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Achieving a Balance Between *Amour* and Prowess: The Education of Erec and Yvain

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Poster Presentation 6

ACHIEVING A BALANCE BETWEEN *AMOUR* AND PROWESS:
THE EDUCATION OF EREC AND YVAIN

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In my paper I argue that Chrétien de Troyes wrote his romances to educate those young knights (*juvenes*) who had yet to undergo the transition from youthful irresponsibility to responsible seniority. His characters, especially Erec and Yvain, learn to balance their private lives of love and marital responsibilities with their public lives and displays of prowess and *largesse* (generosity).

I use the historical information provided by Georges Duby, Sidney Painter, and Judith Kellogg to explore the economic and social tensions that concerned the knights at the time that Chrétien wrote his romances. The tensions are reflected in his work, and his characters are meant to be role models for the *juvenes*. I compare two of his romances, *Erec and Enide* and *Yvain*. Each concerns a young knight who has the chance to live happily ever after, but loses it through his reckless/irresponsible behavior. The knight undergoes hardships and trials to achieve the balance between *amour* and prowess and to redeem himself to his wife.

I focus on the strong female characters Enide and Lunete, and their roles in the education of these knights. They are represented as feminine, but having masculine qualities and roles, thus mirroring the balance that the knights must also achieve. Enide acts as Erec's conscience and support as he vacillates between being *recreant* and recklessness. Lunete fills the masculine roles of advisor, rescuer, and matchmaker, and also teaches Yvain the value of reciprocity. Chrétien chose female characters to be the educators of his knights because of their ability to successfully combine both feminine and masculine sides.