The Warrior Gets Married:  
Constructing the Masculine Hero in *Beowulf* and Chrétien de Troyes’ *Erec et Enide*

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This dissertation titled
The Warrior Gets Married: Constructing the Masculine Hero in *Beowulf* and Chrétien de Troyes' *Erec et Enide*

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ABSTRACT

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The Warrior Gets Married: Constructing the Masculine Hero in Beowulf and Chrétien de Troyes' Erec et Enide

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The hero that emerged in twelfth-century romance appears to respond to a different masculine ideal than the heroes of genres with earlier roots. What changing conditions of the social construction of masculinity contributed to the emergence of a new literary hero? Comparing Chrétien de Troyes’ first Arthurian romance, Erec et Enide, with the Danish adventure that comprises the first two-thirds of Beowulf through the lens of masculinity reveals much about the hero’s changing initiation into manhood. Each receives the property and status that recognizes his manhood at the end of his exploits, suggesting that his performance has demonstrated accepted masculine behavior. The heroes’ actions are measured against an array of others—beasts, women, boys, and old men—not only demonstrating their superiority over these others but also absorbing some of their qualities. Both heroes perform a manhood that balances these qualities with traditional masculine qualities as reflected in concepts of naturalized gender and of socially constructed warrior codes.

The changes apparent in the hero of romance reflect the ways that marriage was changing in Chrétien’s time. At the same time that aristocratic marriage strategies had begun to favor the eldest son, the church was redefining marriage in canon law, making marriage formation a personal choice that initiated a relationship that would develop into
a loving marital bond. Thus, romance heroes at first reflect the desires of young knights who must make their way by their own skills to attract wives of means. The spectacle of manhood becomes emphasized—the visual display of martial skills as well as bodily attractiveness. Further, the romance plot reflects the association of maturity with a man’s growth into the responsibilities of a husband. Whereas Beowulf has only to perform a public masculinity, the romance hero has to reconcile his public responsibilities with these new private expectations. Despite these differences, when closely examined, the two heroes reveal an adherence to a surprisingly similar masculine ideal. To demonstrate manhood, both heroes must balance a ferocious prowess with an internalized feminine voice of forward-looking wisdom.

Approved: _____________________________________________________________

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INTRODUCTION

In Geoffrey of Monmouth’s 1138 History of the Kings of Britain, after recounting centuries of battles and treacheries, Geoffrey strikes a remarkably different tone when he arrives at the story of Arthur. At the celebration of Arthur’s coronation, he says, “The knights planned an imitation battle and competed together on horseback, while their womenfolk watched from the top of the city walls and aroused them to passionate excitement by their flirtatious behavior” (230). This moment of romanticized history crystallizes much of the change in the depiction of the literary warrior that was to take place in the twelfth century.¹ The separation of female spectator and male combatant foretells countless moments in romances that follow when the lady watches from afar as her champion performs on the artificial space of the tournament field. The women’s role as spectators, the emphasis on the feminine gaze, implies a departure from the unspectated masculine world of Anglo-Saxon literature. The masculine skills of the fighting man seem to be consciously turned into performance, in a spectacle that has an audience of women and an overtly sexual purpose. Thus, Geoffrey’s history projects into an imagined past the values emerging in his age—values that will be reflected in the romances of Chrétien de Troyes and that stand in contrast with those represented in Anglo-Saxon heroic poetry from only a century earlier.

As suggested by Geoffrey’s account of the tournament celebrating Arthur’s coronation, literary sources show a significant change in the manner of constructing manhood in the times before and after the Norman Conquest. Whereas the Anglo-Saxon

¹ Robert Hanning uses this same passage to demonstrate the rise of the individual in twelfth-century romance (55).
warrior performed his masculinity almost exclusively in a homosocial context with direct implications for the maintenance, and even survival, of the warrior group, the Norman French knight performs masculinity in the presence of women, often with little or no concern for the immediate practical effect of his actions. These very different models of masculinity are represented by Beowulf, the only surviving long heroic poem in Old English, and Erec et Enide, Chrétien’s earliest extant romance. A key historical development may account for the changes that occur in the construction of the masculine hero between the times of these two poems: a redefinition of marriage as result of a jockeying for power between the church and powerful aristocratic families.

In Beowulf, marriage is purely a matter of political maneuvering, by which powerful men try to achieve alliances by the exchange of daughters as peace pledges, and the question of marriage never arises in reference to the poem’s hero. In contrast, the marriage of the hero stands at the center of the action in Erec et Enide. As Chrétien begins writing romances, a struggle between the church and powerful aristocratic families to control the conditions of marriage is being resolved in canon law. While the legal authority of the church does not end the power struggle, especially at the highest levels, the ripples of change that emanate from the ongoing debate create a new context in which to consider masculinity. Marriage becomes not just a primary marker of manhood but becomes the motivation, both directly and indirectly, for the kind of performance demonstrated in Geoffrey’s depiction of the celebration at Arthur’s coronation. The literary heroes that stand on either side of this divide reflect the conflict implied by the shifting ideal of manhood. Though representatives of entirely separate cultures, Beowulf
and Chrétien’s Erec share the masculine culture of the warrior. While *Erec et Enide* explicitly exposes the tensions that marriage brings to the surface in the construction of masculinity, similar tensions lie beneath the surface in *Beowulf*. 
CHAPTER 1: BEOWULF: PERFORMING MASCULINITY FOR MEN

While the masculine nature of Beowulf may seem almost too obvious to discuss, close examination of the poem reveals the seams in the masculine world, suggesting the ways that masculinity may have been constructed in pre-Conquest England. There is wide critical agreement that at the end of the second episode, when Beowulf receives his patrimony in Hygelac’s hall, gaining social recognition of his status, he has crossed the threshold of manhood. The poem, however, then elides the next fifty years that would dramatize the period of manhood. Instead it leaps ahead to the time of the elderly Beowulf, much as the poem’s beginning elides the masculine heroics of Hrothgar to take us to the elderly, somewhat de-masculinized king. Thus, the poem appears to be most interested in the boundaries of masculinity. But at the same time that it explores these boundaries, each episode of the poem also complicates the issue of manhood itself. As the first two episodes of the poem demonstrate the emergence of Beowulf into manhood, for instance, he grapples with enemies who are decidedly not men—the monstrous boy, Grendel, and the monstrous woman, Grendel’s mother. Standing in relation to these foes, Beowulf proves that he is not a boy nor a woman nor a monster, yet, paradoxically, it seems that he is a man only insofar as he integrates the qualities of each. In a poem that looks back nostalgically to a time of heroic ancestors, the fact that this hero succeeds with an ambiguous manhood draws attention to the areas of tension that define this model of masculinity for an eleventh-century English audience.
The Audience of Beowulf

The same questions that attend determining a date for Beowulf\(^2\) complicate the attempts to determine or describe the audience for the poem. Attempts have often focused on that audience’s knowledge, particularly its knowledge of Christianity. Scholars who consider the poem’s oral origins posit an audience able to understand the allusive nature of the narrative, particularly the digressions. Such an audience is assumed to have a thorough understanding of weaponry (Caroline Brady, 108-9 qtd in Overing 43), of the dynamics of feuds (Whitelock 13-19), and of the legendary heroes historical events (Whitelock 34). The audience that is most easily constructed from these analyses is, of course, male—an imagined mead-hall audience of warriors like that depicted in Beowulf. Eric John, for example, identifies the audience as “retainers” because of its interest in “swords, feuds, and loot” (74). While these observations suggest a male audience, in the poem itself women are present at the hall celebrations where such storytelling takes place. Wealhtheow is prominent, and the day after Beowulf has defeated Grendel she appears in the hall among a “mægþa hōse” (“band of women”; 924b). \(^3\)

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\(^2\) According to the range of scholarly arguments, Beowulf could have been composed any time between 670 and 1025, a range of dates encompassing nearly the entire Old English period.

\(^3\) Translations of Old English throughout the dissertation are my own, except where indicated in the citation. I use others’ translations when summarizing their arguments or when the translation provides an interpretation seems particularly apt. I have tried to make the translation as literal as possible and still be comprehensible. At times I have left passages untranslated when the meaning seemed adequately clear in context. When I characterize the translations as mine, it is with the awareness that I am indebted to many who came before, including the text and glosses of Beowulf of Frederick Klaeber as well as Bosworth and Toller’s An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary in its online version. But I also have been guided by Howell Chickering’s and Roy Liuzza’s translations of Beowulf. Finally, and most importantly I acknowledge my two patient teachers, Dr. R. Vance Ramsey, under whose tutelage, I, cnihtwesende, wrote my first translation of Beowulf, to which I have referred regularly, and Dr. Josephine Bloomfield, who has taught me much about the language and patiently kept me from going astray.
Focusing on the version of the poem preserved in the manuscript further complicates the question of audience. Once the poem is written down, it brings into being an audience different from that for any supposed oral performance. As Nicholas Howe points out, “We must recognize that any inscription of *Beowulf* in a manuscript creates a new context for the poem and thus shifts the grounds for its interpretation” (215). Every time it is copied or recast, it is both produced for and produces a new audience. The poem has often been described as a nostalgic look at the past, but from what vantage point and to whose interest? What audience can be constructed for the surviving manuscript? It is not a mead-hall audience of warriors, but it is clearly an audience with an interest in the story of a hero, and perhaps in aristocratic warrior culture. Alcuin’s lament in 797, “What has Ingeld to do with Christ?” implies that even monks were entertained by the heroic legends. An appreciative audience might have some of the knowledge referred to in previous analyses, but surely a lack of knowledge would not exclude one from an interest in the story of a hero’s adventures.

David Townsend further problematizes the issue of audience for heroic narratives in a discussion of the Latin *Waltharius*. The poem addresses a homosocial audience of *fratres*, yet Townsend argues that such an audience of medieval churchmen would represent a variety of perspectives, allowing the possibility of a contemporary reading that did not necessarily identify with Walther and resists “the norms of dominant patriarchal narrative patterns” (82). Similar thinking perhaps may be applied to readers of *Beowulf*. 
Interestingly, in *Language, Sign, and Gender in Beowulf*, Gillian R. Overing suggests that the metonymic and woven interlace pattern of the narrative implies a more “feminine” audience. Both the overt image of weaving and the unclosed meaning of metonymy invoke the feminine: “Interlace and the metonymic mode share the same capacity for indefinite growth and change, a similar resistance to definition and closure” (32). Overing’s approach seems to allow for an audience that does not need to close the meaning of the poem but that possesses, to a certain degree, an ability to be in ambiguity. At the same time that she says the poem implies a “feminine” audience, however, in both the introduction and afterword of *Language, Sign, and Gender in Beowulf*, Overing asserts that *Beowulf* “is a profoundly masculine poem” (xxiii, 111), adding in the latter that the poem is, “enacting and depicting masculine desire from both within and without” (111).

The ambiguous historical context for the poem that makes identifying a specific audience problematic requires that a reader attend to the audience constructed by the poem, at least in terms of its interest in masculinity. The paradox of a feminine form expressing a masculine ideal implied by Overing is reflected in the first episode, which shows the vulnerability of an apparently unshakeable patriarchal structure.

Episode I: A Pervasively Masculine World

The opening passage of *Beowulf*, describing Hrothgar’s ancestry, establishes a profoundly masculine context for the poem—violent and patriarchal. The poem begins with a reference to the legendary “þēodcyninga” (“great kings”; 2) of the Scyldings.
Scyld arrives in the land of the Danes mysteriously and grows powerful in total absence of any female agency. One effect of his mysterious, solitary arrival is the separation of his origin from a natural association with a mother; if the implication is that he is delivered to the Danes by God, his origin is even more firmly established as male-generated. The poem thus begins with a seemingly self-generating patrilineal world, where men have usurped the generative power of the female—an idea also inherent in the concept of “God the father.” Since Scyld’s advent also is absent a physical father, his story is one of naturally emergent manhood: “wōox under wolcnum, weorðmyndum þāh” (“he grew under the heavens, in honors prospered”; 8), subjecting neighboring tribes to his power. Before the poem reveals his origin, it reveals that he has used violence to subdue these tribes—knocking them from their mead benches and terrorizing them. When subsequently the audience hears of his end and return to the sea by a grateful people, his funeral at sea is “swā hē selfa bæd” (“as he himself ordered”; 29b). He is a self-contained vessel of masculine power.

The brief recounting of Scyld’s glory that begins the poem is punctuated by the formulaic assertion “þæt wæs gōd cyning!” (11b). The very next words double the masculine emphasis of that line, describing his warrior heir to power, Beowulf, as “eafera” (“a son/boy”; 12a) and repeating seven lines later “Scyldes eafera” (19a). Michael D. C. Drout says that “Beowulf begins with successful inheritances” (199), with a seemingly uncomplicated succession of only one son per generation following the arrival of Scyld and his glorious life and death. Beowulf, the son of Scyld, not the hero of the poem, is described explicitly as “þone God sende” (“the one God sent”; 13b)—
God who is in turn called “Līffrēa” (“Lord of life”; 15b) as well as “wuldres Wealdend” (“Ruler of Glory”; 16a). Thus, the power of generation is emphasized as male—ascribed, not surprisingly, to God the Father—and associated with lordly power of the succession of kings. The descriptions of Beowulf go on to emphasize not only his violent power, but his maleness: he acts properly as a “(geong g)uma” (“young man”; 20a) to distribute his father’s possessions. After Scyld’s death, “wæs on burgum Bēowulf Scyldinga / lēof lēodcyning / longe þrāge / folcum gefrǣge” (“was in the strongholds Beowulf of the Scyldings dear people’s-king for a long time among the people famous”; 53-55a). Af

After Beowulf “onwōc / hēah Healfdene; hēold þenden lifde, / gamol ond gūthrēouw, glæde Scyldingas (“arose the great Healfdene who held while he lived, old and battle-fierce, the glorious Scyldings”; 56b-58). Drout infers that “Beowulf and Healfdane are both the only sons of their respective fathers” because “we have no reason to assume otherwise” (200). In each case, the successor appears by his own agency.

Drout suggests that this smooth succession that begins the poem reflects the uncomplicated merging of blood and worth. For Drout, “blood inheritance happens through the direct agency of women via biological reproduction” (203), but in the case of the poem’s opening story of Scyld, the “smoothness” seems to be a divine (or artistic) erasing of women from the succession.

In the enumeration of Healfdene’s children, the first mention of a woman in the Scylding line occurs, but the lineage continues to be male dominated. The poet describes Healfdene’s daughter in terms of her association with men: She is a “cwēn, / Heaðo-Scilfingas healsgebedda” (“queen, bed-companion of the Battle Scylfing”; 62-63). In the
threatening world of these opening lines, Healfdene’s daughter, like violence and tribute-paying, becomes another way to define the power of men. As the poem approaches the present crisis by tracing the rise to greatness of Hrothgar, bypassing for the moment the tragic history of the king’s brothers, the language continues to be dominated by references to men and sons of men through the description of the building of Heorot (1-85). The world that Beowulf the Geat enters—the world of the Danes that he literally enters and the world of the poem that these lines create—is masculine through and through.

The Generative Masculine Voice

The narrative voice in this opening passage further enhances the profoundly masculine tone of the poem. The narrator assumes the role of the scop, the creator of the narrative itself. The generative role of scop is constructed as male in Anglo-Saxon poetry, one of the non-warrior male roles in the world of the poem. Within the poem itself, the Dane who weaves Beowulf’s story while returning from Grendel’s mere is characterized as “cyninges þegn / guma gilphlædan” (“the king’s thane, a man laden with songs”; 867b-68a).

In addition, the narrative voice might be constructed as masculine because of its authority. Stanley B. Greenfield characterizes the voice as “authenticating,” to suggest that the voice “validates the way or ways in which it understands and wishes its audience to understand” the events it recounts (99). The narrator establishes authority early in the poem through judgmental assertions, beginning with the assertion about Scyld that
concludes the poem’s opening passage: “þæt wæs gōd cyning!” (11b). Furthermore, the narrator authoritatively places the characters’ actions in the context of correct behavior. This is also demonstrated in the opening genealogy when the narrator judges Beowulf’s proper treatment of his retainers: “Swā sceal (geong g)uma gōde gewyrcean” (20).

Notably, both of these early judgments by the narrator emphasize proper masculine behavior. Approximately 150 lines later, a somewhat parallel structure voices disapproval of the Danes’ pagan customs: “Swylc wæs þēaw hyra, / hǣþenra hyht” (“Such was their custom, the heathens’ hope”; 178b-179a). Such formulaic judgments in the poem build in the reader a sense of being in the hands of an omniscient storyteller.

At the same time that he establishes an authoritative, omniscient voice, the narrator localizes the story by beginning, “WĒ GĀR-DEna . . . þrym gefrūnon” (“We have heard of the glory of the Spear-Danes”; 1-2). The narrator then is like Beowulf, who has heard of the Danes’ problem with Grendel, or Hrothgar, who has heard that Beowulf has the strength of thirty men. This device associates the narrative voice with the many voices in the narrative. In the poem’s first episode, only masculine voices are heard, and the male voices dramatized in the narrative share the authoritative, engendering power of the narrator. The way in which individual perspectives weave together an authoritative narrative of the future is emphasized early in the poem when Beowulf verbally spars with Unferth. Unferth reports what he has heard about Beowulf’s swimming match with Breca, but his version is corrected by Beowulf, who then is moved to assert his boast to defeat Grendel. Together their stories serve to create the Beowulf who will defend Heorot.
The two dominant voices in the first third of the poem, Beowulf’s and Hrothgar’s, demonstrate authority and engendering power like that possessed by the narrator. Each provides authoritative narrative of what he has heard and seen. At the same time, like the narrator or scop, the two men seem to weave the narrative of their lives, assuming a generative power that creates the future. Thus, the male voices that dominate the first episode will be seen to have an engendering power that parallels the apparently male engendered line of Danish succession.

For example, Wulfgar and Hrothgar have constructed Beowulf in heroic form before Beowulf faces Hrothgar and speaks to him. Wulfgar tells Hrothgar, “nō ðū him wearne getēoh” because the Geats “wyrðe þinceað” and Beowulf “dēah” (“give no refusal to him” because the Geats “appear worthy” and Beowulf “is able”; 366-69). Then Hrothgar remembers Beowulf “cnihtwesende” (“being a boy”; 372b) and says that the “eafora . . . heard” of Ecgtheow has come (“brave son”; 375b-76a). Hrothgar has heard from seafarers—the same source of information that Beowulf has about Hrothgar’s difficulties—that Beowulf has “heaþorōf” (“battle fame”; 381) and “þrītiges / manna mægencræft” in his handgrip (“thirty men’s strength”; 379b-380a). Hrothgar concludes,

Hine hālig God /
for ārstafum üs onsende /
to West-Denum, þæs ic wēn hæbbe, /
wið Grendles gryre. Ic þēm gōdan sceal
for his mōdþræce mādmas bēodon. (381b-85)
Holy God / In ‘an awe-inspiring sign of his power’⁴ has sent him to us, / to the West-Danes, of which I had hope, against Grendel’s terror. I to him must, for his courage, offer treasures.

Wulfgar sends Beowulf into the hall because Hrothgar “ēower æþelu can” (“your noble ancestry knows”; 392). From that knowledge, and his awareness of the obligation he is owed, he has constructed the warrior he needs for his situation, in essence engendering the hero that he needs from the boy he remembers. Beowulf also bears the reflected glory of the men of the Geats, “þā sēlestan, snotere ceorlas” (“those best, wise men”; 416), who advised him to go to Hrothgar “forþan hīe mægenes cræft mīnne cūpon” (“because they knew my might’s power”; 418). His retrospective reporting of the Geats’ best men’s predictions furthers the construction of the hero that is required.

Beowulf demonstrates a model of engendering speech through his boasts, a characteristic speech in the warrior tradition. The warrior’s boast takes the form of a declarative statement that narrates the future, usually asserting that one of two things will happen. For instance, to the coast guard, Beowulf boldly asserts that he can provide advice to Hrothgar that will relieve him of the burden of Grendel’s attacks, adding that the other option is for the Danes to continue suffering. His most direct boast follows his accepting the cup from Wealhtheow, when he twice expresses his intent to defeat Grendel or die trying:

\[
\text{Ic þæt hogode, þā ic on holm gestāh, sǣbāt gesæt mid mīnra secga gedriht,}
\]

⁴ The translation of “arstafum” is one suggested Josephine Bloomfield (“Benevolent” 140).
I this resolved when I from home set out, a sea-boat boarded, with my band of men, that I, entirely, for your people would perform your wishes, or with the slaughtered perish in the enemy’s hard grip. I must do a valiant deed or my end-day in this meadhall expect.

Beowulf both reflects on his intent upon leaving home and re-asserts his continuing intent. However, this bold boast seems to be the result of a structured performance in the hall that includes the participation not only of Unferth, but of the queen.

Beowulf’s previous boast had been less assertive. In his first formal speech to Hrothgar Beowulf requests permission to cleanse Heorot and expresses an expectation of his success. The other option, the possibility of his defeat by Grendel, is expressed indirectly: “gif hē wealdan mōt” (“if he [Grendel] might control”; 442b). The contingent nature of his boast reflects his recognition of a power outside of himself: “ðǣr gelȳfan sceal / Dryhtnes dōme sē þe hine dēað nimeð” (“there he must leave to the lord’s judgment the one whom death takes”; 440b-41). Interestingly, in this instance, the power is “Dryhntes dōme” and not “wyrd.” Beowulf defers to a higher power in terms that reflect the comitatus relationship, assigning control of events to a masculine power, reminiscent of the generative power of God the Father alluded to in the poem’s opening.
But even with that contingency, Beowulf’s confidence in his ability to cleanse Heorot dominates the scene—even if that cleansing is through sacrifice. His subsequent exchange of words with Unferth leads to his overt expression of the other half of the boast that anyone who wishes will be able to enter the mead hall the next morning (601-06). His complete, aggressive boast quoted above follows his acceptance of the cup from Wealhtheow.

Furthermore, masculine voice and violence become intertwined. Beowulf expresses his plan to fight Grendel as a kind of discussion: “wið þām āglǣcan, āna gehēgan ðing wið þyrse” (425-26a). The construction of “gehēgan ðing” would seem to mean literally, “hold a meeting.” Thus, Beowulf’s speech is directly associated with action, in this case the violent action of fighting the monster. In his subsequent speech to Hrothgar, Beowulf boasts that he will grapple without weapons “lāð wið lāþum” (“foe against foe”; 440a), interpreting the implied meeting—“thing”—as this hand-to-hand fight, suggesting a fulfillment of Hrothgar’s hearing of his strength of thirty men.

Before having a meeting with Grendel, Beowulf has fighting words with Unferth—who “unband beadurūne” (“unbound battle-runes”; 501). Helene Damico calls Unferth’s taunts “an oral violence” that “attempts to destroy heroic identity” (7). In fact, Unferth opens by directly questioning Beowulf’s identity: “Eart þū sē Bēowulf, þe wið Brecan wunne?” (506). He then constructs a version of Beowulf’s competition with Breca that, like Hrothgar’s construction of the hero, is based on hearsay. Unferth says that he has heard of Beowulf’s failure in this venture and suggests similar failure

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5 Liuzza’s translation makes the statement of action even more directly into a kind of proposed speech act: “I shall by myself have / a word or two with that giant” (66).
against Grendel. Unferth’s challenge, as has often been noted, causes Beowulf to reconfirm his boast and increase his anger for the coming fight. First, his own description of the match reconstructs his heroic identity. Then, he boasts that he will show Grendel that the “eafoð ond ellen” of the Geats is “ungeāra nū” (“strength and courage” of the Geats is “not ready now”; 602) so that anyone will be able to enter the mead hall in the morning. The interaction of the two males effectively completes the generation of the warrior that is needed to bring about the desired future.

Unmasculine Speech

Contrasting with the masculine speech that actively creates the future, other patterns of speech in the poem are more reflective or passive. For example, the lament provides a potentially clear feminine contrast with the boast, both in terms of its reactive rather than predictive nature, and in its general expression of powerlessness. Joyce Hill identifies the mourning woman as the “dominant stereotype” of heroic poetry (236). Hill suggests that in the process of making legend from history, “the highlighting and stereotyping of an idealized male heroism has its counterpart the highlighting and stereotyping of female helplessness” (240). As such, the stereotype of the geomuru ides, particularly in the figure of Hildeburh in Beowulf, defines “the essentials of heroic tragedy” (241). In Hill’s view, the stereotype serves as a counterpoint to the idealized male and the concepts of success in war, decisive action, integration into a comitatus, the status-enhancing values of treasure, a loyalty that transcends death,
and the refounding of an illustrious dynasty; the female being a figure of inaction and isolation, a victim of the destructive forces of ‘heroism,’ and a witness to the degradation of treasure—and human (female) life—to the level of mere plunder. (241)

The presence of this stereotypically feminine speech seems to be supported by the narrator in *Beowulf*, who asserts of Hildeburh, “þæt wæs geōmuru ides!” (1075b), paralleling the formulaic assertion about Scyld in the poem’s opening. However, when the entire poem is considered, *Beowulf* seems to resist Hill’s generalization. A lamenting woman appears only twice: briefly near the conclusion of the Finnsburg digression when Hildeburh has laid her son and brother on the same funeral pyre and at the end of the poem when the old woman of the Geats laments for Beowulf and the Geats. Like the lamenting woman, the old king, Hrothgar, demonstrates a similarly powerless speech focused on the past and sometimes conveys the helplessness of the Danes in the face of Grendel’s depredations. While such speech may lack engendering force, the voices of women and old men have in common the expression of wisdom and advice—imparting to them a different kind of power.

The clearest contrast to assertive, engendering masculine speech in the first episode of *Beowulf* is lack of speech or silence. Women in the first part of the poem are essentially silent as their speech is reported only indirectly. Wealhtheow’s words of counsel or Hildeburh’s lament are not heard by the audience. Grendel, with whom Beowulf intends to hold a council, does not speak, though he seems to make noises expressing emotion: weeping and exulting. Later in the poem, the women will find
voice, but the beasts will remain without speech. The unmasculine speech that
distinguishes women, old men, and beasts defines three categories of non-men that will
stand in relation to the masculine warrior’s violence.

**Mastering the Monstrous Boy**

Beowulf will direct his violence at a beast in each of the three episodes, beginning
with Grendel. Grendel at first is identified as non-human, a “grimma gæst” (102a) and
“feond on helle” (101b), but he is also described as a “wonsælī wer” (“unfortunate man”;
105a), inviting a consideration of his relation to men. Grendel becomes a kind of anti-
man, inferior by nature, who will provide a multi-dimensional contrast with men. First,
his actions contrast with those of the warrior, whose virtues are established by the poem’s
opening. Furthermore, Grendel comes to express an opposition to the engendering power
of men like Beowulf. Grendel is “Godes andsacan” (“God’s enemy”; 786b), suggesting
his opposition to the *Lifrēa*. So while it is not surprising that he appears to be aroused to
anger by the Scylding scop’s singing the story of Creation, he may be reacting not just
against God, but against an overt expression of masculine generative power: the scop
singing of God’s engendering the world and all of its creatures. Finally, it might be
possible to regard Grendel as a boy, an unready man because of his exclusion from the
masculine rituals of the hall.

When Grendel invades Heorot as the Geats wait, he is clearly defined as an anti-
warrior. The language describing his actions mirrors ironically that referring to the hall
heroes. As Grendel approaches, he is called “rinc” (“man”; 720b), and when he enters
the hall, “(he ge)bolgen wæs” (“he was swollen with rage”; 723b) and advances “yrremōd” (“angry-minded”; 726a), resembling Beowulf, who lies in wait “bolgenmōd” (“enraged”; 709a). In addition, Grendel’s “mōd āhlōg” (“spirit laughs”; 730b), at once mimicking the joy of the warriors and revealing his solipsistic nature, as it is not a laugh shared in fellowship. His thought of “wistfylle” (“an abundance of food”; 734a) will not be for the joyous sharing with others, but for the cannibalistic pleasure of a beast, a “mānscaða” (737b). Grendel devours one thane and then reaches for Beowulf. Liuzza points out that “it is not entirely clear who grabs whom,” as they become one terror (76n).

The fight sounds like an “ealuscerwen” (“alesharing”; 769b), and Grendel “gryrelēoð galan” (“shrieked a grisly song”; 786a). Damico contrasts Grendel’s song with that of the scop heard earlier: “Grendel’s subject is wōp ‘lamentation,’ whereas the scop’s is creation. The swutol song ‘sweet song’ of the scop is one of praise, whereas the gryrelēoð ‘terrible song’ of God’s adversary betokens defeat (9). Not only does Grendel’s cry parody the scop’s song, but the “wop” associates him with the lamenting of the woman—feminizing him, making him even more anti-man as he struggles to escape the fight.

The parody of hall celebration among warriors provides the context for this struggle, making it not just a fight between enemy warriors, but a re-interpretation of the warrior relationship. The masculine bonding of the hall, even including the mock battle with Unferth, is echoed in this struggle between enemy forces that the language makes indistinguishable from one another. The subsequent revelation that Grendel has worked a curse on all swords, so that the Geats’ attempts to assist Beowulf are useless because
“gūðbilla nān grētan nolde” (“no war-sword could touch him”; 803), puts Grendel’s refusal to use weapons in a new light. If it previously implies strength or boldness when Beowulf says that he too will forego weapons, it now suggests the cowardly and unnatural, a further exclusion from the world of men. In addition, as soon as Beowulf seize him, Grendel responds in a most unwarriorlike manner: “Hyge waes him hinfūs, wolde on heolster flēon” (“In his mind he was ready to get away, wished into the darkness to flee”; 755). But he cannot break Beowulf’s grip. In the ensuing battle, the one who had come to divide others from life is himself divided, separated from his arm: “him on eaxle wearð /syndolh sweotol” (“on his shoulder became clear a great wound”; 816b-17a).

Yet the line between Grendel and Beowulf is not distinct. In the celebration that follows Grendel’s defeat, the scop’s song connects Beowulf to Sigemund through their mutual mastery of beasts. The scop sings not only of the slaying of the dragon, but of Sigemund and Fitela slaughtering “ealfela eotena cynnes” (“a great many of the race of giants”; 883). But even at this point, at the height of Beowulf’s success, a contrast with Sigemund can be seen. Sigemund fought with a companion; Beowulf fights alone. Fighting alone, he resembles the monsters. The defeat of the beasts requires the strength if not the spirit of the beast. As noted, both fight in a state of rage, reliant on physical strength. Grendel is repeatedly called āglǣca (“terrifying one”), an epithet that is also applied to Beowulf (2592a). The difference can be defined at least somewhat by Grendel’s alienation from God. Similarly, one of the signs of weakness among the Danes occurs when they turn to their pagan gods: “Swylc wæs thēaw hyra, / hǣthenra hyht;
helle gemundon / in mōdsefan ("Such was their custom, the heathens’ expectation; they remembered hell; in their minds, they did not know the Creator"; 178b-180). But most important, Grendel fails to live up to the warrior code\(^6\) and, as a result, is dismembered. He flees without his arm and will next be seen lying lifeless in a cave.

Later in the poem, when Beowulf faces Grendel’s mother, disturbingly close parallels are drawn between the monster and the hero again. First, a passage recounting the earlier battle with Grendel just before the second monster’s assault on Heorot confuses the two grammatically:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{wæs } & \text{þæra Grendel sum,} \\
\text{heorowearh } & \text{hetelīc, } \quad \text{sē aet Heorote fand} \\
wæccendne & \text{wer } \quad \text{wīges bidan.} \\
þær & \text{him } \text{āglēca } \quad \text{ætgrǣpe wearð;} \\
\text{hwæþre } & \text{hē gemunde } \quad \text{mægenes strenge,} \\
gimfæste & \text{gifē, } \quad \text{ðē him God sealde,} \\
ond & \text{him } \text{tō Anwaldan } \quad \text{āre gelŷfde,} \\
frōfre & \text{ond fultum; } \quad \text{ðȳ } \text{hē } \text{þone } \text{féond ofercwōm,} \\
gehnēgde & \text{helle gāst. } \quad \text{þā } \text{hē } \text{hēan gewāt,} \\
drēame & \text{bedāled } \quad \text{dēaþwīc sēon,} \\
mancynnes & \text{féond. } (1266b-76a, emphasis added)}
\end{align*}
\]

\(^6\) The warrior code will be discussed in Chapter 4.
Was among them [demons] Grendel one, a savage inspired by hate, who at Heorot found a watching man for battle waiting. There the terrifying one grasped at him; however, he remembered his might’s strength, the ample gift which to him God gave, and trusted the Almighty for help, favor and support; by means of this he the fiend overcame, subdued the spirit of hell. Then he humbled went, of joy deprived, his place of death to see, mankind’s enemy.

Twice the pronoun shifts referent without warning. If the audience did not already know what happened in Heorot, they would misinterpret the lines. Since the audience does know, the effect of the ambiguous pronoun reference is to confuse the identities of hero and beast.

Even more disturbing is Beowulf’s last act in the underwater cave. First, the narrator refers to Grendel’s previous cowardly attacks on the Danes, in which Grendel attacked them in their sleep: “þonne hē Hrōðgāres heorðgenēatas / slōh on sweofote, slǣpende frǣt” (“when he Hrothgar’s beloved hall-companions killed in their beds, ate them sleeping”; 1580-81). Then Beowulf exacts revenge on Grendel’s already dead, already dismembered body. While revenge being exacted on a dead man—or beast—may seem questionable, its monstrosity is strangely highlighted by the metaphoric association of death and sleep that connect Beowulf’s act with that of Grendel just described:

Hē him þæs lēan forgeald, rēþe cempa, tō ðæs þe hē on ræste geseah
Surely the image of Beowulf attacking a “sleeping” foe deliberately recalls Grendel’s behavior.

But the mastery of beasts is a step toward manhood that Beowulf has already achieved as a boy. Beowulf boasts in his first speech to Hrothgar that he has already slain “eotena cyn, ond on ýðum slōg /niceras nihtes, nearoþearfé drēah, / wræc Wedera nīð” (“a family of giants, and in the waves slew sea-monsters by night, survived that narrow-need, avenged the Weders’ affliction”; 421-23a). He thus expresses confidence in fighting Grendel, “þām āglǣcan” (“that terrifying one”; 425a), or “þyrse” (“giant”; 426a). The challenge of Unferth, however, makes him confront his boyhood escapade that led to the fight with the sea monsters that, if it is the same fight to which he refers here, had little to do with “wræc Wedera nīð.”

From Boy to Man

When Unferth challenges Beowulf’s claims of prowess, Beowulf draws a distinct dividing line between his boyhood adventures and the manly venture he is proposing in fighting Grendel. Unferth opens with a question that goes to Beowulf’s identity: “Eart þū
sē Bēowulf, sē þe wið Brecan wunne” (“Are you the Beowulf, he who against Breca strove?”; 506). He says that Beowulf, “for wience” made a “dolgilpe” to risk his life (“out of pride” made a “foolish boast”; 508-09) and that “nē inc ānig mon, / nē lēof nē lāð, belēan might / sohrfullne sīð” (“no man, neither dear nor loathed, could dissuade him from that sorrowful adventure”; 510b-12a), contrasting with Beowulf’s assertion about the current venture that all the warriors and wisest men of his tribe had encouraged him. Unferth’s retelling of the match depicts Breca as fulfilling his boast and bettering Beowulf; Unferth asserts that he expects even less from Beowulf against Grendel. Beowulf then presents the story from his own perspective, beginning by asserting that he “merestrengo māran āhte, / earfeþo on ȳþum, done ānig ōþer man” (“more sea-strength possessed more ordeals on the waves, than any other man”; 533-34). He then defends what Unferth has called the foolishness of the boast and contest:

Wit þæt gecwǣdon cnihtwesende
ond gebēotedon —wāeron bēgen þā gīt
on geogoðfēore— þæt wit on gārsecg ūt
aldrum nēðdon. (535-38a)

We two agreed, being boys, and boasted—we were both then still in our youth—that we two on the sea would risk our lives.

Thus, Beowulf draws a significant line between boyhood and manhood and implicitly seems to accept that his youthful boast was foolish. While such variation is common in the poem, the repetition that he was a boy at lines 535 and 537 seems to bear a
psychological reality—a speaker emphasizing his explanation, without openly admitting the foolishness of the act.

However, Beowulf’s description of his encounter with the sea beasts clearly suggests manly prowess, despite his youth. He is seized by a sea monster, reminiscent of his grasping of Grendel. As the monsters repeatedly attack, Beowulf says, “Ic him þēnode / dēoran sworde” (“I served them with my dear sword”; 561b-62a). After he vanquishes the monsters, “nā / ymb brontne ford           brim ļīðende / lāde ne letton” (“never about the deep crossings on the sea did they hinder sailors’ course”; 567b-69a). This last assertion makes of the adventure an act that exceeds the immediate context of boyish foolishness: Killing the monsters has made the seas safer. Eventually, when Beowulf pursues Grendel’s mother on behalf of the Danes he exhibits the same courage as in the foolish episode of his youth. In fact, the scene of his being attacked by monsters recalls the Breca episode almost exactly. But the subsequent action will go much further. Rather than pursuing a foolish, pointless adventure, Beowulf acts purposefully in defense of a tribe’s right to hold its land and hall—a political purpose. The adventure, which marks Beowulf’s passage into manhood, requires not only the strength of the monster but also the impetuous action of the boy.

Episode 2: Mastering the Feminine

Almost exactly one third of the way through the poem, the story begins to emphasize a female perspective. This shift is signaled when the scop turns to the story of Hildeburh. Jane Chance, in her analysis of this section of the poem, is particularly
persuasive in establishing that a middle episode is clearly defined here by the significant presence of female characters: following in succession after the story of Hildeburh come Wealhtheow’s speech and gift-giving at the celebration in Heorot; Grendel’s mother’s renewal of the feud; Hygd’s presence at the welcome celebration for Beowulf; the story of Thryth as a contrast to Hygd; and Beowulf’s retelling of his adventure among the Danes, including not only a reference to Wealhtheow’s cupbearing but that of the potential peace-weaver Freawaru (99). The central place of female characters in this section of the poem may be used to clarify the deeper textures of masculinity than have been heretofore defined by the behavior of Beowulf and the other warriors, for woven throughout this episode are women as peaceweavers, a role at once contrastive to masculinity in its passivity at the same time that it is representative of the rationality that must temper the impetuosity and strength of masculinity.

*Foreshadowing the Failure of Exclusively Masculine Action*

While the inadequacy of exclusive masculinity seems to be demonstrated in the eventual failure of Hrothgar and Beowulf, the potential shortcoming of such a world view is implied early in the poem in the description of Healfdene’s son, Hrothgar. Drout, in fact, sees the succession of Hrothgar to the throne as the end of the “successful inheritances” (199). First, Hrothgar is not the only son, not even the first born. And Drout points out that Hrothgar regards his older brother, Heorogar, “a better man than” himself (200): “sē wæs betera ðonne ic!” (469b). The failure of blood inheritance will be complete when his sons fail to succeed him, and Hrothgar will eventually prove his weakness in deed when faced with Grendel’s attacks (203). When Beowulf defeats
Grendel, Hrothgar will echo his earlier statement about Heorogar, calling Beowulf “secg betsta” (947a). In this same sentence Hrothgar also seems to adopt Beowulf as his son:

\[
\text{Nū, ic, Bēowulf, þec, secg betsta, mē for sunu wylle}
\]

\[
\text{frēogan on ferhþēc; heald forð tela}
\]

\[
\text{nīwe sibbe. Ne bið þē [n]ānigre gād worolde wilna, þē ic geweald hæbbe. (946b-50)}
\]

Now, I, Beowulf, you, best of men, to me as a son will honor in life; hold henceforth rightly this new kinship. You will not lack any of the world’s goods, of which I have control.

This announcement immediately follows Hrothgar’s oblique reference to Beowulf’s mother:

\[
\text{Hwæt, þæt secgan mæg efne swā hwylc mægþa, swā ðone magan cende}
\]

\[
\text{æfter gumcynnnum, gyf hēo gȳt lyfað, þæt hyre Ealdmetod ēste wǣre}
\]

\[
\text{bearngebyrdo. (942b-46a)}
\]

Lo, she may say, indeed such a woman as bore this son among mankind, if she yet lives, that Eternal God was gracious to her in child-bearing.

In the context of Beowulf’s successful violent revenge against Grendel, Hrothgar punctuates the first, dominantly masculine episode of the poem, by introducing the procreative role of the feminine at the very moment that he makes a gesture to exclude
the mother of his sons from a role in succession. For nearly the first third of the poem, all references to lineage have been to fathers, but at this point, immediately before Hrothgar extends an offer to treat Beowulf as a son, the audience is made to consider the role of the mother, perhaps foreshadowing Wealhtheow’s motherly concern. His act of making Beowulf his son, of engendering by speech act, negating the role of a mother, seems an attempt to reproduce the masculine context with which the poem began. The succession of kingship from Scyld through Healfdene as described in the poem’s opening depicts an orderly world dominated by men. Hrothgar’s attempt to redirect the succession away from Wealhtheow’s and his sons would literally erase her from the generative process. Of course, Wealhtheow is compelled to respond, and the moment that Hrothgar labels Beowulf the best of men in response to his successful, violent, physical mastery of the monster stands at the point when the poem turns to the women’s point of view. Beowulf’s journey to manhood will not be complete until he encounters the feminine.

Hildeburh and the Destructive Violence of Revenge

The second episode begins with the story of the fight at Finnsburg, told from the perspective of failed peacemaker Hildeburh. She has her son burned on the same funeral pyre as her brother, after they have died fighting one another. This seems a gesture that reflects feminine powerlessness, but instead, the story ultimately reveals the failure and hopelessness of men’s violent revenge. Lamenting, she places her son and brother together on the pyre, parodying the peace-weaving role she has failed at:

Hēt ēð Hildeburh æt Hnæfes ēde
Then Hildeburh commanded to Hnaef’s pyre her own son committed to the flames, the body to burn, placed on the pyre at his uncle’s shoulder; the lady sang a grieving song. The warrior ascended; wound to the sky, the greatest of deathfires roared before their mound.

She symbolically weaves the connection of the two tribes in the smoke of the pyre. In this context, she commands, but she commands only the manipulation of dead bodies. She ineffectually joins the two sides who have just fought one another after sealing a peace contract with their oaths—a failure of their equally ineffectual words to engender events. Her blood unites them, but their (patrilineal) tribal connections divide them. Eventually, the violent patriarchal world destroys any peaceful intent. Hildeburh’s powerlessness may be inherent in her identification as the “Hōces dohtor” (“daughter of Hoc”; 1076b). The circumscription of the woman’s role is emphasized by the immediate reference to “ides gnornode, / geōmrode giddum” (1117b-18a). Despite this circumscribing of woman’s role, the scene nonetheless posits the men’s violence as a destructive, lamentable force; the woman’s lamentation, while powerless, becomes affirming.
The end of the Finn episode emphasizes Hildeburh’s powerlessness. The Danes carry Hildeburh back home. At first, the action is described as an abduction: “sēo cwēn numen” (“the queen [was] seized”; 1153b). The lines immediately following would seem to objectify her even further, by associating her with inanimate property: “Scēotend Scyldinga tō scypon feredon / eal ingesteald eorðcyninges” (“The Scylding warriors to their ships carried all the household goods of that earth king”; 1154-55). The only specified property are decorative items usually associated with women—in fact, items that occasionally provide synecdoche for woman—“sigla searogimma” (“necklace of precious stones”; 1157a). The conclusion to the episode softens the abduction image, suggesting the return of the woman to her proper place: “Hīe on sǣlāde / drihtlīice wīf tō Denum feredon, / lǣddon tō lēodum” (“On their sea journey that noble woman to the Danes they carried, led her to her people”; 1157b-59a). She has ceased to be the property of Finn, from whom she is “feredon” and is re-integrated, “lǣddon,” to her people. She is completely without agency. Thus, the story to celebrate Beowulf’s restorative violence against Grendel depicts a failed peacemaker reduced to complete passivity by men’s destructive violence. This recollection of the past punctuates the masculine-dominated first episode before the appearance of two women who resist passivity: Wealhtheow and Grendel’s mother.

*Wealhtheow: A Powerful Feminine Presence*

Wealhtheow returns to the hall—and the poem—providing a powerful contrast to Hildeburh. Thus, as Chance has pointed out, her appearance becomes closely associated
with the story of the failed peaceweaver (99). The half-line that completes the Finn story is followed by a half-line returning to the celebration in Heorot: “Lēoð wæs āsungen” (1159b). After conventional general description of hall celebration, “þa cwōm Wealhþeō forð / gān under gyldnum bēage” (“Wealhtheow came forth / walking under her golden crown”; 1162b-63a). This description of Wealhtheow directly opposes the last image of Hildeburh. Variation emphasizes her movement: Wealhtheow comes forth, walking; she is not borne nor led. The golden crown implies her status, making the characterization of Hildeburh as “drihtlīice wīf” seem condescending, if not ironic. At this point the treacherous world of men that has been so clearly depicted in the lay of Finnsburg is encapsulated in the references to “suhterge-fæderan thā gȳt wæs hiera sib ætgædere” (“nephew and uncle whose kinship then still was intact” 1164) and to Unferth, who “his māgum nǣre / ārfæst æt ecga gelācum” (“to his kinsmen was not merciful in the play of edges”; 1167b-68a). The interweaving of Hildeburh’s story with the allusion to potential treachery in Heorot leaves the failure of patriarchy hanging over the hall scene that follows, in which Beowulf’s violent masculine victory is celebrated.

In her first appearance in Heorot, Wealhtheow had demonstrated a ceremonial presence that accepted the superior status and role of the men who preceded her into the hall. Like Wulfgar and Beowulf before her, Wealhtheow is “cynna gemyndig” (“mindful of custom”; 613b). And as a thane previously had done, she passes a cup among the warriors. Helen Damico suggests the implied power of the queen by identifying the “ornamental, drink-bearing, welcoming figure” with women from both Norse and Mediterranean epic traditions, giving to Wealhtheow an underlying “element of
foreboding that modifies and deepens the decorative aspect of the characters” (18). Upon Beowulf’s return to Geatland, Hygd will fill this welcoming role among the Geats.

Wealhtheow represents a clear exception to the stereotype of the mourning lady represented by Hildeburh. Her prominent role in Heorot includes formal speeches and the giving of gifts, conferring upon her an aura of power. In fact, she asserts that the men in the hall will do as she says (1231b). While her statements are not as assertive as the warrior’s boasts, nor engendering in the same manner, they represent an attempt to bring into being a particular version of the future. Drout argues that Wealhtheow’s preference for her sons is a preference for blood-based inheritance, which would keep in check the potential for uncontrolled violence within the comitatus (208). Wealhtheow, acting in the present of the poem, demonstrates a stronger sense of agency, or at least one that is sanctioned by the poem’s view, than do the women described in the digressions, who function as more traditional models of behavior fixed in the memory of the male scop.

In her first appearance, Wealhtheow’s “wīsfæst wordum” (“words rooted in wisdom”; 626a; Damico 22) are reported indirectly, while Beowulf’s exact words in response are represented. While Wealhtheow does not seem to have her own voice in this first appearance, her presence serves to incite Beowulf and elicit his boast for future action:

Hē þæt ful geþeah,

wælrēow wiga æt Wealhþeon,

ond thā gyddode gūþe gefȳsed. (628b-30)
He took up that cup, the warrior fierce in battle, from the hands of Wealhtheow, and then, incited to battle, made a boasting speech.

(Damico 4)

Damico says that Wealhtheow “is in an oblique way exhorting him to battle, a characteristic action of the Germanic warrior-woman who, in both historical and fictional writings, appears as an inciter and instigator of turbulent activity.” Damico continues, “The queen may be thus perceived as both a parallel figure to Unferth and a contrasting one” (8). Later, Damico adds, “The incitement of warriors to heroic action is a characterizing feature of the warrior-maidens of Old Norse heroic literature; and, although much softened, it is a trait exhibited by Wealhtheow” (24). Thus, Wealhtheow, in Damico’s analysis, is not passive even in this first appearance. In his boast, prompted by the queen’s actions, Beowulf asserts his intention to perform “eorlīc ellen” (“a deed of manly courage”; 637a; Liuzza 72)—which would “ānunga ēowra lēoda / willan geworhte” (“carry out the will of your people in every respect”; 634-35a; Damico 4)—or die. The queen, like Hrothgar, is pleased.

With her second appearance, after Beowulf has defeated Grendel, Wealhtheow’s voice intrudes and she assumes an even more active role in the proceedings of the hall. When the narrative moves from stories/legends from the past—fixed by a male voice in that historical past—to the present and the living voice of the queen, the woman seems much less passive. At the morning’s celebration of Beowulf’s defeat of Grendel, she returns to the homosocial world established at the previous day’s celebration. Both old
retainers and young warriors have ridden out and back from Grendel’s mere. They
compete in races and listen to the song of the scop. Finally, Hrothgar

of brýdbûre, bēahhorda weard,

tryddode tīrfæst getrume micle,
cystum gecȳþed, ond his cwēn mid him

medostigge mæt mægtha hōse. (921-24)

stepped forth from the woman’s apartment, secure in glory, with a great
troop known for its excellence, and his queen with him traversed the
mead-path with a troop of maidens. (Damico 72)

The male bonding ritual is entered into by the old king and his queen, whose “mægtha
hōse,” translated by Damico as “troop of maidens,” associates her again with the
masculine/warrior world. Damico suggests that “the tableau of Heorot’s rulers attended
by their respective ‘troops’ implies that Wealhtheow’s power and authority within the
court are in some measure comparable to Hrothgar’s” (5). The re-appearance of
Wealhtheow with Hrothgar in terms that echo the descriptions of the band of warriors
elevates her presence at what can be seen as the transition from the first to second part of
the poem.

When Wealhtheow speaks, her words, while deferential to some extent, further
reveal her strong presence, suggesting an agency that was not shown in her earlier
appearance. Unlike her earlier indirectly reported “wise words,” the words she speaks to
Hrothgar and Beowulf are reported. According to Josephine Bloomfield, these speeches
reveal Wealhtheow’s role as “peace weaver and power broker” (“Diminished” 184). Her
first speech, to Hrothgar, is introduced with the direct language associated with the
previous speeches of Beowulf and Hrothgar: “Spræc ðā ides Scyldinga” (1168). Her first
words to Hrothgar contain four imperatives, the first two related to her role as hostess—
“Onfōh þissum fulle” (“Take this cup”; 1169a) and “þū on sǣlum wes” (“Thou in joy
be”; 1170b)—and the second two reflecting her role as counselor—“tō Gēatum spræc /
mildum wordum” (“to the Geats speak in generous words”; 1171b-72a) and “bēo wið
Gēatas glæd” (“Be to the Geats lordly”; 1173a). But the tone is formal and proper, if not
deferential, greeting him as “frēodrihten mīn / sinces brytta” (“my noble lord, dispenser
of treasure”; 1169b-70a) and “goldwine gumena” (“gold-friend of men”; 1171a) as she
delivers frank counsel: she tells him to speak “swā sceal man dōn” (“as a man should
do”; 1172b) and to be “geofena gemyndig / nēan ond feorran          þū nū hafast”
(“mindful of the gifts from near and far that you now have”; 1173b-74). Bloomfield
notes that in this passage Wealhtheow emphasizes the context of “the noble and kinglike
quality of generous gift giving” (“Diminished” 192), and thus her own intent to
participate in the “ritualistic display of power and leadership through giving”
(“Diminished” 196).

Wealhtheow’s subsequent concern about Hrothgar’s intent to make Beowulf his
son reveals her intent to influence the lineal descent of power. Her warning to “þīnum
māgum lǣf / folc and rīce” (“to your kinsmen leave the folk and kingdom”; 1178b-79b)
echoes the narrator’s earlier description of Hrothgar’s model behavior in Heorot, where
he would “eall gedǣlan / geongum and ealdum         swylc him God sealde /  būton
folcscaer          ond feorum gumena” ( share all, with young and old, that God  gave him
except for the common land and the lives of men”; 71b-73). Her voice thus carries the authority of the patriarchal tradition voiced in the poem’s beginning, a part of which insists on the rights of men that come from their blood, not just from their deeds. But she must ask others to act.

The immediate context, in which she protects the rights of her sons, is more interesting and may be informed by the historical question of the lines of descent. Wealhtheow places her trust in Hrothulf: “Ic mīnne can / glædne Hrōþulf,  þæt hē þā geogoðe wile / ārum healdan” (“I know of my own lordly Hrothulf that he will hold those young men in honor”; 1180b-81a). Her confidence in Hrothulf is based on his upholding the code of mutual benefit:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{wēne ic  þæt hē mid gōde} & \quad \text{gyldan wille} \\
\text{uncran eaferan,} & \quad \text{gif hē  þæt eal gemon,} \\
\text{hwæt wit tō willan} & \quad \text{ond tō worðmyndum} \\
\text{umborwesendum ēr} & \quad \text{ārna gefremedon.} \quad (1184-87)
\end{align*}
\]

I believe he with goodness will repay our sons, if he remembers all that we two, of desires and of favors, earlier, when he was a child, earlier honors performed.

Bloomfield suggests that referring to Hrothulf as “glæd” will remind him of his obligations, invoking “a rational political and personal reciprocity that depends on tribal/kinship bonding and ritual” (“Diminished” 196). The fact that the poem indicates that the trust is misplaced links Wealhtheow with Hildeburh as failed peaceweaver. Like Hildeburh, Wealhtheow relies upon the masculine system of honor for her success as a
peaceweaver. But Hrothulf is kin to Hrothgar, not to her. So rather than weaving peace among separate tribes, she attempts to maintain harmony within Hrothgar’s troubled family. Or as Drout suggests, “Her peace-weaving is directed at violence in general rather than violence between any two warring family groups” (222-23).

Drout’s argument that women can be “individually significant in the cultural world of Beowulf” only through “a system of inheritance with a substantial blood component” suggests convincingly that Wealhtheow has a personal stake in excluding Beowulf from the Danish line of succession (222). She has provided male heirs, successfully fulfilling her role as peace weaver (223), and her role as mother and spouse, which Drout sees as the source of her influence in Heorot (222). According to Drout, “Inheritance by deeds is constructed (in *Beowulf*) as a solely masculine activity” (203). If Hrothgar can simply choose a successor, then the role of blood inheritance is negated, and the woman’s role is eliminated (223-24). So her support of Hrothulf demonstrates her interest in maintaining a system that supports the role of blood in inheritance (220-21).

Wealhtheow’s honoring of Beowulf occurs in a context of failed masculinity. After her speech to Hrothgar, she turns then to “hyre byre” (“her boys”; 1188b) and to Beowulf, seated between the two brothers (1191). Wealhtheow’s speech to Beowulf is preceded by the cup’s being borne to him and the offering of gifts. While Wealhtheow’s gifts are decorative items rather than war gear, she participates in the power ritual. A brief digression occurs concerning the neck-collar that Beowulf receives, its comparison to the Brosinga necklace with its mythic origins, and its fate to be worn by Hygelac on
his ill-advised attack on the Frisians, where “wyrsan wīgfrecan wæl rēafedon” (“lesser warriors plundered the corpses”; 1212). Thus, the digression interjects again the failure of alliances and the eruption of violence amid the celebration of peace. Hygelac “for wlenco wēan āhsode / fǣhðe tō Frȳsum” (“for pride experienced woe, a feud with the Frisians”; 1206-07). The Pyrrhic nature of the Geats’ victory further emphasizes the futility of restraining the violence of men.

Wealhtheow’s speech to Beowulf follows the pattern of her earlier speech to Hrothgar, suggesting possibly the formulaic nature of her speeches or reflecting the (masculine) custom of the mead hall. It also demonstrates resolve. Though soft-spoken, the speech has an iron core. Drout suggests that Wealhtheow’s peace-weaving efforts are “accomplished through her use of language rather than the physical exchange of her body” (223). Her speech is introduced with the formal “maþelode” and is clearly addressed to everyone in the hall: “Weahlðēo maþelode, hēo fore thǣm werede spræc” (1215). Similar to her speech to Hrothgar, she begins with a sequence of five imperatives, the first three expressing honor and respect, and the final two turning toward advice:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Wealhtheow's Speech to Beowulf} \\
\text{Brūc ðisses bēages, Bēowulf lēofa,} \\
\text{hyse, mid hǣle, ond þisses hrægles nēot} \\
\text{þēo[d]gestrēona, ond geþēoh tela;} \\
\text{cen þec mid cræfte, ond þyssum cnyhtum wes} \\
\text{lāra līðe. (1216-20a)}
\end{align*}
\]
Enjoy this neck-ring, dear Beowulf, in youth, with good health, and these war garments use, the people’s treasures, and prosper well; make known your strength, and to these young men be persuasive in counsel.

It seems especially notable that she follows her exhortations to enjoy the gifts he has received and to continue to spread his fame, which emphasize the masculine aspect of the gift-giving ritual, with a directive to share his persuasive counsel, suggesting a contrasting, more reflective role of counselor for Beowulf. She punctuates this opening salvo saying that she will not forget him for that counsel: “ic þē þæs lēan geman” (1220b). She seems to place herself within the masculine system of honor by which memory serves to motivate action, often, violent action. The impact of her invocation of memory will reverberate when she closes this speech to Beowulf by saying that the men in the hall will do as she asks.

As Wealhtheow continues, she further emphasizes the contrast between feminine and masculine deeds. Next, she speaks of his being remembered throughout the world, followed by two more imperatives: first a greeting of honor, “Wes þenden þū lifige, / æþeling, ēadig!” (“Be while you live, noble one, prosperous”; 1224b-25a), and then another seemingly cautionary reference to her sons, “Bēo thū suna mīnum / dǣdum gedēfe” (“Be thou to my sons / in deeds proper”; 1226b-27a). Then she repeats her assessment of the Danish troop: “Hēr is ǣghwylc eorl          ōþrum getrȳwe, / mōdes milde,          mandrihtne hol[d],          þegnas syndon geþwǣre,          þēod ealgearo” (“Here each earl is true to the other, generous in spirit, loyal to his liege-lord, the thanes are united, the nation prepared”; 1228-30). This assessment not only misreads the thanes’
future loyalty, but ends with a characterization—a prepared nation—that is belied by the events that have occurred (especially in contrast to Beowulf’s preparedness the previous night). In immediate context, these realities might be seen as undercutting her counsel, her wisdom. But a slight change in perspective emphasizes the treachery of the world of men. Her wisdom can only be applied to the world as it is conceived and perceived, that is through the masculine lens of proper behavior. Wealhtheow assumes that gifts and honors will have the expected effect of making warriors worthy and loyal. Reality makes the effort futile.

Woven through the speech and its conventional expressions are three bold “I” statements. All three of these statements have potential engendering power, especially when combined. She first invokes the power of memory, potentially assuming a role in the masculine system of honor: “ic þē þæs [lāra līðe] lēan geman” (“I will remember you for that [counsel]”; 1220). Remembering is the basis for acting—whether revenge for remembered assaults or defense for remembered honor. She then reinforces that with words that accompany her gift-giving, by which she participates in the male economy of honor: “Ic þē an tela / sincgestrēona” (“I grant you fittingly these bright treasures”; 1225b-26a). And then she ends her speech ominously and powerfully with a suggestion of her power in the hall: “druncne dryhtguman          dōð swā ic bidde” (“having drunk, the retainers will do as I ask”; 1231). Thus, Wealhtheow’s presence suggests power through persuasion, not violent action.
The Threat of the Monstrous Woman

While Wealhtheow’s appearance in the mead hall establishes a powerful presence, the dominant female figure of the middle episode is, of course, Grendel’s mother. In overcoming the monster woman, Beowulf metaphorically overcomes both beastliness and the feminine and achieves traditional manhood. Like Grendel, she represents a perversion and parody of the warrior. Being female, she becomes an even more monstrous version of the anti-warrior than Grendel. At the same time, despite her attempt to usurp a masculine role of vengeance, she is clearly a female prescence. Thus, the questions—of inheritance, of deed vs. blood, of the power to engender—raised by Wealhtheow’s words may be resolved by Beowulf’s deeds in the face of the monstrous female. Beowulf, who seems to have proved he is no longer a boy, and has engaged the beast, will be born into full manhood with his mastery of the monstrous female.

The narration of Grendel’s mother’s attack on Heorot emphasizes her ambiguous nature. She is overtly female, but acts as a man. As a result, she appears to be both, or neither. Most obviously, she has no personal identity as would be represented by a name. She is most personally identified by her role as mother—a particularly powerless role in the world of the poem. Otherwise, she is identified as female other—“āglǣcwīf” (“monster-woman”; 1259a), “brimwylf” (“sea-wolf”; 1599a), “merewīf” (“mere-woman”; 1519a). In acting out the masculine action of revenge, she becomes not merely an anti-woman, but an anti-peaceweaver. Her attempt to act as a warrior is undercut, not just by her monstrosity, as was Grendel’s before her, but also by her femaleness. She is

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7 Vengeance as an aspect of the warrior code will be discussed in Chapter 4.
at once both stronger and weaker than Grendel—and Beowulf. That paradox may reflect
the conflict that defines Beowulf’s quest for manhood.

The attack by Grendel’s mother comes while the warriors are not vigilant, not
“ealgearo” (“all-ready”; 1230b), as Wealhtheow has suggested. Hrothgar has once again
retired to the queen’s chamber. Beowulf also sleeps elsewhere and is not present to face
the avenging attack, although this information is withheld until after the attack. The
celebration that has taken place, “symbla cyst,” (the best of feasts, 1232b), is
overshadowed by the fact that the men in the hall are unaware of the fate to which they
will become passive victims: “Wyrd ne cūþon, / geōsceaf grimme, swā hit
ägangen wearð eorla manegum, syððan āfen cwōm” (“they did not know wyrd, the
grim fate that would come to pass for many earls after evening came”; 1233b-35). Thus,
the audience’s awareness of wyrd casts an ironic shadow over the careful preparations for
sleep of the Danes: “Reced weardode / unrīm eorla swā hīe oft ār dydon”
(“Guarded the hall countless men, as they often had before”; 1237b-38). By reminding
us of how they had not guarded the hall before, that last half-line undercuts the detailed
description of their preparations that follow:

Bencþelu beredon; hit geondbrǣded wearð
beddum ond bolstrum. Bēor-scealca sum
fūs ond fǣge fletræste gebēag.
Setton him tō hēafdon hilderandas
bordwudu beorhtan; þær on bence wæs
ofer æþelinge ţþgesēne
They made bare the bench-floor; it was overspread with bedding and bolsters. A certain one of those beer-servers, ready and fated, bowed to his floor-rest. They set at their heads their battle-shields, bright board-woods; there on the bench was over the noblemen easily seen the battle-proud helmet, the ringed byrnie, the splendid wooden spear. It was their custom that they often were in battle gear, both at home and among the army, and anywhere, precisely on such occasions as their lord had need; that was a good troop.

The concluding half line recalls that despite the recent failures, the Danes had executed their responsibilities historically and have a clear will to do the same now. They will be prevented by a power beyond their control. Nonetheless, the picture created here is of a passive readiness. Their custom is to be ready and prepared, but lately they have failed to act.

The physical agent of *wyrd* will be Grendel’s mother. She will be associated with evil, by reference to Cain, suggesting the Christian version of a higher power. But, as Grendel embodied the anti-warrior, his mother represents the anti-peaceweaver, as
Chance suggests, almost an anti-woman (95). She will be identified only by her role as mother—but who fulfills this female role with a traditionally male motive: revenge. She does not weave peace; she destroys it in the way the men had at Finnsburg. She does not offer reflective wise words; she strikes out impulsively, never speaking. Like Grendel, she is not part of a society but an exile living in the cold, dark fens. And like all of Beowulf’s adversaries, she is without voice.

The poet immediately undercuts the reference to “sēo þēod tilu” of Danish warriors by the third reference to a fated Danish warrior who will die “swā him ful oft gelamp / siþðan goldsele Grendel warode” (“as to them had often happened while Grendel guarded that gold-hall”; 1252b-53a). Not only is the audience reminded of the previous night’s situation and Grendel’s long domination, but the seemingly ironic reference to Grendel guarding the hall, an image of vigilant action, contrasts with the “þēod tilu” who “Sigon þā tō slǣpe” (“sank into sleep”; 1251a). The tension between active and passive invites a consideration of the association with masculine and feminine respectively. ⁸ The hall celebration that precedes this night of sleep interrupted by slaughter had featured a story of attempted peaceweaving by a woman interrupted by the eruption of violence among men. The hall scene itself had featured the reflective and passive image of Wealhtheow offering counsel to the man who had the previous night shaken the walls and furniture of Heorot in his battle with Grendel. Now the Danish warriors are sunk in sleep and another monster is awake and active. A surrendering of the masculine posture of vigilance and action allows for the intrusion of the feminine,

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⁸ The gendering of active as masculine and passive as feminine will be discussed in Chapter 4.
here equated with monstrosity. In contrast with Beowulf’s approach to Heorot from the sea, where he was stopped and interrogated at the coastline and at the entrance to the hall, the monsters enter the hall, approaching from the unknown borderlands, without anyone even remotely aware that they are coming. Vigilance is absent, asleep. Is masculinity absent and asleep?

The appearance of Grendel’s mother is heralded by lines that initiate the ambiguity and tangled language that prevails in much of the description of her actions—much in the way Beowulf and Grendel earlier had become entangled and the language almost made them seem to share one body. After the dire foreshadowing the poet reports that

\[
\text{þæet gesýne wearþ,}
\]
\[
wīdcūth werum, \quad \text{þætte wrecend thā gýt}
\]
\[
lifðe æfter lāþum, \quad \text{lange þrāge,}
\]
\[
æfter gūðceare. 1255b-58a
\]

It was clearly seen, widely known to men, that an avenger still lived on after that enemy for a long time after that grim battle. The monster’s attack occurs on the following night, and Beowulf kills her the following day. How can it be “þætte wrecend thā gýt / lifðe æfter lāþum, \quad \text{lange þrāge}”?

Then, the male role of “wrecend” is immediately set against her femaleness, as well as her monstrosity: “Grendles mōdor, / ides, āglǣcwīf \quad \text{yrmþe gemunde}” (“Grendel’s mother, woman, monster-woman, her misery remembered”; 1258b-59). Variation emphasizes three times her female nature: mother, lady, terrifying woman. This last
emphasizes she is doubly not man. The last half-line emphasizes her anti-man status:

whereas the warrior would act vengefully by remembering his joy—the gifts and pledges of the meadhall—Grendel’s mother acts by remembering her misery.

The reference to her misery leads to a description of her lineage—the emergence of her race from Cain. Notably, she does not have a personal line of descent:

\[
\text{sē þe wæteregeasan wunian scolde,}
\]
\[
\text{cealde strēamas, siþðan Cāin wearð,}
\]
\[
\text{tō ecgbanan āngan brēþer,}
\]
\[
\text{fæderenmǣge. (1260-63a)}
\]

she who had to dwell in those dreadful waters, the cold streams, after Cain was a sword-killer to his only brother, kin of his father.

She has lived in the mere from the time of Cain’s exile, but, even with a mother explicitly identified, the poet implies a direct line of descent to Grendel from Cain, \textit{fæderenmǣge}:

\[\text{“þanon wōc fela / gēosceafťgāsta; wæs þēra Grendel sum” (“From him arose many fateful spirits—Grendel was one of those”; 1265b-66).}\]

The absence of the female from procreation recalls the opening of the poem, where the Danish line is described in terms of masculine generation. The potential analogical connection of the two races may have implications. Both are defined as masculine, patrilineal races. Women are alien to these worlds.

While Grendel’s mother is given the masculine motive of vengeance, she is described in the same hard-alliterating terms as her monstrous son: “Ond his mōdor þā gȳt / gīfre ond galgmōd gegān wolde / sorhfulne sīð, sunu dēoð wrecan” (“But
his mother still greedy, grim-minded, wanted to go on her sorrowful journey to avenge her son’s death”; 1276b-78). In describing her action as a “sorhfulne sīð,” the poet uses the language of exile, implying unwilling action, not the joyous aggression of a heroic revenge attack on an enemy. And though her attack is announced much as Grendel’s had been—“inne fealh / Grendles mōdor” (“inside made her way, Grendel’s mother”; 1281b-82a)—her identification only in terms of her maternal relation to Grendel undercuts its aggressiveness. Then follows more ambiguous language that creates a sense of confusion of identity between the monster and a male warrior counterpart:

\[ Wæs se gryre lāessa \]

\[ efne swā micle, \]
\[ swā bīð mægþa cræft, \]
\[ wīggryre wīfes, \]
\[ be wæpnedmen \]
\[ þonne heoru bunden, \]
\[ hamere geþrūen, \]
\[ sweord swāte fāh \]
\[ swīn ofer helme \]
\[ ecgum dyhtig, \]
\[ andweard scireð. \] (1282b-87)

The terror was less even as much as is a maiden’s strength, a woman’s war-terror, than an armed man’s when decorated sword, hammer forged, the blood-decorated sword, the boar over the helmet, with edges strong, opposite shears.

Liuzza emphasizes the ambiguity that poet creates, saying that “the point of these lines is not clear” since “Grendel’s mother is a much more dangerous opponent for Beowulf”
Like all of the language describing the opponent, these lines try to undercut her action. But her motive and actions stand for themselves to a large extent, working against the language that tries to diminish her power in the male heroic world.

The female monster’s attack is clearly out of vengeance, but rather than being aligned with other actions in the poem that exalt vengeance as a requisite of manhood, her attack, like Grendel’s, contradicts the actions of the warrior and serves to emphasize the present failings of the Danes. When the Danes attack her, she is anxious to get away to save herself: “Hēo wæs on ofste, wolde ūt þanon / fēore beorgan, þā hēo onfunden wæs” (“She was in haste, wished to be out from there, to save her life, when she was discovered”; 1292-93). The Danes attack with swords and protect themselves with shields, but “helm ne gemunde, / byrnan sīde, þā hine se brōga angeat” (“not one remembered his helmet / or broad mail shirt when that terror seized him”; 1290b-91). The immediate image of these warriors seized by terror undercuts their valiant defense, associating them to some extent with the unmasculine weakness of the monster. Further, the scene points back to the apparent uselessness of their careful preparations before sleep. In fact, the helmets remain hanging on the wall to be “ȳþgesēne.” Finally, the language of memory brings to mind their obligation to repay their lord. Not remembering the helmets and byrnies may suggest a subtext of their failure to fulfill the warrior code. Immediately after the description of the monster carrying off Hrothgar’s “hæleþa lēofost” (“dearest warrior”; 1296b), the narrator tells us that “Næs Bēowulf þær”

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9 Liuzza translates these lines as follows: “The horror was less / by as much as a maiden’s strength, / a woman’s warfare, is less than an armed man’s / when a bloodstained blade, its edges strong / hammer-forged sword, slices through / the boar image on a helmet opposite” (93).
("Beowulf was not there"; 1299b). After the monster departs with Grendel’s claw, the poet laments, “ceare wæs genīwod / geworden in wīcun” (“Care was renewed, / come again to the dwellings”; 1303b-04a), connecting the attack to the previous one and all it implied for the Danes. Then the poet goes on to frame the encounter in formulaic terms of battle: “Ne wæs þæt gewrixle til, / þæt hīe on bā haelfa biegan scoldon / frēonda fēorum!” (“Nor was it a good exchange that those on both sides must purchase with the lives of friends”; 1304b-06). However, the monstrous woman, on her own, had successfully attacked a hall of fully armed warriors and left them complaining about the lack of the attacker’s attention to the formal rules of wergild, rather than taking physical responsive action.

*The Masculine Response*

Beowulf is not like the Danes. When he pursues the monster to her cave home, he acts quickly. After only a brief final boast, he dives precipitously into the mere and into action:

> ic mē mid Hruntinge dōm gewyrce,  oþðe mec dēað nimeð.”

Æfter þēm wordum  Weder-Gēata lēod efste mid elne,—  nalas andswere bīdan wolde;  brimwylm onfēng hilderince. (1490b-95a)
“I for myself with Hrunting shall gain gloy, or death will take me!” After these words the man of the Weder-Geats hastened with courage, not at all wishing to wait for an answer; the sea surge received the battle-man. His words are powerful, engendering, and his action is swift. His hastening and not waiting contrasts with the Danes’ behavior previously and to come. In the ensuing fight Beowulf will defeat the non-man—both female and beast—and earn a right to manhood. But Beowulf’s actions seem focused mostly on defeating a monster—a familiar fight that extends back to his fights with the water beasts as a boy.

The battle begins almost immediately and lasts only seventy-three lines, and while it emphasizes Beowulf’s fury and perseverance, it also shows the readiness of his female adversary:

Sōna þæt onfunde, sē ðe flōda begong
heorogīfre behēold hund missēra,
grim ond grǣdig, þæt þær gumena sum
ælwihta eard ufan cunnode. (1497-1500)
At once discovered he who held the flood’s expanse, eager to destroy,
for a hundred half-years, grim and greedy, that there a certain man from an alien land down ventured.

She, unlike the Danes in Heorot, acts immediately: “Grāp þā tōgēanes; gūðrinc gefēng / atolan clommum (“She grasped at him; seized the warrior in her terrible

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10 Chance writes that the poet tries “to stress her inversion of the Anglo-Saxon ideal of woman,” including by occasionally referring to her with a masculine pronoun (95).
And exceeding Grendel in tenacity, she holds tight and bears him to her hall under the water.

Beowulf survives only because of his chain mail: “hēo þone fyrdhom ðurhfōn ne mihte . . . lāþan fingrum” (“She the war-garment might not pierce . . . with hostile fingers”; 1504-05). The mail similarly protects him when “sædēor monig / hildetūxum heresyrcan bræc” (“many sea-beasts with battle-tusks broke through the war-sark”; 1510b-11). He is protected through no agency of his own; in fact, as the sea monsters attack, he has been rendered passive. The hold of the “brimwyl[f]” (1506) as she drags him to the bottom of the mere is so tight that “hē ne mihte . . . / wǣpna gewaldan” (“he might not . . . wield weapons”; 1508-09a). This scene provides a confusion of imagery about Beowulf’s manhood. In a way Beowulf is at his weakest, subdued by a woman. The attempted violation of his body can be seen in terms of a rape—the female (and her monster allies) attempt to pierce his body. On the other hand, Beowulf’s potential manhood is most strongly implied because he does not react like Grendel at finding a stronger foe by thinking of escape. Rather, he thinks of action, and as soon as they reach the bright, dry cave of the monster, he acts. He attacks immediately—of course with his sword: “mægenrǣs forgeaf / hildebille, hond sweng ne oftēah” (“he gave a mighty blow with his battle-sword; his hand struck, did not hold back”; 1519b-20). The sword reverberates a “grǣdig gūðlēoð” suggesting the monsters’ ironic enactment of hall celebration (“greedy war-song”; 1522a; Chance 102). When Beowulf discovers the uselessness of his sword, his reaction to his initial failure is in stark contrast to Grendel’s when his strength failed: “Eft wæs anrǣd, nalas elnes
læt, / mǣrða gemyndig          mǣg Hȳlāces” (“Again he was resolute, not at all of courage slow, of glory mindful, the kinsman of Hygelac”; 1529-30). Enumerated one by one, the qualities of the warrior emerge in Beowulf—steadfast and concerned with glory. His movement toward courageous action is expressed appropriately in litotes, contrasting him with Hrothgar: not at all slow. Finally, he is associated with his male kin.

Thinking of Hygelac, Beowulf, “yrre ōretta” (“the angry warrior”; 1532a), throws away the useless sword and calls upon his own strength, eliciting a gnomic reflection on manhood from the narrator:

Strenge getruwode,

mundgripe mægenes.          Swā sceal man dôn,

þonne hē æt gūde          gegān þenceð

Longsumne lof,          nā ymb his līf cearað.  (1533b-36)

He trusted his strength, the might of his handgrip. Thus a man must do when he in battle thinks to achieve long-lasting praise: nothing about his life he cares.

The focus on gaining long-lasting fame over protecting his life is explicitly connected to what “a man should do.” As the poet continues, Beowulf’s manhood stays in focus:

Gefēng þa bē eaxle          —nalas for fǣhðe mearn—

Gūð-Gēata lēod          Grendles mōdor;

brægd þā beadwe heard,          þā hē gebolgen wæs

feorhgeniðlan,          þæt hēo on flet gebēah.  (1537-40)
The man of the War-Geats grabbed by the shoulder—not at all the feud
lamented—Grendel’s mother; twisted then the battle-hard one, when he
was enraged, his deadly foe, so that she bowed to the ground.

The repeated reminders that his opponent is female could diminish the manly character of
his victory or merely emphasize that this fight is against the feminine. At the point at
which Beowulf begins to turn the fight in his favor, his opponent, who has been a
monster, a mere-woman, is identified as “Grendel’s mother.”

If Beowulf is on the threshold of manhood, if the adventure among the Danes
represents his passage into manhood, then this violent fight might be seen as a coded
sexual encounter, as Jane Chance suggests (102). A subsequent line of the poem then
becomes fraught with sexual meaning, at least in one translation of *ofsæt*: “Ofsæt þā þone
selegyst, ond hyre seax getēah” (“She sat upon her hall-guest, and drew her knife”; 1545). This reversal of sexual posture, paralleling the parody of vengeance being enacted
by the monster, emphasizes the fact that Beowulf must overthrow this feminine influence.

The intervening lines in which Grendel’s mother renews her attack on Beowulf
resonate in this context. She perseveres like Beowulf, rather than recoiling like Grendel:

*Hēo him eft hraþe andlēan forgeald
grimman grāpum, ond him tōgēanes fēng;
oferwærp þā wērigmōd wigena strengest,
fēþecempa, þæt hē on fylle wearð.* (1541-44)
She to him again quickly paid retribution with a fierce grasp, and embraced him against her; stumbled then, weary in spirit, strongest of warriors, champion, so that he fell.

And Beowulf is saved again by his coat of mail, not by his own strength:

Him on eaxle læg

breōstnet brōden;       þæt gebearh fēore,
wið ord and wið ecge       ingang forstōd.

Hæfde þā forsīðod       sunu Ecgþēowes
under gynne grund,       Geata cempa,
nemne him heaðobyrne       helpe gefremede,
herenet hearde.  (1547b-53a)

On his shoulders lay the woven breast-net; it protected his life, against point and against edge entrance prevented. The son of Ecgtheow had then perished under the wide ground, the Geats’ champion, except the battle-byrnie provided him help, the hard battle-net.

The corselet becomes personified, is given agency. It gebearh, forstōd, and helpe gefremede (“protected,” “prevented,” and “provided help”). Protected by his garment from being pierced by the monster’s knife, and possessing a useless sword, Beowulf seems by turns unmanned by the onslaught of the monster.

When the battle turns again, the narrator makes clear that Beowulf will achieve the victory through the agency of God:

ond hālig God
Beowulf sees a sword among the weapons in the cave that becomes the third sword that he carries into battle. His own sword has not yet been used, having been set aside for the weaponless fight with Grendel and exchanged temporarily for Hrunting, which has been cast aside useless. The sword he finds in the cave, revealed to him by God, has supernatural character, twice identified with giants: “ealdsweord eotenisc” (“ancient sword of a giant”; 1558a) and “gīganta geweorc” (“the work of giants”; 1562b). When Beowulf returns to Heorot, he will refer to it as “ealdsweord ēacen” (“powerful ancient sword”; 1663a). As Hrothgar gazes on the hilt, the narrator calls it again “enta ērgeweorc” (“ancient work of giants”; 1679a) as well as “wundorsmiþa geweorc” (“work of wonder-smiths”; 1681a). In addition, the sword’s formulaically described qualities associate it with the earlier swords, “wǣpna cyst” (“the best of weapons”; 1559b), “gōd ond geatolīc” (“good and adorned”; 1562a), “būton hit wæs māre ēnig mon ōðer / tō beadulāce ætberan meahte” (“except that it was greater than any other man into the battle-play might bear”; 1560-61). The implication that only Beowulf has the strength to wield this sword of giants sets Beowulf outside of manhood—associating him with the monsters of the present—but it also associates him with the giants of the past.
Whatever the meaning of the sword, Beowulf strikes the monstrous woman and kills her, moving through the sequence of manly emotions: Beowulf

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{hrēoh ond heorogrim} & \quad \text{hringmǣl gebrægd} \\
\text{aldres orwēna,} & \quad \text{yrringa slōh,} \\
\text{þæt hire wið halse} & \quad \text{heard grāpode,} \\
\text{bānhringas bræc;} & \quad \text{bil eal ðurhwōd} \\
\text{fægne flǣschoman;} & \quad \text{hēo on flet gecrong,} \\
\text{sweord wæs swātig,} & \quad \text{secg weorce gefeh. (1564-69)}
\end{align*}
\]

savage and sword-fierce, drew the ring-marked sword, of life despairing, in anger struck so that against her neck it hard gripped, broke the bone-rings; the sword passed through the fated body; she fell to the floor, the sword was bloody, the man in the work rejoiced.

Beowulf has regained his agency: drawing, striking, rejoicing. The sword becomes an extension of his action as it grips, breaks, and passes through so that in the end, it is “swātig.” Grendel’s mother bleeds like a human, like him, so he may be killing something like himself, or in himself. He slays that female monster, which suggests the potential for passivity, immoderate behavior, and lack of resolve that have been represented by humans such as the Danish warriors and Unferth.

Beowulf’s subsequent action completes his vengeance, but in a strange act. First, the cave is supernaturally illuminated. Then Beowulf acts with a furor similar to that he accessed to defeat Grendel’s mother: he “wǣpen hafenade / heard be hiltum Higelāces ðegn / yrre ond anrǣd” (“lifted the weapon hard by its hilt, Hygelac’s thane,
angry and resolute”; 1573b-75a). In this moment, the poet emphasizes Beowulf’s warrior status and his connection to his maternal uncle and king. And he maintains his anger through his rejoicing at the monster’s death. Then the theme of vengeance is emphasized:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{næs sēo ecg fracod} \\
\text{hilderince, } & \text{ac hē hraþe wolde} \\
\text{Grendle forgylidan} & \text{gūðrǣsa fela} \\
\text{ðāra þe hē geworhte} & \text{tō West-Denum} \\
\text{oftor micle} & \text{ðonne on ēnne sīð.} (1575b-79)
\end{align*}
\]

the edge was not useless to that warrior, but he quickly wished to pay back Grendel for the many battle-rushes which he had wrought on the West-Danes much more often than on one occasion.

As discussed earlier, Beowulf’s final violence in the cave is beheading the dead Grendel.

*Crossing the Threshold into Manhood*

Then the poet turns to the activity of “Weder-Gēata lēod” (“the man of the Weder-Geats”; 1612b), who takes only the hilt of the melted sword and Grendel’s head from among the treasures in the cave before swimming back to the world. Like Heorot before, the hall of the monsters is cleansed, but the act that accomplishes that cleansing remains ambiguous:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{wǣron ȳðgebland} & \text{ eal gefēlsod} \\
\text{ēacne eardas} & \text{ þā se ellorgāst}
\end{align*}
\]
oflēt lýfdagas ond þās lēnan gesceaf. (1620-22)

the sea currents were all cleansed, the vast regions, when the departing
spirit relinquished its life-days in this transitory world.

Four lines earlier, the “departing spirit” seems to be Grendel, whose blood has melted the
sword. The cleansing, therefore, seems to be connected more to the death—and
dismemberment—of the male monster. Beowulf swims to the surface “swīðmōd”
(“stout-hearted”), rejoicing in his deed, and the thanes rejoice in him (1624-47). Beowulf
re-emerges onto the land as if birthed from the mere “wældrēore fāg” (“with slaughter-
blood stained”; 1631). The thanes remove his helmet and byrnie after he emerges, but
the unarmored body is not described.

When Beowulf and the Geats bear the head back to Heorot as a token, the
sequence of events in the hall demonstrate Beowulf’s crossing the threshold of manhood.

At their arrival, Beowulf becomes the focus of a passage of praise:

Đā cōm in gân ealdor ðegna,
dǣdcēne mon dōme gewurþad,
haele hildedēor, Hrōðgār grētan. (1644-46)

Then came walking in the leader of the thanes, the deed-bold man,
honored in fame, the battle-brave hero, to greet Hrothgar.

The scene in the meadhall provides a display again to set the masculine against the
feminine as the queen is in the hall:

þār guman druncon,
egeslīc for eorlum ond þāre idese mid
there men drank, terrible for earls and the lady together the wondrous spectacle; men looked on.

The passage draws attention to the queen’s presence, seemingly making her an equal witness to the “wondrous spectacle” of Grendel’s head. Yet the witnesses are three times identified as men (guman, eorlum, weras) creating a tension in the reading of gender.

After Beowulf has defeated the female monster, the queen, whose presence was so prominent in the previous night’s celebration, seems to have again been reduced to a passive observer.  

Beowulf’s subsequent performance in the hall establishes his superior manhood. Beowulf’s speech is introduced formally, invoking his father’s name: “Bēowulf maþelode, bearn Ecgþēowes” (1651). He addresses his words directly to Hrothgar, directing attention to the spectacle of the head and the hilt:

\[
\text{Hwæt! wē þē þās sǣlāc, sunu Healfdenes lēod Scyldinga, lustum brōhton, }
\text{tīres tō tācne, þē þū hēr tō lōcast. (1652-54)}
\]

Lo! We to you these sea-gifts, son of Healfdene, prince of the Scyldings, with joy brought, a token of glory, that you here gaze on.

The items that Beowulf has brought from the monsters’ cave are gifts—though they are not like the gifts that Beowulf had received earlier from Hrothgar. The shift to the singular “token of glory” suggests their power—as well as the positive reflection they

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11 Liuzza translates the weras of the last half line as “Everyone” (103).
cast on Beowulf. By the end of the speech, Beowulf asserts that he has avenged the crimes against the Danes, fulfilling the vow that he had made earlier to make Heorot safe.

Then he suggests the degree to which he has proven himself superior to the Danes:

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{Ic hit þē þonne gehāte,} & \text{þæt þū on Heorote mōst} \\
&\text{sorhlēas swefan} & \text{þēnra secga gedryht} \\
&\text{ond þegna gehwylc} & \text{þēnra lēoda,} \\
&\text{duguðe ond iogoþe} & \text{þæt þū him ondrǣdan ne þearft,} \\
&\text{þēoden Scyldinga,} & \text{on þā healfe,} \\
&\text{alderbealu eorlum,} & \text{swā þū ðēr dydest. (1671-76)} \\
\end{align*}
\]

I to you then promise that you in Heorot may sleep secure with your troop of men and each of the thanes from your people, old warriors and young warriors, that you do not need to dread, prince of the Scyldings, on your part, the life-evil to earls, as you earlier did.

The implied former fear of the potential slaughter of men places Hrothgar in a position inferior to Beowulf, despite the formality and deference with which Beowulf speaks.

In summarizing events in the monster’s cave, Beowulf emphasizes his own strength in recalling the role of the two swords. He could not “æt hilde mid Hruntinge / wiht gewyrcan, þēah þæt wǣpen duge” (“in battle with Hrunting, achieve anything, though that weapon is good”; 1659-60). The sword could stand as a symbol of the Danish men—ineffective despite past success. He then says that God allowed him only to see the sword, leaving him the agency to act, which he describes succinctly: “Ofslōh ðā æt þǣre sæcce, þā mē sǣl āgeald, / hūses hyrdas” (“I slew
then in that contest, when the shepherds of that house rewarded me the opportunity”; 1665-66a). Interestingly, he speaks as though he has slain two monsters with that sword, when in fact he has beheaded an already dead Grendel. Then he describes the melting of the sword in graphically violent terms: “þā þæt hildebil / forbarn, brogdenmǣl, swā þæt blōd gesprang, / hātost heaðoswāta” (“Then that battle-sword burned up, marked with signs, as the blood sprang forth, hottest battle-sweat”; 1666b-68a).

Clearly, entering the mere to fight Grendel’s mother, Beowulf crosses a threshold. The monsters dwell in the borderlands, the wastelands, a region that Hrothgar claims not to know, despite his eventual revelation of considerable information about the mere and the monsters. Everyone else waits at the edge when Beowulf alone enters the water—at the place that even a cornered stag will avoid going into the water (1368-72a). In the water Beowulf enters a dreamworld where he is beset with monsters—monsters with strong sexual overtones. Beowulf is still young, proving his manhood. His bold actions place him at the opposite pole from the aged Hrothgar. In terms of the poem’s structure, Beowulf is in the midst of his youthful adventures before he subsequently becomes the aged king himself, at the other extreme of his life, at the other point of passage into another world. In the literal warrior context of the poem, Beowulf is proving himself according to the code: desire for fame, desire for danger, physical prowess, winning of rewards. The troll-wife of course is not a woman, but she may represent the monstrous threat of the feminine: this could mean the distraction from the masculine world or the domestication of the violent hero. And the watery, dreamlike ambience of this
transitional scene invites us to see the following scene as sexual initiation as well as a physical/martial one.

**Hrothgar’s Advice: The Past Informing the Future**

When Beowulf finishes speaking, the narrator turns to Hrothgar, contrasting Beowulf’s emergent manhood with Hrothgar’s receding manhood. Hrothgar is described as “gamelum rince” (“the old warrior”; 1677b). Furthermore, his passivity is emphasized as he receives the sword from Beowulf: the hilt, “on hand gyfen” (“in his hand was given”; 1678b); “hit on æht gehwearf” (“it into his possession passed”; 1679b); “on geweald gehwearf woroldcyninga / ðǣm sēlestan” (“into the power it passed of the best of world kings”; 1684-85a). The sword’s apparent agency, emphasized by variation, contrasts with Hrothgar’s passivity, undercutting the praise of his leadership and making the gray hair and wisdom more apparent. Depicting the flood and inscribed with the identity of its original owner, the sword that Beowulf has wielded to kill the monsters becomes a relic of the past in Hrothgar’s hands: “enta Ærgeweore” (1679a) and “eald lāfe” (“the old relic”; 1688a). After the traditional introduction of Hrothgar’s speech, “Hrōðgar maþelode,” the narrative pauses to focus on the sword hilt with its engraved story of the flood that becomes inspiration for Hrothgar’s meditative words of wisdom—often referred to as his sermon.

A second introduction of Hrothgar’s speech emphasizes both his wisdom and his patriarchal descent: “Đā se wīsa spræc, / sunu Helfdenes” (“Then the wise one spoke, son of Healfdene”; 1698b-99a). Hrothgar then gives Beowulf advice for the future, seeming
no longer to be absorbed in any present role of manhood. He begins with praise for Beowulf: “ðes eorl wǣre / geboren betera!” (“this earl was born a better man”; 1702b-03a). The context suggests that Hrothgar means better than himself. The two and a half lines of his speech that precede this judgment seem obliquely about himself and emphasize those qualities that distinguish him from Beowulf: he speaks rather than acts; his actions are primarily to remember; and he is the “eald ēðelweard” (“old guard of the homeland”; 1702a). As earlier when Hrothgar had spoken of the mother of a warrior like Beowulf, Hrothgar’s allusion is not clearly to himself. The latter description combines contrasting images—the strength of being the guardian of his people and weakness of his advanced age—reminding us that his glory is in the past.\footnote{“Guardian” may also be seen as a passive role; it is also a term applied, possiblyironically, to Grendel.} The first contrast is expressed in interesting fashion when Hrothgar conflates speech with action in introducing his praise of Beowulf as the better man: “þæt, lā, mæg secgan, sē þe sōd ond riht / fremed on folce” (“That, indeed, one may say, he who in truth and right acts among his people”; 1700-01a). Speech is Hrothgar’s only action in the poem. Suggesting that Beowulf’s latest actions—defeating the troll-wife and cutting off Grendel’s head—have served as a rite of passage, Hrothgar further enhances Beowulf’s status, saying, “Blǣd is ārāred / geond wīdwegas, wine mīn Bēowulf, / ðīn ofer þēoda gehwylce” (“Your glory is exalted throughout the world, my friend Beowulf, over every people”; 1703b-05a). It sounds as if Beowulf has attained the level of fame that Hrothgar has previously had—and passed through. Furthermore, he praises Beowulf for his maturity: “Eal þū hit gehylendum healdest, / mægen mid mōdes snyttrum” (“You hold it all patiently, might with...
mind’s wisdom”; 1705b-06a). Beowulf combines the traits of the young (strength) and old (patience and wisdom). Thus, again Beowulf seems to be at the threshold—but now having crossed it—between boy and man. Hrothgar has passed through manhood, having wisdom without strength. That balance—which also can be seen to be a balance between masculine and feminine—may define manhood. Monsters have strength; old men and women have wisdom; boys have impatient/impetuous strength. The poem may suggest that only a man can hold those qualities at once.

As Hrothgar’s speech continues, his advice reveals the contrast between his age and Beowulf’s youth. He relies first on his remembrance of the past, beginning by referring to the evil example of Heremod and ending with a remembrance of the exemplary model of his own life. When Beowulf recounts his adventure on his return home, he notes this tendency of Hrothgar:

```
eldo gebunden

gomel gūðwiga          gioguðe cwīðan,
hilstrengo;          hreðer inne wēoll,
þonne hē wintrum frōd          worn gemunde. (2111b-14)
```

bound in age, the old warrior spoke of youth, battle-strength; his heart within him welled when he, in winters wise, a multitude remembered.

By means of the two analogies from the past, Hrothgar warns Beowulf against the arrogance that leads men not to be properly generous, leaving them unprepared for death, including from “atol yldo” (“hateful old age”; 1766a).
The next morning, taking his leave, Beowulf vows to provide future help to the Danes if needed. Beowulf’s speech causes Hrothgar to remark on his wisdom: “ne hȳrde ic snotorlīcor / on swā geongum feore guman þingian” (“Never heard I wiser speech in a man so young in life”; 1842b-43). Hrothgar then says that the Geats could have no better choice for a king if Hygelac were to die. Then Hrothgar reveals that Beowulf’s actions have settled a feud between the Danes and Geats:

Hafast þū gefēred, þæt þām folcum sceal,
Gēata lēodum ond Gār-Denum,
sib gemǣne, ond sacu restan,
inwitnīþas, þē hīe ǣr drugon. (1855-58)

You have brought to pass that these peoples, the people of the Geats and Spear-Danes, kinship remember, and strife shall sleep, malicious attacks that they earlier endured.

This assertion has led Robert Morey to suggest that “Beowulf also fulfills his society’s idealized feminine role: that of peaceweaver” and “becomes distinctly feminized” (486). Hrothgar continues, promising that he will give treasures and that there will be peaceful meetings between the two peoples “ealde wīsan” (“in the old way”; 1865b). Even this, Hrothgar’s strongest assertion about the future, he defines in terms of a return to the past. Finally, Hrothgar is overcome with emotion as Beowulf leaves. He kisses the young warrior as “hruron him tēaras, / blondenfeaxum” (“tears ran down his gray beard”; 1872b-73a). “Ealdum infrōdum” (“Old and wise”; 1874a), he realizes that he will not see
Beowulf again. In contrast, Beowulf marches to his ship “since hrēmig” (“exulting in treasure”; 1882a).

**Returning Home a Man**

Rather than feminizing him, as Morey suggests, enacting the peaceweaver-like role may indeed complete Beowulf’s initiation into full manhood. As Beowulf returns home, the role of the peaceweaver/peace pledge is given prominence. After Beowulf is sighted by the Geats’ coast guard at line 1914, fewer than three hundred lines remain to complete the story of his adventure among the Danes. The first half of these 286 lines contain the most dense group of references to women in the entire poem. After brief description of Beowulf landing and having his treasure unloaded to be taken to Hygelac’s hall, a reference to Hygd, Hygelac’s queen, “swīðe geong, / wīs wēlþungen” (“very young, wise, accomplished”; 1926b-27a), leads to a meditation on queenship. Hygd is contrasted with Modthryth, the arrogant queen who had men killed for looking at her, but who became a model queen after her marriage to Offa.13 The narrator’s meditation on queenship parallels Hrothgar’s meditation on kingship, in which Heremod provides the cautionary exemplum. After Beowulf reaches the hall, as many lines are devoted to Hygd’s passing through the hall with the cup as are devoted to Hygelac greeting Beowulf. As Beowulf recounts his adventure, he begins with the cupbearing of Wealhtheow and Hrothgar’s daughter Freawaru. The presence of Freawaru had not been

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13 Gillian Overing does not think that Modthryth provides an opposition to Hygd in the same way that Heremod does for Beowulf: “there is a part of Modthryth that will not translate or match up” (106). She creates a disruption that does not fit “the masculine symbolic order of the poem” (104), introducing “disease” and “a tremor of amazement at the unknown” (107).
mentioned earlier and here leads Beowulf into a reflection on her likely failure as peace pledge between Hrothgar and Ingeld. Beowulf imagines this failure in terms that recall the Finnsburg story that was told in Heorot. Violence erupts when broken are “on bā healfe / āðsweord eorla” (“on both sides sword-oaths of earls”; 2063-64a).

Thus, the context of Beowulf’s return, and the transition into the final episode, is that of failed peaceweaving and the hopelessness of controlling masculine violence. In particular, Beowulf’s imagining characterizes the failure in terms of the past infecting the future. He imagines the words of an old warrior to a young warrior, making him notice that his former enemy is wearing his father’s sword, reminding him of past enmity:

\[
\text{Manað swā ond myndgað mǣla gehwylce} \\
\text{sārum wordum oð ðæt sæl cymeð,} \\
\text{þæt se fǣmnan þegn fore fæder dǣdum} \\
\text{æfter billes bite blōd-fāg swefeð,} \\
\text{ealdres scyldig. (2057-2061a)}
\]

He urges thus and calls to mind on every occasion with painful words until that time comes when the lady’s thane, for his father’s deeds, after sword’s bite, blood-stained sleeps, his life forfeited.

The old warrior’s words do not reflect wisdom of age, and they engender only the recursive violence that results from revenge. As the words culminate in a return to violence, Beowulf remembers the fǣmnan placed hopelessly at the center of this violence, like Hildeburh. Beowulf’s wisdom about the peace pledge, however, does not rely upon remembering the past, but upon recognizing the cycle of revenge that comes
from remembering the past. His meditation on the future calls to mind Hrothgar’s declaration that he has never seen such wisdom in one so young. Rather than the wisdom of age, Beowulf seems to possess the wisdom of the peace-weaving queen.

The last half of the passage concluding the Danish adventure includes Beowulf’s retelling of his fights with the monsters and culminates with an exchange of gifts. While Beowulf adds a few details that were not included in the earlier descriptions of the two fights, he tells the story concisely in seventy-five lines, assuming that the story of his fights already “is undyrne” (“is not a secret”; 2000a). So his account is likely to focus on what is most important at this moment. Like his earlier retelling of the competition with Breca, he can tell the version that will serve the immediate purpose. He does not linger on what he did to defeat Grendel; “tō lang ys tō recenne” (“Too long it is to tell”; 2093a). Most interestingly, he does not refer to his beheading of Grendel in the cave. At the end of the story of the fight with Grendel he says, “Hē hēan ēnan, / mōdes gēomor meregrund gefēoll” (“He humiliated went thence, mournful in mind, fell on the mere-bottom”; 2099b-2100). He gives nearly as much attention to the celebration that followed Grendel’s defeat. But after a very brief and general reference to the gifts he received, he tells of a “gomela Scilding” (2105b) who “feorran rehte” (“told stories from long ago”; 2106b). It is unclear whether this is a reference to Hrothgar or a scop. But Beowulf moves on to describe

 hwīlum syllīc spell
 rehte æfter rīhte rūmheort cyning;
 hwīlum eft ongan eldo gebunden
Sometimes an excellent tale told, as was right, the great-hearted king; sometimes again began, in old age bound, the old warrior to speak of youth, his battle-strength; his heart welled up within him, when wise in winters, he remembered much.

Beowulf here recognizes the way the Danes represent a passive remembrance of the past that contrasts with an active engagement in the present that will engender a future for a tribe. Beowulf then recounts the fight with Grendel’s mother. Again his focus is less on his own actions than on those of the monster. Notably, he asserts that “Wīf unhŷre / hyre bearn gewræc” (“the savage woman her son avenged”; 2120b-21a). Vengeance is easy—achievable by the doubly unmasculine monstrous woman.

As a result of his performance, both in Daneland and in Hygelac’s hall upon his return home, Beowulf attains his full and rightful position among the Geats. Hygelac presents him with the sword of his grandfather, Hrethel. In addition, he receives seven thousand hides of land, which Eric John convincingly argues represents his patrimony, as well as a hall and gift-stool.  

14 While Hygelac continues to rule the kingdom,

Him wæs bām samod
Thus, Beowulf has attained his full status within his society. He has his full rights of manhood. It is inarguable that Beowulf achieves that status through the physical prowess, strength, courage, and resolve that he demonstrates in defeating the two monsters as well as the words and deeds that demonstrate the proper behavior as a member of the masculine community, acts of revenge and individual sacrifice, but also generosity and, most important, loyalty. Further, his actions symbolically distinguish him from non-men, both the monster and the monstrous female. As a result of these masculine behaviors, the masculine warrior enacts a power of generating the future without feminine agency. But the evidence of the final passages of the poem’s second episode suggests that, while the man must master certain aspects of the feminine, he must internalize others to achieve complete manhood. Just as each court has at its heart the wise-counseling, peace-weaving queen, the man requires a core of such feminine wisdom. This is, however, not the wisdom of old age as seen in Hrothgar, which is accompanied by the additional qualities of passivity, excessive emotion, and weakness, but the active wisdom demonstrated by Wealhtheow. That such a balanced concept of manhood is required seems to be born out in the final episode of the poem when an

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15 These aspects of the warrior code will be discussed in Chapter 4.
elderly Beowulf faces the dragon, where feminine presence is almost completely absent, and the physical prowess that Beowulf has maintained into old age is inadequate to save the Geats from the cycle of revenge.

The dark future that is forecast for the Geats at the end of *Beowulf* suggests the change that is inevitable for any culture. While much that defines manhood for Beowulf will apply among the knightly class that emerges in the post-Conquest world, cultural changes over the ensuing centuries, particularly the relationship of the Church to the rising feudal culture, changes the ideal of manhood in visible ways. When the literary romance emerges in the twelfth century, the knightly hero seems a very different model of masculinity.
CHAPTER 2: REDEFINING MASCULINITY IN THE TWELFTH CENTURY

In the first chapter I have argued that the hero of the pre-conquest Anglo-Saxon poem *Beowulf* achieves manhood by balancing the animating forces of youth, the monstrous, and the feminine. He performs rationally controlled violence in loyal service to his lord. Through his generous actions and resolve he achieves lasting fame for himself as he strives for the continued existence of the communities for whom he acts. His deeds are supported by wisdom expressed in speech that powerfully engenders future action. By deeds and words he establishes his place as a man in a homosocial community of warriors and a patriarchal society.

The reshaping of the context for constructing manhood in twelfth-century French romance reveals itself most obviously in the breaking down of the exclusivity of the masculine community that dominates the world depicted in *Beowulf*. In romance narrative, women assume a more prominent presence and become primary motivators of action as potential mates, as nurturers, and as lovers. In these narratives, the chivalric code defines an emerging model of masculinity that responds to this new context for the masculine hero’s initiation. This new, feminized world, I will argue, reflects shifting social conditions in the period between the Norman Conquest and the reign of Henry II (1154-1189). Changing principles of ownership and inheritance of property and the growing influence and power of the Church combine to reshape the world of the secular leader and warrior; in particular, the interests of secular and ecclesiastical leaders compete directly in the century-long conflict to control marriage. In the end, the triumph of the ecclesiastical model recasts marriage as a personal relationship between husband
and wife, one of many relationships that become redefined by the recognition of the power of spiritual love. As marriage becomes central to defining manhood, the qualities that attract a mate and lead to the development of marital love become associated with the ideal of manhood that is on display in the hero of emerging genre of romance.

Twelfth-century France provides such a discontinuity in context between Chrétien de Troyes’ first Arthurian romance *Erec et Enide* and the Anglo-Saxon *Beowulf* that it might render the comparison of the two heroes meaningless. Milton McC. Gatch observes, “The Norman Conquest of England coincided with (and indeed was part of) a major and international cultural revolution which so altered all of European culture that what followed can justly be said to be the product of a different civilization” (18). Specific changes in the cultural landscape during this revolution may seem to provide obvious explanations for the emergence of a new literary hero, for example the influence of “courtly love” or the generic shift from epic to romance. The most common explanation for the difference between the worlds of *Beowulf* and *Erec* is the influence of Christianity. In *Chivalry*, Maurice Keen concludes that “chivalry may be described as an ethos in which martial, aristocratic, and Christian elements were fused together” (16). *Beowulf* can be seen as having the martial and aristocratic elements without the Christian. In a study that separates *Beowulf’s* warrior ethic from its immediate historical context, Chris Blazina reaches a similar conclusion, claiming that the chivalric code “took the Indo-European warrior and gave him an injection of love, gentleness, and mercy” (33). Blazina concludes that “the hardened warrior is challenged to become, instead, a softened chivalrous and courtly gentleman” (xvii). This conclusion reflects a
common reaction to the new hero of romance—that he is somehow “softened” or even feminized.

However, Chrétien’s first romance defies such assumptions. In fact, Erec’s behavior is far from soft, having more in common with Beowulf than not, as is demonstrated in Chapter 3 and analyzed in Chapter 4. While Erec, like romance heroes who will follow, demonstrates marked differences from Beowulf, broader generalizations about the change in the literary hero do not really apply. Erec et Enide bears little mark of courtly love, unlike Chrétien’s later Le Chevalier de la Charrette, in which Lancelot’s story exemplifies courtly love as it comes to be recognized. The romance also does not have an overt Christian presence as will Chrétien’s later Conte du Graal. All of the “broad-stroke” differences, as Blazina characterizes his own analysis, miss the nuances of the specific historic changes in the construction of masculinity that occurs in the time and place where the romance emerged. The romance hero, especially as imagined by Chrétien de Troyes, reflects how the ideal of manhood was being reconstructed in the twelfth century.

**Chivalric Masculinity**

The twelfth century saw the rise to preeminence of a new warrior model, defined by the code of chivalry. In *Chivalry*, Maurice Keen’s groundbreaking 1984 historical synthesis of the subject, Keen concludes that chivalry “is a way of life in which we can discern these three essential facets, the military, the noble, and the religious” (17). Keen derives this general description, in particular, from three treatises, two from the mid-
thirteenth century—*Ordene de chevalerie* and Ramon Lull’s *Book of the Ordre of Chivalrye*—and one from the mid-fourteenth century—Geoffrey de Charny’s *Livre de chevelerie*. The latter is clearly influenced by the first two, and subsequent treatises into the sixteenth century do not add much to the essentials of chivalry described by these three (15). While these defining treatises come much later than Chrétien’s romances, the chivalry they describe is rooted in the ideals that show themselves as early as *Erec et Enide*. Keen notes that the extension of chivalric virtues to all fighting men fits the social developments of the fourteenth century, but the democratization of chivalric values may also have roots in the time of Chrétien. Keen says of the twelfth-century *Livre de manieres* of Etienne de Fougères, Bishop of Lisieux, that it “has at least a claim to contain the first systematic treatment of chivalry” (4). Written during the same time that Chrétien is writing Arthurian romances, Etienne’s book, like the treatises that follow, is written in the vernacular, as are the romances which take their name from their composition in the vernacular.

Unlike the work of churchmen and other didactic writing, composed in Latin, these vernacular works speak directly to an audience of knights, the fighting men on whom the ruling powers of church and state were coming to rely. Georges Duby identifies specifically the young knights,¹⁶ participants in tournaments and the courtly love game, as the primary audience for romances and whose interests “governed the development of aristocratic values” (*Love and Marriage* 69). The male heroes of the court poets “were quite evidently admired and imitated during the second half of the

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¹⁶ These “youths” (*juvenes*), unmarried knights, are discussed below.
twelfth century” (*Love and Marriage* 59). Furthermore, Keen observes that the documented careers of two knights in the latter half of the twelfth century, Arnold of Ardres and William Marshall, “make it clear, in fact, that already then a pattern of chivalrous living, with a defined style of its own, was well established” (21). Both knights were associated with courts known to Chrétien. As a youth, Arnold was placed in the care of Philip of Flanders, and William Marshall, of course, was long associated with the Angevins, beginning with his mentoring of the son of Henry II, Young King Henry (1170-1183), and ending with his serving as regent for the young Henry III (1216-1272), son of King John (1199-1216).

The treatises describe chivalric ideals to which young men at court could aspire. Despite his strong religious focus, Lull gives knighthood secular origins. He “urges knights to exercise themselves at jousts and tournaments, which were banned by the church.” Also, knighthood is connected to secular government; the knight is “not only a nobly born warrior but a lord of men” (Keen 11). According to Keen, Geoffrey de Charny extends the description of the knight in three ways that not only reflect courtly romance but reflect the new context for the literary construction of masculinity. First, Geoffrey’s description gives women and love a prominent place in the chivalric life. The knight achieves higher renown for the honor of his lady. The quest for ever higher renown is a second extension of the knightly ideal by Geoffrey. The best men move from one honor to the next: a knightly career will progress through jousts to tournaments to war, with honor further accruing to those who fight in distant countries (13). As Keen
emphasizes, “Chivalry involves a constant quest to improve upon achievement and cannot rest satisfied” (15).

This notion of a “constant quest” suggests an ongoing initiation that occurs in the familiar romance plot of the knight errant. Furthermore, the evolution from “jousts to tournaments to war” a movement from game, or “imitation war,” to reality reflects the growth of the hero found in Chrétien’s romances, who first imitates the forms and appearances of manhood before internalizing the values that underlie the forms. Finally, Keen notes that Geoffrey includes all men at arms in the order of chivalry, not just knights (14). For example, William Marshall, as the landless fourth son of an English baron, earned his eventual powerful place by beginning with tournament success. Keen identifies him with “those ‘poor companions’ whom Geoffrey de Charny includes in the brotherhood of chivalry” (22).

Unlike the idealizations of both courtly romance literature and the descriptions of the warrior class by churchmen, these treatises present a more realistic image of knighthood. As Keen says of the Ordene, “It offers an excellent introduction to what men understood chivalry to mean” (8). The picture of chivalry that these three treatises present accords with what is still recognized as chivalric behavior, which is to say what is demonstrated in the knightly romances. Keen observes that the Ordene, in addition to the religious requirements made of a knight, the commandments to “eschew false judgment and treason and . . . honor and aid womankind, recall two classic themes of romantic narrative” (8). Thus, the chivalric code acknowledges explicitly the prominence of women, if only as a passive object of men’s attention.
Women in romances, in fact, become essential to the construction of the knight’s chivalric persona, and so of his manhood. Women take prominent positions in the narrative, interacting with the hero in ways that define his character. In the *Roman d’Eneas* (c.1160), one of the earliest vernacular romances, many of the additions the poet makes to Virgil augment the presence of female characters. Among John A. Yunck’s catalogue of the French poet’s additions to the poem are instances when the poet interrupts the narrative for long digressions, including the story of the Judgment of Paris and description of Camilla (18). More generally, Yunck observes, “Romantic love in *Eneas*, especially as it appears in the long yearnings of Eneas and Lavine for each other, is the French poet’s greatest, and most crucial, contribution to the genre,” adding that “before *Eneas*, there is no expanded treatment of it in the long vernacular narrative” (27).

Women and romantic love, and its implications for the male hero, take center stage in Chrétien’s Arthurian romances that follow *Eneas*. Chrétien’s creation of the love story between Lancelot and Guinevere in *Le Chevalier de la Charrette* may be the most well-known example. The entire narrative focuses on Lancelot’s relentless attempts to rescue the captured queen. However, other of Chrétien’s romances present women who play a more active and meaningful role in the hero’s development. For example, in *Le Chevalier au Lion*, Yvain’s life is saved and he is aided throughout his adventures by Lunete, who says to him, “Vos, la vostre grant merci, / m’i enorastes et servistes” (“You, to your great credit, / honored and served me there”; 1012-13). She refers to his courteous treatment of her when she visited Arthur’s court. Even more important to

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17 Unless otherwise indicated, all translations of *Le Chevalier au Lion* are those of William W. Kibler from his facing-page translation of the romance.
Yvain’s story is Lunete’s mistress, the Lady Laudine, whom Yvain persuades to marry him aided by Lunete’s intervention. His subsequent betrayal of his promise to her not only drives the narrative, but initiates the events that will lead to his development as a man. Likewise, the female character who has the most profound influence on the hero in *Erec et Enide* is Erec’s wife, Enide.\(^\text{18}\)

**Courtly Love**

While romantic love is central to early romances, especially those of Chrétien, courtly love is not. Yunck notes that “the romantic passion in *Eneas* has nothing to do with” the literary trope of courtly love (29). With the exception of *Le Chevalier de la Charrete*, Chrétien’s romances do not depict courtly love. Instead, Chrétien is more interested in love associated with marriage. However, romantic love at the center of Chrétien’s romances may emerge from the same tradition as the courtly love convention.

Rather than being a sign of feminizing influence, the behavior in the French courts that gave rise to the literary trope of courtly love can be seen as having traditional masculine values at its heart, a manifestation of male bonding. Georges Duby describes courtly love as “a man’s game—specifically masculine, as was indeed the whole literature which revealed the rules of the game and which exalted only male values” (*Love and Marriage* 33). This man’s game was controlled by the lord: “Women were never anything other than bit-part players, lures—mere objects. All the poems of courtly love were sung by men, and the desire which they celebrated was always male desire”

\(^{18}\) *Erec et Enide* will be the focus of Chapter 3.
This misogynist game is about the relationship between lord and vassal—not really about the relationship between men and women. Duby calls it the “exact counterpart to the tournament,” in which “the young man was risking his life in the hope of improving himself, of enhancing his worth, his price” (Love and Marriage 57). Courtly love was an education in moderation, but also required competition. The best man was the one who served the lady best, “and serving was the duty of the good vassal.” The model for this amorous relationship is friendship, amistat, Cicero’s amicitia: “To desire the well-being of another person more than one’s own was what the lord expected of his man” (Love and Marriage 62).

Elaborating on Duby’s argument, Meg Bogin in an introductory section of her book The Women Troubadours argues that the love described by the troubadours of southern France, from which courtly love originated, can be interpreted as an expression of the lord-vassal relationship. These court poets were dependent on wealthy patrons and had to satisfy a diverse audience at the court, which included the lord and his peers, his wife and her attendants, and a diversity of lesser nobles and men of “unclear status” (49). She describes courtly love as “a patrimony any man could have if he was ‘courtly’.” At “the center of the overwhelmingly male court” was the wife of the lord, who made cultural decisions or who, in the lord’s absence on Crusade or other military adventures, presided over the court on her own (51). Chrétien identifies such a court and patron as audience for both Erec et Enide and Le Chevalier de la Charrete. He identifies the Court of Champagne in his introduction to Erec et Enide and says his story of Lancelot is written at the behest of Marie de
Champagne (1145-98), who provides both the “matier et san” (“matter and the meaning”; 26). Marie, daughter of Eleanor of Aquitane and Louis VII, presided over the court of Champagne as regent from 1181-87 and 1190-97. Into such a courtly milieu, Bogin suggests, the troubadour inserts himself in the persona of the courtly lover: “With his image of the noble lady deigning to receive the low-born poet as her vassal, the troubadour extended to these footloose men the possibility of membership in a new aristocracy, an aristocracy based not on noble birth or feats at arms, but on nobility of spirit.”

After quoting Bernart de Ventadorn’s (c. 1140-1200) use of the word friendship (*amistat*) to characterize his relationship with the lady, Bogin notes that the use of the term has led to “interminable speculation” about just what this relationship between the man and woman was (51). Duby describes this *amor* as friendship like that which strengthens the bond between vassal and lord, “thereby reinforcing the political foundations of the social structure.” He suggests that the mistress becomes identified with the lord (*Love and Marriage* 33-34). Similarly, Bogin calls the lady “a convenient stand-in for her husband,” bridging the gap in social status between men in a way that could not be done directly (55). Thus, both Bogin and Duby seem to suggest that this literary trope with its obvious parallels of lord and vassal played out by the lady and knight serves as a vicarious male-bonding ritual.

Bogin shows further that the language used by the poets emphasizes the gender ambiguity. The troubadours addressed the lady as *midons* (my lord), creating at once anonymity and ambiguity. Maintaining the anonymity of the lady addressed in the poem
allowed for the audience to identify the object of the poet’s love as anyone, and particularly protected him from the danger of expressing love for his patroness openly. This anonymity is the source of the convention of the secrecy of the love in courtly romance. By referring to the lover as *midons*, he creates even an ambiguity of gender.

Bogin calls the word “almost hermaphroditic,” combining a feminine possessive with the masculine *dons*, lord, making her “more than ‘just’ a woman: she was a man” (50). Further, “*dons* expressed the troubadour’s exact relation to his patron.” The feminine possessive made the flattery “appropriately oblique” (50).

While courtly love does not reflect in a direct way anything new in the relation of men and women, Duby sees it as one of several forces that work to reduce masculine aggression. Abduction was “placed among the foremost acts of valor in the moral code of the bachelors. But in a society that was becoming less brutal each day, the proprieties demanded that abduction be given a more sophisticated and sublimated form” (*Medieval Marriage* 105). Duby sees the game of courtly love as controlled by the *senior* as a means of “domesticating” the youth (*Medieval Marriage* 15). While courtly love emphasized men’s sexual aggression, the woman’s role in the game forced the young man to learn “how to master himself, and how to control his body” (*Love and Marriage* 58). The new game “introduced moderation, self-control and that semi-monastic virtue, discretion, into the fundamental values of the moral code of knighthood” (*Love and Marriage* 73).

In addition, courtly love may have provided a counterpoint to emphasize the relationship that was more fundamentally changing the way in which masculinity was
constructed in the romance: marriage. For Duby, the game of courtly love, as an expression of the masculine pursuit of adventure, ultimately reflected the value of marriage. For the youth it fulfilled a “dream of abduction” (Medieval Marriage 13) that expressed a “profound hostility to marriage” (Medieval Marriage 14). While the attention of literary scholars is usually focused on the adulterous game, Duby asserts that a current that held marriage among the highest values of aristocratic society also “pervaded the entire literature of entertainment” (Medieval Marriage 15).

The changing shape of the institution of marriage that may have led to the literary construct of courtly love may have also been the root cause for a new social construction of masculinity that is reflected in Chrétien’s Erec et Enide. In the twelfth century the Church and the nobility jousted for power on the field of marriage, which then became central to defining manhood. The adult status of a man came to be identified by reference to his marital status—juvenes vs. seniores (Brundage 205; Duby, Love and Marriage 57, 69)—rather than being defined in terms of one’s place among the warriors—geogothe vs. duguthe—as it is in Old English poetry. According to JoAnn McNamara, the marriage rituals “equated male adulthood with the assumption of responsibility of a family of dependents” (4). No longer could one’s manly rights be defined only in terms of physical strength and ability to control other men or be maintained solely by the interests of family and feudal lords. Duby identifies the twelfth century as “the beginning of the decisive phase” in the conflict between “the lay model of marriage, created to safeguard the social order, and the ecclesiastical model, created to safeguard the divine order” (Medieval Marriage 3).
Safeguarding the Social Order: Aristocratic Marriage

Primogeniture

Because both *Beowulf* and *Erec et Enide* mark the hero’s achievement of full masculine status by his receipt of his patrimony and assumption of his privileged place, the process of inheritance provides important context for the way that each constructs masculinity. In *Medieval Marriage*, Georges Duby observes that the aristocracy in the twelfth century came to rely upon “the resources of a patrimony and on the hereditary power to exploit the land and men.” He concludes, “The knights of the twelfth century were basically inheritors” (9). Noble houses proliferated in the tenth century as feudal tenures became hereditary. In the latter half of the eleventh and the twelfth centuries, this proliferation stopped when, in order to protect their patrimony, aristocratic families became “lineage-oriented” (10). In *Love and Marriage in the Middle Ages*, Duby presents evidence from deeds in Burgundy over the course of the eleventh century that shows by mid-century “a gradual strengthening of the solidarity of blood relatives around the family inheritance” (106). At the same time, the extension of the rights of the husband along with the custom of excluding women from inheritance led to the prevailing of male lineages after 1000 (109). The families’ interest in lineage is shown by the genealogical literature of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, through which Duby recognizes the shift that occurs in the mid-tenth to early eleventh centuries from horizontal family alliances to a vertical, patrilineal line of dissent (117-8). By the end of the century “emerged the first measures designed to favour the eldest son,” overcoming
custom that gave equal status to heirs of the same rank primarily by “a sustained policy of limiting the number of marriages” (109).

The authority of the house was vested in the eldest son, who employed a restrictive marriage strategy to consolidate the family’s wealth and power. A network of alliances was created through the marriage of all of the daughters, but so that the inheritance would not be divided, marriage was arranged for only the eldest son. Georges Duby suggests that “slow popularization” of “the lineal model which favoured succession by male primogeniture” made it more difficult to divide up inheritance and place it under the authority of a woman (Love and Marriage 14). This model led to “changes which imperceptibly affected the strategy of marriage in aristocratic society” (Love and Marriage 13). Married daughters were provided a dowry, a practice supported by reform canonists, and excluded from inheritance, encouraging “noble families to marry off all their daughters if they could” (Love and Marriage 14).

Another result of the marriage strategy was that most knights remained unmarried. While this had the dynastic advantage of leaving more marriageable women available to be pursued on behalf of the eldest son, it left a large body of knights without means. Duby concludes, “The new situation prompted the chivalric ideology to extol the life of adventure more resoundingly than ever as a mock compensation for the frustrations of ‘youth’” (Medieval Marriage 13).

Disorder in the Court: The Juvenes

The twelfth century in northern France becomes for Duby
“the age of juvenes”—unmarried knights, turned out of the paternal home, gallivanting about, fantasizing about the various stages in their adventurous quest to find maidens who, as they put it, would rouse them *(tastonment)* but above all, anxiously and nearly always vainly, in search of a situation which would at last allow them to accede to the status of *senior* (Love and Marriage 14).

These knights, denied access to family holdings, formed part of the diverse population at court and comprised an important part of the audience for the courtly romances. Such young men were joined by others who gained preferment through service to a lord. Lords interceded to arrange marriages for their knights and any young men with connections to their household (Love and Marriage 15). Meg Bogin describes the hangers on at court as “the restless offspring of the bourgeoisie, the sons of former serfs, or the landless sons of poverty-stricken nobles” (51).

For these men at court, “marriage came to be perceived as an event that transformed a man’s life” (Duby, Medieval Marriage 12). For this group of knights, the *juvenes*, marriage conferred not just stability, but adulthood. Duby continues, “To a young man, marrying meant leaving behind his unsteady existence, his troubled and impetuous wanderings; it meant ‘setting himself up,’ in the true sense of the word, and acquiring both power and wisdom (*sapientia*).” But such a marriage was a rare possibility (Medieval Marriage 12). Young men became dependent on earning a fiefdom by the lord’s arranging a marriage with an heiress so that they could found their own household: “All the rivalry centred on the court was directed to this reward” (Duby, Love
and Marriage 71). Jo Ann McNamara suggests, “The growing class of disinherited ‘youth’ were obliged to make themselves pleasing to women if they were to compete successfully in securing their lost place in the social order. In life as in literature, the harsh reality was that many men had to put women’s tastes ahead of their own masculine image” (8-9).

As McNamara implies, the dynastic policies of the aristocracy created circumstances in which the masculine ideal for young knights was dependent on women. Their traditional masculine warrior skills were directed toward a new purpose, personal gain, especially by winning a bride. In this context, displays of manhood, whether or not they had meaningful purpose to the community at large, became essential to the performance of manhood. Tournaments became especially important to this group of men who did not inherit the family’s wealth. In a literary context, ideals of masculine behavior that served previously for the purpose of community survival could be demonstrated for pure spectacle with battles and hunts that were not about safety or food, creating a means of attracting wealth and attention, particularly from women. Despite McNamara’s assertion that men had to put women’s tastes first to gain a wife, the success of these young knights was, in fact, still dependent on the judgment of the lord, since the lord arranged the marriage. The changes in marriage formation that church reform brought, however, created a new context in which masculine performance would, indeed, be directed toward the lady herself.
Safeguarding the Divine Order: Church Reform

The ecclesiastical model of marriage that “slowly infiltrated and eventually absorbed” the aristocratic model (Duby, *Medieval Marriage* 18) sought to reconcile the Biblically imposed procreative function of marriage with a desire to regulate sexual behavior (Duby, *Medieval Marriage* 16). While the emphasis on procreation dovetailed nicely with the goal of the lay model, the Church’s moral injunctions conflicted with the customary practices among the aristocracy and the aristocracy’s means of controlling inheritance through marriage. James A. Brundage identifies seven principles that formed the foundation of the ecclesiastical model of marriage. Four of these, which defined the conditions of marriage, conflicted with the lay model: Marriage had to be monogamous, indissoluble, exogamous, and “contracted freely by the parties themselves.” An additional three principles regulated sexual activity: marriage was the “only legally protected type of sexual relationship,” so that all sexual activity outside of marriage was punishable by legal sanctions, over all of which sexual activity the church courts had jurisdiction (183).

While the reformers wanted to control sexual behavior in general, reforms also served to give the Church leverage in dealing with powerful families. According to Brundage, the broad goals of the reform movement beginning in the early eleventh century were to disentangle church officials and institutions from feudal society (184). In 1059 the first reform Pope, Leo IX, was elected. He and his successors strove to influence Christians to accept a Church free from secular influence (Brundage 180).
The Church was most successful in gaining jurisdiction over marriage. In addition to wanting to abolish marriage among the clergy, the reformers wanted to bring marriage among the laity under the control of church courts, replacing customary marriage laws. By 1100 they had succeeded to the extent that even the nobility accepted for the most part the church’s authority on questions concerning the formation of marriage as well as divorce and remarriage (Brundage 223). Like powerful aristocratic families, the Church did not want its own property to be divided or lost by becoming the object of hereditary transfer. Feudal lords were taking control of lands owned by parishes and monasteries, and kings and nobles were influencing the selection of ecclesiastical officials (Brundage 179).

Even the major thrust of reform with regard to marriage, the prohibition of clerical marriage, may have been motivated by the desire to maintain control of Church property. Brundage asserts, “Reformers called for the ‘liberation’ of the clergy from their wives and concubines as an essential precondition for the liberation of Church property from lay control” (214). He further explains that, while the reformers argued from a moral stance that the clergy should avoid the impurity of sexual relations and the distractions of domestic life, they also addressed “economic considerations”: the Church’s resources were spent to support the cleric’s family and, worse, the ecclesiastical offices might be treated as family property. Brundage notes that there was good reason for the latter concern as “sacerdotal dynasties were common” (215).

A series of decrees in the eleventh century against clerical marriage culminated in 1059 when Pope Nicholas II forbade the laity to attend Masses said by priests who
remained with their wives or concubines. Not only was the priest’s ecclesiastical power eclipsed by the decree, but by equating wives and concubines Nicholas implied that clerical marriages were invalid (Brundage 218). Subsequently, the Lateran decrees of 1123 and 1140 made clerical marriage a canonical crime (Brundage 220). By the 1120s, reform had left the church in the hands of celibate men. For Jo Ann McNamara, this situation “raised inherently frightening questions about masculinity” (5). An alternative masculinity to that of the fighting man had arisen exemplified by these churchmen whose power and influence were growing.

The ecclesiastical view of marriage that gained sway in the twelfth century represented a potential diminishment in power for aristocratic families. For example, Brundage notes that the principles of monogamy and indissolubility restricted noble families from adjusting alliances to promote their interests (183). Making the consent of the parties necessary and sufficient for marriage also lessened the power of the parents in making alliances through marriage contracts. The principle of exogamy most deliberately aimed to reduce the power of the nobility to consolidate power by acquiring landholdings through the creation of a web of family relationships. Reform canonists even prohibited marriages involving godparent relationships, closing off another means for noble families to consolidate power. Prohibiting these potential marriages between related or aligned families not only reduced the threat of legal claims on Church property that could come from a broad network of familial associations but possibly checked the power that noble families wielded because of extensive landholdings, power that could be used to influence Church matters (Brundage 193).
The Church had established its jurisdiction over marriage matters by the
beginning of the twelfth century (Duby, *Medieval Marriage* 20), but conflicts between
noble families and the Church continued throughout the century. In *Medieval Marriage*,
Duby examines marriage disputes from various points of view and concludes, “The new
teology established the supremacy of indissolubility” (64). Therefore, the priests
insisted on their authority to decide on a divorce (Duby, *Medieval Marriage* 22). The
wedge used by the aristocracy was the inconsistency that, on the one hand, marriage was
indissoluble but, on the other hand, it had to be dissolved in cases of fornication or incest
(*Medieval Marriage* 21). From the second third of the twelfth century the Church stood
for the permanence of marriage, leading to a reversal of strategies regarding incest.
Previously, the priests had used consanguinity as an impediment to marriages that they
disapproved of; now the laity used it “if they wanted to recover their freedom or restore
fluidity to their marital commitments” (*Medieval Marriage* 65). Flexible interpretation of
the laws as they had begun to be codified by Gratian mid-century allowed the two models
“to adjust to each other.” So, even though aristocratic families continued to rely on
inherited property for their preeminence, they could manipulate the rules of kinship to
achieve their ends (Duby, *Medieval Marriage* 72-73). Over the course of the century, the
knights had accepted the Christian code of morals, so the dominance of the ecclesiastical
model of marriage had been firmly established and accepted. The infiltration was
achieved in two ways: “Priests became involved in the marriage ceremony,” and the
Church codified its jurisdiction over marriage (Duby, *Medieval Marriage* 18).
Triumph of the Ecclesiastical Model

The rituals that marked the marriage agreement between families were superseded by ceremonies that became centered on the church. Duby identifies three “gestures” of the lay model that were subsumed in ecclesiastical ritual: the placing of hands to indicate the giving of the bride, the giving of a ring or coins by the bridegroom to symbolize his possession of the property of the new household, and the kneeling of the bride before the husband, affirming that she was now under the power of another male (Duby, *Medieval Marriage* 5). Reform canonists worked to establish that marriage contracts be public and formal (Brundage 189), and moving the contracts out of the private realm opened the way for deeper Church involvement. Duby notes that over time priests played a larger role in the marriage ceremonies, “making the rituals sacred” (*Love and Marriage* 11). The church gradually became the location for the wedding ceremony, first on porches adjacent to the church and eventually inside the church itself (Brooke 248).

Like other questions of marriage in the twelfth century, its status as a sacrament is unclear, but of much interest. According to Christopher Brooke, marriage became one of the sacraments in the eleventh and twelfth centuries (263). However, Brundage says that “the mid-twelfth century was a period of uncertainty about the sacramental character of marriage” (254). While theologians had characterized marriage as a sacrament for centuries, the term “sacrament” was more precisely defined in the twelfth century, especially as applied to marriage, as a “mechanism for securing grace” (Brundage 270). For canonists, the sacramental nature of marriage made the married couple inseparable and mutually dependent (Brundage 270-71).
Also, over the course of the twelfth century, reform canonists organized the immense amount of disparate opinion on legal issues, establishing a standard body of canon law. In the early 1140s, Gratian compiled and analyzed the questions under debate in his *Decretum* (Brundage 229), which became the basis for further debate in the latter half of the century. While Gratian’s compilation did not reflect official Church law, Brundage asserts that Gratian made “legal sense” out of wide range of conflicting canonical texts and successfully established canon law as a separate discipline from theology and as a separate “juristic science” from Roman law (233). In his analysis of the questions of canon law, Gratian reflected “the dynamic social developments of his period,” including the shifting view of marriage as a relationship of a couple rather than the couple’s family, as theological writers had also begun to do (234).

The “massive amount of new law” written over the next century, beginning with Gratian’s *Decretum*, was overwhelming for legal practitioners and scholars (Brundage 325). Various decretists collected these new laws, until the *Decretals of Gregory IX* were issued in 1234. Known as the *Liber Extra*, the massive collection would be used by the Catholic Church into the twentieth century (Brundage 327). A primary contributor to this process was Rolandus Bandinelli, whose pontificate as Alexander III from 1159-1181 coincides almost exactly with the time during which Chrétien wrote his romances. Brundage calls Alexander III the “preeminent contributor to the clarification of marriage law” (331). He claims that “Alexander gave Western marriage law a form that was to endure for the greater part of four centuries” (346). More than a third of the canons in the *Liber Extra* concerning marriage and family originated with him (332).
Alexander defined a valid marriage as one contracted by voluntary consent of the couple, whether present or future (334). Evidence of force or fear used to coerce consent nullified it (335). Consummation was not required to form a marriage, but it made the marriage made by consent indissoluble (334). Alexander’s emphasis on clearly defining the formation of marriage emphasized marriage as a personal relationship, which coincided with the “dawning consciousness of the importance of individual choice” (333). Duby observes that “the Church emphasized the union of two hearts in marriage,” making the betrothal, when the couple expressed their mutual consent, the validating act rather than the wedding itself (Medieval Marriage 17). It is perhaps no surprise that during this time when this sacralized view of marriage emerged out of power struggles and legal wrangling, a cleric who called himself “Christian” wrote an Arthurian romance whose hero is defined to a large extent by his relationship with his wife. *Erec et Enide* constructs a masculinity not merely adequate to attract a worthy bride, but one capable of establishing a personal union.

*The Marital Bond*

As ecclesiastically defined, marriage forms a bond between husband and wife that is initially physical but deepens into an emotional bond. Nearly all of the writers examining the relation of sex and marriage from an ecclesiastical legal perspective agreed that sex in marriage accorded with natural law, even those who did not regard sex itself as part of natural law (Brundage 279). Further, some clerical writers felt that marital sex created an emotional bond between husband and wife. A monk writing between 1133 and 1135 said that “love, including physical love, between man and wife . . . ought to be
a central value in marriage.” Anselm of Laon maintained that love in marriage “had a
worth all its own, so that even a childless union had merit, so long as the parties loved
one another” (Brundage 197). Hugh of St. Victor (1130s) wrote, according to Brundage,
that “sex was a central part of married love, along with affection and fidelity, and that
sexual relations provided married couples with a focus for their loving union” (198).
Hugh said that marriage united man and wife “in a unique and extraordinary way in
shared love” (qtd. in Duby, “Marriage in Early Medieval Society” 17). Bernard of
Clairvaux claimed in one of his sermons on *The Song of Songs* that “love especially and
chiefly belongs to those who are married” (114).

The canonists also found a role for marital affection. Gratian redefined the notion
of marital affection from Roman law so that, Brundage says, it became “tinged with the
sense of an emotional bond between the spouses, a mutual attachment and regard for the
well-being of one another” (239). For some canonists that followed, affection between a
married couple was sufficient as a goal for marriage (Brundage 323). Canonists saw
marriage as “a joining of souls . . . to create a ‘solid friendship’ (*firma amicitia*)”
Marital affection, the love that grew as a consequence of the marriage, bonded the
partners into a personal relationship that developed in part from their sexual relationship
(273-74). Marital affection even became a factor in making legal distinctions with
regard to concubinage. Concubinage without marital affection was merely fornication,
while concubinage with marital affection was considered a kind of informal marriage
(Brundage 297-98). Rolandus, the future Pope Alexander III, declared that concubinage
with marital affection was an impediment to clerical promotion, while cohabitation without marital affection was not (Brundage 316).

*The Bond of Love (Caritas)*

Marital affection, however, may have had little in common with the ideal of romantic love that developed in the twelfth century. In fact, Brundage suggests that the birth of “the ideal of romantic love” as represented in early twelfth-century poetry “took shape in opposition to, and as an escape from, a bleak marriage ideology that canonists and theologians championed” (Brundage 184). Provençal poets “idealized sensuality and carnal relationships, while canonists and theologians deplored them” (Brundage 185). However, Brundage sees “a complex interconnection between the new ideas about love and the new order of marital and sexual relationships that resulted from the legal as well as the social changes of the reform period” (228). For example, Gratian’s description of the emotional bond between a married couple “seems closely related to the qualities poets invoked in their descriptions of love” (239). Duby sees the new relationship between men and women that is expressed in the literature of courtly love as growing from religious writers’ observations on *caritas* and the distorted perception of *amicitias* from the Latin classics (*Love and Marriage* 58-59).

The shift in the way men regarded love began in writings from the monasteries in northern France in the early twelfth century as a result of the learning associated with the twelfth-century renaissance. Inspired by Cicero’s model of *amicitia*, they conceived of love “as a voluntary leap out of ‘self’, forgetful of ‘self’ and disinterested, leading, through a gradated process of self-purification, to fusion in the other” (Duby, *Love and
Marriage 22). While these meditations on *caritas* led naturally to meditations on affection in marriage, marriage did not provide a context for this new concept of selfless love (23). Duby sees the ecclesiastical conception of love itself as an obstacle to the development of love in marriage because it could only be directed toward God (29). Duby illustrates the incompatibility of the idealized concept of love to the reality of marriage by reference to Gislebert’s description of the marriage of Baldwin, son of the Count of Hainaut, to Marie of the House of Champagne. Gislebert derides Baldwin for devoting himself to Marie despite her retreat from him to a life of prayer. He characterizes Baldwin’s devotion as *amor*, not *caritas*. Gislebert describes the ridicule received by Baldwin for giving in to the desire of a *juvenis*, when he should have asserted himself as a *senior* by taking her by force or directing his desires elsewhere (30-31).

Duby claims that while affection and physical love were possible in a marriage for twelfth-century men, the selfless love defined as *caritas* was not (32). Similarly, Brundage suggests that when the canonists spoke of “mutual attraction” they meant physical attraction; love did not cause a couple to marry but grew between the couple after marriage (273). While women were expected to sublimate feelings of love into spiritual feelings, men turned those desires outward “towards courtly pastimes and the wide open spaces of courtly literature” (Duby 31).

Even though marriage might have been antithetical to the ideal of love that became synonymous with the knightly romance, that ideal has clear connections to the theology of the twelfth century. The loving relationship of men with God is expressed in terms that resemble what occurs between men and women in romance narrative. Bernard
of Clairvaux, in “On Loving God,” addresses God as “everything I can desire and love” (66). He later returns to this language of desire: “He causes you to desire, and he himself satisfies your desire. . . . He himself creates the longing. He himself fulfills the desire” (72). Bernard’s eighty-six sermons on the Song of Songs were “rich in allusions to chivalric literature . . . , and he exploited and elaborated even further the erotic discourse of the early troubadours” (Nightingale 137). Furthermore, these sermons expound the relationship of the bride and bridegroom as a metaphor for the relationship of the soul and God. For example, the early sermons address Verse 1:2 “Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth,” in which the “kiss is no other than the Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (104). In Sermon 7, Bernard identifies the Word and the soul receiving the kiss as bridegroom and bride. Then he proclaims that “love especially and chiefly belongs to those who are married” (114).

Works from the twelfth century depict religious men and women who reject marriage but feel a spiritual love that reflects the language of desire and becomes analogous to marriage. McNamara refers to “chaste rhetorical romances” among celibate clergy, citing letters between Peter Damien and the Empress Agnes and the emotional closeness of Gregory VII and Beatrice of Tuscany and her daughter (11). The recluse Christina of Markyate refused the husband urged upon her by her parents because of her previous commitment to God. During her devout spiritual life she developed strong bonds with two men, first the hermit Roger who sheltered her for years and later Geoffrey, the Abbot of St. Albans. The author of The Life of Christina of Markyate
describes the physical attraction between Christina and Roger after inadvertently glancing at one another:

Truly, the fire which had been kindled by the spirit of God burned in each of them; it threw its sparks into both their hearts by the grace of that mutual glance; and so they were made one heart and one soul in charity and chastity in Christ, and they were not afraid to live together in the same house. (Cartlidge 114-15)

This familiar description of passion, entering through the eye and penetrating the heart, has its origin in God. The spiritual love binds them, as if in marriage, but through their shared love of God to which the burning of desire is sublimated. Christina’s later relationship with Abbot Geoffrey is portrayed as “an exaltation of human love as well as a model of partnership in faith and chastity” (Cartlidge 113). Cartlidge characterizes their relationship as “at least analogous to marriage” (113).

The life of Saint Alexis, as told in the late eleventh- or early twelfth-century version included in The Saint Albans Psalter because of its parallels to Christina’s life, provides another illustration of a spiritual love that replaces marriage. Alexis takes leave of his wife on their wedding night to pursue a religious life. At their parting he leaves with her a ring and sword knot, items that suggest the marriage ceremony (96). Despite Alexis’s abandonment, with the wife’s tacit acceptance, the life ends with the assurance that the two will be together in heaven (92).
Internalization of Choice

Changes in marriage law and custom and a concomitant emphasis on romantic love between the married couple provide a lens through which to view how romance reinterprets the hero’s evolution from personally motivated actions to actions that demonstrate his awareness of his responsibility to the broader community. In fact, the theological climate of the twelfth century that underlies the canonical reforms regarding marriage may explain this internalization of values. In *Jesus as Mother*, Caroline Walker Bynum suggests that a concern for the “inner man” in the twelfth century came from religious writing and practice that emphasized conforming the “outer man” to models represented by social roles and groups (85). The perception that an individual could choose a role or group required “a new awareness of a choosing and interior self” (107). Beyond awareness, the individual was expected to align inner motivations with the outward choice (104). Bynum notes, for example, that “twelfth-century theories of penance locate remission of sin in contrition, not oral confession” (86). The triumph of the ecclesiastical model of marriage in the twelfth century may similarly reflect an internalization of values. By recognizing the choice of the couple as the basis of marriage, the church validated personal desire over the external factors that the aristocratic model of marriage concerned itself with. Thus, the emphasis in early romance narrative on the hero’s marriage can be connected to a more general emphasis in twelfth-century culture on awareness of choice and an “internal self.” In fact, Bynum identifies “the married” as among the newly recognized “groups or roles in society” that an individual could choose (89).
In sum, the obvious differences in the way that twelfth-century romance constructs masculinity from *Beowulf* can be seen to reflect developments in the church, both legal and theological, during the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The canonical change in marriage formation that occurs at the same time that marriage becomes essential for a young man to achieve adult status coincides with the appearance of romances in which women figure prominently as the audience for masculine performance. When marriage becomes a personal choice, men’s attractiveness to women becomes important. Furthermore, after that initial attraction, the man must cultivate a mature relationship with his wife assuring its long-term success, and the theology of love provides a model for that relationship. The emphasis on personal choice in marriage suggests that an internalized sense of value can direct choice. The need to conform this inner value to external action makes the performance of manhood look very different from the model that emphasizes only outward manifestations. In the time that these theological ideas were the subject of debate and questions of marriage were being resolved in favor of the ecclesiastical model, Chrétien de Troyes wrote several romances that seem steeped in these ideas, placing the hero’s marriage at the center of the narrative. While the subsequent history of romance treated the relationships between men and women very differently, Chrétien’s romances initiated the change in the way the masculinity of the literary hero was constructed. His first romance, *Erec et Enide*, dramatizes the change through a hero who begins from an unquestioned reliance on an old model of masculinity. When that model fails him, he then absorbs a new masculine ideal that serves him and his community well.
CHAPTER 3: *ERECE ET ENIDE*: PERFORMING MASCULINITY FOR WOMEN

Twelfth-century church reforms regarding the formation of marriage and the theology that drove those reforms redefined the context in which masculinity was constructed. Changing customs of inheritance among the aristocracy were manipulated by marriage policy at the same time that marriage was redefined by the Church as a personal relationship based on mutual attraction. As a result, large numbers of *juvenes* were left to make their own way. Among the means to financial security for them were masculine displays in tournaments and at court. While tournaments could bring direct financial rewards, displays of manly ability or of courtliness could identify them as a good match in the marriage economy and make them attractive to a potential mate.

Therefore, aspects of manly behavior that can be apprehended by an audience including women become foregrounded—spectacles of knightly skill and bodily attractiveness. This emphasis on spectacle and display appears to push into the background some aspects of masculine performance that were essential in *Beowulf*, such as achieving direct social impact for the community, especially the masculine community of warriors, and achieving as a result long-lasting fame for the hero.

The model of manhood that prevails in the twelfth century is on display in the emerging romance genre, whose heroes, like the court audiences of ladies and *juvenes*, have as their central concern the achievement of love, courtly or marital. In Chrétien de Troyes’ *Erec et Enide*, marital love is central. A key moment in Erec’s development into manhood occurs when he fully embraces his marital role, which brings him into harmony with his larger community, not just the male community. The balanced manhood he
displays as a result of his experiences in the romance resembles the balanced model of
masculine heroism that Beowulf displays to a surprising extent given the very different
contexts in which the heroes’ experiences occur.

Among the French romances, those of Chrétien de Troyes stand out for their
strong influence on the later romance tradition in England. Chrétien’s romances also are
pivotal in an examination of the development of the English masculine hero. They come
out of the continental French culture that remains influential at the English court long
after it is no longer centered on the continent. In the end, his romances provide the heroic
model that eventually emerges as the norm of English romance, in contrast to the models
of the Anglo-Saxon warrior or the “English heroes” prevalent in the popular Anglo-
Norman romances and thirteenth-century Middle English romances. Despite the tenuous
nature of any direct connection of Chrétien to the court of Henry II, Chrétien’s romances
are the products of the literary culture in which the Angevin courts participated. In
addition, Chrétien sets his romances at Arthur’s court in Britain. I do not suggest that
there is a direct relationship between Beowulf and Chrétien’s romances or that Chrétien
was consciously rethinking the hero’s experience. Rather, I suggest that, when Chrétien
tells a story, a part of which is the warrior’s coming of age, he uses virtually the same
elements as the Beowulf poet, but the context of his time reshapes these elements,
creating an apparently very different masculine hero. Reflecting on the way romance
newly defines men in relation to women, M. Bennett suggests that “how much this
change is a product of developing literary genres rather than an ideal with deep social
significance is a matter of debate” (88). But clearly the new literary hero in Chrétien’s
romances reflects the cultural and theological changes that transformed the world of aristocratic men in the twelfth century.

Chrétien’s romances are among the earliest artifacts of the shift in the literary expression of the warrior ideal from epic to romance in the literature of England. Chrétien’s first romance, *Erec et Enide*, demonstrates the emergent differences between Beowulf and the literary hero that develops after the Conquest, providing an opportunity to observe a transition in how the romance genre constructs masculinity. For many the romance hero may be best exemplified by Lancelot, the hero of Chrétien’s later romance *Le Chevalier de la Charrete*.

Lancelot

The change in the perception of the individual man that develops in romance beginning with *Erec et Enide* is starkly visible in Lancelot. In contrast to Beowulf, Lancelot measures himself by an internalized sense of honor, more than by the honor or shame conferred upon him through public displays of his physical prowess and achievement. M. Bennett describes the story that emerges as “the ‘unmanning’ of the warrior hero” (84), thus defining the change in the hero in terms of his masculinity. When Lancelot gets into a dwarf’s cart in his effort to rescue the queen, he accepts public shame in order to demonstrate his private devotion to the queen.

*Le Chevalier de la Charrete* seems to concern itself not at all with the knight’s public responsibility, thus potentially bringing to the fore masculine qualities that might have remained submerged in the Anglo-Saxon shame culture. Lancelot’s headlong
pursuit of the captured Guinevere requires bold and precipitous action and concludes with 
the violent spectacle of Malegeant’s dismemberment, all of which accord with the 
Beowulfian model. In the episodes of the cart and the tournament in which Guinevere 
commands Lancelot to perform badly, Lancelot’s masculine accomplishment seems to 
focus on sexual conquest. The public good he accomplishes—the freeing of prisoners, 
restoration of the queen to the court, defense of the challenge at Arthur’s court—seems 
incidental to his acting to honor his private commitment to Guinevere. His willingness to 
humiliate himself seems to demonstrate an internalization of value—the shift from shame 
to guilt that Helen Cooper identifies as emerging in the vernacular romances of mid-
century (25) and that accords with the internalization of choice that results from the 
thought of the twelfth century.

The internal motivation that Lancelot feels when he gets into the dwarf’s cart, 
potentially presenting himself publically as less than a man, resembles the internal 
motivation that motivates the Christian. A sincere love of God in one’s heart supersedes 
any earthly considerations. For the pagan Beowulf, the fame he attains from his public 
actions and the continuance of his tribe because of the fame he gains for those public 
actions are the only things that survive him. Thus, considering a hero such as Lancelot 
makes the conclusion that the chivalric hero is influenced by Christianity seem obvious. 
And while considering Lancelot’s character draws attention to aspects of a new 
masculine ideal that have already appeared in Erec’s story, the earlier example of Erec 
complicates this conclusion.
Lancelot’s easy internalization of value may point to the formation of masculinity opposed to that defined solely by public honor. The courtly-love relationship exemplified by Lancelot and Guinevere, in which the lady has the power of a lord, appears to reduce the role of public honor as the mark of a warrior, and so of a man. As a result, the measure of a man depends less on his status in the eyes of his male companions than on his status with a potential female companion. The role of secrecy in what becomes recognized as a courtly love convention forces the values to be internalized. If the knight can live by such an internalized code that defines his worth, then a similar internal code may define his sense of being a man.

Several points may suggest why Lancelot marks such an apparently dramatic departure for the hero. First, Chrétien claims that he has written this romance in response to a request by “ma dame de Chanpaigne” (1), who has provided “matier et san” (“matter and meaning”; 26). The notion that the story had its origin possibly as a request or an official commission suggests it has some resonance in its own time and place. That the request is from a lady suggests the appeal of the story and its hero to a female audience contrasting sharply with the usual understanding of Beowulf’s audience and purpose. Furthermore, Chrétien’s apparent abandonment of the story before it was finished may suggest his own lack of engagement in the story and hero. As a cleric and author of more traditional heroic narratives, he may not have had an interest in a hero like Lancelot, even though a contemporary audience did. Most certainly the audience of romance for the following centuries will have such an interest, as the Lancelot/Guinevere narrative becomes central to the Arthurian legend, no matter how it comes to be interpreted.
If Lancelot’s emergence as romance hero represents a full manifestation of the reconceptualization of the masculine hero, then Chrétien’s first romance, *Erec et Enide*, might reveal an earlier development of this new hero. Erec may bridge the gap between Beowulf and Lancelot, revealing tensions that suggest a masculinity in transition. An abstract outline of Chrétien’s earliest surviving romance can easily be set side by side with the Danish episode of *Beowulf*. In each story, a young warrior of established prowess journeys out from his home. Away from home, he faces a series of challenges that test him and lead him to the point where he passes into a state of full manhood and is prepared to assume his privileged social position. In these ways, the trajectories of the two young men are aligned.

But their stories also diverge, because Erec’s story has much to do with the questions that arise out of his relationship with his wife. Whereas *Beowulf* may have raised questions about the social responsibility of a king to provide heirs to maintain a stable kingdom, *Erec et Enide* has as its central concern how Erec’s relationship with his wife and lover relates to his role as a leader of men—as well as his self-image as a man. While each of Beowulf’s violent battles directly contributes to the preservation of a kingdom, each of Erec’s, performed at least in part as a display for a feminine audience, contributes to the preservation of his self image and only indirectly serves a political function until the end of the romance. As a result, masculine performance, especially the
performance of violence, is at first reduced more literally to performance only. And for Erec this performance must occur in the presence of his wife.

However, Erec, unlike the Lancelot of *Le Chevalier de la Charrette*, remains concerned with his public persona, as well as his public responsibilities, though he acts seemingly randomly on internal, private motives. Chrétien addresses the complexity of masculine responsibilities faced by a hero who has become both a private and public person, someone who has internal standards as well as public responsibilities. By placing Erec’s private relationship, his marriage, at the center of the narrative, Chrétien dramatizes Erec’s coming to awareness of his public responsibility. In the end, Erec balances his public and private responsibilities and achieves manhood by internalizing the feminine wisdom and conscience represented by Enide’s insistent voice during his adventure. Thus, Erec’s story again aligns with Beowulf’s, whose performance of manhood requires his absorption of the wisdom of the peaceweaver. In addition, Erec begins to act more on a Beowulfian model of manhood as his actions focus more on benefitting the larger community.

With *Erec et Enide*, the warrior hero begins to be defined in terms other than his successful participation in the perpetuation of a patriarchal past. As represented by such a hero, masculinity comes to be defined by the perceptions of feminine influences and by personal conscience. While most traditional masculine values remain intact, they are often directed toward new purposes and supplemented by concerns that would never have entered the mind of Beowulf.
A Destabilized Masculine World

Feminist readings of *Erec et Enide* emphasize the destabilizing effect of Enide’s voice and apparent agency on the romance genre. Maureen Fries, in a classification of Arthurian women as heroines, heroes, and counter-heroes, identifies Enide as “the only heroine who, for part of the story, is also a female hero” (64). Erec’s trial of Enide turns her into a “wife-hero,” who demonstrates “loyal and loving disobedience as well as assertion of real female prowess” (65). E. Jane Burns demonstrates the way that Enide’s voice rewrites the *conte d’aventure* after Enide ceases to be the silenced body that is the object of such stories. Traditionally, these stories recount the adventures of knights from the perspective of the men—those who participate in the adventures and those who recount them. Reading *Erec et Enide* “as a tale of female voices speaking against that tradition of storytelling, we get a new picture of love and courtliness, romance and adventure” (26).

Lee Patterson analyzes the poem as interpreting its historical moment specifically in terms of the hero’s masculinity. Associated with the court of Arthur “stands a masculinity that perceives the feminine as but one among the many objects that in their richness and multiplicity ratify knightly prowess.” In contrast, the new court of Erec and Enide that is established in the end represents a “feminine subjectivity that insists upon both the mutuality of erotic relations and the need to endow the object world with significance” (186). The latter description, of the “new, redeemed” social order, asserts feminine agency but leaves the effect on masculinity as implied. It is worth noting that Patterson’s
discussion assumes a chivalric ambition placed in Arthur’s court, suggesting perhaps that neither the shift to a feudal society nor the emergence of romance as a dominant genre is sufficient explanation for a new construction of masculinity.

While these readings destabilize the world of the knight and his adventures by foregrounding the roles that women play, the implications for the construction of the masculine are left to be examined. The question remains, how does the narrative of Erec et Enide construct this new masculinity? And how is it defined? When Chrétien identifies the poem’s two-part structure, he points to the possible two-stage examination of the hero’s growth, which can be directly connected to the construction of the romance hero’s masculinity. The first part relates a largely conventional romance in which the hero’s adventure serves to stabilize the patriarchal order and establish his own place in that order. But even here the destabilization of the masculine world is foreshadowed by a potentially disruptive feminine presence and the apparent lack of meaningful purpose for the hero’s traditionally masculine virtues. The second part dismantles the hero’s masculine identity and reconstructs it to accommodate a partnership with his wife.

Part I: The Patriarchal Court

The first part of the poem, where Arthur’s court provides the model, depicts a world in which the masculine warrior virtues are dominant—as Patterson suggests. Sarah-Jane Murray notes that “il premerains vers constitutes a miniromance—with a beginning, midpoint, and ending—in itself” (200). This miniromance “focuses on the couple’s initial encounter and marriage” (197). Murray’s characterization of the first part
of the poem as self-contained suggests the separate reality that it depicts. The convention of Arthurian romance has the knight riding out from Arthur’s court on his adventure or quest. The land of adventure that is traversed often is literally an Otherworld. In *Erec et Enide*, Arthur notes that the hunting of the stag will occur “an la forest avanteureuse / ceste chace iert molt mervelleuse” (“in the forest of adventures: / this hunt will be truly wondrous”; 65-66). Erec, with the queen and her attendant, tries to follow the hunt, but the group loses track of the hunters. Their encounter with a mysterious knight (Yder), his lady, and his dwarf occurs immediately after they no longer can hear “home parler / ne cri de chien de nule part” (“human voice / or the cry of a hound from any side”; 134-35). Erec’s subsequent actions follow the model of a conventional romance adventure, resulting in the re-establishment of the stability of Arthur’s Court. This adventure could easily be set alongside Beowulf’s cleansing of Heorot of the monster Grendel. By comparing the two adventures, I intend to show that Chrétien may be writing with an awareness of literary tradition for which *Beowulf* provides an earlier example. In addition to defeating the monstrous opponent, however, Erec acquires a wife, thus establishing the narrative line that will distinguish the romance. Nonetheless, the marriage occurs in a manner that reflects traditional aristocratic marriage practice that further stabilizes the order represented by the Arthurian court.

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19 Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are those of Carleton W. Carroll in his facing-page translation. Line numbers for the translation will be included only when they differ from the lines of the original.
Throughout this first part, as in the first episode of *Beowulf*, the authoritative male voice is dominant. Arthur immediately asserts the authority of the king’s voice when he responds to Gawain’s rational criticism of his plan to revive the custom of hunting the white stag, saying, “car parole que rois a dite / ne doit puis estre contredite” (“For the word of a king / must not be opposed”; 61-62). In the first part of the poem, the feminine voice is not heard. When Enide’s father gives her to Erec, the narrator draws attention to Enide’s silence, which will be the point of conflict around which much of the second part of the poem revolves: “la pucele ert tote coie, / mes molt estoit joianz et liee” (“the maiden was very still, / but she was very joyful and happy”; 684-85). In the poem’s first conflict, Erec encounters a knight riding with a maiden who is similarly without voice.

The unspoken dominance of the knight, who is eventually identified as Yder, Son of Nut, enacts a pantomime of male dominance and “serves to initiate Erec into the world of chivalric aggression” (Patterson 186). The knight’s authority is understood, assumed, and unquestioned. He cannot even be approached; the dwarf intercepts those who approach him. Through the dwarf, Yder asserts unreasoning masculine authority. Even the authority of the queen is rejected as the dwarf whips and repulses first the Queen’s lady and then Erec. The dwarf in this scene is the first of two that Erec encounters. Lee

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20 In *Medieval Marriage* Georges Duby describes a scene from the *History of the House of Guines*, written early in the thirteenth century by the cleric Lambert, that closely resembles this scene: “Lambert, attesting to the effects of the Church’s exhortations on the moral code of the laity, goes out of his way to prove the consent (consensus) of the prospective spouses, especially that of the girls” (88). In describing the betrothal of Count Baldwin II around 1150, Duby says, “Lambert tells us that when the bride was brought before the large audience assembled in her father’s house, ‘she expressed her willingness by the happy expression on her face,’ which was sufficient to satisfy the two contracting parties and to give the signal for the unanimous acclamation needed to seal the pact” (88-89).
Patterson identifies Yder as a giant, if “only allusively,” because of the comparison of Erec’s eventual victory over him to that of Tristan over Morholt (line 1246), whose “folkloric past” identifies him with an Irish giant (Patterson 186). In this first encounter, with a dwarf and a symbolic giant, Chrétien introduces a pattern that, according to Patterson, “literalizes the central metaphor by which the twelfth century expresses its complicated historical consciousness—that of the dwarf of the present astride the giant of the past” (184-85). The historical metaphor might be expanded to describe two caricatures of manhood. On the one hand, Yder represents the man of the past who is a giant of physical strength and authority. On the other is the man of the present as a dwarf who has strength and authority only by connection, in servitude, to the giant of the past.

In this encounter and throughout his first adventure, Erec demonstrates the warrior virtues that Beowulf demonstrates. First, the treatment that Erec receives moves him to revenge expressed in an either/or construction that coincidentally resembles the warrior’s boast in Beowulf: “Je vangerai / ma honte, ou je la crestrai!” (“I will avenge / my shame, or else I’ll augment it!” 245-46). Motivated by revenge, Erec rides away from the queen to follow the mysterious knight until he has the opportunity to arm himself. When he finally engages Yder, Erec exhibits the strength and prowess of the warrior motivated by anger, so much so that as he stops short of killing him, Yder asks why he is acting with seemingly unreasonable anger: “Por quel forfet ne por quel tort / me doiz tu donc haïr de mort?” (“For what injury or what wrong / must you bear me this deadly hatred?”; 1003-04). Like Beowulf, Erec becomes identified with his opponent in his capacity for monstrosity, represented here by his apparently irrational anger and
violence. At the same time, in this moment he is able to assert a rational control over his violent impulse and allow Yder to live.

When he arrives at the mysterious knight’s destination, Erec is drawn to Enide’s father, a symbolic representative of threatened older values. The fashionable crowd that welcomes Yder ignores Erec “qu’il ne le conuissoient pas” (“because they did not know him”; 367). In contrast, Erec is welcomed by “un vavasor auques de jorz” (“an elderly vavasor”; 375). As the white-haired man greets Erec, the poet twice refers to his status: “Li vavasors contre lui cort; / einz qu’Erec li eüst dit mot, / li vavasors salüé l’ot” (“The vavasor ran to meet him; / before Erec had said a word, / the vavasor had greeted him”; 384-86). As a guest in the old man’s house, Erec sees a once prosperous household reduced to poverty. The narrator notes the absence of servants except for only one, gesturing toward the incongruity between the worthiness of the people and their limited means. The old man describes his losses: “tant ai esté toz jorz an guerre, / tote en ai perdue ma terre, / et angagiee, et vandue” (“I have spent so much time at war / I have lost all my land thereby, / and mortgaged it and sold it”; 515-17). This picture of privation and loss might recall Hrothgar’s situation, into which Beowulf stepped to restore the patriarchal status quo. The vavasor’s loss of land particularly suggests the loss of power, and manhood, resembling the elderly Danish king’s loss of control of the meadhall.

When Erec inquires about the knight he has followed there, the old vavasor conveys a powerless inevitability. He reveals that the knight has taken the hawk twice before without challenge and will do so again, and “a toz jorz desresnié l’avra” (“he will have claimed it forever”; 598). Furthermore, none will offer resistance:
C’est cil qui avra l’esprevier
sanz contredit de chevalier:
ja n’i avra ne cop ne plaie;
ne cuit que nus avant s’an traie.  (591-94)
He is the one who will have the sparrow-hawk
without being challenged by any other knight;
ever will there be blow or wound,
for I believe no one else will come forward.

Thus, except for the atmosphere of celebration, the situation of the people of the castle resembles the plight of the men in Heorot. The knight has usurped a kind of authority that now the people are reluctant to resist. They are unwilling to fight or shed blood, so it is up to Erec to enact this masculine violence. But, unlike Beowulf, Erec is acting for his own private revenge, not in defense of this oppressed community.

Fortunately for Erec, the father’s thoughts are not quite as preoccupied with the past as were Hrothgar’s; he continues to consider the future. In particular, he has maintained control of his most valuable possession. The incongruity of the old man’s past and present is most obvious in the figure of his daughter Enide herself. In the description of Enide the sense of something lost or past is made explicit: “Povre estoit la robe dehors, / mes desoz estoit biax li cors. / Molt estoit la pucele gente” (“The clothing was poor on the outside / but the body beneath was lovely. / The maiden was very beautiful”; 409-11). The matter of Enide’s clothing serves to reveal not only the father’s loss, but his continuing pride expressed through his control of his daughter. When Erec
asks why Enide is dressed so poorly, the father declares, “Et ne por quant bien fust vestue, / se ge sofrisse qu’el preïst / ce que l’an doner li vossist” (“And yet she would be well clothed / if I allowed her to accept / what someone would like to give her”; 518-20). Despite his obviously sincere love, she is a commodity: “c’est mes avoirs et mes tresors” (“she is my wealth and my treasure”; 545). And when Erec asks him for the right to claim the hawk for his daughter, revealing his identity and promising to make her a queen, their verbal exchange suggests the exchange of property: “‘Tenez,’ fet il, ‘je la vos doing.’ / Erec lieemant la reçut” (“‘Here,’ he said, ‘I give her to you.’ / Erec joyfully received her”; 678-79). This transaction has occurred immediately after Erec has requested armor, and the old knight has offered to lend him all of his own fine war gear (as lovingly described as Enide has been). Recognizable here is the “old chivalric ideology” of “erotic possessiveness” that Patterson associates with the Arthurian court, in which Enide is “one among many objects that . . . ratify knightly prowess” (Patterson 183-84).

The father gives his daughter to Erec with a promise of future marriage only after Erec reveals his own noble lineage. The father’s refusal to allow Enide to accept gifts, even from the lord of the castle, is out of his expectation of a “meillor point” (“better opportunity”; 528). He asks, “A dons soz ciel ne roi ne conte / qui eüst an ma fille honte” (“Is there in all the world a king or count / who would be ashamed of my daughter?”; 533-34). In Erec he has found the match he desires, and in the end he will be restored to a state of wealth when he receives two castles in the kingdom of Erec’s father. Thus, adhering to the aristocratic model of marriage, Enide’s father negotiates the marriage of
his daughter to enhance his wealth and position. As Duby says, those responsible for making marriage decisions for a family wanted “to make the best possible use of the exchange value of their daughters” (*Medieval Marriage* 99).

Erec enacts both symbolically and literally the masculine values associated with Arthur and the patriarchal past. First, Erec stands in for the old man whose fortunes have declined. He gives Erec the armor he needs to put him on an equal basis with the knight:

Leanz est li haubers tresliz,

qui antre cinc cenz fu esliz,

et les chauces beles et chieres;

boenes et fresches et legieres;

li hiaumes i rest boens et biax

et li escuz fres et noviax.

Le cheval, l’espee et la lance,

tot vos presterai sanz dotance,

que ja riens n’an sera a dire (615-23)

Inside there is the hauberk of woven mail,

chosen from among five hundred,

and beautiful and expensive greaves,

good and new and light;

the helmet is likewise good and beautiful

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21 Dorothea Kullmann notes that this marriage arrangement is less traditional when Erec’s decision is considered. Erec “néglige complètement les intérêts économiques et politiques de son lignage et doit même pourvoir à l’établissement des parents de sa femme” (128).
and the shield brand new.
The horse, the sword, and the lance,
I shall lend you all, without hesitation,
so that you need ask for nothing more.

Of course, Erec does not need a better horse or sword, but he accepts the rest of the arms.

The symbolic value of the armor resonates with importance of armor in *Beowulf*.

Throughout *Beowulf*, the warrior’s value is reflected by the armor with no interest in what lies beneath. When Hrothgar bestows gifts, he confers further public status upon Beowulf so that he leaves Daneland worthy of being a king. In Chrétien, when Erec rides with Enide to the hawk, the people “s’an mervoille” at the sight (“marveled”; 751). They first praise Enide’s beauty as worthy to challenge for the hawk. Then they praise his arms—the helmet, the mail-shirt, and the lance—all borrowed. So at first, his value is reflected. Erec seems to be standing in for the old man in a way similar to Beowulf’s defense of Heorot for Hrothgar. Beowulf receives similar gifts from Hrothgar after his defeat of Grendel: “helm ond byrnan / mǣre māðþumsweord” (“helmet and coat of mail, / a treasure- sword”; 1022b-23a), as well as eight horses and Hrothgar’s own battle saddle. Despite the difference between borrowed and gifted arms, because arms are so closely associated with the identity of a warrior, each young warrior becomes identified with the older warrior. Thus, Erec rides to his confrontation with Yder in symbolic defense of the old values.

In addition, Erec’s revenge is achieved in a conventionally masculine exercise of physical ferocity. The battle sounds and looks like one between Anglo-Saxon warriors:
“li hiaume cassent et resonent” (“their helmets resounded and broke”; 880); “tot
deronpent quanqu’il ataignent, / tranchent escuz, faussent haubers. / Del sanc vermoil
rogist li fers” (“they split apart whatever they hit, / slicing shields and deforming
hauberks. / The iron reddened with their blood”; 884-86). As Erec calls his opponent
back to the fight after a brief rest, “Ses mautalanz li renovele” (“His wrath renewed itself
within him”; 925). When they return to the fight, the violence steadily increases. Erec’s
helmet, shield, and hauberk are cut through. Only God’s intervention prevents his
violent death: “se li fers ne tornast dehors / tranché l’eüst par mi le cors” (“if the blade
had not turned outward, / it would have sliced right through his body”; 949-50). Erec’s
sword cuts Yder to the bone so that “tot contre val jusqu’au braier / a fet le sanc vermoil
raier” (“it made the crimson blood stream downward / all the way to his belt”; 959-60).

Finally, as they both weaken, Erec strikes three blows that disable Yder—

li hiaumes escartele toz

et la coisfe tranche desoz.

Jusqu’au test l’espee n’areste:

un os li tranche de la teste

mes nel tocha an la cervele. (977-81)

broke the helmet completely apart

and sliced the coif beneath.

The sword went all the way to his skull:

it sliced through one of the bones in his head,

but did not touch his brain.
While the level of violence seems comparable to that in Anglo-Saxon heroic poetry, the injured body is much more graphically depicted. Only in death do bodies appear physically in *Beowulf*, but even then much less graphically.

Erec’s adventure culminates with a return to Arthur’s court with Enide, a return to the status quo with a promise of its continuance into the future, emphasized by the portrayal of a passive Enide being transferred from father to future husband. When Erec refuses to allow Enide to be dressed in finer clothes before they return to Cardigan, he seems to be enacting the father’s power over her. After telling Enide’s father that he will send him silk to clothe him and his wife, he says, “Demain droit a l’aube del jor, / an tel robe et an tel ator, / an manrai vostre fille a corts” (“Tomorrow right at daybreak / I shall take your daughter to court, / dressed and adorned as she is now”; 1335-37).

Despite protests from Enide’s cousin and a suggestion from her uncle, the count, Erec insists that she will travel to court as she is to be clothed by the queen. When Erec presents Enide to the queen at Arthur’s court, his words emphasize her status as property and assert continuity with the past:

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Je vos amain,

dame, ma pucele et m’amie

de povres garnemanz garnie;

si com ele me fu donee,

ensi la vos ai amenee. (1542-46)

My lady,

I bring you my maiden and my lady
```
clad in poor garments;
just as she was given to me,
so have I brought her to you.

As Erec hands her to the queen as she has been handed to him, he twice uses the possessive pronoun. Her poor garments suggest that she remains who she was before, not the partner that she will become after a long series of trials for both of them.

But before Enide becomes the partner Erec will need, she is fashioned into the woman the court needs more immediately. Chrétien ends the first part of the romance with these lines:

Li rois par itele avanture
randi l’usage et la droiture
qu’a sa cort avoit li blans cers.

Ici fenist li premier vers. (1805-08)

Through such an adventure did the king reestablish the tradition and the right
which the white stag had at his court.

Here ends the first movement.

The structural break, interrupting what seems to be the main story, points to the emphasis of this first episode: the maintenance of the values of the past. The stag hunt is a custom of Arthur’s father. Furthermore, the hunt serves as a male-bonding ritual, pointing even deeper into a patriarchal past. At Arthur’s court, the hunt becomes a game, a spectacle for the female gaze, though an elusive one. While Erec, significantly, separates himself
from the custom of the hunt and its consequent turbulence, Erec’s story of winning Enide and bringing her to the court serves as a vehicle for assuring the stability of the Arthurian Court. Immediately before the lines that end Part One, Arthur has received from Enide the reward of the kiss for his successful slaying of the stag, with the approval of all of the knights and ladies of the court. The threat of discord that Gawain, the first of Arthur’s knights, identifies in the beginning is defused by Enide’s presence. She is such an obvious choice as the most beautiful, and therefore the recipient of the kiss from Arthur, that she defuses the incipient hostility. Similar to the Anglo-Saxon peaceweaver, Enide weaves harmony at Arthur’s court. But, as Patterson points out, the tensions at court are not truly resolved by these events, but “relocate[d] . . . in the inner world of the lovers’ marriage” (184)—where they will be resolved in the second part of the poem, which will begin with the fulfillment of the adventure for Erec. His wedding to Enide and its celebration will begin the second part of the poem.

Like Beowulf’s defeat of Grendel, Erec’s first adventure has served to restore and stabilize patriarchal order. However, Beowulf continues to act to maintain that same order. The defeat of Grendel’s mother completes his defense of Heorot, and is even climaxed by the beheading of the already dead Grendel. Until his death, Beowulf continues to act out his solitary defense of Hygelac’s kingdom, which is apparently doomed at the poem’s end. In contrast, Erec’s second adventure, framed by ceremonies of union, culminates with the promise of a new kingdom continuing into the future. The establishment of this new kingdom requires Erec to redefine himself as a man.
Despite the mostly masculine view suggested by the plot and outcome of the first part of the poem, the peaceful resolution of the first episode relies completely on the presence of Enide. When Erec brings her to court in her poor garments, he gives her to the queen to dress. Sarah Stanbury describes the result as she becomes the focus of attention of all the knights:

> The account of her presentation to the court pays explicit attention to the spectacles of her entrance and display—the mechanics of spectacle-making in which she is transformed from a natural girl to the courtly maiden. It recounts, that is, her purchase and incorporation by courtly society, a transformation through which she literally becomes a constructed woman, living sign of the Arthurian court’s power to transform the world . . . (54).

Stanbury’s analysis emphasizes the power of the patriarchal court. Her reference to Enide’s “purchase and incorporation” especially suggests the traditional practice of marriage. However, Stanbury’s analysis also suggests the importance of the feminine presence, which can be brought into relief by a comparable moment in *Beowulf*. When Beowulf arrives at Heorot, the king and his retainers construct Beowulf as the hero they require through his remembered and reported deeds. Arthur’s court constructs the woman that it needs through the manipulation of her as “spectacle.”
The Clash of the Old and the New: The Destabilizing Effect of Feminine Presence

Throughout the first part of the romance, the destabilizing force of change, the presence of women, lurks at the margins of this “miniromance.” The poem’s opening calls attention to the difference in the setting of Erec’s masculine performance from the homosocial world of Beowulf. Of Arthur’s Easter court the narrator says,

Einz si riche ne fu veûe,
que molt i ot boens chevaliers,
hardiz et conbatanz et fiers,
et riches dames et puceles,
filles de rois, gentes et beles. (30-34)

So rich a one was never seen,
for there were many good knights,
brave and combative and fierce,
and rich ladies and maidens,
daughters of kings, noble and beautiful.

The lines suggest a familiar gathering of men, but the emphasis on the presence of “dames et puceles” immediately suggests the potential for a different world view. Of course, women are present, even prominently so, in Heorot, but they are never so equally emphasized as participants or audience, especially as a group. Thus, the activities here might be very different from the male bonding that prevails in the hall of men in constant preparation for battle.
The difference in activity centered at the court becomes immediately apparent when Arthur initiates a competition of hunting a stag that has as its end a courtly reward of a kiss. Thus, in the first place, competition between men is framed as a competition for women, and becomes almost a competition between women. Furthermore, as such, it will threaten the very stability of the court. Gawain points out the inevitable outbreak of violence that will occur when the knights contend over which lady of the court is the fairest. Thus, the terms of the competition, that the slayer of the stag will receive a kiss from the most beautiful woman at court, sows potential discord that would not occur in a world in which bonds between men supersede all others. Lee Patterson refers to the hunt as “a custom that simultaneously constitutes and imperils the court,” resulting from “the opposition inherent in the chivalric ideology between individual prowess and social cohesion” (183). In the world of Beowulf, social cohesion is reinforced by the individual’s prowess. Chrétien presents a circumstance in which individual prowess is deployed for the individual. The potential conflict will not be ritualized competition like the flyting between Unferth and Beowulf that intensifies Beowulf’s focus on defeating Grendel. In fact, Gawain suggests that having the hunt may bring “maus . . . molt granz” (“great evil”; 49), evoking the misogynist notion that women, the daughters of Eve, tempt men toward evil.

Almost immediately after the hunt begins, Arthur’s court is marginalized in the narrative. Not only does the activity at Cardigan take up a small portion of the first 1805 lines, but the hunt itself is offstage for the most part as the poem follows Erec and the queen as they maintain contact by only the sounds of the hunt. Distanced in this way
from the court’s masculine competition, Erec encounters Yder and will be drawn completely away, eventually arriving at a foreign castle, but one that resembles Arthur’s court: “El chastel molt grant joie avoit / de chevaliers et de puceles, / car molt en i avoit de beles” (“In the town there was great joy / among the knights and damsels, / for there were many beautiful ones”; 348-50). The passage reveals a similar emphasis on the presence of women. But these knights and ladies seem overly involved in fashionable leisure: caring for hawks, playing games, currying horses. And in particular, “les dames es chanbres s’attillent” (“ladies, in their chambers, were adorning themselves”; 360). The emphasis on the courtly atmosphere in the castle gives particular weight to Patterson’s assertion that the potential conflict at Arthur’s court is “circumvented by its displacement into Erec’s” adventure (184). By placing the conflict in a space away from the Arthurian court, a space that seemingly has already succumbed to the threat of the new—of the feminine presence—, Chrétien can not only demonstrate the power of masculine virtue to rescue the patriarchal world but also lay the groundwork for a new definition of masculine virtue that will accommodate the new, including feminine influence.

The competition that will take place in the castle contains the same conditions and perils that are threatened by the hunt at Arthur’s court. The local lords have gathered and a sparrow-hawk is displayed on a silver perch:

Qui l’esprevier voldra avoir,

avoir li covandra amie

bele et saige sanz vilenie;

s’il i a chevalier si os
qui vuelle le pris et le los
de la plus bele desresnier
devant toz a la perche prandre. (570-77)

Whoever wants to have the sparrow-hawk
will have to have a lady
who is beautiful and wise and free from baseness;
if there is any knight so bold
as to want to claim the reputation
and the honor of the most beautiful,
he will have his lady, in front of everyone,
take the sparrow-hawk from its perch.

Thus, the challenge resembles the hunting of the stag in that men will compete, but what is at stake is the honor of their ladies. The contest does not threaten social cohesion, but “the honor of the most beautiful.” Interestingly, however, the risk to honor involved in the competition is to the ladies rather than the knights. In fact, as noted earlier, the men of the castle have ceased even to try to compete. The ascent of a feminine passivity seems to have pushed the older masculine values into the closet with the arms of Enide’s aged father.

Furthermore, Chrétien emphasizes the contest’s importance as spectacle, narrowing the field of spectators eventually to only the two ladies “for” whom the knights fight. First, Enide’s father notes that the hawk will be claimed “devant toz” (in front of
everyone”; 577). When the battle between the two knights finally begins, Chrétien announces, “Des or mes an orroiz les cos” (“Now you will hear the blows”; 862). He engages directly his listeners as audience for the violence, fulfilling the expectation that had been established when Erec had said to the queen earlier, “Se ge truis qui armes me prest, / maintenant me trovera prest / li chevealiers de la bataille” (”If I can find someone to lend me armor, / then the knight will immediately / find me ready to do battle”; 259-61). Quickly, the emphasis shifts to the spectators within the poem again: “La place fu delivre et granz; / de totes parz furent les genz” (“The field was clear and open / there were people on all sides”; 863-64). The creation of a field for the battle, spectators, and the carefully rule-bound fight all suggest a tournament atmosphere that would be familiar to the *juvenes* in Chrétien’s audience. The focus on spectators is further narrowed as the two knights weaken after apparently hours of fighting since it is approaching evening. At this point, “Andeus les puceles ploroient” (“Both the maidens were weeping”; 890). The shift in focus to the women reminds us that the knights are fighting for the women, but the sense of spectacle that Chrétien introduces seems to give new dimension to “fighting for.” Now their violent masculine performance becomes for the audience of women.

But immediately after drawing our attention to the two women in tears, the gaze is reversed: “chascuns voit la soe plorer” (“each of the knights saw his damsel weep”; 891). The women, having become the focus of attention, momentarily appear to be more substantively the source of motivation. Yder has turned attention to the two ladies as he proposes a rest so that they can fight with enough strength to be worthy of them:

Voi la cele gente pucele
qui por toi plore et Deu apele!
Molt prie dolcemant por toi
et la moie autresi por moi,
si nos devons as branz d’acier
por noz amies resforcier. (903-08)
See there that gracious maiden
who weeps for you and calls upon God!
She is praying very softly for you
and mine is doing likewise for me,
and we must renew our efforts,
on behalf of our ladies, with our steel blades.

Erec agrees and soon seems to be inspired by Enide:

Erec regarde vers s’amie,
qui molt dolcemant por lui prie.
Tot maintenant qu’il l’ot veüe,
se li est sa force creüe;
por s’amor et por sa biauté
a reprise molt grant fierté. (911-16)

Erec looked toward his lady,
who was very softly praying for him.
As soon as he saw her,
his strength was renewed;
because of her love and her beauty
he regained his great courage.

The fact that the knights’ attention, as well as the audience’s, turns to the women—to the
motivation for their battle—is crucial. The spectacle of the fighting men will have its real
impact on those watching. When Erec’s attention is turned in that direction in a real,
non-superficial way, he will have perhaps completed his journey to manhood. As Peter
S. Noble points out, this is the first reference to *amor* between Erec and Enide (14).
Erec’s beauty, wealth, and status had been sufficient for Enide to consent, or at least
comesce, to marrying Erec. But the first hint of love occurs when Erec is fighting and in
danger. When he awakes from a coma near the end of his adventure, Erec will echo the
narrator’s words about Enide’s love inspiring courage.

The world that Erec moves within as he wins this battle and returns to Cardigan
seems to reflect an increasingly feminine perspective. When Erec recalls his desire for
revenge, he frames it as his promise to the queen:

Ramanbre li de la reïne,
qu’il avoit dit an la gaudine
que il sa honte vangeroit
ou il ancore la crestroït.

“Hé! mauves,” fet il, “qu’atant gie?
Ancores n’ai ge pas vangié
le let que cil vasax sofri
quant ses nains el bois me feri!” (917-24)
He remembered the queen,

to whom he had said in the woods

that he would avenge his shame

or else augment it further.

“Well, what am I waiting for, like a coward? said he

“I haven’t yet avenged

the outrage that this vassal allowed,

when his dwarf struck me in the woods!”

The invocation of memory recalls the use of memory throughout *Beowulf*, when the warrior remembers past gifts or his boast. Erec’s sense of honor seems to be firmly attached to fulfilling his commitments to women. In this context, Erec’s insistence on Enide’s returning with him to Arthur’s Court in her threadbare clothes can be seen from another perspective—the importance of his service to the queen. He intends that the queen dress her properly, and it is to the queen that he presents Enide upon his return.

The emphasis on spectacle also introduces the importance of the body and its subjection to the gaze. From the first, the audience is made to consider the female physical form since women in the court are characterized in terms of physical appearance, and, as Gawain reminds Arthur, the winner of the competition to kill the white stag “par reison beisier li estuet / des puceles de vostre cort / la plus bele” (“by right must kiss / the most beautiful of the maidens of your court “; 46-48; Carroll 46-47).

As Erec and Enide ride toward Cardigan, Erec admires her beauty:

22 When Beowulf is in Grendel’s grasp, he “gemunde . . . ǣfen-sprāce” (“remembered his speech of that evening”; 758-59) before wrenching off the monster’s arm.
De l’esgarder ne puet preu faire;
quant plus l’esgarder et plus li plest.
volantiers pres de li se tret.
An li esgarder se refet:
molt remire son chief le blont,
ses ialz rianz et son cler front,
le nes et la face et la boche,
don granz dolçors au cuer li toche.
Tot remire jusqu’a la hanche:
le manton et la gorge blanche
flans et costez et braz et mains. (1474-85)
He could not get enough of seeing her;
the more he looked at her, the more she pleased him.
He could not keep from kissing her;
eagerly he drew near to her.
Looking at her restored and delighted him:
her laughing eyes and her unclouded brow,
her nose and her face and her mouth,
and from this great sweetness touched his heart.
He admired everything, down to her hips:
her chin and her white throat,
her flanks and sides, her arms and hands.

Sarah Stanbury observes that this description is representative of the formulaic
description of the beautiful woman found in twelfth-century literature, but serves a more
important function here, “foreshadowing the sensual bond between the pair of lovers that
will later become Erec’s central problem in the story” (52).

But the readers’ attention is quickly drawn to the male body as object of the
female gaze when the following lines turn Enide’s gaze on Erec: “Mes ne remire mie
mains / la dameisele le vasal” (“But the damsel, for her part, looked at the knight / no less
than he looked at her”; 1486-87). Stanbury notes that “the poetry reveals nothing of what
her gaze encompasses.” The description “exposes not the body of the knight, but again
her own organs of perception,” her eyes and heart (57). Similarly, when Erec is
introduced in the company of the queen, the first description of him includes the assertion
that Erec “fu tant biax qu’an nule terre / n’estovoit plus bel de lui querre” (“he was so
handsome that there was no need / to seek a handsomer man anywhere”; 87-88).23 This
attention to Erec’s handsomeness begins to emphasize his personal potential, in contrast
with the anonymous armored man who reflected values outside himself. In addition, the
attention to his body begins to sexualize him, showing his potential specifically as a mate.

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23 Interestingly, while Beowulf’s appearance remains vague throughout the poem, so that the audience is
never invited to consider his handsomeness, the men in the poem, such as the coast guard, are struck by his
appearance. This again emphasizes the homosocial world of the poem as well as the practical focus of
those men’s concerns. Beowulf’s body never seems physical, only vaguely large and shining. If the latter
mostly suggests his armor, then what is attractive is his warrior potential—not his good looks. Such a
characterization emphasizes his potential to serve the public good, for example, by killing a monster.
The Feminized Warrior: Conventional Masculinity Destabilized

In defeating Yder and winning Enide, Erec has demonstrated the behavior of the traditional masculine warrior: a motivation to revenge, a propensity to anger, the tendency to resort to violence to assert authority over other men, and the assumption of an unquestioned authority over women. And Erec moderates his vengeful, angry, and violent tendencies. At the same time, Erec becomes more and more assimilated to a feminized world. As his masculine virtues become the object of the feminine gaze and he gravitates toward the company of women and accepts their influence, if not authority, Erec begins to emerge as a “new” masculine hero. But Erec has been marked to some degree as a potentially new masculine hero from the beginning.

Erec begins the poem unmanned—at least in a warrior sense. He chooses the company of women—the queen and her attendant—instead of competing with the other knights in the hunting of the white stag, saying to Guinevere, “Je ne ving ça por autre afere / fors por vos compaignie fere” (“I have come here for no other reason / than to keep you company”; 109-10). By not engaging in the hunt, Erec reveals himself to be an unattached *juven*. Erec “n’avoi pas vint et cinc anz” (“was not yet twenty-five years old”; 90), yet he is already known for his prowess: “onques nus hom de son aage / ne fu de si grant vaselage” (“never was any man of his age / so accomplished in knighthood”; 91-92). Erec likely does not compete in the hunt because he is not among the knights who has a favorite among five hundred “dameiseles de hauz paraiges” (“damsels of high lineage”; 51) at court. As an unattached young man, his most likely road to preferment is
through the queen. When he eventually presents Enide to the queen, as fulfillment of his promise to defend her, he may be completing the stage of his life among the *juvenes.*

Furthermore, he is unarmed, forcing him to back away from a challenge presented by Yder through his dwarf page. When the dwarf cuts Erec’s face and neck with a whip,

Il sot bien que del nain ferir  
ne porroit il mie joîr,  
car le chevalier vit armé,  
molt felon et desmesuré,  
et crient qu’asez tost l’ocirroit  
se devant lui son nain feroit.  
Folie n’est pas vaselages;  
de ce fist molt Erec que sages:  
rala s’an, que plus n’i ot fet. (225-33)

Erec knew full well that he could not have the satisfaction of striking the dwarf,  
for he saw the armored knight,  
ruthless and arrogant,  
and he feared that the knight would very quickly kill him if he struck his dwarf in his presence.  
Folly is not prowess;

24 Duby and Bogin demonstrate the importance of the lady presiding over the court as a stand-in for the Lord, explaining her role in the courtly-love game. See Chapter 2, pages 88-90.
in this Erec acted very wisely: he withdrew, without doing anything more.

Erec’s wisdom prevents him from acting impulsively, marking a clear departure from the masculine as defined by Beowulf. For the Anglo-Saxon warrior, madness might indeed mean courage as the Anglo-Saxon/Norse warrior works himself up to a madness to do battle; Beowulf and Grendel both are angry as they fight. In addition, in choosing not to fight at first, Erec has a concern, like Beowulf, that it be an equal fight. But Erec has the opposite concern of Beowulf, who wants to make his opponent equal. So Beowulf disarms himself because he has heard that Grendel does not use a sword. Erec waits until he can acquire equal arms.

For Erec, however, postponing this fight, despite the insult to both him and the queen’s attendant, will not reflect upon his honor. When he explains his decision to back away from the dwarf, he says to the queen,

Ne l’osai ferir ne tochier,
mes nus nel me doit reprochier,
que ge toz desarmez estoie:
le chevalier armé dotoie,
quoi vilains est et outrageus.
Et il nel tenist pas a geus:
tost m’oceïst par son orguel.
Itant bien prometre vos vuel
que, se ge puis, je vangerai
ma honte, ou je la crestrai! (237-46)

I dared not touch or strike him,

but no one must blame me for that

since I was completely unarmed:

I was afraid of the armed knight;

he is uncourtly and unprincipled.

And he would have considered it no joke:

he would at once have killed me, in his pride.

But I want to promise you,

that, if I can, I will avenge

my shame, or else I’ll augment it!

Whereas Beowulf might assert that he would avenge himself or die—or achieve fame or die—throughout this exchange with the queen Erec emphasizes not potential glory, but “blame” and potential “shame.” Erec shows concern for the public appearance of his actions, consistent with the values demonstrated by Beowulf, but realizes that his motivation will be considered, not just his action.

The difference in Erec’s attitude points the way to Erec’s very different purpose in the ensuing fight from Beowulf’s in fighting Grendel. The opponent resembles Grendel in a way because he is dehumanized by his not speaking and threatening uncontrolled violence. However, Erec follows him motivated by personal revenge. Yder represents no threat to either Arthur’s or Erec’s realm. Erec arrives as an outsider to the castle, but not as a cleansing liberator. He is ignored, not recognized for his worth. His
effort will ultimately win the favor of the lord of the castle and allow him to restore Enide’s father to a place of status. But neither of these are Erec’s motivations for fighting. Enide’s role in allowing for the peaceful reinstatement of the hunt of the stag seems even more incidental. These social benefits are not quite as marginalized as those in *Le Chevalier de la Charrete*, but the poem makes clear that Erec’s revenge is personal. He does, however, enact that revenge on behalf of the queen and, formally, on behalf of Enide. But these are also steps away from the Beowulfian model of masculine heroism.

As the romance continues, the emphasis on fighting for women will become more real. Erec will move from his self-centered motivation to avenge his honor to a whole-hearted defense of Enide’s honor when she is threatened by Count Oringle. The subsequent personal education of Erec, during which the unmerited suffering of Enide and the spectacle of excessive violence continue, ends with a public coronation of king and queen. Sarah-Jane Murray relates the first, self-contained part of the poem to the second:

> As the first part of Chrétien’s romance draws to an end, harmony seems to reign at the court of King Arthur; Érec and Énide’s union, closely linked to the poetic structure of Chrétien’s story, promises to be joyful. Yet, as the newlyweds soon discover, neither the seamless conflation of their two worlds nor Énide’s great beauty is enough to ensure a successful marriage, or *conjointure*. It will take many more adventures and a great deal of personal growth before Érec and Énide truly mature into a couple. (200)
Part Two: The Marriage

If the violence becomes spectacle rather than a productive means to an end, then traditional masculine values have significance only in the ways they affect spectators, who frequently in romance are women. But the role of spectator is passive. If the violent spectacle is merely a means of winning a passive lady, then it becomes a variation on the captured woman that appears in Anglo-Saxon narrative. At the other end of the spectrum, when the woman exercises her agency tyrannically, the result might be the “unmanned” Lancelot. In Part Two of *Erec et Enide*, Chrétien complicates the issue of Erec’s masculinity and in the end positions it between these two extremes. Erec’s second adventure, which will complete his initiation into manhood and his assumption of his place in his father’s kingdom, has as its central event Erec’s encounter with the feminine. Just as Beowulf had grappled with the female monster after his defeat of a monstrous parody of the masculine in Grendel, Erec will grapple with an intrusive feminine presence in the form of his no longer silent wife. Confronted with his own passive masculinity, Erec sets out to assert his masculine agency on the model of the old values he had succeeded with in his first adventure. But whereas Beowulf calls upon the masculine weapon of violent revenge to defeat the female monster to be fully born into the company of men, Erec’s repeated acts of violent vengefulness destroy him, dismantling his masculine identity. As Enide emerges from her silent role of Part I, her insistent feminine voice helps Erec to reconstruct his identity to be reborn to a masculine agency capable of acting in partnership with Enide as well as listening to an internalized feminine voice.
The Second Part of the poem begins with what seems to be the completion of Erec’s successful adventure of the first part. In *Beowulf*, the episodes are complete when the celebration and gift-giving is complete. But in *Erec et Enide*, the marriage of Erec and Enide and the celebratory tournament are displaced to the beginning of the second part of the poem. Interestingly, the gift-giving that opens this portion of the poem originates with Erec. He fulfills his promise to Enide’s father, rewarding him with two castles in his father’s kingdom as promised. A somewhat comparable act in *Beowulf* occurs after Beowulf’s second adventure—the fight with Grendel’s mother. Beowulf demonstrates his leadership potential in his rewarding of the coast guard and his generosity and sense of order and propriety in his passing Hrothgar’s gifts to Hygelac and Hygd. So while this particular rite of passage occurs for Beowulf after his encounter with the female monster, for Erec, it occurs before his adventure with Enide. This might be one of the first signals that Erec’s initiation into full manhood will take a different path. Beowulf receives his patrimony upon his return to Geatland, his ability to be king having been certified by Hrothgar before he left the Danes. Perhaps Erec’s first victory, a show of physical and public prowess, is adequate in some respects—the formal, outward aspects. He demonstrates a similar command of his political responsibilities as Beowulf had. However, the trials of Part Two will prepare him to assume his full responsibilities as a man, including taking his proper place as husband, and leading him to internalize the values that determine masculine behavior.
Soon after Erec and Enide return to Erec’s homeland, Erec inadvertently breaks with the masculine relationships that define the traditional patriarchal world represented by Arthur and his knights in the first part of the poem. He abandons the activities that bond him with the men under his command in favor of the activities of love that he shares with Enide. The potential threat of feminine influence voiced by Gawain in Part I is fully realized in Erec’s situation. Erec does not openly conflict with his barons, but his actions incite a current of dissent.

This dissent arises because Erec is drawn away from his masculine pursuits, and possibly responsibilities, by the love he has for his wife:

Mes tant l’ama Erec d’amors
que d’armes mes ne li chaloit,
ne a tornoiemant n’aloit.

N’avoit mes soing de tornoier:
a sa fame volt dosnoier,
si an fist s’amie et sa drue.

En li a mise s’antendue,
en acoler et an beisier;
ne se queroit d’el aeisier.

Si conpaignon duel en avoient;
sovant entr’ax se demantoient
de ce que trop l’amoit assez. (2396-407)
But Erec was so in love with her
that he cared no more for arms,
nor did he go to tournaments.

He no longer cared for tourneying:
he wanted to enjoy his wife’s company,
and he made her his lady and his mistress.

He turned all his attention to her,
to embracing and kissing;
he sought no other delight.

His companions were grieved thereby;
often they lamented among themselves
that he loved her far too much.

The mutual attraction that had surfaced overtly as they rode back to Cardigan becomes,
for Erec, a uxorious attachment. Erec’s behavior not only suggests that his relationship
with Enide is still focused on physical attraction, but also would be regarded as puerile as
Georges Duby shows in his summary of the accounts of Louis VII’s divorce from
Eleanor. Louis was characterized as immature for his excessive attraction to his wife.
John of Salisbury’s account of Louis VII’s divorce of Eleanor says that Louis, “lacking
maturity, was bewitched by his wife” (*Medieval Marriage* 58). William of Newburgh
similarly describes Louis as “behav[ing] like a ‘youth’ rather than like an elder (*senior*),
burning with excessive desire for Eleanor’s lovely body” (*Medieval Marriage* 60).
The barons “complain” of the “shame” because Erec has lost his interest in fighting—and “blame” him for it (2458-62). This is the same language that Erec used when he decided to avoid an immediate confrontation with Yder. At the beginning of Part One, Erec had indicated he would not be blamed for not engaging the knight without weapons, but here he experiences such blame for his abandonment of martial pursuits and the company of men. Erec’s voluntary exclusion from the stag hunt is different in two significant ways. First, this one-time choice is not the extended abandonment of tournaments that has resulted in shame. As it is throughout Part I, the feminine threat is at the margins of the narrative. Second, his situation is now different than when he was at Arthur’s court. He is no longer a *juven*. In Part II, Erec must establish his status not just as *senior*, but as the king to take his father’s place. No longer a knight establishing his reputation, Erec must become the full man who can be a leader of men. And it so happens that the world in which he must lead is not the one of the past represented by Arthur or by his and Enide’s father.

Furthermore, the threat to Erec’s reputation expressed in these lines is explicitly connected to his relationship with other men. While his comrades feel the loss of his companionship, Erec has continued to perform his responsibilities as leader: “ne donoit / de rien nule a ses chevaliers / armes ne robes ne deniers” (“[He] gave no less / of anything to his knights, / not of arms nor clothes nor deniers”; 2412-14). And he sent his knights to tournaments well-supplied whatever the cost (2415-20). But fulfilling his responsibilities is not enough to maintain his public reputation. They judge him and project on him a shame and blame that the audience does not see him experience,
exposing the conflict between his public reputation and his personal perceptions. Public appearance remains important to Erec, but he has begun to internalize a sense of appropriate behavior. Although in some ways Erec is acting upon internal motivation of love and devotion to his wife, similar to the extreme shown by Lancelot in the later romance, he nonetheless responds to the perceived threat to his reputation. The result will put those two motivating forces into conflict until Erec resolves his public role with his internal values. Lee Patterson suggests that the romance “opens up a space between wedding and coronation, between their fulfillment as lovers and their assumption of the burden of the historical world.” Chrétien, according to Patterson, confronts an opposition of the newly privileged “interiorization and privatization” with a Virgilian sense of the primacy of historical destiny, and his articulation of the “terms of Virgilian historiography . . . takes the form of what will become a familiar romance debate between _amour_ and _chevalerie_” (184).

Erec’s marriage has resulted in an unsatisfactory situation for the masculine warrior hero—the knight with ruling responsibilities. Erec must reconcile his public and private responsibilities. In Part Two of the romance Erec and Enide must develop a more mature relationship in marriage, a more balanced love with roots in theological concepts of caritas that will empower Erec as a leader. Such a relationship requires a more active role for Enide, the first effect of which is the disruption of Erec’s self perception.
Enide’s Disruptive Voice

Erec seems completely unaware of his perceived lapse, requiring the intervention of Enide, who must make her first move from passive silence to make him aware of what others are saying. Jeanne Nightingale observes that rather than the “authoritative ‘parole’” of Arthur, a new direction in the romance “begins with the audacious ‘parole de femme’ of Enide” (134). Enide’s voice will play a crucial role throughout Part II of the poem. Her insistent voice will force Erec to confront the feminine, and her voice will awaken Erec to his new manhood. As E. Jane Burns says, Enide has “parad[ed] somnolently through the first 2000 lines of Chrétien’s text in utter silence before uttering the first in a series of curt but disruptively uncourtly statements” (25). The first wakes Erec from his lethargy.

Enide’s voice emerges slowly. She first utters the words of blame when Erec is asleep as they lie in a lovers’ embrace. The words escape almost inadvertently:

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de la parole li manbra
que disoient de son seignor
par la contree li plusor.
Quant il l’an prist a sovenir,
de plorer ne se pot tenir;
tel duel en ot et tel pesance
qu’il li avint par mescheance
qu’ele dist lors une parole
dom ele se tint puis por fole,
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mes ele n’i pansoit nul mal. (2442-51)

she remembered what

many people throughout the land

were saying about her lord.

When she began to remember that,

she could not refrain from weeping;

she felt such pain and sorrow

that by mischance it happened

that she made a remark

for which she later counted herself a fool,

but she meant no evil thereby.

Enide begins from a posture of passivity, crying without the power to stop, somewhat reminiscent of the passive voice of lamentation that appears in Anglo-Saxon poetry. The power of the words themselves seems to be in control, her lips acting on their own. But the next lines suggest the emergence of a more conscious control as “Son seignor a mont et a val / comança tant a regarder; / le cors vit bel et le vis cler” (“She began to contemplate / her lord from head to foot; / she saw his handsome body and fair face”; 2452-54). Enide seems to react to his physical beauty, to his body, which is somewhat less abstractly described than when she admired him earlier (Stanbury 59). Tears burst forth, followed by words in which she casts herself as the cause, saying that Erec a del tot an tot relanquie

por moi tote chevalrie.
Dons l’ai ge honi tot por voir;
nel volsisse por nul avoir. (2465-68)

has, because of me,
completely abandoned all chivalry.

Now have I truly shamed him;
I should not have wished it for anything.

When Enide’s words wake Erec from a shallow sleep, she first denies having said anything, an apparent attempt to maintain her silent role. She eventually relents when Erec compels her to speak, and once compelled, Erec finds, the voice cannot be silenced.

He has compelled Enide to behave contrary to the passive role she has assumed, the conventional role of romance heroine. As Fries suggests, the ironic result of his demands is that he turns her from the role of heroine—silent, obedient, “the still point around which the real action (of the male universe) turns”—to hero (65).

Enide’s report of what she has heard does not match the narrator’s account of what the barons have been saying. She portrays the barons’ description of his shame much more explicitly:

Par ceste terre dient tuit,
li blonc et li mor et li ros,
que granz domages est de vos
que voz armes antrelessiez:
Vostre pris est molt abessiez:
tuit soloient dire l’autre an
qu’an tot le mont ne savoit l’an
meillor chevalier ne plus preu;
vostres parauz n’estoit nul leu.
Or se vont tuit de vos gabant,
juesne et chenu, petit et grant;
recreant vos apelent tuit. (2506-17)
Throughout this land all are saying,
the blonds and the brunets and the redheads,
that it is a great shame
that you have laid aside your arms.
Your renown has greatly declined:
that in all the world no one knew
a better nor a more valiant knight;
your equal was nowhere to be found.
Now everyone holds you up to ridicule,
young and old, high and low;
all call you recreant.

Finally, she suggests that he respond, at the same time implying the power that he has
over her and the lack of agency in this eruption of speech:

Or vos an estuet consoil prandre,
que vos puissiez ce blasme estaindre
et vostre premier los ataindre,
car trop vos ai oï blasmer.
Onques nel vos osai mostrer.
d’angoisse plorer me covient:
si grant angoisse orainz en oi
que garde prandre ne m’an soi,
tant que je dis que mar i fustes. (2528-37)
Now it is fitting that you consider,
so that you may put an end to this blame
and regain your former glory,
for I have heard you blamed too much.
I never dared reveal this to you.
Oftentimes, when I recall it,
I have to weep with anguish:
just now it caused me such anguish
that I could not restrain myself
from saying you were unfortunate.

Erec responds that she was right to tell him and that those who blame him are also right.

As Noble points out, when he first awakes after hearing her speak, he addresses her as “amie chiere,” but after she denies speaking, he shifts to the more formal “Dame,” which Noble says suggests “coldness” (18). The change in address may also suggest Erec’s
awareness that the problem lies in the nature of the relationship. But his language may suggest an overreaction, just as his subsequent actions will. While the relationship must mature, and he must assume his place as senior, he will learn that he does not need to stop regarding Enide as amie. While Erec’s thoughts and motives remain hidden to all, including the audience, it is clear that Enide’s words galvanize him into taking immediate action.

Erec’s Quest to Assert Traditional Manhood

Upon hearing from Enide of the blame being assigned to his behavior, Erec immediately prepares to set out on an adventure, the conditions of which suggest that he is intent on (re)establishing his masculine credentials. Unlike Lancelot, who will allow his love for Guinevere to override his concern with public shame, Erec has chosen to go on a knightly adventure, apparently to reclaim his reputation. But in a gesture that recalls more the tyranny of Guinevere than the passive obedience of Lancelot, Erec compels Enide to accompany him. The motivation for Erec’s second quest has been a point of debate. Z. P. Zaddy in his 1973 book on Chrétien claims that the evidence shows that “wounded pride . . . drove Erec to go off into the unknown with Enide.” His conclusion accords to some extent with the idea that Erec needs to restore his status as a man, but Zaddy seems to make Erec’s motivation too personal: “It is the story of a man taken to task by his wife, who sets out resentfully to vindicate himself in her eyes” (14). He carefully shows that the poem does not support Erec’s setting out to test Enide, but still concludes that when Erec continues the adventure after recognizing his wife’s love “can
only mean” that he is waiting for an opportunity to save face (8-9). Perhaps, there is more to his quest than proving himself to Enide only.

To counter his perceived laxness, Erec devises a plan that will mobilize all of the heroic masculine traits demonstrated by Beowulf: he will venture out alone in order to assert his dominance over his environment, over women, and over other men. However, Erec’s quest will differ from Beowulf’s in two significant ways. First, unlike Beowulf, (and like his earlier adventuring self), there is no immediate social purpose to his action. At stake is only his personal reputation, his standing among his barons. Of course this concern for reputation does have a political dimension since he will be effective as a leader only insofar as he has their support and confidence, and reputation is at least partial motivation for Beowulf’s venture to Daneland. The second way in which Erec’s quest will differ tremendously from Beowulf’s relates directly to the resolution of these relationships. Erec requires Enide to accompany him on this quest—something it is impossible to conceive of Beowulf doing. One way of explaining this decision is that the feminine is something that Erec takes with him and must deal with, not a force to be encountered along the way.

As Erec prepares to set out, the question of his doing so “alone” raises questions. Of course, Beowulf is accompanied by fourteen men on his adventure to Heorot, but when Beowulf surveys his life at the end and says that he was always “alone on the point” (ana on ord), it is clear that he has stood heroically apart. He grappled with Grendel alone; he went into the troll-wife’s mere alone; and he entered the dragon’s cave alone. While Erec appears similarly alone, the circumstances and his words suggest the
unusual nature of what he does. Everyone is confused by his behavior—Enide, the knights, and his father. The knights question his intent to go alone, but he rejects their offers to accompany him in terms that emphasize the unusual nature of his intent: “il lor jure et acreante / qu’il n’an nanra ja compaignon, / se sa fame solemant non” (“he swore and promised them / that he would have no companion / apart from his wife”; 2654-56). In a note to this reference to being alone, Carleton W. Carroll clarifies that Erec is alone because he is “without the normal retinue befitting his station” (322). Erec’s father expresses his concern over just that fact when he twice refers to Erec’s riding alone. First, he says, “Ne doit seus aler filz de roi” (“A king’s son must not travel alone”; 2672). Erec responds only that “ne puet autre estre” (“it cannot be otherwise”; 2681). He repeats nearly these same words after his father further laments his going alone:

“Mes de ce que aler t’an voi sanz compaignie, ai molt grant duel; ja ne le feïsses, mon vuel.”

“But seeing you leave unaccompanied causes me great sorrow; you would not do so, were it up to me.”

“Sire, it cannot be otherwise.”

Before leaving, Erec asks his father to remember his knights: “Mes de mes compaignons pansez: / chevax et armes lor donez / et quanqu’a chevalier estuet” (“But think of my companions: / give them horses and arms / and everything knights need”; 2701-03).
Erec’s words to his father recall Beowulf’s final words to Hrothgar before diving into the mere to face Grendel’s mother: “Wes þū mundbora mīnum magoþegnum / hondgesellum gif mec hild nime” (“Be protector of my thanes, my companions if this battle takes me”; 1480-01). However, it seems ironic that Erec’s apparent goal to reconcile his relationship with his men will be accomplished by abandoning them and being alone with his wife.

Certainly Erec’s being without proper retinue explains his being described as traveling alone while accompanied by Enide, but it invites other interpretations. First, it seems to negate Enide as a person because she is not a man. As Erec’s father points out, having other knights with him will not interfere with his ability to prove himself “seul a seul contre un chevalier” (“in single combat against some knight”; 2667). Beowulf traveled with fourteen thanes and still fought Grendel “lāð wið lāþum” (“foe against foe”; 440a). Thus, Erec’s intent may suggest something not satisfied by the Beowulfian model of adventure. Another reading of his riding alone is that Erec acknowledges his and Enide’s one flesh in marriage. While such an explanation accords with the essential role of marriage in the poem, it might also be read as negating Enide’s personhood, which does not seem consistent with the outcome. A third reading, which might be the most important to acknowledge, is that Erec is truly by himself in that Enide represents some internal feminine aspect that he tries to distance himself from throughout this part of the poem. All three of these readings provide relevant perspectives for evaluating Erec’s masculinity. The issues of public reputation drive him to this adventure, so he must perform his manhood for other men and for women. Since Enide has been the source of
his learning of his knights’ blame, it fulfills a certain kind of logic that she bear witness to his actions. In fact, Zaddy sees Erec’s need to prove “his hardihood” to Enide as the primary motivation for initiating his quest (11). But Erec’s insistence on his aloneness may suggest that the success of his quest will be measured in terms of his own internal evaluation. The marriage becomes the site where the public performance and private fulfillment of manhood will be reconciled.

As Erec and Enide set out together, Erec overtly exercises his dominance over Enide by laying out the unusual conditions that she must travel under:

\begin{quote}
Erec s’an va: sa fame an moinne,
ne set ou, mes en avanture.

“Alez,” fet il, “grant 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. (2728-37)
\end{quote}

Erec rode off, leading his wife, knowing not where, but seeking adventure.

“Ride rapidly,” said he,

“and take care not to be so bold,
if you see anything,
as to say this or that to me.
Take care not to speak to me,
if I do not speak to you first.
Go speedily before,
and ride in complete confidence.

The differences of Chrétien’s story from its Welsh analog, “Gereint Son of Erbin,” at this point in the story are illuminating. In the Welsh story, Gereint’s actions are motivated by his suspicions that Enid has been unfaithful, and he orders her to put on the tattered dress that she wore when he found her living in poverty with her parents. Both of those pieces of information suggest clearly that Gereint is testing Enid, in part by re-enacting her status before her marriage to him. In Chrétien’s telling, not only is Enide riding out in her most beautiful dress, reflecting her current ennobled status, but before they leave, Erec demonstrates his commitment to her when he tells his father,

Mes je vos pri, que qu’il aveigne,
se ge muir et ele reveigne,
que vos l’amoi et tenez chiere,
por m’amor et por ma proiere,
et la mitié de vostre terre
quite, sanz bataille et sanz guerre,
li otroiez tote sa vie. (2687-93)
But, whatever may happen,
if I die and she returns,
I pray you may love her and hold her dear,
for love of me and because I ask it,
and that you grant her half your land,
freely, without battle and without strife,
for the rest of her life.

While these lines may be ambiguous in expressing Erec’s love for Enide, he clearly intends for her to retain her marital status. This request of his father emphasizes the material aspect of the marriage, the secular concerns. But Erec also suggests here that he considers the marriage indissoluble, even in the event of death, which may help to explain his behavior in taking Enide on his adventure. The adventure is clearly intended to reestablish his manhood, and his marriage to Enide is an essential part of that.

In addition to asserting dominance over Enide, Erec will fulfill the expectations of a venturing knight errant and demonstrate physical dominance over other men. On his adventure, Erec is challenged by a variety of opponents. He fights off the attacks of “marauding knights” (Maddox and Sturm-Maddox 110), but also meets the challenge of two counts who are even more treacherous. Maddox and Sturm-Maddox suggest, “All of these episodes illustrate the destructive potential of chivalric aggressivity” (109). By insisting on Enide’s passive silence as she rides in front of him, Erec has positioned her as bait to draw such men to him, contriving a reason for him to respond in a vengeful way. While Enide rides in front silently, they encounter two sets of thieves, first a group of three and then a group of five. Each of the groups’ attention is drawn first to Enide.
When they attack, Enide is unable to resist warning Erec of the danger, incurring his anger, but forgiveness each time. Erec defeats the thieves easily, capturing their horses, which he has Enide lead. Thus, Erec demonstrates his physical prowess in a routine manner. Zaddy suggests because Chrétien tells us that Erec is aware of the second group of robbers, but not the first, it may be in the first case that “Erec’s attention is turned in upon himself and is not directed toward Enide” (4). That being the case, Erec would seem to be focused on his problem, internally, and not necessarily testing Enide.

However, the anger, which is part of the performance of masculinity and functions to enhance the fighting man’s strength in the earlier model of masculinity, is directed at Enide, not the male opponents, suggesting that Enide represents what he is fighting in some way.

With their next encounter, the character of the adventure begins to turn. After sleeping in the woods, they are met by a squire, who sees an opportunity to benefit himself, so he gives them food and secures them lodging for the night. While Erec and Enide are generously treated by their host, the local count visits and attempts to seduce Enide. Maddox and Sturm-Maddox note that “Count Galoain’s attentions to Enide suggest again, as in the premerains vers, that competition occasioned by feminine beauty can have devastating effect on chivalric solidarity” (110). However, the count’s threat is to the marriage itself, as well as to Enide, and the outcome of this incident begins to change the direction of the narrative. Enide takes charge of events and enacts a fake betrayal that parodies Erec’s actions and makes him the bait. She convinces the count that it will be easier to kill Erec if they wait until Erec is asleep. This allows her to warn
Erec to escape before morning. When the count gives chase, one hundred men follow him to attack Erec:

Lors le sivent tuit abrivé,
de maualant sont aïrè
vers celui qui onques nes vit,
ne mal ne lor a fet ne dit (3503-06)
Then they all followed him impatiently,
furious and wrathful
toward him who had never seen them
nor done them ill by word or deed.

Enide has her longest debate with herself about whether to warn Erec, but finally does. Erec threatens her before turning to fight. He kills one of the men and then delivers a severe wound to the count, who wears no armor, before attempting to escape to the woods. Wounded, the count recognizes that he has behaved falsely, declares that “Molt est preuz et saige et cortoise / la dame qui deceü m’a” (“The lady who has foiled me / is very brave, sensible, and courtly”; 3606-07), and prevents his men from pursuing Erec. The count’s sudden conversion may foreshadow Erec’s eventual recognition of who the lady truly is.

The next challenge Erec faces, from Guivret the Dwarf, is the first that does not target Enide and is motivated by honor rather than treachery. Guivret sees an opportunity to test his prowess in a fight, not to the death, but to exhaustion:

qu’il ot veü devant ses lices
un chevalier armé passer
a cui se vialt d’armes lasser,
ou il a lui se lassera
tant que toz recreanz sera. (3650-54)

for before his enceintes he had seen
an armed knight pass by,
with whom he wished to exhaust himself in combat,
or the other would wear himself out
and declare himself defeated.

Although Erec has not repeated an overt demand for her silence, Enide still is under his threat as she struggles before speaking to warn him about Guivret’s approach with sparks flying from his horse’s hoofs. Erec’s response to Enide marks a turning point for them:

Ele li dit; il la menace,
mes n’a talant que mal li face,
qu’il aparçoit et conuist bien
qu’ele l’ainme sor tote rien,
et il li, tant que plus ne puet. (3725-29)

She spoke to him; he threatened her,
but had no wish to harm her,
for he perceived and knew full well
that she loved him above all else,
and he loved her, with all his might.
From this point forward Erec’s attempt to assert traditional masculinity moves toward failure. The sequence of encounters that precede the one with Guivret have been pointless displays, conflicts that he contrived by exposing Enide as a temptation. After defeating Guivret, Erec is for the first time wounded to the extent that there is concern. His wounds badly need care. His physical condition deteriorates from this point on as he resolutely tries to maintain the conditions he has set for himself—particularly to pursue the adventure independently. He refuses Guivret’s offer to have his wounds tended to. There is a sense that he is trying to master himself at this point, more than anything else. But he also shows that he is not ready to accept the new manhood that Guivret represents. Subsequently, he has a series of encounters where he enacts symbolic battles with the patriarchal old order and the model of masculinity it represents, culminating in his complete physical collapse.

Erec next has a return encounter with Arthur and his court. Arthur is in the woods hunting again—reminiscent of the poem’s beginning. First, Kay, with Gawain’s horse and arms, comes upon Erec but does not recognize him in his battle-damaged armor. Erec rejects Kay’s invitation to come to Arthur’s camp and have his wounds tended, but he is eventually tricked by Gawain and forced to stop for the night at Arthur’s pavilions. At this point, Erec reveals his identity. After one night’s reunion, Erec insists on pressing on, refusing still to pause to provide an opportunity for his wounds to heal. When they prepare to leave in the morning, “Au departir a toz molt grieve, / que ja mes reveoir nes
cuident” (“Their departure distressed them all, / for they thought never to see them
again”; 4246-47). Their fear is reminiscent of that of the Geats as they watch Beowulf
dive into the mere to face Grendel’s mother and then see the mere well with blood. But
those left behind by Beowulf understand the purpose of Beowulf’s sacrifice. While
Arthur’s knights cannot possibly understand Erec’s purpose, their expressed concern
emphasizes the extreme physical challenge that Erec faces alone. When they all rush
from their tents to ride with him, Erec tells them, “ja avoec moi n’iroiz un pas” (“you will
not go one step with me”; 4252). His actions inspire only confusion rather than an
enhancement of his reputation.

This encounter seems to complicate Erec’s situation at this pivotal point. Arthur’s
court presents an opportunity for Erec to fall back into the safety of the old order.
Interestingly, this would require passivity on his part; instead, he insists on continuing on
his own. He tells Arthur, “Je ai si ceste chose anprise, / ne remanroie en nule guise” (“I
have undertaken this matter, / and would not stay in any manner”; 4209-10). His
encounter with Guivret and his certainty of the love between him and Enide have begun
to point in a new direction. Nonetheless, he continues on the same quest—apparently for
opportunities to demonstrate his physical prowess. He has an idea about completing his
adventure, but what that means remains a mystery. His concerns about his reputation
would seem to have been assuaged by the reception he receives from those at Arthur’s
court. The end of his journey may not be outwardly visible. Since he is the only one
who seems to know what the end of the journey is, it may now end only when he has
internalized a sense of his manhood.
After he continues on his way with Enide, Erec faces one more challenge that culminates his solitary struggle with the masculine. It begins with what has come to epitomize a knight errant’s adventure, a damsel in distress. Coming to the aid of women is an explicit aspect of the chivalric code (Keen 8), and this is the first conflict on Erec’s adventure that has an altruistic purpose. This episode will end with Erec symbolically defeating the past and falling into apparent death. When they hear a woman crying, Erec recognizes her desperation and need for help. He tells Enide to “Descendez ci, et g’irai la, / si m’atandez andemantiers” (“Dismount here, while I go there, / and wait for me meanwhile”; 4276-77). After requiring her to accompany him constantly up to this point, he does not need her to contrive a rescue nor, apparently, to witness his battle. Erec learns that the lady’s knight has been carried off by giants and promises in the either/or construction of the hero’s boast, “ou avoec lui pris esterai, / ou jel vos randrai tot delivre” (“either I will be taken prisoner with him, / or I will return him to you completely free”; 4314-15). Erec tells the girl also to wait and quickly tracks the giants, and

Le chevalier vit an pur cors,

deschauz et nu sor un roncin,

les mains liees et les piez.  (4338-41)

He saw the unclad knight,
barefoot and naked upon a draft horse,

bound hand and foot,

as if he had been caught committing larceny.
The knight is not only in danger of his life, but he has been humiliated. So Erec can be seen as rescuing his manhood in order to restore it to his lady.

Erec defeats the two giants with relative ease but with extreme violence. The giants have only clubs and whips as weapons. When they refuse to release the knight, Erec charges, and

\[
\text{fiert le premerain an l’uel} \\
\text{si par mi outre le cervel} \\
\text{que d’autre part le haterel} \\
\text{li sans et la cervele an saut} \\
\text{et cil chiet morz—li cuers li faut. (4398-402)}
\]

he struck the first in the eye,

right through the brain, so that,

at the back of the head,

the blood and brains spurted out

and the giant fell dead—his heart gave out.

The second giant is able to strike a stunning blow and is about to strike a second,

\[
\text{mes Erec tint l’espee trete;} \\
\text{une anvaïe li a fete} \\
\text{don li jaianz fu mal serviz;} \\
\text{si le fiert par mi la cerviz} \\
\text{que desi es arçons le fant;} \\
\text{la böele a terre an espant,}
\]
et li cors chiet toz estanduz,
qui fu an deus mitiez fanduz. (4419-26)

but Erec held his sword drawn;
he made an attack
that served the giant ill;
he struck him so atop the head
that he split him right down to the saddlebows;
he spilled the guts upon the ground,
and the body fell, stretched out full length,
split into two halves.

Erec sends the rescued knight, who wishes to serve Erec, to Arthur’s court to tell his story and report who had rescued him. This entire episode stands as a microcosm of a heroic action on the Beowulfian model. It is framed by a boast at the beginning and a gesture to the king at the end. The violence is among the most graphic in the poem, and even uses understatement characteristic of Anglo-Saxon heroic poetry: “an attack / that served the giant ill.” And this is Erec’s only fight with actual monstrous figures.

Considered with what follows, it is as if Erec has purged himself of all aspects of the traditional masculine. By the time that he returns to the distraught Enide, his wounds have all reopened:

car toz ses cors an sanc baignoit
et li cuers faillant li aloit.
A un tertre qu’il avaluoi,
cheï toz a un fes a val
jusque sor le col del cheval;

si com il relever cuida,

la sele et les arçons vuida,

et chiet pasmez con s’il fust morz. (4552-59)

for his whole body was bathed in blood
and his heart was failing him.

As he was coming down a knoll,
he fell down all at once
upon the neck of his horse;
as he tried to get up again,
he toppled from the saddle
and fell unconscious as though dead.

Thus, Erec’s defeat of two actual giants—the symbol of the past—occurs right before he falls into a near-death state, from which he will emerge a new man. Maintaining the traditional expectations of manhood nearly kills him, bringing about his apparent physical death, which may be considered the actual death of his former masculine self.
Building a New Masculine Identity

Erec’s quest has destroyed him physically, but it has laid the foundation from which he will be reborn a new man. Erec has demonstrated over and over the natural masculine qualities\(^\text{25}\) of strength and anger tempered with rationality during his quest. In addition, he has shown an adherence to a warrior code close to that represented by Beowulf, except for its personal emphasis. He has contrived situations, using Enide as bait, for personal revenge. His resoluteness on his adventure with Enide is nearly maniacal. He is consistently loyal to Arthur and supports his own barons generously despite his perceived lapses by them. While his pursuit of these masculine virtues has led to his physical collapse, Erec’s confidence in these natural abilities and codes of conduct will remain essential when he emerges from his coma. Two influences have emerged that will help him awaken to a new masculinity: Enide with her new assertion of voice and agency, and Guivret as a model of power and honor.

The potential for love that Erec has finally heard in Enide’s voice leads Erec past the formal ritual of marriage and the enslavement of physical attraction to the potential for a partnership. In addition, Enide’s insistent voice and active presence seem to finally make Erec aware that he must integrate the feminine with his own masculine strength. He begins by attempting to dominate and control the feminine voice, but comes to recognize that the voice cannot be silenced and must be recognized, acknowledged, and accepted.

\(^{25}\) So-called natural masculine qualities and qualities associated with the socially constructed masculine warrior codes, all of which adhere across the cultural boundaries that separate Beowulf and Erec et Enide, are discussed in Chapter 4.
Erec also forges a relationship with Guivret—the dwarf symbolic of the new man. Unlike other knights that he defeats, Erec does not require Guivret to present himself at Arthur’s court; he asks only that Guivret come to his aid if he ever hears that Erec is in trouble. They end this compact with extraordinary courtesy and affection:

“Ja plus ne vos quier demander,”

s‘ont lor plaies antre bandees. (3872-82)

“I wish to ask no more of you,”

said Erec; “you have promised me much.

You are my lord and my friend,

if the deed is like the words.”

Each of them kissed and embraced the other.

Never from such a fierce battle

was there such a sweet parting,
for, moved by love and generosity,

each of them cut long, broad bands

from the tail of his shirt,

and they bound up each other’s wounds.

Guivret is not only the most honorable individual that Erec fights, but he is also the strongest opponent, inflicting the severe wounds to which Erec eventually almost succumbs. In comparison to Guivret, Erec dispatches the two giants easily. Despite his size, he has fighting ability nearly equal to Erec’s. But Guivret also represents a different model of masculinity, expressed not only in his physical smallness, but in his association with the feminine through his two sisters with the power to heal. Most significantly, he has achieved reputation and holds broad authority based on his personal prowess, not by his connections to the past.

After Erec defeats him, Guivret identifies himself in terms of his political power.

First, he defines himself in terms of feudal hierarchy:

Je sui de ceste terre rois:

mi home lige sont Irois;

n’i a nul ne soit mes rantiz.

Et j’ai non Guivrez li Petiz;

assez sui riches et puissanz,

qu’an ceste terre, de toz sanz

n’a baron, qui a moi marchisse,

qui de mon comandemant isse
et mon pleisir ne face tot. (3821-9)

I am the king of this land:
my liegemen are Irish;
every one of them pays me tribute.
And my name is Guivret the Short;
I am very rich and powerful,
for in this land, in all directions,
there is not a baron whose lands border on mine
who eludes my command
or who does not do exactly as I wish.

The kingly power, like that of Scyld described in the opening of Beowulf, suggested by these lines is more clearly echoed in the lines that follow: “Je n’ai veisin qui ne me dot, / tant se face orguellex ne cointes” (“All my neighbors fear me, / however arrogant or valiant they may be”; 3830-31). Erec replies that he also is “assez gentix hom” (“quite a noble man”; 3835). In fact, Guivret has not defined himself in terms of nobility, but in terms of power. Erec boasts further, describing all that his father owns, which is second only to King Arthur. Whereas Guivret’s power comes from personal prowess, Erec sees his worth from his blood—by his connection to the past.

After he wakes from his deathlike coma, Erec establishes a new marital bond with Enide and accepts Guivret’s friendship fully. Erec’s bonding with Enide and with Guivret, who together heal him, empowers Erec with a new masculinity. In the final challenge of the romance, Erec faces la Joie de la Cort. In doing so he will demonstrate
masculine virtues that will bring his actions into alignment with Beowulf’s: he pursues
the challenge as a point of honor and succeeds because of his natural masculine strengths;
he shows a willingness to sacrifice for the community, and his actions engender the same
freedom that he has experienced himself for a knight trapped by the old masculine model.
In addition, this final challenge will reveal the power of his new manhood.

_Erec’s Rebirth: A New Man_

After he is awakened from apparent death by Enide’s strident repulse of Count
Oringle, Erec begins performing a balanced masculinity. Erec returns to himself after he
awaits from a deathlike state and immediately strikes and kills the count whom he hears
threatening Enide: “Cele part cort ou il la voit / et fiert par mi le chief le conte / si qu’il
l’escervele et esfronte” (“He ran to where he saw her / and struck the count atop the head
/ so that he sliced through his brain and his brow”; 4816-18). The count’s household
flees, thinking him possessed, still a corpse, shouting “Fuiez! Fuiez! Veez le mort”
(“Away! Away! The dead man!”; 4830).

Patterson emphasizes the significance to the construction of masculinity in his
analysis of the scene of Erec’s rebirth in the poem. He translates Enide’s rejection of
Count Oringle as “I will never find you so manly that I would do either more or less for
you” (“ja tant ne te troverai fier / que por toi face plus ne mains”; 4800-01). A footnote
explains that he has “translated the ‘fier’ of line 4800 as ‘manly’ in an effort capture
something of its ambiguous value. Carroll translates the line more literally “I’ll never
find you so fearsome.” Patterson further emphasizes that Erec is described as “like a man
awakening” (“ausi con li hom qui s’esvoille”; 4807). At this point Erec “recuperates and
reintegrates the complex mix of militarism and eroticism that constitutes chivalric
heroism” (189). By emphasizing the manhood in this analysis, Patterson seems to be
equating “chivalric heroism” with masculinity. Furthermore, when Erec is defeated by
Guivret in their second encounter, Patterson characterizes Erec as freed from “the burden
of unconstrained chivalric ambition” (188). Thus, he seems to imply that the poem,
through its hero, constructs masculinity in terms of a balance of chivalric prowess with
“the object world,” including the feminine: “A chivalric ideology of knightly self-
sufficiency and erotic possessiveness set in opposition to values that privilege self-
consciousness, strategic circumspection, and a sense of limitations” (185-86).

So, while Erec is still interested in satisfying his chivalric ambition, that ambition
now has internal as well as external motivations and impediments. Furthermore, Erec’s
precipitous action in attacking the count has double motivation, reflecting the
traditionally masculine as well as the new chivalric masculinity: “ire li done hardemant, /
et l’amors qu’an sa fame avoit” (“wrath made him bold, / and the love he bore for his
wife”; 4814-15). Carroll notes that the second line has been interpreted to refer to
Enide’s love for him (329). The ambiguity may speak louder than either interpretation to
represent the mutual love between the couple that is demonstrated from this moment.

At this point, Erec and Enide appear ready to fight alongside one another, Enide
becoming a complement to Erec’s warrior self. In an interesting reversal of what might
be considered the gendered symbolism of the knight’s weapons, as Erec puts his shield
around his neck, Enide takes up his lance. They then ride away together on one horse:
Erec monte antre les arçons,
puis se prant Enide a l’estrier,
et saut sor le col del destrier,
si con li comanda et dist
Erec, qui sus monter la fist. (4856-60)

Erec got into the saddle;
then Enide put her foot to the stirrup
and jumped up to the neck of the charger,
just as Erec, who had her get on,
instructed her to do.

This action contrasts with their separation throughout this adventure when Enide rides separately and in front of Erec. That she is following Erec’s instruction may suggest that Erec is finally asserting an appropriate authority. As they ride away, Erec declares aloud their mutual love:

Ma dolce suer,
bien vos ai de tot essaiee.
Or ne soiez plus esmaiee,
c’or vos aim plus qu’ainz mes ne fis,
et je resui certains et fis
que vos m’amez parfitemant.
Or voel estre d’or en avant,

26 This scene also echoes visually the end of Marie’s “Lanval,” in which the knight Lanval jumps onto the horse of his love, the fairy queen, who has rescued him.
ausi con j’estoie devant
tot a vostre comandement;
et se vos rien m’avez mesdit,
je le vos par.doing tot et quit
del forfet et de la parole. (4872-3).

My sweet sister,
I’ve tested you well in every way.
Now be no more dismayed,
for now I love you more than ever I did,
and I am once more certain and convinced
that you love me completely.
Now I want to be henceforth
just as I was before,
entirely at your command;
and if your words offended me,
I fully pardon and forgive you
for both the deed and the word.

This statement, while offering some questionable interpretation of the events so far that suggest a lack of full awareness, expresses aloud the mutual love that he had recognized internally before his fight with Guivret. He has indeed returned to who he was before, having returned from death. The comparable moment for Beowulf occurs when he emerges from the mere after being assumed dead by all who are watching. He
emerges from the bloody water of the mere and his companions remove his armor. The imagery suggests a symbolic rebirth rather than Erec’s dramatic rising up from apparent death. Similar to Erec’s splitting the skull of the count, Beowulf’s last act of violence has been the beheading of Grendel’s body. In each case the regenerative act is an assertion of manhood through anger-motivated violence. But whereas Beowulf seems to have killed the feminine in himself in the form of Grendel’s mother, Erec defends the feminine, as represented by Enide. He describes his return to who he was in terms of their relationship—his certainty of Enide’s love. But Erec also says that he loves Enide more than he had formerly. As Zaddy claims, “His love has grown and deepened with the knowledge of her that the quest has brought him” (21). Surprisingly, Erec identifies the return to their former love in what seem to be courtly love terms, to be at Enide’s command. While the poem has not given any previous indication of Erec’s being at Enide’s command, his statement at least suggests that Enide will be allowed her voice.

After they have escaped, they encounter Guivret again, who has ridden out with a thousand armored men, intent on rescuing Enide from Count Oringle. As he approaches, the two knights do not recognize one another in the dark night. Erec requires Enide to hide. He is still weak from his wounds, yet he intends to meet the armed men unafraid and joust if necessary. When Guivret knocks Erec to the ground, Enide steps in to stop him. Maddox and Sturm-Maddox observe of Enide, “Formerly silent and submissive, she now becomes an eloquent advocate for chivalric values” (112). She seizes his reins and chastises Guivret for attacking a lone and wounded man and exhorts him to

Or soies frans et afeitiez,
Now be generous and noble,
and in your generosity abandon
this combat that you have begun,
for your esteem would never improve
for having killed or captured
a knight who had not the strength
to get up—you can see this,
for he has suffered so many blows
that he is all covered with wounds.

Once the two knights know each other, Erec agrees to Guivret’s advice to rest for the night and then return to his castle. Now under the protection of Guivret, Enide

Son seignor desarme et desvest;

si li a ses plaies lavees,

ressuiees et rebandees,
car n’i leissa autrui tochier. (5086-89)

disarmed and disrobed her lord,

and washed his wounds for him,

wiped them and rebandaged them,

for she let no one else touch them.

Whereas Beowulf is restored to and by his male comrades, Erec is attended only by his wife, though under Guivret’s protection. The completion of his healing will be through the ministrations of Guivret’s two sisters. Thus, Erec is reintegrated into the world of marriage, not into the company of men as was Beowulf. When he is completely healed, Erec and Enide

Ansanble jurent an un lit,

et li uns l’autre acole et beise:

riens nule n’est qui tant lor pleise.

Tant ont eü mal et enui,

il por li et ele por lui

c’or ont feite lor penitance. (5202-07)

They lay together in one bed,

and each embraced and kissed the other:

nothing else pleased them so much.

They had had so much pain and trouble,

he for her and she for him,

that now they had done their penance.
Their return to their passionate physical relationship validates the initial mutual attraction as a sound basis for marriage. The reference to penance lends their trials a spiritual dimension, perhaps suggesting that their experience together has transformed their physical relationship. Dorothea Kullman argues that the physical love expressed here differs from that the couple expressed at the beginning of their marriage when they wanted only to satisfy their own desires. Now each is concerned for the other’s pleasure. Kullmann suggests that penance, in Erec’s case, can only be for “l’amour immodéré, base uniquement sur le désir physique, qu’il portrait à sa femme au commencement de leur marriage” (127).

After “ont lor amor afermee / et lor grant dolor oblïee, / que petit mes lor an sovient” (“they had confirmed their love / and forgotten their great sorrow, / which they little remembered henceforth”; 5211-13), Erec is ready to return to Arthur’s court. Maddox and Sturm-Maddox conclude, “In both its affective and its societal dimensions, Erec and Enide’s reconciliation has deepened and consolidated their marital bond. At this point, the tale’s conjugal and chivalric threads are at last conjoined in a secure, indeed triumphant, conclusion” (112). If their marital bond is symbolized by Enide’s becoming a partner in chivalry, then that bond becomes a complement to Erec’s bond with his barons that the marriage initially seems to have broken, assuring the stability of the kingdom over which they will preside. But before he makes it to Tintagel, Erec has one final adventure. The ironically named “la Joie de la Cort” will turn conventional heroic narrative on its head and provide an ironic commentary on Erec’s adventures so far. Erec will reveal a nurturing and generative manhood in addition to his manly
strength and prowess, demonstrating a new model of the masculine warrior that resonates with the balanced masculinity shown by Beowulf.

La Joie de la Cort — the Liberation of Masculinity

When Erec asks Guivret’s permission to leave, Guivret insists on travelling with him. Erec, unlike Beowulf, is not merely returning to where he began after having rescued and been informed by the past. As the dwarf may symbolically represent the present and a new model of manhood strongly associated with the feminine, Erec begins his journey to Arthur’s court as a new man, bringing the present with him. Before leaving, Erec, with Enide, acknowledges his relationship as a knight with women, thanking Guivret’s two sisters “de sa santé et de sa vie, / et molt lor promet son servise” (“for his health and his life / and promised them his complete service”; 5258-59). The four walk out “tuit main a main antre tenu” (“all holding hands together”; 5264).

Beowulf has absorbed a degree of feminine wisdom, but he remains isolated in a narrow masculine world view that fails him eventually. Erec has entered into full partnership with the feminine, most importantly in his marriage to Enide, but also in his acceptance of the feminine life force that has restored his life and in his chivalric commitment to protect women. The challenge of la Joie de la Cort that he encounters on his return will demonstrate not only the extent to which he retains the traditional masculine virtues he has demonstrated from the beginning of the romance but also the degree to which he has internalized this feminine principle.
At the point of Erec’s returning home after having been reborn a new man, Chrétien invokes the age’s defining narrative, *The Aeneid*. At a similar point in *Beowulf*, the poet invokes the story of the flood, engraved on the sword hilt upon which Hrothgar reflects as he delivers his advice to Beowulf to be mindful of the transitory nature of life.

Here, the carving on Enide’s saddle bows tells the story

comant Eneas vint de Troye,
comant a Cartaige a grant joie
Dido an son leu lec reçut,
comant Eneas la deçut,
comant ele por lui s’ocist,
comant Eneas puis conquist
Laurente et tote Lonbardie,
dom il fu rois tote sa vie. (5293-300)

of how Aeneas came from Troy
how in Carthage with great joy
Dido received him in her bed,
how Aeneas betrayed her,
how she killed herself because of him,
how Aeneas later conquered
Laurentum and all of Lombardy,
where he was king for the rest of his life.
Though the saddle bows depict the entire story, this summary emphasizes Dido’s tragic part in the story, her brief distraction of Aeneas from his political destiny. In such a summary it is easy to see an analogy to Erec’s story. The temptations of Enide’s bed had distracted Erec for a time from his masculine duties, including his own destined rule of his father’s kingdom. But the completely different outcome for Erec and Enide is emphasized by the context. Rather than being abandoned, Enide is mounting a horse to accompany Erec on his triumphant return to Arthur’s court. Rather than a distracting temptation, Enide has proven to be a partner essential to Erec’s success. While Chrétien only implies such an association of Enide with Dido, he will compare the wife of Erec’s final opponent, Maboagrain, directly to Lavinia: “e’onques Lavine de Laurente, / qui tant par fu et bele et gente, / n’en ot de sa biauté le quart” (“that never did Lavinia of Laurentum, / who was so very beautiful and noble, / have a quarter of her beauty”; 5845-47). Thus, Erec’s fight with Maboagrain might be contrasted with Aeneas’s with Turnus. The fight with Maboagrain will not be motivated by the need for conquest and revenge. Rather, Erec’s defeat of Maboagrain will liberate him from the tyranny of both his love and his personal sense of masculine duty.

These implied contrasts to *The Aeneid* suggest the contrast between Erec’s final adventure and previous events in the poem and direct further attention to the changes in Erec. As soon as Erec becomes aware of the challenge of *la Joie de la Cort*, he is compelled to face it. Guivret warns Erec against it, as will King Evrain, and Enide desires that Erec not take the challenge. But Erec still feels the masculine need to engage
the hopeless challenge, suggesting that for him manhood is still defined in large part as it is for Beowulf. Guivret’s warnings begin before Erec even knows of the challenge:

J’en ai sovant oï parler,  
que passé a set anz ou plus  
que del chastel ne revint nus  
qui l’avanture i alast querre;  
s’i sont venu de mainte terre chevalier fier et corageus. (5388-93)

I have often heard tell of it,  
for seven years or more have passed  
since anyone returned from the town who went there to seek the adventure;  
and yet from many a land have come bold and courageous knights.

But the warnings only serve to feed a desire for honor; Erec responds, “Se il nule enors m’i croist / ce vos devroit estre molt bel” (“If any honor accrues to me there, / that should bring you great pleasure”; 5408-9). In fact, while the king’s efforts to dissuade Erec appear the exact opposite of Hrothgar’s enthusiasm for Beowulf’s taking on the monster oppressing him, the king’s words evoke a monstrous foe reminiscent of Grendel:

Ceste chose est molt dolereuse,  
car dolant a fet maint prodome,  
Vos meïsmes a la parsome
an seroiz morz et afolez,

se consoil croirre n’an volez. (5564-68)

This subject is very painful,

for it has brought pain to many a good man.

You yourself, in the end,

will be wounded and killed by it,

if you will heed no counsel.

As he continues, the king describes Erec’s motives in terms that similarly suggest the desire for fame that motivates Beowulf: “De rien nule ne me mervoil / se vos querez enor et pris” (“I do not wonder in the least / if you seek honor and renown”; 5576-77). The hero’s motivation to gain honor is intact, but his actions will prove to spread his newly acquired personal sense of masculinity rather than merely vanquish a physical opponent. His compulsion to act is also still strong, but Erec has never been ruthless; even in his battle with Yder in the first part of the romance he tempered his violence with mercy. In addition, his sense of self has been altered. He says to Enide before leaving her to face the challenge,

s’an moi n’avoit de hardemant

for tant con vostre amors m’a baille,

cors a cors, nul home vivant. (5810-13)

if there were no bravery in me

apart from what your love gives me,
I would not fear to do battle,

hand to hand, with any man alive.

And if Enide’s rational voice has not been internalized completely, Enide remains by his side. Though he ignores her desire not to face the challenge, he does not attempt to silence her. In other words, Erec appears overtly to act as he has all along, but the context of his actions allows us to see a new model of manhood. He also does not react in anger over the fear she has for him. When Erec takes his leave of Enide before facing la Joie de la Cort, “the complementarity between love and prowess has been restored through understanding”: “these two properties, initially functional within the couple’s earliest private life, are now fully operative within the public sphere” (Maddox and Sturm-Maddox 114).

Erec’s arrival at Brandigan, where he will face the test of la Joie de la Cort, seems to resemble, yet in a way reverse, his own and Yder’s arrival at the castle where he met the Sparrowhawk challenge in the first part of the romance. Though Erec is a stranger as he was in that first episode, his arrival attracts the people’s attention as Yder’s had:

les genz, qui furent amasses
par la rue a granz tropeiax,
voient Erec, qui tant est biax
que par sanblant cuident et croient
que trestuit li autre a lui soient,
A mervoilles l’esgardent tuit;
la vile an fremist tote et bruit,
tant an consoillent et parolent.

Nes les puceles qui querolent
lor chant an leissent et retardent. (5450-59)

the people, who were gathered
along the street in great crowds,
saw Erec, who was so handsome

that judging from appearances they thought
that all the others were in his service.

Everyone looked at him with admiration;
the whole town was astir with rumors,
so much were people buzzing and talking.

Even the maidens dancing their rounds
left off their singing and postponed it.

Of course, their attention relates to their fear for him:

et molt fet ta biauteez a plaindre,
car demain la verrons estaindre:
da demain est ta morz venue;
demain morras sanz retenue,
se Dex ne te garde et desfant. (5475-79)

and much is your beauty to be pitied,
for tomorrow we shall see it extinguished:
tomorrow your death has come;

tomorrow you’ll die without delay,

if God does not protect and defend you.

While there is also a vague similarity to Beowulf’s reception among the Danes here, the
differences reflected in this scene point clearly to the different construction of
masculinity that Erec represents at this point. The emphasis on Erec’s handsomeness as a
sign of his worthiness and the loss of his beauty representing the transience of his life
suggest the importance of the physical body. Beowulf is only a vague physical presence
whose size and armor suggest his strength and rightness for the challenge.

Erec’s subsequent fight with Maboagrain in the challenge of la Joie de la Cort
also recalls his fight with Yder in several ways that serve further to emphasize Erec’s
growth and the model of manhood that the poem has at its center. First, the fight with
Maboagrain is Erec’s third encounter with a giant, if Yder can be considered the first of
those. Rather than being a giant “allusively” as Patterson characterized Yder,
Maboagrain is actually large, as the narrator says three times: he is “granz a merevoilles”
(“marvelously large”; 5854) and “granz a enui” (“excessively tall”; 5855) and a foot
taller than any other knight (5857; Patterson 187). Maboagrain has also been associated
with Turnus by the comparison of his wife to Lavinia. Virgil says that Turnus is a head
taller than any other man (Book VII, 1029-31). If, as Patterson suggests, Chrétien
“literalizes the central metaphor by which the twelfth century expresses its complicated
historical consciousness—that of the dwarf of the present astride the giant of the past”
(184-5), then Erec’s battle with Maboagrain provides an important bookend to the first
fight. In contrast to that first encounter, Erec is the one accompanied by the dwarf. And
whereas the first dwarf was a servant to Yder, Guivret is Erec’s most worthy opponent
during his venture, his rescuer after his rebirth, and his companion on his return to
Arthur’s court. Metaphorically, Erec has embraced the present, whereas Yder had
enslaved it to a past ideal of knighthood and manhood. Similarly, Yder’s lady travelled
with him in silence. Erec now travels with Enide as his equal partner. After Erec
defeated Yder he required Yder to offer himself at Arthur’s Court—to join the court that
represents traditional knighthood and manhood. When he defeats Maboagrain, Erec sets
him free to take his rightful place as a knight and husband. Thus, Erec’s deeds have an
engendering impact, restoring life to Maboagrain and to the community.

On a literal level, the fight suggests a reduced spectacle of violence from what has
appeared earlier. Even the strongest violence in the fight is briefly and somewhat
vaguely described:

Sor les escuz par tel esforz
s’antre fierent des fers tranchanz
que par mi les escuz luisanz
passa de chascun une toise;
mes li uns l’autre an char n’adoise. (5898-902)
upon their shields they struck each other
with the heads of their lances, with such force
that through the shining shields
a fathom of each one passed;
but neither touched the other’s flesh.

et fierent granz cos et nuisanz
sor les escuz clers et luisanz,
si que trestoz les escartelent. (5919-21)

and they struck mighty and damaging blows

on the bright and shining shields,

so that they broke them all apart.

La süors lor troble les ialz,

et le sans qui avoec degote,
si que par po ne voient gote (5936-8)

The sweat blurred their vision,

as did the blood dripping with it,

so that they could barely see at all.

The blood dripping into their eyes notwithstanding, the fight ends when Maboagrain surrenders out of exhaustion after Erec causes his helmet to come loose. By thus only symbolically beheading this last giant, Erec allows the monstrous man to survive; this giant can be liberated from his monstrosity and become a man, controlling his strength, prowess, and resolve. Not only is the spectacle reduced for Chrétien’s audience, but there are no spectators apparent within the narrative. Erec enters the garden alone because of the rules of the challenge. The fight apparently occurs near the bed on which
he has found Maboagrain’s wife, but there are no references to her watching—a vivid
counter to the two crying ladies who come to dominate the narrative of the fight with
Yder. This apparent reduction in the emphasis on masculine performance as spectacle
may suggest that the quest for honor has been internalized at least to some extent.

Finally, Erec’s victory results in his opponent’s own liberation. When Erec
accepts Maboagrain’s surrender, they enact the ritual of revealing their identities. When
Erec tells who he is, Maboagrain receives the information with the usual rejoicing.

However, Maboagrain’s identity turns out to be somewhat ambiguous:

Maboagrin’s sui apelez,
mes ne sui nes point coneüz
an leu ou j’aie esté veüz,
par remanbrance de cest non,
s’an cest païs solemant non,
car onques tant con vaslez fui
mon non ne dis ne ne conui. (6086-92)

I am called Maboagrain,
but I am not at all well known
in any place where I’ve been seen,
by recollection of that name,
except in this land,
for while I was youth I never
spoke my name nor revealed it.
The notion that his identity is tied to his current place suggests that he, like Erec, has undergone a passage tied to his movement, possibly as an adventuring knight. Soon it is revealed that he and his love had come to Brandigan when they married, without anyone knowing. As the result of a rash promise, Maboagrain found himself trapped in the game of *la Joie de la Cort* by his own excessive love, recalling Erec’s situation at the beginning of Part II of the poem:

Des que ge soi le bien an li,

a la rien que ge oi plus chiere

n’an dui feir sanblant ne chiere

que nule rien me despleüst,

car, se ele l’aparceüst,

el retraissist a li son cuer,

et je nel volsisse a nul fuer

por rien qui poïst avenir.

Ensi me cuida retenir

ma dameisele a lonc sejor;

ne cuidoit pas que a nul jor

deüst an cest vergier antrer

vasaus qui me deüst outrer. (6036-48)

Since I knew the good in her,

in the thing that I held most dear,

I must not show in any way
that anything displeased me,
for, if she had noticed it,
she would have withdrawn her love,
and at no price did I wish that,
no matter what might happen.

Thus my damsel thought
to keep me for a long stay;
she did not think that into this garden
might ever come
a vassal who was to outdo me.

Noble observes that the relationship takes the courtly love model to the extreme, and thus becomes a counterpoint to Erec and Enide’s love in marriage. Maboagrain becomes “a victim of a courtly relationship” (25). Zaddy shows that the two marriages are mirror images: Maboagrain “is the exact counterpart of Enide, . . . who must learn to assert himself.” His wife “is the counterpart of Erec’s earlier self, . . . who “obviously has to learn that lovers can not turn their backs on the world and live solely for themselves, since there are obligations beyond their private interests which must be met.” Zaddy concludes, “Comparing Erec and Enide with Maboagrain and his amie is a way of comparing their present and their former selves, and a most effective means of indicating the progress that each has made as a result of their recent experiences” (46).

But Maboagrain is not trapped only by his wife and his promise to her. He also is trapped by a self-imposed adherence to chivalric heroism:
Et ge feîsse mesprison
se de rien nule me faïnsisse
que trestoz ces ne conqueïsse
vers cui ge eüsse puissance:
vilainne fust tex delivrance.
Bien vos puis dire et acointier
que je n’ai nul ami si chier
vers cui je m’an faïnisisse pas;
onques mes d’armes ne fui las,
ne de conbatre recreüz.
Bien avez les hiaumes veüz
de ces que j’ai vaincuz et morz
mes miens n’an est mie li torz,
qui reison voldroit esgarder:
de ce ne me poi ge garder,
se ge ne volsisse estre fax
et foi mantie et deslëax. (6052-68)
And I should have committed a grievous fault
had I held back in any way
from defeating all those
over whom I had power:
such a deliverance would have been ignoble.
I can truly say and inform you
that I have no friend so dear
that I would have held back at all against him;
ever was I weary of bearing arms
or tired of fighting.
You have seen the helmets
of those I have defeated and killed;
but the fault is not at all mine,
for anyone willing to look aright:
I could not help do what I did,
if I did not want to be false
and faithless and disloyal.

The warrior virtue of alertness is here turned into a monstrous version of itself. He is like Grendel, mindlessly killing any who sleep in the hall. Maboagrain not only represents a negative alternative to Erec’s growth, but he becomes the means by which Erec is able to spread a new model of masculinity. Patterson notes that Erec “reintegrates the complex mix of militarism and eroticism that constitutes chivalric heroism,” which had been out of balance. Maboagrain has become trapped in this unbalanced state. As is often the case in romance, a magical explanation creates a motivation for irrational behavior, or a means of denial for the individual. Maboagrain further suggests that Erec has “fesniee / mon pris et ma chevalerie” (“becharmed my valor and my prowess”; 6082-3). In fact, he is freed by being defeated by Erec. And, unlike Yder, Erec does not require that he
surrender himself to Arthur—to a model of masculinity tied to the past. Maboagrain disappears from the narrative. Others Erec has defeated who are not dead are with him at his coronation at the end of the poem. Guivret and Yder—a dwarf and a giant—represent Erec’s success at uniting the past and the present, including a past ideal of manhood with present ideal that stands in partnership with the feminine. Erec’s power to engender life among men demonstrated in la Joie de la Cort also seems to extend its reach to Arthur. As Erec and Enide finally approach Arthur’s court, Arthur is depressed because he has only a small retinue of knights with him. The news of Erec’s approach with Guivret restores him. Erec, Enide, and Guivret remain at Arthur’s court until Erec’s father dies.

Erec’s response in preparation for succeeding his father is a model of propriety. First,

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 duel. (6478-81)

This weighed upon Erec much more
than he showed people outwardly,
but grieving is uncourtly on the part of a king,
and it does not befit a king to show grief.

He then “molt fist bien ce que fere dut” (“did very well what was fitting and proper” 6487), having services sung and giving charitably. Zaddy notes that his behavior at his father’s death demonstrates that he has learned to put his public obligations before his
personal feelings (18). Finally, “qant departi ot son avoir, / après fist un molt grant savoir, / que del roi sa terre reprist” (“when he had shared his wealth, / he performed an act of great wisdom, / for he took back his land from the king”; 6497-99). Arthur arranges the coronation at Nantes in Brittany, where Arthur placed the scepter in King Erec’s right hand, making him “rois si com il dut estre” (“king as he should be”; 6840).

Thus, as Beowulf had received his patrimony from Hygelac, Erec accepts his rightful place as king directly from the king in whose name he has acted as he achieved manhood. Further continuity with the past is suggested by the presence of Enide’s parents at the coronation. Enide’s father in particular, in addition to giving Erec his daughter, had represented older values that had set Erec on his path. Also like Beowulf, Erec has reached manhood through bold, violent action. He gains respect through his physical dominance over not just a succession of brigands and monstrous men, but also over noble men of great prowess: Yder, Guivret, and Maboagrain. However, the succession of physical challenges would have destroyed Erec had he not reconciled his relationship with Enide. The threat to her brings about his rebirth, and he is restored completely to his physical self through further feminine ministrations. The latter occurs because he has succumbed to wounds inflicted by Guivret. The final challenge requires that Erec bring to bear the full range of traditional masculine virtues that Beowulf demonstrated, including a desire for honor. Yet, after establishing a bond with his wife, he balances his masculine strength with an internalized feminine strength, allowing him to go beyond the physical defeat of Maboagrain and restore him to his life.
CHAPTER 4: THE MASCULINE CODE: ANGLO-SAXON WARRIORS AND FRENCH KNIGHTS

Considering Chrétien’s Erec alongside Beowulf makes it clear that twelfth-century cultural changes, particularly in marriage law and customs, had an important impact on the performance of manhood in literature as well as life. Erec’s story demonstrates his evolving relationship to his wife, Enide, toward an acceptance of the masculine responsibility of being a husband. A traditional marriage arrangement between men for their mutual benefit unites Erec to Enide. After the marriage, the couple’s immersion in their mutual physical attraction conflicts with Erec’s political role. He attempts a tyrannical assertion of authority over his wife that nearly destroys him and leaves Enide vulnerable. Finally, Erec embraces a partnership with Enide, within which he maintains an appropriate level of authority. The narrative of a youth who becomes a husband parallels the story of his evolution as a knight who becomes a king. Early in the romance, he is motivated to action by concern of the perceptions of others—seeking revenge against Yder and setting out on adventure when he hears the criticism of his barons. He asserts his courage and prowess until it nearly kills him. During his adventure, only Enide conducts an internal dialogue that demonstrates how her love for Erec motivates her actions. Eventually, Erec seems to assume Enide’s ability to act on internal values in balance with his outward image. He proves himself as a potential king when his self-motivated actions to earn honor are directed at public good.

Ironically, this internalization of his sense of worth brings the romance hero back to the masculine values that Beowulf displays outwardly from the beginning as Erec
accepts the responsibilities of his public role. While the emphasis on the hero’s growth into a marital relationship marks *Erec et Enide* as generically different from *Beowulf*, Erec demonstrates his growth into a *senior* by means of actions and behaviors much like *Beowulf*’s and ultimately expresses a masculinity quite similar to that *Beowulf* does. The differences that result from the more prominent role of women in romance are so visible that they may obscure the fact that both heroes seem to respond to a “masculine code” that cuts across eleventh and twelfth century Anglo-Norman culture. An examination—historical and anthropological—of what is meant by masculine in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, will pull the lens back from these two examples of the masculine hero to understand the ways pre- and post-conquest literature understands and interprets the masculine code differently.

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27 The reference to a “masculine code” should not be confused with universalizing interpretations of the hero’s adventures. Such mythologizing of these actions threatens to turn them into essential experiences of manhood. For example, Robert A. Johnston interprets the grail myth, using primarily Chrétien’s *Perceval*, as an archetypal story of manhood. Johnston begins from an apparently historically grounded perspective: “Often when a new era begins in history, a myth for that era springs up simultaneously,” containing “sage advice for coping with the psychological elements of the time.” But he quickly adds that the grail myth provides “such a prescription for our modern day.” And eventually claims that “the winds of the twelfth century have become the whirlwinds of the twentieth century” (ix). Similarly, Leo Braudy, whose survey of warrior masculinity usually maintains a historical perspective, observes, “In eleventh- and twelfth-century Europe, knightly tales take place in a chivalric world whose courtesy and decorum are in perpetual war against the darker, natural forces, like giants, but also against uncivilized urges within human society, especially greed and desire” (24). While it can be useful to consider such universal interpretations of the characters’ experiences, these approaches take us away from the historical context. Scott Coltrane notes “one of the central flaws in mythopoetic and other essentialist approaches to gender: They reduce historically and culturally specific myths and practices to universal psychological or biological truths, thereby ignoring the social structural conditions that produced them” (45).
Public and Private Values

Having foregrounded the personal relationship of marriage, the twelfth-century heroic narrative also demonstrates an internalization of values, putting into specific social context the long-recognized distinction between a shame and guilt culture. In *The Greeks and the Irrational* E. R. Dodds applies this distinction between a shame and guilt culture developed by anthropologists to characterize Homeric culture versus post-Homeric Greece: “Homerick man’s highest good is not the enjoyment of a quiet conscience, but the enjoyment of *tēmē*, public esteem . . . . And the strongest moral force which Homeric man knows is not the fear of god, but respect for public opinion” (17-18). This construction, with “conscience” and “the fear of god” defining a guilt culture that supersedes the shame culture, conforms easily to the idea that chivalry was a martial code influenced by the importance of Christianity. In *Shame and Necessity* Bernard Williams implies that the “overwhelming role of Christianity in the transition from antiquity to the modern world” does not need to be considered to explain such apparent shifts in thinking. Furthermore, from a philosophical point of view, Williams revisits the concept of a shame culture and questions the notion that it evolved into a guilt culture, in which internal judgment replaces public reaction. He argues that shame had to already be an internalized motivation if it were more than a fear of discovery or a concern for behavior witnessed by just anyone (82). He claims that “shame continues to work for us” mediating behavior through “an internalized other . . . whose reactions the agent can respect” (102). Thus, rather than explaining the shift in the hero’s behavior, it may, in fact, suggest an underlying similarity in the growth of the heroes.
While Beowulf’s actions throughout the Danish adventure show a consistent concern for the public good, Erec’s story shows him growing into an awareness of his public responsibility. As a result, the hero’s sacrifice may often seem sterile, without effect on the life of the community. In Chrétien’s romances, until he accepts the responsibilities of marriage, the hero acts selfishly, focused on his personal honor and even his personal safety. Erec’s first encounter, with the silent knight, shows the extent of his personal focus. His first response to the knight’s insult is not to strike back impulsively, but to consider his safety since he is unarmed. His subsequent pursuit and defeat of Yder is motivated mostly by wounded personal pride and eventually his desire for Enide. The potential for Erec to develop more socially responsible motivations is suggested by the resulting marriage, as well as by his sending Yder to increase the knights at Arthur’s court, but his actions will not become community-nurturing until he internalizes the awareness of his responsibility. Thus, after his reconciliation with Enide, he begins to demonstrate a meaningful willingness to sacrifice himself, first in the rescue of the knight from the giants and then, more importantly, in facing the challenge of *la Joie de la Cort*. Erec’s potential sacrifice is indicated by the concern of the people at his inevitable loss (5656-75). Once he has defeated Maboagrain, he blows the horn that will draw everyone to the court to celebrate. All of the celebrants commend Erec to God for returning joy to the court: “Dex saut celui par cui ressort / joie et leesce an nostre cort!” (“God save him through whom / joy and happiness revive in our court!” 6329-30).28

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28 The translation of “ressort” as “revive” suggests that Carleton W. Carroll recognizes the generative nature of Erec’s actions. However, a more literal translation does not support such a direct connection to restoring life. As translated by Hindley, Langley, and Levy’s *Old French-English Dictionary*, the verb
In Chrétien’s *Le Chevalier au Lion*, Yvain’s focus on personal fame is greatly exaggerated. Throughout his first adventure at the “Perilous Spring,” he selfishly pursues his own interests and is concerned only with outward proof of his success. He sneaks out under cover of night to arrive at the spring before Arthur, who plans to ride there the following week. He claims that he wants to avenge his cousin’s shame, in itself a particularly narrow focus, but he mostly seems concerned to avoid further taunting from Kay. So he is intent on bringing back proof of his success. When he observes the burial of the knight he has slain, he can think only of Kay’s insults:

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que del cors qu’il voit qu’an enfuet
li poise, qant avoir n’en puet
aucune chose qu’il an port
tesmoing qu’il l’a ocis et mort;
s’il n’en a tesmoing et garant
que mostrer puisse a parlemant,
donc iert il honiz en travers,
tant est Kex et fel et pervers,
plains de ranpones et d’enui,
qu’il ne garra jamés a lui,
einz l’ira formant afeitant
et gas et ranpones gitant,
pas si com il fist l’autre jor.
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Males ranpones a sejor

li sont el cors batanz et fresches. (1345-59)

for he was upset to see them

burying the body, since he had not obtained

anything that would prove

that he had slain and killed him;

if he doesn’t have some proof

that he can show in the assembly,

then he will be thoroughly shamed

for Kay is so wicked and perverse,

full of insults and mockery,

that he’ll never convince him;

instead, Kay will keep on

hurling insults and taunts at him,

just as he did the other day.

The wicked taunts are still

rankling and fresh within him.

Yvain completely misunderstands the concept of winning fame and honor that motivates a mature knight. He worries about feeling shame from the taunts of the unworthy Kay, whom the queen has called “enuies” and “vilains” (“tiresome” and “base”; 90). As Yvain matures, he acts on behalf of others, gaining a reputation as defender of women in need of help (4821-22).
In Le Chevalier de la Charrette Chrétien turns the whole notion of honor on its head. Lancelot never grows out of the personal motivation for his actions in the romance. His obsessive love for the queen drives all of his actions, so his willingness to sacrifice himself is never directed toward nurturing the community. When Lancelot risks death crossing the sword bridge, his only concern is getting to the queen. In fact, he sacrifices even his reputation when he subjects himself to scorn, first by entering a dwarf’s cart as he pursues the captured queen and later by deliberately performing badly in a tournament at the queen’s request. Lancelot, thus, is not only unheroic, but unmasculine. M. Bennett describes Lancelot’s story as “the ‘unmanning’ of the warrior hero” (84). While Chrétien does not suggest that Lancelot’s actions will lead to the destruction of Arthur’s kingdom as future romance writers will, in Le Chevalier au Lion, which refers occasionally to events in La Chevalier de la Charrette, Chrétien reveals that Lancelot is imprisoned (4746-47). Lancelot’s story seems to demonstrate most thoroughly the sterile result when a knight’s self-absorption goes unchecked.

While Chrétien’s heroes seem far removed from the Beowulf who comes to manhood in Daneland, in fact, Beowulf’s development bears striking resemblances to these knights’ experiences. It seems as though the difference is more one of focus of the poems. Chrétien’s romances focus attention on the hero’s growth from a time of immature pursuit of empty adventure toward a more mature manhood. Beowulf pushes immature adventure to the margins, providing only a retrospective description of the foolish boyhood contest with Breca. Furthermore, Beowulf’s experience suggests that he is sufficiently mature from the beginning of his adventure, during which he demonstrates
his manhood by a sequence of actions. The emphasis on the growth of the hero marks the
romance’s generic difference, but more importantly the genre of romance may have
emerged to accommodate the examination of the hero’s progress as a husband, during
which he also progresses toward a mature masculinity in the understanding of how to use
his substantial strength and prowess—in the end living up to the same masculine code as
Beowulf.

Foundations of the Masculine Code

Each culture—Anglo-Saxon and Norman—constructs a distinct code of behavior
for the fighting man that pervades the literature of each period, embracing not only the
competitive qualities of prowess, courage, and hardiness, but also qualities that serve to
bind the community of men: loyalty and generosity. Furthermore, the performance of
manhood for both the warrior and knight obliges them to seek revenge. Standing behind
these socially constructed masculine behaviors are apparently assumed masculine
qualities: strength, propensity for action, motivating anger, and rationality. At the same
time that Anglo-Saxon heroic poetry and twelfth-century French romance extol these
recognized masculine behaviors and characteristics, the heroes of both must internalize
feminine wisdom and demonstrate the feminine power of generation. The warrior hero’s
words and actions seem to generate future events, reflecting the myth of patriarchal
culture generating lines of descent without female agency.
Underlying each of the culturally constructed military codes acted out in *Beowulf* and *Erec et Enide* are physical characteristics of masculinity that have an assumed, or naturalized, status. Joan Cadden, in her study of sex differences in the eleventh to fourteenth centuries, provides a list of masculine constructs from a work on physiognomy of the thirteenth century that resembles the qualities of the masculine hero constructed by eleventh- and twelfth-century literature: “active, not easily subdued when roused to anger, generous, studious, and controlled by virtue.” In a manner parallel to the way in which the chivalry of twelfth-century romance was codified in the centuries following, a thirteenth-century source seems to theorize gender in a way that describes what is apparent in earlier literary sources. The Arabic and classical sources that allow for such theorizing by natural philosophers became influential in the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries because “between 1125 and 1200, a veritable flood of translations into Latin made a significant part of Greek and Arabic science available” (Grant 23). Because there are no contemporary analyses of gender, potentially naturalized aspects of gender can only be identified from “evidence that can be seen from the outside” (Frantzen 69). Cadden observes that “‘manly’ stands for a set of qualities derived from the notion of an ideal natural man” (205). She demonstrates that the essential sex differences defined by natural philosophers and theologians carried with them gender constructs. She observes that “there was no clear boundary between science or religion, on the one

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29 See Chapter 2 pages 81-83.

30 Frantzen is referring to his discussion of same-sex love in Anglo-Saxon culture. Similarly, gender distinctions are not made overt and must be extrapolated.
hand, and social constructs, on the other, for both natural philosophy and theology were understood to encompass judgments about values, dispositions, and behaviors” (194). Cadden also notes, however, “a certain cultural discomfort” with abstracting characteristics of gender and a “desire to anchor properties, whether physical or behavioral, in ordinary natural processes” (204). Thus, behaviors that seem clearly to be gender constructs are shown to be biologically determined.

In particular, Cadden shows that medieval ideas about essential sex differences associate men with action and women with passivity, an assumption that is pervasive in heroic literature of both periods. For the twelfth century, the “central organs” that differentiate the physical shape of the sexes, the penis and uterus, further the association with active and passive natures. Cadden asserts, “The emphasis upon the womb as the central female organ was in harmony with the view of women as essentially passive vessels.” Furthermore, “the association of the womb with the penis suggests [the penis] is an active, sexual organ (as distinguished from a passive reproductive organ)” (178). In his twelfth-century satire, The Complaint of Nature, Alain de Lille, “wish[ing] to uphold the masculinity of the male” has his narrator say in his attack on homosexuality, that as with Latin grammar, no good can result when “the sex of the active type degenerates into the passive type” (qtd. in Cadden 222).

On the surface, the appearance of active women, especially fighting women, would contradict the active/passive binary—but even these exceptions clearly do not exhibit the active masculinity of the warrior. Helen Damico exhaustively studies women who appear in Anglo-Saxon poetry, demonstrating their relationship to the “warrior-
women” of Old Norse heroic poetry. These include the apocryphal Old Testament Judith and Cynewulf’s saintly heroes Elene and Juliana. Damico identifies three traits that the warrior-women share: “wisdom, acumen, and eloquence” (35). These traits all represent passivity in contrast to the actions of the warrior. Wisdom, which also becomes associated with old men, proves impotent against the power of violent action and the desire for vengeance. And women’s eloquence is frequently expressed in lamentation, as Joyce Hill notes when she identifies the mourning woman as a “dominant stereotype” of heroic poetry (236).

Damico notes that in Germanic tradition, represented by Tacitus, “it was customary for Germanic wives to be on the battlefield, engaging in the fight” (24). In the tenth century, Queen Æthelflæd, daughter of Alfred, proved an effective military leader. After the death of her husband, Mercian king Æthelred, she continued an alliance with her brother, the West Saxon king Edward, to resist Viking attacks (Wainwright 44). She was responsible for building many fortifications and conducted successful campaigns at Derby and Leicester, after which “the men of York (Eoforwicingas) also approached her with offers of submission and allegiance” (Wainwright 45). As a result of her leadership, Æthelflæd can be seen “as the architect of victory in the north” (Wainwright 52). Thus, her power gains recognition like that of the powerful kings described in Beowulf.

In Old English poetry two female fighters unambiguously arrogate the role of the male warrior: Judith and Grendel’s mother. As E. G. Stanley says of Judith, “she was actively, throat slittingly heroic” (199). They enter the “field” and, despite any hesitation, successfully fulfill their respective acts of revenge, decapitating their male
warrior foes. So the will and ability to act for the tribe and to commit violence is not unique to the male in Anglo-Saxon poetry. But their differences from male warriors suggest that these particular warrior-women are both unfamiliar with the role, or at least that the poet is uncomfortable with them in the role. First, the females are of lesser strength. The *Beowulf* poet at least takes pains assert that is the case: “Wæs se gryre lēssa / efne swā micle, / swā bið mægða cræft, / wīggryre wīfes, / wīpnedmen” (“The terror was less even as much as is a maiden’s strength, a woman’s war-terror, than an armed man’s”; 1282b-84). Judith requires more than one stroke to behead Holofernes (107b-11a). More interestingly, neither woman revels in the fight or rejoices in the victory as is common for warriors in Anglo-Saxon poetry. In fact, both are eager to be away immediately after the task is accomplished. Grendel’s mother “wæs in ofste, / wolde ūt þanon, / fēore beorgan þā hēo onfunden wæs” (“was in haste, wished to be out from there to save her life when she was discovered”; 1292-93). After beheading Holofernes, Judith and her handmaiden put the head in a bag and leave immediately (125-35). The practical completion of the task is more important than the fight. Finally, in the case of Judith, the fight requires calculation; she has to create a situation in which she can have a physical advantage. And as she prepares to leave, Judith is characterized as “snotere mægð” (“wise maiden”; 125a). Grendel’s mother, while probably incapable of calculation, is aided by the surprise nature of her attack on the ill-prepared Danes and the absence of Beowulf from the hall.

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31 See pages 226-30 below, where the significance of beheading the beast in heroic narrative is discussed.
Women in fighting roles are similarly anomalies in the twelfth century, and their role seems to be mostly consistent with the emphasis on spectacle that does not represent a depth of reality. When Louis VII announced his intention to lead a second Crusade, Eleanor took the cross with him, providing the example for several other noble women to accompany her as well as three hundred other women who volunteered to go to nurse the wounded (Weir 49). Eleanor’s contribution to the crusade was extensive in that she persuaded several lords of Aquitaine to join Louis (Weir 49) and recruited troops so that “the larger part of the crusading army comprised her own vassals” (Weir 51). Despite that, the women who accompanied the crusaders performed no active military role.

Alison Weir observes that later historians asserted that “the Queen and her ladies behaved as if they were on a pleasure trip,” while contemporary accounts make little mention of Eleanor’s behavior, and Weir suggests in referring to one contemporary account that “probably Odo did not consider women worthy of much mention” (55-56). However, the spectacle of the women’s presence is recorded by a Greek chronicler, who describes the women “boldly sitting astride in their saddles as men do, dressed as men and armed with lance and battle axe. They kept a martial mien, bold as Amazons” (57).

Twelfth-century romance occasionally reflects a similar spectacle of masculinized fighting women. Legendary sources provide some such models to exploit, as had Judith for the Anglo-Saxon poet. Weir suggests that the description of Penthesilea, the Amazon queen, in Benoît de Saint-Maure’s *Roman de Troie* resembles the Greek chronicler’s account of Eleanor’s retinue (50). In *Le Roman d’Eneas*, Camilla and her one hundred maidens provide a similar spectacle. Camilla is one of the tribal leaders who comes to
support Turnus and displays ability equal to the men: “she loved chivalry greatly and upheld it her whole life” (Yunck 135). Her presence in the *Eneas* is greatly expanded from her portrayal in Virgil, and the poet emphasizes her uniqueness, characterizing her as a “wonder” (Yunck 137). In *Erec et Enide*, Enide, who E. Jane Burns identifies as a “female hero” when she sheds her passive role (64), takes up a lance as she escapes with Erec after he has killed Count Oringle (4840). However, she does not use it. Thus, the appearances of women in martial roles, whether in literature or life, are rare exceptions, and most often do not disrupt the active/passive binary in a substantive way.

*Generative Masculinity*

Interestingly, neither *Beowulf* nor *Erec et Enide* makes a part of the hero’s story the siring of children, despite the fact that the ascent to his proper status through the inheritance of his father’s land and power culminates the hero’s initiation experience. Because *Beowulf* describes the hero’s death, Beowulf has the opportunity to express his concern over not having an heir. But Beowulf’s story has not concerned itself at all with the question of the hero’s marriage. In fact, Beowulf has reflected upon the fruitlessness of the peace-weaving model of marriage. Similarly, no mention of children enters Erec’s story, but since Erec has achieved a successful marriage partnership, when King Arthur crowns Enide alongside Erec, the stability of succession is implied.

The elision of the question of children from both heroes’ stories is telling. In cultures that associate biological sex with gender constructs, the production and nurturing of future generations would seem to be a strictly feminine trait. However, the solidly
patriarchal society that provides the context for both poems creates the illusion of masculine generation by describing lineage exclusively through the male line and associating it with God, the father and creator, as can be seen in the opening passage of *Beowulf*.

Furthermore, the heroic literature seems to suggest that masculinity, particularly military masculinity, requires a man to assume the role of nurturer for his community and generate its future through his words and actions. David D. Gilmore, working from an anthropological perspective, identifies the power to give life to a community with masculinity: “‘Real’ men are expected to tame nature in order to recreate and bolster the basic kinship units of their society; that is, to reinvent and perpetuate the social order by will, to create something of value from nothing. Manhood is a kind of male procreation; its heroic quality lies in its self-direction and discipline, its absolute self-reliance—in a word, its agential autonomy” (223). In both *Beowulf* and *Erec et Enide*, masculine exercise of generative power becomes a significant aspect of masculine performance. While the importance of marriage moves to the center of the narrative in *Erec et Enide*, suggesting the overt recognition of women’s importance in the succession of generations, Erec, nonetheless, must demonstrate this power of generation before his initiation into full manhood is complete.

The hero’s desire to nurture and perpetuate the community reveals itself in part through “a willingness for sacrifice” (Morgan 166), a timeless aspect of military heroism. Gilmore notes the ubiquity of sacrifice in constructing masculinity: “To be men, most of all, they must accept the fact that they are expendable. This acceptance of expendability

32 See Chapter 1, pages 16-19.
constitutes the basis of the manly pose everywhere it is encountered” (223). Further, he
relates the warrior’s sacrifice to the nurturing quality of women: “Men nurture their
society by . . . dying if necessary in faraway places to provide a safe haven for their
people. This, too, is nurturing in the sense of endowing or increasing” (230). The
medieval hero’s willingness to sacrifice for his community reveals itself when he is ready
to accept full masculine responsibility.

The Anglo-Saxon Code embraces sacrifice implicitly in its requirement to achieve
fame by facing impossible odds, and the honor of sacrifice is an obvious feature of
Beowulf. Before each of his three fights with monsters, Beowulf boasts that he will win
fame or die in the effort (636b-38; 1477-79; 2535b-37). In each case, the fame that
Beowulf achieves is associated with the defense of the larger community, the Danish
community in the first two instances, and his own Geatish people in the third. The
acceptance of sacrifice is shared by the Geats who accompanied Beowulf to Daneland.
When the Geats await Grendel in Heorot, they expect to die (691-96a), and when
Beowulf enters the mere to fight Grendel’s mother, the other Geats do not expect him to
return from the fight (1602b-04). Nearly every martial poem emphasizes the warrior’s
desire to sacrifice. Most famously, Byrhtnoth’s thanes fight to their deaths against the
Vikings in “The Battle of Maldon.” One after another, the thanes boast that they will die
by their lord’s body before continuing the fight—and dying. The Parker Chronicle for
the year 755 includes a narrative of the attack of Cyneheard on Cynewulf. When
Cynewulf is ambushed and killed, the small band of men come to where his body lies and
fight to their deaths—rejecting Cyneheard’s offer of money and their lives. When
Cynewulf’s thanes who were not with him ride to avenge their lord, rejecting the offer of money, they slaughter Cyneheard and all of the men with him, some of whom also reject a chance to go free.

While romance heroes do not express their willingness to sacrifice their lives so overtly, the mature knights in Chrétien’s romances accept extreme challenges for the benefit of others. Gawain is the knight most sought out by those who come to court seeking help. In *Le Chevalier au Lion*, his fight with Yvain demonstrates the willingness of both knights to sacrifice when asked for help. After Yvain recognizes his failure as a husband, he begins to sacrifice willingly his own safety for others, becoming known as a champion of women. He does not seek conflict, but he accepts the extreme challenges that he encounters. His story culminates when he is enlisted to champion a woman who has been wrongfully disinherited by her older sister. Unknown to him, Gawain has agreed to champion the other sister. On his way to face that challenge, he is forced into a fight with “dui maufé” (“two demons”; 5291), who have bent an entire town to their mindless will. When he defeats them, he asks as a reward that three hundred women who have been enslaved as tribute be allowed to go free. The generative power of his potential sacrifice is made explicit in the narrator’s description of the freed women’s joy:

ne ne cuit pas qu’elle feissent

tel joie com eles li font

a celui qui fist tot le mont,

s’il fust venuz de ciel an terre. (5779-87)

I don’t believe they would have expressed
any more joy for Him who made this world,

had He come from heaven to earth,

than they showed for Yvain.

When Yvain subsequently faces the challenge to restore the younger sister to her rightful inheritance, his resolve to defend the challenge is clear. He fights the unrecognized Gawain to a draw in a day-long violent struggle: “des pons si granz cos se donent / sor les hiaumes que tuit s’estonest / et par po qu’il ne seescervelent” (“with their pommels they struck so hard / upon their helmets that both were stunned / and nearly had their brains beaten out” (6143-45). Both knights persevere, “que par martire enor achatent” (“purchasing honor by their suffering”; 6204). At this point Yvain’s willingness to sacrifice has become outwardly focused and nurturing, so he is ready to return his attention to his marriage.

Beyond the nurturing power of the warrior’s sacrifice, heroic masculinity can on occasion seem to usurp feminine generative power, almost enacting the patrilineal illusion of masculine generation. The life-giving power that becomes associated with masculinity can be recognized by the generative speech of men that seems to create the future. Rupert Pickens suggests that Marie de France, a contemporary of Chrétien who was also associated with the Angevin courts, reverses sexual roles in some of her Lais (c. 1160-99) in that “the male ‘gives birth’” (149). In “Yonec,” a clandestine lover who comes to a lady in the form of a hawk is fatally wounded by her husband’s trap. Subsequently, on his death bed, he narrates the lady’s entire future. Rupert Pickens argues that the engendering power of the knight’s discourse “is such that, as Marie’s text
verifies, everything he announces comes to pass” (148). Having left the lady pregnant, the lover tells her to name their son Yonec and keep his sword for Yonec to avenge his death. He describes for her exactly what will happen, leaving her to await its fulfillment. Pickens’ recognition of generative discourse in Marie’s lais can suggest similar examples in heroic poetry.

In *Beowulf*, the warrior’s speeches in Heorot work to create a version of the future that will obligate the warrior to risk his life to bring it about. The warrior’s boast encapsulates this process, as when Beowulf boasts of his intent when he left home:

> þæt ic ānunga  ðowra lēoda
> willan geworfte,  oþđe on wæl crunge. (634-35)

that I entirely your people’s desires would fulfill or in slaughter perish.

As a result of his actions, the Danes are essentially restored to life.

Elsewhere in Old English poetry, even when the outcome is death, bold words and action bring about a future reality. Beowulf’s boast before diving into the mere to face Grendel’s mother suggests that even a fateful outcome assures future renown:

> ic mē mid Hruntinge
dōm gewyrce,  oþđe mec dēað nimeđ! (1490b-91)

I for myself with Hrunting shall gain gloy, or death will take me!

In “The Battle of Maldon,” the warriors express their intentions “lif forlætan  oððe leofne gewrecan” (“to give up their life or to avenge their beloved lord”; 208; Treharne 149). Leofsunu expresses his future renown for seeking vengeance in litotes:

> Ne þurfon me embe Sturmere  stedefæste hælæð
They will not need around Sturmer, the resolute heroes, to reproach me with words.

When Offa dies, the poet refers to his pledge of loyalty to his lord that has come to pass:

he hæfde ðeah geforþod thæt he his frean get,

swa he beotode ær wið his beahgifan. (289-90)

he had, though, accomplished what he to his lord vowed, as he boasted earlier with his ring-giver.

Similar to Beowulf, Erec seems to bring about events. Immediately after he has demonstrated his commitment to Enide, Erec promises help to a lady he has encountered crying, in a manner resembling Beowulf’s boasts: “ou avoec lui pris esterai, / ou jel vos randrai tot delivre” (“either I will be taken prisoner with him, / or I will return him to you completely free”; 4314-15).

Proving Manhood: Performing the Code

The biologically determined and generative aspects of the masculine code provide a foundation of “natural” masculine superiority that the initiate must demonstrate. The literary hero encounters figures whose bestial and/or feminine qualities provide the means to prove that he possesses the physical and mental attributes of manhood, demonstrating that he is superior to and thus distinct from each. But in addition to demonstrating these differences, he reveals the affinities that he has with the bestial and feminine opponents. Masculine heroes overmatch the physical and emotional strength of
monsters while rationally controlling the monstrous potential therein. The competitive and violent action that they demonstrate against beasts distinguishes them from women, yet they still must directly face the feminine and in the process absorb a kind of feminine wisdom that they will need as leaders of men. Finally, the initiate proves himself directly within the male community. Masculine heroes both compete with men in the warrior community to establish their superiority and ultimately bond with the men, constructing the social code of the masculine community. From these encounters they construct their masculine identity. Manhood emerges in the balance and containment of all of these forces, bestial, feminine, and masculine.

*Constructing the Masculine, Stage One: Fighting the Beast*

In *Beowulf* and *Erec et Enide*, as throughout medieval heroic literature, masculine initiation nearly always features encounters with monsters, figures of superhuman strength. Fighting monsters requires the hero to demonstrate extreme physical prowess, as well as the courage and “hardiness” required by both the Anglo-Saxon and chivalric codes. At the same time that monstrous figures challenge the hero’s physical abilities, they challenge his humanity. He must prove himself not only physically superior to the beast, but he must demonstrate a superior rational control of the desires and emotions that activate and motivate his manhood. The monster becomes not just an extreme opportunity for the hero to perform masculinity but a metaphor for masculinity itself. In

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33 The requirements of the codes are discussed below.
a sense, the hero has to activate the monstrous within himself, yet control it so that he
does not lose his manhood.

The monsters of *Beowulf* were famously embraced by Tolkien in the 1930s, who claimed that the un-historical monsters gave the poem its great depth, countering the critics who lamented that the important historical detail that they wished to mine from the poem had been pushed to the margins. For Tolkien the monsters are “fundamentally allied to the underlying ideas of the poem” (68). One such underlying idea is precisely Beowulf’s masculine initiation. His battles with two monsters in the Danish episode present an extreme physical test of manhood. Chrétien’s hero, on the other hand, in a world where social changes and Christian doctrine on marriage have made physical appearance increasingly important, encounters only apparent monstrosity: Erec has a series of encounters with giants, but only one of these encounters involves actual giants. The others are with large and monstrously behaving men, who appear to be monstrous as long as they pose a physical threat to Erec. In all cases, however, monstrosity of behavior is a key element to these encounters, for in addition to demonstrating superior prowess, the heroes also differentiate themselves from the monsters by their refusal to become monstrous themselves, demonstrating rational control of potentially monstrous tendencies. As a result, the monsters in both cultures, real or apparent, come to represent the limits of physical power in the construction of manhood, demonstrating that a real hero cannot become so by strength alone.

In *Of Giants*, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen characterizes the giant as “a violently gendered body” that is “encountered in the performance of a masculinity as necessary as
it is obscene” (xii), appearing “at that moment when the boundaries of the body are being culturally demarcated” (xiii). In particular, he identifies the beheading of the giant as the climactic moment in the initiation of the literary hero from *Beowulf* into romance. For Cohen, scenes of decapitation “function formally as a rite of passage, inextricably linking the defeat of the monster to a political, sexual, social coming of age. The scene repeats itself,” he argues, “because a new male generation is always engaging in the fight against the giant, struggling with the behavior of codes that gender some actions and monsterize others” (66). Beowulf, he says, can return home to “embrace his destiny as king” after displaying the head of Grendel in Heorot (65). In Geoffrey of Monmouth’s history, Cohen argues, “Arthur’s display of the head of the giant of Saint Michel “signals his political coming of age, his readiness to assume the heavy mantle of world-class heroism” (71). When Cohen comes to Chrétien’s romance *Le Chevalier au lion*, his characterization of Yvain’s initiation accords with the the profound changes that church doctrine on marriage has in the twelfth-century heroic model, saying that the overcoming of two giants initiates a sequence of events that “unite [Yvain] permanently with his wife” (73-74).

Giants, real or apparent, most obviously demonstrate the excesses of masculine desire, especially the violence so central to the demonstration of manhood across the pre- and post-conquest cultures. As the narrative giant exists as an exterior threat, it also symbolically represents the threat of internal desires. Giants are associated with unregulated appetites, including that of violence. Cohen argues that the giant encountered by Arthur demonstrates “bestial desire” in the nightly assault of the
Cohen says that in this case “the giant’s body is one that knows neither limit nor control, only immediate sensual gratification” (38). Grendel demonstrates similar gluttonous appetite when he attacks Heorot as the Geats wait. He immediately seizes one of them and

\[\text{bāt bānlocan, blōd ēdrum dranc synsnēdum swealh; sōna hæfde unlyfigendes eal gefeormod, fēt and folma. (742-45a)}\]

bit into the body, drank blood from the veins, swallowed chunks one after another; at once he had devoured the feet and hands of the dead man.

In Old English literature, monsters as foes to be defeated appear sparingly, but Cohen suggests that “the monster became a kind of cultural short-hand for identity construction” for Anglo-Saxon England in the centuries preceding the Norman Conquest when cultural forces clashed and merged—various Germanic tribes, Romanized and non-Romanized Celts, Vikings, waves of Christianization: “The history of Anglo-Saxon England is a narrative of resistant hybridity, of small groups ingested into larger bodies without full assimilation, without cultural homogeneity” (4-5). Significantly, Beowulf appears in a manuscript with four other works that have apparently one thing in common: monsters. *The Passion of Saint Christopher* depicts the mission of the saint who was traditionally a giant dog-headed cannibal, “the worst of wild beasts” (Orchard 14). *Wonders of the East* and *Letter of Alexander to Aristotle* both describe monstrosities from various parts of the world. The first work in the manuscript, Judith, has no literal
monsters, but Andy Orchard notes that Holofernes’s “behavior is certainly monstrous” (4). The fact that Judith decapitates the monstrous king would seem to place her actions in the heroic tradition that Cohen describes.

Cohen analyzes a manuscript illustration from another copy of *Wonders of the East* depicting a man’s encounter with a Donestre, demonstrating how the monstrous represents the boundaries of (masculine) identity. At the top, in the first of three scenes, the man talks with the Donestre, “a fleshy naked man with a lion’s head,” who “commiserates” with him. In the next scene at the bottom right of the picture, the Donestre is devouring the man. Finally, to the left of that picture, the Donestre looks upon the head of the devoured traveler. Cohen’s description captures the way that the representation of the beast resembles a man but pushes beyond the boundaries of masculine identity:

At first more virile than bestial, the monster’s animal head is fully anthropomorphized to give an empathetic look. His hands, calves, and chest bulge with muscles. His genitalia, painted a vibrant red, are prominently displayed. . . . As the Donestre ingests his victim, he becomes more leonine: he is on all fours, as if he has just pounced; his nose and lips form a snout; his eyes suddenly lack whites. An oral animal ecstasy characterizes the second scene as the monster—bare buttocks arched above the prone foreigner’s hips—devours the man’s erect arm. That this combination of violence, eroticism, and transgression is difficult to contain in the illustration is indicated by the Donestre’s very human left
foot, which steps out of the picture into the frame—the only part of the illustration to violate the demarcative power of its border. The last segment of the tripartite story finds both bodies much reduced. The traveler has vanished, replaced by the peacefully oblivious head. The monster is an indistinct collection of curved lines that center around a trembling hand, a dark eye, and a tight frown. (2)

The illustration evokes images of the monsters that Beowulf faces in Daneland: Grendel and his mother are at once familiar and alien and flee mournfully from their cannibalistic attacks, the mother leaving behind a victim’s head. Cohen continues, “The severed head is an empty point of fascination that directs the viewer’s gaze back to the alienating form in which the traveler is now contained, at the monster he has now become; he ponders what he once was from the outside as a foreigner” (3). The excesses of monstrosity expressed through the monster’s “human” foot thrusting into the frame of the picture are transferred to a metaphorical understanding of the monster’s story. The man who is devoured by the monstrous will not be a man. The masculine qualities that the monster has in excess—physical strength, power through violence, and propensity for precipitous action—will devour the man, rendering him not a man at all. The man must be wary of the threat of losing himself in the violence and anger that defines him as a warrior. This threat is implied in Beowulf by the ways in which Grendel’s behavior mirrors Beowulf’s to a large extent, and made explicit when the poet refers to Beowulf as “āeglēcean” (“terrifying one”; 2592a), an epithet that is also applied to Grendel (e.g., 159a). Erec similarly faces an explicit reference to his potential monstrosity early in the romance.
when, as he is about to behead the apparently monstrous Yder, Yder turns the table on him and questions why Erec is acting with seemingly unreasonable anger: “Por quel forfet ne por quel tort / me doiz tudonc haïr de mort?” (“For what injury or what wrong / must you bear me this deadly hatred?” 1003-4).

In twelfth-century romance, monstrosity also defines an aspect of masculine identity, but in this case connected to the new social and theological world that has been created by the church’s reformed strictures on marriage. In Chrétien’s *Le Chevalier au Lion*, Yvain devolves into monstrosity when he fails his responsibility as a husband. He descends into madness when he realizes he has let far more than a year elapse without returning to Laudine as promised. He becomes a naked wild man eating raw meat. After he is restored to himself, he is accompanied on his quest to redeem his manhood by a lion that he has rescued from a fight with a dragon/serpent. His constant companion, the lion becomes an outward representation of his bestial nature. The lion comes to Yvain’s aid in his fights with two giants and with three knights. Yvain tries to keep the lion from the fight, but when the lion perceives that Yvain is in difficulty, he cannot restrain himself from attack, leading to the violent deaths of Yvain’s monstrous opponents. In his climactic battle with Gawain, however, Yvain is successful in leaving the lion behind until Gawain reveals his identity, and the two beloved companions end their fight with an outbreak of affection in which they contend with one another to concede defeat. At this point, with his inner beast symbolically under control, Yvain returns to his wife, prepared to fulfill his responsibility as a husband.
In Marie de France’s “Bisclavret,” monstrosity as an aspect of manhood is also seen in the context of marriage. In this lai an enchanted knight, who is otherwise happily married and a loyal servant to the king, becomes a werewolf three days a week. In the introduction to the story, the narrator says,

Garvalf, ceo est beste salvage;
Tant cum il est en cele rage,
Hummes devure, grant mal fait,
Ex granz forez converse e vait. (9-12)
A werewolf is a savage beast;
while his fury is on him
he eats men, does much harm
goes deep in the forest to live.\(^{34}\)

Thus, the knight, while in wolf form, possesses the same cannibalistic nature as Grendel or the Donestre. However, the other four days of the week, the knight is “Merveille l’ai oî loër: / Beaus chevaliers e bons esteit / E noblemen se cunteneit. / De su seinur esteit privez” (“marvelously praised; / a fine handsome knight / who behaved nobly / He was close to his lord”; 16-19). He reluctantly tells his wife his secret, even though he says in revealing his secret he risks losing his identity, “mei meismes” (“[his] very self“; 56). When the knight assumes his bestial identity, he sheds his clothes, and he explains to his wife that if he cannot find his clothes when his werewolf state ends, he has to remain a

\(^{34}\) All translations of Marie’s lais are from Robert Hanning and Joan Ferrante.
werewolf. The knight’s clothing might be seen to symbolize the civilizing forces that keep the beast in him in check.

In the second half of the lai, however, when the knight is trapped in werewolf form because of his wife’s betrayal, it becomes clear that the beast does not, in fact, control the man in him. Even as a wolf, he once again becomes the constant loyal companion to the king. As Hanning and Ferrante say in their commentary on the lai, the men at court, unlike the wife, recognize the man in the beast (104). When he attacks the wife and the conspirator who helped hide her clothes, the men at court recognize an appropriate masculine response of revenge, rather than monstrousness (248-49). Upon the return of his clothes, the werewolf assumes again the knight’s courtly behavior, refusing to don the clothes and restore his manly shape in the presence of the court because he felt “ad grant hunte” (“a great shame”; 288). After the knight is restored to himself, the king embraced him affectionately and “Tute sa tere li rendi” (“gave him back all his lands”; 303). Here again, restoration of manhood is demonstrated by the receiving of property from the lord. In Marie’s lai, the knight has lost his rights as the result of a betrayal of marital trust, a wife breaking her marriage vows. As a result, she becomes “the monstrous” because in his attack on her the werewolf/husband has torn off her nose, a monstrosity that she passes on to future generations of women.

*Constructing the Masculine, Stage Two: Mastering the Feminine*

According to sociologist Michael S. Kimmel, masculinity is always to some extent constructed in relation to femininity (102). Even for the High Middle Ages,
despite the essential nature of masculinity, a demonstration of masculinity seems to require a confrontation with the feminine. Similar to the way that masculinity is constructed in relation to beasts, the hero must exploit feminine qualities but control them appropriately. In fact, the rationality that distinguishes the hero from beasts is one of the qualities that he shares with women. The wisdom and eloquence that mark a superior man do not lead him to passivity but are precursors to action that has creative/engendering power.

Constructing masculinity in relation to women in a medieval context is complicated by the degree to which the superiority of men was naturalized. For example, in the early twelfth century, the Bishop of Limerick defined the status of women in terms of the three orders: “I do not say that the function of women is to pray or toil, let alone to fight, but they are married to those who pray, toil and fight and they serve them” (qtd. in McNamara 3-4). In her examination of late medieval masculinity, Ruth Mazo Karras observes that subordination of women is assumed and their subjection “was always a part of masculinity, but not always its purpose or central feature.” Women could be “tools” in testing oneself against other men, but men did not define themselves by the relationship with women as they did with other men (11). The patriarchal domination of men is at least equally taken for granted in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

Beowulf’s and Erec’s encounters with the feminine suggest that the thorough naturalization of male superiority does not negate the concern for the assertion and expression of the masculine as “not feminine.” Both the Danish episode of Beowulf and the romance of Erec et Enide include in their heroes’ journeys to manhood an explicit, if
metaphorical, encounter with the feminine. After defeating Grendel, Beowulf has to defeat the monster’s mother before Heorot is safe. In the second part of Chrétien’s poem, Erec requires that Enide accompany him on his adventure to reassert his manhood. Therefore, while the construction of masculinity in these works has little to do with demonstrating superiority over women, the heroes’ masculinity is constructed to some extent in relation to women.

In the context of men’s perceived natural superiority over women, the hero does not need to compete overtly with women to prove his superiority, but his actions must demonstrate implicitly that he is in control of feminine influence in a way similar to his controlling the monstrous. Both Beowulf and Erec et Enide complicate this expectation because the heroes do seem to compete overtly with their female antagonists. For Beowulf, it is easy to resolve the complication by recognizing that his physical battle is with a monster. If metaphorically the fight is with a monstrous femininity, then it can be seen from an alternative view as an internalized struggle. The notion that there are two opponents may be suggested by the ambiguous characterization of Grendel’s mother as both stronger and weaker than Grendel. Similarly, Erec’s forcing Enide to accompany him and commanding her silence can be read as a direct attempt to assert dominance: “By treating her roughly and passing a series of dangerous tests, he regained his masculinity. The heroine learned to subordinate herself and her superior intelligence to his manly pride. At last, the proper balance was restored and a happy marriage was made possible” (McNamara 21). However, the circumstances of Erec’s actions—including his refusal to provide any justification to anyone, words to his father confirming his continued love and
trust of Enide, and his repeated insistence that he is going alone—strongly suggest that his struggle too is internal. Additionally, not only does Enide never subordinate herself or her intelligence, but she never appears as a vanquished opponent. That Enide grows into a strong presence in the romance reflects the evolving concept of marriage away from the aristocratic model to the ecclesiastical model that makes the choice of the woman as important as that of the man. So, while Erec’s adventure may begin as an attempt to assert dominance, he will only attain manhood by creating the partnership of marriage that will make him a *senior*. In the end, both Beowulf and Erec absorb feminine wisdom and demonstrate the feminine powers of nurture and generation.

*Constructing the Masculine, Stage Three: Competing with Other Men*

How a man conducts himself in relation to other men in the masculine community is central to defining manhood in *Beowulf* and *Erec et Enide*. The hero shows his superior physical abilities to other men in direct competition. But other men in the narrative reveal by contrast not only the hero’s physical superiority, but his model social behavior. These latter examples go beyond demonstrating the “natural,” biologically determined qualities of manhood to introduce the social constructed codes of the masculine hero. His model behavior in contrast with failed men suggests the socially constructed masculine values that set the warrior community apart. These warrior codes emphasize the surprising similarities between the Anglo-Saxon warrior and the French knight, but they also reveal profound differences. The Anglo-Saxon community relies on these values for its very existence. For the knight, while the values sometimes seem to
overemphasize mere appearance or ritual, when they do obtain a real social function, their application is among a community much broader than the warrior band and, as a result, the values appear to have a shallower social significance.

Some of the men whom the hero defeats serve as a means to demonstrate his extreme physical strength in much the same way beasts do. In fact some of his encounters are complicated by the ambiguous bestiality of the opponents. Whereas Grendel is a beast who bears some similarities to men, in *Erec et Enide*, men such as Yder and Maboagrain seem inhuman until Erec defeats them and reveals their humanity.

Other times the hero’s physical ability is emphasized by his success against large numbers of men. In the ill-advised battle that results in Hygelac’s death, Beowulf defeats and carries off the arms of thirty Hetware (2354b-62). At the beginning of his adventure with Enide, Erec defeats and seizes the horses of groups of villainous men who outnumber him. First they are attacked by three thieves (2757-61), and then by five more (2889). Soon thereafter, they are chased by a hundred knights, and while Erec does not have to fight them all, he turns to face the count leading them, severely wounding him and stopping the attack (3542-45).

Some men, with whom the hero does not compete physically, provide meaningful contrasts to his character by their failures to live up to the masculine code. At one extreme of the failed masculine are the men who act with overt cowardice or treachery, violating their oaths of loyalty. For example, at the end of *Beowulf* ten of the thanes who accompany Beowulf to the dragon’s cave run away to the woods (2596-2601). Wiglaf, the one warrior who stands with Beowulf, speaks to the cowardly warriors, describing
their failure to fulfill their duty of reciprocity to the king by describing the war gear that
Beowulf had given them (2864-74a). Such contrasting models of men failing to live up
to expectation are seen elsewhere in Old English poetry. In the “Battle of Maldon” after
their lord, Byrhtnoth, falls, a number of warriors flee, one warrior on the king’s horse,
leading others to follow him (238-40). The poet emphasizes their failure of loyalty and
unwillingness to sacrifice themselves:

\[
\begin{align*}
& \text{flugeon on þæt fæsten} \quad \text{and hyra feore burgon,} \\
& \text{and manna ma} \quad \text{þonne hit Ænig mæð wære,} \\
& \text{gyf hi þa geearnunga} \quad \text{ealle gemundon} \\
& \text{þe he him to dugufge gedon hæfde.} \quad 194-97
\end{align*}
\]

they fled into the place of safety and their own lives saved, and many
more than it any way right was, if they remembered all the acts deserving
favor that he had done to help them.

Treacherous men also provide a clear contrast in behavior to the hero. The
structure of *Beowulf* has been long recognized as juxtaposing models of behavior through
what were once regarded as digressions to define character.\(^{35}\) Among these
juxtapositions, Hrothgar contrasts Beowulf with Heremod, who killed his own
companions (1711b-14a) and “nallas bēagas geaf / Denum æfter dōme” (“not at all gave
rings to the Danes for honor”; 1719b-20a). In addition, men in the narrative demonstrate

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\(^{35}\) For example, Adrien Bonjour in *The Digressions in Beowulf* suggests that some apparent digressions
serve to glorify Beowulf, including those that contrast him with an historical figure such as Heremod.
Similarly, Fred C. Robinson in *Beowulf and the Appositive Style* asserts that the “appositive method is used
repeatedly to characterize Beowulf” for example implying that Beowulf is “unlike Heremod,” “the violent
ruler who turned on his subjects” (22).
such contrasts more subtly. For example, Beowulf accuses Unferth of having killed his
own brothers, for which he deserves condemnation (587-89). Later, the narrator implies
the future treachery of Hrothulf (1017-19). These treacheries contrast directly with
Beowulf’s own understated summation of his life after he has received his death wound:

\[
\text{Ic on earde bād} \\
mālgesceafte, \quad \text{hēold mīn tela,} \\
\text{ne sōhte searonīðas,} \quad \text{nē mē swōr fela} \\
\text{āða on unriht.} \quad \text{Ic ēaes ealles mæg,} \\
\text{feorhbennum sēoc,} \quad \text{gefēan habban;} \\
\text{forðām mē wītan ne ðearf} \quad \text{Waldend fīra} \\
\text{morðorbealo māga. (2736b-2742a)}
\]

At home I awaited what fate assigned, held mine well; I did not seek
treachery; nor swore many oaths wrongfully. I for all this
may, sick with a mortal wound, have joy; therefore, the Ruler of men need
not lay charge on me for murder of kin.

In *Erec et Enide*, some treacherous men who contrast with Erec notably
demonstrate an inappropriate attitude toward women and, especially, marriage. Erec
creates the circumstances for such men to reveal themselves by having Enide accompany
him on his adventure, and, at first, to ride in front. Thus, the first attackers, who are
merely thieves, respond first to the sight of Enide. More interestingly, the two most
threatening opponents are counts, who attempt to impose an unacceptable model of
marriage, abduction. First, Count Galoain attempts to seduce Enide in Erec’s presence
and, when Enide tricks him, pursues them with one hundred men. Later, Count Oringle compels Enide to marry him after Erec is thought to be dead.

Also significant are the men who prove merely ineffectual through lack of ability or passivity. In *Beowulf* the Danes have essentially surrendered the possession of Heorot to Grendel. When prompted to boast by Unferth’s taunts, Beowulf observes sarcastically that Grendel has discovered that he has nothing to fear from the “Sige Scyldinga” (“Victory Scyldings”; 595-97). Later, the Danes abandon the watch at the mere when they assume that Beowulf is dead. While this is not the overt cowardice demonstrated by the Geats at the dragon cave or the warriors at Maldon, it demonstrates a desultory lack of resolve and loyalty, and its results are clear: by such behavior the Danes have allowed their tribal community to be decimated and rendered powerless.

In an apparent similarity, Erec contrasts with the men who precede him in his three fights with giants. When he approaches each of the challenges that will lead to the fight with Yder and Maboagrain, the ineffectual opponents that each of the giant men have faced previously cause the local residents to dismiss his chances. When he faces the two giants, he rescues a knight who has been bound and humiliated by them. Kay serves as a model of the ineffectual knight in Chrétien’s romances. Erec quickly dispenses with Kay’s attempt to have him stop at Arthur’s camp in the midst of his adventure (3939 ff.), before Gawain succeeds in tricking Erec to stop. In *Le Chevalier de la Charrete* Kay insists on being given permission to answer the challenge of protecting the queen, which results in her being captured. Gawain, again, is designated to lead the rescue, but encounters Lancelot, who is already in headlong pursuit of the queen. But despite the
apparent similarity, it is clear that Erec’s and Lancelot’s superior prowess does not strengthen the community directly. Erec’s success with the giant men after others’ failures seems to echo Beowulf’s success where the Danes have failed, but the direct result is the rescue of a woman’s husband. However, he potentially enlarges Arthur’s retinue of knights when he sends the rescued knight to court. More important, he has rescued a marriage, echoing the central effect of his own quest. While less direct than Beowulf’s rescue of the Danes, the personal triumph of a successful marriage has long-term effects for Erec and for his kingdom. Lancelot demonstrates that heroic prowess can serve an unmanly purpose as his actions are never directed toward an unselfish, community-oriented goal. In fact, his love for the queen potentially undermines not only the marriage of his king and lord but the whole Arthurian culture.

The hero is also measured by those who are his near equal and those who are willing to serve him and follow his lead. As an epic hero, Beowulf’s prowess sets him far apart from other men, but when Wiglaf stands with Beowulf in the dragon fight, the younger warrior reflects the hero’s greatness in his own prowess and loyalty. As a questing hero of romance, Erec’s great prowess inspires the admiration and loyalty of knights outside of his own community. He develops a bond with Guivret after the two fight and discover their mutual prowess. In addition, Erec, like Yvain, gains stature as a knight by his close relationship with Gawain. Unlike Wiglaf, Gawain and Guivret are

36 See Chapter 3, pages 176-78.

37 Gawain even appears a better man than the king on occasion, becoming not only the great champion of the court, but demonstrating greater rationality than Arthur. In *Erec et Enide*, Gawain warns Arthur that the restoration of the custom of the stag will lead to discord (49-58). In *Le Chevalier de la Charrete*,


not thanes or vassals to Erec, acting to preserve the secure world Beowulf has created. Whereas Wiglaf’s loyalty to Beowulf demonstrates the way in which Beowulf’s model creates a bond that is essential to the survival of his tribe, Erec evokes no such following among his vassals. Rather, Erec has inspired loyalty among knights from other kingdoms, who will come to his aid. The bond of friendship achieves an alliance with other kingdoms, broadening his connections rather than deepening them among his own vassals.

Constructing the Warrior, Stage Four: Binding Men to Other Men

A set of masculine values begins to emerge out of the heroes’ contrasts with other men in heroic narratives. At the same time that the hero demonstrates his superiority among men, he also participates in the male bonding that establishes a community of fighting men. Just as his affinity with his feminine and bestial opponents is acknowledged as a part of his manhood, the masculine hero must demonstrate his connection with his male comrades, including those with whom he has competed. In Beowulf, for example, after competing verbally with Unferth, Beowulf accepts a sword from him to fight Grendel’s mother and returns the sword to Unferth graciously despite its uselessness in battle. Erec and Guivret become close companions after nearly killing one another in combat. Membership in the fighting community can even override to some extent the divisions of class or privilege. Maurice Keen notes that uses of the Latin miles in the eleventh and twelfth centuries not just to identify a soldier but to designate --

Gawain tells Arthur that he is acting like a child when he fails to act when the queen is taken (226-27; Staines 173).
status suggests that “the lesser knighthood (often earlier described as vassi or vassals) and the greater nobility (the overlords of vassals) were drawing together in terms of social cohesion” (27). Georges Duby observes that “the rituals of homage, in particular the kiss given on the mouth, to which serfs had no right, were intended to show clearly the essential equality of the leader and his war companions” (*Love and Marriage in the Middle Ages* 66). A commitment to shared ideals creates a unity among the members of the Anglo-Saxon comitatus and the company of knights like those at Arthur’s Round Table.

As constructed from the literary record, the code of conduct that defines such shared ideals lies at the heart of the construction of masculinity for both Anglo-Saxon warriors and French knights. In his historical examination of chivalry, Maurice Keen suggests the essential unity between the pre-Conquest Anglo-Saxon and the French fighting man featured in post-Conquest history and romance. Because the three estates—the clergy, the warrior, and the laborer—are described in Alfred’s late-ninth-century translation of Boethius, Keen argues, “The idea of warriors as a separate order with distinct functions antedates, by an easy margin, the use of the word chivalry” (4). The persistence of the concept of a separate warrior culture across the two cultures suggests the possibility of the presence of a consistent warrior masculinity in both. The socially constructed codes from each period would seem to justify that assumption by their similarities; however, just as with other aspects of the masculine code, the interpretations of these similar martial values of the two codes reveal distinct differences reflecting the cultural changes that occurred in the twelfth century, especially with regard to marriage.
While the Anglo-Saxon warrior code has been constructed by modern scholars, the chivalric code revealed by the French romances became embedded in the social structure when books defining the code of chivalry began to appear in the twelfth century. Each iteration of the code defines an expectation of the ideal warrior, revealing the construction of manhood that is on display in the heroic poetry of each culture. John M. Hill succinctly summarizes the three elements of the “Germanic ‘heroic code’” that readers of Anglo-Saxon heroic poetry have come to assume: “reciprocal loyalty between retainer and warlord, as especially enacted by the exchange of gifts for services and services for gifts; revenge obligation regarding injury or death, on behalf of kinsmen as well as for one’s lord; and fame-assuring courage, especially if a successful outcome—battlefield victory—seems impossible” (1). Keen delineates knightly qualities identified in treatises on chivalry from the thirteenth century that show clear points of contact with the code defined by Hill: “courtesy, loyalty, hardiness, largesse, franchise” (11). Keen compares these qualities with “the classic virtues of good knighthood” that were already established by romances, including those of Chrétien; they are identical except that he lists prouesse and not hardiness (2). The table below shows the points of contact between Keen and Hill’s summaries of the two codes:

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38 Hill’s book demonstrates that these topics of heroism, which he says remain “literarily abstract” in scholarly commentary (1), are flexibly interpreted by social and historical context—especially the obligations for revenge and kinship loyalty. Even Beowulf, which Hill differentiates from the Alfredian project of redefining lordship in the historical heroic literature, suggests more nuanced approaches to revenge and feuds.
Table 1

Comparison of Warrior Codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Anglo-Saxon Code (Hill 2)</th>
<th>Chivalric Code (Keen 11)</th>
<th>Knightly virtues of romance (Keen 2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reciprocal Loyalty</td>
<td>Loyalty</td>
<td>Loyaute</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fame-assuring courage</td>
<td>Hardiness</td>
<td>Prouesse</td>
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<tr>
<td>Exchange of Gifts</td>
<td>Largesse</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Franchise</td>
<td>Franchise</td>
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<tr>
<td>Revenge Obligation</td>
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Thus, the qualities of loyalty, physical stamina, and generosity identified by two separate codes can be recognized to define not only the similar actions of both Erec and Beowulf as demonstrated in Chapters 1 and 3 above but of men’s actions in other heroic literature from both periods. Furthermore, forms of courtesy (courtly behavior) and revenge obligation are prominent aspects of manhood in both periods, though they are explicitly identified in only one code.

First, the codes emphasize the physical and competitive aspects of warrior culture: prowess, courage, and hardiness. Prowess is mentioned as a quality demonstrated in chivalric literature, but is not mentioned in either code. Courage and hardiness are explicitly identified in different codes, but taken together they represent very similar behavior. The picture that emerges seems to define the actions of both Beowulf and Erec, if not of any warrior hero: he willingly faces challenges that appear impossible, resolutely pursues them until his great fighting abilities achieve whatever success is
possible. This narrative is succinctly forecast in the Anglo-Saxon warrior’s boast, a vestige of which still can be heard in *Erec et Enide.*

In addition to identifying essential martial skills and behaviors, the codes prescribe the behaviors that bind the community: loyalty and generosity. Loyalty and generosity are explicit in both codes and serve first to bind the company of warriors, at least in *Beowulf.* The two qualities are intertwined. Generosity provides the means of recognizing the bond of loyalty between a lord and retainer. Hill describes a feature of the Anglo-Saxon code: “reciprocal loyalty between retainer and warlord, as especially enacted by the exchange of gifts for services and services for gifts” (1). This fundamental aspect of the relationship between lord and thane is established immediately in the opening of *Beowulf:*

Swā sceal (geong g)uma       gōde gewyrcean,
fromum feohgiftum          on fæder (bea)rme,
þaet hine on ylde           eft gewunigen
wilgesīpas,          þonne wīg cume,
lēode gelǣsten;          lofdǣdum sceal
in mǣgþa gehwǣre      man geþēon. (20-25)

So must a young man good actions perform, with abundant precious gifts from his father’s bosom, so that with him in old age afterwards will remain the pleasant companions, when war comes, the nation will last; by praiseworthy deeds must, among kinsmen everywhere, a man prosper.

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39 See pages 122 and 171 above.
Georges Duby sees the vassal relationship in the post-conquest world similarly: the feudal lord, or seigneur, who wanted to be popular had to be munificent; rich rewards had to be shared continually and freely amongst his vassals. There were not constraints on them other than the constraints of a moral code, whose pillars, the virtues of loyalty and valour, supported the entire system of aristocratic values and esprit de corps which they protected. (*Love and Marriage in the Middle Ages* 66-67)

Indeed, in *Erec et Enide*, Erec’s generosity is recognized even when he is blamed for not fulfilling his responsibilities:

\[
\text{Nul leu n’avoit tornoiemant nes anveast, molt richemant aparelliez et atornez.}
\]

\[
\text{Destiers lor donoit sejornez por tornoier et por joster, que qu’il li deüssent coster. (2415-20)}
\]

Wherever there was a tournament he sent them there, most richly appareled and equipped.

He gave them fresh chargers to tourney and to joust with, whatever they might cost him.
Whereas Beowulf’s kingly generosity is a matter of life and death for the tribe, Erec maintains the form of a bonding ritual, but without the same substance. Erec and his barons do not have to form a band that resists the outside world; in fact, Erec pointedly leaves all of his barons behind when he seeks to restore his manhood. The relationship that he must maintain to assure a future for his kingdom is the one he has with his wife. The result of his eventual reconciliation with Enide is a generosity that is turned outward—toward women in distress, communities in bondage, knights enslaved to arcane values. It is not generosity defined by physical gifts, but by his selfless assistance of others.

Anthropologist David Gilmore says, “Manhood ideologies always include a criterion of selfless generosity, even to the point of sacrifice. Again and again we find that ‘real’ men are those who give more than they take; they serve others.” In contrast, “Non-men are often those stigmatized as stingy and unproductive” (229). Often, such generosity on the part of the knight results in the expansion of the warrior community. For example, when the knight errant sends worthy vanquished knights to Arthur’s court, he expands the community of fighting men. When he wins the devotion of communities or powerful knights, he gains powerful allies, as Erec does when he wins the devotion of Guivret. Thus, no longer are loyalty and generosity integrated to create a reciprocal bond between lord and thane or vassal in an insular community of warriors. Rather, it becomes a means of allying one community with others.

Nonetheless, Georges Duby describes a new context for generosity in the twelfth-century court culture that relates it directly to marriage: a lord’s generosity can manifest
itself in terms of a vassal’s desire to marry. In his discussion of the *History of the House of Guines*, Duby says that Count Baldwin had taken upon himself to arrange marriages for orphans among his vassals. When Duby says that the count “showed his largesse to the world, which saw him in the role of wife-giver” (*Medieval Marriage* 98-99), he refers to the “largesse” of the chivalric code, but echoes the language of Anglo-Saxon poetry in applying the epithet “wife-giver.” Furthermore, Duby interprets the courtly love game in terms of the lordly largesse, linking it to loyalty: “By exhibiting his largesse to the point of letting his lady pretend that was gradually giving herself, he was able to gain an ever stronger hold over the young men of his household” (*Medieval Marriage* 14).

Loyalty can be the source of an even more significant point of departure between the Beowulfian hero and the romance hero because of the potential conflict in loyalty between a knight’s lady and his lord in the romances. In fact, such disloyalty is at the heart of the “courtly love” plot that becomes familiar and is exemplified in the later development of the story of Lancelot and Guinevere, in which their betrayal of Arthur leads to the destruction of his kingdom. However, while Chrétien’s *Le Chevalier de la Charrette* focuses on Lancelot’s love for the queen, it does not directly address the disloyalty to Arthur that might be inferred. In addition to the conflicts in loyalty that arise out of courtly love plots in romance, marriage issues can create more direct conflict between lord and vassal. For example, in *Le Roman d'Eneas*, a romance based on *The Aeneid* that probably precedes Chrétien’s romances, Turnus regards the king’s decision to marry Lavine to Eneas as not only a breach of promise regarding the marriage, but a violation of his status as the king’s vassal “to whom he is bound by oath.” He refuses to
give up the land and castles with which he has been enfeoffed (Yunck 132). In *Le Chevalier au Lion*, conflicting loyalty immediately arises when Yvain marries Laudine when he must defend her fountain from attack by his King, Arthur.

Some of the lais of Marie de France more directly address conflicts between feudal loyalty and loyalty to a lover or wife. For example, in “Guigemar” a young knight and a lady exchange a vow of loyalty when they are separated after being found out by the lady’s tyrannical husband. When Meriaduc, a lord to whom Guigemar has pledged his service, discovers the lady alone aboard an enchanted ship that has brought her to Guigemar, he wants to have her for himself. Guigemar asks Meriaduc to release her to him, but Meriaduc refuses. As a result, Guigemar renounces his bond of vassalage to Meriaduc and, with the one hundred knights he had brought to support Meriaduc, leads his opponent’s forces to assault and defeat Meriaduc. In “Equitain” King Equitain seduces his seneschal’s wife, reversing the usual courtly love situation. As he debates her seduction, the king recognizes that he is “doing wrong” by violating the bond of loyalty to his seneschal: “Garder li dei amur e fei / Si cum jeo voil k’il face a mei” (“I owe him the same faith and love / that I want him to give me”; 73-74). What begins as the story of “a most courtly man” descends into fabliau that ends with the gruesome deaths of the deceitful lovers. The seriousness of the violation of loyalty brought about by the love of a woman is made clear when Marie says, “Femme espuse ot li seneschals / Dunt puis vint el pais granz mals” (“This seneschal took a wife / through whom great harm later came to the land”; 29-30). Marie’s alternative view of chivalric values in her lais thus makes obvious the reinterpretation of loyalty through the lens of marriage,
emphasizing the deep divide between the chivalric ideal of loyalty and the tribal value of loyalty in Anglo-Saxon culture, which depends on the bond of loyalty for survival.

In Chrétien, the potential for love to disrupt the loyal relationships among men is prominent. Gawain argues that discord will result from Arthur’s revival of the stag hunt when the decision has to be made about whose lady is the most beautiful and should reward the winner with a kiss. Also, disaffection occurs between Erec and his barons when he devotes too much attention to Enide. In his later romance *Le Chevalier au Lion*, Chrétien reverses the effect of a similar conflict of loyalty. After Yvain marries Laudine, Gawain challenges him: “Gardez quë en vos ne remoigne, / biax compainz, nostre conpaignie” (“See to it that our friendship / does not end, fair companion, because of you”; 2514-15). As a result of Gawain’s cautions not to allow his marriage to cause him to lose his reputation, Yvain leaves Laudine and becomes so engaged in tournaments that he fails to return in a year as promised, precipitating the crisis of the poem when Laudine refuses to see him because of the breach of promise. In all of these cases, loyalty is understood within the context of the marriage bond, not only within the context of the bond between lord and vassal. Thus, it becomes imperative for the hero to bring these loyalties into balance.

Finally, the bonds formed by generosity and loyalty must be proven by avenging action when necessary. While the revenge obligation is identified only in the Anglo-Saxon code, revenge continues to be important to the knights of romance, though with different motivation. As Hill says, the obligation for the Anglo-Saxon warrior is “on behalf of kinsmen” or his lord. The revenge obligation is believed to derive from
Germanic folklaw. By the time of the fifth-century migrations, however, the protective role of kin was being replaced by the authority of the king to “intervene in quarrels and disagreements” (Brundage 126). So the revenge obligation had most likely lost its enforcement function by the eleventh century. If revenge is required by a code of honor, rather than as a requirement for maintaining social order, its role in constructing manhood might become more complicated, even in Beowulf. According to Klaeber, Beowulf possibly takes place in the sixth century (xxxi), and if so, it is intended to depict a hero closer to the time when the legal obligation was still in force. Nonetheless, in Beowulf revenge becomes associated with old ways disruptive to peace and the maintaining of vows between men. This is clear in the retelling of the Finnsburg episode, in which the need for revenge ruins all chances of peace (1063-159). Upon his return to Geatland, Beowulf imagines the failure of Freawaru as peaceweaver when an old warrior incites a young warrior to revenge (2022-69). And, of course, since revenge is enacted by Grendel’s mother, revenge must have a more complex relationship with masculinity.

However, Beowulf does not let an act like that of Grendel’s mother go unavenged. And he acts in vengeance for the tribe, Danes or Geats, remaining close to the original legal role of revenge in Germanic law; he never acts out of personal revenge.

For Chrétien’s Erec, on the other hand, revenge is a formal obligation clearly associated with preserving personal reputation rather than social order. The nature of revenge in Erec et Enide is exemplified in the first challenge Erec meets in the poem. When he is whipped by the dwarf servant of Yder, he is compelled to follow Yder and avenge his and the queen’s honor. But he does not challenge Yder on the spot, saying
that no one would blame him for waiting to seek revenge until he is properly armed (218-61). He pursues Yder until he acquires armor from Enide’s father and defeats him. He stops just short of beheading Yder, telling him that he must hate him for the injuries he received (1026). He completes his vengeance by sending Yder to surrender himself to the queen (1028-37). Thus, Erec’s revenge is a calculated response to a personal injury and an insult to the queen, with no significant impact on his community. In *Le Chevalier au Lion*, Yvain’s expression of revenge rings even more hollow. He claims that in pursuing the adventure to the Perilous Spring “qu’il vangera, s’il puët, la honte / son cosin” (“he intends to avenge / his cousin’s shame”; 748-49). Yvain thus claims to seek revenge for a kinsman, but merely on account of his personal humiliation. And his subsequent actions suggest that he is more motivated by personal glory. Clearly, the still immature knights in Chrétien’s two romances recognize revenge as a manly act, but theirs is a calculated response focused on how others perceive them. For both knights, these actions lead directly to their marriages, which will then define their subsequent journey to manhood. Thus, the obligation for revenge as interpreted in *Beowulf* and Chrétien’s romances may begin to reveal that the apparent similarities in the Anglo-Saxon and chivalric codes hide the differences that redefine masculinity.

The underlying differences between the two codes are further revealed in their interpretation of courage. In Hill’s summary of the Anglo-Saxon code courage is characterized as “fame-assuring.” Beowulf is always concerned with the visible evidence that recognizes his feats. When he returns from the Danes’ land, he emphasizes the rewards he received in the hall from Hrothgar (2101-04). At his death, his last wishes are
for Wiglaf to bring to him the dragon’s treasure to look upon (2747-51) and to have a mound built that sailors will recognize as his memorial (2802-08).

In contrast, in some twelfth-century romances the process of the internalization of a sense of honor seems to be occurring, perhaps as a result of the effects of twelfth-century cultural change. In Chrétien’s romance *Le Chevalier au Lion*, as well as *Erec et Enide*, the hero seems to internalize his values over the course of the narrative. Erec begins his adventure attempting to force Enide to be a silent witness to his prowess. But he eventually is able to leave Enide behind when he sets out to help a crying lady and then rescues her husband from two giants. By the end, he faces Maboagrain in the challenge of *la Joie de la Cort* with no witnesses. In *Le Chevalier au Lion*, Yvain expresses his desire to have a witness for his deeds repeatedly early in the romance. When Yvain delivers what will be a deathblow to a knight who then rides off on his horse, Yvain gives chase and fears that “ne creüz n’iert an nule guise / s’anseignes veraies n’an porte” (“no one would believe him at all / if he did not bring back real proof”; 898-99). Trapped in the knight’s castle, he receives help from Lunete, who, ironically, saves him by making him invisible. He watches as the knight is buried, and believes without evidence that he had killed the knight, “iert il honiz en travers” (“he would be thoroughly ashamed”; 1351). As the romance progresses, however, Yvain humbles himself and gains renown as a protector of women known only as the knight with the lion.

It is notable that Yvain’s adventures to restore his manhood de-emphasize concern for reputation to the degree that he becomes uninterested in fighting. He wants
only to right wrongs. This point is driven home when after being forced into the fight with the two demons, unable to accept the offered reward of the lord’s daughter, he gives meaning to his victory by asking for the freedom of the three hundred enslaved women. Finally, in defending the rights of a wronged younger sister, he must face Gawain, but they fight not knowing who the other is. Neither is able to gain advantage, but once they reveal their identities to each other, both declare themselves defeated, refusing to accept victory, until Arthur steps in to resolve the dispute. There is an extraordinary movement here from the warrior world of Beowulf in which fighting anonymously for an internal value would be inconceivable.
CONCLUSION: DIFFERENCES THAT MATTER

For the Anglo-Saxon warrior represented by Beowulf, the desire for fame, the obligation for revenge, and the king’s need to ensure loyalty through generous gift-giving all are essential to tribal survival through the maintenance of an insular warrior community. The twelfth-century romance hero represented by Erec maintains the same set of values, but they seem vestigial at times when they are applied selfishly during his youth. After a period of growth, marked by adventuring away from his community, Erec arrives at adulthood by achieving an awareness of his obligations to others. The chivalric values, especially of loyalty and generosity, become more substantive and are applied broadly, not just to fellow knights but to women and to men outside the community. At the center of this growth is the marriage that had been established by virtue of his youthful personal attractiveness but matures, through love, into a partnership. In the end, the marriage and the alliances Erec has achieved as a result of his journey have the same intent as the Anglo-Saxon warrior’s code that Beowulf follows: long-term survival of his community.

This new heroic narrative reflects the increased importance of marriage to young knights in establishing themselves as men at a time when the marital relationship was being redefined by the Church. The desire of the juvenes to attract wives empowers the feminine gaze, and possibly as a result, heroic literature increasingly emphasizes the hero’s appearance, both his personal attractiveness and the spectacle of his fighting skills. At the same time, the process of entering manhood requires attention to aspects of masculine character to fulfill the role of senior, requiring that the young man grow
beyond the superficial emphasis on appearance. Thus, the romance plot emphasizes Erec’s growth toward manhood. In contrast, Beowulf emphasizes the demonstration of the manly qualities he has attained before the narrative begins.

Despite these differences of emphasis, both heroes by the time that their masculine status is recognized have demonstrated a very similar ideal of manhood. The ideal holds in balance the recognized natural masculine qualities of strength, action, and anger with masculine rationality. Both heroes demonstrate this by their mastery of beasts, including the beast within. In addition, each hero proves his ability as a leader through a particularly feminine wisdom that is reflective and nurturing, focused on concerns of the larger community. As a result, the heroes’ actions and words have generative power. For Beowulf the absorption of the feminine also expresses itself by mastery of the female beast, asserting his natural superiority. Because the romance hero must learn to balance his responsibilities as a political and military leader with the personal responsibilities of a husband, Erec’s superiority cannot be expressed by the real or symbolic subjugation of the feminine. The authority he asserts over his wife must be negotiated as a part of his initiation into manhood. Despite the ultimate similarity of the two heroes’ performance of masculinity, the specific cultural context of the twelfth century results in a significantly different ideal of manhood being expressed in *Erec et Enide*.

Jo Ann McNamara has located a “masculine identity crisis” in the twelfth century, largely as a result of “the ideological struggle between celibate and married men for leadership in the Christian world” (3). As Derek G. Neal concludes, “These crises have
happened rather too often over recent centuries, with no apparent resolutions, for the concept to have much use.” (6). And in this case, that struggle among celibate and married men is only indirectly what Chrétien is responding to when he recreates the hero in *Erec et Enide*. Nor does that struggle relate to what is interesting in the way that the masculine hero of romance differs from *Beowulf*. Rather the differences that matter are in the struggle with feminine influence, differences that are surfaced by changes in marriage law and custom. Issues related to marriage are important in *Beowulf*, as evidenced by the conflict that arises between Wealhtheow and Hrothgar. But, while much might be at stake for the woman, to a man marriage has significance only as a means of perpetuating his lineage. It has no personal meaning that would affect the identity of the hero, especially his identity as a man, whereas it becomes central to Erec’s masculine identity.

Nonetheless, while the construction of the masculine in twelfth-century romance reflects a specific cultural context, the hero of romance continues to resonate with audiences long after Chrétien. While *Beowulf’s* heroism becomes alien, tales of the Arthurian knights persist consistently over the centuries. The masculine ideal depicted in *Erec et Enide* remains at the heart of those tales. Furthermore, later depictions of the masculine hero are very frequently framed within the context of marriage. I think of two iconic John Ford Western films starring the twentieth century masculine icon John Wayne. In an early collaboration between the two, *Stagecoach*, the Ringo Kid (Wayne) rides off at the end to homestead with the woman he has met on the stagecoach. In a later film, *The Searchers*, Ethan Edwards (Wayne) is filmed at the end through the cabin door,
walking away from the homestead of the woman whom he loved and did not marry, pointedly excluded from the domesticated life.

Thus, while the Arthurian romance as created by Chrétien de Troyes is clearly a reflection of an historic moment, the masculine hero that resulted from that moment persists in our cultural imagination. Nonetheless, at the core of his masculinity he is much the same as Beowulf.
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