INTRODUCTION

THE FIRST KNOWN ARTHURIAN ROMANCE, *Erec and Enide* was composed about 1170. Whether it had precursors is a subject of debate and conjecture. As far as we know, Chrétien de Troyes created the genre, drawing on ancient Celtic legend, classical and ecclesiastical Latin learning, and the literary and social conventions of French culture in his day. The twelfth century had already produced the French epic, or chanson de geste, which celebrated the matter of France (the deeds of Charlemagne and his warriors, and the epic cycles of William and of the Rebel Barons) and the matter of Rome (the deeds of heroes and princes of antiquity). In the previous generation, romances had been created from classical material (the *Roman de Thèbes,* the *Roman de Troie,* and the *Roman d'Eneas*); in Chrétien's own time Béroul and Thomas created their romances of Tristan. Also roughly contemporary with Chrétien was the distinguished Marie de France, whose *lais,* drawn from Breton tales and songs and imbued with Celtic themes, often portray human limitation or cruelty that is exposed or remedied by fairies, changelings, werewolves, or other supernatural beings. Such, in broad terms, was the cultural climate that conditioned Chrétien and with which, through his skill in creating a *bele conjointure,*[1] he suffused his versatile and civilized art.

1. *Erec et Enide,* line 16. In his prologue, lines 1–28, Chrétien sets forth an aesthetic of a well-constructed narrative, or "molt bele conjointure."

Erec and Enide is the first of five extant romances known to be the work of Chrétien. The others are *Cligès; Yvain,* or *The Knight with the Lion; Lancelot,* or *The Knight of the Cart;* and *Perceval, or the Story of the Grail.* The influence of these works on European literature has been enormous. In Chrétien's own time, or shortly thereafter, his works—notably *Perceval*—were continued, expanded, or cast into other versions. Robert de Boron, scholars are convinced, knew Chrétien's *Perceval;* Robert's ambition, however, was to write a trilogy of verse romances describing the whole history of the Grail and of Arthur's reign. Of this trilogy only the first part, *Joseph,* or *Le Roman de l'Estoire dou Graal,* and 502 lines of the second part, *Merlin,* survive in their original verse form, in a late thirteenth-century manuscript. These romances were soon worked into prose versions, which became popular and were in turn expanded and imitated. *Perlesvaus* appeared sometime between 1191 and 1250; it, with the work of Chrétien and Robert de Boron, gave rise to the voluminous cycle known as the Vulgate prose romances. One of these, *Lancelot,* is believed to be directly descended from Chrétien; others, written in the early thirteenth century and employing much Arthurian material familiar to modern readers, include the *Queste del Saint Graal,* the *Grand Saint Graal,* the *Mort Artu* (Malory's chief source), and the *Estoire de Merlin.* These works were immensely popular and were widely disseminated.

Outside of France Chrétien's influence extended to the Middle High German poets Hartmann von Aue (*Erec, Iwein*) and Wolfram von Eschenbach (*Parzifal*), who wrote one generation later; the Old Norse *Erexsaga* and *Ivensaga* (prose narratives) are still later versions of Chrétien romances. There is a Swedish version of Chrétien's *Yvain, Ivan Lejonsriddaren,* or "Ivan, the Knight of the Lion," a poem in rhymed couplets; the manuscript states that it was translated from the French in 1303. The fourteenth-century Middle

English poem *Ywain and Gawain* is a shorter version of Chrétien's *Yvain.* But these are only the most direct descendants. As the artist who first celebrated Arthurian chivalry in the romance genre, Chrétien opened the way for the Middle English romances, including the magnificent *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,* and his influence extends ultimately to Chaucer, Malory, Spenser, Tennyson, and Robinson Jeffers, as well as to Richard Wagner—to mention only a few of the most illustrious participants in the tradition.

Lancelot is unfinished (Chrétien turned the tale over to a collaborator, Godefroi de Lagny), and *Perceval,* left incomplete at the poet's death, was continued by others. A sixth romance, *William of England,* is often attributed (with caution) to Chrétien. In his prologue to *Cligès* the poet claims to have written a version of the Tristan story, *King Marc and Iseut the Blond;* it may have been a romance or a short episode, but in any case it is lost. Two lyric poems, which show influence of the troubadours, are often attributed to him, and he claims authorship of four poems that are apparently versions of Ovid. Three of these, *Les Comandemanz Ovide* (Ovid's *Remedia amoris*?), *L'Art d'amors* (Ovid's *Ars amandi*?), and *Le Mors de l'espaule* (in English, *The Shoulder Bite*) do not survive. The surviving Ovidian poem, *La Muance de la hupe, de l'aronde et du rossignol* (*The Change of the Hoopoe, the Swallow, and the Nightingale,* better known as the *Philomena*), was preserved in a thirteenth-century *Ovid moralisé.* It is often conjectured that the Ovidiana were written before the romances and may have been apprentice work.

What little we know about Chrétien is based almost entirely on internal evidence (like the list of works in *Cligès*) and on our knowledge of his world. He flourished after 1164 until possibly as late as the 1190s at the court of Henry I of Champagne and his countess, Marie, the daughter of Eleanor of Aquitaine and Louis VII

of France.[2] He dedicated his *Perceval* to Philip of Alsace, count of Flanders, at whose court he may have served before the count's departure for the Third Crusade in 1190 (Philip was killed at Acre the next year). Apart from this information, we are left with conjecture.

Gaston Paris, Jean Frappier, and others have speculated, not at all conclusively, about what role Chrétien played in his society, suggesting that he might have been a herald or a page, or was perhaps the Christianus, canon of Saint-Loup at Troyes, whose name is found in a charter of 1173. But was Chrétien an ecclesiastic? Frappier points out that Christianus was not a rare name in that age; he also believes that the poet expressed too worldly and secular a spirit for an ecclesiastic.[3]

This thought bears pondering, since Chrétien's age produced ecclesiastics whose outlook could appear noticeably worldly. A striking example is Andreas Capellanus (André the Chaplain), who also served at Marie's court (c. 1170–1180) and whose sophisticated, at times mordant Ovidian work *De amore* (often called *The Art of Courtly Love*) shows an extremely "mundane" perspective—Andreas's retraction notwithstanding—and one that is ethically far more relaxed than Chrétien's. For example, a large section of Andreas's work consists of dialogues that serve as recommended scripts for aspiring lovers of various social classes. There are scripts

2. John F. Benton, in "The Court of Champagne as a Literary Center," *Speculum* 36 (1961): 553–54, maintains that Chrétien's chronology could begin five years earlier, if not more; he believes that Henry and Marie were betrothed as early as 1153 and could have married as early as 1159. Anthime Fourrier, in *Mélanges de langue et de littérature du moyen-âge et de la Renaissance offerts à Jean Frappier* (Geneva: Droz, 1970), 299–311, offers a rebuttal to Benton.

3. Jean Frappier, *Chrétien de Troyes: The Man and His Work,* trans. Raymond J. Cormier (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1982), 4.

for a bourgeois approaching a woman of his own class, a woman of the nobility, and a woman of great nobility; for a great nobleman approaching a woman of his own rank, a woman of lesser nobility, and so forth. Peasant women may be taken by force. Clerics should not love, but since they are human beings and therefore imperfect they often will, so etiquette is prescribed for them too. Nuns, significantly, are denied any possibility of receiving carnal love.[4]

Another detail that might shed light on Chrétien's status is the fact that the rich and increasingly civilized courts of Champagne, Flanders, Burgundy, and elsewhere attracted men who had acquired humanistic learning, or *clergie,* through the Church, and then took only minor orders or did not enter religious service at all. As Frappier points out,

> More men of letters than men of the church, such clerics in a way were also humanists. Ideally, they saw themselves responsible for the heritage and transmission of Latin and even Greek poetry. Ever mindful of the advice in the *Liber Sapientiae* [Book of Wisdom attributed to Solomon in the Middle Ages] they sought to cultivate and never conceal man's divine gifts—knowledge and wisdom. Thus a scriptural text justified their lofty desire and linked them to traditions of antiquity.[5]

These men contributed much to the life and activity of the courts, and no doubt many poets were produced from their ranks. As for Chrétien, the prologue to *Erec and Enide* expresses just such a humanistic view as that described by Frappier: humans have an obligation to study, learn, and teach what is right, so that precious

4. Andreas Capellanus, *The Art of Courtly Love,* trans. John Jay Perry, ed. Frederick W. Locke (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1957), 5–24.

5. *Chrétien,* 10.

knowledge will not be lost. Witty and offhand as Chrétien's narrative voice frequently is, one senses in this opening passage the urgency of his convictions. At the end of the poem another passage demonstrates the importance of *clergie,* of the divine gift of knowledge for those powerful on earth: Erec's coronation robe bears the allegorical images of the four disciplines of the quadrivium, woven by magic. A great king must rule with the assistance of these disciplines, for it is through them that we comprehend our universe. Given such passages (and others showing reverence for Ovid and Virgil) it seems probable that Chrétien was a cleric of some sort, trained, perhaps, in the thriving schools at Troyes.

Troyes in Chrétien's period was a cosmopolitan center; it was one of the great fair towns of Europe (of which several existed in Champagne). These fairs occurred twice yearly in Troyes, and traders and entertainers gathered there from most corners of the known world. In Henri Pirenne's words, "the commercial expansion . . . spread like a beneficent epidemic over the whole Continent," and the famous fairs "fulfilled . . . the functions of an exchange and clearing house."[6] Chrétien's verse is full of descriptions—props for the rich fantasy of his courtly audience—of splendid goods from distant lands: opulent fabrics, such as "the silk called *escarlate,*" or "the silk called *osterin,*" or sendal (another silk, resembling taffeta); rubies, emeralds, and other gems; a saddle with ivory trimmings on which is carved the story of Aeneas; cloves, cinnamon, and other spices; exotic dyes in brilliant colors. After the First Crusade and on into the twelfth century, as trade expanded and the provincial courts grew richer, such luxuries as Chrétien describes were much in vogue. The great fairs were clearinghouses for art and ideas as well.

6. *Medieval Cities: Their Origins and the Revival of Trade,* trans. Frank D. Halsey (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1925), 74.

No doubt a Norman or a Londoner—for that matter a Russian or an Icelander—could hear Provençal troubadour songs on the streets of Troyes, or the northern French trouvère songs of Chrétien's generation. One might hear Arab music and poetry or a Breton *conteur* reciting a Celtic legend of King Arthur or King Bran, imported over the centuries from Wales and Ireland.

In this city, for at least part of Chrétien's lifetime, the court of Champagne assembled. Countess Marie, like her mother, Eleanor of Aquitaine (and her sister, Aélis of Blois), promulgated the code of *courtoisie,* or refined and aristocratic manners, which included courtly love. The nature, extent, and influence of courtly love are vexed questions in the scholarship of our own time.[7] We can safely say that in addition to the masculine and military ethic of chivalry—embracing valor, piety, loyalty, honor, and so forth—courtly love entailed values of refinement and sensitivity; as Frappier remarks,

> The highest qualities of the epic hero were preserved in the courtly hero: he had prowess (from *preux,* "brave") and was *courtois,* two characteristics often associated in the twelfth- and thirteenth-century romances. All this implied pride of lineage and control of self. But to these must henceforth be added other qualities, suitable to a more sophisticated social life, for example, refinement of language, manners, and clothing, a scrupulous loyalty in battle, *largesse* ("liberality," "generosity"), physical beauty, and, similarly, strength and courage. Perfect courtliness also involved respect for the actions and feelings of others, however disconcerting; this in turn inspired a predilection for moral nuances on the part of those rare individuals, the elite who

7. For a most thorough, sage, and illuminating review of studies of this subject, see Roger Boase, *The Origin and Meaning of Courtly Love: A Critical Study of European Scholarship* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1977).

evaluated themselves above the common order by dint of their inbred nobility or through their generous but hidden thoughts.[8]

For *fin' amors—courtoisie* in its more precise and limited sense—we have the evidence of the troubadours and trouvères; we have the definition and codification of love given by Andreas Capellanus (however seriously it was taken by his audience); and we have the poetry of the early romance writers. Chrétien's ideas on the subject seem to have differed from those in fashion at Marie's court. The prologue to his *Lancelot* strongly suggests that he wrote this work, a story of adulterous love between the hero and Queen Guinevere, at the behest of his patroness, not that of his muse. He appears to have resisted the notion of love as something intensely secret, painful, exalted, and adulterous, unrelated to the primarily economic and dynastic institution of marriage.

Indeed he appears to assert that marriage and love are the proper culmination of each other. In *Erec* and *Yvain,* the two romances with the most unified structure, the hero's problem is how to bring the demands of a man's external life—honor, reputation, hardihood, skill, noble acts toward others—into balance with the internal exploration, the growth and refinement of the spirit, made possible by erotic, conjugal love. Both the internal and the external virtues are absolutely necessary for the development of the chevalier. Courtly chivalry, at least as Chrétien conceived it, implies continuous effort, progress, *perfectionnement;* a static existence is a spiritual and moral death for the knight, as we shall see in the resolution of the *Erec.* The knight seeks a quest, or *avanture;* the word *avanture* is related to the word *avant*—that which lies *before* him, which he must accomplish to realize his implicit powers. The demands of action

8. *Chrétien,* 7.

and service (specifically service in love) are great and are constantly changing. To be a true chevalier, a full man and a noble one, the hero must have the fullness and readiness of spirit for both these demands.

Such, then, were the formative influences on Chrétien: chivalry, *courtoisie, clergie,* and the richness and variety of the civilization of his time. He is a civilized writer; Erich Auerbach, in his celebrated study *Mimesis,* speaks of the "natural narrative style" and the "impression of . . . fresh and easy breadth" in Chrétien's poetic voice, while remarking on the subtlety of structure in *Yvain* and the "analytical skill" evident in Chrétien's use of rhetorical devices.[9] To structure the poem as a whole, Chrétien uses *entrelacement*—the interlacing of subplots, a convention of the long medieval narrative —and *annulation,* a circular movement of plot whereby a threatening situation resembles one encountered earlier in the story but is more difficult, thus requiring more courage and maturity of the protagonist. Woven into these structures is what might be called a "language of portents," which sometimes seems to suggest a formal symbolic system and at other times seems to play, shrewdly and ironically, with the expectations a symbolic system sets up. There is much compelling allegory, some obvious, some less apparent to a modern sensibility; but nearly always the personifications are so supple and skillfully wrought that the allegory does not offend a modern reader. Chrétien has an extraordinary ability to combine eerie, fantastic subjects with worldly, shrewd attitudes; he gives a Celtic tale of the supernatural a down-to-earth setting and interpretation, without losing for his audience the dimension of the

9. *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature,* trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), 128.

mysterious. One sometimes suspects him of mischief, as when he claims that a castle, bestowed by Erec on his impoverished father-in-law, was built in the time of Adam; or when, with arcane slyness, he slips ludicrous characters into the procession of guests at Erec and Enide's wedding (see n. 13).

Chrétien is a gifted poet in a demanding verse form. Although the octosyllabic rhymed couplet puts strict limitations on its user, when properly handled it is a form of great suppleness, adaptability, and grace. In Chrétien's time Old French verse was accentual-syllabic, and thus not unlike modern English in meter and rhythm. In long narratives such verse establishes a cumulative, complex, and subtle movement. Often a skillful poet, like Chrétien or Chaucer, can establish a counterpoint between the syntactical movement of a sentence and the structure of the verse by judiciously using enjambment, choosing sound values that make rhymes emphatic or unemphatic, or quickening or slowing the pace of the narrative.

Chrétien repeats certain rhymes or certain lines for thematic emphasis; one particularly compelling example is "Cil dormi et cele veilla" (Roques ed., 2475, 3093; paraphrased at 3446–47): "He was asleep, and she awake." Here the young wife watches over her husband while he lies in great moral, or mortal, danger, in the shifting episodes of their adventurous life. The repetition of this line helps us see how their relationship changes, since in the second instance (and the paraphrase) they are on strained terms and share no physical intimacy. Chrétien frequently uses rhyme to link a name with a personal quality, or he repeats a rhyme in two or three successive couplets for emphasis, or sometimes, it seems, for the sheer pleasure of his "fine careless rapture." In Chrétien *rime riche*—a fashion much employed in medieval French verse (and later in medieval English verse, including Chaucer)—often forms a pun, as in *genz* (people, folk) and *genz* (noble, handsome), or *foiz* (times, in

the sense of number) and *foiz* (faith or promise). Sometimes the *rime riche* is not so much a pun as the same word used in different contexts, offering contrast ("Nature was able to / . . . she was not able to") or more subtle comparisons. Chrétien shows us that words have facets, like well-cut gems; he holds them up to the light for us and demonstrates how they reflect meaning in their surroundings, shifting them back and forth slightly in the *rime riche* couplets.

Onomatopoeia occurs here and there in Chrétien's verse, to great effect. One passage delightfully describes a stag hunt, with its hue and cry, its horns, and its baying dogs:

> Li un cornent, li autre huient;
> li chien apres le cerf s'esbruient,
> corent, angressent et abaient;
> li archier espessement traient.
>
> (Roques ed., 119–22)

> Horns exulted, people cried out,
> dogs bayed and snapped and leaped about,
> hurled themselves, savaging the deer,
> tormenting him; the archers there
> shot thick, quick volleys. . . .
>
> (below, 123–27)

Many battle scenes in Chrétien are full of the hiss and crackle and crashing noises of combat, suggesting the rushing of horses and the clang of steel on steel or the crack of weapons on wooden and leather shields—the intense hostility as enemy knights confront each other. Unfortunately, no translation can reproduce the felicity of the opening couplet of the story: "Au jor du Pasque, au tans novel, / a Quaradigan, son chastel . . ." The *novel / chastel* rhyme is like the chime of a bell, ringing in the story with all its human and mortal

complexities, against the backdrop of the fresh, hopeful, and renewing time of Easter.

THE STORY

In the poem's brief prologue, Chrétien quotes a proverb and makes a boast. We are told, first of all, that we may have overlooked something of great value, that the story we are about to hear has been all but ruined by hack storytellers (who make an ill-gotten living telling bits and pieces of the popular Celtic Arthurian tales). Chrétien then claims that he will resurrect this poor, fractured tale; with his *molt bele conjointure* he will give it form and beauty, and it will last forever.[10] The story itself has a tripartite structure. In the first part Erec, a young man not quite twenty-five, who has a brilliant reputation for valor but appears to have side-stepped the experience of love, suddenly (and rather impulsively) finds himself an excellent bride. In the second part, Erec's love for his young wife, Enide, appears to have taken the place of his valor as an all-consuming occupation, and with his reputation endangered, he and his wife set out on a series of difficult and hazardous adventures. In the third section, with the dilemma resolved, Erec faces a still more dangerous *avanture;* his mastery of it enables him and Enide to set free a couple even more trammeled by the conflicts and drives of their existence than they themselves had been. In the end Erec and Enide have "proved most royal," and we see King Arthur crown them the rulers of Erec's hereditary domain.

10. Such uses of the proverb and the boast were common in Chrétien's time. The proverb is frequently found at the beginning of a fabliau; the poet's boast of superiority is a convention of French epic.

As the story opens, Arthur's court is celebrating Easter. Arthurian romances frequently begin with a religious festival, whether Easter, Pentecost, or Christmas, against which we see the all too human actions of the characters, with their weaknesses and their idealistic striving for *perfectionnement.* The beautiful Middle English *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* likewise begins and ends with celebrations of Christmas and New Year, and we see the round of the year, the demarcation of human time and limitation and striving, against the implicit and explicit religious background of the work.

In *Erec and Enide,* King Arthur has rather willfully revived an ancient custom, a courtly entertainment; it is one that virtually demands that each participant have a lady to love and serve, as of course every chevalier should. A hunt for a white stag is planned, and the captor must kiss the loveliest lady at court (presumably his own!). The hero, Erec, has no *amie,* or lady love, and so he lags behind, all but avoiding this courtly exercise. Setting off by himself, he encounters Queen Guinevere and offers to accompany her to the hunt, but they lose their way in the woods and come upon a vicious little band of strangers—a knight, his haughty *amie,* and a dwarf with a whip—who insult the queen and her party. Erec sets off after this knight to avenge the insult.

Already we see the language of portents, which would have been immediately recognized by Chrétien's audience, at work in the story. In the Celtic tales Chrétien and Marie de France employ, white stags, and white animals generally, are often guides to the Other World; sometimes they lead the hero to a supernatural encounter, for example with a supernally beautiful fairy mistress.[11]

11. Süheylâ Bayrav, *Symbolisme médiéval: Béroul, Marie, Chrétien* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1957), 204. For a compelling example from Marie de France, with a very interesting correlation to *Erec,* see Marie's *lai Guigemar.* There

Dwarfs are frequently portents of the supernatural and of evil.[12] In this instance, however, after we, *la crème* of Champagne, have been led to expect such an encounter, we see the hero enter a very real medieval town, where people are sweeping rooms, currying horses, and sitting about playing chess and throwing dice. Here Erec encounters an impoverished vavasor (a "vassal's vassal," or minor nobleman) and his lovely daughter, a young girl who performs the humblest tasks of house and stable and who wears a dress (white, significantly) so shabby that her elbows poke through the holes in her sleeves. Erec has avoided the stag hunt; now he involves himself in a ritual with far more serious consequences. He engages to champion the vavasor's daughter in a joust with the knight he is

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the young hero goes to hunt a stag but instead finds a doe, all white and bearing antlers, with her fawn. He shoots her and she falls, but the arrow bounces back, wounding Guigemar through the right thigh and also wounding his horse. The dying deer speaks, saying that nothing will heal Guigemar's wound but a woman who will love him and suffer untold pain and grief for her love (81–122). The sexual imagery in this beautiful tale of developing adolescence is clear enough. Guigemar, like Erec, is a young man who has avoided the complications of love; he is full of "aggressive self-sufficiency and repressive chastity," as Robert Hanning and Joan Ferrante remark in an excellent discussion in their *Lais of Marie de France* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1978), 55–59. In his attempt to deny the erotic side of his nature, or to obliterate the erotic urge as he knows it, the young huntsman succeeds only in nearly castrating himself, before a woman appears who delivers him from his plight.

12. A sinister dwarf drives the cart, a sort of tumbril for criminals, in Chrétien's *Lancelot.* See also Béroul's *Romance of Tristan,* trans. Alan S. Frederick (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1970). The translator has an illuminating discussion of the tradition of evil dwarfs in medieval literature (see 16–17). But dwarfs could be portentous in other ways; see my discussion of Guivret le Petit and of Oberon in *Huon de Bordeaux,* below.

pursuing; he also proposes to marry the girl and take her to his own domain. The prize of the joust is a sparrow hawk, to be bestowed on the winner's lady. Erec wins this joust and sends the knight packing to Arthur's court; then he reiterates his serious intention of marrying the girl.

After much celebration with her family, he returns with the girl to court. She still wears her shabby white dress, which symbolizes her purity but also suggests a connection with the white stag (which did, indirectly, bring the couple together and guide Erec to his destiny). One might wonder whether there is something uncanny about this mysterious bride, so modest and beautiful yet so strangely dressed, whom Erec has won so precipitately. How will she assist in his development? Might she present some hidden danger to him? Thus Chrétien plays with our expectations. The couple is received with great honor at Arthur's court, where all concede that Enide is the loveliest woman present. Arthur, who killed the white stag, confers the ceremonial kiss upon her. Thus ends the first section of the story, which Chrétien refers to as the *premier vers* and which serves as a kind of overture in which the major themes are introduced.

There is a lavish wedding, with a guest list that evokes many tales from Celtic legend, as well as other figures of more recherché medieval lore.[13] A splendid tourney follows, and then the young couple departs for Erec's ancestral home of Estre-Gales (Outer Wales, or

13. Ferdinand Lot, "Les Noces d'Erec et d'Enide," *Romania* 66 (1920): 42–45, notes that in the *Etymologies* of Isidore of Seville, the Antipodes (in Libya) are reported to have feet pointing backward, with eight toes to each foot, and suggests that Chrétien, with Isidore's report in mind, was having fun with the wedding guest list.

southern Wales). Here they take up their roles as heir and heiress apparent. But Erec has shifted to a completely different mode of life; the brilliant chevalier has become uxorious, all but abandoning the outward questing life of the knight for the comforts and explorations of love. The lady is no supernatural lover, like those in Celtic stories; but with a power all too devastating in the natural world, she has inspired a love that threatens to destroy his knightly prowess and his will. She learns of his loss of reputation and is grief-stricken; he then learns of it through her.

His shame and anger (anger primarily at himself, though he only partly realizes it) are insupportable to him. He orders Enide to accompany him on another quest. She is to ride in front of him, in her most magnificent dress, and is not to speak to him unless he addresses her. In the Welsh tale *Geraint Son of Erbin,* thought to be an analogue, the young wife is made to wear her shabby dress in order to humiliate her; this detail has thematic symmetry. But in Chrétien's poem the wife rides in ironic magnificence, displaying the wealth her princely husband bestowed upon her—quite a contrast, this scene, from that in which the beloved betrothed is proudly presented to court in her rags and astonishing loveliness. In both stories the couple travels in silence, unattended, declaring no destination to anyone. Riding in front, Enide is obviously a lure, greatly increasing their danger and the difficulty of the test Erec has set himself.

Danger presents itself soon enough. First a band of three robbers appears and is defeated by Erec; very soon afterward a second group, of five this time, attacks, and Erec overcomes them as well, but in a more prolonged and bloodier fight. There is a structural logic in the way the second episode follows the first; this *annulation* emphasizes the cyclical, repetitive character of the story and prepares us for further paired incidents.