

---

Theses and Dissertations

---

2010

# From ekphrasis and the fantastic to commodity fetishism in the Roman de Thebes and Chretien de Troyes' Erec et Enide

Sonja Nicole Mayrhofer  
*University of Iowa*

Copyright 2010 Sonja Nicole Mayrhofer

This dissertation is available at Iowa Research Online: <http://ir.uiowa.edu/etd/2940>

---

## Recommended Citation

Mayrhofer, Sonja Nicole. "From ekphrasis and the fantastic to commodity fetishism in the Roman de Thebes and Chretien de Troyes' Erec et Enide." MA (Master of Arts) thesis, University of Iowa, 2010.  
<http://ir.uiowa.edu/etd/2940>.

---

Follow this and additional works at: <http://ir.uiowa.edu/etd>



Part of the [Comparative Literature Commons](#)

FROM EKPHRASIS AND THE FANTASTIC TO COMMODITY FETISHISM  
IN THE *ROMAN DE THÈBES* AND CHRÉTIEN DE TROYES' *EREC ET ENIDE*

by

Sonja Nicole Mayrhofer

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in Comparative Literature  
in the Graduate College of  
The University of Iowa

May 2010

Thesis Supervisors: Professor Steven Ungar  
Associate Professor Glenn Ehrstine

Graduate College  
The University of Iowa  
Iowa City, Iowa

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

---

MASTER'S THESIS

---

This is to certify that the Master's thesis of

Sonja Nicole Mayrhofer

has been approved by the Examining Committee  
for the thesis requirement of the Master of Arts degree  
in Comparative Literature at  
the May 2010 graduation.

Thesis Committee: \_\_\_\_\_  
Steven Ungar, Thesis Supervisor

\_\_\_\_\_  
Glenn Ehrstine, Thesis Supervisor

\_\_\_\_\_  
Astrid Oesmann

\_\_\_\_\_  
Claire Sponsler

To my family

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank Glenn Ehrstine for his involvement in this project, especially for his feedback during the revision process. My thanks also go out to Steve Ungar for his administrative and editorial advice. Special thanks are also due to my committee members Claire Sponsler and Astrid Oesmann, for their advice and feedback.

Moreover, although they were not directly involved with my thesis project, I would also like to acknowledge Kathy Lavezzo, Sabine Gölz, and Ruedi Kuenzli, as the courses I have taken with these instructors have triggered questions which influenced this project to a large extent.

Finally, I would like to extend a very special thanks to my family and friends for their emotional and sometimes editorial support during my pursuit of this degree and during the writing of this thesis, especially to my parents, as well as to Petra, Shad, Ava, Jared, and Sarah.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: A THEORETICAL AND HISTORICAL FRAMEWORK FOR MEDIEVAL EKPHRASIS	1
CHAPTER 2: THE <i>MAPPA MUNDI</i> AND AMPHIAREUS' CHARIOT: HENRY II'S EXPANSIONISTIC AGENDA IN THE <i>ROMAN DE THÈBES</i>	16
CHAPTER 3: EREC'S ROBE: MASTERY OF SPACE AND THE SUBJUGATION OF BRETON LORDS IN CHRÉTIEN DE TROYES' <i>EREC ET ENIDE</i>	39
CONCLUSION: POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF EKPHRASIS	61
APPENDIX A: EXCERPT FROM THE <i>ROMAN DE THÈBES</i> : MAPPA MUNDI	66
APPENDIX B: EXCERPT FROM THE <i>ROMAN DE THÈBES</i> : AMPHIAREUS' CHARIOT	68
APPENDIX C: EXCERPT FROM THE <i>ROMAN DE THÈBES</i> : AMPHIAREUS' DEATH	71
APPENDIX D: EXCERPT FROM CHRÉTIEN DE TROYES' <i>EREC ET ENIDE</i> : CHRÉTIEN'S PROLOGUE	73
APPENDIX E: EXCERPT FROM CHRÉTIEN DE TROYES' <i>EREC ET ENIDE</i> : THE TWO CHAIRS	75
APPENDIX F: EXCERPT FROM CHRÉTIEN DE TROYES' <i>EREC ET ENIDE</i> : THE ROBE	76
APPENDIX G: EXCERPT FROM CHRÉTIEN DE TROYES' <i>EREC ET ENIDE</i> : THE CROWNS	80
APPENDIX H: EXCERPT FROM CHRÉTIEN DE TROYES' <i>EREC ET ENIDE</i> : THE SCEPTER	82
BIBLIOGRAPHY	83

## CHAPTER 1: A THEORETICAL AND HISTORICAL FRAMEWORK FOR MEDIEVAL EKPHRASIS

The *Roman de Thèbes* and Chrétien de Troyes' *Erec et Enide* are Old French romances of an Anglo-Norman tradition, which were crafted during the second half of the twelfth century. The *Roman de Thèbes*, most probably created during the 1150s, is an anonymous reworking of Statius' first-century *Thebaid* and relates the story of the battle between Greeks and Thebans, which breaks out because Oedipus' sons fight over their inherited lands. Chrétien de Troyes' *Erec et Enide*, an Arthurian romance, was created ca. 1170 and culminates with the coronation of Erec as the new king of his lands. Both texts therefore center on questions of land inheritance.

The rhetoric employed by the poets also emphasizes the significance of mastering space and territorializing fictional geographies. This is especially the case during moments in which the poets interrupt their narrative to insert ekphrastic accounts of elaborately crafted objects, like the seer Amphiaraus' chariot, an object crafted by the Greco-Roman god Vulcan, or King Erec's royal robe, a gift bestowed to him by four fairies. Because these fantastic objects are significant commodities derived from supernatural sources, they thereby add a supernatural or otherworldly aura to their owners, which increases the owners' already fetishized positions in these fictional pre-capitalist societies.

Moreover, the objects grant an intrinsic power to claim authority over space, which is implied through the elaborate images each object contains. The chariot and the robe both feature depictions of the liberal arts, which signify political legitimization of territorial expansion through a mastery of *clergie*, or learning. The emphasis on the

numerical arts, also called the *quadrivium*, signifies technological mastery of space through the power granted by arithmetic, music, geometry, and especially astronomy. These numerical arts provide the technological tools needed to exert authority over the terrestrial realm of the narrative. The political objective of mastering space in these narratives becomes even more apparent when these supernatural objects are read in connection with other ekphrastic moments featured in the narratives, especially one ekphrastic account in the *Roman de Thèbes* that describes a world map that traces the boundaries of this fictional terrestrial realm. The territorialization implied in the narratives through these ekphrastic moments, in turn, promotes Henry II's expansionistic agenda through encoded references to the contemporary socio-political situation.

Both romances show evidence that Henry II's political agenda penetrated the fictional worlds these authors created. The texts were, very significantly, written during important stages in Henry II's career, as it was during this time frame that Henry II (1133-1189) gained dominance in the British Isles as well as in western continental Europe. Historians have argued that Henry II had a clear goal from an early stage of his career as a ruler: he wanted to assume the role of the English monarch to which he was entitled through his maternal lineage. Moreover, his expansionistic plans were not limited to the British Isles alone. During the approximately 20-year gap which separates the creation of these two literary texts, Henry II was able to conquer not only large parts of the British Isles, but also to claim suzerainty in western Continental Europe, especially in Brittany.

The second half of the twelfth century was truly a time during which Henry II expanded his territory within Europe and the British Isles. Henry II was born in 1133 to Empress Matilda, daughter of the English King Henry I, and to Count Geoffrey of



Anjou. His life is marked by numerous inheritance struggles, first and foremost because his cousin Stephen had been named king by the Anglo-Norman court in 1135 after Henry I had passed away. Even though Henry II's birthright would have entitled him to legally inherit his grandfather's lands, his mother was not able to regain this birthright for her son. At the age of sixteen, the newly knighted Henry II was officially of age and assumed his role as Duke of Normandy. Scholars believe that Henry II's intention at this point was indeed to invade the British Isles to regain the territory over which Stephen reigned. In the meantime, Stephen sought an alliance with Louis VII of France. Complicated peace negotiations stalled an invasion and when Henry II's father Geoffrey died unexpectedly in 1151, Henry II suddenly became count of Anjou, Maine, and Tourraine. One year later, in 1152, his marriage to Eleanor of Aquitaine, who had just recently been divorced from King Louis VII, enhanced his territory even further. In 1154, Henry II then finally succeeded to the throne after Stephen's death (Keefe 3).<sup>1</sup> He also established a strong presence in Brittany through marital politics, and subsequently also expanded his territory to Ireland, Scotland, and Wales through military invasions during the 1170s (Gillingham 59, Kearney 117).

The *Roman de Thèbes* was therefore created during an early stage in Henry II's career as a ruler, while Chrétien de Troyes' *Erec et Enide* was crafted shortly after Henry II had established his son Geoffrey's position as duke of Brittany through marital politics. It is evident that the anonymous poet of the *Roman de Thèbes*, who most likely lived in northwestern France, reflects the ambitions of the young Henry in his reworking of Statius' material. At the time of its creation, the young Henry would have just assumed his title as Duke of Normandy and may have been making plans to thwart

---

<sup>1</sup> Historical information preceding this reference was taken from Keefe, pp. 1-3.

Stephen's reign in England. Two decades later, during the time Chrétien de Troyes created his first Arthurian text, Henry II's reign in England had already been secured, although Henry II was still bent on expanding his territory towards the fringes of the British Isles, i.e. Ireland, Scotland, and Wales, as well as on securing his overlordship in Brittany.

Both texts are products of a patronage culture, in which poets produced their work for noble patrons who provided their means of living. This was a common arrangement; works of medieval poets and artists were often sponsored in this way. Patronage also meant that poets were influenced by the contemporary political situation, in which their patrons were involved through family ties or political allegiances. This is also the case with the *Roman de Thèbes* and Chrétien de Troyes' *Erec et Enide*. While the patronage of the former is unclear, it is assumed that this text was written for an Anglo-Norman audience; Chrétien de Troyes' patrons were, however, more clearly tied to the court of Henry II. Because both texts originated in Anglo-Norman territory during the time Henry II expanded his power, and because, at least in Chrétien's case, the patronage of his texts indicates that he had ties to Henry II's court, it is very plausible that both poets, while dealing with questions of inheritance and conquest of land, ultimately weave Henry II's political ambitions into their romances. These political ambitions are reflected very clearly in the poets' ekphrastic insertions.

As mentioned above, the *Roman de Thèbes* features two extensive moments of ekphrasis. First, we encounter a detailed description of a *mappa mundi* (world map), which is attached to the entrance of the Greek King Adrastus' tent. The fictional map, although it is incorporated within a story in which Greeks fight their Theban neighbors because of an inheritance struggle, features twelfth-century notions of geography more

so than classical perceptions of geography. The map divides the known world into different sections, emphasizing which parts are habitable and uninhabitable, thus also subtly implying the scarcity of habitable land. Later on, once the first battle between Greeks and Thebans is launched, we receive a second lengthy instance of ekphrasis. The artifact described is an elaborately crafted chariot, which enables Amphiareus, a Greek prophet and seer, to charge into battle against the Thebans. The chariot is said to have been crafted by the Greco-Roman god Vulcan, who includes depictions of the Ptolemaic spheres, the Seven Liberal Arts, and segments of Greek mythology on his work of art. The supernatural chariot enables Amphiareus to display his prowess as a fighter before being, quite literally, swallowed by the earth. Both of these ekphrastic moments evidently seek to map out territory, be it that the *mappa mundi* traces the boundaries of the known world or that the chariot's depictions map out the cosmos with intricate details about each individual sphere.

Chrétien de Troyes also offers extensive moments of ekphrasis during the final scene of his narrative. In Chrétien's Arthurian romance, Erec, who is the hero of the story and a knight at Arthur's court, achieves great honor through various trials which he must undergo after his knightly prowess falls prey to his excessive love for his wife Enide. Erec manages to bring about the *joie de la curt* (joy of the court) by releasing Mabonagrin, an esteemed knight who has been obliged to stay in a magical garden because of his foolish promise to his beloved. Erec's father, King Lac, passes away shortly after Erec achieves this great feat, and Erec is subsequently crowned king of his inherited territory. The narrator describes the elaborate objects during the coronation scene which takes place in King Lac's castle. Of central importance is the robe Erec is wearing, which has been crafted by fairies. Each of the four fairies has embroidered

depictions of the *quadrivium* (the four numerical arts of the Seven Liberal Arts) onto the robe during the process of its production. Both Amphiareus' chariot and Erec's robe are therefore supernaturally created objects which feature depictions of the arts.

At the core of these texts, inheritance claims influence the plot lines and are, as I will argue, also intricately connected to the ekphrastic accounts featured in the romances. In the *Roman de Thèbes*, the *mappa mundi* and the chariot complement each other by addressing the need to expand territory to the northwestern part of the known world and suggest the desire to rule over the territory because it has been decreed so by destiny. Both the map and the chariot trace the terrestrial and celestial realm as conquerable spaces over which to exert authority. Erec's robe allows him to incorporate the superhuman aura of a ruler chosen by destiny, enabling him to lay claim over geographical and cosmological space as an authoritative ruler. The fairies who produce the robe are representatives of the otherworld; they function as relics of Breton lore, subsumed into a new Anglo-Norman tradition of storytelling. Greek and Roman cosmologies are also incorporated into the *Roman de Thèbes* through Vulcan, although this inclusion may not have had the same ties to the current political situation as it did with Chrétien de Troyes. Moreover, the depictions of the Arts on the chariot and the robe open the pathway to questions about how ekphrasis is linked to narrative strategies, as these depictions could be interpreted in different ways.

The term ekphrasis designates the “representation of an artwork of any kind in a literary work” (Harmon et al, 181). The term is usually limited to visual or graphic works, such as paintings, shields, statues, and other artifacts, that are depicted in literary

texts (Harmon et al, 181).<sup>2</sup> Haiko Wandhoff outlines various points of departure that researchers have taken to approach the topic of ekphrasis. He distinguishes between three major schools of thought. The first sees ekphrasis as a form of intermediality, that is to say as a gateway between visual and auditory media (Wandhoff, 4-7). The second focuses on the place of ekphrasis in narratology<sup>3</sup>; oftentimes, moments of ekphrasis will mirror narrational moments within a larger narrative. One can therefore speak of “micro-narratives” or “para-narratives” that are displayed on these artifacts (Wandhoff, 7-10). This is also where we can situate Linda Clemente’s study of literary *objets d’art* in medieval French Romances, in which she employs the term *mise en abyme* as a way of describing certain types of ekphrasis.<sup>4</sup> She argues that one should read *mise en abyme* in ekphrasis “as an analogy to and a constitutive symbol for its macro-structure” in order to “[wrench] ekphrasis from its ties to visual artwork” (Clemente 10). She thus proposes that this type of ekphrasis should be read exclusively from a narratological perspective.

A third school of thought builds on the other two, and forms a more recent theory that concerns itself with the idea of representation (Wandhoff, 10-12). This theory argues that ekphrasis is a moment that is “twice removed from reality,” because it is a depiction of something that is already depicted on an artifact (Blanchard, qtd. in Wandhoff, 10). This theory concerns itself especially with the idea that ekphrasis tries to

---

<sup>2</sup> One famous example of ekphrasis in ancient Greek epic literature is the description of the shield of Achilles in the *Iliad* (XVIII) (Harmon et al, 181).

<sup>3</sup> According to Harmon’s definition, narratology is “the sophisticated analysis of the relations among a story [...] and all the other elements involved in the telling thereof” (341). Narratology also often incorporates an examination into the narrator’s persona, voice, and style, and how these elements establish a relationship between the story, the narrator, and the audience (341). Some critics, like Bruhn or Clemente, have examined the use of ekphrasis in medieval literature through this approach.

<sup>4</sup> Harmon describes *mise en abyme* as follows: “In heraldry the representation of a small shield on a big shield (escutcheon) is called *en abyme*. More generally, placement *en abyme* has to do with any occasion when a small text is imprinted on or contained in a bigger text that it replicates. Fairly often, a film will contain another film, which serves as a commentary of sorts to the outer story” (328).

differentiate “between art and nature,” between “representation and non-representation” (Mario Klarer, qtd. in Wandhoff, 11).

Clemente’s idea of *mise en abyme* proves especially helpful when examining the three sections of Amphiareus’ chariot (the Seven Liberal Arts, the Ptolemaic Spheres, and the battle between Greek gods and giants). However, her theory of *mise en abyme* neglects to consider the socio-political influence which also affected the poets’ writing. Although she attempts to read Chrétien’s *Erec et Enide* in terms of micronarratives, her theory does not work as neatly when applied to Erec’s robe because of her negligence to consider Henry II’s expansionistic plans. Critics like Bruhn, however, have tried to read Erec’s robe in conjunction with a narrative framework, and although his approach makes more of an effort to consider twelfth-century educational practices, he neglects to consider the representation of space in the ekphrastic account of the coronation hall. Critics who have put significant emphasis on ekphrasis as part of a narrative structure have therefore often neglected other elements which may also inform interpretations of ekphrastic moments. One of these elements is the supernatural quality of the artifacts described.

As mentioned above, both texts incorporate extensive moments of ekphrasis which also feature artifacts that originate from supernatural sources, such as through the involvement of the four fairies who create Erec’s robe or the Greco-Roman god Vulcan who crafts Amphiareus’ chariot. In both texts, ornate art objects form a link between the “supernatural” worlds in which they are created, and the “natural” worlds in which they are used. As much of the narratives is devoted to describing these objects, I will analyze how the descriptions bridge the gap between "supernatural" and "natural" beings/worlds,

and how they evoke a sense of fetishism for these physical objects. In order to do so, I will rely on Tzvetan Todorov's analysis of the "fantastic."

Todorov's examination of supernatural elements in narratives leads him to create a specific genre which he calls the fantastic:

In a world which is indeed our world, the one we know, a world without devils, sylphides, or vampires, there occurs an event which cannot be explained by the laws of this same familiar world. The person who experiences the event must opt for one of two possible solutions: either he is the victim of an illusion of the senses, of a product of the imagination – and the laws of the world then remain what they are; or else the event has indeed taken place, it is an integral part of the reality – but then this reality is controlled by laws unknown to us. [...] The fantastic occupies the duration of this uncertainty. Once we choose one answer or the other, we leave the fantastic for a neighboring genre, the uncanny or the marvelous. The fantastic is that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event. (25)

The fantastic is thus the hesitation which precedes the choice to read a series of events as falling into either the uncanny or the marvelous. According to Todorov, the fantastic usually fulfils three requirements: the reader hesitates between a supernatural and a natural explanation for these turns of events; the character in the narrative hesitates before deciding whether these events are supernatural or not; and lastly, the reader must reject any allegorical<sup>5</sup> or poetical interpretations of the text to make clear that the text is not a fable (33). While Todorov's discussion focuses on novels, such as Jan Potocki's *The Saragossa Manuscript*, more so than on medieval romances, the latter thrive on descriptions of otherworldly experiences, so that Todorov's terminology can be helpful in analyzing the ekphrastic accounts of Amphiareus' chariot and Erec's robe.

---

<sup>5</sup> Harmon's definition of allegory outlines that it is "a form of extended metaphor in which objects, persons, and actions in a narrative are equated with meanings that lie outside the narrative itself. Thus, [the metaphor] represents one thing in the guise of another – an abstraction in that of a concrete image" (12). This "process of double signification" means that "the order of words represents actions and characters, and they, in turn, represent ideas" (12). Characters are therefore usually personifications of abstract qualities (12). This idea will be explored later, as certain critics read the representation of the Seven Liberal Arts in these texts as allegorical figures.

Todorov believes in transitory sub-genres of narratives because some narratives are not always clearly uncanny or clearly marvelous (44). He thus distinguishes between the transitory sub-genres of the fantastic-uncanny and the fantastic-marvelous (44). These two sub-genres straddle the border of the uncanny and the marvelous (44). Within the category of “marvelous” fiction, Todorov also distinguishes between the following sub-genres: the *hyperbolic marvelous* (i.e. “phenomena are supernatural only by virtue of their dimensions”) (54); the *exotic marvelous* (“The implicit reader is supposed to be ignorant of the regions where the events take place” so that the reader cannot question the supernatural events) (55); the *instrumental marvelous* (which includes marvelous “gadgets” like flying carpets) (56); and finally, the *scientific marvelous* (which is very close to science fiction; i.e. “the supernatural is explained in a rational manner, but according to laws which contemporary science does not acknowledge”) (56).<sup>6</sup>

Amphiaraus’ chariot and Erec’s robe, as we will see, fall into several of these categories, because they are objects which inspire the admiration of an audience which has never encountered any such otherworldly objects before. The ingenuity ascribed to the production of the robe and the chariot is similar and the language of both descriptions implies that the artistry is so unique that even the best craftsmen cannot compete with these otherworldly smithies and seamstresses. A simple identification of these objects within their “marvelous” categories, however, neglects to consider how the hyperbolic descriptions of these supernatural objects compare with other ekphrastic accounts of objects that do not derive from supernatural sources. These objects, especially Adrastus’ map and Erec’s other coronation items, inform the way one can read the inclusion of supernatural objects within the narrative. While the map is

---

<sup>6</sup> Please also refer to Todorov, pp. 44-56.



indicative of the narrative's spatial reasoning, the chariot is an otherworldly gift which blesses the mission of the Greeks. Likewise, the robe is set apart from other coronation items because it is a gift bestowed by the otherworldly realm as a signal to bless Erec's reign. The supernatural aura that Ampharicus' chariot and Erec's robe exude also enhances the status both of these characters hold within their fictional societies. Erec and Amphiareus obtain objects which have been produced by otherworldly beings for their use; therefore, the supernatural realm which surrounds the "natural" world of the narrative seems to support certain political objectives these characters have, as these objects can be read as a "gift" or "blessing" from the otherworldly beings for the characters' political missions.

The chariot and the robe therefore contain a strange position as supernatural commodities within these fictional societies. On the one hand, they have a certain use-value: the robe is meant to be worn and the chariot is meant to serve as a mode of transportation. However, the hyperbolic description directs the audience to focus on the exterior beauty of the artifacts, and perhaps even to meditate on the depictions of the Arts (and in the chariot's case, on those of the cosmos and the battle between Greek gods and giants), in order to gain a certain educational benefit from the description. This forced meditation upon these commodities, which emphasizes their uniqueness and their exorbitant value, implies that these artifacts are meant to be revered, even fetishized.

Slavoj Žižek's work on commodity fetishism proves very helpful as a point of comparison to the commodity fetishism which occurs in these narratives, although his theory about fetishism in pre-capitalist societies must be altered when considering the evidence these narratives offer. Žižek, who draws on the work of Marx, Freud, and mostly Lacan, establishes that commodity fetishism has been understood as "a definite

social relation between men, that assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things” (Marx, qtd. in Žižek, p. 23). He emphasizes that the Lacanian perspective slightly changes this assumption, because it implies an inversion of fetishism which focuses on the social relations of humans rather than that of things. This second mode of fetishism is ultimately incompatible with Marx’s idea of commodity fetishism because it focuses on the relationship between humans rather than between objects (Žižek 24-25). Ultimately, Žižek pursues this type of fetishism when he argues that because commodity fetishism is incompatible with this second mode of fetishism, societies which show symptoms of commodity fetishism will not fetishize “relations between men,” whereas those “pre-capitalist societies” which fetishize “relations between men” have not yet developed commodity fetishism (25). He exemplifies this as follows:

‘Being-a-king’ is an effect of the network of social relations between a ‘king’ and his ‘subjects’; but – and here is the fetishistic misrecognition – to the participants of this social bond, the relationship appears necessarily in an inverse form: they think that they are subjects giving the king royal treatment because the king is already in himself, outside the relationship to his subjects, a king; as if the determination of ‘being-a-king’ were a ‘natural’ property of the person of a king. How can one not remind oneself here of the famous Lacanian affirmation that a madman who believes to be a king is no more mad than a king who believes himself to be a king – who, that is, identifies immediately with the mandate ‘king’? (Žižek 25)

Žižek then posits that these so-called pre-capitalist societies have not developed commodity fetishism because the production of these commodities is “natural,” as they are not meant for “the market which predominates” production (25-26). According to this reasoning, pre-capitalist societies will therefore fetishize relationships rather than objects. However, the fetishism which occurs in these narratives renders Žižek’s reasoning faulty.

Even though the supernatural objects of the *Roman de Thèbes* and *Erec et Enide* are produced in fictional pre-capitalist societies, they contradict Žižek's understanding of commodity fetishism because their production and their use-value diverge from Žižek's line of argument. Although the chariot and the robe are not the results of a capitalist market based on supply and demand, they are nonetheless luxury items which inspire the awe of the reader/listener, and establish the position of authority of the fictional owner over other fictional characters of the narrative. As such, they establish a fetishized relationship between individuals through commodity fetishism, because they promote the ethos of those who own and use them.

My reading of these texts adds another layer to Žižek's understanding that, in feudalism "relations between people are mystified, mediated through a web of ideological beliefs and superstitions" (Žižek 34). While indeed, some relationships in these fictional worlds follow the pattern Žižek has laid out, the ekphrastic accounts inserted by the narrators of these two texts also illustrate a complex relationship between people and objects, which ultimately affects the relationship between those people who own these objects and those who do not. The fact that Erec's robe and Amphiareus' chariot do not result from a "natural" production, but from a "supernatural" production, influences the way these objects and their owners are viewed. In this specific case, Žižek's argument needs to be amended in order to account for the ekphrastic insertions of these luxury items which have been produced in these pre-capitalist narratives by supernatural forces.

Moreover, even though we have limited information about the reception of these texts during the twelfth century, it is possible that the description of these objects also had an impact on the members of the audience who are meant to revere these objects.

The reverence the ekphrastic accounts inspire would naturally lead a medieval audience to ascribe a position of authority to the fictional owners of these objects. In turn, because these narratives support rather than challenge the monarchs' authority, the audience is also subject to ideological interpellation through these fictions. The subtle references to territorial expansion, authoritative monarchs, and supernatural objects which aid and abet the conquest of fictional geographies, all resonate with an aristocratic audience tied to the court of Henry II.

In summary, Henry II's expansionistic agenda therefore weaves itself into these narratives, taking hold of fictional societies and territorializing fictional geographies. The moments of ekphrasis reveal these expansionistic plans, as the narrators of these romances pause in their narratives to provide elaborate and lengthy descriptions of luxury items. Significantly, two of these items, Erec's robe and Amphiareus' chariot, stem from the craftsmanship of supernatural workers, and therefore bridge the gap between the Otherworld and the "natural" world of these settings. Their supernatural origin adds to their value as commodities, and they are fetishized as uniquely crafted masterpieces. This type of commodity fetishism, however, also enhances the charisma of the owners of these items, who use them to signify their authority in these fictional settings and to accomplish their part in establishing a secure rule over the lands in question.

My thesis explores these works separately. The subsequent section treats the ekphrastic accounts featured in the *Roman de Thèbes*, focusing on the *mappa mundi* and Amphiareus' chariot. The chapter will also analyze how these moments mirror the ambitions of Henry II during the early stages of his reign. The penultimate section will then move on to discuss the coronation scene featured in Chrétien de Troyes' *Erec et*

*Enide*, with a special emphasis on Erec's robe. As we will see, the coronation scene mirrors the historical occurrences in of the late 1160s, during which time Henry tried to establish his authority in Brittany. The concluding section weaves these moments together to provide a comprehensive reading of these ekphrastic accounts.

CHAPTER 2: THE *MAPPA MUNDI* AND AMPHIAREUS' CHARIOT:  
HENRY II'S EXPANSIONISTIC AGENDA IN THE *ROMAN DE THÈBES*

The twelfth-century *Roman de Thèbes* is a rendering of the first-century Latin epic *Thebaïd* by Statius. The story relates the battle between Greeks and Thebans that breaks out because Polyneices and Etiocles, the sons of the Theban King Oedipus, disagree about how to share the rule over their inherited kingdom after their father's passing. They decide to alternate ruling over their kingdom; one brother will be in control for one year while the other brother is in exile (ll. 520-543). Polyneices, who seeks shelter at the court of the Greek King Adrastus during his year of exile, receives the support of the Greek fighters when he returns to his Theban home to challenge his brother, because Etiocles refuses to cede power to him after a year has passed. At the heart of the *Roman*, then, lies a major struggle for land. The brothers' squabble over their inherited kingdom dominates and drives the plot.

The Old French text features two moments of ekphrasis which are not in the original Latin text. Both instances of ekphrasis concern issues of space: a world map (*mappa mundi*) and various depictions which are embossed on the seer Amphiareus's chariot (See Appendices A and B for full passages). The *mappa mundi* is located at the entrance of King Adrastus' tent in which the Greek fighters camp before the commencement of the first battle against the Thebans (ll. 3979-4064). It is embroidered with the finest materials (ll. 3985-3989) and it divides the known world into various zones which are habitable and uninhabitable (ll. 3989-3990). The description of Amphiareus's chariot occurs during the first battle scene, when the narration of the battle pauses to insert the ekphrastic account right before Amphiareus's brutal death (ll.

4711-4779). This elaborate description of the chariot offers a representation of the nine Ptolemaic spheres, a depiction of the giants' rebellion against the Greek gods, and an image of the Seven Liberal Arts which is on the rear of the chariot (ll. 4721-4749).

In light of the fact that this poem was written during the 1150s, a time when Henry II was expanding his territory to the northwestern part of Europe, especially within the British Isles, it is not insignificant that the moments of ekphrasis deal with questions of space. The *mappa mundi* features the "natural" realm of the earth – its boundaries, climates, and peoples. However, critics make clear that this map represents twelfth-century perceptions of geography rather than first-century views. Juxtaposed to this description, the chariot features the fixed spheres of the "supernatural," celestial realm, which reminds the audience that an individual's destiny is fixed by the celestial forces which encircle the terrestrial realm. Once again, this cosmology is a twelfth-century projection and does not reflect the original Latin text. These moments of ekphrasis therefore show the liberties the twelfth-century poet takes while reworking a Latin epic for a medieval audience.

Aside from descriptions of space, it is also significant that Amphiareus' chariot is a gift from the Otherworld to aid the Greeks in their combat against the Thebans. Forged by Vulcan, the chariot is a supernatural commodity which, through its otherworldly forces, enhances Amphiareus' performance on the battlefield. In Žižekian terms, the description of chariot implies that an audience reading/listening to its description is also meant to take pleasure the sumptuous and exotic qualities of the depictions and the exotic animals which pull the chariot. This type of commodity fetishism also enhances Amphiareus' esteem within the narrative. While Amphiareus is a controversial figure who straddles the elusive boundary between the supernatural and the natural realm

through his mediation as a seer, he also displays superhuman strength as a fighter on the battlefield, because he owns the chariot. He therefore fulfills his part in the political mission of the Greeks before succumbing to his untimely death. The chariot, as a fantastic commodity, is therefore also meant to enable the Greeks to accomplish their territorialization of Thebes.

In *The Production of Space*, Henri Lefebvre proposes that a representation of space within a literary work can convey a hidden ideology (9). These literary representations of space are still fictional constructions within a fictional text. Geography can therefore be read as a fiction or construct, because any notions of border demarcations can be politically motivated. Considering the socio-political environment which surrounded the creation of the *Roman de Thèbes*, these moments of ekphrasis function in the narrative as a subtle form of political propaganda for Henry II's twelfth-century mission to expand his territory in the Northwestern part of Europe. This text was most likely created in 1150, at the early stages of Henry II's accession to power. A poet associated with the court of Henry II through his aristocratic patrons would have known of these ambitions well. Encoded within these ekphrastic accounts, we therefore have representations which, on the one hand, work well as examples of *mise en abyme*, as they can be read as micronarratives within the grander narrative of the *Roman*; on the other hand, they also reflect the twelfth-century projections of a political mission that included the territorialization of the British Isles.

Moreover, Amphiaraus, the Greek prophet, seer, and archbishop, who is knowledgeable about governing land, receives an otherworldly object from the god Vulcan. Here, the medieval author creates a hybrid cosmology, mixing a Judeo-Christian



worldview with Greco-Roman mythology.<sup>7</sup> Even though Amphiareus dies by being swallowed by the earth (a death he also suffers in the Latin original), the otherworldly chariot serves him well as a commodity that highlights his prowess as a fighter in battle. The political mission of the Greeks seems to have received the blessing of the gods through this gift, although the expedition is doomed by the Fates.<sup>8</sup> Amphiareus, who serves as a mediator to the Otherworld, is aware of the Greeks' destiny and relates the dangers of the expedition as a form of criticism before venturing to Thebes. The narrator casts Amphiareus in an ambiguous light, hailing him as a hero, but also drawing him as an elusive and pernicious character, comparing him to other political rebels featured in Biblical stories. The chariot, however, enhances his qualities as a fighter before he dies, bringing success to the Greeks in some measure.

Not much is known about the twelfth-century poet who crafted the *Roman*. According to Léopold Constans, who compiled the various remaining manuscripts into his 1890 edition, there are five extant manuscripts and two fragments (Constans, "Introduction" II-III).<sup>9</sup> Constans justifies the dating of what he believes was the "Ur-Thebes" by referring to a passage (ll. 8791-98), in which the Almoravides are said to aid King Adrastus (Constans CXVII-CXVIII and Smartt Coley, "Introduction," xxvi-xxvii).

---

<sup>7</sup> While the story takes place in Greece, where Hephaistos would be the corresponding god who functions as smith of the gods, Statius and the medieval poet latinize the names of the gods.

<sup>8</sup> While the Greek fighters fail to win against the Thebans and most die in the gruesome battles, the Greek widows return to Thebes with Duke Theseus to recover the bodies of their men. Theseus challenges Creon, who has been elected ruler of Thebes after Etiocles' passing. Because Creon refuses to surrender the city, Theseus kills him, which means that the Greeks, in the end, do win, but not without extensive losses.

<sup>9</sup> Three of the manuscripts are in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris (A, B, and C), and two of them (S for Spalding in Lincolnshire and P for Cheltenham in Gloucestershire) were in private libraries at the time of Constans' publications (Constans, Introduction, II- XIV). L. G. Donovan's bibliography, however, recounts that MS S is now held in the British Museum in London, while MS P is kept in the Fondation Bodmer in Geneva, Switzerland. The Bibliothèque municipale d'Angers still holds the two fragments which are marked by the letter D.

The twelfth-century historical accounts of the Almoravides indicated that their own political situation would not have allowed them to aid another people after 1163 (Smartt Coley xxvi). Constans also cites certain lines in the *Roman d'Enéas*, which was also composed in the 1150s, indicating that the author of the *Roman d'Enéas* was familiar with the *Roman de Thèbes* (Smartt Coley xvii; Constans CXVIII). These textual references led Constans to assume that the *Roman de Thèbes* was most likely created in 1150 or shortly before, most probably by a courtly cleric residing in the North or Northwest of France (Constans XXIII and Smartt Coley xxvii-xxix). If this poet therefore resided in this part of France during the 1140s and 1150s, he would have been affected by the inheritance and accession struggles of Henry II.

The *mappa mundi* is the first of these two examples of ekphrasis that we encounter in the *Roman de Thèbes*. As mentioned, this map is located on King Adrastus's tent, who, along with the six other Greek chieftains, camps outside Thebes. The description of this map, significantly, appears right before the first battle scene between Greeks and Thebans (l. 3986). This is therefore a moment where the narrative pauses before the bloodshed and the general mayhem of the battle begin. The map, as we read, is located at the entrance of the tent. It is embroidered with the finest materials (l. 3985-3989) and it divides the "known world" into "five zones/Painted just as nature made them" (ll. 3989-3990). With North at the top of the map and South at the bottom, this map can be classified as a quadripartite map,<sup>10</sup> and the poet indicates that only the

---

<sup>10</sup> The description of the map implies that it is a quadripartite map, as it features the climactic regions of the world. The map, however, also includes characteristics of both the zonal and the tripartite mappae mundi. As David Woodward points out, there are not very many examples of these maps, but "they are sufficiently distinctive to warrant a separate category" (296). Quadripartite maps are then a type of hybrid; although they form their own category in Woodward's study, it is clear that these types of maps are combinations of zonal and tripartite maps. Whether the poet consciously chose this particular type of map over tripartite or zonal maps for a reason is unclear; however, the 12<sup>th</sup> century did see an increase in the

northwestern region of the map is worthy of being inhabited (ll. 3991-4002). According to twelfth-century cartography, Europe was located in the northwestern part of these round world maps (Donovan 223-226). The text thus features Europe as the only habitable location in this fictional ancient world, because, as the poet states:

En ot une que fu tempree:  
Devers gualerne est habitee . (ll. 4001-4002)

There was one [region] which was temperate;  
Toward the northwest it was inhabited. (ll. 4001-4002)

If there is indeed only a certain part of this fictional world which can be inhabited because the climate permits it, then that would inform Polyneices' decision to claim his territory in that specific, temperate zone. If his brother does not share the rule over the territory that they both inherited, then that would mean that Polyneices would have a difficult time finding land elsewhere within this temperate zone, because it has already been divided into specific kingdoms, each ruled by kings with their respective territories marked on the world map:

Tuit li reaume et tuit li rei  
Sont iluec peint chascuns par sei (ll. 4007-4008)

All the kingdoms and all the kings  
Were represented there individually (ll. 4007-4008).

Including the world map at this point of the narrative therefore emphasizes the importance of the mission on which the Greeks are embarking. They must ensure that Polyneices receives his land, because he cannot rule anywhere else. Polyneices' and Etioles' anxiety to claim their inheritance, especially their struggle to acquire and

---

production of these maps, so one possible reason would be that the poet chose the map because of its increased popularity (Woodward 298).

maintain their claim on land, becomes more acute because, as the map indicates, only a certain region of the known world, the Northwest, is habitable.

The socio-political environment of twelfth-century Europe provides a context for the poet's inclusion of a quadripartite *mappa mundi*. Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski implies that the *romans antiques* had a connection with the Angevin dynasty and may very well have been used to legitimize Henry's territorial aspirations (2). Indeed, Henry II moved very fast to accomplish his goals. His "dreams of empire" were perhaps the driving force behind his conquests, and were known at the early stages of his career (Keefe 23). Even at the age of 16, in 1149, when he assumed his title as Duke of Normandy, Henry II wanted to claim the lands in England to which he would have been entitled through his grandfather Henry I (Keefe 1-2). Two years after his marriage to Eleanor of Aquitaine, Henry finally did accomplish this goal in 1154. Throughout his reign, Henry II extended his territory in the British Isles by gaining Cumbria and Northumbria from Malcom IV of Scotland and by invading Ireland and securing an English presence there. These conquests of the early 1170s took place rather rapidly (Gillingham 59, Kearney 117). Hugh Kearney even describes this invasion of the Norman and post-Norman ascendancy within Wales and Scotland as a "blitzkrieg" (Kearney 117). This term seems anachronistic, but strangely appropriate, considering the speed and determination needed to spread out his authority over the British Isles. By the end of his lifetime, Henry II thus held not only a large part of France, but also claimed land in the British Isles. The political situation in the twelfth-century holdings of Henry II was such that, a medieval poet adapting a Latin text which deals with questions of territory may very well have been influenced by the political conquests taking place around him. Indeed, I imagine that it would have been very hard for a poet not to be

influenced by European court politics of the twelfth century, especially if the imagined audience of the text was composed of members of the court.

Thus the insertion of the map, which is itself an intricately made object, foreshadows not only the mastery of space which will occur in the narrative, but also the conquests the young and ambitious Henry II will accomplish throughout the early 1150s. The ekphrastic moment therefore carves out the political mission of the fictional fighters as well as that of the twelfth-century political leaders. The map is an aid to understanding the boundaries of the “natural” world within the fictional context of the *Roman*. However, its inclusion also foreshadows the ekphrastic account of Amphiarieus’ chariot, which, among other things, outlines the cosmos and symbolizes the intersection between the “natural” and the “supernatural” realms.

The chariot is an artifact which bridges the gap between the “natural” realm of this fictional Ancient Greek world, and the “supernatural” world of a hybrid ancient mythological and medieval cosmology. The narrator uses exaggerated language to describe this artifact, aimed at convincing the audience that this chariot is indeed otherworldly – a thing which has not yet been seen on earth. The depictions of the chariot can, however, also be read bearing Clemente’s theory of micronarratives in mind. These micronarratives are well-placed insertions in the grander narrative of the *Roman*, but their inclusion stems from the political motivation of the narrator. The depictions on the chariot appear as subtle reminders to an audience of the territorial ambitions of the young medieval ruler. The cosmological references to the Ptolemaic spheres admonish an audience about their fixed destinies. The story of the giants’ rebellion, in turn, functions as a warning to those who rebel against authority figures, and the depiction of the Seven Liberal Arts might well be a reference to the civilizing

process which takes place in Henry II's newly claimed territories. On a fictional level, the supernatural chariot establishes the authority of Amphiareus as a prophet, seer, and leader within the battle against the Thebans, because its supernatural origins enhance Amphiareus' display of *aristeia*, the Greek term for valorous prowess in battle.

The ekphrastic account of Amphiareus' chariot occurs during the first battle scene between Greeks and Thebans right before Amphiareus's brutal death (ll. 4711-4779). The poet's rhetoric draws the audience's attention to the sumptuous qualities of the object, while simultaneously making note of its supernatural heritage. The object was supposedly "made beyond St. Thomas" (ll. 4714-4715).<sup>11</sup> As the narrator gives us no notion of where exactly St. Thomas is located, we might assume that it is on the threshold to the otherworldly realm where the medieval poet imagined the gods to dwell.

The poet mentions that the chariot was made by Vulcan, the god of fire (l. 4715). Vulcan, or Hephaistos, is known in the Greco-Roman tradition as the only "ugly" and lame god (Hamilton 36). Various sources discuss how he was thrown from Mount Olympus, where all the other immortals dwelled. The *Illiad* mentions that Hera, his mother, threw him from heaven; another source explains that Zeus lost his temper with Vulcan, and thus cast him out (Hamilton 36). Homer, however, relates that, much later, Vulcan was welcomed again to Mount Olympus, and was honored as the armorer and smith of immortals (Hamilton 36). In most sources, he is married to Aphrodite (or Venus, in the Roman tradition) (Hamilton 36-37). Vulcan, the smith of the gods who is somewhat of an outcast of Mount Olympus, becomes the craftsman of an object, which, in this narrative, is not to be used by the gods, but by a mortal. The medieval poet emphasizes that Vulcan used "artistry" ("art") and "enchantment" ("enchantment") in

---

<sup>11</sup> "Qui fu faiz outre Saint Thomas: / Vulcans le fist par grant porpens" (ll. 4714-4715).

the process of crafting the chariot (l. 4720). The chariot is therefore not only a technological masterpiece, but it was clearly forged by someone who used supernatural, possibly even pernicious, powers during its creation.

Todorov's categories for "marvelous" fictional matter help to reveal the supernatural *mélange* that makes up Amphiaraus' chariot. The chariot appears as a hyperbolically marvelous object, because of the chariot's exaggerated perfection or its perfect workmanship, as it apparently had "no flaw at all" (l. 4764).<sup>12</sup> The origins of the chariot, which lie "beyond St. Thomas," form an *exotic marvelous* aspect (l. 4714). Moreover, the chariot is pulled by what John Smartt Coley has translated as "four zebras" ("quatre azeivre"), exotic beasts who leave no hoof-prints because they travel so fast (ll. 4775-4777). This fits the *instrumental marvelous* or *scientific marvelous*, because of its special functions, like the gadgets that either sound "the horn for the charge" or continuously pipe "clearer than a lute or a viol" (ll. 4765-4768).<sup>13</sup> These items may be examples of technological advancements which are too difficult for contemporaries to understand, but they may also be magical items, which emit their sounds when prompted by an unseen supernatural force.

Historian Richard Kiekhefer reports that "the technology for creating mechanical men and beasts had been known since antiquity" (Kiekhefer 100). Treatises written by Philo of Byzantium and Hero of Alexandria incorporate accounts of such technological advancements (Kiekhefer 100). The Byzantine and Muslim cultures were apparently better at preserving this type of technology in the Middle Ages than those in Western Europe (Kiekhefer 100). Liutprand of Cremona, who traveled to Constantinople during

---

<sup>12</sup> "Bien fu ovrez, onc n'i ot faille." (4764)

<sup>13</sup> "Une image I ot tresgetee,/Que vait cornant a la mencee;/Une autre que toz tens frestèle/ Plus clér que rote ne vïele. (ll. 4765-4768).

the 10<sup>th</sup> century, was astounded by the marvelous “Throne of Solomon,” i.e. the emperor’s seat, which featured a bronze tree with bronze birds, “which uttered different cries, each according to its varying species” (William Eamon,<sup>14</sup> qtd. in Kiekhefer, 100-101). Such technological advancements were more common in Western Europe by the thirteenth century, but needed the funding of affluent nobility in order to be produced (Kiekhefer 101). The twelfth century, however, may still talk of technological advancements as if they were forged in a supernatural or exotic location.

Kiekhefer also emphasizes that, in general, medieval writers treated these mechanisms with caution: “No matter how well known these mechanisms became, writers of fiction persisted in teasing their readers with the suggestion that such things were done by ‘necromancy’” (Kiekhefer 101). Kiekhefer uses fifteenth-century examples, such as the works of physician Giovanni da Fontana or Conrad Kyeser, to establish that men at the forefront of engineering purposely used the superstition of the wider public to create a pernicious, even demonic aura of their ability to produce these objects (101-102). Kyeser, who crafted military machines, even created a battle wagon in “the form of a giant cat with its claws outstretched in a threatening gesture” (Kiekhefer 102). Amphiareus’ fictional chariot is therefore an ambiguous addition to the narrative the medieval poet is devising: part-technological masterpiece, part-magical object, it was created by a marginalized god who, according to various traditions, practiced his (perhaps malignant) “artistry” or “enchantment” on the outskirts of Mount Olympus. The chariot’s pernicious but magical qualities might also lend its owner Amphiareus an aura of awe-inspiring leadership within this battle.

---

<sup>14</sup> William Eamon, “Technology as magic in the late Middle Ages and Renaissance,” *Janus* 70 (1983): 175.



Of course, one must also consider that the depictions of this technological/magical masterpiece might carry interpretive value. As mentioned, there are three distinct sections on the chariot which might be interpreted as micronarratives within the larger structure of the *Roman*. Clemente's idea of *mise en abyme* proves especially helpful when examining the three sections of Amphiareus' chariot.

In the first section (ll. 4711-4730; Refer to Appendix B for full passage), the poet indulges in astrothesia, an elaborate description of the stars, to describe a cosmological framework which Vulcan has managed to capture and display on the chariot by means of "artistry and enchantment." The poet describes the Ptolemaic spheres: the constellations form the outer circle, whereas the seven "lesser" circles are made up of "planets and the course of the stars" (ll. 4721-4728). This elaborate description emphasizes that the "ninth sphere," i.e. the sphere that is made up of "the land and the deep sea," is encircled by fixed, organized spheres which form the celestial realm (l. 4726). While the poet does not necessarily mention the prime mover by name, it is implied that the constellations ("les signes") are part of the greatest sphere ("la maior" = greatest / spheres = "espères"), and that Vulcan placed all of the spheres "in order" ("par ordre") (ll. 4721-4722). This established "order" of the spheres, which the medieval poet anachronistically applies to the Greco-Roman world of Vulcan, evokes other medieval literary images of the cosmos, in which the prime mover (as in Chaucer's *The Knight's Tale*, for example) fixes the destinies of certain characters. Likewise, the anonymous poet might have wanted to imply that Polyneices' and Etiocles' destinies are fixed by the constellations as well. Even Amphiareus' destiny is fixed; even though he is able to predict his own death, he is not able to change his destiny.

In the Old French text,<sup>15</sup> Amphiaraus is an archbishop, as well as a prophet who “knows the secrets of heaven,”<sup>16</sup> and thirdly, he also a “master” of the laws of Greece.<sup>17</sup> The role of Amphiaraus must also be considered, because it informs the questions of land inheritance and the governing of territories. He is described as being a “master of [Greek] law” (l. 2027)<sup>18</sup> who “had taught [Adrastus] to govern the land” (l. 4883).<sup>19</sup> He is first introduced when Adrastus wonders whether or not they should embark on this mission to Thebes:

Amphiarias manda li reis,  
 Un arcevesque mout corteis:  
 Cil esteit maistre de lor lei,  
 Del ciel saveit tot le secrei;  
 Il prent respons et giéte sorz  
 Et reviver fait homes morz;  
 De toz oiseaus sot le latin,  
 Soz ciel n’aveit meillor devin. (ll. 2025-2032)

King Adrastus summoned Amphiaraus,  
 A very noble archbishop;  
 He was master of their law  
 And knew all the secrets of heaven;  
 He received answers and cast lots  
 And made dead men live again;  
 He knew the language of all birds –  
 There was not under heaven a better prophet. (ll. 2025-2032)

---

<sup>15</sup> In Statius’s version, he is known as Amphiaraus, a seer who is one of the seven leaders setting out to fight the Thebans. The other Greek leaders are Adrastus, Polynices, Tydeus, Hippomedon, Capaneus, and young Parthenopaeus (Melville, xlix). Amphiaraus appears most prominently in the Latin text, when he predicts the failure of the expedition to Thebes in Book II, has a chariot race (with the help of Apollo, who seems to be on his side) in Book VI, and then dies in Book VII during the first battle, where he fights well through the help of Apollo but then drives his chariot into the abyss that has been created through a large earthquake (Melville, “Summary of the Poem,” xlix-lii). Amphiaraus then enters the Underworld in Book VIII, and this intrusion surprises Pluto, the god of the underworld, so much that Pluto plans to unleash his vengeance, until Amphiaraus explains the situation. Amphiaraus, once he has entered the Underworld, cannot exit, and so the Greeks are left to mourn his engulfment by the earth (Melville, “Summary of the Poem,” xlix-lii).

<sup>16</sup> “Del ciel savait tot le secrei” (2028)

<sup>17</sup> “Cil esteit maistre de lor lei” (2027)

<sup>18</sup> “Cil esteit maistre de lor lei,/Del ciel saveit tot le secrei;” (2027-2028)

<sup>19</sup> “Enseignot lui terre a tenir” (4883)

Similar to the Latin original, Amphiareus predicts the failure of the expedition in this version (l. 2028). He also predicts his own death, which he describes as follows, and which is very similar to the Latin original:

Se vos a Thèbes les menez,  
 Se jo onc rien d'augure soi,  
 Mout en retournera ça poi.  
 Jo i morrai, se tu m'i meines,  
 Ne vivrai mie dous semaines;  
 Et j anus hon ne m'ocira,  
 Mais la terre me sorbira,  
 Sorbira mei et mon cheval  
 Jusqu'en parfont abisme a val. (ll. 2043-2050).

If you lead them to Thebes—  
 If I am ever anything of a prophet---  
 If you take me there [to Thebes], I will die there;  
 I will not live even two weeks;  
 And yet no man will kill me.  
 But the earth will swallow me,  
 Will swallow me and my horse  
 Into the deep abyss below. (ll. 2043-2050)

Sure enough, Amphiareus's prediction holds true, and he dies very tragically during the first battle between Greeks and Thebans (Refer to Appendix C for the full passage). The passage indicates that, as God has decreed it and Amphiareus has predicted it, "the earth actually swallows him /As it did Abiram and Dathan" (ll. 4837-4838). The poet thus mentions Amphiareus' death in the same breath as the deaths of two Biblical rebels.

The passage describing Amphiareus' death shows the hybrid nature of the cosmology the medieval poet is crafting for the sake of the *Roman*. While, on the one hand, the audience finds a pagan Greco-Roman tradition, they also see the medieval poet's Christian projections very clearly in two places. The poet mentions that "Deus" (God) had predestined Amphiareus's death, and secondly, the poet likens Amphiareus's death to the Old Testament example of Dathan and Abiram, whose story is featured in

Numbers Chapter 16 (*KJV*). These two brothers were the sons of Korah, who led a rebellion against Moses and Aaron, and in retribution, Moses asks God to devise a “new” punishment for these two rebellious brothers (Numbers 16:30). God therefore opens up the earth, which swallows the brothers, as well as their households and their possessions (Numbers 16: 32). This story, referred to in one line only, is an interesting intertextual insertion, because it refers to a story of two brothers who rebel against authorities. While reworking the Latin version of his demise, the poet frames his medieval Amphiaraus’s death in a Judeo-Christian narrative framework. Although Amphiaraus is not as rebellious as the two Old Testament brothers, he does warn the Greek leaders about the impending failure of their expedition. This type of doubt or criticism may have merited him a comparison to the rebellious brothers, as their deaths are described similarly. Neither the brothers nor Amphiaraus can help their allotted destiny. They are helpless when faced with God’s will for them.<sup>20</sup>

Comparing the Latin Amphiaraus to the medieval Amphiaraus, Patricia Grout also points out that the support of the Greek god Apollo is conspicuously absent in the Old French text (28). She moreover notices that the chasm which swallows Amphiaraus in the *Roman de Thèbes* does not close immediately; this leads her to examine the

---

<sup>20</sup> Although Statius’s Amphiaraus has a chariot, this chariot does not bear the same image as that of the medieval Amphiaraus, or at least, the reader does not receive as detailed a description. Significant is the fact that the Latin Amphiaraus has a charioteer who is killed in the first battle, at which point Amphiaraus must then take over the reigns (Melville, “Summary of the Poem,” lii). The medieval Amphiaraus, however, relies on his own strength as a charioteer during the battle. Moreover, the Latin Amphiaraus is a seer who is aided by Apollo, while the medieval Amphiaraus is introduced, as mentioned before, as an “archbishop” (l. 2026), who is also a “prophet” (l. 2033) and a “master of law” l. 2027). Although the medieval Amphiaraus often invokes the gods, he does not have any one specific god aiding him in battle; rather, his efforts in battle are a “one-man show” in which he displays *aristeia*, the Greek term for valorous prowess in battle (Dewar, “Introduction,” xix). The Latin Amphiaraus, however, has both divine help through Apollo, and throughout a good part of the Latin text, human help through a charioteer.

grieving process the Greeks undergo in the medieval text (28). Grout draws the parallels about grieving as follows:

It is true that in the *Thebaid* the Argives do not consider turning home, but they do obviously feel that they may have committed some specific crime for which they have been called upon to atone (VIII, 318). The attitude of the Argives in the *Roman de Thèbes*, while not so different, is more obviously Christian in nature. They see themselves as being in a general state of sin. . . . They see Amphiaraus as having died because of their sins, and not, as in the *Thebaid*, as a sign that they have committed some crime, or through the failure of Apollo to protect his priest (VIII, 176). (28)

Grout thus emphasizes the Christian projections the medieval author uses in his recreation of the Latin seer. In Grout's analysis, Amphiaraus becomes a Christ-figure; through his death, the Greeks are atoned.

As Grout aptly notes, the medieval Amphiaraus is clearly modeled after the Latin original, but also modified to suit a twelfth-century Christian audience.<sup>21</sup> Yet, the Old French Amphiaraus is a character who clearly shows the ambiguity of translating or reworking pagan material for a courtly Christian audience. His character certainly is not exclusively Christian, even though he is called an "archbishop" at times. Amphiaraus is also skilled in augury, reading the future through signs. Rather than reading his character exclusively as a sacrificial Christ-figure who atones the crimes the Greek army has committed, I would read him as someone who can intercede with the supernatural realm, because he is able to foresee the future through his elusive and perhaps malignant craft. More interesting, however, is the idea that he cannot fight against his destiny, even though he can predict it. The idea of destiny, in the classical Greek tradition, was tied to the three Fates, or Moirae: Clotho was known for spinning the thread of life; Lachesis cast lots according to each man's destiny; and Atropos cut the thread of life with her

---

<sup>21</sup> Aimé Petit has also argued this in "'Monseigneur' Amphiaraus?." *Les Lettres Romanes* 33 (1979): 163-171.

shears (Hamilton 48-49). Destiny, in this medieval rendering of a Greek tale, is fixed by celestial constellations of the spheres, as depicted on the chariot which will lead Amphiareus to his untimely death. While Amphiareus' destiny is thus prefixed, he cannot change it.

The description of the cosmos, embedded on the chariot, may have also been intended to remind the audience of the *Roman* that their own destiny is fixed by the constellations, or by God, who created the universe and controls the lives of the humans within it through the power of the constellations. Historian Robert Bartlett recounts that astrology, which had been practiced avidly in the ancient world and in the early Middle Ages, was revived and more popular in the twelfth century because of "the influx of Arabic science" during this time (Bartlett 648). He calls astrology "the most elaborate and self-consciously scientific form of prediction" of the Middle Ages (Bartlett 647). Other forms of soothsaying, like palmistry, crystal-gazing, or the invoking of demons, were criticized by the Church; astrology was more esteemed (Bartlett 645-647). Apparently, there are even four horoscopes left behind which were devised by the help of astrologers at Stephen's court in 1151, and which concerned the political events which would take place within that year (Bartlett 648). These historical examples lead us assume that medieval contemporaries believed in fixed destinies, as well as in the ability to ascertain, through the means of astrology, what their destinies were. This tendency is also reflected in the fact that the medieval poet chooses to insert a description of Amphiareus's chariot before his destined death, and that this chariot, moreover, includes a detailed description of the celestial spheres, which evokes the image that a certain destiny is fixed for each individual on earth.

The rebellion of the giants against the Greco-Roman gods forms part of the second section of the chariot (ll. 4731-4748). In Greek mythology, the giants were born when Gaia, Mother Earth, decided she had had enough offspring with her husband Uranus, the Heavenly Firmament. She asked her Titan son Chronos to castrate his father, and her son dutifully accomplished this feat (Hamilton 80). Uranus's wound bled and from the blood were born the giants, as well the Furies (Hamilton 80). The gods of Mount Olympus had a succession of civil wars to deal with before they could really feel secure about their position; first, they had to defeat the Titans, who were actually their ancestors; then, they had to defeat a horrible creature named Typhon; and lastly, they had to defeat the giants, who also tried to claim their power (Hamilton 80-83). Once they were defeated, the giants were hurled into Tartarus, which is the part in the Underworld that is designated for worst torture imaginable (Hamilton 83). Although sources differ about the exact location of the Underworld in the Greek imaginary, one version speaks of Tartarus as being in "the bowels of the earth" (Leadbetter, "Gaia"). The death of the giants therefore directly parallels Amphiareus' death. However, the narrative is ambiguous as to whether we are meant to understand that Amphiareus himself is a rebel.

Inserting a description of a painting that depicts this power struggle serves as an important micronarrative in the larger narrative of the *Roman*. It serves as a warning to those who rebel against authority. The giants were all swallowed by the earth or hurled into the bowels of the earth as a form of punishment. Of Amphiareus, it is also said that "Mother Earth swallowed him"<sup>22</sup> (4861). While he does not challenge authority, he does voice criticism about the expedition. However, it is his allotted destiny to die this way, both in the Latin and in the Old French version, so mere criticism of the expedition does

---

<sup>22</sup> "Com terre mère le sorbi" (4861).

not necessarily contribute to his engulfment by the earth. The medieval poet successfully amplifies the theme of earthly entombment by turning it into an intertextual reference to Greek mythology on the chariot. Within the myth of the giants, engulfment was indeed the punishment allotted to rebels. Moreover, within a biblical context, rebels like Abiram and Dathan were also punished by being swallowed by the earth. By using these intertextual micronarratives, the poet thus makes brief references to cases of power struggles which ended badly for those who challenged authority figures, while interweaving them with the main plot of the story, which is in closer keeping to the original Latin version. Amphiareus' character remains ambiguous. While his death is in keeping with the Latin original, the micronarratives inserted in the French text highlight the possibility that the poet wanted to voice a critique about Amphiareus' challenge of Adrastus' authority.

In a final moment of ekphrasis, the author offers a detailed depiction of the Seven Liberal Arts on the rear of the chariot (ll. 4749-4762). After listing the Ptolemaic spheres, the poet emphasizes that

Qui de physique sot entendre,  
Es peintures pot mout aprende. (4729-4730)

He who could understand natural philosophy  
Could learn much from the paintings. (4729-4730)

It seems odd that the poet would admonish his audience to pay close heed to the educational benefits of this technological masterpiece. Given that critics like Constans believe that the poet was a courtly cleric, this passage could refer to the value he places in the Classical educational curriculum which incorporated the Seven Liberal Arts. Some critics have attempted to read the Arts as micronarratives within the larger narrative of the *Roman*. However, the Arts have also been interpreted as an insertion



which refers to Henry II's attempt to bring civilization to his new territories through the Arts.

Yet, the passage also emphasizes a certain fetishism which the poet inspires in his audience. They are clearly meant to admire the sumptuous qualities of the chariot and the intricate depictions of the Arts, but also take with them an increased understanding through meditation upon the chariot's depictions. It follows that someone who masters learning will therefore probably be revered as well. An inclusion of the Arts within the chariot, a vehicle that is mastered by Amphiaraus (who himself is a learned man), therefore inspires an audience to revere him. Mastery of the Arts also, to a certain extent, grants the right technological knowledge to master measuring the earth through Geometry's rod and the stars through Astronomy's astrolabe (ll. 4759-4762). Mastering the Arts therefore also leads to a mastery over the terrestrial and celestial realm.

Blumenfeld-Kosinski reads this passage of the depiction of the chariot with an eye towards the "civilizing process" which is emphasized through the inclusion of the Seven Liberal Arts (5-7). She argues that "this passage can be taken to represent poetic creation" because it reflects the ideas of ancient rhetoric: *inventio* (through the term "estuide"), *dispositio* (through the term "Conseil"), and *elocutio* (through the term "enchantment") (5). As a counterpoint, she argues, the poet places the story of the giants' usurpation, which supposedly "serves as a negative exemplum of what can happen in an illegitimate power struggle" (6). The Seven Liberal Arts, according to Blumenfeld-Kosinski are thus meant to favor civilized learning over illegitimate power struggles (6). Blumenfeld-Kosinski offers a valid interpretation of the civilizing power of the Arts, but the story of the giants also works well when examined with an eye

towards Clemente's idea of narratology. Within the grand narrative of the *Roman*, the illegitimate power struggle of giants can be read as a parallel to the illegitimate power struggle between Polyneices and Etioeles. Considering the socio-political environment surrounding the creation of the *Roman*, it is also necessary to step outside the bounds of a narrative framework, in order to analyze how the poet mirrors historical realities within his ekphrastic moments.

Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski points to a "curious commentary on Statius's epic that had been attributed to Fulgentius but has now been recognized to date back to the twelfth century (3). Based on the influence of the School of Chartres, this commentary interprets "Thebes as the soul, Laius as the sacred light, the Seven against Thebes as the Seven Liberal Arts (i.e. worldly wisdom), Oediups as licentiousness, Jocasta as pure joy (defiled by Oedipus's birth), Hypsipyle as idolatry, and Ethioeles and Polynices as greed and lust..." (3). This interpretation therefore reads the Latin epic as an allegorical piece and informs the portrayal of the Seven Liberal Arts on the rear of the chariot in the Old French text. A purely allegorical reading eliminates the possibility of reading the chariot as a fantastic otherworldly object, though.

The fixed celestial spheres portrayed on the chariot, along with the story of the giants, and the description of the Seven Liberal Arts, form the second moment of ekphrasis during which the narrator pauses, before describing the brutal death of Amphiareus. While the spheres are meant to indicate what lies in the future and are meant to show individuals that their destiny has already been decided for them, the story of the giants poses a warning for those who question the authority of a young and ambitious ruler who wishes to claim his birthright as the King of England. Blumenfeld-Kosinski offers a valid reading of the Seven Liberal Arts; perhaps Henry II's court did

include a “civilizing process” in its mission to conquer the northwestern part of Europe. These territorial ambitions, which have worked their way into the narrative of the *Roman de Thèbes*, are encoded in these moments of ekphrasis which are embedded within the narrative. The *mappa mundi* clearly outlines the “known world” and forms a plan of action to territorialize the northwestern part of Europe. The chariot, a fantastic, otherworldly object masterfully incorporates the means for how Henry II will accomplish this feat: through the blessing of destiny, through the unquestioned authority of a monarch, and through a mastery of the Arts which will bring education to the realms which are to be conquered.

Amphiareus is incorporated as an elusive and possibly even pernicious character, whose inclusion in the medieval version of the tale opens up some interesting questions. The poet clearly models this character after the Latin original, but also reserves the right to make some changes in his presentation of him, especially during the scene with the chariot. While Amphiareus’ own supernatural abilities and the chariot itself might have a devious quality about them, it seems that the supernatural chariot – if only for a brief time before he dies – establishes his ethos as a prophet and seer, and gives him a chance to display the kind of prowess that might be expected from a warrior.

To use the terminology employed by Žižek, the chariot is therefore a valuable commodity which is clearly fetishized. Since it stems from a supernatural source, its mode of production is, however, clearly not “natural,” even though it is featured in a fictional pre-capitalist society. The chariot enhances the status of its owner and clearly allows him to establish his position of authority within the clan of Greek fighters who revere him. The type of commodity fetishism we encounter here therefore also clearly creates fetishism for the owner of said commodity.

The chariot does, however, also lend its owner an aura of necromancy, a possibly malevolent quality which, coupled with the fact that Amphiareus voices critique about the excursion to Thebes, may have been the reason the author compared his death to that of other political dissidents. Before his untimely death, Amphiareus is presented as a mediator between the “natural” and the “supernatural” realm of this fictional cosmology, but he is also able to govern the land and to teach Adrastus the knowledge associated with governing his kingdom. For him the chariot therefore has a dualistic function. Blessed by the gods and inscribed by Vulcan with the sign of the fixed constellations, it seals Amphiareus’ destiny, but it also allows him to establish his place in the fictional society of Greek warriors.

CHAPTER 3: EREC'S ROBE: MASTERY OF SPACE AND THE  
SUBJUGATION OF BRETON LORDS IN CHRÉTIEN DE TROYES' *EREC ET  
ENIDE*

Chrétien de Troyes' *Erec et Enide* is the earliest example of an Arthurian Romance and was probably created around 1170 (Duggan, "Afterword," *Erec et Enide*, 221). At the core of the story lies the relationship of Arthur's young knight Erec and his wife Enide. Erec's marriage negatively affects his chivalrous prowess because he overindulges in the physical pleasures of marriage while neglecting his knightly duties (i.e. jousting in tournaments and seeking *aventure*). When he finds out, through a slip of the tongue by Enide, that his fellow knights are speaking badly about his behavior, Erec decides to leave the comfort of his father's castle (where they are residing at this point in the narrative) in search of *aventure*. He brings Enide along, to ascertain her love for him through what a twenty-first-century reader might perceive as rather cruel treatment. After various trials, in which Erec's prowess and Enide's loyalty are tested, the two lovers are reconciled. At the close of the romance, after Erec's father, King Lac, passes away, they are ready to assume their roles as rulers. In the closing coronation scene, the narrator includes extensive ekphrastic moments in order to describe the objects within the coronation hall.

In this culminating moment of the narrative, we therefore receive a detailed description of various sumptuous objects which feature prominently in the coronation hall for Erec's new role as a king (Refer to Appendices E, F, G, and H for full passages). As Arthur prepares to crown Erec, both of them sit on intricately carved ivory and gold thrones, which have been crafted by an anonymous but very skilled craftsman. After Enide joins them, Arthur makes way for her before crowning the couple, and then hands

Erec, wearing a magnificent robe, the royal scepter. Erec's robe is made "of rich black silk" which has been crafted by four fairies, each of which embroiders an image of one of the arts of the *quadrivium* (four of the Seven Liberal Arts) onto the robe during the process of its production (l. 6739). The fairies, like Morgan le Fay, who is mentioned in connection to other supernatural objects earlier in the narrative, are representatives of the Celtic Otherworld. Their gift to Erec shows an approval of the Otherworld for the new ruler of Lac's territory.

Each of the coronation objects contributes to the new role Erec assumes as a monarch. Scholars have drawn parallels between this coronation scene and the political circumstances which surrounded the narrative, as Chrétien is said to have crafted this work shortly after Henry II established his son as the duke of Brittany in 1169. If this ekphrastic account can therefore be read with eye towards Henry II's political ambitions, then an object like Erec's robe becomes a significant detail which mirrors certain encoded references to historical realities. Although Clemente attempts to read the coronation scene as a *mise en abyme*, she neglect to consider the socio-political environment which influenced Chrétien at the time of writing. Some critics like Bruhn have attempted to read the ekphrastic coronation scene in terms of narrative strategies. However, focusing exclusively on the narrative framework avoids a discussion of other factors which might have influenced Chrétien during the production of this work. On the one hand, his work supports an authoritative and ambitious Henry II who is establishing his power in Brittany, while on the other hand, Chrétien establishes a new "genre" of romance which reworks Breton material in a new format. These "relics" of Breton storytelling tradition can be found in such Celtic supernatural figures as the fairies who produce Erec's robe. The robe, which is fetishized because of its intricate depictions of

the Arts and because of its supernatural origins, also grants power to Erec, who now gains mastery over new territory by cloaking himself with an object that merges the Breton heritage with his new role as a chivalric ruler. Although Žižek posited that pre-capitalist societies do not have any instances of commodity fetishism, it is clear that this text evokes both fetishism for the supernatural commodity, as well as for the owner who is granted more authority by his association with the object.

The depictions of the Arts resemble those of Amphiaraus' chariot, and the robe, similar to the chariot, has been crafted by otherworldly beings. Unlike the chariot, however, the robe does not have any special functions, like playing music or enabling the wearer of the robe to achieve superhuman speed. One therefore cannot necessarily classify it as an object which pertains to the *instrumental marvelous* but since it has been created by otherworldly creatures, it evokes an aura of the *exotic marvelous* because these otherworldly Celtic creatures do not seem to originate from any specifically designated location that exists outside of the narrative. The *hyperbolic marvelous* also pertains to the robe because of its intricate manufacturing. The inclusion of otherworldly creatures who fabricate the depictions of the *quadrivium* on this robe reflects that Chrétien, on the one hand, is familiar with Celtic supernatural elements of Breton storytelling, and that he is also familiar with the elements of the Classical curriculum which would have been taught at a medieval cathedral school. The ekphrastic account merges these traditions, which is why this scene therefore also opens the pathway to questions regarding the persona of Chrétien de Troyes, his connection to the court of Henry II, and why he chose to merge Classical and Breton elements within his narrative.

Scholars have more information about Chrétien de Troyes than about the anonymous poet of the *Roman de Thèbes*; however, much still remains guesswork.

Usually, a poet's patrons offer more information about the poet's political affiliations. *Erec et Enide* was not dedicated explicitly to a specific patron. Two of Chrétien's five romances, however, were (Duggan 231). *Lancelot: Le Chevalier de la Charette* was written for Marie de Champagne, Eleanor of Aquitaine's daughter and the wife of Henry the Liberal,<sup>23</sup> Count of Champagne, while, *Perceval: Le conte du Graal*, Chrétien's last romance, was dedicated to Philip d'Alsace, count of Flanders (Duggan 231). It is generally assumed that Marie de Champagne was Chrétien's patroness until her husband's death in 1181 (Kibler, "Introduction," *Arthurian Romances*, 5). From then on, Chrétien must have been under the patronage of Marie's cousin Philip of Flanders, who died in 1191 in Acre during the Third Crusade (Kibler 5).<sup>24</sup> It is thus likely that *Erec et Enide*, Chrétien's first Arthurian romance, was crafted during the time he was under the patronage of Marie de Champagne.

Moreover, further evidence suggests that Chrétien was associated with the court of Henry II. Bruckner notes that there are no extant documents to assert that Chrétien actually lived in either Troyes or Flanders (Bruckner 79). Scholars have pointed out the fact that "Chrétien" is a rare name for that region and time, and that his name could either signify that he recently converted from Judaism to Christianity, that he was associated with Islamic mysticism which had reached France through northern Spain, or that he was the canon Christianus of Saint-Maclou, who was listed on Henry's witness lists (Bruckner 79). There is, however, broad agreement that Chrétien was most certainly connected to the court of Henry II through his patrons, who were tied to the Angevin dynasty. Kibler also suggests that Chrétien may well have spent his early career in

---

<sup>23</sup> Marie apparently married Henry the Liberal in 1159 (Kibler, "Introduction," *Arthurian Romances*, 4).

<sup>24</sup> Glyn S. Burgess even indicates that Philip of Flanders courted Marie after the death of her husband in 1181 (Burgess 9).



England, at the court of Henry II, because of Chrétien's description of English cities and his knowledge of topography (Kibler 5). Kibler also draws parallels between Chrétien's Arthur and King Henry II Plantagenet, suggesting that Henry II served Chrétien as a model for his mythical king (Kibler 5). Burgess points out that the fictional donor of the intricate royal thrones, Bruianz des Illes (l. 6668), must be a reference to Henry II's "best friend, Brian of Wallingford, called in contemporary documents Brian Fitz Count, Brian de Insula, or Brian de l'Isle" (Schmolke-Hasselmann, 111, p. 245; qtd. in Burgess, p. 100). Here as well, the coronation scene reflects the contemporary Anglo-Norman political situation.

Another important link between Troyes, Chrétien's supposed hometown, and England is Henry of Blois, the abbot of Glastonbury from 1126-1171 and bishop of Winchester between 1129 and 1171 (Kibler 5). Henry of Blois was the uncle of Henry the Liberal, but he also had connections to Geoffrey of Monmouth and William of Malmesbury, who were responsible for popularizing Arthurian legends in England through their Latin writings (Kibler 5-6). Chrétien may have been introduced to English Arthurian material through his connection to his patrons and then reworked this material to cater towards an aristocratic audience under the rule of Henry II. Moreover, Bruckner mentions that two other individuals tie Chrétien to the Anglo-Norman court: Godefroi de Leigni, the poet who completed *Lancelot*, and Guiot, the scribe who transmitted all five of Chrétien's romances in manuscript BnF, fr. 794 (Bruckner 79). It is therefore most likely that Chrétien's association with the court of Henry II had an impact on Chrétien's writing, much like Henry's influence on anonymous poet of the *Roman de Thèbes*.

In fact, most critics agree that the ekphrastic coronation scene at the end of the romance, in which Erec receives the royal insignia and thereby follows in his late

father's footsteps to become the king of his lands, reflects the coronation of Henry II's son Geoffrey, who was made duke of Brittany in 1169. Much like Erec, Geoffrey was crowned at Nantes on Christmas day (Bruckner 79). This coronation was also an opportunity for Henry II to force an engagement between Geoffrey and Constance, the daughter of Conan IV of Brittany (Kibler 6). Henry II sought to bring about the submission of important Breton barons through marital politics, as his military campaigns between the years of 1167-1169 had proved unsuccessful (Kibler 6). The engagement eventually resulted in Geoffrey and Constance's marriage in 1181 (Bartlett 46) and the match gained Henry II the homage of the Breton barons, which granted him a more direct lordship than any Norman predecessor had gained in that region (Bartlett 22-23). As seen in Erec's coronation scene, Chrétien mirrored historical realities in his fictional worlds. Critics are therefore prone to interpret the coronation scene, in which we receive the ekphrastic accounts of the sumptuous objects, in connection with the expansionistic politics of Henry II.

A sense of superiority over Brittany might also be reflected in Chrétien's prologue of *Erec et Enide*. Here, Chrétien emphasizes that other storytellers would have "ruined" the story he is about to tell (ll. 20-23; Refer to Appendix D for the full excerpt of Chrétien's prologue). Chrétien boasts that his new version will be superior to that of these other "professional storytellers" (ll. 20-23). Bruckner posits that this prologue reflects Chrétien's training as a *clerc*<sup>25</sup> who has received official cathedral school training<sup>26</sup> and who can weave together the remnants of a tale he found in much more exquisite ways than has been previously mastered (Bruckner 81). Chrétien draws on two

---

<sup>25</sup> The best translation for cleric is: "cleric, clerk, intellectual, in twelfth-century usage" (Bruckner 81).

<sup>26</sup> Bruhn also assumes that Chrétien has cathedral school training because his prologue reflects the kind of classical rhetoric which would have been part of its curriculum (Bruhn 89).

major types of sources to create his account of Arthur's court: oral Breton tales and written texts such as Geoffrey of Monmouth's pseudo-historic *Historia Regnum Britanniae* and Wace's Anglo-Norman adaption of the *Historia*, the *Roman de Brut* (Bruckner 81). Bruhn argues that the specific "conte" to which Chrétien refers during his prologue remains unidentified (Bruhn 89).<sup>27</sup> Duggan, however, suggests that the sources he refers to in his prologue might be those of Breton storytellers (Duggan 229). If an unidentifiable orally transmitted Breton lay served as Chrétien's source, then his critical remark which is directed towards "professional poets" might be geared towards Breton storytellers who did not deliver their versions in a format of which Chrétien approves (Duggan 229). This remark therefore carries political significance if Chrétien was in the process of crafting this "new" tale after Henry II had established his overlordship over the physical territory of Brittany. The "friendly merger" of Brittany with the ever-increasing territory under the rule of Henry II through a marriage orchestrated by the king might reflect the "marriage" of Breton elements with Chrétien's new approach to storytelling.

Duggan points out that Breton storytellers enjoyed considerable fame throughout the twelfth century, and that they used Celtic stories to entertain audiences in western Europe (Duggan 229). A certain poet by the name of Bleri is one example of a traveling storyteller, who spent time at the court of Poitiers, possibly during the time of the troubadour king William of Aquitaine (Duggan 229). Although Bleri predated Chrétien, Duggan suggests that, in line 1698, Chrétien pays tribute to Bleri by including him as a

---

<sup>27</sup> Bruhn claims that the unidentifiable, possibly fictitious source mentioned during the beginning leads Chrétien to mention a more tangible author, Macrobius, during the coronation scene, in order to establish a sense of authoritative writing (Bruhn 93).

guest in Arthur's court, albeit in an altered form (calling him "Blioberis"<sup>28</sup>). Chrétien may therefore have heard of a Breton version of *Erec and Enide*, especially if he was aware of Bleri's work. Duggan also points out linguistic similarities between the names of Breton regions and the names of Chrétien's main characters (Duggan 229-230)<sup>29</sup>. The geographical regions of Bro Wened and Bro Gueroc may be the source of the names for Enide and Erec (Duggan 229-230). Burgess also discusses the name of "Erec," which had been borne by a tenth-century ruler of Nantes, as a reason for why Chrétien might have chosen to place the final coronation scene in Nantes (Burgess 97). There is therefore reasonable evidence to suggest that Chrétien was familiar with orally transmitted versions of the tale, which were most probably of Breton origin. In order to establish his authority as an educated *auctor*, he therefore resorted to speaking negatively of earlier Breton versions. Moreover, considering the socio-political context which surrounded the creation of *Erec et Enide*, it is also reasonable to assume that the submission of Breton lords to Henry II may be another reason for including a reference to earlier source material in the prologue, to undermine the Breton tradition of storytelling and to boast of the cultured and learned form of storytelling which reflects Angevin overlordship. Yet, the incorporation of otherworldly Celtic creatures, like the Fairies or Morgan le Fay, also speaks of Chrétien's willingness to subsume these supernatural Celtic elements within his narrative, in order to create a new "genre" of

---

<sup>28</sup> Foerster's edition gives the following manuscript variants for line 1714: "Bliobleheris," "Bleoberis" (critical apparatus, PV), "Blios Blieris" (critical apparatus, H), "Bleobleheris" (critical apparatus, B), "Bleosblieris" (critical apparatus, A), "blioberis" (critical apparatus, C), "Bliobeheri" (critical apparatus, E).

<sup>29</sup> Duggan cites Rachel Bromwich's edition of *Trioedd Ynys Prydein: Triads of the Isle of Britain* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1978), arguing that Bromwich "points out that there was an area of Brittany known as Bro Wened ('land of the Veneti, territory of Vannes' but easily misinterpreted as 'land of Ened' or 'Enide') and also as Bro Gueroc ('land of Gueroc' or 'Erec,' after a fifth-century ruler)" (Duggan 229-230).

stories. His Arthurian romances are generally rich with these Breton elements, and key moments like the coronation passage reflect one such ambiguous use of Breton lore.

Thus, while the coronation passage is rooted in Henry II's expansionistic plans, it is also significant for its literary complexity. While Chrétien often strives for a "bele conjointure," i.e., a text which is well-crafted and plot lines which are well-connected, he also, like many other medieval writers, indulges in tensions and ambiguities. One example is Chrétien's treatment of cosmological perceptions. While his main characters are clearly Christian, and while there are various instances where characters engage in Christian rituals, Chrétien also incorporates the pagan world of Celtic lore within his romance, and his characters do not condemn these pagan or supernatural elements. Christian and pagan elements therefore coexist in a hybrid fashion within Chrétien's fictional world, and he does not seem to make a value judgment about the Celtic pagan heritage which surrounds Erec's adventures, even though he judges Breton storytelling for its inferior presentation of story material.

Chrétien gives expression to Celtic elements through supernatural people, creatures, objects, or spaces. Two very prominent examples are references made to either Morgan le Fay, Arthur's half-sister, who has connections to the otherworldly Island of Avalon, or to the unnamed fairies who craft Erec's robe during the coronation scene. These Celtic elements are remnants of the oral Breton heritage which Chrétien weaves into a tale, tailoring it for a Christian audience. In *Erec et Enide*, the coronation scene offers a perfect example for how Chrétien incorporates Celtic lore into his story. While the other objects described in the coronation scene are created by anonymous craftsmen, the robe is clearly made by the hands of four otherworldly creatures of Celtic

origin. This nod to the Celtic otherworld elevates the robe from the other objects described in this scene.

Some scholars have suggested that this scene should be read as an allegory. In his study of the *Roman de Thèbes*, L.G. Donovan devotes nothing more than a footnote to Chrétien's use of the four fairies, arguing that Chrétien "remembers" the technique of description used in the *Roman de Thèbes* to describe the arts, and that he incorporates it to produce his own description of the four fairies (Donovan 229).<sup>30</sup> Donovan seems to equate the four arts with the four fairies, thus seeing each as an allegorical representation of one of the four arts. Wandhoff offers a similar, albeit more thorough, reading of the passage, positing that the representations of the arts are allegorical, although he does not venture into a discussion about whether the fairies are allegorical as well (Wandhoff 120).<sup>31</sup> He does, however, discuss the importance of their number (four) at length (Wandhoff 122).

Nevertheless, reading the four fairies as allegorical representations of the arts completely neglects the "fantastic" element of this passage. By focusing on allegory, Donovan thereby disregards the Celtic elements which Chrétien also incorporates in his work through supernatural references. It is significant that each representation of an art is crafted by members of the otherworld. I will therefore analyze this moment in Chrétien's work, not just for its allegorical implications but for its incorporation of the supernatural realm within the process of producing exquisite objects. In order to do so, I

---

<sup>30</sup> "Chrétien de Troyes se souviendra de la technique de ses descriptions, voire de certains passages, précis de *Thèbes*, lorsqu'il décrira les *quatre fees*, Géométrie, Aritmétique, Musique et Astronomie, puis la bête singulière de l'Inde, brodées sur la *robe* d'Erec, aussi bien que les pierres précieuses *es tassiax* de son manteau." (Donovan 229)

<sup>31</sup> "Erec, der in einem der Stühle zunächst neben Artus sitzt, bevor dieser für Enide Platz macht, trägt zum andern ein kostbares Gewand, auf dem allegorische Darstellungen der vier Künste des *quadriviums* abgebildet sind. Dieses Kleidungsstück, für dessen Beschreibung Chrétien Macrobius als Quelle angibt (v. 6676, 6679), ist von vier Feen gewebt, die sich jeweils einer Kunst angenommen haben." (Wandhoff 120).

will examine other moments in the narrative which offer ekphrastic accounts, to explore the significance of the representation of Erec's robe.

One such representation occurs much earlier in the narrative, shortly after Erec and Enide are married and return to Erec's father's castle in Carnant. They celebrate mass in the local church and show their devotion by giving gifts to the church in which they pray. Wandhoff points out that this scene has long been neglected as a point of comparison to the coronation scene, because the passage can only be found in the Guiot Manuscript (fr. 794) in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris (Wandhoff 134). Foerster's edition only cites the passage in the critical apparatus as a variant of text C (i.e. the Guiot Manuscript; Wandhoff 134). Wandhoff emphasizes that the Guiot text is probably the most "authentic," because it is the oldest (Wandhoff 134). As mentioned previously, Guiot is the scribe who first transmitted all five of Chrétien's romances.

In the passage in question, Erec donates a piece of the "One True Cross" which is incorporated in a golden crucifix which the Byzantine Emperor Constantine had supposedly worn (ll. 2330-2324). This "priceless, ancient cross" was "studded with precious stones / Of great and wonderful power" (ll. 2339-2341). While clearly a gift which is heavily laden with Christian heritage, the relic also includes "magical stones" which have supernatural power. Even more interesting is the story which surrounds the gift Enide gives to the church in Carnant. After she prays devoutly for an heir, she gives

Un paisle uert nut (so) ne uit tel  
 Et une grant chasuble ouree  
 Tote a fin or estoit brodee  
 Et ce fu ueritez prouee  
 Que lueure an fist Morgue la fee  
 Et ual perilleus ou estoit  
 Grant antante mise i auoit  
 Dor fu de soie d'aumarie  
 La fee fet ne lauait mie  
 A oes chasuble por chanter

Mes son ami la uolt doner  
 Por feire riche uestement  
 Car a meruoille ert auenant  
 Ganieure par engin ml't grant  
 La fame artus le roi puissant  
 Lot par lemperor Gassa  
 Vne chasuble feite en a  
 Si lot maint ior en sa chapele  
 Por ce que boene estoit et bele  
 Qant Enide de li torna  
 Cele chasuble li dona. (ll. 2380-2408 – only in MS C)

A wonderfully woven green  
 Silk cloth and a priestly cloak,  
 Covered with filigreed gold,  
 Made with all her skill  
 And care by Morgana le Fay  
 At her home in the Valley of Danger.  
 The silk was from Spain – and surely  
 Morgana had never made  
 The cloak for use in church,  
 But let one of her lovers  
 Have it because it was richly  
 Elegant. Guinevere,  
 Mighty Arthur's wife,  
 Had deceived the Emperor Gassa  
 And gotten it, and had it used  
 To celebrate Mass in her chapel,  
 Because it was lovely. And when  
 Enide had left her, the queen  
 Had made it a gift for Erec's  
 Wife. (ll. 2359-2379)

The cloth is therefore the handiwork of Morgan le Fay, although it is now transformed into a donation to the church. Significantly, the original purpose of the cloth was not to be displayed in church; rather, Morgan crafted it for one of her lovers. Guinevere had to use deceptive tactics to acquire it for her purposes. More interesting, however, is that both of these gifts to the church have pagan supernatural elements. The crucifix bears magical stones, whereas the cloth was made by a “Morgue la fee,” (literally translated, “Morgan the fairy”). Both gifts are, however, transformed into donations to a Christian church, adopted, into a Christian culture. Their pagan heritage is referenced, but does not



detract from the fact that these gifts are subsumed into a location of prayer and devotion to a Christian god.

Chrétien incorporates this scene as a way to speak of the purpose of supernatural objects, or supernaturally created objects, within his narrative. While they may include pagan elements of Celtic heritage, they are transformed into objects that can be used for Christian purposes, within the confines of a location which is specifically designated for worship to a Christian deity. This tendency to incorporate pagan elements of Breton origin and to subsume them into a Christian context, may also be a symptom of Chrétien's socio-political environment, as one can draw parallels between the subordination of Breton lords to Henry II and the "subordination" of elements of pagan Celtic culture to those of a predominantly Christian Anglo-Norman system.

Wandhoff suggests that Enide's donation of the green cloth to the church in Carnant points the reader towards the scepter Erec will receive during the coronation scene, because the scepter bears a rather large and intricately carved emerald (Wandhoff 138; refer to Appendix G for full description of Erec's scepter). Wandhoff also makes note of the fact that both Enide's cloth and Erec's robe were crafted by representatives of the Otherworld, and that the cloth can thus be read as a prefiguration of what is to come during the coronation scene (Wandhoff 138). In both cases, objects that have been crafted by otherworldly creatures are translated into a courtly, and specifically Christian context, in which the objects in question are used more "appropriately" (Wandhoff 138).<sup>32</sup> However, Wandhoff's argument fails to acknowledge fully the socio-political

---

<sup>32</sup> "Darüber hinaus deutet das kostbare grüne Tuch, welches Enide im Münster von Carnant stiftet, auf das leuchtende Grün des Zepters voraus, und schließlich kann in dem von einer Fee gearbeiteten Meßgewand unschwer eine weitere Präfiguration von Erecs Krönungsmantel gesehen werden. Beide Gewänder stammen von Vertreterinnen der Anderwelt, und in beiden Fällen wird dieser ‚magische‘ Ursprung mittels *translatio* und ‚rechtem Gebrauch‘ eingebunden in die höfisch-christliche Welt" (Wandhoff 138).

environment which may have influenced Chrétien to incorporate these otherworldly objects into his narrative.

While Morgan le Fay is not an active character in the narrative, her name is mentioned several times throughout the course of Erec's adventures, and her otherworldly arts have an effect on the narrative. Towards the beginning of the narrative, during a feast held by Arthur, a certain Guingemars is mentioned on the guest list (l. 1913). Guingemars is referred to as the "Lord of Avalon Island" and the narrator emphasizes that it is rumored that he is the lover of "Morgana le Fay, a claim / History has proven true" (ll. 1914-1917). The next time Morgan's name is mentioned is during the donation of the green cloth (l. 2363). A third mention of Morgan's name occurs while Erec is wounded after his first round of adventures and seeks shelter, if only for a night, in Arthur's tent. Looking at Erec's wounds, Arthur sends for "a magic ointment / Prepared by his sister Morgana / For the king's particular use" (ll. 4185-4186). In all of these cases, Morgan only appears on the margins of the narrative, never making a personal appearance. Rather, the narrator builds her character as someone who is the subject of both rumors and "proven" historical investigation. The narrator establishes her as an otherworldly creature who has connections to the elusive Avalon Island, who has the power to provide medical healing through her ointments, and who has the ability to craft intricate fabrics which become the pride of secular courts and the precious objects harbored by Christian churches. Morgan produces, though inadvertently, valuable commodities for a courtly Christian society.

Morgan's unnamed fairy counterparts, on the other hand, share her talent for crafting sumptuous fabrics, especially in their embroidered depiction of the arts. Their depictions of the *quadrivium* have been the subject of much scholarly investigation.

Among the Seven Liberal Arts, the *quadrivium* comprised arithmetic, music, geometry, and astronomy, the numerical arts which built on the three language arts of the *trivium*: grammar, rhetoric, and logic. Isidore of Seville, the Seventh-century bishop of said town, described the seven liberal arts (*De septem liberalibus disciplinis*) in his etymologies:

1. There are seven disciplines of the liberal arts. The first is grammar, that is skill in speaking. The second is rhetoric, which, on account of the brilliance and fluency of its eloquence, is considered most necessary in public proceedings. The third is dialectic, otherwise known as logic, which separates the true from the false by very subtle argumentation. 2. The fourth is arithmetic, which contains the principles and classifications of numbers. The fifth is music, which consists of poems and songs. 3. The sixth is geometry, which encompasses the measures and dimensions of the earth. The seventh is astronomy, which covers the law of the stars. (39)

The seven liberal arts formed part of the traditional curriculum of institutions of higher learning throughout a substantial part of the middle ages. Historian Charles Homer Haskins points out that the “long” twelfth century (ca. 1050-1250), which witnessed the creation of universities in cities like Paris, Bologna, and Salerno, also witnessed transformations in the curriculum (Haskins 368). The *trivium* and *quadrivium* were bolstered with new findings in logic, mathematics, and astronomy, and universities specialized the doctoral disciplines such as law, medicine, or theology (Haskins 368). Haskins refers to the twelfth century as a veritable “intellectual revolution” (Haskins 368). Yet, Chrétien, unconcerned with mentioning specific specialized universities (which, as Bruckner posits, makes it plausible that he himself received a traditional cathedral school education rather than a university education), is more concerned with the curriculum of the number arts.

The representation of the *quadrivium* on Erec’s robe is therefore as significant as the fact that the robe is made by creatures of a pagan Celtic otherworld. The robe

establishes Erec's position as a ruler who must incorporate these arts as a good steward of his new kingdom, but it also implies that the Celtic Otherworld is subservient to the new king; that the inhabitants of this other space are ready to submit to the new king's authority. The arts, especially the "number" arts represent a mastery of space (the new kingdom) through these technological advancements of learning. Donald Maddox reaches a similar conclusion when he analyzes the ekphrastic accounts of the coronation hall. He emphasizes that each art has a certain quality: Geometry measures space; Arithmetic measures discrete quantities (time, water, etc.); Music measures universal harmonies; and Astronomy which, as he argues, consults the universe concerning the past and the future (Maddox 170). He believes that the coronation objects, as a whole, "transform the king's body into a pictorial representation of the Cosmos – heaven and earth, man and beast, fish and fowl, space, and time past, present, and future" (Maddox 170). While Maddox focuses on the transformation of the king through these objects into a "miniature replica of the cosmos", it is also significant that Erec's robe, which forms part of his "new wardrobe," has been crafted by fairies, who, much like Morgan, stem from a pagan Celtic otherworldly space (Maddox 170). While Maddox focuses on how the robe emphasizes Erec's authority over a courtly society, he does not incorporate a discussion about how the robe also connects Erec to the otherworldly realm.

The inclusion of the *quadrivium's* number arts in conjunction with the fairies who produce them therefore imply a merger of traditions. On the hand, the depictions show us Chrétien's familiarity with the traditional curriculum of a Classical education, an education which a new ruler would have to master in order to possess a sense of *clergie*, or learning. On the other hand, Chrétien merges this Classical tradition with remnants of Breton folk lore by attaching the origin of the robe to the Celtic otherworld.

His “*bele conjointure*” therefore weaves these traditions together, thereby also reflecting the weaving together of Breton lands under the authority of an Angevin ruler. The Celtic world of Breton storytelling tradition therefore submits itself to a new ruler and even blesses him with a gift which implies that this new ruler has mastered the Arts, and by his mastery of Arts, has also mastered the space he is about to rule.

While some scholars have focused on the allegorical implications of the Arts, other scholars have yet again read the coronation scene differently – focusing on its narrative function. In his comparison of Chrétien’s *Yvain* and *Erec et Enide*, especially in terms of the fabrication of clothing in both of these romances, Henning Krauß reaches the conclusion that clothing communicates a person’s “God-given” status in society, and represents the moral value of the bearer of clothing (Krauß 184). He also suggests that this type of symbolic clothing is a sign of the “*mout bele conjointure*” of which Chrétien boasts when he compares his tale to those of “professional storytellers” who ruin the story (Krauß 184).<sup>33</sup> Krauß reads the inclusion of description of fashion as a means for the author to weave his story more pleasurably together for the audience because of the entertainment value description of clothing has for an aristocratic medieval audience (Krauß 184-185). Bruhn reads the ekphrastic moment in the coronation hall as an “edifying element” because it “turns out to be the finest reconciliation of *chevalerie* (the chivalrous dimension), *clergie* (the learned dimension), and marital love” (Bruhn 93).

---

<sup>33</sup> Innerhalb der symbolischen Kommunikation stratifikatorischer Gesellschaftsordnungen fällt Kleiderzeichen eine klare definitorische Funktion zu: Sie verweisen auf den (von Gott gegebenen) ständischen Status eines Menschen, letztendlich auf seinen moralischen Wert. Unsere These lautet, dass in *Erec et Enide* und *Yvain* die *mout bele conjointure*, deren Chrestien sich gegenüber jenen rühmt, die die Erzählungen willkürlich zerstückeln (*depecier*), vom sinntragenden Gebrauch der vestimentären Zeichen abhängt, ja, dass die zentralen Handlungselemente an diese geknüpft sind.” (Krauß 184)

He refers to the passage in which Chrétien cites Macrobius (ll. 6740-6745) to shift his discussion of ekphrasis to one of the development of the *narratio fabulosa*<sup>34</sup> (93).

This passage deserves more attention, as scholars have linked Chrétien's reference to Macrobius to the idea that Chrétien may have tried to create a *narratio fabulosa* with this description. Chrétien introduces Macrobius as follows:

Lisant trovomes an l'estoire  
 La description de la robe,  
 Si an trai a garant Macrobe  
 Qui au descrire mist s'antante,  
 Que l'an ne die que je mante.  
 Macrobes m'ansaigne a descrivre  
 Si con je l'ai trové el livre,  
 L'uevre del drap et le portret. (ll. 6736-6743)

The robe was described  
 In a book I read, written  
 By Makrobius, who taught the science  
 Of attentive vision: I mention  
 His name to prove I'm telling  
 The truth. I draw the details  
 Of the cloth from his pages, exactly  
 As I found them there. (ll. 6740-6747)

Bruhn uses Peter Dembowski's commentary in the *Pléiade* edition of Chrétien's work to establish that Ambrosius Theodisius Macrobius, who lived around 400 AD and wrote a commentary on Cicero's *The Dream of Scipio* as well as *The Saturnalia*, has, according to Dembowski, never given a description of the *quadrivium* in any of his works (Bruhn 94).<sup>35</sup> Scholars like Dembowski and M.-R. Jung have therefore suggested that Chrétien may have mistaken Macrobius for Martianus Capella who uses descriptions of the

---

<sup>34</sup> Bruhn describes the "narratio fabulosa" as an attempt to utter "truth by telling a lie" (Bruhn 99).

<sup>35</sup> Bruhn translates the quotation which he takes from Dembowski (in the *Pléiade* version, edited by Daniel Poirion). The original reads: "Macrobe (Ambrosius Theodisius Macrobius; circa 400) était philosophe, philologue et homme d'État. Son *In somnium Scipionis* (commentaire du *Songe de Scipion* de Cicéron) jouissait d'une grande autorité parmi les clercs du Moyen Âge. Mais, à notre connaissance, il n'a jamais donné de description du *quadrivium*." (*Pléiade*, p. 112, qtd. in Bruhn, p. 94).

*quadrivium* and the liberal arts in his *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii* (Bruhn 95).

Bruhn finally argues that, since both of these texts were widely circulated during Chrétien's time, Chrétien may have tried to rewrite Martianus but referenced Macrobius, a "mistake" that shows the intertextual influence of these writings, and which leads Bruhn to argue that Macrobius' influence over Chrétien occurred through his descriptions of the relatively "new" classical genre of the "*fabula/fictio/mendacia*" – a genre Chrétien was just then developing (Bruhn 96-98). Barbara Haupt's research also notes that previous scholars, including Foerster, thought that Chrétien's reference to Macrobius was either pure fiction or a mistake (Haupt 563). Stefan Hofer, a scholar who conducted research on the same question in 1928, seemed to believe that there were correlations between Macrobius' commentary on *Scipio's Dream*, especially in terms of descriptions of nature and the arts.<sup>36</sup> Scholars are thus divided on the interpretation of the reference to Macrobius, but I find Bruhn's argument helpful, especially considering Chrétien's socio-political environment.

If Chrétien indeed received the classical education afforded to him in a traditional cathedral school, then exposure to different kinds of Breton narratives, which could not be classified in the "classical" system, a system which is also described by Isidore of Seville, and which differentiates between the *fabula* ("that which cannot and

---

<sup>36</sup> "Wollen wir Chrestiens Aussage, er habe die Kunst des *describere* von Macrobius gelernt, ernst nehmen, so steht dennoch fest, daß er nirgendwo im Werk des Macrobius ein konkretes Muster zur Beschreibung eines textilen Kunstwerks oder Anweisungen zur *descriptio* nach Art der mittelalterlichen Poetiken, d.h. Anweisungen formaler, „rein technischer Art“, gefunden haben kann. Gerade deshalb auch ist die Macrobius-Berufung interpretationsbedürftig. Wendelin Foerster hatte in seiner großen Erec-Ausgabe von 1890 ein etwas ambivalentes Urteil dazu abgegeben: „Was die Gewährung Macrobius's anlangt, so ist sie wohl auf Kristians Erfindung zu setzen. Die Elemente zu seiner Beschreibung mag er in seinem Comment. in Som. Scip. gefunden haben.“ Während Faral dann 1913 Chrestiens Hinweis auf Macrobius als bloße Fiktion beurteilt hatte, konnte Hofer in seiner Untersuchung von 1928 deutliche Entsprechungen zwischen den Commentarii in Somnium Scipionis und Chrestiens Darstellung des Quadriviums auf einer inhaltlichen Ebene nachweisen; er konnte aufzeigen, dass die Angaben des Macrobius zu den Erd- und Himmelsdimensionen, zu Musik und Arithmetik mit Chrestiens Darlegung korrespondieren.“ (Haupt 563-564)

did not take place”), *argumentum* (“that which did not take place, but could have happened”), or *historia* (which “relates what did take place”), might have urged him to craft a new romance genre which differed from the classical romances (like the *Roman de Thèbes*) through “*bele conjointure*” (Bruhn 98). By merging Breton storytelling techniques, including elements of the pagan otherworld, but incorporating classical elements, like a description of the arts, Chrétien creates a tale which is fictional, but which is based on historical occurrences which shape his fictional worlds while merging traditional classical learning with supernatural Celtic elements.

Chrétien’s description of Erec’s robe, which he claims to have taken from Macrobius, therefore offers an important passage which mirrors Chrétien’s writing techniques, his learning, perhaps even his world view. Chrétien’s association with the court of Henry II leads us to assume that the coronation scene in which Erec receives a spectacular crown and an intricately crafted scepter from King Arthur, all while wearing a robe which has been crafted by fairies, and which includes depictions of the *quadrivium*, may reflect a fictionalized description of the coronation scene which took place in Nantes in 1169. By gaining the submission of important Breton lords, the power of Henry II was clearly augmented in Western Europe. Chrétien’s writing, in turn, attempts to incorporate Breton elements while subsuming them within the new genre of the romance. While Chrétien writes for a courtly Christian audience, his writing clearly incorporates ambiguities, especially between Christian and pagan elements.

The Breton pagan world, which is most clearly represented by the otherworldly Morgan le Fay and the four fairies who craft the robe, produces objects for the courtly Christian society which are valuable commodities. These objects are not only revered and valued, but they also help Erec to acquire his status as the ruler of a new space. The



otherworldly realm, through its magical gifts, seems to endorse and support the new position of the King through these supernatural commodities. Krauß implies that the description of these commodities were included, on some level, for the entertainment of an aristocratic audience who enjoyed the descriptions of ornaments and fashion. This type of pleasure which was supposedly experienced by the medieval audience implies that this pre-capitalist society did indeed experience commodity fetishism.

Contrary to Žižek's understanding of commodity fetishism, which implies that pre-capitalist societies did not indulge in commodity fetishism, Chrétien's work thus implies that ekphrastic accounts were indeed meant for the audience to experience pleasure while hearing or reading descriptions of luxury items, thus fetishizing the luxurious objects described. Within the narrative, these luxury items are used by the fictional King Erec to establish his position as an authoritative ruler; the robe can especially be read as an object which implies mastery of space (his new lands) through the Arts and as an object of supernatural origin which carries with it the blessing of the supernatural realm which submits to the rule of the new King. While the object itself is therefore revered as a luxury item, it also establishes Erec as a fetishized, revered King. Within this pre-capitalist society, which according to Žižek, fetishizes relationships over objects (which, in Žižek's mind, are crafted through a "natural" production), we see an exception to this rule within the coronation scene Chrétien offers us.

The coronation scene clearly shows that objects can be fetishized in a pre-capitalist society, moreover, especially objects which are of supernatural origins and fall into certain Todorovian categories are not necessarily of "natural" production, but of "supernatural" production. These objects evoke commodity fetishism, but they also carry over to the owner of the fetishized object. In Erec's case, the fetishized robe

enhances his status as king, transforms him into a revered authoritative monarch for his people, and establishes his ethos as a ruler who masters the Arts and displays the learning which will help him territorialize his inherited lands. Moreover, the robe also merges classical traditions with those of Breton lore, through the introduction of the mysterious Fairies who produce depictions of the *quadrivium*.

Since scholars have posited that the coronation scene also mirrors the coronation of Henry II's son Geoffrey, the ekphrastic account also carries political implications. *Erec et Enide* reflects the ambitions of Henry II to augment and validate his reign over Breton lands. Chrétien's work becomes a mouthpiece to establish his power through a literary representation of Erec's power, and the ekphrastic account at the culmination of the coronation scene shows the "marriage" of traditional Breton story matter with classical learning as Chrétien attempts to establish "new" Arthurian romance genre with *Erec et Enide*. Commodity fetishism enhances the authority of the fictional ruler, and thereby also enhances the authority of the contemporary twelfth-century ruler who sought overlordship over Breton rulers.

## CONCLUSION: POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF EKPHRASIS

Although the use of ekphrasis dates back to classical literature (including such famous examples in Homer's *Iliad* and Virgil's *Aeneid*), where it was used as form of rhetorical "digression," the term has come to be applied more generically to incorporate depictions of artistic objects in literary works (Clemente 5). Twelfth- and thirteenth-century authors also indulged in the use of ekphrastic moments, as we have seen in the *Roman de Thèbes* and *Erec et Enide*. Previous scholarship of ekphrasis in these texts has usually focused on the entertainment value these descriptions have for an audience enthralled with the details of sumptuous objects (Clemente 5). However, other scholars have focused on these moments to establish a narrative framework, positing that these moments either function as micro-narratives within the larger frame of the story, or that these authors are establishing themselves as skilled *auctores*, and that they are therefore weaving rhetorical patterns into their own narrations.

Erec's robe and Amphiaraus' chariot are fantastic objects which are donations from the supernatural realm. As such, they are intricately made, fetishized commodities which are meant to be revered by an audience of listeners/readers. The supernatural objects also increase the ethos of the characters who own them, as they represent a conferred blessing from the supernatural realm for the individuals' political missions. In both cases, the political missions of these individuals involves territorializing and mastering space.

The political situation of the twelfth century certainly also adds a layer to potential interpretations of these ekphrastic moments. As both authors were most likely tied to Angevin dynasty through patronage (although there is clearer evidence for this

with Chrétien de Troyes), this would likely influence court writers to support the political, religious, and aesthetic interests of their patrons and their political allies. Henry II's territorial ambitions are therefore reflected within the ekphrastic moments of the texts.

The *Roman de Thèbes* is said to have been created during the 1150s, a time during which Henry II succeeded to the English throne, married Eleanor of Aquitaine, and thereby expanded his territory to the northwestern part of Europe. His ambitious plans to conquer the British Isles are encoded in Adrastus' *mappa mundi*, as a plan of action to forcefully settle an inheritance struggle and reclaim the land of a wronged heir. Amphiaraus, the Greek prophet and seer who is knowledgeable about governing a kingdom, receives a supernaturally crafted chariot to charge into battle along with his Greek cohort. The depictions embedded on this supernatural object can be read as inserted micronarratives within this larger Romance. They may, however, also serve as warnings to a twelfth-century audience under the rule of an ambitious Henry II by using the depictions of the giant's rebellion as a negative example of a power struggle, then reminding them that their destinies are fixed by the stars, and finally emphasizing the authority of a ruler who has mastered the Arts, and thereby also mastered measuring the terrestrial realm he is about to conquer. The story, which is of Latin origin, is modified for a courtly Christian audience under the rule of Henry II.

Likewise, Chrétien de Troyes, who was more clearly linked to Henry II's court through his affiliation with Marie de Champagne and Phillip of Flanders, wrote for an aristocratic twelfth-century audience. Although *Erec et Enide* was most likely created two decades later than the *Roman de Thèbes*, the ambitions of Henry II may still have influenced a writer who is attempting to create a "new" Romance genre out of Breton

stories. Writing during a time in which Breton lords were obliged to submit to Henry II through the arranged wedding of Henry's son Geoffrey and Constance, daughter of Conan IV of Brittany, Chrétien probably had to deal with Breton story matter rather carefully. While establishing the authority of his own "new" way of telling stories, he still incorporates Breton matter through supernatural Celtic imagery and creatures. Subsuming these elements into his narrative, he crafts an elaborate description of Erec's robe, which, while it is created by members of the Otherworld, still incorporates the fundamental medieval curriculum of higher classical learning. Cloaking himself with knowledge and the blessing of the Celtic Otherworld, the Erec embodies the kind of authoritative power a medieval ruler should have – mastering space through the power provided by the numerical arts.

In both texts, hybrid cosmologies emerge from the union of supernatural and Christian elements. In the *Roman de Thèbes*, the narrator often exchanges pagan Greco-Roman references for Christian references. Thus Amphiareus' chariot was crafted by the Greco-Roman god Vulcan, who blesses the endeavors of the Greek fighters with his gift. In *Erec et Enide*, Chrétien clearly incorporates references to Christianity as well as to the pagan Celtic Otherworld, which is most clearly seen in references to Morgan le Fay and the anonymous Fairy seamstresses who so skillfully create Erec's new robe. Here again, the supernatural realm seems to bless the endeavor of the fictional heroes, bestowing them with gifts to succeed. While Morgan le Fay is not an active character in the narrative, the objects she creates, be they medical ointments or green cloths, permeate the courtly society. The green cloth, for example, becomes a much sought-after commodity, which is obtained through trickery, barter, or as in Enide's case, as a parting gift. Finally, the green cloth which stems from a pagan source is subsumed into a

Christian space of worship. Once again, the pagan Otherworld is subsumed into a Christian society, similar to the pagan Breton elements Chrétien subsumes into his new Romance genre.

The supernatural origin of these objects also adds to their value as commodities within these fictional societies. They are fetishized objects, meant to be admired by potential twelfth-century listeners or readers. As such, the commodities also enhance the status of their owners. Although Amphiareus himself dies a gruesome death, he fulfills his part during the first of many battles against the Thebans. The chariot also contributes to this battle, as it enables Amphiareus to display his prowess as a fighter. The robe, along with the other ornamental items in the coronation hall, establish Erec's ethos as an authoritative ruler over his newly inherited lands. The depictions of the *quadrivium* grant him an aura of learnedness, while showing his ability to become a knowledgeable lord over his territory.

From the perspective of these pre-capitalist works, Žižek's theory of commodity fetishism must be altered. These objects are very clearly described to evoke admiration and fetishism for artifacts, but they also enhance the aura of the owner, thereby allowing for a fetishized relation between fictional human beings; non-owners admiring the owners for their intricately made objects. While these fictional characters therefore benefit from their ownership of these objects, these ekphrastic moments, as rhetorical strategies employed by writers, also offer an interesting view into the writers' perceptions of monarch-subject relationships. Implied through the descriptions of these fetishized objects, a monarch seemingly enhances his authority over the individual subjects in his kingdom through the fantastic objects in their possession. Erec's

superiority over other members of the nobility is established through the objects he receives.

During a time when Henry II clearly expanded his territory and sought to use military strategies and marital politics to further establish himself as a monarch, these writers employ ekphrastic accounts to create fantastic, fetishized objects that grant political and military power to their owners. In the historical reality of the twelfth century, an ambitious monarch like Henry II may well have promoted a fetishized relationship between himself and his vassals. In these narratives, ekphrasis is thus not merely a rhetorical trope or a form of digression, but a means of bestowing political power on fictional characters as well as on those who held authority in the historical reality of the twelfth century.

APPENDIX A: EXCERPT FROM THE *ROMAN DE THÈBES*:  
THE *MAPPA MUNDI*

The tent was spectacular and extensive  
 And decorated with strips of flowered tapestry;  
 It was not of hemp nor of linen  
 But was of skins from beyond the sea.  
 Of indigo and vermilion skins it was,  
 And many a marvel was painted there.  
 There was a map of the world in detail,  
 Embroidered, perfectly round,  
 On the front panel above the entrance,  
 Worked with fine beaten gold.  
 The map included five zones  
 Painted just as nature made them;  
 For the two which were at the top and bottom  
 Were full of ice and of snow,  
 And were indigo blue in color –  
 For they inclined somewhat to coldness.  
 And the hot zone, which was in the middle section,  
 Was vermilion because of the heat.  
 Either because of the heat, or because of the snow  
 Nothing lived in these three zones.  
 Between each of the extreme zones  
 And the hot zone which was in the middle  
 There was one which was temperate;  
 Toward the northwest it was inhabited. (ll. 3979-4002)

Li très fu merveillos et granz  
 Et entailiez a flors par panz:  
 Ne fu de chanve ne de lin,  
 Ainz fu de porpre outremarin;  
 De porpre fu inde et vermeille,  
 Et peint I ot mainte merveille.  
 A compass I fu mapamonde  
 Enlevee, tote roonde,  
 El pan davant desus l'entrée,  
 A or batu menu ovree.  
 Par cinc zones la mape dure  
 Si peintes com les fist nature:  
 Car les dous que sont deforaines  
 De glace sont et de neif pleines,  
 Et orent inde la color,  
 Car auques torment a freidor;  
 Et la chaude, qu'est el mé lou



Cele est vermeille por le fou.  
Que por le fou, que por les neis,  
N'abite rien en celes treis.  
Entre chascune daerraine  
Et la chaude, qu'est meiloaine,  
En o tune que fu tempree:  
Devers gualerne est habitee. (ll. 3979-4002)

APPENDIX B: EXCERPT FROM THE *ROMAN DE THÈBES*:  
AMPHIAREUS' CHARIOT

I must tell you about Amphiareus,  
 How he conducted himself in this tourney.  
 Amphiareus was in a chariot  
 Which was made beyond St. Thomas;  
 Vulcan made it with great skill  
 And took a long time to do it.  
 With study and great deliberation  
 He put the moon and the sun on it  
 And cast in metal the sky  
 By means of artistry and enchantment.  
 He made in order there the nine spheres:  
 In the greatest he placed the constellations;  
 In the seven others, which were lesser,  
 He put the planets and the course of the stars;  
 The ninth he situated in the midst of the whole—  
 That one was the land and the deep sea.  
 On the land he painted men and beasts;  
 In the sea, fish and winds and tempests.  
 He who could understand natural philosophy  
 Could learn much from the paintings.  
 In one section were the giants,  
 All full of pride and insolence;  
 They wanted to dethrone the gods  
 And throw them by force from the sky.  
 They had made a ladder to climb up,  
 And no man who lived ever saw such a one;  
 For they had put one hill on top of another —  
 They had stacked more than seven of them—  
 And climbed up to capture the gods  
 Unless the gods could defend themselves.  
 Jupiter was on the other part  
 And held a thunderbolt and a spear;  
 Mars and Pallas were in his following,  
 And these two supported the whole enterprise.  
 All the others who ruled in the sky  
 Took their arms quickly:  
 There was not one of them who would seek excuse,  
 And throughout the sky all were fighting.  
 And of precious stones and enamel  
 Toward the rear of the chariot were formed  
 And embossed the seven arts.  
 Grammar was portrayed there with her divisions,

Dialectic with arguments,  
 And Rhetoric with judgments;  
 Arithmetic held the abacus,  
 And Music sang by the scale.  
 Diatessaron was portrayed there  
 And Diapente, Diapason;  
 Geometry had a rod,  
 And Astronomy an astrolabe;  
 One used its measure on earth  
 And the other had its concern in the stars.  
 There was much subtle detail on the chariot,  
 And it was well worked; there was no flaw at all.  
 There was one image worked in metal,  
 Which was sounding the horn for the charge—  
 Another which at all times piped  
 Clearer than a lute or viol.  
 The work on the chariot with the material  
 Was easily worth Thebes with all the empire;  
 For the sides were of fine carved gold  
 And the shafts of white ivory.  
 The wheels were of chrysoprase  
 And had the color of burning fire.  
 Four zebras drew the chariot;  
 No man could see their hoof-print  
 In sand or in soft earth,  
 For they went faster than a bird flew. (ll. 4711-4779)

D'Amphiaras dire vos dei  
 Com se contint en cel tornei.  
 En un curre ert Amphiaras,  
 Qui fu faiz outre Saint Thomas:  
 Vulcans le fist par grant porpens  
 Et a lui faire mist grant tens.  
 Par estuide et par grant conseil,  
 I mist la lune et le soleil,  
 Et tresgeta le firmament  
 Par art et par enchantement.  
 Nuef espères par ordre i fist:  
 En la maior les signes mist;  
 Es autres set, que sont menors,  
 Fist les planètes et les cors;  
 La nuefme assist en mé le monde:  
 Ço est la terre et mer parfonde.  
 En terre peinst homes et bestes,  
 En mer peissons, venz et tempestes.  
 Qui de fisique sot entendre,  
 Es peintures pot mout aprende.  
 Li jaiant sont en l'autre pan,

Tuit plein d'orgueil et de boban:  
 Les deus vuelent desheriter  
 Et par force del ciel geter.  
 A poier sus ont fait eschale:  
 On chon qui vive ne vit tale,  
 Car un pué ont sor autre mis,  
 Plus de set en i ont assis,  
 Et puéent sus por les deus prendre,  
 Se d'eus ne se pueent defender.  
 Jupiter est de l'autre part,  
 Une foildre tient et un dart;  
 Mars et Pallas sont en après:  
 Cil dui sostiéent tot le fais;  
 Tuit li autre qui el ciel regnent  
 Isnélement lor armes prenent:  
 Cel d'eus n'i a qui quierge essone,  
 Tuit se combatent par le trone.  
 Et a pierres et a esmaus  
 Fu faiz derière li frontaus,  
 Et enlevees les set arz:  
 Gramaire i est peinte o ses parz,  
 Dialetique o argumenz;  
 L'abaque tient Arimetique,  
 Par la game chante musique;  
 Peint i est Diatessaron,  
 Diapenté, Diapason;  
 Une verge ot Geometrie,  
 Un astrelabe Astronomie:  
 L'une en terre met sa mesure,  
 L'autre es esteiles a sa cure.  
 El curre ot mout sotil entaille:  
 Bien fu ovrez, onc n'i ot faille.  
 Une image I ot tresgetee,  
 Que vait cornant a la menee;  
 Une autre, que toz tens frestèle  
 Plus clér que rote ne vïele.  
 L'uevre del curre o la matère  
 Vaut bien Thèbes o tot l'empère:  
 Car li pan sont d'or fin trifuère  
 Et li timon de blanc ivuère;  
 Les roes sont de crisopase,  
 Color ont de fou qui embrase.  
 Le curre traient quatre azeivre:  
 L'esclot n'en puet hon aperceivre  
 En sablon ne en terre mole,  
 Car plus tost vont qu'oseaus qui vole. (ll. 4711-4779)

APPENDIX C: EXCERPT FROM THE *ROMAN DE THÈBES*:  
AMPHIAREUS' DEATH

Amphiaras sot bien par sot  
 Qu'a icel jor recevreit mort;  
 Par augure sot li guerriers  
 Que ço esteit sis jorz deriers:  
 Pués que certainement le sot,  
 Empleia le com il mieuz pot  
 De ceus dedenz fait grant martire  
 Ne vieil ne juefne n'en remire;  
 Quant que il en trueve en sa veie  
 En enfer avant sei enveie.  
 Grant perte I refont cil defors  
 De lor chevaus et de lor cors,  
 Mais a neient le tenissant,  
 Se il lui sol ne perdissant.  
 Mout en furent desconseillié:  
 De ço se sont esmerveillié  
 Que il mori en tal manière,  
 Que sa mort fu horrible et fiére;  
 Car al vespre, soentre none,  
 La terre crolle et li cieus tone,  
 Et, si com Deus l'ot destiné  
 Terre le sorbi senz enjan,  
 Com fist Abiron et Datan.  
 Cil qui cele merveille virent  
 S'espoentérent et foïrent;  
 Mout foïrent a grant desrei,  
 Car chascuns ot poor de sei. (ll. 4815-4844)

Amphiareus knows well by foreseeing  
 That on this day he will receive death;  
 By augury the warrior knows  
 That this is his last day.  
 Since he knows it certainly,  
 He uses it as best he can.  
 On those of Thebes he inflicts great slaughter  
 And considers neither old nor young;  
 Those that he finds in his path  
 He sends to the underworld ahead of himself.  
 In their turn the Greeks experience great loss  
 Of their horses and of themselves;  
 But they would regard that as nothing  
 If only they have not lost Amphiareus himself.

They are very disconsolate about it;  
They are astonished about this—  
That he dies in such a manner,  
And that his death is horrible and savage.  
For in the evening, after the ninth hour,  
The earth trembles and the heaven thunders;  
And, just as God has predestined it  
And Amphiareus has foreseen and said,  
The earth actually swallows him  
As did Abiram and Dathan.  
Those who see this marvel  
Are frightened out of their wits and flee—  
Flee in great disarray,  
For each is afraid for himself. (ll. 4815-4844)

APPENDIX D: EXCERPT FROM CHRÉTIEN DE TROYES' *EREC ET ENIDE*:  
CHRÉTIEN'S PROLOGUE

Peasants have a proverb:  
 The thing we think worthless  
 Is worth more than we know.  
 Work as hard as you can  
 For wisdom; the sluggard's way  
 Teaches us, soon enough,  
 That nothing ventured is nothing  
 Gained, but something wonderful  
 Lost. Chrétien, believing  
 Men should think, and learn,  
 And use their tongues well  
 And teach others, has found  
 This lovely tale of adventure,  
 Beautifully put together,  
 Proving beyond a doubt  
 That no one granted wisdom  
 And grace by the mercy of God  
 Should ever refuse to use it.  
 He tells of Erec, son  
 Of Lac – a story professional  
 Poets usually ruin,  
 Spinning it out for kings  
 And counts. And here I begin:  
 This is a story they'll repeat  
 Forever, in Christian lands.  
 Chrétien of Troyes says so. (ll. 1-26)

Li vilains dit an son respit  
 Que tel chose a l'an an despit,  
 Qui mout vaut miauz que l'an ne cuide.  
 Por ce fet bien qui son estuide  
 Atozne a bien, quell que il l'et;  
 Car qui son estuide antrelet,  
 Tost i puet tel chose teisir,  
 Qui mout vandroit puis a pleisir.  
 Por ce dit Crestiens de Troyes  
 Que reisons est que totes voies  
 Doit chascuns panser et antandre  
 A bien dire et a bien aprandre,  
 Et tret d'un conte d'avanture  
 Une mout bele conjointure,

Par qu'an puet prover et savoir  
Que cil ne fet mie savoir,  
Qui sa sciance n'abandone  
Tant con Deus la grace l'an done.  
D'Erec, le fil Lac, est li contes,  
Que devant rois et devant contes  
Depecier et corronpre suelent  
Cil qui de conter vivre vuelent.  
Des or comancerai l'estoire  
Qui toz jorz mes iert an memoire  
Tant con durra crestiantez.  
De ce s'est Cretiens vantez. (ll. 1-26)



APPENDIX E: EXCERPT FROM CHRÉTIEN DE TROYES' *EREC ET ENIDE*:  
THE TWO CHAIRS

Two brand-new chairs, fashioned  
Of brilliant white ivory, both made  
Precisely the same, had been set  
In the hall. Clearly, the craftsman  
Who'd carved them had been clever and subtle,  
For in height, and length, and breadth  
And in decoration, no matter  
How you looked, or where,  
You saw them exactly the same:  
No one could possibly tell  
One from the other. And every  
Piece in each of those chairs  
Was either ivory or gold,  
Chiseled with a delicate touch,  
The two front feet sculpted  
Like a pair of leopards, and the back ones  
Like crocodiles. They were gifts  
Of homage and respect for Arthur  
And his queen, given by a knight  
Whose name was Brian of the Islands. (ll. 6717-6736)

Li rois avoit deus faudestués  
D'ivoire blanc, bien fez et nués,  
D'une meniere et d'une taille.  
Cil qui les fist fanz nule faille  
Fu mout sotis et angigneus;  
Car si les fist fanblanz andeus  
D'un haut, d'un le et d'un ator,  
Ja tant n'esgardessiez an tor,  
Por l'un de l'autre deviser,  
Que ja i poïssiez trover  
An l'un, qui an l'autre ne fust.  
N'I avoit nule rien de fust  
Se d'or non ou d'ivoire fin.  
Bien furent taillié de grant fin;  
Car li dui manbre d'une part  
Orent sanblance de liepart,  
Li autre dui de corcatrilles.  
Uns chevaliers, Bruianz des Illes,  
An avoit fet don et seisine  
Le roi Artu et la reïne. (ll. 6713-6732)

APPENDIX F: EXCERPT FROM CHRÉTIEN DE TROYES' *EREC ET ENIDE*:  
THE ROBE

Arthur sat in one [chair],  
 And Erec, wearing a robe  
 Of rich black silk, was seated  
 In the other. The robe was described  
 In a book I read, written  
 By Makrobius, who taught the science  
 Of attentive vision: I mention  
 His name to prove I'm telling  
 The truth. I draw the details  
 Of the cloth from his pages, exactly  
 As I found them there. It was woven  
 By four fairies, working  
 As great and masterful craftsmen.  
 And the first had spun an accurate  
 Portrait of Geometry and how  
 It measures the sky and earth,  
 Capturing every aspect –  
 Including depth and height,  
 And length and width, and how  
 We follow the sea from shore  
 To shore, measuring its width  
 And depth: in short, measuring  
 The world. That was the first fairy's  
 Work. The second spun  
 A picture of Arithmetic,  
 Carefully tracing the steps  
 By which we count days,  
 And the hours they're made of, and count  
 Every drop in the ocean,  
 And each tiny grain of sand,  
 And all the stars on high,  
 And how many leaves on a tree,  
 And how we frame these numbers –  
 All accurately counted,  
 Employing no tricks and no lies,  
 For this fairy knows what she weaves.  
 And her subject was Arithmetic.  
 The third chose to show Music,  
 Which blends with every human  
 Pleasure, in counterpoint  
 And song, with harps and lutes  
 And viols – a beautiful picture,

With Music seated and in front  
 Of her her tools and delights.  
 But the fourth and final fairy  
 Drew the nobles portrait,  
 Having chosen the highest art:  
 Astronomy, which governs  
 And regulates marvels, the stars  
 In the sky, and the moon, and the sun.  
 And in every respect it rules  
 Entirely by its own arts,  
 Independently sure of whatever has been,  
 Perceiving whatever is still  
 To come, its learning precise,  
 Containing no lies and no fraud.  
 The fairies embroidered these things  
 In golden thread, on the cloth  
 From which Erec's robe was made.  
 And the lining was sewn from the skins  
 Of strange and wonderful beasts,  
 Their heads pale and blond,  
 Their necks dark as a mullet,  
 Their spines red, their bellies  
 Mottled, and their tails blue.  
 They come from the Indies, they're called  
 Berbiolettes, and they eat  
 Aromatic spices,  
 Fresh cloves and cinnamon.  
 What can I tell you about  
 The cloak? It was lush and beautiful,  
 With four gems for its clasps:  
 Chrysolite green on one side,  
 Amethyst purple on the other,  
 And all mounted in gold. (ll. 6737-6813)

Li rois Artus sor l'un s'assist,  
 Sor l'autre Erec asseoir fist,  
 Qui fu vestuz d'un drap de moire.  
 Lisant trovomes an l'estoire  
 La description de la robe,  
 Si an trai a garant Macrobe  
 Qui au descrire mist s'antante,  
 Que l'an ne die que je mante.  
 Macrobe m'ansaingne a descrivre  
 Si con je l'ai trové el livre,  
 L'uevre del drap et le portret.  
 Quatre fees l'avoient fet  
 Par grant san et par grant mestrie,  
 L'une I portrest geometrie,

Si com ele esgarde et mesure,  
 Con li ciaus et la terre dure,  
 Si que de rien nule n'I faut,  
 Et puis le bas et puis le lonc;  
 Et puis esgarde par selonc,  
 Con la mers est lee et parfonde,  
 Et si mesure tot le monde.  
 Tel oevre i mist la premerainne;  
 Et la seconde mist sa painne  
 An arimetique portreire,  
 Si se pena mout de bien feire,  
 Si com ele nonbre par sans  
 Les jorz et les ores del tans,  
 Et l'eve de mer gote a gote,  
 Et puis après l'arainne tote  
 Et les estoiles tire a tire,  
 - Bien an set la verité dire, -  
 Et quantes fuelles an bois a:  
 Onques nonbres ne l'an boisa,  
 Ne ja n'an mantira de rien,  
 Quant ele i viaut antandre bien;  
 Teus est li fans d'arimetique.  
 La tierce oevre fu de musique,  
 A cui toz li deduiz s'acorde,  
 Chanz et deschanz, et sons de corde  
 De harpe, de rote et vièle.  
 Ceste oevre fu et buene et bele;  
 Car devant li gisoient tuit  
 Li estrumant et li deduit.  
 La quarte, qui après ovra,  
 A mout buene oevre recovra;  
 Car la mellor des arz i mist.  
 D'astronomie s'antremist,  
 Celi qui fet tante mervoille,  
 Qui as estoiles se consoille  
 Et a la lune et au soloil.  
 An autre leu ne prant consoil  
 De rien qui a feire li soit;  
 Cil la consoillent bien a droit.  
 De quan que ele les requiert,  
 Et quan que fu et quan que iert,  
 Li font certainement savoir  
 Sanz mantir et sanz decevoir,  
 Ceste oevre fu el drap portreite,  
 De quoi la robe Erec fu feite,  
 A fil d'or ovree et tissue  
 La pane qui I fu cosue  
 Fu d'unes contrefeites bestes,

Qui ont totes blanches les testes  
Et les cos noirs com une more,  
Les dos ont toz vermauz dessore,  
Les vantres vers, et la coe inde,  
Iteus bestes neissent an Inde,  
Si ont barbioletes non;  
Ne manjuent s'especes non,  
Quenele et girofle novel.  
Que vos diroie del mantel?  
Mout fu riches et buens et biaux:  
Quatre pierres ot es taffiaus,  
D'une part ot deus crisolites,  
Et de l'autre deus ametistes,  
Qui furent assises an or. (ll. 6733-6809)

APPENDIX G: EXCERPT FROM CHRÉTIEN DE TROYES' *EREC ET ENIDE*:  
THE CROWNS

And then, in a courteous display,  
 He [Arthur] seated her [Enide] next to her husband,  
 Wanting to do her great honor.  
 And then he ordered his servants  
 To take a pair of heavy  
 gold crowns from his treasure chests,  
 And they rushed to obey his commands,  
 Quickly returning with massive  
 Crowns of gold, embossed  
 With great red rubies, each of them  
 Boasting four rich stones,  
 And even the smallest burned  
 With a light many times brighter  
 And clearer than the moon. And those  
 In the palace who looked at that light  
 Were unable, for some considerable  
 Time, to see at all.  
 The king himself was dazzled,  
 By the brilliant glow, but rejoiced in it  
 All the same, delighting  
 That the gems shone so beautifully  
 Clear. (ll. 6837-6858)

Li rois Artus, et par franchise  
 Lez Erec a Enide assise;  
 Car mout li viaut grant enor feire.  
 Maintenant comande fors treire  
 Deus corones de son tresor,  
 Totes massices de fin or.  
 Des qu'il l'ot comandé et dit,  
 Les corones sanz nul respit  
 Li furent devant aportees,  
 D'escharboncles anluminees;  
 Que quatre an avoit an chascune  
 Nule riens n'est clartez de lune  
 A la calrté que toz li mandre  
 Des escharboncles pooit randre.  
 Por la clarté qu'eles randoient,  
 Tuit cil qui el palés estoient,  
 Si tres duremant s'esbaïrent  
 Que de piece gote ne virent;  
 Et nes li rois s'an esbaï,

Et neporquant mout s'esjoï,  
Quant il les vit cleres et beles. (ll. 6832-6854)

APPENDIX H: EXCERPT FROM CHRÉTIEN DE TROYES' *EREC ET ENIDE*:  
THE SCEPTER

King Arthur  
 Ordered a wonderful scepter  
 Brought out, which all admired.  
 Listen and hear how this scepter  
 Was made: it glowed like a bell glass,  
 For it was set with a single emerald  
 As fat around as a fist.  
 And let me tell you the truth:  
 No fish that swims in the water,  
 No wild beast, no manner  
 Of man or flying bird,  
 But the artist had cut and worked  
 Its image into the stone.  
 They brought the scepter to Arthur,  
 Who stood a moment, admiring it,  
 And then with no further delay  
 Placed it in King Erec's  
 Right hand, making him a proper  
 King. (6873-6891)

Li rois Artus aporter fist  
 Un ceptre qui mout fu loez.  
 Del ceptre la façon oëz,  
 Qui fu plus clers d'une verrine,  
 Toz d'une esmeraude anterine,  
 Et s'avoit bien plain poing de gros.  
 Par verité dire vos os  
 Qu'an tot le monde n'a meniere  
 De peisson ne de beste fiere  
 Ne d'ome ne d'oisel volage,  
 Que chascuns lonc sa proper image  
 N'i fust ovrez et antailliez.  
 Li ceptres fu au roi bailliez,  
 Qui a mervoilles l'esgarda;  
 Si le mist, que plus ne tarda,  
 Li rois Erec an sa main destre,  
 - Or fu il rois si con dut ester – (ll. 6870-6886).



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

**Primary Sources**

Chrétien de Troyes. *Arthurian Romances*. Ed and trans. William W. Kibler and Carleton W. Carroll. London: Penguin, 2004.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Erec et Enide*. Trans. Burton Raffel. New Haven: Yale UP, 1997.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Christian von Troyes Sämtliche Werke; nach allen bekannten Handschriften* herausgegeben von Wendelin Foerster, vol. 1-3. Halle: M. Niemeyer, 1884.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Oeuvres complètes; édition publiée sous la direction de Daniel Poirion ; avec la collaboration d'Anne Berthelot et al.* Paris: Gallimard, 1994.

Isidore of Seville. *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*. Trans. Stephen A. Barney, W. J. Lewis, J.A. Beach, and Oliver Berghorf. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006.

*Le Roman de Thèbes (The Story of Thebes)*. Trans. John Smartt Coley. New York: Garland, 1986.

*Le Roman de Thèbes*. Trans. Léopold Constans. 2 vols. Paris: Didot, 1890.

Statius, P. Papinius. *Thebaïd*. Trans. A.D. Melville. Oxford, UP: 1992.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Thebaïd IX*. Ed. and trans. Michael Dewar. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991.

**Secondary Sources**

Bartlett, Robert. *England Under the Norman and Angevin Kings, 1075-1225*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000.

Birkholz, Daniel. *The King's Two Maps: Cartography and Culture in Thirteenth-Century England*. New York, Routledge, 2004.

Blumenfeld-Kosinski, Renate. "The Gods as Metaphor in the 'Roman de Thèbes.'" *Modern Philology* 83.1 (Aug. 1985): 1-11.

Bruckner, Matilda Tomaryn. "Chrétien de Troyes." In *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval French Literature*. Ed. Simon Gaunt and Sarah Kay. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008.

Bruhn, Jørgen. "From Reference to Deferment: Ekphrasis, Authority, and Fiction in Chrétien de Troyes." In *Negotiating Heritage: Memories of the Middle Ages*. Ed. Mette B. Bruun and Stephanie Glaser. 81-102. Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2008.

- Burgess, Glyn S. *Chrétien de Troyes Erec et Enide*. London: Grant and Cutler, 1984.
- Clemente, Linda M. *Literary objets d'art: Ekphrasis in Medieval French Romance 1150-1210*. New York: Peter Lang, 1992.
- Donovan, L.G. *Recherches Sur Le Roman de Thèbes*. Paris: Société d'édition d'enseignement supérieur, 1975.
- Elliott, Daphne. "Greek Creation Myths." *Encyclopedia Mythica*. 2004.  
[http://www.pantheon.org/articles/g/greek\\_creation\\_myths.html](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/g/greek_creation_myths.html)
- Gillingham, John. *The English in the Twelfth Century: Imperialism, National Identity, and Political Values*. Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK: Boydell Press, 2000.
- Greimas, A.J. *Dictionnaire de l'Ancien Français jusqu'au milieu due XIVe siècle*. Paris: Librairie Larousse, 1968.
- Grout, Patricia. "Religion and Mythology in the *Roman de Thèbes*." In *The Classical Tradition in French Literature: Essays Presented to R.C. Knight by Colleagues, Pupils, and Friends*. 23-30. Edinburgh: Authors, 1977.
- Hamilton, Edith. *Mythology*. Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1942.
- Harley, J.B. and David Woodward, eds. *The History of Cartography*. Vol. 1. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987.
- Harmon, William and Hugh Homan. *A Handbook to Literature*. 10<sup>th</sup> Edition. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson, 2006.
- Haupt, Barbara. "Literarische Bildbeschreibung im Artusroman – Tradition und Aktualisierung. Zu Chrestiens Beschreibung von Erecs Krönungsmantel und Zepter." *Zeitschrift für Germanistik* 9.3 (1999): 557-585.
- "Henry II (1154-1189)." *Britannia.com*. 2007. April 30 2009.  
<http://www.britannia.com/history/monarchs/mon26.html>
- Hindley, Alan, Frederick W. Langley, and Brian J. Levy. *Old French – English Dictionary*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000.
- Joly, Geneviève. *L'ancien français*. Paris: Belin, 2004.
- Kearney, Hugh. *The British Isles: A History of Four Nations*. Cambridge: UP, 2006.
- Keefe, Thomas K. "Henry II (1133-1189)." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. 2009.

- Krauß, Henning. "Kleiderzeichen und Arbeit in der „mout bele conjointure“ – Ein Vergleich zwischen Chrestiens *Erec et Enide* und *Yvain*." *Romanistische Zeitschrift für Literaturgeschichte/Cahiers d'Histoire des Littératures Romanes* 29.1-2 (2005): 183-96.
- Leadbetter, Ron. "Gaia." *Encyclopedia Mythica*. 2006.  
<http://www.pantheon.org/articles/g/gaia.html>
- Leadbetter, Ron. "Uranus." *Encyclopedia Mythica*. 1999.  
<http://www.pantheon.org/articles/u/uranus.html>
- Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991.
- Lindemans, Micha F. "Gigantes." *Encyclopedia Mythica*. 2004.  
<http://www.pantheon.org/articles/g/gigantes.html>
- Lindemans, Micha F. "Titans." *Encyclopedia Mythica*. 2005.  
<http://www.pantheon.org/articles/t/titans.html>
- Luttrell, Claude. *The Creation of the First Arthurian Romance: A Quest*. London: Edward Arnold Ltd., 1974.
- Maddox, Donald. *Structure and Sacring: The Systematic Kingdom in Chrétien's Erec et Enide*. Lexington, Ky.: French Forum, c. 1978.
- Minnis, A. J. *Chaucer and Pagan Antiquity*. Totowa, N.J.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1982.
- Kieckhefer, Richard. *Magic in the Middle Ages*. Cambridge: UP, 1990.
- Petit, Aime. "'Monseigneur' Amphiaraüs?." *Les Lettres Romanes* 33 (1979): 163-171.
- Störmer-Caysa, Uta. *Grundstrukturen mittelalterlicher Erzählungen : Raum und Zeit im höfischen Roman*. Berlin : De Gruyter, 2007.
- The Holy Bible. King James Version*. Online at  
<http://www.biblegateway.com/versions/?action=getVersionInfo&vid=9#copy>
- Todorov, Tzvetan. *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1973.
- Wandhoff, Haiko. *Der epische Blick: Eine mediengeschichtliche Studie zur höfischen Literatur*. Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 1996.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Ekphrasis: Kunstbeschreibungen und virtuelle Räume in der Literatur des Mittelalters*. New York: de Gruyter, 2003.

Watkins, C.S. *History and the Supernatural in Medieval England*. Cambridge: UP, 2008.

Žižek, Slavoj. *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. London: Verso, 1989.