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THE EFFECTS OF PATRONAGE AND MEDIEVAL AUDIENCES: EREC ET ENIDE AS A FEMALE WISH FULFILLMENT FANTASY

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Chrétien de Troye’s Erec et Enide has been controversial for centuries. Critics have long explored and debated the gender problems it raises and the question of whether it is a male or female wish fulfillment fantasy. Critics also argue over which sex Chrétien was aiming to exalt, but a female patron and a mostly female aristocratic audience seem to have forced Chrétien to focus on the desires of women. As a result, the medieval woman’s marriage fantasy gets fulfilled in Erec et Enide.

Beginning with Urban Holmes and Douglas Kelly’s ideas on patronage and audiences in the Middle Ages as well as Georges Duby’s observations of love and courtship, I argue, with Keith Busby, Douglas Kelly, and L.T. Topsfield, that Enide would be quite a dynamic woman in comparison to other middle-aristocratic women of the time period. Furthermore, I argue that the qualities and situations Chrétien chose to bestow upon her are quite unattainable for his female audience, but that they would appeal to them nevertheless. I use Douglas Kelly’s idea of the power of medieval patrons to show how Chrétien fit his romance to a female patron’s desires, and how this affects Enide’s fate. I argue, with Busby, Kelly, and Topsfield, that Enide is the true hero of the romance, and that a male medieval audience would find the heroic characteristics Chrétien bestowed upon her provocative, but that a female audience would have found them pleasing.