

THE FOUR ELEMENTS OF *EREC ET ENIDE*

By

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The main focus of this analysis is a breakdown of the imagery present within this courtly romance according to the four elements of antiquity. In a deepening of this thesis, the comparison of imagery to the four elements will also be subject to an interpretation according to the works of two main thinkers, Gaston Bachelard, and Sigmund Freud. The interplay of both the classical view of the text and the introduction of theories by the two twentieth century thinkers lead to a hypothesis how works from history can be analyzed using theories put forth well after their publication.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

During the years of antiquity, the system that classified physical reality was divided into four simple categories, earth, air, wind, and fire. This represented the realm of human knowledge up until the modern periodic table created by Dmitri Mendeleev in the nineteenth century. The basic elements and their connotations permeated not only the scientific thought of the years preceding the invention of the modern periodic table, but also the literature which was written during this expanse of time. One of the more notable eras to use this imagery was the Middle Ages, where such invocations of imagery resounded with the audiences of the texts. Chrétien de Troyes was one such author to utilize imagery based upon the imagery of the four elements. Within works such as *Erec et Enide*, *Cliges*, *Yvain ou Le Chevalier au lion*, *Lancelot ou Le Chevalier de la Charette*, and *Perceval ou le Conte du Graal*, Chrétien de Troyes presents numerous instances where his use of imagery is associated with the four elements. Fire is most closely associated with emotion, rage, anger, and also the concept of male prowess. The masculine aspect of *fortitudo* or the strength of the hero is the manifestation of this. This demonstrates the power of the characters as well as their prowess as men, seen in the combats that occur throughout the story. Earth is most closely associated with the forest and plants, which indicates knowledge of Mother Earth, connotations of female fertility, and the passion symbolized within nature. Also associated with the earth is the faithful companion of the knight, his steed, which represents the bond between man and nature, and also serves as a surrogate of the woman on the battlefield. As the center of a feudal society and the economic system which supports it, it comes as no surprise that earth is a major image in the works of Chrétien de Troyes. The fields from which the serfs reap their crops, where all life comes from, and most of the tools that the hero has in his possession find their one source in the soil and the minerals

found there. Within the scope of this element, there are two classes of earth, the hard earth, or terra firma, and the soft earth, or terra mollis. Terra firma takes on a more masculine aspect and is where we can place such items as durable armor, swords, and lances, so this image is used concurrently with battle and the demonstration of masculine superiority in that sphere. Terra Mollis, on the other hand, takes on a more feminine aspect and associates itself with all things that come from the ground that have life, such as animals and flowers. Also, sometimes this term can be used to describe weak armor that is defeated by the instruments of the Terra Firma. Air has a three pronged association in Chrétien de Troyes, the divine presence of the everyday, the favor of the divine in the form of weather, which symbolizes the divine's goodwill or disfavor towards the protagonist, and the role of speech as presented within the text between characters and between the orator and his audience. Water presents the final image used by Chrétien. It represents the essence of life, as we see the necessity of water being central to some of the battles portrayed. Also water makes an appearance in the voyage, as water is usually the means of transport, which develops the metamorphosis of the protagonist, and sometimes introduces the point of no return in the character's progression.

Within this analysis we will take a step-by-step look at how these images are prevalent in one particular work of Chrétien, *Erec et Enide*. There will be an examination of selected excerpts from the work in the order as the author has presented them, followed by an analysis of how the images of earth, wind, air, or fire are present within the selection. This analysis will employ two approaches, a Freudian interpretation of how elements demonstrate flaws and desires for some characters, and the works of Gaston Bachelard, which demonstrate how the elements of earth, air, wind, and fire exist and interplay in the human imagination. Thus through a study of selected verses in the order they appear in the text, the analysis will demonstrate that not only can these

twentieth century theories be used on texts that existed roughly eight hundred years before their publication, the ideas at the root of these theories existed back then as well.

CHAPTER 2 ANALYSIS

De l'esgarder ne puet preu faire:
Quant plus l'esgarde et plus li plest,
Ne puet müer qu'il ne la best;
Volantiers pres de li se tret,
An li esgarder se refet:
Mout remire son chief le blond,
Ses ialz rianz et son cler front,
Le nes et la face et la boche,
Don granz dolçors au cuer li toche.¹

This is Erec's first contact with his future wife, and one of the major characters within the story, Enide. As this a tale made to be told, the descriptions tend to make indications of the temperament and psychology of the character. Here, one of the major attributes is the hair color of the individual. This citation indicates that Enide has blond, or fair, hair, so at first glance it is as if rays sunshine were cascading upon her shoulders and not hair. This is important because it demonstrates the radiant properties of Enide, giving her a majestic glow in her appearance, and making her a woman worthy of note in the Arthurian realm. Yet something that can be regarded as a trivial aesthetic, such as the glow of blond hair can have some significance after incorporating the ideas of Bachelard and Freud. As it has a light-emitting nature, blond hair can easily be attributed to the sun, which has not only been a symbol of royal power, but also the largest source of fire and energy close to the Earth. So those with blond hair have the radiance and heat of the sun, they can choose to let their energy, personality, or power spread from their aura. The reason blond hair is chosen for nobles and their loved ones is that it is easy to see how their power and influence can be diffused to those that surround them. Also, the closer one gets to the sun, the warmer they become, so individuals try to get closer to those with noble traits, such as blond hair, so they can partake in the warmth that they emit.

¹ Chrétien, vv 1474-1482

Li rois ancontre lui s'avale
Et la reïne d'autre part;
Tuit li dient que Dex le gart.
Lui et sa pucele conjoent,
Sa grant biauté prisent et loent.
Et li rois meïsmes l'a prise
Et jus del palefoir l'a mise.
Mout fu li rois bien afeitiez,
A cele ore estoit bien heitiez.
La pucele a mout enoree,
Par la main l'a a mont menee
An la mestre sale perrine.²

The strength of the kingdom is often directly related to the strength of the king, and the body part which is most commonly associated with strength in literature is the arm. Thus, the king's arm is one of the most important images that is prevalent in Arthurian legend. Here, we see the arms of the king being used to help a lady of the court down from her horse. The first thing that should be noted is the importance of the woman in question, who is in this case none other than Enide. Normally, one would see the valets or other servants of the court take charge in helping a lady dismount from her steed, yet in this case, the king takes over the role of the humble valet. Therefore, it is clear that this woman is no mere handmaiden but a woman of high stature within the court and subsequently a major figure within this particular courtly romance. Directly related to this are the arms which help her descend from the horse, the arms of the king. Since it is with his arms that the king wields sword, shield, and scepter, this royal appendage is intimately attached to the authority of the monarchy and the power of the kingdom. The power of any man is represented in the fire of the male fortitudo, so consequently this right arm of the king is an extension of the fire elemental. Thus, in helping the eventual lead female character down from her horse, the king is in fact extending the entire power of the kingdom to help her.

² Chrétien, vv 1528-1539

Ceste est de cors, de vis ansamble,
Et de quanqu'estuet a pucele,
Et la plus gente et la plus bele
Qui soit dusque la, ce me sanble,
Ou li ciex et la terre ansamble.
Je di que droiz est antresait
Ceste l'enor de blanc cerf ait.³

Within the confines of the epic poem *Eric et Enide*, one of the most intriguing images that confronts the reader is that of the white stag. It is this animal that the king chooses to have hunted by the best knights in the realm. To capture this beast will not only prove the prowess of the victorious knight to the kingdom, but also win him the king's favor. There are two basic elements to this beast that make it such an important part of the story. The first being the stag, a powerful animal that can often be seen as one of the kings of the European forests, who is considered the main prize of the hunt. This shows that it is only a knight with the greatest fortitudo, or prowess can bring it down, so the symbol of the hunt, and male dominance follows the fire elemental. One of the elements that supports the view of the stag as the king of the forest is his dominant role in the family unit of the deer, and the presence and awe that is evoked. The second is the crown that this animal wears, the antlers which protrude from the head of this majestic beast resemble a crown, and also serve as a means of establishing dominance over other stags within the forest. Thus, the antlers are not only a sign of majesty but usually a direct correlation to the prowess of the animal is establishing dominance over his territory, much like a king must do to provide security to his realm. A second part of the imagery of the white stag is purity and innocence as indicated by the color of his pelt. The normal color of a stag is brown, and a common beast is unworthy to be the target in such an important hunt. Thus, the white stag, noble in its stature, innocent and pure in its color, must be the target in this game. This elevation

³ Chrétien, vv. 1746-1752

of the target in the hunt, making it a beast of innocence and purity, makes sure only the most noble and valiant knights can fell it.

Resion doi garder et droiture,
Qu'il apartient a leal roi
Que il doit maintenir la loi,
Verité, et foi, et justice.
Je ne voldroie an nule guise
Fere desl'auté ne tort,
Ne plus au foible que au fort
N'est droiz que nus de moi se plaigne
Et je ne voel pas que remaigne
La costume ne li usages
Que siaut maintenir mes lignages.⁴

Here is where we see the king muse about the importance of truth and loyalty as it pertains to the king's word. The four most important duties of the king are those of maintaining the law, truth, faith, and justice. Without the insurmountable support of the people and the lesser nobles in the king's word, it becomes difficult to maintain these pillars of the feudal society. Throughout the genre of the courtly romance, the word of royalty can be viewed as solid as the sword which enforces it, and without this foundation, the protagonist would face a dilemma to determine where his loyalties lie. As the loyalties are based upon an oath, or the word of the knight, it is through oral communication and the air elemental this oral bond expresses its importance.

Aprés, por la joie angraignier,
Comanda cent vaslez baignier,
Que toz les vialt chevaliers faire.
N'i a nul qui n'ai robe vaire
De riche paisle d'Alixandre,
Chascuns tel com il la volt prandre
A son voloir, a sa devise.
Tuit orent armes d'une guise
Et chevax corranz et delivres:
Li pires valoît bien cent livres.⁵

⁴ Chrétien, vv 1760-1770

The various colors with which the knights are adorned by their kings represent both the valor and prowess they have displayed in the endeavors assigned to them and also the loyalty that they have demonstrated. Frequently, the reader will see that the knights are dressed in fine silks with bright and extravagant colors to distinguish them from the rank and file soldiers also present within the king's army. Here we come across the need for the knight to build his ego and self-esteem, sometimes even bordering on narcissism, so he can view himself as a great knight. None of the stories written by Chretien de Troyes depict a knight trying to stay within his current position and not attempt great feats of valor or impossible quests. These protagonists are made to stand out in the mind of the reader, and as such must be suitably dressed for the occasion. Also important is the armor with which the knight is presented. The first and foremost importance of this piece of clothing is the basic goal of protecting the protagonist from harm. Usually the main characters within the works of Chretien de Troyes can be seen donning armor only of the most durable and strongest creation. Important in this creation is the source of the materials to make these armors and clothes. All of these items were found naturally from the earth, so they belong to either the terra firma or the terra mollis classes. The silks obviously belong to the terra mollis due to their soft nature. The armors, if they are well constructed, belong to the terra firma classification, to protect their wearer. Otherwise, the courtly romance might wind up being too short to be remembered. Another aspect of the armor is the supernatural element of the material. Not only does the armor have to be of superb quality in the human realm, but sometimes the blessings of the king or other elements in the Arthurian universe give even greater strength to the armor, which symbolizes blessings and fidelity to one's sovereign leader or otherworldly powers. This strength of the armor can be directly related to the strength or hardiness of the knight, for

⁵ Chrétien, vv. 1977-1986

one who wields armor of significant strength has the mental fortitude to pursue all his quests, without care or consequence to the harm his person may suffer. Thus, like the Achilles of antiquity, there is a sort of invincibility attributed to many of the heroes in Chrétien de Troyes, though this attribute does not extend to cover all injuries, as numerous heroes are frequently beaten and must endure their own private quest for redemption, but prevents the hero from losing his life, still the armor becomes a life-sustaining carapace for the protagonist.

The inseparable companion to the knight on all of his errands, aside from the occasional valet or servant, is his faithful steed, who bears the brunt of the transportation duties in the romance. In this first quote from Chretien de Troyes, the reader can see the value placed on the need for horses by the king, as he only dispenses steeds of great speed, enthusiasm, and value. Since the knight was considered the most formidable of all the medieval soldiers, he was reliant on his horse to move him about the battlefield, and since the knights depicted in Arthurian legend were frequently faced with daunting quests and fearsome adversaries, the need for a horse of considerable quality was evident. Also, since the protagonist frequently found himself alone on quests, the horse served as a faithful companion, one who would never leave his side. This helped build the rapport between man and beast along the journey. This shows how man and beast, the fruit of the earth elemental, create a necessary reciprocity on these journeys, and without the survival of both, the quest would surely fail. Along with the sword of the hero, his steed was one element within Chrétien de Troyes which is difficult if not impossible to replace. The dependence of the knight on his horse is profound.

Li oel d'esgarder se refont,
Cil qui d'amor la voie font
Et le message au cuer anvoient,
Que mout lor plest quanque il voient.
Aprés le message de ialz
Vient la dolçors, qui mout valt mialz,

Des beisiens qui amor atraient:
Andui cele dolçor essaient,
Que les cuers dedanz en aboivrent,
Si qu' a grant poinne se dessoivrent.
De beisier fu li premiers jeux.
De l'amor qui est antr'ax deus
Fu la pucele plus hardie:
De rien ne s'est acoardie,
Tot sofri, que qu'il li grevast.⁶

One of the major elements that has reoccurred throughout all literature, not just that of the medieval poems of Chrétien de Troyes, is that of the love which the protagonist encounters. Since passion for glory or passion for love is what drives the heroes of these stories, it comes as no surprise that we see love represented most often by fire, because it is this heat and this energy which pushes the protagonist to accomplish great feats. Here, we see the first meeting between Erec and Enide, and as if it was mandated by the heavens, love between the two is immediately ignited. Fire is a most appropriate image to be associated with the love between Erec and Enide because as one knows the strength of a fire can wane or explode, as does the love between these two main characters. At first, both hearts are filled with the burning flame of love, then the passion of Enide wanes, and as her flame begins to rekindle, it is the Erec's love that falters, until at the end both passions return to their peak. Thus the nature of love is not only represented by fire, but it also mimics its actions, without being extinguished.

Tant blazon et tant hauberc blanc,
Tante espee a senestre flanc,
Tanz boens escuz fres et noviax,
D'azur et de sinople biax,
Et tant d'argent a bocles d'or;
Tant boen cheval baucent et sor,
Fauves, et blans, et noirs, et bais.
Tuit s'antre vienent a eslais.
D'armes est tos coverz li chans.⁷

⁶ Chrétien, vv 2051-2065

⁷ Chrétien, vv 2111-2119

Once again we see the dispensing of arms and armor to the heroes of Chrétien de Troyes, here there is special attention given to the coats of arms that appears with the swords and shields. This goes to demonstrate that the armor, and indeed the knight himself, is closely tied to the king, and that it is only by his good graces that the knight finds himself clad in his armor. So it is not only through political stature that the king protects his knight but also in a very literal sense as well, as he is the one who directly provides protection to the protagonist. Another direct association between the knight and his king is the giving of swords. The first major connotation is that the king is giving his swords, the extension of his authority to the knights. Therefore, in wielding these swords the knights are acting as a military extension to the political entity of the king. One could even deduce that the knights are the arm of the king, reaching out and establishing order in the far off realms distant to the king's direct authority. This relationship to the power of the king can also create a correlation between the fortitudo, or masculine prowess, of the king and his knights, so not only is there a political and military relationship between the two, but also a quasi-sexual relationship. As a man sets out to conquer and sow his oats in the female domain, the king sends his knights out to conquer and establish new lands in his name. As a knight's sword can be viewed as the source of his virility and sexual prowess, the prowess of the king, who is aged and has probably already proved his worth in combat in an earlier age, is further demonstrated by the ability of his knights to leave his lands and sow the seeds of his authority.

Sor un des lor sa lance estrosse,
Si bien le fiert soz la memele
Que vuidier li convint la sele.
Puis tret l'espee, si lor passe,
Les hiaumes lor anbarre et quasse.
Cil s'an fuient, si li font rote,
Car toz li plus hardiz le dote.
Tant lor dona et cos et bous

Que Sagremor lor a rescos;
El chastel les remet batant.
Les vespres sonerent a tant.⁸

Here is one of the first combat scenes we encounter in the works of Chrétien de Troyes, and we come face to face with some of the uses of imagery during battles. This first major image is the use of the lance as the first weapon of the knight. Clearly phallic in view, the charging knight uses his lance to assert his dominance over other mounted assailants. Thus it is not only a long weapon the knight is attacking with, but also his male virility and sexual prowess that he is putting to the test. These are important elements because without feats of strength and heroism, there is no barometer with which to gauge the quality of knights. Since it is through tournaments, quests, and encounters with the enemy that the knight is deemed worthy by the female characters, this is the demonstration of his sexual prowess. Not only does Erec manage to vanquish his enemies with his lance in this scene, but his lance penetrates their armor with relative ease, so that his combat is perceived to be not only a military victory, but also a sexual conquest. This imagery continues after the victorious knight forces his enemy off his horse, because he immediately reaches for his sword as the knights begin their engagement in ground combat. Erec uses the sword to try to decapitate his enemies which can be viewed as an attempted castration. After asserting his dominance over his foes, he continues to try and castrate them, rendering them incapable of ever challenging his prowess again.

-Dame, fet il, droit an eüstes,
Et cil qui m'an blasment ont droit.
Apareilliez vos orandroit,
Por chevauchier vos apretez.
Levez de ci, si vos vestez
De vostre robe la plus bele,
Et faites metre vostre sele
Sor vostre meillor palefroi.”

⁸ Chrétien, vv 2202-2212

Or est Enyde an grant esfroi.
Mout se lieve triste et panssive;
A li seule tance et estrive
De la folie qu'ele dist"
Tant grate chievre que mal gist.⁹

Here we see the announcement by Erec of his fateful voyage through the countryside to prove himself worthy of Enide. This demonstrates one of the major events often embedded in Arthurian legend, that of the unknown voyage, not knowing where the main characters will be taken. This quest for an ideal reinforces the risk taken by those in the courtly romance, that they must hold themselves to an ideal higher than that of the common man. This is the feat that proves that the protagonist is not merely an ordinary knight, but a knight of the round table, and a person worthy of renown. Though the journey described within the pages of Erec et Enide takes place mostly on land, this rite of passage mirrors the qualities of the water element. This stems from some of the precursors of these heroes in epic poetry, Odysseus, Aneas, and Jason. These three heroes faced daunting obstacles upon the open seas of the Mediterranean, which helped cement their status as great men. Erec is faced with a similar task, as he must undergo a long trek to achieve his goal, yet the way is fraught with danger. This demonstrates the confidence of the hero over the water elemental, believing he can defeat any foe or menace which could confront him. From the invention of the waterborne craft to modern day, the sea has always represented a mysterious domain, and an adversary not to be reckoned with, who can seemingly swallow up ships quickly and without warning. At the time Erec et Enide was written, navigational tools and boat construction technology was limited, so any nautical endeavor was a task. Couple this with bad weather, another form of the water elemental, this undertaking can be further complicated. The inclement weather can range from minor drizzle and fog, which can obscure the vision of

⁹ Chrétien, vv 2588-2600

the protagonist and hide a nearby shoreline, to hurricane-like storms, which can dismember a boat in moments and would convince the hero that it was a form of divine intervention. In the older works whose base was rooted within the Greek and Roman mythologies, the hero would often find himself at the mercy of numerous divine beings who could control the elements. More often than not, the protagonist would be the subject of a god's ire which would result in further difficulties appearing during the voyage, manifesting typically in the form of bad weather. In the age of the courtly romance, the notion of divine intervention was simplified greatly by reducing it from a pantheon of gods to a monotheistic view. So instead of a relatively good hero being punished by a divine being who was wicked, we have a hero who is rewarded through his faith and only tempted by evil. This helps the reader clearly identify between the protagonists and antagonists that are dotted along the path of the quest. We have seen how water can impede the trip, but it can also act as an aiding agent as well. First, water is the primary medium of travel in the courtly romance, *Erec et Enide* can be viewed as an exception to this rule, other works of the period, such as *Cligés* by Chrétien and the *Tristan et Iseut* works of Béroul and Thomas, feature naval voyages as a major component within the work. Speaking of the voyage in a general sense, it is a metamorphosis for the hero. For Erec, he starts off shamed in the eyes of his wife. Through engaging an almost countless array of enemies, going through victories and near defeats, demonstrating the male prowess that Enide thought he had lost. So Erec changes in the eyes of Enide, from a devoted husband who has neglected his knightly duties to a powerful knight and loving spouse. The concept of the metamorphosis within the courtly romance is important because it helps the reader identify with the protagonist. Although the tales were told in royal halls, the main audience for the courtly romance was the ordinary person of the period. The transformation from mediocrity (or worse) to greatness is one that the common man always

hopes to accomplish, and this gives him a sense of drive and determination, and that through hard work he may be able to elevate himself in society. So the hero is not viewed simply as inheriting greatness or having it bestowed upon him by a magical force, but earning it through a long and trying feat. This gives the protagonist a measure of respect in the eyes of the reader. It also starts to establish a measure of plausibility and helps the audience invest itself within the work. The more human and more ordinary the hero, the more the reader urges him to succeed no matter what the odds. Thus the voyage, and the water elemental it represents, demonstrates its importance in the genre of courtly romance.

Erec s'an va, sa fame an moinne,
Ne set ou, mes en aventure.
"Alez, fet il, arant aleüre,
Et gardez ne soiez tant ose
Que, se vos veez nule chose,
Ne me dites ne ce ne quoi.
Tenez vos de parler a moi,
Se ge ne vos aresne avant.
Alez grant aleüre avant
Et chevauchiez tot a seür.¹⁰

In a tale almost solely based on the orality of the characters and of the narrator the power of speech is of immense proportions. The most direct means the author has of communicating the feelings and psychology of the characters is through the dialog in these works. Such is the case for Erec et Enide by Chrétien de Troyes. The major aspect of dialog, within which distinguishes it from most other works is the power of the hero to wield speech over the other characters. Once Erec has decided that he is not worthy of Enide, and commences his quest to demonstrate his love for her, he allows her to follow him, with the constraint that she not speak for the duration of the quest. This has stripped Enide of the ability of the spoken word, and since the women of courtly romance are not known for their strength, but their wit and intelligence,

¹⁰ Chrétien, vv 2778-2787

this effectively castrates the woman of her power within the tale. This is not to say that Enide wields no power whatsoever, for it is the words of Enide that convince Erec that he is unworthy of her affection. As the romantic interest of the protagonist, she holds sway over the opinions of Erec and subsequently his actions. When the favor of the heroine turns to disfavor, it is because Erec has abandoned the practice of demonstrating his male prowess upon the battlefield and in tournaments. Each word of rebuke from Enide becomes a flying poisonous barb that digs deep into the Erec's. Thus the hero retreats into a corner to avoid these verbal assaults, yet they do not abate. Once cornered, he fights back against these relentless attacks of venomous words. In a sense, Erec views the negative remarks from Enide concerning his love for her as attempts by his wife to castrate his inner self, to form him in her image. In order to prevent this, Erec seeks to remind Enide of the man he was before marriage. To ensure that her sardonic remarks will do no further harm to him or his machismo, he takes the power of speech from her.

Now that one has seen what the power of speech can do when used by Enide, the consequences can be devastating. From the moment Erec insists upon silence for Enide during the journey, she is forced to bear mute witness to Erec's deeds upon the battlefields of his choosing. In a reversal of the situation, Erec has changed the words of Enide from being one of the most important aspects in his world to being one of the most insignificant. Not only is any word she says forbidden, but they are set aside angrily as meaningless drivel. In her effort to shape him in her image, Enide must see the consequences of those noble feats that she idealized and which she thought Erec had been neglecting. These consequences are the grotesque violence that comes from these combats. Erec, who used to hinge upon every word that she said, was more than ready to hang up his lance and sword, now demonstrates the horrific effects of her ideal. In a reversal of her attempt at castration, Enide is powerless to scream upon envisioning

the gruesome facts of combat, or to lament at the wounding of her one, true love. The woman whose words once bellowed on the winds of the mightiest hurricane now go unheard like the whimpers of a small child upon the breeze that caresses blood-stained grasses of the battlefield. In the genre of courtly romance, where one expects the woman to wield the force of the wind element, and of speech, Erec et Enide turns a gale into stale air.

Sor l'escu fiert de tel aïr
Que d'un chief en autre le fant,
Ne li haubers ne li desfant:
En mi le piz le fraint et ront,
Et de la lance li repont
Pié et demi dedanze le cors.
Au retrere a son cop estors,
Et cil chei. Morir l'estut,
Car li gliaves el cuer li but.
Li uns des autres deus s'eslesse,
Son compaignon arrieres lesse,
Vers Erec point, si le menace.
Erec l'escu del col anbrace,
Si le requiert come hardiz.¹¹

The opening lines of this quotation indicate that the armor of the enemy falls into the class of soft earth, or terra mollis. His armor did not protect him that sets the tone for the reader that the metal is weak and malleable. It comes as no surprise when he is defeated. The manner of the defeat goes directly to the argument between the male/female relationship, between soft earth and hard earth. The weak armor, which belongs to the soft earth class, presents itself as feminine in nature, as it yields, succumbs, and breaks under the forceful attack of the lance. This armor acts as a protective shield guarding the innocence, or life, of the wearer. Once the barrier has broken, the protector loses his purity and consequently his life. Thus, the likeness between female sexual organs, the armor, and the victim is shown, though in a rather sudden turnaround the meeting of the phallic lance and the vaginal armor does not result in the creation of life, but

¹¹ Chrétien, vv 2878- 2891

of death. This forceful, sexual act makes it easy for one to posit the similarities between battle and rape. Also posited is the lance as part of the terra firma, hard earth, with its masculine qualities. In addition to its appearance as an aroused male member, the lance is used as a demonstration of masculine prowess. In this episode of *Erec et Enide*, Chrétien shows how Erec is the definition of the perfect knight, his lance easily penetrating the armor of the enemy. As with his conquest of Enide, the phallic tool easily defeats the resistance, in battle or of a woman waiting in bed. If a knight fails to vanquish an antagonist, he is viewed the same as a suitor who fails to become aroused in the final stages of a romantic conquest, that is powerless. The encounter between Erec and his adversary continues by detailing how the lance penetrated a foot and a half into the unlucky victim. To be most assured of victory, the knight must incur the maximum amount of damage to his interior organs. To accomplish this, the lance must be burrowed deeply within the human torso. Much like the act of intercourse, to make sure that the goal is reached, the invasive tool must make headway deep into its desired location. Finally, Chrétien describes how the lance is pulled out, and blood gushes from the wound as the combatant falls. This can be likened to the post orgasmic bliss reached after intercourse. The withdrawal of the lance and that of the male organ after coitus is self-apparent, as with the completion of the conquest after the male withdraws the lance from the wound and the member from the woman on the battlefield and the bedroom, respectively. The most vivid similarity is the presence of bodily fluids in both events, which are produced during both sexual and physical combat. The withdrawal of the necessary tools of the act becomes tainted during their efforts of conquest. Thirdly, the collapse of the conquered is a shared similarity in both spheres. The opposing fighter collapses in the ecstasy of death, where the woman collapses from in ecstasy of sex. It comes as no surprise that in several romance languages the act of orgasm is most often

labeled as the little death. Also the blood pouring out from the wound can be compared to the deflowering of a virgin, as the more experienced combatant easily conquers the novice in both the military and sexual domains. In conclusion, the interaction between the terra firma and the terra mollis usually represents a quasi- or full bodied sexual allusion in the act of battle, with the protagonist being the victorious male and his foe the conquered female.

Erec li met tot a bandon
Desoz le manton an la gorge
Le fer tranchant de boene forge;
Toz tranche les os et les ners
Que d'autre part an saut li fers.
Li sans vermauz toz chaux an raie
D'anbedeus parz par mi la plaie:
L'ame s'an va, li cuers li faut.¹²

Erec mout chieremant li vant
Sa lance, que sor lui a fraite,
Del fuerre a tost l'espee traite.
Cil releva, si fist que fos:
Erec li dona tex trois cos
Qu'el sanc li fist l'espee boire.
L'espaul del bu li dessoivre,
Si qu'a la terre jus chei¹³

Not all battles in Chrétien's *Erec et Enide* fall neatly into the terra firma/terra mollis, or male/female encounter which mimics sexual intercourse. Existing also are other encounters which have more subtle sexual connotations which also have a direct impact on the author's representation of the protagonist's male prowess on the battlefield and in the bedroom. One of the acts that is not apparent in the terra firma/terra mollis encounters is decapitation or the amputation of limbs from the body of the protagonist's opponent. These can be primarily viewed as the castration of the foe by the hero. Decapitation results in the loss of the nerve center which

¹² Chrétien, vv 3034-3041

¹³ Chrétien, vv 3064-3071

is most crucial in making decisions during the struggle. In a military contest, the loss of the head will almost certainly result in defeat, akin to an army losing its general. In the realm of the sexual contest, the loss of the male member will almost certainly bring about failure in this other endeavor. So, in the protagonist's attempt to prove he is the better man, it could be deemed necessary to castrate his opponent, make sure that his fortitudo is unable to complete the task which it has set forth to accomplish. The decapitation of the adversary assures that through his loss of military strategy and intellect, housed in the head, will force him to submit and symbolically declare himself the lesser man sexually as well. Decapitation is not the only way to demonstrate sexual dominance upon the battlefield, for the use of amputation is also effective in this manner. The feat of decapitation is a most difficult achievement, due in part to the presence of dense bone and flesh in the area. As a consequence, the idea of a protagonist marching onto the field of battle and using decapitation as the sole means of defeating his enemies could eat into the plausibility of the courtly romance, so another means of vanquishing his foes in order to assert his dominance was used, one that effectively mirrored the combat that occurred during that period, amputation. More often than not, when one encounters amputation by a sharpened edge, the limb that is put in the most jeopardy is the right arm, the appendage which most commonly holds the sword. As the limb which displays male prowess, which is often extrapolated from the battlefield to the bedroom, it carries an inherent significance. Once a combatant has lost his right arm, he is incapable of continuing the fight, as he will most likely be unable to hold a sword in his left hand. Being stripped of his male fortitudo on the field of honor, he is thus castrated. Since the sword and the lance are the representatives of the phallus on the battlefield, the act of rendering an opponent unable to grip either means he is incapacitated and he cannot further demonstrate male prowess or impress maidens who are nearby to witness it. So in that brief

moment it is as if he has lost the male member itself. Thus, through the use of the sword, or the terra firma, the protagonist is once more able to assert his dominance as an alpha male over his enemies by castrating them.

Ha! Sire, fet ele, merci!
Levez isnelemant de ci,
Que traïz estes antreset
Sanz acoison et sanz forfeit.
Li cuens est traïtres provez:
Se ci poez estre trovez,
Ja n'eschaperoiz de la place
Que tot desmanbrer ne vos face.
Avoir me vialt, por ce vos het.
Mes se Deu plest, qui toz biens set,
Vos n'i seroiz ne morz ne pris.
Des her soir vos eüst ocis,
Se creanté ne li eüsse
Que s'amie et sa fame fusse.
Je le verroiz ceanz venir:
Prandre me vialt et retinir,
Et vos ocirre, s'il vos trueve.¹⁴

Typically, the reader will see the act of decapitation as a consequence of combat in courtly romance, but in the story of *Erec et Enide*, Chrétien uses it in a different sense. We see the threat of amputation as a motivation to push our protagonist into action. However, in the preceding citation, there are several nuances that show how this use is different from previous instances. First off, it is not the knight who trembles at the prospect of amputation, but his wife, which guides the reader toward where the real source of the fear lies. One can see how the loss of life, limb, and reputation may affect the mindset of Erec, but the question of how this will effect Enide comes into play. The most apparent, and overly simplistic, answer is love, which is due in main part by the genre of the work, courtly romance, and the impact of said emotion in the genre. With this in mind, the refusal of the hypothesis of love as the major inspiration of Enide's action

¹⁴ Chrétien, vv 3481-3497

is a necessary and easy step to take. If Enide used love as a motivation throughout the story, her questioning of Erec's masculinity seems to come from nowhere. She had a husband devoted to loving her, who forsook entering further tournaments to prove his physical prowess, and for this he was chastised by his wife. This dismisses love as Enide's motivation to plea with Erec, but there are other possible motivations. The act of dismemberment will most certainly cause the loss of Erec's right arm. As we return to the cause of this quest, the reader comes to realize that it is his refusal to use his right arm in jousts and combat after his marriage that was at heart of Enide's negative remarks. This presents what her view is of Erec's right arm and its importance to her. First, it is the Erec's military strength, the arm that holds the sword or the lance. The sword which has been wielded by this arm and has saved her life and also the lives of her friends would be lost (if the dismemberment were to take place), that is not to say that it would be impossible for Enide to survive using wit or guile, but her character lacks the physical ability or training to defend herself against armed attackers. Where the loss of the sword would be a loss to her physical security, the loss of Erec's lance would be a blow to her mental stability. One of the main attractants between the two protagonists was Erec's ability to dominate the jousting circuit, asserting his physical prowess to the country. It is the demonstration of this fortitudo that Enide regards as the principal jewel upon her crown. One can see the manifestation of a materialistic mindset for the heroine, for once Erec sets down his lance, Enide begins to withdraw her love for him. Her need to be viewed as the wife of such a man is put in serious jeopardy if he loses the arm with which he fights. It is with this in mind that she pleads to Erec to flee and escape the count's men. There is also a third reason for the female protagonist to lament the loss of Erec, the lineage aspect. Since they have yet to conceive a child, she would most unlikely be able to find a suitor as worthy as Erec (or at least one as successful in tournaments) after being classified as a

widow. Since Erec carries much favor with Guinevere, and subsequently Arthur as well, the advantage of having a child with the hero ensures a comfortable life afterwards for Enide. Thus, a castration of Erec, either metaphorically with his right arm, or quite literally under the torturous hands of the count, will result in a devastating set of circumstances for Enide. The reader must remark that the perceived loss for Enide does not tug at her heartstrings, as one would expect in the genre of courtly romance, but more at the material issues she would face.

Et dist: “Sire, grant mervoille oi.
Onques de rien tel joie n’oi
Con j’ai de vostre conuissance.
Avoir poez tele fiance
En ma terre et an mon avoir
Que ja tant n’I voldroiz manoir
Que mout ne vos face enorer.
Je tant n’i voldroiz demorer
Que desor moi ne soiez sire.
Andui avons mestier de mire,
Et j’ai ci pres un mien recet,
N’i a pas sis liues ne set.
La vos voel avoec moi mener,
S’i ferons noz plaies sener.”
Erec respont: “Boen gré vos sai
De ce qu’oi dire vos ai.”¹⁵

It comes as no surprise that during medieval times that land was continually fought over, sought after and reflected the power of the noble who owned these plots in the political world. This economic view of the time also exists in the literary world of Chrétien de Troyes. One of the first instances which demonstrates the value of land comes in *Erec et Enide*, when Count Guivret gives Erec access to his assets and his land. The aspects which must be examined during this exchange is how respect can be shown through the use of land and how land is viewed in medieval society, beside from a purely economic standpoint. The view of land in terms of respect starts with the pattern of primo genitur, where the eldest son receives the family’s land

¹⁵ Chrétien, vv 3893-3908

upon the death of the father. Thus the flow of economic and political power from one generation to the next is established. This is where they become more than just plots of land, but a symbol of the family's power, for the more area that a family can control, the more influence they wield. So when we see Guivret give access to his territories and assets to Erec, and make him answer only to the count while he stays on these lands, this shows the amount of esteem he has for the knight. With most guests who arrive within the borders of a sovereign lord's domain, he expects them to show the same gesture of respect, unless the guest is his lord. Erec is a complete stranger when he enters the lands of Guivret, and has only just revealed his family history when Guivret bestows this honor upon him. In a shift from the ordinary, Guivret treats him as an equal, and not a lesser man, even though there is no evidence that the lands of Erec exceed those of Guivret, this gratitude stems from past dealings with his family.

Now that we have seen that nobles can use their lands in interaction with other nobles to show respect, the reader must further examine the real relationship between the noble and his lands. To the noble, the land is more than a possession with which he earns his economic livelihood; it is part of his identity. There are three methods of acquiring land in medieval France; inheritance, war, or as a gift by a king. If a noble obtains his domain in the first manner, then the lands contain the footprints of his familial DNA. By his family holding these plots for an extended duration, and having rule over the serfs who farmed them, the nobles have had an incredible amount of influence over the development of the land. What crops are grown there, where the fields are located, where the towns are located, what defenses are in place, and the general condition of the land are all factors that can be altered by the overseeing family. The laws enacted and the landmarks/artwork they have commissioned also adds to the legacy and the lingering traces of the family line. With that in mind, one can see how the land of a royal clan

can be viewed symbolically as an archetypal matriarch in that circle. One of the most important properties of the land is that it be fertile; if not, the nobles are unable to produce the crops or support the animals that make the plot economically viable. The matriarch herself must also be fertile, in order to produce offspring and keep the royal bloodline going. As the dominant family can shape what the land will look like in the future, the matriarch shapes what the nobles will look like in the future, not through castles or crops but through marriage to other noble families. The second method of obtaining lands is an act of the masculine fortitudo on a larger scale. It is through facing off against other male nobles in an effort to assert their prowess can they win the terrains they desire. The same feats are acted out on the jousting fields in order to win the affection of the female protagonists in the courtly romance, methods in which multiple similarities exist. Mainly through the conquest of an opponent can one obtain the desired fertile object. The final means of property transference is the gift of lands to a knight from a king. Either through battle or service, sometimes a knight proves his loyalty to the king for which he is rewarded with lands that the king has at his disposal. Whether through war or marriage, sometimes the king finds himself in possession of more lands than he can directly control, so he gives them to one of the lesser nobles whom he can trust. The same thing is sometime done with the daughters of the king, as well as maidens and widows under his control, as that the person whom the king's daughter marries may have the right to claim his lands some day. Such consequences force the king to push his daughter to marry someone whom the king can trust. That way the king can feel secure that after his passing his land will be in appropriate hands. Thus, the reader is able to see that, in a sense, Chrétien treated land in a similar fashion as he treated women.

Escorgiees andui tenoient.
Tant feru et batu l'avoient
Que ja li avoient del dos
La char ronpue jusqu'as os.
Par les costez et par les flans
Li coroit contre val li sans,
Si que li roncis estoit toz
An sanc jusqy'au vandre desoz.
Et Erec vint après toz seus,
Mout dolanz et mout angoisseus
Del chevalier, quant il le vit
Demener a si grant despit.¹⁶

Within this passage there are two items that represent threats to the male fortitudo and the success of the knight's quest in *Erec et Enide*. The first is the giants themselves, monsters of gargantuan stature who frequently disrupt the chivalric pursuits of Chrétien's protagonists. What these figures tend to represent is the insecurities present in the psychology of the hero. Though not a new idea in the literary universe, readers can easily remember the well known example of David and Goliath, the concept of a hero who doubts himself and his ability to conquer the obstacles that face him help draw a connection between the protagonist and the audience. While the existence of a fearless and all powerful protagonist does provide a concrete conclusion to the story, it erases the possibility for the protagonist to experience the subtleties of human psychology, which draw the reader into the story. So the author adds frailties to the character in order to make him more approachable and plausible. Though the tales of courtly romance were told within the royal halls, the poorer segments of the population were also exposed to these stories. Since these works almost exclusively dealt with the endeavors of the noble class, there was already an inherent distance in the interaction that took place between the characters in the story and the listener. To combat this, the storyteller infuses the main character with the psychological weaknesses of the everyday person, When Erec comes upon the giants whipping

¹⁶ Chrétien, vv 4393-4404

the knight, it is not the other knight that Erec sees, but himself being tortured at the expense of his foes. For a moment, he is paralyzed by the fear that he will not complete his journey successfully. Then the protagonist exhibits a character trait which all can possess, resolve. The spirit of resolve convinces even the lowliest peasant that he can, for a moment, be the knight partaking in these endeavors. The flame, the desire of the knight to complete his quest, is threatened by the presence of self-doubt, and it is an important step for the hero to overcome this impediment on his quest for glory.

Another barrier that blocks the knight from his ultimate goal is present in this passage, the prospect of humiliation. Fortunately, in this passage, Erec is not the one who finds himself to be the object of humiliation, but the knight whom he sees as the giant's victim. Erec is trapped as the helpless voyeur, who, for a moment, watches the knight's suffering as if it were his own. Here we see the other weaknesses in Erec's psychology : fear and inaction. Like many who were in the audience when this tale was told, Erec fears that he will someday find himself in a similar position as the knight he is watching. This fear induces panic in his mind which results in a moment of inaction. Again, this created an illusion of proximity between the hero and the audience, as the reader or listener begins to identify with the character in the story. Instead of using the sword against the knight, as would seem typical for the genre, the giants use whips, a less deadly weapon, yet more efficient in producing pain. This is the first step that is used in the process to break the will of the knight and to cause his mind to bend to their will without a direct fight. This could be viewed as a mental loss of the hero's, or in this case the knight's, masculinity. Instead of being the hero who vanquishes the vicious foes, he is found at their mercy, powerless to fight them. For such an individual steeped in the chivalric code, this poor soul sees his power to defeat his enemies as a mirror of his masculine prowess. To find

himself at the whim of these people is to strip him of the very thing he uses to call himself a man. Worse than the act of whipping, the knight begins to feel it tear away at the skin and the muscle it contains, having exposed the bones as all that remains of his hardiness. In addition to the pain, the whips are destroying the knight's physical strength. The muscles and skin where the hero finds the strength to wield his weapon, to rip pieces of them from an individual, it is as if the giants were surgically removing those body parts themselves. It is as if they centered on the masculinity of the knight itself and removed it from his soul.

Haï! Sire, con mar i fus!
A toi ne s'apareilloit nus,
Qu'an toi s'estoit Biautez miree,
Proesce s'I ert esprovee,
Savoirs t'avoit son cuer doné,
Largesce tavoit coroné,
Cele sanz cui nus n'a grant pris.
Mes qu'ai ge dit? Trop ai mespris,
Qui la prole ai manteüe
Don mes sire a mort receüe,
La mortel parole antoschiee
Qui me doit estre reprchiee.
Et je requenuis et otroi
Que nus n'I a corpes fors moi:
Je seule an doi estre blasmee.¹⁷

We have already seen how Erec uses silence to wield power over Enide and the importance of speech, a branch of the air element, in *Erec et Enide*. The text does not take the misogynistic view and leave Enide completely without any voice whatsoever after the proclamation of silence by Erec. She is given a voice which subsequently allows some insight into her view about her predicament. Here she espouses the merits of silence on certain occasions, though not the silence that was thrust upon her by Erec, a voluntary silence. This silence disallows the possibility of treason that the spoken word permits. When one thinks of the treason possible with a word, we

¹⁷ Chrétien, vv 4637-4651

think of the questioning of Erec's masculinity by Enide. While that may have been a severe blow to Erec's psychology, in this matter Enide is referring to something that is much more of a threat to Erec physically. The notion of a word resulting in great physical danger is not new to French literature, used most notably in the chanson de geste *Chanson de Roland*. Even though Enide does not have the malicious intent of Ganelon, she fears that her words have brought about a similar result. Contrary to Ganelon, the treason gives her much grief. In the courtly romance, it is frequently the spoken word, a part of the air elemental, which represents the bond of trust between two individuals. When a knight enters the servitude of his king, it is with an oral pledge that he makes this gesture. When a couple weds, it is not until the vows are exchanged that is viewed as official. According to the chivalric code, the knight sometimes uses courtly love poetry in recital to woo the object of his affection.

This demonstrates the numerous oral bonds of trust that can be seen within the genre of the courtly romance. If trust can be bestowed with the power of the spoken word, then treason can be given away with the same amount of ease. Here, the careless lapse by Enide to give the advantage to her husband's enemies (tricked by their promises of good faith), thus resulting in grave injury to Erec. This apparent minute misstep, in the mind of Enide, is the catalyst which prompts the enemy into action. Not only is the spoken word a symbol of trust in this case, but is also a valuable symbol of information. Since the beginning of military history, the importance of information about the enemy has never been underappreciated. In the tale of *Erec et Enide*, the source of the information is very unlikely, the hero's faithful wife. In the genre of courtly romance, frequently the hero finds himself in a chess match between himself and the obstacles that lay between him and his goal. Information plays the role of the driving force in this game. The protagonist uses information to try and find the most efficient route to his objective. En

though this is harder to see in *Erec et Enide*, as the goal is to rekindle Enide's love for Erec, it is still present. Erec tries to choose quests and duels which will easily demonstrate his male prowess and shorten his quest. To counter balance this, his opponents use information to sabotage and trap him, to earn their own chance at wooing Enide. Here the count uses a momentary lapse of reason by Enide to ambush Erec and inflict terrible wounds upon him. Not to be forgotten is the role of the word as an agent of trust between the orator and the audience during the performance of the work. Here, the author is selling the plausibility of the story. When the audience starts to believe in the story that is when the bond of trust is established. The listener trusts the storyteller to provide an entertaining and believable story, to guide him, as well as the protagonist to the conclusion.

Lors rechief a terre pasmee,
Et quant ele releva sus,
Si se rescrie plus en plus:¹⁸

Emotion is the fiery desire that the protagonist can use to fuel himself along his journey. However, sometimes the hero and other characters can let this fire become over fueled and burn out of control. The physical manifestation of this event is most often the act of fainting. Here we see the overload of the grief emotion for Enide, having accidentally caused the serious wounding of her true love, Erec. Frequently, we see honor or determination for success drive the protagonist to accomplish his goal. When these two sources have become depleted, the hero must find something else to push him to succeed, this alternate source most likely being emotion. Though the main protagonist is not the only one who can suffer the rollercoaster effects of emotion, frequently in the courtly romance we see female characters subjected to it. In a move which could be considered stereotypical, we often see the heroines of this genre to be almost

¹⁸ Chrétien, vv 4652-4654

solely emotion driven when faced with adverse circumstances. However the flood of adrenaline and/or grief can overwhelm the protagonist, which would cause fainting and rend them incapable of further reaction for the duration. Using the fire element as a simile, it is like a buildup of magma in the character's soul and the fainting is a result of an eruption of this lava in the character. The comparison of this psychological event to more a volcano is not just due to the explosive nature of these events. When a volcano erupts there is more than just the initial explosion of magma that occurs, there are stages that follow the first shockwave. After the starting violent stage, there are successive, much softer, outflows of emotions that can burst out, and then harden while cooling, only to be recovered with the following new waves flowing over them. Such is the case with Enide and her grief, which causes her to faint when she first confronts it. Once she overcomes her dizzied spell, a new wave of grief hits her again, which causes yet another episode of fainting. So her tragic emotions become the molten rock spewing from within, causing her sadness to wash over her conscience and her consciousness again and again. Thus even the strength of character present within the heroes of the courtly romance cannot contain the force of their emotions, which can either push them to great deeds or incapacitate them beyond words.

Dex! Que ferai? Por coi vif tant?
La Morze que demore, qu'atant,
Qui ne me prant sanz nul respit?
Trop m'a la Morz an grant despit.
Quant ele ocirre ne me daigne.
Moi meïsmes estuet que praigne
La vengence de mon forfait:
Ensi morrai, mau gré en ait
La Morz qui ne me vialt haidier.
Ne puis morir pour souhaidier,
Ne rien m'i vaudroit complaint:
L'espee qu mes sire a ceinte
Doit par reison sa mort vangier.
Ja n'an serai mes an dongier,

N'an proiere ne an souhait.¹⁹

Also within this segment of the text is the transformation of an object from its normal presence in the earth element to a place within the fire. The object in question is the sword of Erec, and due to its metal construction, when he wields it; it is earthen (*terra firma*) in nature, yet upon the severe wounding of Erec, Enide, stricken with grief, wields it as a show of vengeance. The emotion of revenge is one of the emotions that can be found at the core of the fire elemental due to the fact that it burns through the fear and logic of the character and then consumes them. Most typically the first emotion that comes to mind when dealing with the fire elemental is anger, but anger sometimes does not have a logical source nor target, yet if there is a cause and an aim, usually that anger is transformed into vengeance. Here the grief of the loss of Erec has ravaged the mind of Enide, putting her in a very precarious psychological state. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, waves of terror and sadness wash over her, causing her to lose consciousness numerous times. Once she gains a hold on her grief and tries to conquer it, it transforms to a different emotion. No longer is she haunted by loss and sadness, she desires to find the causal agent in this traumatic experience. As she searches her mind for this answer, her subconscious starts pushing her to hate the people and the events that gave birth to these circumstances. This hate takes over and becomes her driving force, and a woman who was once shocked at the displays of violence her husband displayed in the jousting tournaments or on the battlefield (even though these displays did augment her feelings for him), now finds the strength to pick up her felled husband's sword and threaten those that have harmed him, and subsequently her. Here we can see the strength that the fire elemental possesses, instilling Enide with a version of the male fortitudo. Let us not forget that the weapons of the medieval times were not the

¹⁹ Chrétien, vv 4655-4669

lightest of tools, there was a reason that the knights were frequently regarded as elite warriors, as it took a great amount of strength to wield both the armament and the armor. Then we come to this scene, where the vision of beauty, as was described earlier in the story, can pick up her husband's blade and admonishes a group of battle-hardened men for committing wrongs against her and her husband. Without the presence and drive that vengeance and the fire elemental give Enide, this situation would lose plausibility and almost be laughable, yet these emotions bequeath a strength that can be difficult to understand. So not only can vengeance give Enide the will to attack this group of men, but also the strength. The fickle nature of the fire elemental is thoroughly demonstrated in these two passages, as we can see how at one point it can choose to incapacitate a character, or on the other hand empower them to overcome insurmountable odds.

El vergier n'avoit an viron
Mur ne paliz, se de l'air non.
Mes de l'air est de totes parz
Par nigromance clos li jarz,
Si que iens antrer n'I pooit,
Se par un seul leu n'i antroit,
Ne que s'il fust toz clos de fer.
Et tot esté et to yver
Y avait flors et frui maür;
Que leanz se lessoit mangier,
Mes au porter hors fet dongier.
Car qui point an volsist porter
Ne s'an seüst ja mes raler,
Car a l'issue ne venist
Tant qu'an son leu le remist.
Ne soz ciel n'a oisel volant,
Qui pleise a homë an chantant
A lui deduire et resjoïr,
Qu'iluec ne poïst l'an oïr
Plusors de chascune nature.²⁰

One of the more perplexing aspects of air as it appears within the works of Chrétien de

Troyes makes its appearance as the meadow of paradise in *Erec et Enide*. Air is typically an

²⁰ Chrétien, vv 5735-5755

element forgotten or casually omitted within romance, unless it is to note the odor of the hero's lady. Yet here within the pages of *Erec et Enide*, air takes on a magical quality which tricks the eye and fools the mind. Such a beautiful piece of pasture is unable to be contained by a stone or metal wall, as it would destroy the beauty that courtly romance typically conjures, so an unseen force is used to set a boundary completely made of air. Such walls are as impenetrable as their rock and iron counterparts, maybe even more so due to their mythic nature, yet one can see through them. The presence of air tends to reverse the view of air as a passable barrier, lazy in its nature; where here, despite keeping its property of transparency, its physical property is molded into something more solid and concrete than one would expect. As the reader is confronted with the element of air as it is presented by Chrétien, one can see how it is difficult and mysterious in its nature. Upon entering the meadow, Erec finds himself facing objects of the fantastic realm, an occurrence he cannot readily explain, as is his tendency of being firmly grounded within reality. Thus when Erec enters this extraordinary garden, he has every expectation that he can function normally at any moment, yet the air then shows its treacherous nature and creates a boundary not even the bravest and strongest of protagonists can defeat. Unlike earth, water, and fire, the air can be misconstrued by the human eye. Images of an oasis can appear in the middle of the Sahara, and a road may appear wet when it is dry. Chrétien may not have had the scientific explanation at hand when he wrote these stories, yet he knew the deceptive nature of air and he included it, forcing his heroes to confront it.

Thus the element of air is present as a mystical object that can alter its form, create and destroy at a whim, with an almost capricious heart at its center. It is with this in mind that one can further characterize the nature of this element as feminine. Primarily it is the mysterious and confusing tendencies of the air element that gives it a female touch, as it is mostly female

characters that tend to mask their feelings, their true intentions, and even their own physical appearance. These factors suggest that a female character is not always what she seems. Couple this with the capricious nature often attributed to young women and one can see how the air and the winds, that change violently and suddenly, are linked with the female gender.

Cil li distrent la verité,
Comant il estoit avenu
De son pere le viel chenu,
Qui morz estoit et trespassez.
Erec an pesa plus asez
Qu'il ne mostra sanblant as genz,
Mes diaus de roi n'est mie genz,
N'a roi n'avient qu'il face duel²¹

Here, Erec confronts the death of his father, and though we can examine how the grief and anger of this law can stem from the fire elemental, there is another presence of this flammable aspect that could be broached, more specifically in the description of the father. Upon his death, the father is described as a gray-haired king, and as that the color of a character's hair usually has a direct relationship with their personality. Gray hair most commonly expresses the wisdom of the character, as they have lived long enough to let their hair gray, so they must have accumulated a great deal of knowledge during that time. Keeping this in mind, we must examine what can keep an individual alive for such a length of time in the tumultuous world of Chrétien de Troyes. Since the man was a nobleman and a king, it would be most unlikely that he went his entire life without having to face another individual in combat, whether over a woman or land. So a male having gray hair is demonstrating that he has displayed such domination on the battlefields and the arenas that he reached a level where his kingdom no longer needed him to guard it with his own brute force. Throughout the telling of the story of *Erec et Enide*, we have seen selected events where the male protagonists demonstrated their fortitudo, yet the only figure

²¹ Chrétien, vv 6516-6523

until this point that had the adequate respect where none would challenge him is Arthur, yet Erec's father is another example of a revered figure. Their fortitudo is almost a matter of legend, as their deeds are still spoken of long after they were accomplished. In this case, wisdom and grey hair are a demonstration of male prowess and fortitudo, the goal which all knight hope to attain, to be a revered king.

CHAPTER 3 CONCLUSION

Gaston Bachelard put forth a hypothesis that psychoanalysis could be conducted using the foundations of classical cosmology and the theory of alchemy, which had at their heart the four elements of earth, air, water, and fire. He further surmised that these elements were still pervasive in human thought in the modern world. Earlier in the same century, Sigmund Freud created his theory on how sexual imagery played a dominant factor in psychology. Combined, these two schools of thought can show how classical urges and imagery dominate the workings of the human mind and our imagination. These applications can also be applied to literature, by the use of these archetypes demonstrates how the character is developed and also how the reader interacts with the text. Instead of applying these methods to literature in the modern age, I applied these hypotheses to a single text from early French literature, *Erec et Enide* by Chrétien de Troyes, written almost eight hundred years before Bachelard and Freud made their ideas known. In doing this, I sought to demonstrate that there exist both elements of classical alchemy and of Freudian imagery throughout the work.

The four elements - earth, air, wind, and fire - were accounted for. The dominance and aggression of the male ego and its need to constantly provide for the masculine fortitudo were prevalent, as well as the female response, that entails sometimes resistance and sometimes submission. With regards to Bachelard, the most prevalent image was of the earth, and the struggle between its subclasses, hard earth and soft earth. The soft earth represents love, fertility and the female gender, where as the hard earth represents male prowess and domination. The interplay between the two genders is central to this earth element, and also to the courtly romance in its entirety, and this is why this image is found more often in the genre. Also, courtly romance tells of quests that cause the protagonists to scour the earth to seek what they desire, and

since it is this globe of endless possibilities that is thrust before them, earth proves to be at the forefront of the story. Different forms of medieval poetry would most likely show other elements taking the dominant role in the imagery. Chansons de geste and love poetry would most likely have fire throughout, as they are charged with human passions, such as the hatred that comes between the treacherous Ganelon and the remainder of the French forces in *La Chanson de Roland*. The medieval sermon, grounded in the oral nature and its dealings with the ethereal and with forces unseen to the human eye would be filled with air imagery. One of the most common occurrences would be the presence of God as an omnipresent vapor covering the world, yet unseen to the human eye. The pastoral, which preaches the simplicities and benefits of shepherding, and shunning the decadence of urban sophistications, would reveal many allusions to water, the nectar necessary for survival in the rural lands. Even though one can take a simplistic approach to the psychology of characters within medieval literature, using a Freudian approach in my thesis still yielded good results.

The struggle between the urge of the male ego to dominate is ubiquitous in *Erec et Enide*, and the resistance that the female protagonists put to combat these male forces is also present. The combats that took place provide imagery of sexual conquest of one man over another, such that at some moments the knight is viewed more like a rapist than a chivalrous gentleman. Yet the women are not without reproach either. Enide's desire to control Erec and his lifestyle demonstrates that she wishes to symbolically castrate Erec and wield power over him in the relationship. That being said, the humor in the book comes from the interchanges between Erec and Enide and how, even in courtly romances, relationships were far from being perfect once the couple was married. Hopefully analyses such as this provide reason for others to study literature of the past as new methods of psychoanalysis are developed. It is only by seeing the

similarities between the past and the present that we can address the problems of the present, as they have endured through the past and what can be done to resolve them.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

David Charles Sullivan was born in Versailles, Yvelines, France. The youngest of three children, he spent the vast majority of his childhood growing up in Gainesville, Florida, graduating from F.W. Buchholz High School in 2000. He received his B.A. in French from the University of Florida in 2003. Prior to this he spent 2 months studying abroad in Avignon, France. He entered the M.A. French program, literature option in fall 2004, and has concentrated on Medieval French Literature, but also spending time on Surrealism and French Cinema. He hopes to continue his work in these fields in a PhD program at a later date.