



## 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.

*Université des Acadiens*  
*Lafayette, Louisiana*



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. 855  
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." 860  
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 865  
Forward, spearheads crashing,  
Rushing so fiercely together  
That their shields were battered and cracked,  
Their lances smashed to bits,  
Their very saddles destroyed. 870  
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, 875  
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 1280

Of the question. I can't and won't."

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

1285

But my knights and I propose  
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 1615  
Thread be brought for fasteners.  
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, 1995  
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. 2000  
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, 2005  
Oboes and clarinets.  
How can I tell it all?  
No inner doors, no gates  
Were locked, people came  
And went freely, all day: 2010  
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 2015  
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. 2020  
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 2025  
A bishop and archbishop led them

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  
Tourneys 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  
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  
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  
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,  
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,  
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.  
“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 3465  
I'd come to him and love him.  
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  
Wins can have him, step forward! 4395  
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  
Topped 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.  
Givret 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, Givret  
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

Ourselves 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 5000  
So hard that Erec went rolling  
Backward across his horse  
To the ground. Hidden in the hedge,  
Enide watched her husband 5005  
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 5010  
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, 5015  
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, 5020  
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 5025  
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, 5030  
Lady! I see what a loyal

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, 5100  
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 5105  
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 5110  
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. 5115  
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 5120  
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. 5125  
And Guivret treated him  
Extravagantly well,

Laying embroidered quilts  
Across a heap of the softest  
Grass and flowers, to fashion 5130  
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," 5135  
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, 5140  
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. 5145  
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, 5150  
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 5155  
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 5160  
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 5165  
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), 5170  
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 5175  
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 5180  
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, 5185  
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 5190  
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 5195  
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, 5200  
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: 5205  
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 5210  
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; 5215  
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 5220  
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 Givret'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 5260  
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. 5265  
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, 5270  
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. 5275  
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." 5280  
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 5285  
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,  
Givret 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  
Givret, 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,

Independently sure  
Of whatever it needs to do, 6790  
Knowing whatever has been,  
Perceiving whatever is still  
To come, its learning precise,  
Containing no lies and no fraud.  
The fairies embroidered these things 6795  
In golden thread, on the cloth  
From which Erec's robe was made.  
And the lining was sewn from the skins  
Of strange and wonderful beasts,  
Their heads pale and blond, 6800  
Their necks dark as a mullet,  
Their spines red, their bellies  
Mottled, and their tails blue.  
They come from the Indies, they're called  
Berbiolettes, and they eat 6805  
Aromatic spices,  
Fresh cloves and cinnamon.  
What can I tell you about  
The cloak? It was lush and beautiful,  
With four gems for its clasps: 6810  
Chrysolite green on one side,  
Amethyst purple on the other,  
And all mounted in gold.  
And still Enide had not yet  
Come to the palace; seeing 6815  
She was late, the king instructed  
Gawain to go and lead her  
There at once. Gawain  
Hurried to obey, taking  
With him King Carduant 6820

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 repertoires 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 Maonos (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

### Medieval Texts

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