

# *The flaw in Enide's character: a study of Chrétien de Troyes' 'Erec'*

Article

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THE FLAW IN ENIDE'S CHARACTER:  
A STUDY OF CHRÉTIEN DE TROYES' EREC.

This article has its origin in the discussion of the Romance of Erec and Enide by Z.P. Zaddy.<sup>1</sup> I have a great admiration for her work but I think that in this case she has allowed the undoubtedly engaging character of Erec to cast his shadow across Enide, disguising her true appearance. In my opinion Enide is more than the complement of her husband or the inverse of his personality. She stands beside him in the title and the same light illuminates them both, as I hope to demonstrate. The flaw in their characters is the same.

Zaddy believes that the key to Erec is his pride, the heated emotion of a young man. His self-esteem is wounded by Enide's reproaches, the more so as he knows them to be justified: 'Moreover, in Erec's case, the inevitable resentment of wounded pride is exacerbated by the fear that he has forfeited Enide's esteem and thereby her love'.<sup>2</sup> The plot, therefore, is the story of his attempts to re-establish his character in his own eyes and in the eyes of the world as epitomised by his wife. In achieving this he develops many facets of his character: 'As the somewhat self-centred youth who comes to see that he has obligations beyond his immediate pleasures and inclinations; as the selfish lover who comes to recognise his wife as a person in her own right and not just as a source of pleasure, Erec is surely worthy to appear as the central figure in a courtly romance'.<sup>3</sup> This interpretation is indisputedly supported by the text.

Zaddy then argues that Enide is fully as important as Erec in the mind of the narrator and that her part in the story is an active, positive role, not merely an appendage of the hero. 'The truth is that, in the account of his second quest attention is equally divided between the hero and his wife, Enide's feelings and activities are described there in as much detail and with as much interest as Erec's battles, and her part in averting disaster is equal to his. Indeed, as one reads Erec, one realises that it is the story of a joint venture, a joint apprenticeship where Enide, no less than Erec, has a lesson to learn and a fault to expiate'.<sup>4</sup> Some critics have suggested that her fault is to doubt Erec's valour and, taking this idea to its logical conclusion, have seen her finally as the archetype of the obedient wife, obeying her husband's most arbitrary commands in order to demonstrate her utter trust in the merits of her lord and master. Zaddy has no difficulty in disproving this by showing that Chrétien has given us a living woman for a heroine, who is neither a stereotype nor an automaton. Enide's thought processes, her reactions and her reasons, are shown as detailed and individual, not as conventional reflexes and I agree that what she does, and how and why she does it, is as essential to the matter of Chrétien's story as the

emotions and actions of her husband. Where I differ is in the definition of the fault which Enide has to expiate.

In Zaddy's view this fault is diffidence. Since it is disgraceful for a knight to allow love, even married love, to distract his attention from chivalric pursuits Erec is undeniably at fault in his conduct after marriage and 'no blame should be attached to Enide for taxing Erec with his recre-antise. Her criticisms were both justified and necessary. Where she was at fault was, in fact, in failing to raise the matter with Erec when the murmurings of his men first reached her ears'.<sup>5</sup> Her motive is fear

De ceste chose li pesa;  
mes sanblant fere n'an osa,  
que ses sire an mal nel preïst  
asez tost, s'ele le deïst (v.2465-2468)

When Erec commands her to prepare for a journey 'she accepts this fate as the inevitable and justifiable answer to her presumption in daring to tax Erec with his sloth'.<sup>6</sup> She acknowledges her subsequent hardships as 'a fitting punishment for her presumptuous allegations'

Lasse, fet ele, si mar vi  
mon orguel et ma sorcuïdance (v.3102-3103)

and reacts in the same way upon his apparent death after the rescue of Cadoc

ancor fust or mes sires vis,  
se ge, come outrageuse et fole  
n'eüsse dite la parole  
por coi mes sires ça s'esmut; (v. 4588-4591)

This diffidence is the result of her upbringing. She accepts that she is to marry Erec without consultation or consideration and she makes no demur when he takes her to court in her tattered gown. To Zaddy this diffidence is underlined by Enide's tendency to blush in company, as at v.443-447 and v.1707-1712. When she has eventually won the battle for self-confidence her diffidence is still shown in the knowledge that she loves him rather more than he loves her, citing v.6254-6262.

I cannot accept this reading; the crucial verses quoted by Zaddy are, to my mind, capable of a very different interpretation. For me Enide's fault is also pride; not Erec's swaggering youthful conceit but an inbred conviction of her own worth and superiority which prevents her from participating in the needs and emotions of those around her. It limits her sympathies in the same manner as the magic air encloses the garden in the Joie de la Cour episode, and must, in the same way, be dispelled by Erec's valour and chivalry. There is ample evidence for this in the poem.

Firstly, Enide has been brought up by her father to think of herself as destined for some special and elevated fate. The explanation of her condition which he gives to Erec must have been familiar to his daughter since the vavassor has refused many offers of honour and of marriage on her behalf:

Biax amis, fet li vavassors,  
 povretez fet mal as plusors  
 et autresi fet ele moi.  
 Molt me poise, quant ge la voi  
 atornee si povremant,  
 ne n'ai pooir que je l'amant:  
 tant ai esté toz jorz an guerre,  
 tote en ai perdue ma terre,  
 et angagee, et vandue.  
 Et ne por quant bien fust vestue,  
 se ge sofrisse qu'el preïst  
 ce que l'an doner li vossist;  
 nes li sires de cest chastel  
 l'eust vestue bien et bel  
 et se li feïst toz ses buens,  
 qu'els est sa niece et il est cuens;  
 ne n'a trestot cest païs  
 nul baron, tant soit de haut pris,  
 qui ne l'eüst a fame prise  
 volantiers tot a ma devise.  
 Mes j'atant ancor meïllor point,  
 que Dex greignor enor li doint,  
 que aventure li amaïnt  
 ou roi ou conte qui l'an amaïnt. (v.509-532)

Erec immediately supports this valuation in her presence by asserting that she is worthy of the sparrowhawk, and proposing to marry her and make her queen of ten cities:

Lors dit Erec, que l'esprevier  
 vialt par sa desresnier,  
 car por voir n'i avra pucele  
 qui la centiesme part soit bele;  
 et se il avoec lui l'an mainne  
 reïson avra droite et certaine  
 de desresnier et de mostrer  
 qu'ele an doit l'esprevier porter. (v.639-646)

mes je vos promet et otroi,  
 se vos armes m'aparelliez

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et vostre fille me bailliez  
demain a l'esprevier conquerre,  
que je l'an manrai an ma terre,  
se Dex la victoire m'an done;  
la li ferai porter corone,  
s'iert reïne de dis citez. (v. 658-665)

It is true that Enide is given no opportunity to refuse Erec, but how many medieval brides of noble birth did have such an opportunity? Chrétien tells us specifically that she is delighted to accept and that at least half her pleasure lies in contemplating the great position which will be hers.<sup>7</sup> She does indeed sit quietly while her parents express their feelings, but this is well-mannered; moreover, gratified self-esteem is an introverted not an extroverted emotion.

Grant joie font tuit par leanz:  
li peres an ert molt joianz,  
et la mere plore de joie,  
et la pucele ert tote coie,  
mes molt estoit joianz et liee  
qu'ele li estoit otroiee,  
por ce que preuz ert et cortois,  
et bien savoit qu'il seroit rois  
et ele meïsme enoree,  
riche reïne coronee. (v. 681-690)

Although, like many a young girl before and since, she blushed when suddenly confronted with a handsome young man

quant ele le chevalier voit,  
que onques mes veü n'avoit,  
un petit arriere s'estut:  
por ce qu'ele ne le quenut,  
vergoigne en ot et si rogi, (v. 443-447)

this is understandable when we recall the state of her gown

et tant estoit li chaines viez  
que as costez estoit perciez:  
povre estoit la robe dehors,  
mes desoz estoit biaux li cors. (v. 407-410)

and also remember that the strong sexual attraction between Erec and herself may have been instantly recognisable at this first meeting. When she has time to prepare her mind she shows no undue maidenly hesitation, although she is allowing Erec to make her the centre of attraction for a large crowd of people of every station

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La sele fu mise et li frains:  
desli'ée et desafublee  
est la pucele sus montee,  
qui de rien ne s'an fist proier. (v. 738-741)

After Erec's successful challenge we see her rejoicing in her new status and in the sparrowhawk which is her visible trophy. This passage at v.1300 comes from ms. B.N.Fr.1450 but there seems no reason to set it aside or to doubt that Enide was equally delighted with her bird and her lord:

qui d'une ailete d'un plovier  
paissoit sor son puind l'esprevier  
qui por la bataille ot esté;  
molt avoit le jor conquesté  
honor et joie et signorage,  
molt estoit lie en son corage  
de l'oïsel et de son signor.

The same picture is presented as they ride away together:

Erec chevalche lez le conte  
et delez lui sa bele amie,  
qui l'esprevier n'oblia mie:  
a son esprevier se deporté,  
nule autre richesce n'an porte (v.1420-1424)

Enide has no other riches because Erec, following her father's attitude, has refused to allow her to accept assistance from a mere count. Just as her father permitted none but a king's son to marry his daughter so Erec insists that only the queen is fit to dress his bride:

Demain droit a l'aube del jor,  
an tel robe et an tel ator,  
an manrai vostre fille a cort:  
je voel que ma dame l'atort  
de la soe robe demainne  
qui est de soie tainte an grainne. (v.1331-1336)

ne voldroie por nule rien  
qu'ele eüst d'autre robe point  
tant que la reïne li doint. (v.1356-1358)

Enide does not object. Her hawk is all the fortune she needs because, unlike the rich velvets and furs that have been offered to her, it is an indication of unique honour, and her inner pride is such that her image of herself does not need to be sustained by any trivial display. True, she blushes again which, as Chrétien says, was no wonder when she finds the eyes of Arthur's court upon her:

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Quant la bele pucele estrange  
vit toz les chevaliers au range  
qui l'esgardoient a estal,  
son chief ancline contre val;  
vergoigne an ot, ne fu mervoille,  
la face l'an devint vermoille;  
mes la honte si li avint  
que plus bele asez an devint. (v.1707-1714)

but I do not consider this irreconcilable with a good conceit of herself. She has been bred for years to a complete self-assurance, but has presumably had few opportunities as her father's daughter to practice perfect self-possession in such public situations. Nonetheless, she has sufficient composure to accept the place of honour and, according to ms.B.N.Fr.1450, her calm is unbroken when she receives the kiss of the White Stag, another public tribute to which she can believe herself entitled

vers lui se torná si l'acole.  
La pucele ne fu pas fole,  
bien vaut que li rois la baisast;  
vilaine fust s'il l'en pesast. (at v.1786)

Chrétien makes an interesting comment on the young couple as they start life together:

molt estoient igal et per  
de cortésie et de biauté  
et de grant debonereté.  
Si estoient d'une meniere,  
d'unes mors et d'une matiere  
que nus qui le voir volsist dire  
n'an poïst le meilleur eslire  
ne le plus bel ne le plus sage.  
Molt estoient d'igal corage  
et molt avenoit ansamble; (v.1484-1493)

Some platitude of this nature on a hero and heroine of romance might be expected, but it is possible to extend our interpretation of this statement of identity, and so to endow Erec and Enide with essentially the same fault in different aspects.

At first Enide's marriage fulfils all her expectations. In private, the description of her wedding night is totally and explicitly lacking in diffidence

Quant vuidée lor fu la chanbre,  
 lor droit randent a chascun manbre:  
 li oel d'esgarder se refont,  
 cil qui d'amor joie refont  
 et le message au cuer anvoient,  
 mes molt lor plect quanque il voient.  
 Apres le message des ialz  
 vient la dolçors, qui molt valt mialz,  
 des beisiers 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 jeus.  
 De l'amor qui est antr'ax deus  
 fu la pucele plus hardie:  
 de rien ne s'est accoardie,  
 tot sofrir, que qu'il li grevast;  
 ençois qu'ele se relevast,  
 ot perdu le non de pucele;  
 au matin fu dame novele. (v.2035-2054)

In public, at the tournament organised by King Arthur as part of the wedding celebrations, Erec's prowess is unequalled and Enide shines with reflected glory.

Or fu Erec de tel renon  
 qu'an ne parloit se de lui non;  
 nus hom n'avoit si boene grace. (v.2207-2209)

However, when he returns to his own country he abandons his duties as a knight for the pleasures of marriage, until everyone in the realm gossips about him and condemns him. Eventually this gossip reaches Enide who is greatly distressed by it. But what is the root of her distress?

Lasse, fet ele, con mar fui!  
 de mon païs que ving ça querre?  
 Bien me doit essorbir la terre,  
 quant toz li miaudres chevaliers,  
 li plus hardiz et li plus fiers,  
 qui onques fust ne cuens ne rois,  
 li plus læax, li plus cortois,  
 a del tot an tot relanque  
 por moi tote chevalerie.  
 Dons l'ai ge honi tot por voir;  
 nel volsisse por nul avoir. (v.2492-2502)



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Zaddy focusses on her reproaches to herself - he has lost his reputation on my account - but I think there is significance in her first rhetorical question. What did she seek when she left her country? Was her motive not the same as that of her parents when they gave her in marriage?

mes bien savoient ne por quant  
que lor fille an tel leu aloit  
don grant enors lor avandroit. (v.1448-1450)

If it was so then she is grieving now, at least in part, for her own disappointment. Zaddy blames her for not speaking to Erec as soon as she heard the gossip, but did it need gossip to make her aware of his idleness or was that merely the last intolerable blow to her pride? I am not saying that she was not also grieved for him, but when Erec compels her to explain her tears she lays considerable emphasis on her own loss of face and her suffering because she is widely blamed for his faults. Zaddy perceives Erec as unsympathetic to Enide's feelings throughout this scene, concentrating on his own problems and emotions, but I think the same criticism, to a lesser degree, may be levelled at Enide. She certainly wishes to see her husband restored to his former glory, but she cannot fairly be considered disinterested.

Cuidiez vos qu'il ne m'an enuit,  
quant j'oi dire de vos despit?  
Molt me poise, quant an l'an dit,  
et por ce m'an poise ancor plus  
qu'il m'an metent le blasme sus;  
blasmee an sui, ce poise moi,  
et d'ient tuit reison por coi,  
car si vos ai lacié et pris  
que vos an perdez vostre pris,  
ne ne querrez a el antandre.  
Or vos an estuet consoil prendre,  
que vos puissiez ce blasme estaindre  
et vostre premier los ataindre,  
car trop vos ai oi blasmer.  
Onques nel vos osai mostrer;  
sovantes foiz, quant m'an sovient,  
d'angoisse plorer me covient:  
si grant angoisse orainz en oi  
que garde prendre ne m'an soi,  
tant que je dis que mar i fustes. (v.2552-2571)

Throughout the next stages of the adventure Enide continually blames her own pride. Chrétien is always subtle in his narration, full of implication and inference, playing with his audience and providing them with material for argument. Consider his challenge at the end of the poem:

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Mes cuidiez vos que je vos die  
 quex acoisons le fist movoir?  
 Naïe; que bien savez le voir  
 et de ice, et d'autre chose  
 si con ge la vos ai escluse: (v.6420-6424)

Nonetheless, I think we must believe him when he makes a direct statement, and Enide tells us three times that her pride is the mainspring of the action. When preparing to leave court, believing herself to be banished by her husband, she admits

me trop m'a orgualz aleeve,  
 quant ge ai dit si grant oltraige;  
 an mon orguel avrai domaige  
 et molt est bien droiz que je l'aie:  
 ne set qu'est biens qui mal n'essaie. (v.2602-2606)

The fault of which she accused Erec is true and she still holds to what she said

Li miaudres qui onques fust nez  
 s'estoit si a moi atornez  
 que d'autre rien ne li chaloit (v.2597-2599)

but true selfless love would have dared his anger in order to help him. Enide was grieved as much on her own account as on his, and her own false pride made her speak to him in such a way that he is provoked to fury, rather than stirred to amendment.

Again, during her nightlong vigil with the eight horses, she reproaches herself for the fault which has led them both into this predicament. She does not blame Erec's original backsliding, but her own pride and presumption which have needlessly precipitated Erec into danger and herself into distress. However, she is making progress. Whereas in the first speech she bemoaned her loss, she now regrets having insulted a lord who was more worthy than she was willing to credit. Her own feelings are moving to second place.

Lasse, fet ele, si mar vi  
 mon orguel et ma sorcuïdance!  
 Savoir pooie sanz dotance  
 que tel chevalier ne meïllor  
 ne savoit l'an de mon seignor.  
 Bien le savoie. Or le sai mialz;  
 car ge l'ai veü a mes ialz,  
 car trois ne cinc armez ne dote.  
 Honie soit ma leingue tote,  
 qui l'orguel et la honte dist  
 dont mes cors a tel honte gist. (v.3102-3112)

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A third time, when she believes Erec dead after the fight with the giant, she accuses herself of pride in a speech which she intends as her final confession before suicide, the ultimate denial of her own self-importance:

Ha, fet ele, dolante Enyde,  
de mon seignor sui omecide;  
par ma folie l'ai ocis:  
ancor fust or mes sires vis,  
se ge, come outrageuse et fole,  
n'eüsse dite la parole  
por coi mes sires ça s'esmut;  
ainz boens teisirs home ne nut,  
mes parlers nuist mainte foiee:  
ceste chose ai bien essaiee  
et esprovee an mainte guise. (v. 4585-4595)

Mes qu'ai ge dit, trop ai mespris,  
qui la parole ai manteüe  
don mes sire a mort receüe,  
la mortel parole antoschiee  
qui me doit estre reprochiee,  
et je requenuis et otroi  
que nus n'i a corpses fors moi;  
je seule an doi estre blasmee. (v. 4606-4613)

In reading each of these speeches Zaddy concentrates more on Enide's repeated self-accusation than on the fault of which she accuses herself. She asserts that 'it is the excessive deference she feels for Erec that keeps Enide from speaking to him of his sloth, and then makes her handle the matter so badly when she is forced into discussing it',<sup>8</sup> because 'Erec is a formidable person for a shy and diffident girl to have to take to task'.<sup>9</sup> I believe that this is an oversimplification which denies Enide the complexity with which Chrétien endows his other principal characters. To see these three episodes as continuing and equal examples of Enide's diffidence is to ignore both the intervals of time between them and the events which take place in those intervals. It is perfectly possible for Enide to continue to reproach herself for having acted so as to destroy their happiness, first when she believes herself banished, secondly when she believes Erec to be in mortal danger and thirdly when she believes him to be dead and to reconcile this recurrent and deepening sense of guilt with her own spiritual progress. If, in Zaddy's scheme, she is concurrently overcoming her diffidence and learning to assert herself in the intervening time, she shows no sign of development in these three speeches.

There is surely considerable significance in the sequence of episodes

in which Enide plays a leading role. In her hurt pride she reproaches Erec and almost immediately acknowledges that she expressed herself unworthily and deserves to be exiled. Erec's orders to her, as they set out, are harshly worded and, confronted with his furious temper, she is probably right to be afraid to disobey. Chrétien has already told us that

Folie n'est pas vasselages;  
de ce fist molt Erec que sages (v.231-232)

But, remembering that the charge she has quoted to her husband is recreantise it is interesting to see that Enide nerves herself to defy him in the first instance by an appeal to her own courage in similar terms:

Dex! serai je donc si coarde  
que dire ne li oserai?  
Ja si coarde ne serai;  
jel li dirai, nel leirai pas. (v.2836-2839)

In her soliloquy before the second warning I detect again the courage that stems from family pride, pride in her inability to do less than her duty:

Ha! Dex, comant li dirai gié?  
Il m'ocirra. Asez m'ocie!  
ne leirai que je ne li die. (v.2976-2978)

When Erec orders Enide to sleep while he keeps watch she opposes him without hesitation and without heartsearching. What is lacking from this scene is not, as Zaddy suggests, some of Enide's diffidence but any manifestation of Erec's temper. Enide has no cause, at this moment, for physical fear of him.

The next episode is the meeting with the amorous count. A diffident young bride who receives an improper proposal accompanied by threats of violence in the presence of the husband whose own violent temper has brought her into this impasse might react in a variety of ways, but it seems unlikely that her natural timidity should ally itself with her immediate terrors to produce instantly a plot to save herself and her husband, combined with the acting ability to deceive her would-be seducer. Enide demonstrates a talent for the rapid formulation and execution of a plan, coupled with a ready tongue; the demand for reassurance from the count is a master-stroke:

Sire, fet ele, bien le croi,  
mes avoir an voel vostre foi,  
que vos me tandroiz chieremant;  
ne vos an cresrai autremant. (v.3397-3400)

We should note that three times in this dialogue Chrétien introduces the idea of pride. The count accuses Enide of disdain

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Ne me deigneriez amer,  
dame? fet il: trop estes fiere.  
Par losange ne par proiere  
ne feriez rien que je vuelle? (v.3338-3341)

Enide denies the accusation

Ne vos ai rien dit par orguel (v.3360)

but tells him that Erec's pride will drive him to protect her honour

mes sires me voldra desfandre,  
qui molt est fiers et corageus. (v.3382-3383)

Enide now takes the whole responsibility on herself, sets aside the opportunity to advance her own position at Erec's expense, and shows no hesitation in organising him for his own safety. Since he has not thought to issue any prohibitions concerning her behaviour in the lodging, he accepts the warning with a good grace although he reverts when they are safely mounted and on the road.

Zaddy would then have Enide revert to her original state and sees her defiance of Erec before the fight with Guivret as the ultimate struggle with her own diffidence. To do this we must accept her statements here as being essentially identical to those during the adventures with the robbers, and must assume that she has made no progress in conquering her diffidence despite the intervening events. I understand her quite differently. On the first occasion she is concerned for Erec's safety. If she does not speak

Or iert ja morz ou pris mes sire (v.2830)

which would leave her in a difficult situation. But now, since Erec has given her no cause since his original accusation to believe that he feels any love for her, she assumes that in rousing his temper again she risks her own life. In plain words she tells us that she fears to provoke his anger

D'irai li donc tot en apert?  
Nenil. Po quoi? Je n'oseraie,  
que mon seignor correceeroie;  
et se mes sires se corroce,  
il me leira an ceste broce  
seule et cheitive et esgaree (v.3728-3733)

and that she has maintained silence solely because, after weighing the consequences, she foresees her own death as the inevitable result of speech. It is not the instinctive silence of diffidence that she must confront now, but the decision to sacrifice her life for his.

Enide has little to do in the encounter with King Arthur, but we should note in passing that whereas Erec is unrecognisable to Kay and Gawain because of his battered condition, Enide is at pains to avoid recognition by the court where she had previously enjoyed such honour

mes Keus pas lui ne reconut,  
 car a ses armes ne parut  
 nule veraie conuissance:  
 tant cos d'espees et de lance  
 avoit sor son escu eüz  
 que toz li tainz an ert cheuz.  
 Et la dame par grant veidie,  
 por ce qu'ele ne voloit mie  
 qu'il la coneüst ne veüst,  
 ausi con s'ele le feüst  
 por le chaut ou por la poldriere  
 mist sa guinple devant sa chiere. (v.3951-3962)

though she sacrifices her pride when Erec is prepared to accept the physical comfort he so sorely needs.

In the episode with Limors the temptation offered is specifically to her pride. She believes herself to be a widow and therefore legally free to remarry, but she cannot be dissuaded from her devotion to Erec by the prospect of worldly splendour.

Sovaigne vos de quel poverte  
 vos est granz richesce aoverte:  
 povre estiez, or estes riche;  
 n'est pas fortune vers vos chiche,  
 qui tel enor vos a donee  
 c'or seroiz contesse clamee. (v.4761-4766)

When Guivret rescues them she demonstrates that she no longer cares for her own dignity above Erec's needs

Enyde ont bailliee une mure,  
 qui perdu ot son palefroi;  
 mes n'an fu pas an grant esfroi,  
 onques n'i pansa par sanblant;  
 bele mule ot et bien anblant  
 qui a grant eise la porta,  
 et ce molt la reconforta  
 qu'Erec ne s'esmaiot de rien  
 einz li disoit qu'il garroit bien. (v.5136-5144)

Enide has now totally subdued her desire for temporal prestige to her love for her husband while Erec has, as Zaddy demonstrates, contrived to conquer his own fault without losing face in his own eyes or those of the world. In his speech of reconciliation he simultaneously submits his own pride to Enide and forgives her the pride which caused her to speak as she did:

Or voel estre d'or en avant,  
 ausi con j'estoie devant  
 tot a vostre comandemant;  
 et se vos rien m'avez mesdit  
 je le vos pardoing tot et quit  
 del forfet et de la parole. (v.4888-4893)

This interpretation has the advantage of allowing Erec to forgive Enide for her real fault instead of assuming that even here he is saving his own face and has still failed to comprehend her character.

This reading of Enide's character necessitates a measure of disagreement with Zaddy's interpretation of the Joie de la Cour adventure. Mabonagrain and his beloved are clearly intended to reflect the situation of Erec and Enide, and to reflect it in a distorting mirror which will emphasise the beauty of the true image. All four start with a self-centred disregard of the feelings of others, which causes suffering to those around them; we may compare the grief of Evrain's court with the grief at the court of Erec's father when Erec and Enide set out alone. Erec and the maiden both lay undue emphasis on the pleasures of love, to the detriment of their social obligations. But to say that Mabonagrain is as diffident as Enide cannot be justified. Diffidence does not maintain its pride by slaying an endless succession of challengers and displaying their several heads, nor does it argue the necessity of killing one's best friend in order to escape a charge of cowardice

Bien vos puis dire et acointier  
 que je n'ai nul ami si chier  
 vers cui je m'an fainsisse pas;  
 onques mes d'armes ne fui las  
 ne de conbatre recreüz. (v.6053-6057)

Compare the attitude of Yvain and Gvain in their judicial duel and their mutual anxiety to yield in order to spare each other pain; remembering these preux chevaliers we cannot cite Mabonagrain as an example of diffidence. He as well as his beloved, resembles Erec in that he has allowed love to put him in a false position and, like Erec, he defends that position tenaciously. Unlike Erec, however, he cannot escape from it with his honour unscathed. Enide's cousin resembles Enide quite as much as she does Erec in the worldly pride which she shows by tying to herself a champion whom she believes to be unmatched, but she is not willing to sacrifice her desires for his sake, and

indeed Mabonagrain implies that his promise was won by an element of trickery: he never suspected what she would demand.

Reisons fu que je remainisse,  
ainz que ma fiance mantisse,  
ja ne l'eüsse je plevi.  
Des que ge soi le boen et vi  
a la rien que ge oi plus chiere  
n'an dui feire sanblant ne cheire  
que nule rien me despleüst (v.6029-6035)

Enide in her redeemed state is prepared to let Erec risk his life without protest, trusting his judgement

et cil vers Enyde se beisse  
qui delez lui grant duel feisoit,  
ne por quant s'ele teisoit;  
car diax que l'an face de boche  
ne vaut neant, s'au cuer ne toche (v.5778-5782)

After Mabonagrain's release she leaves the celebrations and slips away alone to comfort the disconsolate damsel. She is now able to put sympathy for others above her public image

Molt fist Enyde que cortoise:  
por ce que pansive la vit  
et seule seoir sor le lit,  
li prist talanz que ele iroit  
a li, si li demanderoit  
de son afeire et de son estre,  
et anquerroit s'il pooit estre  
qu'ele del suen li redeüst,  
mes que trop ne li desseüst.  
Seule i cuide Enyde aler,  
que nelui n'i cuida mener (v.6146-6156)

and this at a moment when

Ce jor se pot Erec vanter  
c'onques tel joie ne fu faite (v.6118-6119)

a time for legitimate pride, as Chrétien is careful to observe.

As Zaddy has proved, this whole story shows the development of Erec and Enide from youthful immaturity to readiness for kingship. I repeat my contention that they are an exactly matched couple, in imperfection as in virtue, and that pride, in differing quality, is the underlying fault of each.



## READING MEDIEVAL STUDIES

By the end of the story Enide has forsaken her hollow image of worldly honour for the reality of self-sacrifice to another's good although, in a reassuringly human touch, Chrétien shows that her character is not entirely changed. After she has heard her cousin's account of her clandestine affair with Mabonagrain, Enide may be pardoned for the quiet satisfaction with which she underlines her own socially acceptable marriage

Bele cosine, il m'epousa,  
si que mes peres bien le sot  
et ma mere qui joie en ot.  
Tuit le sorent et lié an furent  
nostre parant, si com il durent;  
liéz an fu meïsmes li cuens,  
car il est chevaliers si buens  
qu'an ne porroit meillor trover. (v.6242-6249)

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NOTES

I have used the edition of Mario Roques in the series Les Classiques Français du Moyen Age, Paris, 1955.

1. Z.P. Zaddy: Chrétien Studies, University of Glasgow, 1973.
2. op.cit., p.10.
3. op.cit., p.22.
4. op.cit., p.23.
5. op.cit., p.25.
6. op.cit., p.27, quoting v.2585-2606.
7. Compare Froissart's account of the reaction of seven-year-old Princess Isabelle of France, when she received a proposal of marriage from the ambassadors of Richard II: 'Sire, repondit la jeune fille, et de li tout avisee sans conseil d'autrui, je le verrai volontiers, car on m'a bien dit que je serai une grande dame'.
8. Zaddy, op.cit., p.31.
9. op.cit., p.30.