
And as they led it in
He leapt on its back with a bound.
The girl brought in his shield 720
And his tempered, sharp-pointed lance.

She gave him the shield, which he took
And hung from his neck by its strap.
Then she put the lance in his hand;
He held it low on the handle, 725
Then said to his open-hearted
Host, "Good lord, if you please,
Let your daughter be ready!
I'll lead her, now, to that hawk,
As you and I have agreed." 730
Without the slightest delay
The good old man saddled
Up a bay-colored palfrey.
But I've nothing to say of its trappings:
There weren't any, on account of 735
The empty purse he'd acknowledged.
She had only saddle and bridle.
No cloak on her shoulders, her head
Bare, and with little time
For prayer, the girl mounted. 740
Erec couldn't wait to leave,
So he left, leading his host's
Daughter at his side, the girl's
Father and mother following
Along behind. Erec 745
Rode with his lance erect,
And the girl on his right. Everyone
Stared as they came, people
Both high and low, amazed
At the sight, questioning each other, 750
And trying to understand.
"What's this? Who's that knight?
He's bound to be brave, and fierce,

With that beautiful girl beside him.

He won't be wasting his time, 755

Claiming that someone so lovely

Is the loveliest one of all."

Some of them said, "By God,

He's going to get that hawk."

Some of them sang the girl's 760

Praises, and many exclaimed,

"Lord! Who could he be,

That knight with his beautiful lady?"

"Who knows? Who knows?" some said,

"But that helmet's a work of art, 765

And that mail shirt." "Just look at that shield."

"And the steel-tipped lance in his hand."

"He knows how to sit on a horse,

He looks like a wellborn knight."

"Oh, he's well built: look at 770

Those arms, those legs, those feet."

Every eye was on them,

But Erec never stopped

Till he stood in front of the hawk.

And then he drew to the side, 775

Awaiting the other knight.

And there he was, coming

With his dwarf and his lady beside him.

He'd heard the news already:

Some knight who wanted the hawk 780

Had made an appearance, but he never

Dreamed the world contained

Anyone brave enough

Actually to stand and oppose him;

He was sure he could crush any challenge. 785

They all knew who he was
And crowded around to greet him.
A great press of knights
And squires pushed along
Behind him, and ladies running 790
After, and girls scampering.
He rode in front of them all,
He, and his woman, and his miniature
Man. He cantered up
To the hawk, bursting with pride. 795
But so many excited peasants
Had crowded around that he couldn't
Approach a bit closer
Than a long crossbow shot.
Then the count of that castle rode 800
His horse straight at the peasants,
Shaking a staff at their heads,
And the louts fell back. Then the knight
Rode up, his voice and manner
Calm, and addressed his lady: 805
 "My dear one! This wonderfully molted
Bird, this beautiful hawk,
Belongs to you by right,
Gracious and lovely as you are.
It is yours for as long as I live. 810
My sweet one, come forward, take
This bird from its silver perch."
The lady put out her hand,
But Erec quickly challenged her,
Indifferent to her knight's disdain: 815
 "No, my dear," he said,
 "Play with something else.

You have no right to this bird.
No matter who may not like it
You'll never own this hawk, 820
For someone else deserves it,
More beautiful still, and more noble."
The other knight glowered,
Which didn't bother Erec.
He called to his own lady: 825
"Come forward, my lovely," he said,
"And lift this bird from its perch,
For it's only right that you have it.
My beauty, come forward and take it!
For here and now I say 830
No woman alive can match you,
Any more than the moon
The sun, not for courage,
Loveliness, courtesy, or honor.
Let anyone dare deny it!" 835
The other knight was furious,
Hearing Erec so boldly
Challenge him and his lady.
"Fellow, who are you,
Presuming to contradict me?" 840
Erec answered him clearly:
"A knight from another land,
Come to hunt this hawk,
Knowing my lady deserves it
No matter what anyone thinks." 845
"You'd better run while you can:
Foolishness led you here.
Try to take this hawk
And you'll pay a terrible price."

"Really? What price did you have
In mind?" "I'll have that hawk
Or here and now we fight."
"That," said Erec, "is truly
Folly, mere empty words
For frightening children, not me.
I scarcely tremble at the thought."
"Then here and now I challenge
You to mortal combat."
"Let God decide," said Erec.
"I wanted nothing else."
So now you'll hear some fighting!



They cleared away a great space,
And the crowd pushed around it.
The knights measured their steps
Back, then spurred their horses
Forward, spearheads crashing,
Rushing so fiercely together
That their shields were battered and cracked,
Their lances smashed to bits,
Their very saddles destroyed.
They were forced to leap from the stirrups
Down to the ground, letting
Their horses run free in the fields.
Spears having done what they could,
They attacked each other on foot,
Drawing forth their swords
And slashing fearsome strokes,
Hacking such heavy blows

That their helmets rang and shattered.
They fought ferociously, cutting 880
Hard at each other's necks,
For this was no make-believe combat:
They smashed whatever they could,
Swords slicing, mail shirts
Crackling, iron red 885
With blood. On and on
They fought, so fierce, so savage
That resolve weakened, and their arms.
The two women were in tears:
The knights saw their ladies 890
Raising their hands to God,
Begging that victory go
To him who suffered for her.
And the other one said to Erec:
"Knight! Let's both step back 895
And rest for just a moment:
Our blows have gotten too feeble.
We need to strike harder,
For it's getting close to dark.
It's shameful, we lose honor, 900
Letting this last so long.
Look at that lovely girl
Calling to Heaven on your
Account; how sweetly she prays;
And my lady, too. These steel 905
Blades must do their work
Better, and for them." And Erec
Answered, "You've spoken well."
They rested a little while.
Erec watched his beloved 910

Sweetly praying. And as soon
As he saw her, he felt his strength
Returning, his courage renewed.
The sight of her beauty, and the force
Of his love, doubled his resolve. 915
And he thought of the queen, and how
He had told her, there in the forest,
He would take revenge for the dwarf's
Insult, and he hadn't done it.
"Scoundrel!" he thought. "Why 920
This delay? I need to revenge
The vileness this knight allowed
His dwarf to commit, there
In that wood." His anger rose
Again, and he cried to his enemy: 925
"Knight! I call you back
To battle. We've taken quite
As long a rest as we need.
There's combat still to be fought."
The knight answered: "Agreed." 930
They threw themselves back into battle.
Both were trained swordsmen:
In the first assault if Erec
Had lowered his guard his enemy's
Sword would have pierced his skin. 935
Reaching around Erec's
Shield, he caught him across
The head, breaking part of
His helmet. The sword cut
Down to the white cap 940
Worn beneath, slicing
The shield halfway through,

Slashing off a chunk
Of mail shirt. Erec would have
Been badly hurt: he felt 945
The cold steel on his hip.
But God saved him, that time:
A little further in
And he'd have been split down the middle.
Erec wasn't worried: 950
Whatever he got, he'd give back.
A fierce swing of his sword
Across the other's shoulder
Fell so swift and sure
That the shield crumpled, and the mail shirt 955
Was worthless, and the sharp blade
Stabbed clear to the bone;
Rivers of red blood
Went running down to his waist.
Both were superb warriors: 960
They fought so equally neither
Could gain an inch on the other,
Could find no way to win.
Both their mail shirts were torn
And tattered, both shields so cut 965
And chopped you couldn't claim
Either had any protection
Left. They stood face to face,
Fighting, both of them bleeding
Freely, both of them weak. 970
He struck Erec, and Erec
Struck him; they'd been beaten so hard
On the helmet they both were stunned.
They swung at each other, without

Resistance. Then Erec landed 975
Three smashing blows, breaking
His enemy's helmet, slicing
His cap, cutting part
Of the skull away, but stopping
Short of the brain. His enemy 980
Tottered, and seeing him buckling
Erec pushed him, and he fell,
Stretched out, right hand down.
Then Erec seized him by the head,
Ripped away the rest 985
Of his helmet and unfastened the visor,
Uncovering his face. Remembering
How this knight's ugly dwarf
Had acted, back in the wood,
He would have cut off his head, 990
But the beaten man begged
For mercy. "Knight! You've won.
Have mercy! Don't kill me—please.
Now that I'm conquered, my death
Can bring you neither honor 995
Nor fame. If you killed me
My death would bring you disgrace.
Here is my sword: take it."
Erec would not take it.
But he said: "All right. You may live." 1000
"Thank you, noble knight!
What wrong, what crime, could make you
Hate me and kill for that hate?
I've never seen you before,
As far as I know, or harmed you, 1005
Or insulted or shamed you. Never."

Erec replied: "You have."

"What?" the other knight said.

"I don't remember your face.

But if I've done you mischief

1010

I pledge you eternal faith."

Then Erec said: "Knight,

I rode in the forest beside

Queen Guinevere, when you let

Your haughty dwarf strike

1015

My queen's maid. What a savage

Deed, striking a woman!

And then he did it to me.

You took me for some sort of serf:

What vile arrogance, to see

1020

Such an outrage and, silent, allow

It to happen, and even take

Delight in watching that miserable

Midget injure the girl

And me. Despise you? Of course,

1025

For what was done to us both.

Pledge yourself my prisoner,

And then, without delay,

Go directly to the queen:

You'll find her at Cardigan castle.

1030

Ride there. You can reach that castle

Tonight, surely: it can't

Be more than twenty miles off.

You, your woman, and your dwarf

Must place yourselves at her

1035

Command and do as she wishes.

And give her this message: tomorrow

I mean to return, happily,

Bringing a wellborn woman
So lovely, so noble, so wise, 1040
That no one could find her equal.
You will tell her exactly that.
And now, tell me your name."
Willy-nilly, the knight
Answered: "My lord, I'm Ydier, 1045
The son of Nudd. Yesterday
Morning I couldn't have imagined
Any knight could defeat me.
I've found my better, it's been proven:
An immensely powerful knight. 1050
You have my promise, I swear
To do as you wish, at once,
And surrender myself to your queen.
But please don't hide your own name:
Tell me what to call you; 1055
Who shall I say has sent me?
I'm almost ready to leave."
Erec replied: "I'll tell you
My name, there's nothing to hide.
I'm Erec. Now go to the queen 1060
And say it was I who sent you."
"I'm going, you have my word.
My dwarf and my woman join me,
All of us wholly at
Her mercy. Rest assured. 1065
And I'll give the queen news
Of you and of your lady."
Erec accepted his word.
Then everyone came to see
The account settled, the count 1070

And his neighbors, ladies and barons.
Some were sad and some
Were happy: some pleased, some not.
But everyone there rejoiced
For the girl in the white dress, 1075
The poor knight's daughter,
For her heart was noble and true.
Ydier's fate made some of them
Mournful, and one was his lady.
And Ydier could stay no longer; 1080
His pledge obliged him to leave.
He mounted his horse. — But why
Bore you with all the details?
Leading his dwarf and his lady
He crossed both wood and plain, 1085
Making his way straight
To Cardigan castle, and came there.
And just outside the hall
Were my lord Gawain, and Kay,
The king's steward, and many 1090
Other knights, I suspect,
With them. Gawain and Kay
Were watching the new arrivals,
And Kay was the first to know them.
He said to Gawain: "My lord, 1095
Unless I'm wrong, that knight
Coming along the road
Is the rude fellow the queen
Spoke of, who grossly insulted her.
I see three of them coming, 1100
One knight, one dwarf, one lady."
"Quite so," Gawain agreed,

"I see a girl and a dwarf
Riding along with a knight,
And they're coming straight toward us. 1105
He's armored, with all his weapons,
But his shield is badly broken.
It seems to me the queen
Will know him as soon as she sees him.
Go, steward, call her!" 1110
Kay went at once
And found her in one of the rooms.
"My lady," he said, "remember
The dwarf who wounded your maid
And made you so angry?" "Indeed, 1115
I remember him very well.
Steward: have you learned something?
Why are you asking such questions?"
"My lady," he said, "I've seen
A knight errant approaching, 1120
Mounted on a gray horse
And armed, and unless my eyes
Deceive me, leading a young
Lady. And he has a dwarf
Carrying, I think, the knotted 1125
Whip that struck Erec."
The queen rose at once,
Saying: "Quickly, steward,
Let's see if this is truly
The man, and if it is 1130
I'll know him at once, believe me,
The moment I see him." Kay said:
"I'll show you. Come to the upper
Rooms, where all our friends

Are gathered. We saw him first, 1135
While standing there; my lord
Gawain awaits you. Hurry,
My lady: we've lingered too long
Down here." And the queen, excited,
Hurried just as he'd said, 1140
And came to the window where lord
Gawain was waiting, and stood there
Beside him, and knew the knight
At once. "My lord, it's him!
And something serious has happened; 1145
He's been in battle. Has Erec
Taken revenge? Who knows
If Erec defeated him
Or was vanquished himself. That shield's
Been battered; his mail shirt's covered 1150
With blood; there's more red
Than white." "Indeed," said Gawain.
"My lady, who could doubt
You've seen it exactly right?
His mail shirt's spattered with blood; 1155
He's badly battered: whatever
Battles he's fought were hard ones.
That's all we can tell for sure:
He's fought fiercely and long.
We'll hear things said, now, 1160
To make us angry or proud.
Either Erec has sent him
To us, his prisoner and yours,
Or else he's such a fool
He's come to boast how he conquered 1165
Erec, or killed him. Nothing

Else is possible." Then the queen
Answered: "You're right. I agree."
"Indeed," said all the others.
Then Ydier reached the gate, 1170
Bringing them his news.
And everyone hurried down
To hear him, all of Arthur's
Knights. At the royal mounting
Block, Ydier dismounted. 1175
Gawain took the lady's
Hand and helped her descend.
And the dwarf, too, came down
From his horse. More than a hundred
Knights were watching. The three 1180
Were brought to the king. And as soon
As Ydier saw the queen
He bowed almost to the ground,
First greeting her and then
The king and the other knights, 1185
And saying: "My lady, a gentleman
Sent me here as your captive,
A brave, courageous knight,
He whom my dwarf struck
On the face with his whip. He has beaten 1190
Me in combat, I am vanquished.
Lady, I bring you my dwarf
As your prisoner, all at your mercy:
Do with him however you wish."
The queen could not remain silent, 1195
But requested news of Erec.
"Tell me, sir," said she,
"Do you know when Erec is coming?"

"Tomorrow, lady. And he'll bring
A woman lovelier than any 1200
I've ever seen on earth."
Then having heard his message
The wise and noble queen
Declared, courteously: "My friend,
Coming here as my captive 1205
Your prison will weigh on you lightly:
I mean you no harm. But God
Help you, tell me your name."
And he answered her: "Lady,
I'm Ydier, the son of Nudd." 1210
Everyone knew it was true.
Then the queen rose, and bowed
Low in front of the king
And said: "Your Majesty has heard?
You've waited for Erec, that valiant 1215
Knight, and it's good that you've waited.
I gave you good counsel, yesterday,
Good advice that you took.
This proves what good advice
Is worth." Said the king: "You speak 1220
An ancient and honorable truth:
Wise men have ears to hear with.
We did well to accept your words.
But now, if you love me even
A little, you'll free this knight 1225
From his prison, with only one
Condition—that he stay forever
In my house and at my court.
And if he won't, the worse
For him!" The king had barely 1230

Spoken when the queen, in proper
Form, proclaimed her captive
Paroled, provided he stayed
At her husband's court. The knight
Made no plea for mercy 1235
And promised to stay where he was;
Thereafter he remained a part
Of that court where he'd never been
Before. Boys came running
To take his weapons and armor. 1240
And now it is time to talk
Of Erec, still there where they'd fought
Their battle. Not even Tristan's
Victory over fierce Morholt,
On Saint-Sampson Island, was welcomed, 1245
I think, with such rejoicing.
From great and small, from fat
And thin, praise poured forth.
His knighthood was sung to the skies,
The whole place exclaiming: 1250
"God, what a knight! The best!"
When Erec returned to his chambers
Their happy words went with him,
Their laughter, their joy, and even
The count of that place praised him, 1255
Saying: "My lord, if you please,
It's only right and proper
That you take your lodging with me,
You, the son of King Lac.
It would honor my house and me 1260
To have you under my roof:
I intend to make you my lord.

Good sir, I beg your goodwill,
Allow me to offer you shelter."

Erec answered: "I mean 1265

No offense, but I can't abandon
My host, who has heaped me with honor,
Granted his daughter's hand.

What nobler gift could he give me,
So lovely, so precious, so rich?" 1270

"To be sure, my lord," said the count.

"As good as she is beautiful,
Surpassingly lovely, and wise,
And born of the best blood:
Indeed, her mother's my sister. 1275

It warms my heart, having you
Condescend to my niece.

But let me urge you, once
Again, to lodge with me."

"Enough," said Erec. "It's out
Of the question. I can't and won't." 1280

Seeing he couldn't prevail,
The count declared: "As you please,
My lord. We'll say no more.

But my knights and I propose 1285
To join you, tonight, to keep you
Company and help you rejoice."

Erec thanked him for that promise.

And then he rode to his lodgings,
The count still at his side, 1290

And knights and ladies behind them,
Every man delighted.

As soon as he reached there, twenty
Servants or more came running,

Happy to take off his armor. 1295
The whole house was filled
With joyous people. Erec
Seated himself, and everyone
Sat in a circle around him,
On benches and beds and cushions. 1300
The count reclined nearby,
The beautiful girl between them,
Her face shining, feeding
A plover's wing to the hawk
For whom the battle had been fought. 1305
What honor and joy she'd won,
That day, what royal grandeur!
No happiness could have been greater,
Nor was she shy about showing it.
She hid none of her joy, 1310
And everyone there could see it.
But all in that house were happy
For her, for all loved her.
Then Erec summoned her father
And spoke handsomely, beginning 1315
As follows: "Good friend, good host,
Good knight, you've honored me
Immensely, but your reward
Will be grander still. Tomorrow
Your daughter will come with me 1320
To King Arthur's court, and there
I intend to make her my wife.
If you could kindly wait here
A little longer, I'll send for you,
Bring you to the land where my father 1325
Rules and I will rule

After him; it's far, far off.
There I will give you two
Castles, rich and strong.
You'll be lord of Roadan, built 1330
In the days of Adam, and another
Nearby castle just as
Noble. Montreval
Is its name. My father has none
Better. And in less than three days 1335
I'll send you gold and silver,
And furs of every sort,
And good silk cloth, so you
May be dressed as you should, and your wife,
Too, who is now my dear 1340
Sweet lady. At the crack of dawn
Tomorrow I shall lead your daughter,
Clothed as you see her now,
To King Arthur's court, where I'll ask
The queen to give her the clothes 1345
She deserves, of bright red silk."
Also seated there,
Next to the lovely lady
In white, was a brave and noble
Girl, courteous and wise, 1350
The lady's cousin and the count's
Niece, and hearing it said
That Erec's lady was to go
To Guinevere's court wearing
Nothing more than a tunic 1355
She said to the count: "My lord,
How shameful for you, as well
As for her, should this knight bring her

To the royal court, your own
Niece, dressed so miserably." 1360
And the count declared: "Please,
Sweet niece of mine, give her
The very best of your own
Clothing, to wear to court."
But hearing these words, Erec 1365
Replied: "Please say no more,
Good sir. Do understand:
I wish my lady clothed
Only in robes given
Her by the queen herself." 1370
To which the other girl
Replied, declaring: "Ha!
Good sir, since you propose
To lead my cousin off,
Dressed in this shabby white tunic, 1375
Let me make you another
Offer. Since you insist
She can have none of my clothes,
Let me give her one
Of my three palfreys, horses 1380
No king or count possesses.
One's sorrel, one's gray, one's dappled.
And truly, of any hundred
Palfreys, none is better
Than the dappled: no bird flying 1385
Through the air can go as fast.
In all his life he's never
Stumbled: a child could ride him.
He's utterly perfect for a girl—
Not stubborn or restless, he doesn't 1390

Bite or kick, he's calm.
Only an unsettled mind
Could hunt a better one. Riding
Him is as free of discomfort,
As easy, as sailing a boat." 1395
Erec replied: "My sweet
Friend, the choice is hers:
She can certainly have him, if she likes,
And I too will be pleased."
The girl immediately called 1400
One of her servants, and said:
"Go, my friend, fetch
My dappled palfrey. Saddle him,
Bring him here at once."
Her order was obeyed, the horse 1405
Saddled and bridled, beautifully
Harnessed, and her servant climbed
On the shaggy-maned steed's back.
And then the horse appeared.
And seeing so fine, so noble 1410
An animal, Erec heaped it
With praise, commanding one
Of his grooms to lead it to the stable
And house it there, next
To the horse he rode himself. 1415
And then the evening ended,
The happy guests left.
The count returned to his home,
Leaving Erec with his host,
But vowing to be back in the morning, 1420
Ready to escort him when he went.
They slept long and peacefully.

As dawn lit up the sky,
Erec prepared to depart,
Ordering his horses saddled 1425
And his lovely lady awakened,
Who was already dressed and ready.
His host rose, with his wife,
Nor was there a knight or lady
Not waiting with them, glad 1430
To go forth with Erec and the beautiful
Girl. Everyone mounted.
Erec rode with the count
On one side, the girl on the other,
And she didn't forget the hawk, 1435
Playing with it as she went.
But she carried no other treasure.
They rode in a happy procession.
And when it was time to leave them,
The count wanted to honor 1440
Erec, sending some
Of those knights and ladies along,
But Erec quickly declined,
Saying he needed no one
And wanted no one except 1445
His beautiful lady. And then
He said: "I commend you to God."
The count and his people lingered,
But at last he kissed Erec
And his niece, and piously blessed them. 1450
Her father and mother kissed her
Too, over and over,
And the mother wept as she left,
And the girl wept, and her father.

Love is like that, and nature, 1455
And affection for the child you raise:
Parents cry with passion,
And sadness, and the tender love
They feel for their child. But father
And mother knew quite well 1460
Their daughter left them only
To go to greater things.
But their love made them weep
Because their daughter was leaving.
They wept for no other reason, 1465
Fully aware that in
The end she'd rise to great honor.
And as they rode away
In different directions, they wept
Piteously and blessed one another. 1470
Erec hurried from his host,
Wildly anxious not
To be late at Arthur's court,
Happy and proud of the wonderfully
Beautiful, wise, and noble 1475
Woman his valor had won.
He couldn't keep himself
From staring, and the more he looked
The better he liked her. From time
To time he bent and kissed her, 1480
Riding as close as he could,
Refreshed, renewed at the very
Sight—her golden hair,
Her laughing eyes and smooth
Brow, her nose, her mouth, 1485
All sweet, all moving his heart.

She was lovely, from top to bottom:
Her chin, her white throat,
Her hips and breasts, her arms,
Her hands. But the girl was staring 1490
Just as hard, as if
Competing with the knight, her eyes
Warm, her heart loyal.
You couldn't have paid them to stop
Looking, each at the other. 1495
They were perfectly matched in manners
And grace, in beauty, of birth
And blood equally noble—
So much alike, indeed,
In education and nature, 1500
That even striving to tell
The truth, no one, seeing them
Together, could pick the better
Or more beautiful—so perfectly suited,
Even their hearts beat as one. 1505
The laws of marriage had never
Joined a lovelier pair.

They rode on together until,
Exactly at noon, they arrived
At Cardigan Castle, where all 1510
Awaited their coming. The noblest
Barons in the king's court
Were perched at windows, watching.
And Guinevere was there,
And even the king, and Kay, 1515
And Perceval from Wales,
And Gawain after him,
And Tor, King Ares' son,

And Lucan, the king's butler,
And many more good knights. 1520
They saw Erec coming
From far away, bringing
His lady, and recognized
Their knight the moment they spied him.
The queen began to smile, 1525
And the whole court was joyful,
Happy to welcome him back,
For knights and ladies alike
Loved him. When he reached the palace
The king came to greet him, 1530
And the queen followed her husband.
All blessed Erec in the name
Of Our Lord; all praised his lady's
Beauty, which the king honored,
His royal hand helping her 1535
Down from her horse: Arthur
Was exceedingly happy, a courtier
To the core, and honored her
Again, leading her in
To his marbled hall. Erec 1540
And the queen came after, hand
In hand, and he said to her,
"My lady, I bring you the woman
I love, dressed in the same
Poor garments she wore when her father 1545
Gave her into my care.
Nothing's been changed. She's daughter
To a poor and noble knight.
Poverty lowers many
Men, but her father honors 1550

His rank, though he owns but little.
 And her mother's a gracious lady,
 Sister to a noble count.

There's nothing to make me refuse
 Her hand; you can see her beauty; 1555
 Her blood is as good as any.

Poverty's forced her to wear
 This white tunic until
 Its sleeves are frayed at the elbow.

But I could have brought her here 1560
 Dressed in splendid clothes,
 Because a girl, her cousin,

Offered her silken robes
 With ermine and other furs,
 But I wouldn't allow it, I wanted 1565

Her to appear to you
 Just as she came to me.
 My sweet lady, look:

Surely she needs, you can see
 For yourself, some elegant dress." 1570
 And the queen at once replied,

"You've done exactly as you should.
 She ought to be wearing one
 Of my gowns, one of the best,
 A new one, fresh and beautiful." 1575

The queen promptly led her
 To her dressing room and ordered
 That there be brought, at once,
 A new under-tunic

And a green and purple-furred 1580
 Cloak, fresh made for royal
 Use. The servant went

And returned with the rich cloak
And a tunic, trimmed (even
Its sleeves) with white ermine, 1585
And its cuffs and collar, without
Exaggeration, adorned
With costly bands of beaten
Gold, and precious stones
Possessing rare powers— 1590
Gray, violet, green,
And brown, all mounted in gold.
A splendid tunic indeed.
But the cloak, I assure you, was worth
Every bit as much. 1595
Both were so utterly fresh
And new that they lacked fasteners
To close them. The finely made
Cloak had a collar fashioned
Of thick sable fur, 1600
And golden clasps weighing
More than an ounce apiece,
One side bearing a ruby
Clearer than a red garnet,
The other a tawny orange jacinth. 1605
And these fittings, too, were covered
With the finest, whitest ermine
Anyone had ever seen.
The purple fur was elaborately
Worked with dozens of crosses 1610
Of every shape and color,
Cinnabar, violet, azure
Blue, green, and yellow.
The queen directed that five

Lengths of gold and silken
Thread be brought for fasteners. 1615
Her servants carried them in,
Rich and beautifully worked.
And the queen insisted the cloak
Be put in order at once, 1620
Assigning the task to a past
Master of all such work.
And when it was done, that noble,
Deep-hearted lady embraced
The girl in the bare white tunic, 1625
Saying these generous words:
"My dear girl, I wish you
To exchange that tunic of yours
For this one, worth a hundred
Silver marks, so much 1630
Do I wish to honor you. And wear
This cloak over it: in time
I'll give you more." She could not
Refuse, but took it, and thanked
The queen. And then two maids 1635
Led her to a secluded room,
Where they took off her old tunic
(Worth less than a straw)
And dressed her in the new, which she fastened
With a rich embroidered belt, 1640
Ordering the old one given
To the poor, for the love of God.
And then she clasped on the cloak.
No one could think of ignoring her
Now; her clothing was brilliant, 1645
Bright, and made her even more

Beautiful. The maids bound up
Her flowing yellow locks
With golden ribbon, but that glowing
Gold couldn't shine as bright 1650
As her hair. And on her head
They set a circle of hammered
Gold, shaped and colored
Like flowers. They wanted her looking
So lovely that no one could find 1655
A thing to improve, and they worked
Hard. One of them placed
Around her neck a double
Strand of inlaid gold,
Mounted with a topaz. She'd become 1660
So lovely, and Nature had formed her
So well, that in my opinion
Nowhere on earth could you find
Her equal. Then she emerged
And came to the queen, who was filled 1665
With joy, seeing the result,
For she loved the lady, so pleasing
Were her gracious ways, and her beauty.
Then leading her by the hand
They came before the king, 1670
And seeing them there, the king
Immediately rose to greet them.
And all the many knights
In that room, when they entered—so many
I could not account for a tenth, 1675
A twentieth, or a thirtieth part
Of them all—rose as well.
But I'll tell you the names of the noblest

Barons, the best in the world,
Seated at the Round Table. 1680

As always, the first among all
Those knights was Gawain, and Erec,
Son of Lac, was second,
And Lancelot of the Lake was third,
And Gornemant of Gort 1685

Fourth, the Handsome Coward
Fifth, the Bold Monster
Sixth, Meliant from Lis
Seventh, the Accursed Wiseman
Eighth, Dodinel the Savage 1690

Ninth—and let Gandelin
Be tenth, because of his goodness.
But I'll list the rest with no numbers,
For ranking such men is hard.

Yvain the brave sat some distance 1695
Away, opposite Yvain
The Bastard, and unsmiling Tristan
Sat next to Blioberis.

Next came Short-Armed Cardoc,
A truly cheerful knight, 1700
And Caveron of Robdic,
And then King Quenedic's son,

And then Quintarus's page,
And Ydier of Gloomy Mountain,
Gaheret, and Kay of Estral, 1705

Amaugain, and Galet the Bald,
Girflet, Do's son, and Taulus,
Never tired of fighting,
And Loholt, Arthur's son,
A truly wonderful knight, 1710

And Sagremor, who followed
No orders: he can't be forgotten,
Nor Bedvere, master of horses,
And master of checkers and chess,
Nor Bravant, nor King Lot, 1715
Or Galgetin of Wales.

And when the beautiful stranger
Saw so many knights
Seated in a circle and staring
At her, she bowed her head 1720
In perfectly natural discomfort;
Her face turned red. But shame,
Too, suited her, made her
More beautiful. And seeing her discomfort,
The king drew her toward him, 1725
Gently taking her hand
And seating her and the queen,
She to his right, the queen
To his left. Then Guinevere said,
" My lord, may I speak my mind? 1730
A man who by force of arms
Can win so lovely a lady
In a foreign land, must be welcome
At your court. We were right to wait
For Erec, for now you can kiss 1735
The loveliest woman here—
And no one, I think, will take
Offense, or term me untruthful,
If I call her the loveliest here
Among us, and in all the world." 1740

And the king answered, "You've told
The truth. And if no one disputes me,

The magic white stag's reward
 Is hers." Then he asked his knights,
 "How say you, gentlemen? Agreed? 1745
 It seems to me, without doubt,
 That, face and body together,
 This is the noblest, most beautiful
 Woman from here to where
 The earth touches the sky. 1750
 The magic stag's reward
 Has got to be hers. Gentlemen:
 Again, what do you think?
 Has anyone any objection?
 And if someone has a challenge 1755
 Let him speak his mind
 Now. The king is never
 Allowed to lie or encourage
 Deceit or untruth or disorder:
 Maintaining virtue and justice 1760
 Is the task of a loyal ruler,
 Upholding the law, and truth,
 And faith, and honest dealing.
 Nothing could make me commit
 Disloyal, dishonest acts 1765
 Against the strongest or weakest
 Of men. No one should need
 To accuse me. But neither do I wish
 The customs and manners of my fathers
 To fall by the way, just 1770
 As I never wish to abuse you
 By making new laws, creating
 Customs unknown to my fathers.
 The laws my father, Pendragon,

Your king, your emperor, enforced, 1775
Shall remain the living law
For you and for me. So tell me
Exactly what you think:
Does anyone disagree?
Is this, or isn't it, the loveliest 1780
Woman at my court, entitled
To the white stag's kiss? I wish
To hear you; let the truth prevail!"
Then all of them cried as one:
"By God and the Holy Cross 1785
You're right to call her the loveliest.
The sun has never shone
On any woman more beautiful.
Kiss her, here and now:
No one disagrees." 1790
And seeing that all agreed
The king waited no longer.
Turning to the girl, he took her
In his arms. And the girl was too wise
Not to be pleased at this kiss, 1795
Which only a peasant could resent.
The king kissed her as a courtier
Should, while his barons watched,
Then told her, "My sweet, I give you
My love sanely, as a gentleman 1800
Should. I mean you no harm,
But love you from the bottom of my heart."
The king had restored the white stag's
Place in the customs of his court.
And here I finish Part One. 1805



After the king's kiss
Had been given according to custom,
Erec, a noble and courteous
Knight, fulfilled—as honor
Required—the promises made 1810
To his poverty-stricken host.
Keeping his word to the letter,
He promptly sent him five
Fat, well-rested horses,
Loaded with clothes and with cloth, 1815
With buckram and other tight-woven
Stuff, and bars of silver
And gold, and squirrel fur,
And sable, and oriental
Silk. And once the mules 1820
Had been heaped with everything a sensible
Man might require, ten knights
And ten household servants
And their helpers went with the animals,
Ordered to greet Erec's 1825
Host, and also his wife,
With all the respect and honor
Erec's own heart could express,
And then to convey horses
And gold and silver and coins, 1830
All the richness borne
In boxes on the horses' broad backs,
And then to escort the high lord
Of Outer Wales to his realm,
He and his wife together, 1835

With all the honor due them.
Erec had promised two castles,
On the best sites, easiest
To defend, and most beautifully built
Of any castles on earth. 1840
One was Montreval,
And the other was Roadan.
Once in that kingdom where his father
Ruled, Erec's men
Were instructed to be sure the castles 1845
Were delivered, with all their rights
And rents, exactly as promised.
And those knights, and servants, and servants
Of servants, obeyed his orders:
Mules, and gold and silver, 1850
And clothes, and coins, all
In immense profusion, were carried
To Erec's host and without
The slightest delay were handed
Over that very same day. 1855
And showing the host the highest
Honor they knew, they led him
To his realm, a three-day journey.
King Lac had no objections
To his beloved son's arrangements, 1860
And the castles and armored towers
Were delivered and their owner much honored,
With his title free and clear,
Guaranteed by the king,
And knights and merchants sworn 1865
To observe and uphold their new lord's
Rights in every respect.

And when all of this had been done
Erec's men turned around
And headed home to their master. 1870
He gave them a warm welcome,
Requesting news of his host
And his wife, and word of his father
The king. They gave him good tidings.
And soon, the time fixed 1875
For the wedding approached. Waiting
Had been hard for Erec; he couldn't
Wait much longer. He came
To the king, asking permission
To be married at court, without 1880
Delay, and the king smiled
And gave him the consent he wanted,
And sent for all the counts
And dukes all over his kingdom
Who held their lands from his hand, 1885
None of them bold enough
To refuse Arthur's invitation.
None of them keeping Pentecost
At home, they hurried to come
As their king had commanded them. Now listen, 1890
And I'll tell you their noble names,
These kings and counts and dukes:
Count Branleigh of Gloucester was there,
With many richly armored
Men and a hundred horses. 1895
And Menagorman came next,
Lord of Eglimon,
And also the lord of the Mountain-
Top, with many well-equipped

Men, and the count of Travain, 1900
Together with a full five hundred.
And then came the count of Goodgrain
With at least as many more.
And along with all of these
Came Melwas, a powerful baron, 1905
Lord of the Island of Glass,
Where no one ever hears thunder
Or sees lightning or storms,
Or any toads or snakes,
And it's never too cold or too warm. 1910
And Grellemeuf of Finstere,
With twenty companions, and also
His brother, Guingemars,
Lord of Avalon Island
And said to be the lover 1915
Of Morgana le Fay, a claim
History has proven true.
And David of Tintagel came,
Who never knew sadness or sorrow.
There were counts and dukes all over, 1920
But even more kings: Garras,
The proud ruler of Cork,
With a full five hundred knights
All wearing tunics and cloaks
And breeches of taffeta silk. 1925
Aguiflest, king
Of Scotland, rode a stallion
Of Cappadocian blood,
Accompanied by his sons, Cadret
And Cuoi, two powerful knights. 1930
King Ban of Ganret came

With a crowd of beardless boys,
Faces smooth as a baby's,
Youngsters who served him at home,
Two hundred or more of the happiest, 1935
Most cheerful pages on earth,
And each and every one of them
With a hawk or falcon on his wrist,
A merlin or sparrow hawk,
Molted birds, and goshawks. 1940
The old king of Orcel,
Quirion, brought no youngsters,
But a troop of two hundred, not one of them
Under the age of a hundred,
Their heads grizzled and bald, 1945
Their beards down to their belts,
From having lived so long.
They all were dear to King Arthur.
Bilis, lord of dwarves,
King of Antipodes, 1950
And Bliant's cousin, was there,
A dwarf himself—indeed,
The smallest dwarf of all,
Just as his cousin Bliant
(By half a foot or more) 1955
Was the tallest of Arthur's knights.
And to prove his power, and his wealth,
Bilis came with two dwarfish
Kings who ruled by his will,
Gribolo and Glodoalan. 1960
Everyone marveled at these miniature
Men, but offered each of them
Honor and respect when they came

To court, arriving as kings
Of high and noble birth, 1965
Surrounded by courtiers and servants.
At the sight of such an assembly
Of barons and counts and kings,
King Arthur's heart rejoiced.
And then, to heap his pleasure 1970
Higher, he ordered baths
For a hundred pages, and made them
Knights, gave each rich robes
In many colors, of fur
And Egyptian silk, chosen 1975
As each of them wished, and weapons
And armor, and a swift-footed horse
Worth at least a hundred
Pounds.
Then Erec married
And was forced to reveal his wife's 1980
True name, for a woman without
A Christian name cannot
Be married. No one had known
Her name, till now; they finally
Learned she'd been baptized Enide. 1985
Canterbury's archbishop,
Who'd come to court himself,
Had performed the solemn rite.
And also assembled at Arthur's
Court was every musician 1990
In all of England who could play
Or sing notes worth hearing.
They filled the palace with their pleasure.
Men were performing everywhere—

Some jumped, some tumbled, some sang, Worked magic tricks, or whistled, Some played the flute, the oboe And the harp, and some the cello. Circles of girls were dancing, Everyone bursting with joy.	1995
Nothing had been neglected That could make men happy and fill Their hearts with joy, that wedding Day. Drums were beating, And flutes and trumpets playing, Oboes and clarinets.	2000
How can I tell it all? No inner doors, no gates Were locked, people came And went freely, all day:	2005
No poor, no rich were kept Away. King Arthur held back Nothing: at the king's command His cooks and bakers, and the stewards Of his wine, provided meat And drink and bread for everyone, And as much as they liked. Anything Anyone asked for was given, And freely, no matter who Or what, and all were well pleased.	2010
The palace rang with joy— But enough of that: let me Tell you the pleasure, the joy, Experienced in bedroom and bed. When the bridal night arrived A bishop and archbishop led them	2015
	2020
	2025

To their room. For this meeting
No one stole Iseult
Away or put Brangene
In her place! The queen herself 2030
Prepared the bride for bed,
For love of both bride and groom.
No hunted stag, panting
With heat, thirsts for a fountain—
No starving sparrow hawk, 2035
Hearing its name, comes flying
Eagerly back—more
Than these two hungered to hold
Each other. And they made up,
That night, for all their waiting. 2040
The moment they were left alone
Every part of their bodies
Received its due. The eyes
(Which open love's way, carrying
Words to the heart) went back 2045
To watching, and liked what they saw.
And once the words had arrived
They knew the even greater
Sweetness of kisses, and both
Relished the taste, drank 2050
With all their heart, till it hurt
To remain apart. The game
Began with kisses. And love
So plainly shared prepared
The girl, gave her courage, 2055
So nothing made her afraid,
She endured it all, no matter
What. And no longer a girl,

Rose the next morning a woman.
And each of the minstrels was happy, 2060
Too, paid so wonderfully
Well their debts disappeared.
They were given handsome gifts,
Robes of rabbit fur,
Of squirrel and ermine, and violet 2065
Silk, and brilliant red.
Whatever they wanted, horses,
Money, all received
Their heart's desire. The joy
Of that wedding feast lasted 2070
Fifteen days, and more,
In glory and high magnificence,
Arthur affirming his lordship
And also honoring Erec
By keeping every one 2075
Of his barons at court for a fortnight.
And when the third week came
They agreed to stage a tournament,
Later; my lord Gawain
Would wear the colors of one side, 2080
And Melis and Meliadox
Would wear the colors of the other,
One of them standing for York,
The other for Edinburgh.
And then the court went home. 2085
Pentecost came and was gone,
And after a month they convened
Their tournament out on a field
Near Edinburgh. Blue
And white and violet banners 2090

Flew, and ladies' sleeves
And veils, all gifts of love.
And lances were everywhere,
Lances colored red
And blue, in gold and silver, 2095
Wound and painted, striped
And spotted, bright and shining.
A host of helmets were laced,
That day, in iron and steel,
Green, yellow, red, 2100
Gleaming in the sun against
The coats of arms, with a forest
Of silver mail shirts, swords
Belted on the left, shields
Fresh and new, painted 2105
Blue and burning red,
With buckles of silver and gold,
And horses white and black,
Brown and bay, decked
With tassels, galloping back 2110
And forth. Weapons and armor
Covered the field. And the knights
Were ready. The noise was tremendous,
Metal crashing on metal:
Lances shattered, shields 2115
Cracked, mail shirts split.
Saddles were emptied, as knights
Went tumbling. Horses sweated
And foamed. And knights unsheathed
Their clanging swords, fighting 2120
Over fallen bodies.
Some were captured, held

In parole; some ran into battle.
Riding a white charger,
Erec led the way, 2125
All alone, seeking
His opponent, Orgueilleux de la Lande,
Mounted on an Irish horse
And riding fast and hard.
Erec struck so fiercely 2130
At his shield, high on the chest,
That he drove him down to the ground.
And Orgueilleux left the field.
Wearing blue silk, Randuraz,
Son of Tergalo's widow, 2135
Came riding at him, a famous,
Worthy knight. They attacked
Each other, hacking hard
At the shields hung from their necks.
A heavy blow from Erec's 2140
Lance rolled him in the dirt.
Then Erec spun around,
Facing the king of Red City,
A valiant, courageous knight.
Clutching knotted reins, 2145
Holding their shields by the straps,
They both wore fine armor
And rode good, rapid horses.
Striking hard, fierce,
At their fresh, new shields, each of them 2150
Broke his lance. No one
Had ever seen such blows.
Shields and weapons, horses
And all, they came hurling together,

And neither reins nor straps 2155
Nor saddle could keep the king
On his horse. He fell to the earth,
Still in his saddle, the reins
In his hands, everything falling
With him, sword and shield 2160
And lance still at the ready.
And everyone watching that battle
Gaped, astonished, swearing
The price for fighting such
A knight was much too high. 2165
But Erec wasn't hunting
Horses or knights, he wanted
Nothing but good fighting
That would show his spirit and strength.
All his opponents trembled, 2170
And those who fought at his side
Felt their courage soaring.
He took captives, and horses,
But only to beat down his foes.
But let me tell you of Gawain, 2175
Who conducted himself to perfection.
He defeated Guincel, first,
And then Gaudin of the Mountain.
He captured knights and horses:
Oh Lord Gawain did well. 2180
Girflet, Do's son, and Yvain,
And Sagremor, who obeyed
No orders, fought so hard
They drove their opponents back
To the gates, and captured many. 2185
And there in front of the castle

The battle began again,
Those inside fighting those outside.
And there Sagremor
Was beaten, a very great knight, 2190
Captured and made a prisoner.
But Erec freed him. He began
By shattering his lance, smashing
An opponent full in the chest
And driving him off his saddle. 2195
Then out came his sword, and he swung it,
Battering in their helmets.
And they fell back, allowing him
Through, even the strongest
Afraid. And he hit them so hard 2200
That he drove them back in the castle
And Sagremor made his escape.
Then vespers rang out, and the fighting
Stopped. Erec's success
Had been greater than anyone there. 2205
But the second day he did
Still better, captured so many
Knights, dashed so many
From their saddles that only those
Who saw it could ever believe it. 2210
Every knight on either
Side declared him the victor:
His lance and his shield had triumphed.
Now Erec had grown so famous
That his name was in every mouth: 2215
No man had been thought so handsome
Since Absalom walked the earth,
No man since Solomon so wise

In his words—fierce as a lion,
More open-handed than any 2220
Lord since Alexander.
But once the tournament ended
Erec sought out the king,
Seeking permission to leave
The court and return to his home, 2225
But first, as a courteous, noble
Knight, he thanked the king
For all the honors he'd received,
Which pleased him immensely. And only
Then did he explain 2230
That he wished to leave for home,
Taking his new wife with him.
The king could hardly refuse,
Though he'd rather Erec stayed
Than went. So he gave him leave 2235
But asked for a speedy return,
For of all the barons at court
Only one, his dear,
Incomparable nephew, Gawain,
Was Erec's rival in courage 2240
And strength. Permission in hand,
Erec ordered his wife
To be ready. And the king sent
An escort of sixty mounted
Knights, wearing furs 2245
And silks. Erec refused
To linger, leaving as soon
As he could, bidding the queen
A courtly farewell and commending
The knights of the court to God. 2250

The sun had just risen when he rode
Away from the royal palace.
With everyone watching, he mounted
His horse; his wife, about
To leave her country, mounted 2255
Hers. Then everyone mounted,
A hundred and forty men,
Knights and their squires. And then
For four whole days they journeyed,
Through forests and plains, up mountains 2260
And hills, down slopes and rocky
Ground, and came, on the fifth day,
To Carnant, King Lac's home
And a wonderfully pleasant place,
A castle so beautifully set 2265
That no one could imagine a better,
Surrounded by forests and prairies,
Vineyards and well-plowed fields,
Dotted with rivers and orchards,
Filled with knights and their ladies, 2270
Brave, laughing young men,
Noble, learned scholars
Who spent their money well,
Beautiful, wellborn girls,
And wealthy merchants and traders. 2275
And before he came to the castle
Erec dispatched a pair
Of messengers, informing the king
Of his coming. And as soon as he heard
This news, the king commanded 2280
The entire court to mount
Their horses, men and women

Alike, and bells to be rung,
And all the streets hung
With silken cloths and banners, 2285
Celebrating his son's
Return. Then the king mounted;
Eighty noble priests,
Honorable men in fur-trimmed,
Costly cloaks, rode with him, 2290
And a full five hundred knights
On horses of every color,
And so many merchants and ladies
That no one could possibly count them.
Their horses ran so fast 2295
That soon the king could see
His son, and his son saw him.
Leaving their horses, they walked
Into each other's arms.
And so they stood for a moment, 2300
Neither willing to move,
Hugging and kissing each other.
The king had never been happier.
But then he stopped and turned,
Looking at his son's new wife, 2305
And his happiness suddenly doubled.
He threw his arms around them,
Kissing, embracing them both,
Not certain who made him happiest.
And then they rode to the castle. 2310
Every bell in every
Church rang out with Erec's
Return; the crowded streets
Were strewn with rushes and herbs,

And the walls draped with silk 2315
And satin sheets, with cloth
Banners and tapestries. The king's
People filled the streets,
Welcomed the young prince,
Joy in all their hearts, 2320
Young and old alike
Wild with delight. And first
They heard a mass sung,
And were welcomed at church by a solemn,
Pious procession. Erec 2325
Knelt at the altar, prayed
On his knees in front of the Holy
Cross, and gave a gift
Of sixty silver bars,
Soon put to good use, and a gold 2330
Crucifix Constantine
Had worn, containing a piece
Of the One True Cross on which
Our Lord suffered and died
For us, to free our souls 2335
From eternal prison, snared
By Adam's sin, whispered
In his ear by the Evil One—
A priceless, ancient cross,
Studded with precious stones 2340
Of great and wonderful power,
A giant ruby in the middle
And another at each end,
Beautifully set in gold.
No one has seen its equal. 2345
At night each of those gems

Glittered as bright as the sun
At noon, shining in the sky—
Such a flood of light that the dark
Church needed no candles, 2350
No chandeliers.

Two

Of the king's barons led
Enide to Our Lady's altar,
Where she most devoutly prayed
To Jesus and the Virgin Mary 2355
That during her life, and her husband's,
They might be given an heir.

And then, as an offering, she gave
A wonderfully woven green
Silk cloth and a priestly cloak, 2360
Covered with filigreed gold,
Made with all her skill

And care by Morgana le Fay
At her home in the Valley of Danger.
The silk was from Spain—and surely 2365
Morgana had never made
The cloak for use in church,

But let one of her lovers
Have it because it was richly
Elegant. Guinevere, 2370

Mighty King Arthur's wife,
Had deceived the Emperor Gassa
And gotten it, and had it used
To celebrate Mass in her chapel,
Because it was lovely. And when 2375
Enide had left her, the queen
Had made it a gift for Erec's

Wife. It was said to be worth

A hundred ounces of silver.

And having made her offering, 2380

Enide drew back a bit,

Silently signaling with her hand,

As only wellborn ladies

Can do. And then they went

Straight from the church to the palace, 2385

And the celebration began.

Knights and burghers brought

Their presents to Erec: a gentle

Horse from Norway, for his wife;

A cup of hammered gold; 2390

A young hawk; a grayhound,

And other dogs for hunting

Hares; a sharp-eyed falcon;

A Spanish battle stallion;

A sword; a painted banner; 2395

A spear; a helmet. No king

Returning home was ever

Greeted with greater pleasure,

Welcomed with warmer joy.

Everyone wanted to serve him. 2400

But his people's delight at lady

Enide was even wilder,

In part for her stunning beauty,

Still more for her gracious ways.

They sat her on a silken cushion 2405

From far-off Thessaly,

And wellborn ladies crowded

Around her, there in that palace

Room. Just as a sparkling

Gem outshines a shard 2410
Of flint, and the rose a dried-up
Poppy, so she outshone
Them all: nowhere in the world
Could anyone hope to find
A girl or a woman to match her— 2415
Her breeding so clearly noble,
Her words so wise and cheerful,
Her manner so winning, so full
Of charm, that the sharpest critical
Eye would never see her 2420
Foolish, or wicked, or mean.
She'd let herself be so
Well taught that she'd learned whatever
Women need to know,
And was open-handed and always 2425
Alert. Her generosity
Was so delightful that kindness
To her was its own reward.
No one told tales of Enide,
For no one had tales to tell. 2430
No woman in the kingdom, or beyond,
Carried herself so correctly.
But Erec loved her with such
True love that, now, the God
Of War bored him. He left off 2435
Attendance at tournaments;
All he wanted was his wife,
Who'd become both lover and friend.
Every waking moment
Went into hugging and kissing, 2440
He needed nothing else.

Among themselves, his comrades
In arms lamented a love
So all-consuming; it pained them.
It was often afternoon 2445
Before he rose from his bed
And joined them. Their pain was his pleasure.
But even lingering at her side
He remained attentive to their needs,
Never failing in his gifts 2450
Of weapons, and garments, and gold.
And he sent his knights wherever
Tourney were taking place,
With rich equipment and clothes.
He gave them sturdy horses, 2455
Fit for traveling and combat,
And never cared about cost.
Still all his barons complained
Of how it pained them, and the shame,
For such a valiant knight 2460
To have lost his interest in fighting.
Everyone blamed him, squires
And knights alike, until
Even Enide heard them
Saying her husband was now 2465
Too lazy for chivalry and had thrown up
His knighthood; he led a new life.
These words weighed on her heart,
But she could not let him know,
For surely her husband would take it 2470
Badly, were she to say
Such things. So she held her peace
Until, one day, as they lay

In bed, where they'd taken great pleasure,
Wrapped in each other's arms, 2475
Their lips together, lovers
Sharing and delighting in love.
Erec slept; she did not,
Remembering words she'd heard
Spoken, up and down 2480
The land, about her lord.
And the memory made her weep
In spite of herself. She could
Not stop. Indeed, those words
So weighed on her mind that, as luck 2485
Would have it, her lips murmured
A few, intending no harm
And certainly not what happened.
She began to study her husband
From top to bottom, seeing him 2490
Handsome of face and of body,
And suddenly wept such a flood
Of tears that some of them fell
Hot on his chest. "Oh Lord,"
She sobbed, "how hard it all is! 2495
Was this why I left my home?
Let the earth open and swallow
Me down, for the best of knights,
The strongest, most loyal, the fiercest
In battle, courteous as no king 2500
Could have been, and no count, has turned
His back on chivalry, and all
On account of me. Clearly,
His shame is completely my fault,
Though I'd never, never have wished it." 2505

And then she said, "Beloved,
How you've been wronged!" That was all
She said. But his sleep was shallow,
Even as he slept he heard her.
Her words woke him, and he stared, 2510
Astonished, seeing her tears
Flowing so fast. So he said:
"My love, my dear, my sweet,
Tell me what's caused these tears.
What's made you so angry? So sad? 2515
I need to know, my beloved.
So tell me, my sweet, tell me,
Don't keep such sorrow secret.
Why did you say I'd been wronged?
I'm sure I heard you: you spoke 2520
Of me—of no one else."
Then Enide was terribly flustered,
Deeply moved, and afraid.
"My lord," she said, "I don't
Understand a word you've said." 2525
"My lady, why bother trying
To conceal it? You can't, I assure you.
You were weeping, I saw your tears,
And something caused them. I know it,
I heard you speaking through 2530
Those tears, I heard what you said."
"But oh, my lord, you heard
Nothing, you only dreamt it."
"Now you're feeding me lies.
I know you're lying, I can hear it, 2535
And you'll be terribly sorry,
Later, unless you admit it."

"My lord, because you oblige me
To speak, I'll tell the truth,
I'll hold back nothing, now. 2540
But I'm much afraid it will hurt you.
Everyone—blonde, brunet,
And redhead—declares you've damaged
Your name by laying down
Your arms. Your reputation, 2545
Your name, have tumbled to the ground.
Last year, all year, they all
Were saying no one knew
A better knight, or a braver;
No one alive was your equal. 2550
Now you're a joke: young
And old, short and tall,
Call you a coward, a traitor.
Was it possible not to be pained,
Hearing my lord despised? 2555
Their words pressed on my heart—
And all the more because
They laid the blame on me:
That was deeply painful,
Everyone saying I 2560
Was the only cause, I
Had taken you captive, I
Had stolen your strength away
And left you thinking of nothing
But me. Consider, now, 2565
How best to efface this slander
And restore your good name, for I've heard
Terrible things said
And never dared to tell you.

Often, remembering those words, 2570
I could barely keep from crying.
But suddenly, just now, the pain
Was so great I couldn't contain it,
And I said that you'd been wronged."
"Lady," he said, "you were right, 2575
And the things they said were true.
Quickly, prepare yourself
For a journey. Rise and put on
The most beautiful dress you own,
And have your saddle put 2580
On your very best palfrey." Enide
Was overwhelmed with fear.
She rose, slow and sobered;
Left alone, her head
Whirled as she thought of her folly: 2585
The ground's a better bed
When it isn't deep-plowed.
"What a fool
I am! Life was too good,
I had whatever I wanted.
Ah me! What made me so bold 2590
That I spoke such insane words?
My God! Could my husband be too much
In love? Yes. He is.
So now he'll send me away!
But not seeing my lord, 2595
Who loved me better than anyone
Else in the world, will be
The worst pain of all.
The best man ever
Born was so caught up 2600

With me that he cared for no one
Else. Nothing was missing—
A happiness more than complete—
Until pride welled up and pushed me,
And I said such intemperate things. 2605
My pride's become my punishment,
One I deserve. Suffering
Allows you to understand pleasure."

While she lamented, the lady
Dressed in her loveliest gown, 2610
But nothing could please her, now,
Everything hurt her heart.

She sent one of her servants
To summon a young squire
And ordered him to saddle
Her sleek dappled palfrey: 2615

Neither king nor count had a better one.
Without the slightest delay
The squire did as she had
Ordered, and the horse was saddled. 2620

And Erec summoned another
Squire, ordering his arms
And armor brought. Ascending,
Then, to a palace room,
He ordered a Limoges cloth 2625

Spread on the ground in front of him,
Then called the squire and commanded
Weapons and armor brought up
And placed there on that cloth.

And then he seated himself 2630
As well on the cloth, directly
Upon the painted image

Of a leopard, and prepared to have
His body clothed in war gear.
First they laced gleaming 2635
Armor over his legs,
Then put on a mail shirt so expensively
Made, so beautifully hammered,
That link by link it was utterly
Seamless, with not enough 2640
Room to insert even
A needle, woven of intricately
Latticed silver and thus
Unable ever to rust,
So perfectly shaped and fitted, 2645
Inside and out, let me
Assure you, that no one wearing
This shirt would feel more weary
Weight than a man comfortably
Draped in a garment of silk. 2650
All his knights and squires
Were astonished, seeing him armored,
But no one dared ask questions.
The mail shirt in place, they fastened
On a circular helmet, 2655
Gold studded with jewels
Shining brighter than mirrors.
He took up his sword and scabbard,
And ordered a saddle put
On his bay Gascony horse. 2660
Then he called a servant and said,
"Fellow, quick, run
To the room next to the tower
Where you'll find my wife. Hurry,

Tell her I've waited too long; 2665
She's had enough time to get dressed.
Tell her to come and mount
Her horse. I'm waiting." He ran
And found her all dressed, but pale
And weeping. He delivered his message 2670
At once: "My lady, why
Are you lingering here? My lord
Is outside, waiting, wearing
His armor and ready to ride.
He says he could have been gone 2675
Long since, had you been ready,
Too." Enide was stunned:
What might Erec be planning?
Still, she proceeded wisely,
Coming quickly to where 2680
He stood, waiting, and acting
As happy as she possibly could.
King Lac came hurrying behind her,
And knights, too, were milling
About, old and young, 2685
Wondering, asking each other
Who would go with their lord.
They offered themselves, humbly,
But he swore in front of them all
That no one would be his companion, 2690
Only his wife, if she wished.
This meant he would ride alone.
King Lac addressed him, sadly:
"My son, what are you doing?
You need to tell me, in plain 2695
Words, hiding nothing

From your father. Where are you going,
Completely alone, not a knight
Or a squire with you, in spite
Of all my pleas? If you plan 2700
Some solitary combat,
Man to man, still
You ought to bring along
A troop of your knights, as much
For company as for protection: 2705
A king's son can't ride
Alone. My son, take horses
With you, and at least some
Of your knights—thirty, or forty,
Or more, and silver and gold, 2710
And whatever else a gentleman
Needs." Then Erec answered,
Telling his father why
He was making this journey. "My lord,"
He said, "I have no choice; 2715
No other horse goes with me;
Silver and gold are pointless
Now, and squires and servants;
Except for my wife, I need
No one with me. But let me 2720
Beg you, should I happen to die,
And she return, that you love
And cherish her, on account
Of my love and because I ask it,
And give her half your kingdom, 2725
And let it be hers for the rest
Of her life, without dispute."
The king listened with care,

And said, "My son, she
Shall have it. But how it pains me, 2730
Seeing you leave alone
Like this. It's not what I want."
"My lord, I have no choice.
I'm going. God protect you.
But don't forget my knights, 2735
Give them horses and weapons
And everything knights require."
The king couldn't keep from weeping,
Seeing his son depart.
The entire court shed tears 2740
With him, ladies and knights
So afflicted with passionate sorrow
On the prince's account that many
Fell to the ground, unconscious.
They crowded around him, kissed 2745
And embraced him, sick with grief.
The pain could not have been worse
Had he fallen, bleeding, in battle.
He tried to lift their spirits:
"My friends, why such tears? 2750
I haven't been wounded, I'm not
A prisoner. This weeping won't help.
I'm going, yes, but with God's
Blessing I'm bound to return.
I commend you all to Him 2755
And ask that you let me leave:
You're keeping me here too long,
And seeing you weep like this
Wearies me, heart and soul."
He blessed them once more, and they him, 2760

And he made his painful departure.
So Erec went, he
And his wife, not knowing where,
But seeking adventure. "We'll ride
Quickly," he told her. "Be careful, 2765
Whatever you see, not
To say a word. Speak
To me only if
And when I speak to you.
Ride in front, as fast 2770
As you can, and as if you owned
The road." "Good luck, my lord!"
She replied, and led the way,
And was still; neither spoke
A word, but Enide sorrowed 2775
As she went, speaking softly
To herself, so he couldn't hear:
"Wretch!" she murmured. "God,
Who raised you to the height of happiness,
Now drops you, like that! to the dust! 2780
And Fortune, having held out
Her hand, has pulled it back.
Miserable as I am, would it matter
If I dared to speak to my lord?
But what wounds me worst of all 2785
Is how my lord hates me.
And he does, oh, I see it!
Or why refuse to speak?
I'm too afraid to turn
And look in his direction." 2790
As she sighed and suffered,
A knight who lived by robbing

Others rode from the wood,
Together with two companions,
All of them armed. And he liked 2795
The look of the horse she was riding.
“Gentlemen,” he said to his friends,
“Just look what’s coming our way.
If we can’t make the most
Of this, we’re three unlucky 2800
Thieves, and shrinking cowards.
Here’s this gorgeous lady—
And yet, she may be a girl.
But look at the clothes she’s wearing!
What a horse! And that saddle! 2805
I’d guess the harness leather
Alone is worth a fortune.
But what I want is the horse:
You’re welcome to all the rest
As long as I get the horse. 2810
Lord! Her knight’s already
Lost those treasures; they’re mine.
Let me tell you, my friends:
I’ll handle him so roughly
He’ll hurt all over. Stay here: 2815
I claim the right to tackle
This fellow all by myself.”
The others agreed, and he dug in
His spurs, covered himself
With his shield, and left them behind. 2820
It was not the custom, then,
For more than one man at a time
To attack a single knight,
And the world would have branded as traitors

Any who broke that rule. 2825
 Seeing the thieves, Enide
Was seized with terrible fear:
"My God!" she thought. "Should I speak?
They'll kill or capture my lord,
They being three and he 2830
Alone. It isn't fair
For a single knight to fight three
At once. And that one's attacking,
Although my lord can't see him.
Lord! Can I sit and say nothing? 2835
Am I such an utter coward?
No, I can't do it,
I have to warn him, that can't
Be wrong." And turning quickly
Toward him, she said, "My lord! 2840
Watch out! Three knights are charging
At you, armed to the teeth.
Be careful! This fills me with fear."
"What?" said Erec. "What?
Do you think so little of me? 2845
How bold you've become, breaking
My prohibition, defying
The command I solemnly gave you.
Well, I'll pardon you once—
But let it happen again 2850
And there'll be no pardon, I warn you."
Then he swung his shield and his spear
Around, and attacked the knight,
Who, seeing him ready, shouted
A challenge, which Erec answered 2855
In kind. Both of them spurred

Their horses, lances ready.
The robber knight struck
At nothing, but Erec's aim
Was perfect, his stroke tremendous: 2860
The robber's shield was split
From top to bottom, nor
Did his mail shirt serve him better,
For Erec smashed it across
His chest, then drove his spear 2865
A foot and a half deep.
When he pulled it out, pivoting
Around, his enemy fell
And was dead, his heart's blood
On the spear. A second knight 2870
Came charging right at Erec,
Riding up from the rear.
Setting his shield in front of him,
Erec attacked at once.
Both shields held high, they drove 2875
Together, shield on shield.
But his enemy's lance broke
In two, while Erec's ran
A quarter of its length through the other's
Body, and he was done with fighting; 2880
Erec tossed him to the ground,
Then turned at an angle and attacked
His friend. And seeing him come,
The third thief broke and ran:
He was too afraid to wait, 2885
Seeking to save himself
In the forest. It did him no good.
Erec came racing after:

"Stop, thief! Stop!

Stand and fight or I'll kill you 2890

Even as you run! You won't

Escape me, now." But the frightened

Man just kept on running,

Fleeing as fast as his horse

Would take him. But Erec caught up 2895

And struck his painted shield

So hard he toppled backward.

These were three thieves who wouldn't

Worry him: one dead, one wounded,

And one left only his legs 2900

To carry him, dropped to the ground.

Erec had all their horses,

Tied together by the reins:

Three very different animals,

One as white as milk, 2905

The second black (but not

Too black), the third dappled.

He led them back to the road,

Where Enide was waiting. He ordered

Her to herd the horses, 2910

Keeping them safely in front of her,

And warned her, fiercely, not

To disobey him, but hold

Her tongue, speaking no word

Whatever without his permission. 2915

"Not one word, my lord,"

She answered, "until you wish it."

On they went, and she held

Her tongue.

They'd gone just half

A mile when they saw, in a valley 2920
Ahead, five knights riding
Toward them, lances at the ready,
Shields held high, gleaming
Helmets laced and tied:
They intended to rob and steal. 2925
They saw the lady, leading
Three horses, coming toward them,
Erec riding behind.
A few quick words, murmured
Among them, were enough to share out 2930
Horses, harnesses, and all,
As if they already owned them.
Greed is evil, vile—
But they fancied nothing stood
In their way, they would have what they wanted. 2935
Yet doing and thinking are different;
Expecting to win isn't winning.
Their plan of attack was like this:
One said he'd take the lady
Or die trying; another 2940
Said he'd take the dappled
Horse, for that would pay him
Well enough for his labor;
The third wanted the black
Horse. Said the fourth, "I'll take 2945
The white!" The fifth wasn't shy,
Declaring he'd settle for Erec's
Arms and armor, and his horse.
Indeed, he'd win them man
For man, and all alone, 2950
If his comrades agreed. Which they cheerfully

Did. So he rode on ahead
— And he rode a first-rate, dashing
Horse. Erec saw him
Yet acted as if he hadn't. 2955
But the moment she saw them coming
Enide's blood went racing;
She was overcome with fear:
"Misery! What can I do?
What can I say? My lord 2960
Has warned me not to make him
Angry by speaking a single
Word, no matter what.
And yet, if they kill my lord
There'll be no one and nothing to help me, 2965
I'll be as good as dead.
Oh God! My lord sees nothing.
Why are you waiting, idiot?
Why worry about that promise?
It's been so long since I said 2970
A thing! And surely these men
Mean to do him harm.
Lord, how can I tell him?
He'll kill me. Then let him kill me!
How can I keep from telling him?" 2975
So she said, softly, "My lord!"
"What? What do you want?"
"Have mercy, my lord! It's just
That five bold men have ridden
Out of the forest, and they frighten me. 2980
I've watched them coming and I'm sure
They propose to pick a fight
With you. Four have hung back,

And the fifth one's coming toward you
As fast as his horse can carry him. 2985
He'll be here any minute.
And those four who stayed behind
Are still so very close;
They could all help if they had to."
He answered, "You've done wrong, 2990
Breaking once again
The silence I laid upon you.
I've always known you thought me
Worth remarkably little.
You'll win no thanks from me, 2995
Giving such warnings. Listen,
And understand: I hate you.
I've told you before, and I tell you
Once more. I'll pardon you
Again, but next time watch out. 3000
Stop looking at me: it makes you
Act like a fool, because
I loathe the words you speak."
Then he turned to the knight who was riding
Directly at him, and attacked. 3005
They fought fiercely. Erec
Struck him so hard that he smashed
The shield hung around
His neck, and cracked his collarbone.
His stirrups broke, and he fell, 3010
Nor was Erec worried he might rise
Once more, with such serious wounds.
Then one of his friends attacked,
And again they fought fiercely.
Erec struck with such force 3015

That his sharp and well-forged weapon
Went under the chin and into
The throat, cutting bones
And muscles, emerging from the back
Of his neck. Hot red blood 3020
Ran both where it entered
And left. His soul fled,
His heart stopped. The next one
Attacked across a ford.
He'd gotten halfway across 3025
When Erec, spurring his horse,
Met him as he reached the bank
And hit him so hard that he fell
Flat, with his horse on top of him.
The animal's weight kept him 3030
From rising, and of course he drowned,
Though the horse struggled so hard
That it finally got to its feet.
So Erec had conquered three of them.
The other two decided 3035
Discretion was better than valor,
And they at least wouldn't fight.
They galloped down the river.
But Erec came chasing after,
Striking from the rear so hard 3040
That the man bent down toward his saddle.
Erec had swung so strongly
That his lance shattered, as his enemy
Collapsed forward on his face.
Erec made him dearly 3045
Regret that spear, broken
On his back. He drew his sword;

The man sat up, which was folly;
For Erec struck him three
Such blows that the sword drank blood, 3050
Slicing away a shoulder,
And the man tumbled to the ground.
Then he swung his sword at the last one,
Who was fleeing as fast as he could,
Awaiting no escort or safe 3055
Conduct, afraid to delay
But unable to escape. Trusting
His horse no longer, he gave
It up, threw away
Sword and lance, and dropped 3060
To the ground. Erec refused
To fight a man with his face
In the dirt. But he bent and collected
The discarded spear, to replace
The one he had broken. Carrying 3065
The lance, he turned back, not
Forgetting the horses: he took
All five and led them to where
His wife was waiting. Herding
These five, and the other three, 3070
Would be serious work. He told her
To hurry and, still, to hold
Her tongue or live to regret it.
She made no reply, remaining
Silent. So on they went, 3075
And all the horses with them.

They rode until it grew dark,
Seeing no house, no village.
At dusk, he allowed them to shelter

Beneath a tree in a wood. 3080
Erec instructed the lady
To sleep, if she liked, but she said
She wouldn't, it wasn't right,
And she didn't want to; he ought
To sleep, for he was truly 3085
Tired. Erec agreed,
And was pleased. He put his sword
Under his head; she took
Her cloak and covered him well.
He slept, and she watched, not closing 3090
Her eyes the whole night long.
Till morning came, she held
The reins of all eight horses.
And how she criticized
Herself for the words she'd spoken! 3095
She'd been too afraid and excited:
"I haven't suffered even
Half I ought to. Oh miserable
Wretch! See what evil
Your pride and arrogance bring you! 3100
Surely I should have known
There exists no better knight
Than my lord, or indeed his equal.
I knew it—and now I know it
Still better, for I've seen it myself: 3105
He wasn't afraid of three
Or of five! My ungrateful tongue
Should suffer for speaking such swollen
Pride, which shames my heart."
And so she lamented, all 3110
Night long, till dawn arrived,

And Erec awoke, and rose,
And set them along the road,
She in front, he
To the rear. Toward noon they saw 3115
A squire riding out
Of a valley, together with a pair
Of servants carrying biscuits
And wine and five rich cheeses
For those who were cutting hay 3120
In Count Galoain's fields.
The squire was a clever sort:
He saw Erec and the lady
Coming out of the woods,
And knew they had spent the night 3125
Under the trees, and couldn't
Have eaten or drunk, since a day's
Journey in any direction
Would turn up no castle, town,
Or tower, no house or abbey, 3130
No inn or resting place.
He conceived a generous plan,
And changing his path gave them
A courteous greeting, saying,
"My lord, it seems to me 3135
You've spent an unpleasant night,
And surely you can't have slept
Long or well in the forest.
Allow me to offer this white
Biscuit, if you'd care to eat. 3140
I want nothing in return
And ask nothing. These biscuits
Are made from very good wheat,

And I've excellent wine and rich
Cheese, a white tablecloth, 3145
And handsome goblets; if you wish
To breakfast, go no farther.
Here in this shade, under
These elms, lay down your arms
And rest yourself a bit. 3150
Dismount, I beg you, and dine."
Erec dismounted, saying,
"My very good friend, yes,
I will eat, and thanks to you:
I wish to go no farther." 3155
He served them quickly, and well:
First helping the lady down
And having his men see
To the horses, he led them both
To the shade, and seated them there, 3160
Then helped Erec out
Of his helmet, unlacing the heavy
Visor covering his face.
Then he spread the tablecloth
In front of them, on the thick grass, 3165
Brought them biscuits and wine,
And cut and trimmed the cheese.
They were hungry indeed, and ate,
And gladly drank the wine.
The squire attended them well, 3170
Nor were his efforts wasted.
Erec ate and drank,
Then said, polite and generous,
"My friend, allow me, please,
To offer you one of my horses: 3175

Take whichever suits you.
And let me ask, if you care to,
That you ride back into town
And find me some worthy lodging."
The squire replied that he'd gladly 3180
Do whatever Erec
Wanted. Then he walked to the horses,
Untied them and, thanking Erec,
Made the black one his choice.
He mounted, using the left 3185
Stirrup, and rode rapidly
Off into town, where he quickly
Arranged a fine and suitable
Lodging, and as quickly returned.
"Mount, my lord," he said, 3190
"Your lodging awaits you." Erec
Mounted first, and then
His lady. The town was not
Distant; they were soon there.
And their host was delighted to have them, 3195
Giving his guests a hearty
Welcome, offering with open
Hands whatever they needed.
And the squire, having done them
All the honor he could, 3200
Remounted his new horse
And rode to the stable; his path
Took him under the castle
Windows, where the count and three
Of his knights were looking out. 3205
Seeing one of his squires
On such a horse, the lord

Of the castle asked who owned it,
And the squire said it was his.
The count was truly astonished: 3210
"Yours? Where did you get it?"
"A wonderfully noble knight,
My lord, gave me this gift.
I brought him to town; he's taken
Lodgings with a merchant. He's truly 3215
A knight of infinite courtesy:
I've never seen a more handsome
Man—so striking, indeed,
I couldn't come close to telling
Just how he looks and what 3220
He is." Said the count, "Surely
He's no more handsome than I am."
"My lord, truly you're
A handsome, noble man.
This land has never seen 3225
Or given birth to a man
Better looking. And yet,
I have to say that even
Weary from a tight-laced mail shirt
And bruised by blows from combat 3230
With eight strong knights, all
Alone in the forest, knights
He defeated, whose steeds he captured
And led away, he's handsomer
Still. His lady is with him, 3235
And she, my lord, is so lovely
That no woman alive has half
Her beauty." Hearing this news,
The count was anxious to see

For himself how true it might be: 3240
"I know nothing of your knight.
Take me to his lodging and show me
Whether you're dreaming or telling
The truth." Said the squire, "Gladly,
My lord. It's not very far; 3245
Please follow, I'll lead the way."
"By God, I'm dying to see him,"
Said the count, and came down to the courtyard.
The squire dismounted and helped
His master onto his horse, 3250
Then ran in front, to announce
To Erec that the count was making
A call. As usual, Erec's
Lodgings were lavishly furnished:
Candles flared in every 3255
Corner, and a host of lamps
Were burning. The count had carefully
Kept his escort to a mere
Three. Erec rose
To greet him, like a well-bred man, 3260
Saying, "Welcome, my lord!"
And the count returned his greeting.
Seating themselves on soft
White cushions, they began to converse.
The count offered, and begged 3265
Erec to accept, repayment
For the cost of his lodgings, but Erec,
Courteous yet firm, assured him
He had more than enough and thus
Needed to trouble no one. 3270
They spoke of this and that,

But as they talked, the count
Kept glancing off to the side,
For he'd seen Erec's wife
And been so struck by her beauty 3275
That, truly, he thought of nothing
Else. His eyes kept wandering
Toward her, more and more
Attracted, until he was burning
With love. He concealed that longing, 3280
And asked Erec for leave
To address her: "A permission depending
From first to last on your pleasure,
My lord. It would please me to sit
Beside her and make her welcome. 3285
I come in friendship, as you see,
So I trust you'll not be offended:
I wish no more than to pledge
My service, as she may desire."
Erec, as far from jealous 3290
As from home, suspected nothing:
"My lord, that's quite all right.
Talk and laugh as you like.
I see no harm: I grant you
Cheerful permission to greet her." 3295
The lady was seated as far
Away as the length of two lances;
The count went and sat
Close by, on a wooden stool.
Polite and pleasant and sensible, 3300
The lady turned in his
Direction. "Oh," he said,
"It pains me, seeing you live

In such squalor! It hurts me deeply.
Believe me, you could win fame 3305
And honor and wealth, if you liked.
Beauty like yours deserves
Enormous honor, immense
Respect. I'd make you my love,
If you pleased, if that made you happy; 3310
You'd be my lady love
And queen of all I own.
Since I've been good enough
To ask for your love, you can't
Refuse me. It's perfectly clear 3315
Your lord has no use for you,
And no love. You'd have a good
Husband, if you came to me."
"Don't trouble yourself, my lord,"
Said Enide. "It's out of the question. 3320
Ah! I'd rather remain
Unborn, or be burned in flaming
Briars and my ashes thrown
To the wind, than betray my lord
In any way, or even 3325
Dream of treachery and treason!
You've done me a grave injustice,
Demanding such a terrible thing:
I'd never, never do it."
The count's anger flared: 3330
"You can't stoop to my love,
Woman? You're far too proud!
I ask, I even beg you,
And you won't do what I want?
Women are known to be prideful; 3335

The more they're asked, the more
They deny, but those who treat them
Badly are much better served.
Yet let me tell you, here
And now: you'll do as I want 3340
Or a sword-blade will settle the affair.
One way or another, right
Or wrong, your husband will die
In battle, in front of your eyes."
"My lord," said Enide, "you neglect 3345
A better and easier path.
How terribly wicked it would be,
How vile and treacherous, to kill him
Like that. But calm yourself,
Dear sir: I'll do as you wish. 3350
You can have me; I'll
Be yours, and gladly. It wasn't
Pride that made me speak
As I did, but my need to know
If you truly spoke from the heart 3355
And meant what you said. But I couldn't
For all the world let you
Do such a traitorous thing.
My lord has no suspicions
Of you: to kill him would be 3360
A vile and miserable deed,
And the guilt would fall on me
As well. Every mouth
Would say I had you do it.
Wait till tomorrow morning, 3365
When my lord is ready to rise
And then confront him as you please

And incur no guilt. That's better."

The mouth's words are never

The heart's thoughts. "My lord," 3370

She said, "believe me, be patient.

Tomorrow, send your knights

And your soldiers to take me by force.

My lord, who's brave and strong,

Will try to protect me. Then kill him 3375

However you choose—in combat,

If you like, or stab him, or cut off

His head. I'm sick and tired

Of living like this, and to tell you

The truth, I'm sick of him 3380

And weary of having him with me.

Oh, I already feel you

Naked in my bed, breast

To breast. And when it comes

To that, you'll know how I love you." 3385

The count replied, "Till then,

Lady! You were born lucky.

How well you'll be treated here!"

"My lord," she said, "I believe it.

But all the same, I want you 3390

To swear you'll always love me,

Or else I can never trust you."

The count replied, bursting

With joy, "Lady, you have

My word, as a true and faithful 3395

Count. You'll always be treated

Well. Don't worry yourself:

You'll always have what you want."

And so she had his promise,

But she knew how much it was worth, 3400
Except for saving her lord.
She knew just how to intoxicate
Fools with a word, when she had to:
And how much better to lie
Than see her lord cut 3405
To pieces? The count left her,
Commending her to God
A hundred times, but she knew
How little his words were worth.
Erec had no suspicion 3410
Anyone was plotting his death,
But God above could save him—
And it seems to me He will.
All the same, his peril
Was great and real, yet he knew 3415
Nothing. The count, meanwhile,
Played his evil part,
Intending to murder the husband
And steal the wife, but saying
“I commend you to God” as he left. 3420
“And I you,” said Erec.
And thus they said their farewells.
It was already late at night.
Beds for husband and wife
Had been made in a side room. 3425
Erec lay in one,
And Enide, deeply troubled,
Lay in the other, tossing
And turning all night long,
Kept awake with worry 3430
For her lord, well aware

That the count was capable of any
And every sort of evil.
And she knew that once he had
Erec in his power, her husband 3435
Was almost as good as dead.
What could she find to comfort her?
So she lay in the dark, waiting
For dawn, hoping that before
It was light, if her husband believed her, 3440
They'd have taken their leave, and the count
Would have plotted for nothing, and neither
She nor her husband would be
In his power. Erec slept
Long, suspecting nothing, 3445
And with daylight almost upon them
She knew it was dangerous to wait.
Her heart was neither deceitful
Nor false: as a loyal lady,
And true, her feelings for her lord 3450
Were tender. So she rose, and dressed,
And went to her lord, and woke him:
"For pity's sake, my lord!
Let's leave this place, and quickly,
For you've been completely betrayed, 3455
And for no reason, no cause.
The count has proven himself
A traitor: if he finds you here
You'll never leave alive;
He'll tear you to pieces. He hates you 3460
On my account; he wants me.
May God in His infinite goodness
Keep you from being captured

Or killed! He meant to kill you
Last night. But I made him believe
I'd come to him and love him. 3465
He'll be here soon, you'll see;
He means to take me, and keep me,
And kill you, here, if he can."
Then Erec truly saw 3470
How loyally loving his wife was.
"Lady," he said, "order
Our horses saddled at once,
And wake up our host, and tell him
To come to me here. Treachery 3475
Leaves us no time to lose!"
Then the horses were quickly saddled,
And the lady summoned their host.
Erec put on his armor.
The host appeared, saying, 3480
"Why are you hurrying, my lord,
Rising at such an hour,
Even before it's dawn?"
Erec answered he had far
To go that day, a long 3485
And difficult journey, so he wanted
To be ready; it weighed on his mind.
And he added, "Sir, you haven't
Drawn up my bill. You've treated
Me well, and done me honor, 3490
And deserve to be well paid.
Shall we call it quits in return
For the seven horses I have
In your stables? It's more than enough,
And they're yours. Right now, I'm afraid, 3495

I couldn't give you another
Bit." This gift delighted
The merchant, who threw himself
At Erec's feet and thanked him.
Then Erec mounted, said 3500
Farewell, and left—but not
Before he warned Enide
That whatever she saw on the way
She should not dream of addressing
A single word to him. 3505
And then a hundred knights
In armor entered the house,
All deeply disappointed,
Not finding Erec at home.
The count understood at once 3510
That the lady had tricked him. Seeing
The horses' hoofprints, he ordered
His men to give chase and, crying
Threats against Erec, declared,
If only he could catch him, 3515
Nothing could stop him, now,
From cutting off his head.
"Curses on any man
Who refuses to spur his horse!
Whoever brings me his head, 3520
This knight I loathe and detest,
Will have served me well and be well
Rewarded." They galloped off,
Wild with rage at those
They'd never seen and who'd never 3525
Said or done a thing
To them. They rode so hard

That just at the edge of a forest
They saw Erec before
The trees hid him. Hungry 3530
For a quarrel, none of them stopped.
Hearing the sound of horses
And weapons, Enide looked
And saw the valley teeming
With riders. And seeing them come 3535
She couldn't keep from speaking:
"My lord, my lord!" she cried.
"This count doesn't just chase you,
He sets an army on your trail!
Ride faster, my lord, ride faster! 3540
We're right at the edge of this forest.
We can still escape them: they're far
Behind, there's still enough time.
But jogging along as we are
We'll never get away, 3545
And they're so many, and you're
Just one." "You don't think much
Of me," he said, "always
Defying my orders. What
Can I say to make you behave? 3550
Ah me, if God is merciful
And I leave this combat alive,
You'll pay for these errors, and dearly,
Unless I'm moved to forgive you."
And then he swung around 3555
And saw the count's steward
Leading the attack, on a strong,
Swift horse, making an open
Challenge from four bowshots

Distant. His armor and weapons 3560
Were good, and nothing was mortgaged.
Counting up his enemies,
Erec saw a hundred
Or more. He thought he'd begin
By stopping the one in front. 3565
They clashed, razor-sharp spear points
Beating on shields, and Erec
Drove the gleaming steel
Of his lance deep in the steward's
Body. Neither his shield 3570
Nor his mail shirt worked any better
Than a bolt of blue silk. The count
Was next. The story assures us
He was truly a powerful fighter,
But wielding only a spear 3575
And a shield, so sure of himself
He refused anything more.
And his courage was clear, for he galloped
At Erec hundreds of yards
In front of his men. And seeing 3580
The count thus open and exposed,
Erec attacked. Not a bit
Afraid, the count charged on
And quickly struck the first blow,
Hitting Erec so hard 3585
On the chest that his stirrups would
Have snapped, had they not been well tied.
The shield-wood cracked, and the spear point
Passed straight through, but Erec's
Mail shirt, so beautifully worked, 3590
Saved him from certain death:

Not a single link gave way.

The count was strong, and his spear

Shattered. Then Erec struck him

So fiercely on his yellow shield 3595

That the lance pierced his stomach

A yard or more deep, and the count

Fell from his horse like a stone.

Erec rode back as fast

As he'd come, wasting no time, 3600

Heading straight for the forest,

Making his horse gallop.

So there was Erec, safe

In the woods, and the others stopped

In the middle of the field where the bodies 3605

Were lying. They shouted and swore,

Declaring they'd keep up the chase

For a day or two or three,

Until they caught and killed him.

The count, his belly bleeding 3610

Freely, heard what they said.

He pulled himself up, barely

Opening his eyes: he realized,

Now, what an evil thing

He'd been doing. He called to his knights, 3615

Commanding them to stop:

"Gentlemen," he said, "among

The lot of you there isn't

One, no matter how noble,

Strong or brave, who's good 3620

Enough to catch him. Go back

At once! I'm guilty of evil

Deeds, and they weigh on my heart.

The lady who tricked me is wise
And courteous, bold and brave. 3625
Her beauty set me to burning,
And because I wanted her
So badly I tried to kill
Her husband and carry her off
By force. I deserve to suffer, 3630
And suffering has come to me, for I
Was a traitor, disloyal, false,
Crazed by my wild treason.
No man born of woman
Is a better knight than this one: 3635
I'll try never to raise
My hand against him. And again:
I command you to return, one
And all." Their hearts sad,
They obeyed. They bore the steward's 3640
Body; they carried the count
On his shield—and in spite of his serious
Wounds, he lived a long life.
Which was how Erec was saved.
His wife riding in front of him, 3645
They galloped along a road
With hedges and trees on either
Side, leading to a small
Meadow, cleared and open.
And where the fenced-in wood 3650
Ended, they found a great
Deep moat, and then a bridge,
And a tall tower surrounded
All around with a wall.
They rattled over the bridge, 3655

But before they'd even crossed it
They were seen, from high above,
By the lord of the tower. This lord,
Let me tell you, was wonderfully
Small of body, a dwarf, 3660
But large of heart, and brave.
As Erec rode across,
He came down from his tower and ordered
A saddle embossed with golden
Lions to be put on a huge 3665
Chestnut horse. He ordered
His shield, and his stiff, straight spear,
His honed and polished sword,
His brightly gleaming helmet,
His triple-mailed armor and mail shirt, 3670
So that having seen a knight
Cross his battle lines
He could test his strength, and his skill,
Until the one or the other
Had won or given up. 3675
His every command was obeyed
And as soon as the horse was saddled
And ready, a squire led it
To their waiting master, and others
Brought him his weapons and armor. 3680
The tiny knight rode out
The gate, as fast as he could,
And all alone. Erec
Was riding up a slope.
The tiny knight came dashing 3685
Down it; he'd started at the top,
His proud, excited horse

Raising a fearful racket
As its iron hooves struck
Against the rocks, mashing them 3690
Finer than a mill grinds wheat;
It ran as if candles
Flared in its every nerve,
And each of its four feet
Had been set on fire and was burning. 3695
Enide was terrified,
Almost falling off
Her horse, fainting, unconscious;
Every single vein
In her body was pulsing, throbbing: 3700
The skin of a cold corpse
Would have gleamed as pale and white.
She trembled in misery and despair—
For how could she disobey
Again, how could she dare, 3705
When silence was so strongly commanded?
Her mind wavered back
And forth, she could not choose
The proper path: to speak,
To warn her lord, or be silent? 3710
She tried to think, to decide,
Sometimes her lips parting,
Her tongue beginning to move,
But her voice unable to speak,
Fear snapping her teeth 3715
Together, locking the words
In her mouth, only able
To control herself by shutting
The gates of speech. She fought

With herself, she struggled, thinking: 3720
"Losing my lord would be terrible,
Painful: that's for sure.
A horrible loss. So:
Can I simply speak as I will?
Impossible. Why? I don't dare, 3725
I'd make him terribly angry,
And if I make him angry
My lord's likely to leave me
All alone in this wood,
Worse off than ever. Worse off? 3730
Why should it make any difference?
I'll never need to hunt
For trouble, as long as I live,
If my lord's able to escape,
Now, without receiving 3735
Some mortal wound. But still,
If I never warn my lord
About this knight, dashing
Down the hill, desperate
To kill him, then he'll be dead 3740
Before he notices. I've already
Waited too long! I'm forbidden
To speak—but why should that stop me?
Clearly, my lord's so lost
In thought, he's even forgotten 3745
Himself! I've got to warn him."
She spoke. And though he poured out
Threats, he hadn't the heart
To hurt her, seeing as clearly
As he did how deeply she loved him 3750
And he, in turn, loved her.

So he spurred his horse and attacked
The knight who'd attacked him first.
They met at the end of the bridge,
Each wielding his lance 3755
Against the other, striking
With every bit of his strength.
The shields hung from their necks
Helped them as much as two bits
Of bark: leather and wood 3760
Split, chain mail broke,
As each jabbed his spear point
Into his enemy's belly
And both horses fell
To the ground. Both of the men 3765
Were strong; neither was mortally
Wounded. Tossing their spears
Aside, they drew out swords
And clashed angrily. They hacked
And slashed, neither holding 3770
Back or sparing the other,
Raining so many massive
Strokes that helmets sparked
And swords recoiled, shields
Were sliced to shreds, mail shirts 3775
Battered, split, cracked,
So that many blows reached
Bare flesh, and slowly their strength
Faded, their arms grew weak.
Indeed, had both swords 3780
Remained intact, neither
Man could have asked for a breather,
Nor could the combat have ended

Except with one of them dead.
Enide had been watching the battle, 3785
Almost insane with misery.
Anyone seeing her suffer,
Twisting her hands, tearing
Her hair, weeping bitterly,
Would know how loyal a lady 3790
She was, and only the hardest
Heart could fail to feel pity.
They struck each other immense
Blows: from nine in the morning
Till three they fought fiercely, 3795
And no one watching could ever
Have seen that either was a better
Knight in any way.
Erec summoned strength
And courage, swinging his sword 3800
Through his enemy's helmet
To the metal hood beneath;
It broke, but the man stood firm
And fought on, his sword striking
Erec's shield so fiercely 3805
That the metal-plaited wood
Cracked his sword, so costly
And fine. He was wild with fury,
Seeing it broken, and threw
Away the fragment still 3810
In his hand, threw it as far
As he could. And then he was frightened,
Needing to retreat, for a knight
Without a weapon can't fight
A battle or sustain an assault. 3815

And when Erec pursued him, the knight
Begged in God's great name
Not to be slaughtered: "Have mercy,
Noble knight! Don't treat me
Cruelly: now that my sword 3820
Has failed me, you have the power
And the means to kill me, and I
Have no way to defend myself."
Erec replied, "Admit,
Then, in unmistakable 3825
Terms, that you're beaten and conquered.
That's all I ask. Surrender
Yourself, and you're safe from attack."
The knight was silent. Seeing
How he delayed, and wanting 3830
To frighten him into surrender,
Erec raised his sword
And ran right at him. The knight
Was terror-stricken, crying,
"Mercy, my lord! You've won, 3835
I'm helpless, I have no choice."
"That's not enough," said Erec.
"You can't get off so easily.
Tell me who and what
You are, and then I'll tell you." 3840
"You're right, my lord," he said.
"I am the king of this land,
And the men who owe me tribute
And loyalty are Irish.
My name is Guivret the Dwarf; 3845
I've power and wealth in abundance.
Wherever you look, in every

Direction, barons with lands
Near mine obey my rule
And do as I wish. All 3850
My neighbors fear me, no matter
How proud they are or how brave.
And I long to be your comrade
And friend forever." Erec
Replied, "I too can boast 3855
Of my ancient, noble family:
I'm Erec, son of King Lac.
My father rules in Outer
Wales, and owns rich cities,
Fine homes, and many powerful 3860
Castles. No king or emperor
Owns more, except King Arthur,
To whom no living man
Can ever hope to compare."
Hearing this, Guivret 3865
Was astonished: "My lord, I'm amazed!
No joy I've ever known
Has delighted me more than meeting
You. Please: treat
My land and goods as your own. 3870
You'll honor me in accepting.
And as long as you wish to remain
You'll be my lord and my king.
But both of us need a physician
First, and one of my homes 3875
Is a very few miles away.
Allow me to lead you there
And have our wounds attended
To." "Thank you for those gracious

Words," said Erec. "I'm grateful. 3880
But I can't go. All
I ask of you is this:
If ever I find myself
In trouble, and you hear of my
Distress, don't forget me 3885
But come to my aid." "My lord,
You have my pledge and my promise
That as long as I live you'll have
All the help I can offer
If ever you need it." "There's nothing 3890
Else I want from you,"
Said Erec. "You've promised everything.
If your actions match your words
You'll be my friend and my comrade."
And they kissed each other as friends. 3895
No battle brutally hard
Was ever broken off
So sweetly, in mutual grace
And affection, each of them tearing
Broad bandages from their shirts 3900
And binding the other's wounds.
And when each had taken care
Of the other, they commended themselves
To God, and parted, as follows:
 Guivret stayed where he was, 3905
And Erec went on his way,
In sore need of ointments
To put on his wounds. They rode
Hard, he and his wife,
And, coming to open country, 3910
Saw a great forest

Full of leaping stags
And bucks, and savage beasts,
And every animal alive.
Here, King Arthur and his queen, 3915
And the best of his barons, had come
Hunting, intending, for their pleasure
And sport, to linger three
Or four days; the king had ordered
Pavilions brought, and tents, 3920
And awnings against the sun,
And his servants had set them out.
Sir Gawain, who'd had enough
Of riding and wanted only
Rest, was sleeping in the king's 3925
Tent; on an elm in front of it
Hung a shield bearing
His coat of arms and his ash-wood
Lance; and from a branch,
Employing famous Gringolet's 3930
Reins, he let saddle and bridle
Hang. The horse was grazing
Quietly when Kay, the king's
Steward, came hurrying up
And, making merry at Gawain's 3935
Expense, mounted (for no one
Was there to stop him). Having
The horse, he also took
The lance and shield hanging
Nearby. And then he galloped 3940
Gringolet along a valley,
Where as it happened he met
Erec. Now Erec knew

Sir Kay, as he also knew
Both the horse and the weapons, 3945
But Kay didn't know
Erec, for the battle markings
Were gone, and the painted shield
Had suffered so many blows
From sword and spear that the coat 3950
Of arms had disappeared.
Erec's lady, unwilling
To be seen, quickly draped
Her veil across her face,
As if against the dust 3955
Or heat. Kay came pressing
Forward, cutting off Erec's
Path, silently seizing
His reins. And holding the horse
In place, he asked, arrogantly, 3960
"Knight, I want you to tell me
Who you are and where
You're from." "You must be a fool,"
Said Erec. "I'll tell you nothing."
"Don't be angry," Kay said. 3965
"I ask with your interests at heart.
It isn't hard to see
You're badly wounded. So stay
With me tonight. Come,
I'll treat you well, I offer you 3970
Honor and comfort. Rest
Is clearly just what you need.
King Arthur and his queen are here
Close by, in a wood, lodged
In tents and pavilions. I ask you 3975

In the best of faith to come
With me and visit my king
And his queen: they'll entertain you
Royally and show you honor."
"How well you talk," said Erec, 3980
"But nothing could make me join you.
You know nothing of my needs;
I've many more miles to go.
Let go; I've lingered too long,
There's plenty of daylight left." 3985
Said Kay, "You're talking nonsense.
Why this silly refusal?
I expect you'll change your mind—
You and your lady, you'll come,
All right, willy-nilly, 3990
Like it or not, like a priest
Summoned by bishops. You're bound
To endure a nasty night,
Let me tell you, unless
You take my advice. And you can't 3995
Refuse, I've got you in my hand."
Erec answered disdainfully,
"You're crazy, fellow, trying
To force me to follow behind you.
I refuse. You made no challenge; 4000
You had no business seizing
My reins without a challenge
To put me on guard." Then he put
His hand on his sword and said,
"Fellow, let go of those reins! 4005
Leave us! I tell you, you're
A haughty, conceited fool!

I warn you: keep those reins
In your hand, and you'll feel my sword.
Let go!" And Kay released him, 4010
Drew himself off a bit,
Then galloped rapidly back,
Shouting an angry challenge
As the distance narrowed. Far
Too noble to kill a knight 4015
Wearing no armor, Erec
Turned his spear so only
The handle would hit him, but leveled
So hard a blow on the fattest
Part of the shield that it smashed 4020
Against Kay's forehead and pinned
His arms to his chest and stretched him
Full length on the ground. And then
Erec took Gringolet
By the reins and led him to Enide, 4025
Intending to lead him off.
But Kay, a skilled flatterer,
Sought to keep the horse
With the softest words, saying,
"Friend, as God is my witness, 4030
I have no right to that horse:
It belongs to one of the best
And most famous knights in the world,
Gawain the Brave. I ask you
In his name and for his sake 4035
To give me Gringolet back.
Let me serve as your messenger:
So wise and noble a deed
Will do you infinite honor."

"Take the horse," said Erec, 4040
"And bring him back to his owner.
It would be wrong of me
To deprive my lord Gawain."
Kay mounted the horse
And rode to the king's tent, 4045
And told him what had happened.
And Arthur summoned Gawain,
Saying, "My fine nephew,
For the sake of all that's noble
In you, ride right after him, 4050
Ask him gently what
He is, and why he's here,
And if, somehow, you can get him
To think of making a visit,
By all means do so." So Gawain 4055
Mounted Gringolet
And followed by a pair of servants
Soon caught up to Erec,
But did not know who he was.
Each of them gave the other 4060
A careful, courteous greeting.
Then Gawain, clearly a knight
Of enormous breeding, declared,
"My lord, King Arthur sent me
After you, down this road. 4065
The king and queen send
You greetings, and ask most kindly
That you come and enjoy their company:
They'd like to help you, they mean you
No harm, and they're very close by." 4070
Erec replied, "My deepest

Thanks to the king and the queen,
And to you; you're plainly a wellborn,
Well-bred man. Right now
I'm not in the best of health, 4075
I've been badly wounded all over
My body and can't afford
To go out of my way for lodging.
Please don't trouble yourself;
I thank you; please go back." 4080

Gawain was nobody's fool.
Drawing aside, he bent
To a servant's ear and, whispering,
Told him to ride directly
To the king, advising Arthur 4085
To take down his tents and pavilions
And carry them two or three miles
Away, then set them up
Again, right in the middle
Of the road. "And there is where 4090
The king must sleep, if he wants
To meet and entertain
The very best knight, to my mind,
Anyone's ever seen,
For nothing could make this knight 4095
Leave the road and take shelter."
The servant left, and delivered
His message. The king struck
His tents at once, and had
Packhorses carry them off. 4100
Then he mounted Aubagu,
And the queen, too, prepared
To ride on her white horse.

And all this time, Gawain
Worked at delaying Erec, 4105
Who finally said, "Sir:
Yesterday I traveled
Farther than today. You're bothering
Me: please leave. You've made me
Lose the better part 4110
Of this day." And Gawain answered,
"Ah, let me stay a while
Longer, and ride at your side.
There's plenty of daylight left."
And they talked so much that Arthur's 4115
Servants were able to set up
The tents in front of them, and Erec
Saw them. And now he knew
He was obliged to accept this lodging.
"Ah, ah! Gawain," he said, 4120
"You're far too clever for me:
You've tricked me into staying.
And now, because you've made
This happen, I'll tell you my name:
I've nothing to gain by concealment. 4125
I am Erec, your old
Friend and companion." Hearing
His name, Gawain hugged him,
Then lifted off his helmet
And untied the brace at his neck, 4130
And Erec did the same for him.
Then Gawain left him, saying,
"My friend, this will be welcome
News to my lord and his queen.
Let me go and make them 4135

Both exceedingly happy.
But first, allow me to greet
And embrace and comfort my lady
Enide, your wife. The queen
Will surely want to see her 4140
At once. Just yesterday
I heard her speaking your lady's
Name." Approaching Enide,
He asked her how the journey
Had gone and how she was. 4145
She answered like a well-bred woman:
"My lord, all is well.
My only concern is for
My husband: it worries me,
Seeing him wounded all over." 4150
Gawain replied, "And it worries
Me. I saw at once
That his face was pale and colorless.
It would have made me weep,
Seeing such pain and pallor, 4155
But joy extinguishes sorrow.
Having him back brought me
Such pleasure that pain was forgotten.
If you please, continue exactly
As before; I'll ride like the wind 4160
And inform the king and queen
You're close behind me." They parted;
He came to the king's tent:
"My lord," he said, "You'll both
Be delighted, you and my lady: 4165
Erec and his wife are coming."
Delighted indeed, the king

Jumped up: "By God, but I'm happy!
You couldn't have brought me news
I was gladder to hear." And then 4170
The king and queen left
Their tent, and at once saw Erec
Approaching. Seeing the king,
Erec quickly dismounted
And Enide came down from her horse. 4175
They were greeted by the king, and embraced,
And the queen, too, sweetly
Kissed and hugged them both.
Everyone there was happy.
Right where he stood, servants 4180
Removed Erec's armor,
But seeing his many wounds
Their joy was turned into sorrow.
Arthur sighed profoundly,
Then called for a magic ointment 4185
Prepared by his sister Morgana
For the king's particular use,
A compound so wonderfully mixed
That once spread on a wound—
Muscle or bone, it made 4190
No difference—in just a week
That wound was completely healed,
Provided only the ointment
Was reapplied each day.
This magic ointment was brought 4195
To the king, much to Erec's
Relief. It was rubbed on his wounds,
And his bandages carefully retied.
The king took husband and wife

By the hand and led them inside, 4200
Declaring that solely for love
Of Erec he'd decided to spend
A full two weeks in that forest,
Until all the wounds had been healed.
And Erec thanked the king, 4205
Saying, "My lord, none
Of my wounds pains me so much
That I'm ready to give up my journey.
No one can hold me back.
I wish to leave early 4210
Tomorrow, at the latest, just
As the sun begins to appear."
Shaking his head, the king
Replied, "I deeply regret
This strange unwillingness. 4215
It's perfectly clear you're in pain.
Remaining here is the path
Of wisdom—for what a shame
It would be if you died in this forest.
My good sweet friend, stay 4220
At least until you're well."
"Enough!" said Erec. "I started
This journey and I mean to complete it.
Nothing can keep me here."
Perceiving that not a word 4225
He said could convince the knight,
Arthur gave up the attempt
And ordered tables set out
At once and supper brought.
His servants hurried to obey him. 4230
It was a Saturday night,

And they dined on fish and fruit,
Perch and pike, salmon
And thick-lipped trout, followed
By pears both fresh and cooked. 4235
As soon as supper was done
Beds were called for, and brought.
The king dearly loved
Erec and gave him a bed
To himself, so no one lying 4240
Too close might touch his wounds.
Erec's lodgings were superb,
That night. And Enide slept
Close by, together with the queen,
Lying under an ermine 4245
Blanket. All were at rest,
Tranquil till morning came.
Erec awoke at dawn,
Rose from his bed, and prepared
To leave, ordering his horse 4250
Saddled and his arms and armor
Brought. He was quickly obeyed.
The king and all his knights
Urged him, once more, to stay,
But their words were a waste of breath: 4255
Nothing could hold him back.
Weeping and wailing began —
Such a wild burst of sorrow
You'd have thought they were watching him die.
He put on his armor; Enide 4260
Stood waiting. They were ready, and everyone
Mourned, sure he would never
Return. Rushing from their tents,

They called for their horses, intending
To ride along as an escort. 4265

But Erec said, "Be calm.

No one needs to come with me.

I thank you all. Go back."

His horse was brought, and he mounted
Quickly, wasting no time; 4270

He took up his shield and his spear.

He commended them all to God,

And they did the same for him.

Enide mounted. And they left.

They rode through the forest, not stopping, 4275
And then, at six o'clock,

As they rode along they heard,

Far off, the voice of a girl

Crying out in distress.

Erec understood that cry: 4280

He knew, the moment it reached

His ears, that the woman was desperate

For help and deeply frightened.

He called to Enide, quickly:

"Lady, there's a girl here 4285

In this wood, crying as she goes.

And it seems to me, hearing

Her voice, she's badly in need

Of help. I'll gallop over

And see what I can do. 4290

Dismount here. I'm off:

Wait for me right where you are."

"Gladly, my lord," she said.

She stayed alone; he went

By himself and quickly found 4295

The girl, running through the woods,
Crying because her beloved
Had been carried off by a pair
Of giants who were handling him savagely.
She was clawing at her hair as she ran, 4300
Ripping her clothes, tearing
The rosy skin of her face.
Astonished at the sight, Erec
Asked her to tell him, please,
Why she wept and lamented. 4305
She sobbed and wept, and told him,
Through her tears: "My lord,
There's nothing strange in my sorrow,
For I'd rather be dead than alive.
My life is worthless, now, 4310
For a pair of cruel, wicked
Giants, my beloved's mortal
Enemies, have taken him prisoner.
Oh Lord! How can a weak
And miserable woman help 4315
The best of all living knights,
The kindest of all, and most noble?
Truly, his life is at stake:
They'll kill him, I know they will,
And he'll die a miserable death. 4320
In the name of God, oh noble
Knight, save my beloved
If you possibly can, save him!
You'll find them pretty quickly,
They haven't gone very far." 4325
"Lady," said Erec, "I'll ride
After them, because you've asked,

And I promise to do whatever
I can: either I'll
Become a prisoner, too, 4330
Or else I'll bring him back.
If only the giants let
Him live until I find them,
I'll set my strength against theirs."
"Oh noble knight," she said, 4335
"I'll be your servant forever,
If you bring me back my love.
May God bless you. Oh hurry,
Hurry, I beg you!" "Tell me
Which way they went." "That way, 4340
My lord. You can see their tracks."
Erec told her to wait
Where she was, and set off at a gallop.
The girl blessed him, in the name
Of the Lord, sweetly praying 4345
To God to give this knight
Strength enough to defeat
Those who were hurting her lover.
Quickly, Erec tracked them,
Spurring his horse. He rode 4350
Hard and finally spied
The giants up ahead,
About to leave the wood.
With them he saw a naked,
Barefoot knight on a packhorse, 4355
Bound both hands and feet
As if he'd been caught stealing.
And he saw that the giants carried
No lances or shields or swords,

Or any weapons except 4360
Clubs and whips, which they'd used
To beat and lash their prisoner
Until the skin on his back
Was sliced open to the bone.
Blood ran so freely 4365
Along his sides that the packhorse
He rode was bloody all over,
Even down to his belly.
Erec came galloping up,
Alone, shocked and dismayed, 4370
Seeing the captive knight
So savagely treated. He reached them
In a meadow, where one wood ended
And before another began.
"Gentlemen," he said, "for what 4375
Crime are you treating this man
So horribly, leading him like
A thief? This is too much!
You're handling him like a criminal
Caught in the very act. 4380
And to see a knight all naked,
Bound both hand and foot,
And cruelly beaten, is shameful,
A vile and offensive sight.
I ask you, politely, as honest 4385
Men, to hand him over
To me. And I make no threats."
"Hey, is it any business
Of yours? You're crazy, asking
Anything of us! If you think 4390
It's wrong, just try and fix it!"

"It makes me sick to see it,"
Said Erec. "You'll have to fight
To keep him. And since you've said
The decision is mine, and whoever 4395
Wins can have him, step forward!
Before you take him further
You'll have to trade blows with me."
"Fellow," they said, "you're really
Crazy, wanting to fight 4400
With us. Even if there
Were four of you, you'd still
Do as well as a lamb with two wolves."
"Who knows?" Erec replied.
"If the sky falls, and the earth 4405
Cracks, we'll catch a lot
Of skylarks. People who rely
On boasts aren't worth much.
Get ready, I'm coming after you!"
The giants were strong, and savage; 4410
Each of them carried a great square
Club in his closed fist.
Erec charged them, lance
At the ready, not afraid
Of either one, for all 4415
Their arrogant bluster. He struck
The first one right in the eye,
And his spear drove through the skull
So that brains and blood both
Poured out the back. And he fell 4420
Dead, his heart failed.
It troubled the second giant,
Seeing the first one dead,

And well it might. Angry,
And wanting revenge, he charged, 4425
Raising his club with both hands,
Intending to bash in Erec's
Head before he could cover it.
But Erec saw the blow
Coming, and took it on his shield. 4430
But the giant had swung so fiercely
That Erec was stunned, almost
Toppled off his horse
And rolled along the ground.
But he held his shield high; 4435
It rang from the force of the blow.
And the giant raised his club
Again, still aiming for the head,
But Erec's sword was ready
And he swung it so hard that the giant's 4440
Health was hardly improved:
It hit him right in the head
And split him all the way down
To his saddle. His guts spilled out,
His body tumbled to the ground 4445
And lay there, cut in half.
And the captive knight cried
With joy, thanking God
For sending him such a savior.
Erec untied him, helped him 4450
Dress himself, then mounted him
On one of the giants' horses,
Leading the other by its reins.
Then Erec asked him his name,
And the former captive said, 4455

"Good knight, you are now
My lord, my master in everything
By right and reason together,
For my life belongs to you,
Who saved it before they could snatch 4460
The soul right out of my body.
What lucky chance, my sweet
Savior, sent you from God
To save me, pluck me out
Of my enemies' hands, rescue 4465
My body with your bravery? My lord,
Let me do you homage: I wish
To follow you the rest
Of my life, go wherever
You go, and serve you always." 4470
Seeing the passion with which
The former captive wished
To serve him, if he could, Erec
Said, "My friend, I can't
Accept your service, but there's 4475
Something you need to know:
I came to your aid because
Of the prayers, and the tears, of the woman
Who loves you, for I found her weeping
In this wood. She sobbed and cried 4480
For you, and her heart ached.
Let me make her a present:
You. And having brought you
Back, I'll go on my way,
Alone; you can't come with me. 4485
But although I can't accept
Your company, I should like to know

Who you are." "As you please, my lord.
If you wish to know my name
I have no right to withhold it. 4490
Good sir, I'm Cadoc of Cabruel—
And there you have my name.
But now, before you leave me,
I'd like to know, if I may,
Where you come from and who 4495
You are, and where I may hope
To find you again, when you're gone."
"My friend, I shouldn't tell you,"
Said Erec. "Let's say no more!
But if you're searching for something 4500
To bring me honor, go
As quickly as you possibly can
To my lord, King Arthur, who's hard
At work hunting in this forest,
In that direction, only 4505
A couple of miles away.
Go to him now, and say
You were sent to see him by the man
He entertained and was kind to,
There in his tent last night. 4510
Hide nothing from him of the pain
And sorrow you and your lady
And your body might have known.
I'm well-beloved at court,
And if you'll bear me witness 4515
You'll do me an honorable service.
Ask, and they'll tell you who
I am: no one else
Will." "Whatever you order,

My lord," said Cadoc, "I will do. 4520
Don't be afraid I'll fail you.
I'll gladly go to Arthur
And tell the king exactly
How you fought this battle
On my account." And as 4525
They spoke, they rode along
Until they came to where
Erec had left the girl
Waiting. And she was wonderfully
Happy, seeing her lover 4530
Return, as she had not believed
He would. And giving her Cadoc's
Hand, he said, "Be happy,
Lady, not sad, for here
Is your lover, rejoicing." She answered him 4535
Well: "My lord, you've conquered
Us both. Our duty, now,
Can only be to serve
And honor you as best
We can. Yet who could repay 4540
Even a half of what
You've given us?" Erec
Answered, "My sweet friend,
I ask for no reward.
I commend you both to God; 4545
I've lingered longer than I should."
Then he swung his horse around
And rode away as fast
As he could. And Cadoc of Cabruel,
Together with his lady, went 4550
To carry the news to Arthur

And his queen. Erec galloped
Down the road, and at last
Arrived where he'd left his own
Lady, half sick with fear, 4555
Sure that he meant to leave her
All alone in that wood.

And Erec, too, was afraid
That someone might have found her
There, unprotected, 4560
And taken her away,
Which was why he rode hard.

But the day had been so hot,
And his armor had weighed so heavily,
That all his wounds opened, 4565
And his bandages broke, and he bled
Freely, with nothing to hold back
The blood. And then he arrived
Where Enide had been left to wait.

How joyful she was, seeing 4570
Her husband coming! But she could not
See the pain he was suffering,
For his whole body was bathed
In blood, and his heart had almost
Stopped beating. Down a small hill 4575
He rode, then dropped like a falling
Log across his horse's

Neck, and tried to straighten,
But slipped from his saddle, losing
His grip and falling flat 4580
On his face like a corpse. And oh!
Watching him tumble down
Was a terrible sight: she ran

To him, not hiding her sorrow,
Shrieking, wringing her hands, 4585
Ripping away her dress
And baring her breast, tearing
Out her hair, clawing
Bloody lines along
Her tender face. "God!" 4590
She cried, "Oh sweet good Lord!
How can you let me live?
Oh Death, come kill me, I'm yours!"
And she fell unconscious on his corpse.
And when she returned to life 4595
She began to rail at herself:
"Ah! Miserable Enide!
I've killed my lord. My own
Folly has killed him. He'd still
Be alive—but stupid, arrogant 4600
Fool that I am, I spoke
The fatal words that spurred him
To make this journey. No one's
Ever been hurt by a wise
Silence, but words do enormous 4605
Damage: and oh, I've proved this
Over and over again."
And sitting next to her lord,
She laid her head on her knees
And began her lament once more: 4610
"Beloved, how wronged you've been!
No one was ever your equal:
You were the living image
Of Beauty, the model of Courage;
Wisdom filled your heart; 4615

Closed-fisted men are worthless,
But oh, how open-handed
You were! But what am I saying?
Did anyone else kill you?
It was I who uttered the words 4620
That brought you death, my lord;
I spoke those fatal words
And I alone should be blamed.
Oh, I admit, I confess
That no one else did it: 4625
The guilt is mine, all mine!"
She fell on the ground, senseless.
And when she awoke, she wept
And wept, on and on:
"God! What shall I do? 4630
Why am I still alive?
Why is Death so slow,
What is he waiting for?
Even Death disdains me,
He can't be bothered. Then I 4635
Must make amends for myself,
Take revenge for my crime:
I'll die in spite of Death,
Who refuses to help me. Weeping
And wailing will never kill me, 4640
All my sighs are worthless.
My lord's sword, there
At his waist, deserves this vengeance.
And then I'll be in no one's
Power, beg for no one's 4645
Assistance." She drew out his sword,
Then sat, staring at the blade.

But God in His mercy made her
Linger a little, kept her
Still. And then, as she sat, 4650
Remembering her pain and her sorrow,
A noble count came galloping
Up, with a host of knights:
He had heard, from far away,
A lady's voice wailing. 4655
She would have died, then
And there, but their coming surprised her:
God had not forgotten.
They took the sword from her hands,
Returned it to the sheath it had come from. 4660
Then the count left his horse
And began to question the lady:
Who was the knight? Was she
His wife or his beloved?
"Both, my lord," she said. 4665
"My sorrow's too great for words:
It hurts to be still alive."
Then the count began to comfort her:
"Lady, in the name of God
I beg you: have mercy on yourself! 4670
You have reason for sorrow, yes,
But nothing deserves such misery,
For life is too good to abandon.
Don't let yourself despise it:
Take comfort, wisdom requires it, 4675
And God will make you happy.
Your beauty's a thing of wonder,
And will bring you good fortune, for I'll
Make you my wife, you'll be

A noble lady, a countess. 4680
That should make you feel better!
And I'll have your husband's body
Taken and buried with honor.
So stop all this weeping and wailing,
Which makes you look like a fool!" 4685
"My lord," she answered, "leave me!
For the love of God, go away!
There's nothing here for you,
And nothing you say or do
Could possibly make me happy." 4690
But the count turned to his knights
And said, "Quickly: make
A bier for carrying this corpse.
We'll take the body and this lady
Straight to the castle at Limors. 4695
We'll bury it there, and there
I propose to marry the lady
(Though it's clear she doesn't want to),
For I've never seen a woman
So beautiful, nor one I wanted 4700
So much. How happy I am
To have found her! Hurry, make
A horse-drawn bier: no
Long faces, no lazy hands!"
Some of them drew their swords, 4705
Cut a pair of poles
From a tree, and bound branches
Across them. Then they laid Erec
On his back and hitched the bier
To horses; Enide remained 4710
Beside it, weeping as they rode.

She fainted, often, falling
Back, but the knights who led her
Along held her upright
In their arms, and they tried to console her. 4715
They brought the body to Limors,
To the count's palace. And all
The people who lived there trailed after—
Ladies, knights, and merchants.
They laid Erec in the largest 4720
Room, stretched him out
On a great round table, then put
His spear and his sword at his side.
The chamber was full, everyone
Crowded around, all 4725
Anxious to learn the cause
Of all this strange mystery and sorrow.
Meanwhile, the count called
His barons to a private council.
"Gentlemen," he said, "I plan 4730
To marry this lady at once.
You can see for yourself how beautiful
She is, and well-bred: clearly,
She comes from some noble line.
Her grace and loveliness prove her 4735
Worthy of all the honor
Of a kingdom, or even an empire.
My standing won't be damaged
By such a wife. Indeed,
I think it will likely increase. 4740
So bring my chaplain here,
And some of you bring the lady,
And if she's willing to do

As I wish, I'll give her a dowry
Of half the lands I own." 4745

Then the chaplain came, as the count
Had directed, and they brought the lady,
Too, but only by force,
For she flatly refused him. But he had
A marriage performed in spite of her, 4750
She pleased him so much. And after
The chaplain completed the marriage,
The count's steward quickly
Prepared tables in the palace
And set out a wedding feast, 4755
For now it was time to dine.

When evening prayers had been said,
That lovely day in May,
Enide was deeply troubled,
And nothing cured her distress, 4760
For the count kept insisting
Sometimes politely, sometimes
Not, that she ought to smile
And rejoice. They brought her an armchair,
Which she did not want, and made her 4765
Sit, and set a table
In front of her, like it or not.
The count seated himself
Across the table, facing her,
Growing increasingly angry 4770
That nothing he did could please her.
"Lady," he said, "you've got
To forget this grief. Stop it!
You can count on me for all
The honor and riches you want. 4775

You certainly know that sorrow
Won't bring a corpse to life:
It never has, and it won't.
Think of how you've been raised
From poverty's depths: you were poor, 4780
When I found you, and now you're rich.
You've gotten a countess's rank
And honor and name—Fortune
Hasn't been stingy. True,
Your former husband is dead. 4785
Do you think I find it strange,
Your mourning and grief? Not
A bit! But let me tell you,
For I know a thing or two,
That the moment I took you in marriage 4790
You should have been grateful, and rejoiced.
Don't take the risk of making
Me angry. Eat when I tell you
To eat!" "My lord," she replied,
"I can't, nor will I eat 4795
Or drink, as long as I live,
If I can't see my husband,
Lying there on that table,
Eating and drinking with me."
"Lady," he answered, "that can't 4800
Happen. Anyone hearing
Such things would think you a fool.
Be careful, watch out! You'll pay—
And dearly—if you make me tell you
Again." She refused to reply, 4805
Unconcerned by his threats.
So the count struck her in the face,

And she cried out in pain, at which
The watching barons scolded
Their lord: "Stop it, sir! 4810
You should be deeply ashamed,
Hitting this lady simply
Because she won't eat. You've done
A very base thing, my lord.
Her husband lies there dead, 4815
And this lady sees him, and mourns him,
And no one can say she is wrong."
"Shut up, all of you!" cried
The count. "She's mine, I'm hers,
And I'll treat her however I like." 4820
Hearing these words, Enide
Swore out loud she would never
Be his, and he hit her again,
And she said, as loud as she could,
"Hah! Why should I care, 4825
Whatever you say or do.
I'm not afraid of your threats
Or your blows. Hit me, beat me
As much as you like! I'll never
Be so afraid that I'll do 4830
What you want, even if here
And now you put out my eyes
Or chop me to little pieces!"

In the middle of this quarrel, Erec
Awoke from his fainting spell, 4835
Like a man waking from a dream.
No wonder he was startled,
Seeing himself surrounded
By so many strangers, but hearing

His wife's voice raised 4840
In despair went straight to his heart.
He jumped from the table, drawing
His sword as he came: anger,
And his love for Enide, gave him
Strength. He ran to his wife 4845
And without a word to the count
Struck him so hard on the head
That he split it open, and blood
And brains poured out. And all
The knights leaped to their feet 4850
And fled, convinced that the devil
Himself had attacked them. Young
And old they ran, frightened
Out of their wits, tumbling
And falling, one on top 4855
Of the other, desperate to escape.
The entire palace emptied
Into the courtyard, no one
Too weak or too strong to flee:
"Run! Run! The dead man 4860
Has risen!" They pushed and shoved
To the doors, too frightened to care
What happened to anyone else:
Those in the back fought
To get to the front. So clawing 4865
And crying they got out as best
They could, and no one waited.
Quickly, Erec snatched up
His shield and hung its strap
Around his neck; Enide 4870
Then took his lance, and together

They, too, went out in the courtyard.
But no one was bold enough
To face them, for they all believed
Erec was a body but not 4875
A man, and the fiend inside him
Was after them. They ran,
One and all, and Erec
Pursued, chasing them
Until he came to a boy 4880
Leading a horse, his horse,
Still saddled and bridled, to the stable.
It was almost too good to be true!
He ran straight to the horse
And the terrified servant released 4885
The reins and ran for his life.
Erec leaped in the saddle,
And Enide, following her husband's
Instructions, set her foot
In the stirrup and jumped up ahead, 4890
Riding in front of him, the horse
Bearing them both, she
On the neck, he in the saddle
Behind. The gate was open,
And no one dared to stop them. 4895
It was the count's castle, and everyone
In it mourned him, but none of them,
Not even the bravest, had the courage
To seek revenge for their lord
And master, killed at his own 4900
Table. Carrying his wife
Away, Erec embraced her,
Kissed her, murmured comforting

Words and held her hard
Against him, near his heart: 4905
"My sweet sister, I've tested
You in a hundred ways.
Be afraid of nothing, now:
I love you better than ever,
And I understand, at last, 4910
How perfectly you love me.
Let me, once again, be
As I was before, your servant
In everything, yours to command.
Whatever you may have said 4915
Against me, I hereby forgive
And forget, with all my soul."
And he kissed her, and hugged her, again.
Nor was Enide displeased,
Finding herself so well 4920
Beloved, so kissed, so embraced.
They galloped into the night,
Happy to ride in the clear
Bright glow of the shining moon.
But the news traveled even 4925
Faster, for nothing can move
So quickly. Guivret the Dwarf
Had heard how a knight, mortally
Wounded in the forest, died,
And his lady, so lovely that Iseult 4930
Would look like a servant beside her,
Wept and sobbed and mourned.
Count Oringle of Limors
Had found them, and carried away
The corpse, and wanted to marry 4935

The lady, but she'd refused him.
Guivret took no pleasure
In this news, for he well remembered
His own adventure with Erec.
The thought came to his heart 4940
To seek out the lady and if
The corpse was truly Erec
To lay him in the ground with all
Due honor. He gathered a thousand
Knights to lay siege to the castle: 4945
Should the count be unwilling to surrender
The corpse and the lady, Guivret
Intended to burn down his castle.
Helmets laced, spears
And shields ready, he led them 4950
To Limors, by the light of the moon,
All of them armed to the teeth.
Just before midnight, riding
In the other direction, Erec
Saw them and thought himself 4955
Betrayed, taken captive
Or dead. He set Enide
Down near a row of hedges;
The concern he felt was hardly
Strange! "Stay here, my lady, 4960
Behind these bushes, until
These men go by: let them
Be unaware of you,
For I've no idea who
They may be or what they want. 4965
Perhaps there's nothing to fear,
But if we needed to keep

Ourself safe from their weapons,
I can see no way. Whatever
I'm facing, evil or good, 4970
Fear won't stop me from meeting
These men in combat. If any
Among them attack me, there'll be
No problem, I'll give as good
As I get, though my heart is heavy, 4975
And my body. It's hardly surprising.
I'm riding out to meet them;
You stay here, and stay quiet:
Be careful no one sees you;
Keep silent, and let them pass." 4980
And then, from a distance, they saw
Guivret approaching, his lance
Lowered. Neither knew
The other, for just at that moment
A dark cloud covered 4985
The moon. Erec was bruised
And weak, but the dwarf had fully
Recovered, his wounds had healed—
What folly might Erec commit,
Not knowing the newcomer's name? 4990
He galloped out from behind
The hedge, and Guivret charged
Straight at him, without a word,
And Erec, too, stayed silent,
Believing in the strength he no longer 4995
Possessed, unable to admit
His weakness or allow himself
To rest. They rode at each other,
But though it looked like combat,

One was weak and the other
Strong. Guivret hit him
So hard that Erec went rolling
Backward across his horse
To the ground. Hidden in the hedge,
Enide watched her husband
Falling, and was sure he was dead;
Hurrying out, she ran
To help him as best she could.
Her grief greater than ever,
She came to Guivret and took
His horse's reins in her hand.
"Knight, may you be cursed!"
She cried. "This man was alone
And weak, in pain and almost
Dead. It was wrong to attack him,
Not knowing why or who
He was. Had he been healthy
And met you, here, alone
And unaided, you'd live to regret
The day! Be noble, now,
And generous: give up, for courtesy's
Sake, this combat you've
Begun, for you've nothing to gain,
No fame and no renown,
Killing or taking captive
A knight who can't resist you.
See for yourself: he's suffered
So many blows, been wounded
So badly, he's covered with blood."
He replied, "You've nothing to fear,
Lady! I see what a loyal

5000
5005
5010
5015
5020
5025
5030

Wife you are; you have
My praise. None of my men
Will harm you, nor will I.
But tell me, don't keep it hidden, 5035
Your lord's name. You've nothing
To lose. Tell me who
He is and you both will be safe.
I assure you, lady, neither
He nor you has a thing 5040
To fear." Reassured,
Enide answered at once,
Wasting no words: "I'll tell you
No lies, I can see you're a loyal,
Generous knight. His name 5045
Is Erec." Overwhelmed with joy,
Guivret dismounted and threw
Himself at Erec's feet,
There where he lay on the ground.
"My lord," he said, "I was coming 5050
Straight to Limors, to seek you,
And thought I'd find you dead.
The news I had was that Count
Oringle of Limors had carried
Away a knight killed 5055
In battle and meant to force
The dead knight's lady, found
Beside the body, to become
His wife. But the lady, I was told,
Disliked him. I came to her aid 5060
As quickly as I could, and had
The count refused to hand me
You and the lady both,

I'd have thought myself a worthless
Creature to leave him one stone 5065
On top of another. But I'd never
Have meddled in his business, except
For the great affection I feel
For you. I'm Guivret, your friend,
And any harm I've done you, 5070
Believe me, came from not knowing
Who you were. Your pardon,
My lord!" Hearing these words,
Erec sat up, he could do
No more: "But you're excused, 5075
My friend! You did not know me;
I forgive you your error." Guivret
Helped him to his feet, and Erec
Told him how he'd killed
The count as he sat at his own 5080
Table, then reclaimed his horse
In front of a stable, as the count's
Men, knights and squires
And all, ran up and down,
Shouting, "Run! Run! 5085
The dead man himself is after
Us!" And he told him he could
Have been captured, but wasn't, and how
He made his escape. And Guivret
Replied, "My lord, I have 5090
A castle nearby, nicely
Set in a fine location.
For your pleasure and profit, let me
Lead you there, tomorrow,
So we can heal your wounds. 5095

My two sisters, gracious
And smiling ladies, are good
Nurses; they'll cure you quickly
And well. For tonight, we'll make
Camp here in these fields, §100
For a bit of rest will do you
A world of good. That's my
Advice: stay here for the night."
Then Erec said, "I agree."
So they pitched their tents and remained §105
Where they were—which wasn't easy,
Though no one minded, for there wasn't
Accommodation for so many:
Most of them slept under
The hedges. Guivret had §110
His own tent put up and ordered
Kindling lit, for light
And comfort; then traveling chests
Were opened, and candles brought out,
And the tent illuminated. §115
And Enide was sad no longer,
For things had turned out well.
She herself took off
Her husband's armor, and his battle
Dress, then washed and cleaned §120
His wounds, and bandaged them,
Allowing no one else
To touch him. And Erec could find
No fault, for he'd thoroughly tested
And proved her love, and his own. §125
And Guivret treated him
Extravagantly well,

Laying embroidered quilts
Across a heap of the softest
Grass and flowers, to fashion §130
A great high bed for Erec
To lie on, piled with covers.
And then he had them open
Another chest and bring out
Three meat pies. "My friend," §135
He said, "eat a bit
Of these cold pies, and drink
Some wine with water. I've seven
Barrels full, but pure
Wine will do you no good, §140
With all your wounds. My good
Sweet friend, try to eat,
It will do you good—and you,
My lady, who've suffered so much
Today, eat with your husband. §145
You've both been well avenged,
You're safe, you're out of danger,
So eat, now, my good
Friends, and I'll eat with you."
Then Guivret sat beside him, §150
Along with Enide, who was deeply
Pleased with everything Guivret
Had done. Each of them coaxed
Erec to eat, and gave him
Wine with water, knowing §155
The unmixed drink was too strong.
Erec ate as sick people
Eat, and drank a little,
Afraid to drink more, but then

He lay back, at peace, and slept §160
The whole night long, for everyone
Near him was careful and made
No noise. They all awoke
At dawn, and readied themselves
For a day of riding. Erec §165
Was far too fond of his horse
Even to think of riding
Another. Enide, who had lost
Her gentle palfrey, scarcely
Missed it (or so it appeared), §170
Jogging lightly along
On a borrowed mule with an easy
Gait, who carried her well.
And her heart was light, too,
Seeing how cheerfully her husband §175
Rode, saying he would soon
Be well. By nine that morning
They came to Penuris,
A beautiful castle, strongly
Built, where both of Guivret's §180
Sisters had chosen to live,
For they loved the location. And there,
In a pleasant, comfortable, airy
Room, far from all noise,
Guivret housed his guest, §185
And his sisters, at his request,
Set themselves to heal him.
Erec was so sure of their love
And skill that he put himself
In their hands. And first they cut §190
Away the dead skin, then spread

On ointment and bound the wounds
With linen. They worked hard,
As they had to; his was a difficult
Case. They washed the wounds §195
Often, and applied more ointment,
And gave him food and drink
Four times a day, or more,
Withholding all garlic and pepper.
Visitors came and went, §200
But Enide was always near him,
For no one's concern could equal
Hers. Guivret came often,
Forever alert for anything
That might be missing or wrong: §205
Erec was carefully, cheerfully
Tended, for no one minded
Serving so fine a knight,
But helped him gladly, of their own
Free will. The young sisters §210
Worked so well that in fifteen
Days his sickness and pain
Were gone. Then, to bring back
His color, they bathed him, for no one
Could teach them much about medicine; §215
The art was one they had mastered.
And finally, when Erec was able
To come and go as he pleased,
Guivret gave them clothes
Of two kinds of silk, specially §220
Sewn, the first lined
With ermine, the second with squirrel.
And one of the silks was Chinese

Blue, the other was striped
And had come from Scotland, sent 5225
As a gift by Guivret's cousin.
The oriental blue
And ermine robe went
To Enide, the striped one, lined
With squirrel, to Erec, who would 5230
Have been happy with either. And now
Erec was restored to health,
Healed, and as strong as ever,
And Enide was full of joy,
Her happiness restored: 5235
They lay together at night,
All her pleasure renewed.
And her beauty, too, returned,
Replacing the drawn pallor
Inflicted by so much suffering. 5240
Now she was hugged and kissed,
Now she had all her joy
And all her delight. They lay
Together, unclothed, in a single
Bed, kissing and hugging, 5245
And nothing in the world could have pleased them
More, after all the misfortune
And disaster they'd known. He
Was hers, and she was his;
They had done their penance, they had paid. 5250
Each of them sought to outdo
The other in giving pleasure:
I'm not permitted to say more.
Their love was reaffirmed,
Their great sorrow forgotten, 5255

Almost removed from memory.
And now it was time to go home,
So they asked Guivret for permission
To leave, he who had been
So good a friend, doing §260
Everything anyone could do,
Serving and honoring them both.
And Erec said, when they spoke
Of parting, "Lord Guivret, I need
To go home, I can wait no longer. §265
Let preparations be made,
And everything needed be ready:
I should like to leave tomorrow,
In the morning, as the sun comes up.
Staying with you this long, §270
I will leave you healthy and strong.
May God let me live
Long enough to see you
Again and give me the chance
To do you honor and serve you. §275
I expect nothing will stop me
(Unless I'm captured or delayed)
From returning at once, straight
To King Arthur's court, whether
The king's at Quarrois or Carduel." §280
And Guivret promptly answered,
"Lord, you won't travel
Alone, for I'll come with you,
And lead you back to your king
And companions, all glad to see you §285
Once more." Erec agreed,
Declaring that all should be

Exactly as Guivret wished.
Everything was readied that night,
For they wanted no further delay: 5290
Baggage and armor and horses
And all. And when they awoke,
At dawn, their horses were saddled
And waiting. Before departing,
Erec went to the sisters' 5295
Room, to take his leave,
And Enide went with him, wonderfully
Pleased, seeing horses
And everything ready. Erec,
A well-bred man, said 5300
Farewell to the sisters, and thanked them
For both his health and his life,
Offering them both his service.
He clasped hands with the lady
Near him, as Enide did 5305
With the other, and then they left
The room, all of them holding
Hands, walking to the courtyard
Where the ladies' brother was waiting,
Anxious to be gone. And Enide, 5310
Too, was more than ready
To ride. A richly prepared
Palfrey, gentle, strong,
And careful, awaited her, worth
No less than her own (which was still 5315
At Limors), standing, patient,
In front of the mounting stone.
Hers was bay, this one
Was sorrel brown, and its head

Was totally different, as if 5320
Designed in two parts, one cheek
The purest white, the other
Black as a barn owl, and between
The white and black was a line
As green as any leaf 5325
On a vine. Let me tell you
About the harness and breast strap
And saddle, all magnificently
Worked. The harness and breast strap
Were studded with emeralds. But the saddle 5330
Was completely different, covered
With dark silk. And the saddle
Bows were ivory, on which
Were sculpted the entire story
Of Aeneas fleeing Troy 5335
And how, in Carthage, Dido
Joyfully took him to her bed,
And Aeneas deceived her, and on his
Account she killed herself,
And Aeneas went on to conquer 5340
Laurentum and Lombardy,
Where he ruled for the rest of his life:
Subtle sculpture, finely
Chiseled, garnished in gold.
The Breton craftsman who'd made it 5345
Had worked for more than seven
Years and done nothing else.
Whether he sold it or not
I don't know, but he should have gotten
A truly noble reward. 5350
And receiving so fine a replacement

For her other horse left Enide
Feeling no sense of loss.
The palfrey she rode on, now,
Was so richly equipped that she climbed 5355
To the saddle gaily, and lords
And squires quickly mounted,
Too. To cheer their journey,
Guivret had ordered a host
Of falcons and hawks brought 5360
Along, some young, some molted,
And hounds, and hunting dogs.
They rode from morning to late
Afternoon, on a straight road,
For thirty Welsh leagues or more, 5365
Until they found themselves
In front of a beautiful castle,
Surrounded by fine, new-made
Walls. And around their base
Ran a deep stream, rapid 5370
And loud, rumbling like a storm.
Erec stopped to watch,
Wondering who it might be
Was lord of such a rich
Castle, and if anyone ever 5375
Saw him. "My friend," he asked
Guivret, who rode beside him,
"Do you know the name of this place
And who rules it? Is it
A king, or a count? Tell me, 5380
Please, since you've brought me here."
"My lord," was the answer, "I know it
Very well indeed.

The castle is called Brandigan,
And it's strong enough to stand 5385
Against a king or an emperor.
Even if all of France,
And Lombardy, too, and everyone
From here to Liège besieged it,
They could spend their lives waiting 5390
And never win, for it's built
On an island more than fifteen
Leagues across, containing
Whatever a wealthy castle
Could ever need—grain 5395
And fruit and wine, and all
The wood and water they could want.
No one could starve them out,
And there's no weakness in those walls:
King Evrain built them, 5400
Who's ruled here from the day
He was born and expects to rule
Till the day he dies. And yet
This fortress was never built
Out of fear; he's afraid of no one. 5405
He liked the way it looked—
For take away the walls
And the towers, leave just the water
Running so fast and hard,
And why should he fear anyone?" 5410
"God!" said Erec. "What wealth!
Let's visit this fortress, and find
Lodgings in the town around it.
I want to see this place."
"My lord," said Guivret, much 5415

Disturbed, "please, if you don't
Mind, let's not stop:
This castle has evil customs."
"Evil?" said Erec. "Really?
Can you tell me what they are? 5420
I'd be very happy to hear."
"My lord," said Guivret, "I'm afraid
You might be seriously harmed.
I'm well aware of your courage,
And your strength and goodwill. If I told you 5425
All that I know of these customs—
And they're more than dangerous, worse
Than miserable—you'd be tempted to try them.
I've heard it said, and often,
That no one's attempted the deed 5430
In seven years, or even
Longer, and come back alive.
Knights from many lands
Have tried it, brave men and strong.
Don't think I'm joking, my lord: 5435
Indeed, whatever I know
You'll never learn it unless,
In the name of the love you've pledged me,
You swear you won't attempt
What can bring you only shame 5440
And death." Erec had heard
Enough. "Don't worry yourself,"
He answered. "But let's at least
Seek lodgings, my good sweet friend:
It's time we put up for the night. 5445
I've no interest in causing
You pain; but if I win

Honor in there, you'll be pleased.

I ask you only the name

Of this adventure: that's all.

5450

Tell me that, and no more."

"How can I help myself?"

Guivret replied. "What you want

To hear, you'll hear. The name

Is delightful: it's only the deed

5455

That's full of terror, for no one

Has ever survived it. Since

You insist on knowing, my lord,

The adventure's name—and it's sweet

Enough—is 'Joie de la Cort.' " *

5460

"My God!" said Erec. "I hear

Good, not evil, in Joy.

And Joy I'll seek. Don't try

Changing my mind, good friend,

About this or anything else.

5465

Let's find our lodgings, and see

What wonderful things await us.

How could anything keep me

From seeking Joy?"

"My lord,"

Said Guivret, "May God hear you

5470

And help you find your Joy

And return as lightly as you leave!

You mean to try it, I can see.

And since it can't be helped,

We'll go: in any case,

5475

Our lodging's already arranged.

It's said that any knight
Of high standing who enters
This land need never seek
A bed, for King Evrain 5480
Will be their host, and none
Will be turned away. He's published
A ban: if a merchant offers
Lodging to a traveling knight
He'll be put to death. Honoring 5485
Men of valor is a charge
The king takes on himself."

And so they rode to the castle,
Past wooden barriers and over
The bridge. And then townsfolk 5490
Came out of their houses, gathered
In crowds, staring at Erec,
And seeing how handsome he was
Were sure that everyone with him
Could only be his servants. 5495
They studied him, amazed.
The town shook with excitement,
Everyone talking at once.

Even little girls
Playing in the street stopped 5500
Their singing and dancing, and gaped.
Every eye was on
Erec; his great beauty
Caused them to cross themselves
And raise an amazing lament: 5505
"Oh God!" they murmured, each
To the other. "Alas, alas!
This knight who's riding by

Has come for Joie de la Cort.
How sorry he'll be, if he ever 5510
Returns, for no one comes
From foreign lands, seeking
Joie de la Cort, and escapes
Shame and pain: they all
Pay with their heads." And then 5515
Louder, so Erec could hear,
They called, "May God protect you,
Knight, and keep you from harm!
You're as handsome as a man can be,
And so we mourn your beauty, 5520
For tomorrow we'll see it vanish.
Death comes for you
Tomorrow; only God
Can save you." Erec heard them,
Seven thousand voices 5525
Raised, along the length
Of the town, but he wasn't worried.
He rode on through, not stopping,
Cheerfully greeting every
Man he passed, and they 5530
In turn saluted him.
Many stood there, trembling
In fear, convinced they would see him
Either dead or disgraced.
Simply seeing his face, 5535
His beauty, and how he carried
Himself won their hearts,
Men and women and girls,
All dreading the suffering and pain
He would feel. And King Evrain 5540

Heard how a knight was approaching
His court, leading a large
Troop of men; to judge
By their weapons and armor their chief
Was a count or perhaps a king. 5545
Evrain set himself
In the middle of the road, and called out,
"Greetings! Welcome to all
This company, and their lord and master!
Welcome, gentlemen. Please 5550
Dismount." They dismounted, and many
Willing hands led off
Their horses. Seeing that Enide
Was with them, the king behaved
With great correctness, greeting her, 5555
Then quickly helping her down.
Leading her by her soft
And lovely hand, he brought her
To his palace, as courtesy required.
And there, thinking no evil 5560
Thoughts, nor anything foolish,
He offered her honor, knowing
Full well what honor was.
He had incense lit
In that room, and myrrh and aloe, 5565
So that everyone, entering, praised
The king's manners. And Evrain
Led them in, hand
In hand, exceedingly happy
To have them. But why should I tell you, 5570
In immense detail, all
The paintings and silk drapery

Beautifully hung on the walls?
Why waste our time on foolish
Matters when what I really 5575
Want is to speed things up?
Drawing my story straight on
Is better than dragging it off
The road. So I won't delay.

When the hour for dinner arrived, 5580
The king ordered it served.
(Nor will I linger here,
For I see a straighter path.)
Whatever they wanted, whatever
They liked, was there to be eaten: 5585
Fowl and venison and fruit
And many varieties of wine.
But best of all was the good
Company—for the sweetest dish
On the table is always pleasant 5590
Talk and smiling faces.
It all went gaily and well
Until, abruptly, Erec
Stopped eating and drinking,
Remembering why he was there: 5595
The Joy he was hunting came
To mind, and he turned their talk,
And the king let him lead the way:
"My lord," he said, "it's time
I said what was on my mind 5600
And why I've come here. I've already
Waited too long to speak;
I can't keep silent any longer.
I claim Joie de la Cort,

There's nothing in the world I want 5605
So much. Whatever it is,
Please let me have it, if you can."
"Sweet friend," said the king, "you couldn't
Have spoken stupider words.
This is a horrible business: 5610
Many good men have suffered.
And you yourself, when it's over,
Will be dead and torn apart
Unless you take my advice.
Believe me, do as I say: 5615
I ask you to withdraw your request
For this ghastly affair, which you can't
Finish; it will bring you no good.
Say no more! Be silent!
Only an utter idiot 5620
Would disregard this counsel.
I'm hardly surprised, finding you
Anxious for fame and honor,
But to see you taken captive,
Or beaten, wounded, and bleeding, 5625
Would cut my heart to the quick.
Please understand me: many
Brave men have come here, claiming
A right to this Joy, but none
Have ever won it; each 5630
And all are dead and gone.
Tomorrow, just before dark,
You, too, can make the attempt,
You, too, can have this Joy,
But you'll pay a terrible price. 5635
It's not too late, you can still

Withdraw, repent and retreat
In your own best interest. I tell you
These things because to tell you
Less than the whole truth 5640
Would be to betray you." Listening
To the king's words, Erec
Was aware what good advice
He'd been given, but greater danger
And wilder wonder only 5645
Made him want the thing more!
So he said, "My lord, I see
You're a brave and loyal knight.
I couldn't possibly lay
Any blame on you, if I make 5650
This attempt, no matter what happens.
The wheel's been spun, the dice
Have been cast—and in all my life
I've never flinched or pulled back,
Once I've begun, until 5655
I've done the best I can do."
"I understand only
Too well," said the king. "You mean
To seek Joy despite
What I've said. But you make me despair, 5660
For the end is bound to be bad.
Still, you have my pledge,
I'll give you whatever you need.
And if you succeed in winning
Joy, you'll gain honor 5665
Greater than any man
Alive has ever known.
May God in His goodness give you

Joy to bring back with you."

All night long they talked 5670

Of nothing else until,

Their beds prepared, they went

To sleep. Erec awoke

As dawn was breaking, saw

The sun's clear light and, rising 5675

From his bed, began to make ready.

But Enide, tortured with doubts,

Awoke in anguish. Seized

The whole long night with fear

And suspicion, she'd worried for her lord, 5680

So willing to face this peril.

And here he was, preparing

Himself, and no one could stop him.

The moment they'd risen, the king

Had sent him the weapons and armor 5685

He would need, and Erec accepted,

Knowing how badly used,

All battered and broken, his own

Equipment had become. Delighted

With his host's generous help, 5690

He prepared himself for battle.

And when he was ready, he left

The great hall, walking

Down flights of stairs to where

His horse, saddled and bridled, 5695

Awaited him, and the king, already

Mounted, was also waiting.

The whole court was waiting,

And all the townsfolk, too:

No one in castle or town, 5700

Man or woman, tall
Or short, straight or bent,
Strong or feeble, wanted
To miss it; all came, if they could.
And as they began to ride, 5705
A swelling roar rolled
Along the streets, everyone
Calling, peasants and nobles
Alike: "Ah ha, knight!
Joy has betrayed you. You dream 5710
Of conquest, but all you'll get
Is pain and suffering and death."
Every one of them shouted,
"God has cursed this Joy,
It's killed many brave men! 5715
And today, without any doubt,
It will do its worst!" Erec
Was listening carefully, hearing
Everything said, right
And left: "How you've been wronged, 5720
Brave knight, so noble, so good!
No, there's no justice
Leading you to this early
Death, to where you'll find
Wounds and suffering and pain." 5725
He heard it all, every
Word, but kept on his way,
Never lowering his head,
Showing no sign of fear.
No matter what, it was time 5730
He saw and understood
Whatever it was that frightened them

All, gave them such pain.

The king led him out
Of the castle, past the town, 5735
Straight to a garden nearby;
And all the people trailing
After prayed that God
In His mercy might let him leave
With Joy. And I, despite 5740
My weary tongue, cannot
Omit a true description
Of this garden, as history records it.

There were no walls around it,
No fences, but only air: 5745
It was sealed by black magic at every
Point by invisible air,
Shuttered tight, as if
By bars of iron. The only
Entry was a single gate. 5750
Inside, flowers blossomed,
Summer and winter, and fruit
Ripened—but bore a spell
That let it be eaten only
There in the garden; no one 5755
Who tried to carry it out
Would ever succeed, unable
To find the only gate
Unless they put back what they'd taken.
Every bird that flies 5760
Through the air, delighting, rejoicing
Men with its song, could be heard
In that garden, and more than one
Of each kind. And the ground itself,

As far as the eye could see, 5765
Grew rich with every herb
And spice men use for medicine,
Every root and leaf.

Everyone entered the same
Narrow gate, King 5770
Evrain first and the rest
After. Erec, his lance
Ready in its rest, rode
To the middle of the garden, relishing
Birds singing them countless 5775
Songs of Joy—Joy,

Which more than anything else
He longed for. And then he saw
An astonishing thing, able
To frighten the most famous of knights, 5780
Old Thibaut the Esclavon,
Or those we know better today,
Ospinel or Fernagu:

For there in front of them, impaled
On spikes, was a row of gleaming 5785
Helmets, and under every
Helmet but one was a head.

The last spike, they could see,
Held nothing except a horn.

Whatever this meant, Erec 5790
Had no idea, but none of it
Made him afraid; the king
Rode at his right hand,
So he asked Evrain to explain.

And the king replied: "My friend, 5795
You don't understand the meaning

Of this thing we see in front of us?
You ought to feel mortal fear,
If you value your life, for this one
Empty spike, where only 5800
A horn hangs, has been waiting
For a knight. Who? We don't know—
You, or someone else.
Be careful, don't let the head
Be yours, as it's meant to be. 5805
Don't forget; I warned you,
Before you entered here.
I doubt you'll ever come back,
Except as a headless corpse.
And since you know, now, 5810
This spike awaits your head,
Then understand that if,
As predicted (as soon as this
Was set in the ground, hung
With a horn), your head is there, 5815
Another spike will be planted,
And it, too, will await
A head, though God knows whose.
I've nothing to tell you about
The horn, for no one's been able 5820
To play it, but whoever can
Will earn the greatest honor
And fame of any knight
In this land: he will become
Knight of all knights across 5825
The world, honored everywhere.
There's nothing more to be said:
Have your people fall back,

For in just a moment Joy
Will arrive, and bring you sorrow." 5830

And King Evrain left him.

Erec bent down to Enide,
Who was weeping bitter tears,
Nor was it sorrow that kept her
Silent, for the sadness you speak 5835
Means nothing: it's the heart that matters.

But knowing her heart well,
He told her, "My good sweet sister,
My noble lady, loyal
And wise, I know your heart, 5840

I see its fear, which you feel
But don't know why. But you frighten
Yourself for nothing. Unless
You see my shield shattered
And a blade pierce my body— 5845

Unless you see my gleaming
Mail shirt bathed in my blood,
My helmet cracked and broken,
And me stretched on the ground,
Beaten, defeated, unable 5850

To defend myself, forced
To beg for mercy, and await it,
Helpless, against my will
—Then you can wail in sorrow.
You've started too soon. My sweet 5855

Lady, neither you
Nor I know what this is.
You terrify yourself
For nothing—for let me tell you,
All the courage and strength 5860

I have comes from your love,
And with it I can face, hand
To hand, any man living.
I may be a fool to say this,
But it isn't pride speaking, 5865
Only my need to comfort
You. Feel better! Let
It be! And now I must go,
And you can't join me, I'm forbidden
By the king's own orders to lead you 5870
Any farther." And then
He kissed her, and commended her
To God, and she him,
But a deep sadness fell
On her heart, knowing she couldn't 5875
Stay with him, follow him, and see
With her own eyes what
This adventure might be and how
He would deal with whatever it was.
Since she couldn't go, she stayed, 5880
Sad and sorrowing. And he
Went down a winding path,
Alone, none of his men
With him, and found, under
A sycamore tree, a silver 5885
Bed, covered with gold
Brocade, and on the bed
Was a young woman, as beautiful
As beauty could be in both face
And body, sitting alone. 5890
What more can I say, except
That simply seeing her beauty,

The delightful way she was dressed,
Would make you swear, truly,
That even Aeneas' wife, 5895
Lavinia of ancient Laurentum,
Noble and lovely as she was,
Had barely a fourth of her beauty.
Erec went closer, wanting
To see her better, then seated 5900
Himself at her side. And then
He saw a knight under
The trees in that garden, wearing
Bright red armor, a man
Incredibly tall, and except 5905
For his size he'd have seemed the handsomest
Man on earth, but he towered,
According to every knight
Who'd ever seen him, at least
A foot above all other 5910
Men. And even before
Erec saw him, he began
To shout, "Knight! Knight!
So help me God, you're crazy:
How can you dare approach 5915
My lady? By my soul,
You aren't worth enough
To come anywhere near her.
By the eyes in my head, you'll pay
Dearly for this stupid behavior. 5920
Get away!" Then he stopped
And stared at Erec, who never
Moved. And so they stood,
Motionless, until Erec

Decided to speak his mind. 5925
"My friend," he said, "words
Of folly and sense are equally
Easy. Threaten as much
As you like; I'll listen, but I won't
Reply. No man who makes threats 5930
Understands anything. Would you like
To know why? A man persuades
Himself he's won, and then
He loses. A threatening, over-
Confident man is a fool. 5935
Some men run, some men
Chase. But I'm not so afraid
Of you that I'll run: here
I stand, ready to defend
Myself if anyone wants 5940
To attack me. If you're looking for a fight,
I promise you I'm prepared."
"As God is my witness," he answered,
"You won't need to worry! I challenge you,
Knight! Here and now 5945
I defy you!" Need it be said
That after this they held back
Nothing? No little lances
Were used, but large ones and solid,
And the wood well dried, to make it 5950
Stiff and strong. They struck
Each other's shining shields
Such blows that the sharp points
Dug holes deep enough
For a man to stand in, but never 5955
Reached as far as the flesh,

And neither spear cracked.
And then, as quickly as they could,
They pulled their lances out
And, as the rules require, 5960
Threw themselves back into combat.
Fiercely determined, they struck
Such powerful blows that, this time,
Each of their lances shattered
And their horses sank to the ground. 5965
But the men sitting in those saddles
Were strong and quick on their feet,
And neither was hurt, but leapt
Safely away. And then,
In the middle of the garden, they stood 5970
On two legs and swung their heavy
Swords of Viennese steel,
Smashing tremendous strokes
Against the gleaming shields,
Splintering them into pieces. 5975
How their eyes glittered
And burned! Were there any way
To do each other more damage,
They'd have struggled to find it, first
Trying the cutting edge 5980
Of their swords and then the flat,
Hammering away at cheeks
And helmet nose guards, at the hands
Holding swords, at arms,
At temples, necks, and collar- 5985
Bones, until they ached
All over. Weary and in pain,
Instead of stopping, they drew

On reserves and redoubled their efforts.
 It was hard to see, for all 5990
 The sweat, mixed with blood,
 Dripping into their eyes.
 Their blows began to miss,
 As happens when men no longer
 See where their swords are swinging. 5995
 No matter what they did,
 Neither could kill the other—
 But have no fear, they tried
 As hard as they could. Sight
 Completely gone, unable 6000
 To see a thing, they dropped
 Their useless shields and fought
 Fiercely, slowly beating
 One another down
 To the ground, on their knees. And still 6005
 They fought, on and on,
 Until it was after noon
 And the tall knight grew
 So tired he couldn't breathe.
 Erec dragged him up 6010
 And down, shook him so hard
 That his helmet laces broke
 And he tumbled to the earth, falling
 Flat on his face, unable
 To get up, incapable of movement. 6015
 No matter what it cost him,
 He was forced to admit defeat:
 "You've won, you've beaten me—
 But oh, how hard to confess it!
 Still, perhaps it's not 6020

As bad as it might be: you may be
Someone so famous that defeat
Is respectable. So tell me truly,
Please, if I'm permitted
To ask, your name, for there may be 6025
Comfort in the knowledge. Let me
Assure you, I'd never be sorry
To be beaten by a better man.
But if I've been conquered by someone
Less well-known than myself, 6030
My sadness would be overwhelming."
"My friend, I'll be glad to tell you
My name," said Erec. "Of course!
You'll know before I leave
This place, provided you tell me, 6035
First, what you're doing
Here in this garden, and why.
Tell me the whole story,
Including your name, and the nature
Of this Joy. I'm impatient to hear it." 6040
"I'll tell you everything," the other
Answered, "exactly as you wish,
With nothing omitted." Then Erec
Decided to reveal his name.
"Have you ever heard," he asked, 6045
"Of a king named Lac and his son,
Erec?" "I have, my lord.
Before I became a knight
I spent a great many days
At that king's court; were it up 6050
To him, I'd never have left it."
"Having been so long

At the court of King Lac, my father,
You ought to know me well."

"My God, what good luck!" he exclaimed. 6055

"Now let me tell you why
I've lingered so long in this garden.
And I'll tell it all, exactly
As you asked, no matter how painful.

That girl sitting over there 6060

Was my childhood love, and I

Was hers. Our love for each other

Matured and grew still greater,

Until she asked me to give her

A gift, but wouldn't say what. 6065

Who could deny his love

A gift? No courteous lover

Could refuse her any pleasure:

He's obliged to oblige her, without

Hesitation, as best he can. 6070

So I said I would, of course,

But she said she also wanted

My solemn oath. So I swore it

And offered anything else

She might like, but my oath was enough. 6075

I'd promised, but didn't know what

Until she told me I would be

Her knight. My uncle, King

Evrain, dubbed me a knight,

Here in this garden, in the presence 6080

Of many brave men. And then

The lady revealed my oath

And explained what it meant: I would never

Leave this garden until

A knight came and conquered
Me in battle. Either 6085
I stayed in this garden or broke
My pledge to the lady, although
I'd never known what she wanted.
But once I saw what the dearest 6090
Creature in the world craved,
What choice did I have? I've done
My best to pretend I approve,
Since once she knew I didn't
Her heart would never be mine 6095
Again — and God knows nothing
Could make me let that happen.
Which is how my lady has kept me
Here, all these years,
For she couldn't believe anyone 6100
Would ever come along
Able to challenge and defeat me.
And thus she thought she could easily
Hold me captive, here,
For the rest of my life. And how wrong 6105
I'd have been, having whatever
Strength and skill I possess,
If I hadn't defeated knights
I was able to beat in combat:
Escaping that duty would only 6110
Be proper for a peasant! I couldn't
Shirk that task, not even
For the dearest of friends. I always
Wore my armor and carried
My weapons, and never refused 6115
A challenge. You've seen the helmets,

You know how many knights
I've conquered and killed. Was I wrong?
All things considered, no—
I couldn't help myself, 6120
Unless I chose to be false
And disloyal and break my oath.
I've told you the whole truth:
Do understand, the honor
You've won is no small affair. 6125
And you've brought an immense Joy
To all my friends and my uncle's
Court, for now I can leave.
And since this Joy you've released
Pleases everyone at court, 6130
They'll call it Joie de la Cort—
And oh! how long they've awaited
This Joy, restored to them only
By you, you who have fought for
And won it. Whatever magic 6135
And spells you've used to defeat me,
Bewitch away my strength,
You've earned the right to know
My name, which you've asked me to tell you.
My name is Mabonagran, 6140
Though no one wherever I've lived
Knows me by that name or will think
It sounds familiar, for I've used it
Only in this land. No matter
How hard they've tried, no one 6145
Anywhere else has learned it.
This, as I say, is the truth,
My lord, as you ordered it told.

But still, there's one thing more.
I believe you've seen the horn 6150
Hanging on an empty spike.
I'm not permitted to leave
This garden until it's been sounded,
And then I'll truly be free
And Joy will begin, since anyone 6155
Hearing that horn, who knows
Its secret, is thereby enabled,
In spite of any obstacle,
To attend my uncle's court.
So rise, my lord, and quickly 6160
Fetch that horn, for now
There's nothing to keep you from doing
What you need to do." Erec
Rose at once, and the beaten
Knight rose with him, and together 6165
They went in search of the horn.
And Erec blew it, and blew
It loud, and its voice carried
Far and wide. And hearing
That sound, oh, what happiness 6170
Enide felt! And Guivret,
Too, rejoiced. And King
Evrain and all his people
Were delighted: every single
Soul was filled with such pleasure 6175
They couldn't stop singing
And dancing and making merry.
Erec could surely have boasted
That no one had ever created
Such Joy. Who could describe it? 6180

No human mouth would know how—
But let me try, briefly,
Without too many words.

News of the great adventure
Flew across the land, 6185

And nothing could keep the whole
World from coming to court,
People flocking from every
Side, on foot and on horse,
No one willing to wait. 6190

Meanwhile, those in the garden
Removed Erec's armor,
All of them trying to sing
The best song to celebrate
Joy. And ladies composed 6195

A poem, and called it "The Song
Of Joy"—a poem, alas,
Now lost. And Erec was well fed
With Joy, exactly as he wished.
But the lady seated on the silver 6200

Bed was less than over-
Joyed with the Joy she saw;
It brought her little pleasure.
How often we're forced to suffer
The sight of what tears at our heart! 6205

But Enide was a wellborn lady,
And seeing how sad and somber
The girl sat, all alone
On her bed, decided to approach her,
Asking in courteous fashion 6210

Who and what she was,
And perhaps to tell her story

If it wasn't too painful. Enide
Intended to approach her alone,
Taking no one with her, 6215
But many of the noblest, most beautiful
Ladies and girls, seeing
Where she went, followed along,
For friendship and affection, and wanting
On their own account to comfort 6220
A lady so seriously saddened
By Joy. And the cause of her sadness
Was this: it seemed to her
That once he left the garden
She'd never see her beloved 6225
As much as she had before.
But she knew her displeasure made
No difference: he would have to leave,
The time had come, her terms
Had been met. Which was why she wept, 6230
The tears wetting her face.
She was sadder and more afflicted
Than I know how to tell you, but like
A lady she rose to greet them,
Even seeing that no one 6235
Approaching was likely to ease
Her pain or staunch her sorrow.
Enide greeted her sweetly,
But for a long time there was no
Response, wracked as the girl 6240
Was by tears and sobs.
Finally, she managed to return
The greeting—and then she stood
Silent for another good while,

Staring hard at Enide, 6245
Thoughtful, as if she knew her,
Had seen her before and remembered
Her face, but couldn't quite
Be sure. And then, taking
Heart, she asked Enide 6250
Where she was from, the name
Of her country, and where her husband
Had been born. Enide answered
At once, telling the truth:
"I'm the niece," she said, "of the count 6255
Who rules in Laluth. My mother
Was born his sister. And I
Was born and raised in Laluth."
And then the girl laughed
Hard and long, so delighted 6260
At what she'd heard that, clearly,
Her sorrows suddenly meant
A good deal less to her. The joy
In her heart leaped and danced,
Nothing could hide it. She came 6265
And hugged Enide, and kissed her,
Saying, "I'm your cousin.
That's the honest truth.
You're my father's niece,
For he and your father are brothers. 6270
I think you've never heard
How I come to be here;
No one has told you. The count—
My father, your uncle—had a war
To fight and hired soldiers 6275
From many lands. And as

It happened, my lovely cousin,
The king of Brandigan's nephew
Came there, with one of those knights,
And stayed with my father for a year. 6280
That was, I believe, twelve years
Ago. I was only a child,
And he was handsome and charming,
And so we agreed, we two,
That we would be married when we could. 6285
I wanted only whatever
He wanted, and he wanted me,
Pledging to love me forever
And be my beloved, and bring me
Here to his home, a plan 6290
That pleased us both. It was hard
To wait, hard for us both;
We longed to be together.
So finally we did come,
Though no one knew it. In those 6295
Days, you and I
Were only little girls.
And that's my story. Now tell me,
Exactly as I've told you,
Just how it happened that your lover 6300
Came to know you." "My lovely
Cousin, we were married
With my father's consent, and my mother's,
Too; they were both pleased.
Both our families knew, 6305
And rejoiced, as they ought to. The count,
My uncle, was truly delighted,
For my husband's so worthy a knight

That no one could find a better,
And now there's no need for him 6310
To prove his strength or his skill,
For where is the knight so young
Who could be his equal? He loves me
Very much, and I love him
More; no love could be greater 6315
Than ours. I've always known
I loved him, I couldn't doubt it;
He's a king's son,
And he took me, threadbare and poor,
And brought me more honor 6320
Than anyone so disowned
As I was has ever known.
And if you like, I'll tell you
The whole story, truthful
In every detail, of my rise 6325
To these heights. I love to tell it!"
And then she told how Erec
Had come to Laluth, hiding
Nothing, telling the entire
Adventure truly and well, 6330
Omitting nothing. But I
Don't dare tell it over
Again, for nothing's duller
Than a twice-told tale. And as
They talked together, one 6335
Of the ladies rose and went
To tell the assembled barons
How truly wonderful their Joy
Had become. And they all agreed,
Hearing her words, and rejoiced, 6340

But Mabonagran was the gayest
Of all, hearing that his lovely
Lady was happy once more.
Even the lady who'd hurried
To bring him the news found 6345
Herself rejoicing. And King
Evrain rejoiced with them,
For happy as they'd been, before,
Now they were happier still.
Enide brought her beautiful 6350
Cousin—more beautiful even
Than Helen, and better bred,
And more charming—to meet her husband.
Everyone rushed to join them,
Mabonagran and Guivret, 6355
And King Evrain, all
Greeting and being greeted,
Each honoring all
The others, no one holding
Back. Mabonagran 6360
Delighted Enide, and she
Him. Erec and Guivret
Took great pleasure in the girl
From the garden; they hugged and kissed
Each other freely. And then 6365
They talked of returning to the castle,
For they'd stayed too long in the garden.
They readied themselves to leave,
And the king himself led them
Out, still rejoicing, 6370
Kissing and hugging each other,
But before they came to the castle

They encountered lords and barons
From every part of the land:
Whoever had heard of their Joy, 6375
And was able to come, was there.
The crowd was enormous, all
Trying to greet Erec —
High and low, poor
And rich, everyone bowing 6380
And calling greetings and saying,
Over and over again,
“God save the man who brought
Joy back to our court!
God save the most fortunate man 6385
He in His wisdom ever
Created!” They led Erec
To court, showing their joy
In whatever ways they could.
Harps could be heard, and fiddles, 6390
Playing every sort
Of song and dance, all
The instruments anyone could name.
But I need to sum this up
More briefly: I’m taking too long. 6395
The king lavished honor
On Erec, and every knight
At court offered, with open
Hearts, to serve him. Their Joy
Lasted for three whole days; 6400
Then Erec was able to think
Of home: on the fourth day
He was ready to leave, despite
Their prayers. He left with a joyous

Escort, a crowd of knights: 6405
Saying farewell to them all,
If he'd made the attempt, would
Have taken another half day.
The barons hugged and hailed him;
He commended the others to God, 6410
Saying farewell to one
And all. Nor was Enide
Silent, in bidding the barons
Goodbye: she greeted them all
By name, as they did her. 6415
And in taking leave of her cousin,
She gently kissed and hugged her.
They were gone. The Joy was over.
Knights rode in every
Direction. Erec and Guivret 6420
Galloped happily off,
Straight to the castle where Arthur,
They'd been told, was staying. The king
Had been bled the day before;
He was in his private chambers, 6425
Accompanied, now, by only
Five hundred knights of his household.
Arthur had never been
So alone, whatever the season,
And it left him depressed, having 6430
So few at his court. Just then,
A messenger came from Erec
And Guivret, riding rapidly,
To announce that his masters were hurrying
To Arthur, with their men following 6435
Behind. Coming to the king

And his knights, with great courtesy
He greeted them: "My lord, Erec
And Guivret the Dwarf have sent me."
And then he told them how soon 6440
His masters would arrive. The king
Answered: "Such brave and noble
Barons are always welcome!
I've no better knights than these two:
My court will be much improved." 6445
And then he sent for the queen
And told her the news. Courtiers
Rushed to saddle their horses,
Hurrying so hard to greet
The newcomers they couldn't take time 6450
To buckle on their spurs.
Let me tell you, just
As quickly, that the travelers' lesser
Servants had already reached
The town—lackeys and cooks 6455
And pages—to prepare their masters'
Lodgings. But the others were still
On the road, though some were close
To town and some had begun
To arrive. They were greeted as they came, 6460
Kisses and hugs were exchanged.
Then they went to their lodgings, removing
Road-worn clothes and, at
Their leisure, dressing in their finest
Robes. And when they were ready 6465
They came to court, where the king
And queen warmly welcomed them,
Especially anxious to see

Erec and Enide. The king
Seated them close to his side, 6470
Kissing Erec and then
Guivret. He hugged Enide
And covered her with kisses.
Nor did the queen hold back,
But embraced Erec and Enide, 6475
Happy as a lark high
In the air and singing merrily.
Everyone welcomed them back.
Then the king called for quiet
And, turning to Erec, requested 6480
An account of his new adventures.
When all were silent and still,
Erec began his tale,
And told them the entire story,
Omitting nothing. I hope 6485
You're not expecting me
To go back and tell it all
Again? Hardly, for you know
Exactly what he did,
And why; I've just finished 6490
Telling you. To do it again
Would be painful, and not particularly
Brief, so why start over,
Rehearsing all his words
Just as he said them—the tale 6495
Of the three knights he defeated,
And then five more, and the count
Who tried so hard to disgrace him,
And then the giants he'd killed.
Erec marched his way 6500

Along the story, one foot
After the other, and got
To the count, cut down as he sat
At his dinner, and told of finding
His horse once more. "Erec," 6505
Interrupted the king, "remain
Here, stay at my court,
As you used to." "My lord, if that
Is what you wish I'd gladly
Stay here a year, or two, 6510
Or even three, but ask
Guivret to stay, if you please,
And I'll ask him myself, as well."
The king made the request,
And Guivret agreed. And so 6515
Both remained at Arthur's
Court, as the king had wanted,
For he loved and honored them both.
Three of them stayed at the court,
Erec, Guivret, and Enide, 6520
Until Erec's father,
A very old man, died,
And the barons, all the noblest
Men in the realm, had messengers
Seek Lac's son, and finally 6525
Found him at Tintagel,
A week before the Nativity.
They told him exactly how
His old father, snowy
Haired, had left this life 6530
Behind. Erec was deeply
Saddened, but had to hide

His sorrow, for a king's pain
Is indecent, if public: it needs
To be kept from ordinary men. 6535
Erec had vigils and masses
Chanted at Tintagel;
He made vows and redeemed
Golden promises made
To hospitals and churches. 6540
And he did what he ought to do,
Choosing more than a hundred
And sixty miserable paupers
And giving them all new clothes,
And to priests, and many poor men 6545
In sacred orders, he gave,
As he should, new hats and warm
New cloaks. For the love of God
He did good, giving sacks of pennies
To those who needed them. And after 6550
Sharing his wealth, he showed
His wisdom, asking and receiving
His kingdom from Arthur's own hands.
And then he asked the king
To let him be crowned at home. 6555
And the king told him to be ready,
For he and his queen would be crowned
Together, both at once,
On the day of Christ's Nativity,
Adding, "I'll plan to crown you 6560
At Nantes, in Brittany,
And there you'll assume the royal
Insignia, a crown on your head,
A scepter in your hand. And thus

I'll honor you." Erec thanked him 6565
For so gracious a gift. The Nativity
Came, and the king summoned
All his barons, without
Exception, and ordered their ladies
To come with them. Not 6570
A one stayed home. And Erec
Had sent for many noble
Knights, but even more
Came than he'd ever expected,
Wanting to serve and honor him. 6575
Nor can I name for you those
Who came—and as for those
Who didn't, it makes no difference.
Erec was careful to include
His wife's father and mother: 6580
Indeed, he asked them first
Of all, and they came richly
Dressed, like proper rulers
Of a castle, accompanied not
By priests, who got to stay home, 6585
Or fools and gawkers, but good knights
And those who were dressed to the hilt.
Every day they traveled
Far, joyously enduring
The long journey, reaching 6590
The city of Nantes in time
For Christmas Eve. Nor did they
Pause but immediately went
To the lofty, noble room
Where Erec and Enide, awaiting 6595
Them, hurried to kiss

And hug the newcomers without
Delay, happy to greet them
Sweetly, as they well deserved.
Having made their guests welcome, 6600
They took them by the hand and joyfully
Led them before the king
And queen, who were seated together;
They greeted the host and his wife
Graciously. Standing hand 6605
In hand with his wife's father,
Erec declared: "My lord,
Here is my host and good friend,
Who did me the great honor
Of making me lord of his household. 6610
Before he knew who I was
He offered me handsome lodgings,
Gave me whatever he had,
And without consulting a soul
Even gave me his daughter." 6615
"And this lady with him, my friend,"
Said the king, "who is she?"
"My lord, the lady of whom
You speak is my wife's mother."
"Her mother?" "Indeed, my lord." 6620
"Ah, I can certainly see
That a flower culled from a plant
So lovely must itself be a beautiful
Bloom, and be noble, and its fruits
Lovelier still, for goodness 6625
And beauty spread like perfume.
Enide is beautiful, as in reason
And justice she'd have to be,

With a mother so exceedingly lovely
And a father so good a knight. 6630

“She’s bred true to her line,
For in all her principal features
She closely resembles her parents.”
The king had finished, and was silent.
He ordered Enide’s parents 6635

To be seated; without a word
Of protest, they obeyed at once.
Enide was enormously happy,
Seeing her father and mother
Again, for she had not seen them 6640

In a very long time. Whatever
Might happen now seemed
Good, and pleased her so much
That although she showed her happiness
Freely, the joy she felt 6645

Was greater than the girl could express.
But that’s enough of that:
What interests me more, at the moment,
Is the nobles gathered at Arthur’s
Court from countries all over 6650

The world, counts and kings
From Normandy, Brittany, Scotland,
And Ireland; England and Cornwall
Produced a horde of rich barons,
And Wales as far as Anjou, 6655

And Maine, and Poitou. No knight
Of noblest rank, no great
Lady, charming and gracious,
Had stayed away: all
The noblest and best came to Nantes 6660

As their mighty king had commanded.

Please, listen carefully:

Once they had all assembled,

Before the bell for evening

Prayers had rung, Arthur,

6665

Anxious to augment his court,

Dubbed more than four hundred

New knights, sons of kings

And counts, gave each three horses

And three pairs of new robes.

6670

The king was powerful and open-

Handed: it wasn't woolen

Cloaks he gave them, or mere rabbit

Fur, but satin and ermine,

Adorned with squirrel and brocade,

6675

Heavy with golden trim.

Even Alexander,

Immensely rich and generous,

Conqueror of all the world,

Seems stingy and poor in comparison!

6680

Not Caesar, emperor of Rome,

Nor any of the kings named

In all the tales of chivalry,

Could have given a banquet like the one

King Arthur gave on the day

6685

Erec was crowned, and neither

Caesar nor Alexander

Would have dared to spend as much

On feasting as was spent that day.

Cloaks had been taken from storage

6690

Chests and left, lying

Free for the taking, in every

Room; no one was watching,
Or minded. Gleaming British
Sovereigns had been sprinkled on a cloth, 6695
Right in the middle of the court,
For those were the days of Merlin,
And British coins were everywhere.
Everyone was fed, that night,
From the king's kitchens, carrying 6700
Quantities of food to their lodgings.
In the middle of the morning, that Christmas
Day, everyone gathered.
The vast joy that was coming
Flooded Erec's heart. 6705
Yet no one, no matter how skilled
In the art, could tell you, in any
Human tongue, a third,
Or a fourth, or a fifth, of all
That took place at that coronation. 6710
I've taken on a fool's
Task, trying to describe it,
But since the responsibility
Is mine, and I must attempt it,
Let me do the very best 6715
I can with my limited ability.

Two brand-new chairs, fashioned
Of brilliant white ivory, both made
Precisely the same, had been set
In the hall. Clearly, the craftsman 6720
Who'd carved them had been clever and subtle,
For in height, and length, and breadth,
And in decoration, no matter
How you looked, or where,

You saw them exactly the same: 6725
No one could possibly tell
One from the other. And every
Piece in each of those chairs
Was either ivory or gold,
Chiseled with a delicate touch, 6730
The two front feet sculpted
Like a pair of leopards, and the back ones
Like crocodiles. They were gifts
Of homage and respect for Arthur
And his queen, given by a knight 6735
Whose name was Brian of the Islands.

Arthur sat in one
And Erec, wearing a robe
Of rich black silk, was seated
In the other. The robe was described 6740
In a book I read, written
By Macrobius, who taught the science
Of attentive vision: I mention
His name to prove I'm telling
The truth. I draw the details 6745
Of the cloth from his pages, exactly
As I found them there. It was woven
By four fairies, working
As great and masterful craftsmen.
And the first had spun an accurate 6750
Portrait of Geometry and how
It measures sky and earth,
Capturing every aspect—
Including depth and height,
And length and width, and how 6755
We follow the sea from shore

To shore, measuring its width
And depth: in short, measuring
The world. That was the first fairy's
Work. The second spun 6760
A picture of Arithmetic,
Carefully tracing the steps
By which we count days,
And the hours they're made of, and count
Every drop in the ocean, 6765
And each tiny grain of sand,
And all the stars on high,
And how many leaves on a tree,
And how we frame these numbers —
All accurately counted, 6770
Employing no tricks and no lies,
For this fairy knows what she weaves.
And her subject was Arithmetic.
The third chose to show Music,
Which blends with every human 6775
Pleasure, in counterpoint
And song, with harps and lutes
And viols — a beautiful picture,
With Music seated and in front
Of her her tools and delights. 6780
But the fourth and final fairy
Drew the noblest portrait,
Having chosen the highest art:
Astronomy, which governs
And regulates marvels, the stars 6785
In the sky, and the moon, and the sun.
And in every respect it rules
Entirely by its own arts,

And the generous king of Galway,
Plus Guivret the Dwarf, and also
Ydier, King Nudd's son.
And other barons quickly
Joined them, to escort the ladies: 6825
There were more than a thousand—enough
Good knights to conquer an army!
The queen had been busy, making
Enide ready, and now
She was led to the palace by courteous 6830
Gawain on one side, and the generous
King of Galway on the other,
Who cherished the girl, and no wonder,
For Erec was his nephew. When they reached
The palace, who hurried out 6835
To greet them but Arthur himself,
And then, in a courteous display,
He seated her next to her husband,
Wanting to do her great honor.
And then he ordered his servants 6840
To take a pair of heavy
Gold crowns from his treasure chests,
And they rushed to obey his commands,
Quickly returning with massive
Crowns of gold, embossed 6845
With great red rubies, each of them
Boasting four rich stones,
And even the smallest burned
With a light many times brighter
And clearer than the moon. And those 6850
In the palace who looked at that light
Were unable, for some considerable

Time, to see at all.

The king himself was dazzled

By the brilliant glow, but rejoiced in it 6855

All the same, delighting

That the gems shone so beautifully

Clear. Two girls presented

The first crown, two barons the other.

Then Arthur ordered his bishops 6860

And priests, and his monastery

Abbots, to come and anoint

The new king, according to Christian

Law. And every man

Of the cloth, whether young or old, 6865

Hurried to obey him—and you know

There were plenty of priests at court,

And abbots, and bishops. And then

The great bishop of Nantes,

A truly holy man, 6870

Beautifully consecrated

The new king, and placed

The crown on his head. King Arthur

Ordered a wonderful scepter

Brought out, which all admired. 6875

Listen and hear how this scepter

Was made: it glowed like a bell glass,

For it was set with a single emerald

As fat around as a fist.

And let me tell you the truth: 6880

No fish that swims in the water,

No wild beast, no manner

Of man or flying bird,

But the artist had cut and worked

Its image into the stone. 6885
They brought the scepter to Arthur,
Who stood a moment, admiring it,
And then with no further delay
Placed it in King Erec's
Right hand, making him a proper 6890
King. Then he crowned Enide.
They were summoned to Mass, and went
To church, there to hear
Mass and attend the service,
Then prayed at the bishop's palace. 6895
Enide's father and mother
Could be seen crying for joy.
To tell you the truth, his name
Was Licorant, and hers
Was Tarsenfide, and both 6900
Were extravagantly happy. The procession
Reached the bishop's palace,
And the monks from the monastery
Came rushing out, bearing
Sacred relics and treasures, 6905
Holy books, and crosses,
And incense holders, and coffers
Containing the bodies of saints,
Of which there were many. They hurried
To meet the procession, chanting 6910
As they came; there was no shortage
Of singing. So many kings
And counts and dukes and barons
Had never attended Mass
All at the same time. 6915
So many had gathered that the chapel

Was full to bursting; only
Ladies and knights could get in;
And common people stayed out.
But even many noble 6920
Knights waited outside
At the door, for so many had come
That the chapel could not hold them.
After the Mass had been heard
They all returned to the castle, 6925
Where preparations were complete,
Tables set up and covered—
At least five hundred, or more.
Yet how can I dare describe
What you won't believe? Five hundred 6930
Tables in a palace hall?
You'd think me a colossal liar.
But it's not what I said: they filled
Five rooms, not one, and packed them
So tight you could hardly move. 6935
Every table boasted
A king or a count or a duke,
And every table seated
At least a hundred knights.
A thousand knights in brand-new 6940
Ermine robes brought bread,
And a thousand wine, and a thousand
Meat. All sorts of dishes
Were served: I could name them for you,
Every single one, 6945
But more important things
Need to be said: they ate
As much as they wanted, freely

And exceedingly well, were graciously,
Joyously served, and were happy. 6950
The banquet over, Arthur
Said farewell to all
The assembled kings and dukes
And the many, many counts,
And all the others, including 6955
Ordinary folk, who'd come
To the feast. And because he loved
Erec, and it was right that he do so,
He gave them gifts of horses,
Weapons, money, and many 6960
Kinds of beautiful cloth.
And that's the end of the story.

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Afterword

Joseph J. Duggan

Erec and Enide, thought to have been composed around 1170, is the earliest romance of King Arthur. Other romances in French preceded it, but they were devoted to figures and events taken from the Greek and Roman past (the fall of Troy, Aeneas, Oedipus, Alexander the Great). As an educated man, and probably a cleric, Chrétien would have been familiar with these romances of antiquity. He refers to Alexander in several places and has the story of Dido and Aeneas carved on Enide's saddlebows in ll. 5332-42. He also alludes to the story of Tristan and Yseult, which would be the counter-text for his second romance, *Cligès*, and to the Latin writer Macrobius, author of the *Dream of Scipio*. A native Welsh Arthurian prose tale, *Culhwch and Olwen*, precedes *Erec and Enide*, perhaps by as much as a century, and scattered references to Arthur are found in earlier Welsh texts. But although Chrétien was a prolific user of Celtic lore and oral tradition, he seems to have had no direct knowledge of any surviving work of Celtic literature—and in any case the Arthur presented in *Culhwch and Olwen* has none of the qualities of courtliness associated with him in the French tradition.

The connection of Arthur with courtliness, and in fact his

fame in Europe outside Celtic lands, results from Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain* (ca. 1136), an astonishingly successful work that blended folk and historiographic traditions to establish Arthur as the paragon of kingship. Geoffrey, prior of the Abbey of Monmouth and a teacher at Oxford, claimed that his account was translated from "a very old book in the British language," probably what we would call Welsh, though it may have been Breton. (Speakers of Welsh and Breton could understand each other in this period.) His intent was to attribute to the kings of Britain a history that traced back to a prestigious event of ancient times, the fall of Troy, and he posited their descent from Aeneas's great-grandson Brutus (Geoffrey claimed that this explained why they were called "Britons"). In Geoffrey's history, Brutus leads his people to the island later named for him, founds London, and gives rise to two lines of descendants, one in Britain and one in Brittany. When the first of these royal branches dies out, the people have recourse to the second, naming Constantine II of Brittany their king. Constantine's son Uther Pendragon and eventually his grandson Arthur succeed him. Arthur defeats the Saxons in a series of battles that culminates in a great victory near Bath. During a twelve-year peace, Arthur develops a code of courtly demeanor that inspires nobles, even those in distant parts, to imitate him and his knights. He then conquers other lands, including Ireland, Norway, Denmark, and, after a nine-year campaign, Gaul. Another period of peace ensues, during which Geoffrey shows Arthur holding a magnificent court in Wales at Caerleon, the City of the Legions, attended by Hoel, leader of the Bretons, and the twelve peers of Gaul. When word comes that the procurator of the Roman Republic, Lucius, demands homage, Arthur leads a large army onto the Continent, leaving his wife, Guinevere, and his nephew Mordred in

charge of the kingdom. Although many of Arthur's men, including the knights Kay and Bedevere, die in battle, Arthur is nearing victory against the Romans when he learns that Mordred has seized the throne of Britain and is living in adultery with Guinevere. Returning immediately, the king and his men meet Mordred's forces in a series of battles at Richborough (where Gawain, depicted at different points as Arthur's cousin or nephew, is killed), at Winchester, and finally at a site on the River Camblam, where Arthur kills Mordred but is "mortally" wounded and transported to the island of Avalon so that his wounds can be healed.

The periods of peace during which, according to Geoffrey, Arthur was able to devote himself to courtly pursuits gave Chrétien the narrative pretext for his Arthurian romances. In fact, Chrétien nowhere mentions Mordred or the Battle of Camblam, let alone Mordred's relationship with Guinevere, and he refers only in passing to Arthur's counselor Merlin (see l. 6697), whose prophecies are the subject of book 5 of the *History of the Kings of Britain*. Instead, Chrétien concentrates on the adventures of Arthur's knights, for which the king himself provides a backdrop of exemplary sovereignty and stability. The idea of the Round Table seems to have come to Chrétien from Wace, a Norman poet who translated Geoffrey's history into French as the *Roman de Brut* (*Romance of Brutus*), perhaps for Eleanor of Aquitaine, in about 1155. The catalogs of those present at Arthur's court when Erec and Enide arrive there and of those who attend the couple's wedding are repertories of the possibilities at Chrétien's disposal, and several of these characters, including Gawain, Lancelot, Yvain the son of Urien, Kay, and Gornemant, reappear in his other romances. Melwas, lord of the Island of Glass, figures later as Méléagant, the villain of *Lancelot: The Knight of the Cart*.

As the first Arthurian romance, *Erec and Enide* includes features that audiences came to expect in other works of its type: an opening at Arthur's court at Cardigan (or Cardiff, or Caerleon . . .) on a major Christian feast day; the mention of Arthur, Gawain, and the Round Table; the anticipation that, before the feast begins, an opportunity for high adventure, often associated with some custom, will present itself; a focus on the loves, warrior exploits, and changes in fortune of the knights rather than of Arthur himself; tests of prowess against seemingly superior and sometimes preternatural challengers; and, last, a resolution accompanied by a ceremony that betokens stability. Some of these traits are also found in lays, relatively brief episodic poems composed, like *Erec and Enide*, in rhymed couplets, of which the earliest surviving examples are Robert Biket's *Lay of the Horn* and the lays of Marie de France.

Erec and Enide shares with another of Chrétien's romances, *Yvain: The Knight of the Lion*, a concern with possible conflicts between the contentment of wedded life and the demands of knighthood. In both works, the first section consists of an adventure that leads to the knight's marriage, which in turn gives rise to a questioning of his reputation for chivalric prowess. Stability is achieved only in the second part after a series of adventures leads to a reconciliation between husband and wife. At stake above all is the knight's renown, not so much what he thinks of himself as what others think of him. A lowering of esteem leads to public shame, which robs the knight of his reputation. The reestablishment of his worth in the eyes of his fellow nobles is a central theme of each romance.

In *Erec and Enide*, news of what people are saying about Erec—namely, that his preoccupation with his surpassingly beautiful bride has led him to neglect chivalric duties—reaches his ears through an inadvertent remark by Enide. Erec's re-

action is sudden and harsh: on his orders, Enide hastily prepares to leave Arthur's court, with no escort but Erec and with no fixed destination. But Chrétien, who in other contexts is fond of revealing the inner lives of his main characters, leaves the reader in the dark about his hero's intentions. In forcing Enide to ride quickly ahead of him in her best dress and on her finest horse, but in total silence, does Erec want to punish her for doubting his prowess? Or for lying to him in ascribing his overhearing of her words to a dream? He appears to be setting her out as bait for robber knights, such as the two groups that soon attack. Enide is surely being tested, but is it a test merely of devotion or also of chastity? Chrétien tells us what Enide is thinking, but his silence on the issue of Erec's purpose is masterful, compelling the reader to speculate on the character's motivations. There can be no doubt, however, that Erec is purposely exposing Enide to danger as well as placing himself at risk by defending her far from the protection of court.

Before Erec and Enide are reconciled in their moonlight ride, each is put to the test many times. Erec wins out in successive battles against first three and then five predatory knights, the lustful count (called Galoain in most manuscripts) and his hundred followers, the little king Guivret, two giants, and Count Oringle of Limors. Enide warns him about the robber knights and the lustful count, nearly kills herself when she thinks Erec is mortally wounded, and rejects Count Oringle's proposal of marriage. She demonstrates her faithfulness in part by violating his prohibition against speech. She also comes to appreciate his prowess fully.

The episode of Guivret, little king of a group of Irish followers, is curious and makes one wonder if it once circulated as an independent adventure about an encounter with a king of the *side*, or fairy-mounds. In spite of his small stature, Guiv-

ret fights from tierce to none, at least six hours by the modern clock, until Erec at last breaks his sword. The battle seems to occur for no particular reason, and ends in a pact of friendship. Later Guivret, not recognizing Erec, and intending to rescue Enide from Count Oringle, again battles Erec. On learning Erec's identity, Guivret gives Erec over into the care of his two sisters, skilled healers who put him on a pepper- and garlic-free diet. Arthur, too, has a sister, Morgana le Fay, who produces unguents in both *Erec and Enide* and *Yvain*; and whose healing skills are applied to the "mortally" wounded Arthur at the end of the thirteenth-century anonymous prose romance *The Death of King Arthur*.

Chrétien calls the culminating adventure "Joie de la Cort" (Joy of the Court), in accordance with the medieval predilection for deriving a name from its contrary: only when the ordeal is done away with will there be joy in the court. Guivret acts as a guide, leading Erec to the castle of Brandigan and explaining the wonders of its garden to him. Mabonagran, the knight whom Erec must meet in single combat, has been constrained by his lover to fight all challengers who approach her in this garden of perpetual summer. The relationship between Mabonagran and the damsel is the opposite of Erec and Enide's. Whereas Erec and Enide married with the knowledge and consent of all their kin, Mabonagran and his lady (who turns out to be Enide's cousin) eloped. By this point in the narrative, Erec and Enide are bound to each other in a relationship of mutual respect and affection. But Mabonagran's lady, fearing that he will leave her when the Joie de la Cort ends, has bound him in captivity through a "rash boon"—in this case, his prior consent to grant her whatever she demands. By contrast, Erec's victory over Mabonagran confirms the exemplary nature of his marriage to Enide. It also expresses a principal theme of the

romance, the proper balance between devotion and freedom of action, achieved only through measured conduct.

But the episode of Joie de la Cort, in which Welsh mythological characters' names are embedded, has another, mythic sense that is harder for us to grasp. Mabonagran is the avatar of the divinity Maponos (Welsh "Mabon"), son of Matrona (Welsh "Modron"), the great Celtic mother goddess for whom the River Marne is named. His uncle in the romance, Evrain, lives in the castle of Brandigan, the first syllable of which is the name of another Celtic deity and mythological king, Bran the Blessed. In the Irish *Voyage of Bran*, this figure visits, among other places, an Isle of Joy. A horn is one of Bran's attributes. Roger Sherman Loomis has proposed that "Joie de la Cort" was a garbling of "Joy of the Horn" (Old French *corn*), a remnant of which would be the magic horn that Erec blows to end the enchantment. Bran's horn, in fact, was a horn of plenty, supplying food to the point of satiation, and it is surely not coincidental that after Erec blows the horn Chrétien describes him as "well fed with Joy" (ll. 6198-99). One conjecture reads the name "Mabonagran" as a combination of "Mabon" and "Bran." An attribute of Mabon and his counterparts in medieval Welsh tradition is to be a prisoner, and Mabon's liberation from captivity is one of the tasks Arthur's men undertake in *Culhwch and Olwen*. Although the mythological significance of the story on which Chrétien based the Joie de la Cort episode is obscure, that it was a tale incorporating elements of Celtic myth is certain.

The adventures with which *Erec and Enide* opens are also of Celtic provenance. In Irish and Welsh mythology, sovereignty is represented by a woman whom the man aspiring to kingship must win and marry. Erec wins Enide in the Test of the Sparrowhawk from the arrogant knight Ydier, whose father, Nudd, is the avatar of the Celtic god Nodens. The Hunt for

the White Stag, a contest that Arthur both revives and wins, gives him the right to kiss the most beautiful woman in the court, Enide. The kiss also signifies, however, that Enide is a figure of sovereignty. In keeping with this status is her association with horses, a quality she shares with Rhiannon (the goddess Rigantona, "Great [or Divine] Queen") in the collection of Welsh mythological tales known as the *Mabinogi*. Enide takes care of Erec's horse when he first arrives in Laluth. Her cousin presents her with three horses as she leaves for Arthur's court. She watches over three horses that Erec captures, then five more. Her ordeal, like that of Rhiannon in two tales of the *Mabinogi*, is associated with horses. Her reconciliation with Erec takes place as they ride off on a single horse. Finally, she receives from Guivret a horse whose head is half white and half black, with the two colors separated by a green band, a combination suggesting otherworldliness.

The clothing of Erec and Enide takes on heightened significance in light of their progression toward sovereignty. At Erec's insistence, Enide is led to Arthur's court in tatters. There Guinevere gives her a new tunic and cloak, reinforcing the notion that, like Arthur's wife, Enide is an embodiment of sovereignty. When after the crucial bedroom scene Erec orders Enide to precede him through the forest, she is to ride on her best saddle horse in her most beautiful dress, presumably to attract the attention of malefactors. Just after the lovers are reconciled, Guivret has two beautiful robes made for them, indicating, I believe, that they love each other equally. In the Christmas coronation scene at Nantes, in Arthur's presence, Erec is crowned wearing a silk robe made by four fairies. On its inner lining are portrayed fabulous Indian beasts that feed on cinnamon and cloves. On the exterior is depicted the quadrivium,

the four liberal arts that involve measurement—geometry, arithmetic, music, and astronomy—which would be especially appropriate for a king to know in order to rule effectively. The robe appears to symbolize that Erec no longer has to prove his prowess or honor and is now finally shown to be without equal. The acquisition of the qualities that render a man and a woman fit to rule a kingdom is, then, a major thematic thread of *Erec and Enide*, interwoven through the text and symbolized by their association with luxurious clothing.

Where would Chrétien have gotten the Celtic material that plays a major role in this poem? He tells us at the beginning of the romance that others usually ruin the adventure story on which he is basing his work. These “others” were likely to have been Breton storytellers, famous in the twelfth century, who entertained audiences in many parts of western Europe with tales of Celtic origin. A certain Bleri, who is said to have known stories about all the kings and counts of Britain, is cited by several medieval authors as the link between Celtic tradition and Continental poets. Bleri is purported to have visited the court of Poitiers, perhaps when William of Aquitaine, the earliest known troubadour, was count. He may be the “Bleri the translator” who is attested as being in charge of a Norman castle near Carmarthen in 1116. Although this would be too early for direct contact with Chrétien, the name “Bleri” seems to be recalled under an altered form in l. 1698 of *Erec and Enide*. The names of Erec and Enide provide further clues. According to Rachel Bromwich, they appear to come from Breton tradition; she points out that there was an area of Brittany known as Bro Wened (“land of the Veneti, territory of Vannes” but easily misinterpreted as “land of Ened” or “Enide”) and also as Bro

Gueroc ("land of Gueroc" or "Erec," after a fifth-century ruler). This seems to indicate that Chrétien's main sources were Breton rather than Welsh or Irish.

In any case, Chrétien boasts of having made of his source (or sources) an adventure tale that is beautifully constructed and, punning on his name, will last as long as Christianity (ll. 24-25). (And, in fact, we are still reading it eight hundred years later.) The term *adventure* in stories associated with the matter of Britain connotes a sense of expectation. The knight (and in this romance his lady as well) puts himself at the mercy of fate, wandering through forests in which danger awaits him, often in the form of otherworldly creatures that threaten him both physically and morally.

But *Erec and Enide* is not merely a good story; it is a story that holds up the actions of the eponymous couple as, in the end, exemplary. Erec and Enide, the accomplished knight and the surpassingly beautiful young woman, have found their way through crisis and adventure to a point at which they not only have sound reasons to trust each other but are fit to rule a kingdom. The theme of the relations between a noble couple in love and the society that surrounds and calls on them dominates the poem. These relations, though tested, are maintained successfully by Erec and Enide, but are not handled successfully either by Ydier and his lady or by Mabonagran and Enide's cousin until Erec forces both couples to end their isolation. The development of this model fulfills the implied promise Chrétien made at the beginning of the romance when he wrote that some things are worth more than they at first appear: his tale is not merely entertaining but edifying.

Like other writers of romance and historiography in this period, Chrétien seems to have been oblivious to the vast differences in social conditions, manners, and morals that separated

his contemporaries from the world of Arthur. If Arthur was indeed a historical figure, he lived in the sixth century, long before the conventions of chivalry, vassalage, and courtesy were invented. The depiction of Arthur's world in terms of the later twelfth century, although born of a lack of awareness of historical difference, facilitates Chrétien's task of showing how an ideal king might deal with his vassals. He may have been thinking of such contemporaries as Louis VII of France or Henry II Plantagenet, ruler not only of England but of most of western France (and both men married Eleanor of Aquitaine). This exemplary purpose is evident in Arthur's speech in ll. 1757-77 setting out the ideal of the just monarch who maintains the customs of the past, and his insistence in ll. 60-61 that a king's command is not to be contradicted.

Two of Chrétien's other four romances were written for well-known patrons, Eleanor of Aquitaine's daughter Marie de Champagne (for *Lancelot: The Knight of the Cart*) and Philip of Flanders (for *Perceval: The Tale of the Grail*). No patron is mentioned in *Erec and Enide*. The guests at the wedding of Erec and Enide, however, come exclusively from lands that were under the suzerainty of Henry II Plantagenet or within his sphere of influence. Moreover, the timing and place of the coronation scene, at Christmas in Nantes in Brittany, coincide with those of a court Henry held there in 1169. Chrétien's placing of the coronation at Nantes seems otherwise unmotivated, as that city does not figure elsewhere in the romance. The court of 1169 was assembled for the nobles of Brittany to swear homage to Henry's third son, Geoffrey. That same year Geoffrey took the title duke of Brittany and was betrothed to Constance, daughter of Count Conon IV of Brittany. Chrétien might well, then, have written *Erec and Enide* for Henry II or for Geoffrey (both, after all, spoke French), or for another noble in their entou-

rage. Henry II certainly took an interest in the legend of King Arthur, and Constance named Geoffrey's posthumous son Arthur, another indication of the importance of the Plantagenet dynasty's desire to link itself with the Arthurian past. Even the mentions of Guivret king of the Irish, and of the presence of Garras, ruler of Cork, at the wedding celebration would be appropriate shortly after 1169-70, a period marked by decisive Norman incursions into Ireland.

As the earliest Arthurian romance, *Erec and Enide* exercised considerable influence on the genre. In addition, three derivations or analogues were composed in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries: the Middle Welsh *Gereint, Son of Erbin*, the Middle High German *Erec*, and the Old Norse *Erex Saga*. The last two of these fall under the rather loose rubric of translations, a category that in this period included a healthy dose of what we would call adaptation. The relation of the Welsh romance to Chrétien de Troyes's work has been a topic of controversy. Some have maintained that *Gereint* is the source of *Erec et Enide*, others that the debt runs in the opposite direction, and still others that they derive from a common source. One reasonable view seems to be that *Gereint* is based on a hearing of either *Erec et Enide* or one of its more or less immediate sources, perhaps a Breton version. The listener would then have retold the story in Welsh, incorporating in the process features that conformed to Welsh tradition but were not found in the original. Among the elements of Welsh lore—for which see Rachel Bromwich's edition and translation of the Welsh triads—introduced in *Gereint* are the central figure himself, Gereint, son of Erbin, a sixth-century ruler and traditional hero of southwest Britain, the porter Glewlwyd Mighty-Grasp, the hero Owein, Arthur's chief physician, Morgan Tud, and

Arthur's dog Cafall. Gereint's father, Erbin, is represented as Arthur's cousin. Guivret is referred to as Gwiffret Petit, but it is said that the Welsh call him the Little King. There are several notable differences in the plot. During the couple's journey, Gereint makes his wife wear her worst dress rather than her best, and Gereint's coronation takes place toward the middle of the romance rather than at its end. In addition, Gereint's motivation is more clearly expressed and quite uncomplicated: he suspects that Enide may be in love with another man.

The German *Erec*, by the knight Hartmann von Aue, is the earliest romance of King Arthur in that language, generally dated to the early 1190s. Like *Gereint*, it places the coronation after Enide first arrives in the kingdom of Erec's father. Hartmann, not understanding why Enide should be taking care of so many horses, adds an excursus on Morgana le Fay's ability to change a human into an animal and her power over wildlife, as well as one on the origins of Enide's remarkable palfrey, said to have been stolen by Guivret from a dwarf. Whereas in Chrétien's romance Erec pardons Enide for having spoken ill of him, Hartmann has Enide pardon Erec for having tested her. Having dispelled the Joie de la Cort, Erec leads to Arthur's court the eighty widows of the knights beheaded by Mabonagran in that enchantment. At the end of the tale, the happy couple find their reward in heaven.

Erex Saga was written on the basis of *Erec and Enide* for King Hákon Hákonarson of Norway, probably in the third decade of the thirteenth century, and it exemplifies still another type of reception. Although this compact tale is substantially the same, it adds two episodes not in the French: Erec's battle with a dragon and his encounter with seven armed men. Again there is no coronation scene at the end, but the royal couple is said to have two sons.

In addition to its importance in establishing the genre of Arthurian romance and its intrinsic qualities as a highly entertaining and instructive tale, then, *Erec and Enide* played an essential role in the transmission of courtly ideals from France and the Norman nobility of Britain to other parts of Europe, one of the most significant developments in the history of Western civilization.



Recommended for Further Reading

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