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The Effects of Patronage and Medieval Audiences: Erec et Enide as a Female Wish Fulfillment Fantasy

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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.