A Troubled Translation: Reading the *Lais* of Marie de France

by

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Abstract

The twelfth-century *Lais* of Marie de France, twelve short narrative romances in French verse, are a delightfully heterogenous mixture of old Celtic, classical, Anglo-Norman and Christian themes and motifs. At times these varied streams of influence stand together in unreconciled incongruity. Scholarly attempts to present a unified interpretation of the *Lais* have yielded varied and often mutually incompatible results.

It is the contention of this dissertation that, while all the differing and contradictory interpretations of the *Lais* offer particular insights into the work and message of the author, the most important single unifying optic is understanding Marie de France as a medieval translator. Marie began with genuine artefacts of Celtic performance and transformed them, not only linguistically but also culturally, assigning to the vernacular oral tradition the same status that was accorded to the written Latin heritage and submitting it to the same sort of treatment, not only representing it in another language but reforming it to enrich its content and meaning. What distinguishes her work from her contemporaries, what in fact, I argue, constitutes its success, is that she resisted a complete transformation, retaining authentic cultural elements unassimilated to one another, and allowing them to speak side by side, even if at times this process resulted in cultural and moral incoherence.

A close reading of the *Lais* undergirded by historical, linguistic and literary investigation frequently enables a distinction of the disparate elements which came together to make the final product, masterfully unified in terms of narrative and disturbingly inconsistent in social and moral stance. This approach reveals at every turn Marie's strategies as a translator and her inventiveness as a writer, and suggests that what became known from the twelfth century on as

the *lai de Bretaigne* was actually a new genre, not of Breton but of Old French literature, in all probability created singlehandedly by Marie de France. Later attempts to imitate, resituate or translate Marie's *Lais* demonstrate that her translation strategy was poorly understood. Though her influence on subsequent literature was profound, the continuing attempts to clarify the poet's ambivalent positions, to moralize, feudalize, masculinize and harmonize the message of the *Lais*, reveal how unsettling was her method, and confirm how strongly her compositions have resisted —and continue to resist—any facile and reductive analysis.

To Loretta

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Chapter 1: General Introduction

1. 1. The *Lais* of Marie de France.

This is a doctoral dissertation on the *Lais* of Marie de France, which is a collection of twelfth-century Old French poems. I am aware at the outset that, being a doctoral dissertation, its readership will be limited. I would like to encourage the reader to continue in spite of this, not really because I want a wider readership (I am not, like Marie de France, seeking renown), but because I wish Marie to have a wider readership. She is worth reading, even at the better part of a millenium after the fact. Her stories are enjoyable. They are about true love, and faith, and danger, and sex, and longing, and real pain and real adventures and supernatural transformations. They are well-paced and written in a deceptively simple, engaging rhythmic style. If tropes occasionally appear which seem well-used and hackneyed, the reader must remember that it is like watching Buster Keaton or listening to Thelonius Monk. They have been imitated to the point where one can too easily forget that, when they did begin, it was something brand-new. So with Marie. She was fresh and original, and so good at what she did that she established conventions of literature which have been copied and extrapolated over and over again since her day.

"*Marie ai nun, si sui de France*." These brief words comprise almost all that is known about one of the greatest poets of Old French literature. Her oeuvre consists, it is supposed, of three works, all of which were some form of translation into French verse. The *Lais* assembled

twelve legends which she claimed to have heard sung by the Breton minstrels of her day; the *Ysopë* is derived, according to her, from an English collection of fables in the Aesop tradition; and the *Espurgatoire seint Patriz* is a religious work based on a Latin source. Indications within the writings themselves, linguistic markers and external references lead to tentative dates of composition in the later twelfth century, at the Anglo-Norman court of Henri II and Aliénor d'Aquitaine.

Thought to be the earliest of Marie's works, translated/composed around 1165, the *Lais* united literary, linguistic, religious and cultural elements from British, French, classical Latin and contemporary European streams, at times in a delightfully unresolved mixture. Most literary figures of the day were translating Latin classics into vernacular languages, and the popularity of the pursuit was one of Marie's avowed reasons for avoiding it: there was no renown to be gained on a path so well-trodden. She was among the first European writers to turn to the "matter of Britain" and to set the world of King Arthur and his knights, the world of dauntless heroism and of Celtic magic and marvels, into the Christian, feudal and courtly world of the Normans. An accomplished linguist, she was evidently comfortable in a number of languages and in the spaces between them, from Latin and French to English and perhaps Breton and Welsh as well.

Marie's *Lais* have been around for over eight centuries: in their original form, in updated French and in interlingual translations. Although they went through a period of obscurity, from about the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries, their influence can be clearly seen on other poets and translators whom they inspired to tackle *lais*, and in the material of later romances. Moreover, since the nineteenth century, they have attracted a considerable amount of scholarly

interest, both because of their literary merit and because of the fact that Marie was the "first lady", in terms both of stature and epoch, of European writers.

Scholarly interest always means, of course, the attempt to analyze and to explain. A satisfactory, or at the least a satisfying, explanation takes account of all the elements and resolves them into a harmonious pattern. Now, while it is true that human life is not always susceptible to resolution into harmonious patterns, the *representations* of life in art, representations of life observed, structured and translated into symbols through the gridwork of the human mind, often are. Literature can therefore be described by—and frankly, often to its detriment, reduced to—its most basic elements, which repeat in arrangements *ad infinitum* the stories that human beings always tell. This is not a negative criticism of such stories, but quite the opposite: our connection, our previous relation, as it were, is necessary; the familiarity of the elements is intelligible and comforting, while the variety of arrangement is interesting. Most great stories are fresh takes on the oldest themes; perhaps the greatest of these so engage us with the freshness that we hardly recognize the familiarity.

Not following the pattern, then, results in a certain amount of incoherence. In its most literal sense, this means that things do not stick together: elements may be out of order (the chain of causality is confused) or out of place (the fitness of elements is compromised). Incoherence is unusual on the (popular or successful) literary scene; and when it occurs it is remarkable, perhaps for the better, perhaps for the worse. I propose three possible explanations for literary incoherence: incompetence, when a writer does not understand how to employ the conventions of storytelling; arrogance, when a writer does not understand *why* to employ the conventions of storytelling, seeing himself or herself as above the obligation to communicate with the *canaglia*;

or genius, when a writer disturbs us by interrogating our assumptions while at the same time irresistibly engaging us. The first two possibilities are frequently connected. The second possibility is all too often mistaken by the writer, and occasionally by critics, for the third. When the third possibility is truly realized, it irrevocably marks a genre; it may transform it, it may even create a new genre.

Such is Marie de France, artistry that translates and transforms with an unsettling and at times arguably incoherent reconstituting of elements so that recreation becomes creation, a new way of telling, a new genre, the *Lais*. This is not to say that these works are finished, without flaw. Some are better than others. One of them might be called trite; another (in my opinion) borders occasionally on tedious. All of them are beautifully crafted, engaging and worthwhile. Their appealing incoherence is not narrative, but cultural. Most of them are short masterpieces; some (like *Lanval* and *Yonec*) have made an indelible imprint upon western literature: often imitated, never equalled.

This dissertation will focus on reading, in the twelfth-century context, those portions of the *Lais* in which conflicting world views seem to stand together unreconciled, in which contrasting standards of ethics are permitted to contribute side by side to the movement of the story while remaining unabsorbed into a consistent whole. This is most striking in those passages which deal with decisions of right and wrong, often involving sexual passion, feudal obligation and love's loyalties, and their interaction with the layers of Breton folklore, Norman social structure, medieval courtly romance and an all-pervasive Christianity. The translation of the *Lais*, by recasting the original Breton worldview into that of courtly love and normative religion, could establish but an uneasy truce with the former by making some attempt to graft it into medieval

morality. This was made all the more troubled by the ambivalent relationship between courtly love and Christian standards. In my view, Marie's success consists in the fact that she made a truce rather than a conquest, allowing disparate elements to speak with a retained authenticity in an arguably incoherent but nevertheless focused and carefully-woven oeuvre. In early reception as well as in later incarnations, Marie's ambiguity was problematic; the difficulty of dealing with it has continued all the way into modern scholarship. Popular but unsettling, the *Lais* in later French and other-language versions were adapted and polished in an attempt to reconcile their destabilizing inconsistencies and to render the translation fully cultural and religious as well as linguistic, at times without fully understanding what is was that made them angular and generally without Marie's master-touch of putting together incongruous features into an intact and engaging narrative whole.

1. 2. Marie de France: A very brief autobiography.

Virtually all that is known for certain about this author, one of the greatest poets of Old French literature, is that her name (or at least her *nom de plume*) was Marie and that she identified France as her place of origin. What scant additional information there is comes from her own writings, their relationship to their sources, and a single clear reference to her and her work by a contemporary author. Some further hints are supplied by the manuscript tradition. In the following paragraphs, I would like to examine the brief portrait of Marie that emerges from her successive productions.

The work considered by current scholarly consensus to be Marie's earliest (but this has been debated in the past and is not yet conclusively resolved) is the collection of short verse romances called the *Lais*. In the *lai* of *Guigemar*, the poem which heads the collection (at least in

the thirteenth-century manuscript Harley 978, which is the only one to include all twelve *Lais* and the *Prologue*), the author declaims:

> Oëz, seignur, que dit Marie,
> ki en sun tens pas ne s'oublie (*Guigemar* 3-4).
>
> (Listen, my lords, to what Marie says,
> who is not forgotten in her day!)[1]

Thus far all that is known, then, is that her name was Marie, that she was (to judge from the name, which might, however, be pseudonymous) a woman writer, and that she was apparently determined to make her mark. The number of works that have come down to us anonymously from the Middle Ages suggests that the declaration of authorship and the ambition to be remembered were not necessarily commonplace.[2]

In the *Prologue* to the *Lais*, we learn a little more about this Marie:

> Qui Deus a duné esciënce
> e de parler bone eloquence,
> ne s'en deit taisir ne celer,
> ainz se deit voluntiers mustrer (1-4).
>
> (One to whom God has given knowledge
> and fine eloquence in speaking
> must not be silent nor hide these gifts,
> but willingly make them known.)

1 Unless otherwise indicated, all translations into English are my own.

2 For example, regarding the author of the twelfth-century history of Britain known as *La Geste des Bretons* or the *Brut*, scholars note that "Wace, unlike many medieval writers, named himself and included comments about himself probably because he was worried about his reputation and his advancement" (Glowka xi).

Clearly, Marie considered herself well-educated and a talented rhetorician, and saw it as her duty to manifest her talents to the world.[3]

Later in the *Prologue*, she justifies her choice of material:

> Pur ceo començai a penser
> d'alkune bone estoire faire
> e de Latin en Romanz traire ;
> mais ne me fust guaires de pris :
> itant s'en sunt altre entremis.
> Des lais pensai qu'oïz aveie.
> Ne dutai pas, bien le saveie,
> que pur remembrance les firent
> des aventures qu'il oïrent
> cil ki primes les comencierent
> e ki avant les enveierent.
> Plusurs en ai oïz conter,
> ne vueil laissier ne obliër.
> Rime en ai e fait ditié,
> soventes feiz en ai veillié (28-42).

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[3] Marie may be echoing the introductory passage from another work, the *Roman de Thèbes* (before 1150):

> Qui sage est nel deit celer,
> ainz por ço deit son sen monstrer,
> que, quant serra del siécle alez,
> en seit pués toz jorz remembrez.
> Se danz Homers et danz Platon
> et Vergiles et Ciceron
> lor sapience celissant,
> ja ne fust d'eus parlé avant.
> Por ço ne vueil mon sen taisir,
> ma sapience retenir;
> ainz me delét a aconter
> chose digne de remembrer. (*Le Roman de Thèbes* 1-12)
>
> (He who is wise must not hide it,
> but for this reason must show his intelligence:
> so that when he is gone from this world,
> he then may always be remembered for it.
> If lord Homer and lord Plato
> and Virgil and Cicero
> had hidden their wisdom,
> no longer would anything be said about them.
> Therefore, I am not willing to silence my intelligence,
> nor hold back my wisdom;
> rather it delights me to recount
> something worthy of remembrance.)

(For this reason I began to think
about working on some fine story,
translating from Latin into Romance;
but this would scarcely have been worth my while:
so many others have already undertaken that task.
I considered the *lais* that I had heard.
I had no doubt, I knew quite well
that they had made them as a memorial
of the adventures that they had heard,
those who first composed them
and published them in time past.
Many of them I have heard recounted;
I do not wish that they should be neglected and forgotten.
I have made rhyming compositions of them;
I have spent many sleepless hours on them.)

From this passage it emerges that Marie's particular knowledge and gifts pertained to languages, composition, poetry, and translation. A skilled wordsmith in *romanz*, which we now call Old French, she was also competent in Latin in a day when translation of Latin works into vernacular languages was necessary because so many of the literate class could no longer understand Latin well. What is more, she could turn with some confidence to Breton and perhaps Welsh,[4] the languages of the conquered Celts of England and of their oral or musical compositions known as the *lais*. (These pieces were apparently also known to English speakers, as on two occasions—*Aüstic* 3-6 and *Chievrefueil* 115-116—she gives the English translation of the titles. This further suggests that she was conversant with the English language, a suggestion which will be confirmed in another of her works, the *Ysopë*.) Finally, her ambition, noted above in *Guigemar* 3-4, is again evident here: she was willing to undertake only what would bring her renown—perhaps the *mot juste* is "distinction", that which would set her apart from pursuits wherein the pioneering glory had already been won.

[4] Marie and her contemporary Old French writers grouped under the moniker *bretun* ("Breton") the northwest Celtic languages of Breton, Welsh, Cornish, Irish and Scottish Erse (Sergent 8).

Then at the end of the *Prologue*, Marie dedicates her work:

> En l'onur de vus, nobles reis,
> ki tant estes pruz e curteis,
> a ki tute joie s'encline,
> e en qui quer tuz biens racine,
> m'entremis des lais assembler,
> par rime faire e reconter.
> En mun quer pensoe e diseie,
> sire, ques vos presentereie.
> Se vos les plaist a receveir,
> mult me ferez grant joie aveir;
> a tuz jurs mais en serrai liee.
> Ne me tenez a surquidiee,
> se vos os faire icest present (43-55).
>
> (In your honour, O noble king,
> who are so valiant and courteous,
> to whom all joy bends the knee,
> and in whose heart every good thing takes root,
> I undertook to bring together these *lais*,
> to set them in rhyme and to recount them.
> In my heart I was planning and determining,
> my lord, that I would dedicate them to you.
> If it pleases you to accept them,
> you will give me great joy;
> I shall be forever in your debt.
> Do not judge me presumptuous
> if I dare to offer them to you.)

A few more details can be gleaned from this passage. Marie's closeness to the court suggests that she was a noble, while her diffidence towards the king indicates that she was herself not royalty. The work had not been commissioned but was undertaken upon her own initiative; nevertheless, she appears to have had some expectation that the "noble king" would be inclined to accept her literary offering, which perhaps hints that he was known for his interest in the arts. And once again we are confronted with Marie's insistence that she be recognized for her work. We have seen above that she chose a source material peculiarly connected to Britain and that she was

acquainted with almost all of the languages current there: Latin, French, Breton, Welsh, and English (only Danish is missing from the list). All of these indications tend to point to Norman/ Angevin England and the court of Henri II and Aliénor d'Aquitaine. Looking at her later works will tend to solidify this supposition.

A second work from the period, similar in style, language and probable origin, bears the name "Marie" and is generally considered a production of the same author/translator as of the *Lais*. A collection of fables translated into French concludes with this identification:

> Al finement de cest escrit,
> qu'en romanz ai treité et dit,
> me numerai pur remembrance:
> Marie ai nun, si sui de France (*Ysopë*, *Epilogue* 1-4).
>
> (At the conclusion of this text,
> which I have worked on and recounted in Romance,
> I shall identify myself in order to be remembered:
> Marie is my name, and I am from France.)

Of objective information about Marie, this is virtually the totality. We remember that "France" of the twelfth century was not the extensive politically defined unit that it is today; the term referred primarily to the region of Île-de-France, that is, around Paris, or if it was used more generally it designated the larger geographical area of France as opposed to England. In addition, the mention of her origin indicates that she was no longer residing there. As seen in the prologue to *Guigemar*, she underscores her desire to have her name go down to posterity; and she adds in the *Epilogue* to the *Ysopë*:

> Cil uevre mal ki sei ublie (8)
>
> (He performs his task poorly who lets himself be forgotten)

There were numerous collections of fables in Latin. Marie's version, according to her own testimony, came from an English (that is, Anglo-Saxon) collection which had been translated from Latin by King Alfred:

> m'entremis de cest livre feire
> e de l'engleis en romanz treire.
> Esopë apel'um cest livre,
> qu'il translata e fist escrire,
> del griu en latin le turna.
> Li reis Alvrez, que mut l'ama,
> le translata puis en engleis,
> e jeo l'ai rimee en franceis (*Ysopë*, *Epilogue* 11-18)
>
> (I undertook to make this book
> and to translate it from English into Romance.
> The book is known as *Aesop*;
> it was he who translated it and caused it to be written down;
> he rendered it from Greek into Latin.
> King Alfred, who ardently admired it,
> then translated it into English,
> and I have rhymed it in French)

The first forty fables are traditionally Aesopic; there is an immediate change of tone after these to more earthy, folky, cruder themes. That Marie knew English (Anglo-Saxon) is evident, as we saw above in certain references in the *Lais*, and that she knew it well enough to translate from a

fable collection by Alfred shows her mastery of the language.[5] Marie's *Ysopë* was extremely popular and her fables survive in at least twenty-three manuscripts (Burgess and Busby 14).

A third work of the same provenance signed "Marie" is *L'Espurgatoire seint Patriz*, a French translation of the Latin *Tractatus de purgatorio sancti Patricii* which was written by a Cistercian monk, H. (perhaps Henri) de Saltrey of Huntingdonshire. Marie translated the *Tractatus* for the benefit of lay readers who did not understand Latin:

> Jo, Marie, ai mis en memoire
> le livre de l'Espurgatoire:
> en Romanz qu'il seit entendables
> a laie gent e cuvenables (2297-2300).
>
> (I, Marie, have preserved
> the book of the Purgatory
> by translating it into Romance, that it may be understood by
> and readily accessible to laypeople.)

Though the earliest, she was not the only one to do so; Bérol, Geofroi de Paris and four anonymous translators also rendered the *Tractatus* into Old French (Jenkins 4-5).

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[5] The famous promoter and translator of the English language was King Alfred, and it is supposed that he was the author of Marie's source. However, since no collection of the fables by Alfred the Great is known, and because of the suggestion that hints of Orientalism can be found, Sahar Amer suggests that Marie accessed Arabic sources for many of the fables, and that the translation she depended on may have been by an Alfred other than she supposed: Alfred the scholar (Alfred of Sarasel) and not Alfred the Great.

Hans Runte rejects the idea that Marie translated from English, since in his view English was too lacking in prestige at the time to attract translation destined for a noble audience. He argues instead that *Epilogue* 16-18 means that Alfred translated the Latin into English, and Marie [also] translated [the Latin] into rhyming French (17-18). This, however, requires a radical reinterpretation of *Epilogue* 11-12, *m'entremis de cest livre feire/e de l'engleis en romanz treire*, as "I undertook to: (a) make this book, and (b) tell in French some English" (Runte 18), that is, to add to the Latin text a certain number of fables drawn from the local English tradition. Runte argues: "I take the second 'de' to be part of a partitive article rather than a repetition of the preposition" (18). It is not really a repetition, however, since the first *de* (of the fixed expression *s'entremetre de*) is a preposition connected with the sense of the verb itself and introduces both following infinitives *feire* and *treire* (see Kibler *Old French* 172; cf. also *Prologue* to the *Lais* 47). More of a problem is that Runte's reading of the preposition as a partitive article is anachronistic: Rohlfs (85) does not consider there to be any partitive use of *de* in Marie, as the form scarcely existed at that time, nor was it used as an indefinite, for which there were separate forms (Kibler *Old French* 12-13). It seems better, then, to accept the most obvious interpretation of lines 11-12: "I undertook to make this book, and to translate it from English into Romance."

In all three of these works composed by a "Marie," there are the common threads of translation into r*omanz* or Old French, the vernacular "Roman" language descended from but by that time very distinct from Vulgar Latin; a desire to preserve works that might otherwise be lost to the reading public; a connection with insular Britain; and a determination to be remarked and remembered.

1. 3. And an even briefer biography…

One word only about Marie, author of the *Lais*, comes to us from a source other than herself, but this word testifies to the great popularity of her writing. Denis Piramus, in the introduction to his *Vie Seint Edmund le rei* (around 1180), wishing to contrast the seriousness of his opus against the frivolous works enjoying great popularity at the time, critiques two celebrated contemporary publications: *Partenopeus de Blois* and the *Lais* of Marie.

> Cil ki Partenope trova,
> e ki les vers fist e rima,
> mult se pena de bien dire;
> si dist il bien de cele matire,
> cume de fable e de menceonge.
> La matire resemble songe;
> kar ceo ne poüst unkes estre.
> Si est il tenu pur bon mestre,
> e les vers sunt mult amez,
> e en ces riches curts loez.
> E dame Marie autresi,
> ki en rime fist e basti
> e compassa les vers de lais,
> ke ne sunt pas del tut verais;
> e si en est ele mult loée
> e la rime par tut amée,
> kar mult l'aiment, si l'unt mult cher
> cunte, barun e chivaler;
> e si enaiment mult l'escrit
> e lire le funt, si unt delit,
> e si les funt sovent retreire.

> Les lais solent as dames pleire,
> de joie les oient e de gré,
> qu'il sunt sulum lur volenté (25-48).
>
> (The one who composed *Partenopeus*,
> and who wrote and rhymed the lines,
> laboured hard to express himself well,
> and indeed he told the story well,
> as it were a fable and a lie.
> The tale sounds like a dream,
> for it could never have taken place.
> So he is considered a master of his craft
> and the lines are treasured
> and praised in these wealthy courts.
> Likewise the lady Marie,
> who wrote and fashioned in rhyme
> and structured the lines from *lais*,
> which are not in the least true;
> and indeed she is highly praised for them
> and the rhyme is everywhere appreciated;
> for they are very taken with her, truly they cherish her,
> counts, barons and knights,
> and they are quite enamoured with her writings
> and have them read out for their pleasure,
> and thus they cause them to be often recited.
> The *lais* are generally pleasing to the ladies;
> they hear them with joy and willingness,
> since these works are suited to their desire.)

Denis Piramus seems rather resentful that the author of *Partenopeus* should be esteemed for imaginative and entertaining writing, and he acknowledges Marie's success with scarcely-veiled contempt for her lack of veracity and her crowd-pleasing style. It is of course only human nature that the pious didactic should be astonished to find that people generally prefer entertainment to edification.[6] There is a lack of sympathy resulting from differing priorities: the scholar researching the pious life of a saint and the poet unearthing the most authentic elements of a

[6] "I have often observed how little young ladies are interested by books of a serious stamp, though written solely for their benefit. It amazes me, I confess; for certainly, there can be nothing so advantageous to them as instruction." The Rev'd Mr Collins in Jane Austen's (1813) *Pride and Prejudice* (London: Folio, 1975), 64.

legend are two very different pursuits, although both are pursuits of truth. Here meet what C. S. Lewis (105) has called "the two ideals of the Middle Ages": the irreconcilable themes of piety and courtly romance. (If Denis Piramus assumes that Marie, in the pursuit of pure diversion, disregards the interplay of religion, history, and culture, it is the focus of his own view that has caused him to fail to perceive the breadth of her work.)

Piramus's backhanded praise may be a reflection of a certain jealous faction of which Marie, as her popularity grew, became aware:

> Celui deivent la genz loër
> ki en bien fait de sei parler.
> Mais quant il a en un païs
> hume ne femme de grant pris,
> cil ke de sun bien unt envie
> sovent en diënt vileinie.
> Sun pris li vuelent abaissier:
> pur ceo comencent le mestier
> del malvais chien coart, felun,
> ki mort la gent par traïsun.
> Nel vueil mie pur ceo laissier,
> se jangleür u losengier
> le me vuelent a mal turner;
> ceo est lur dreiz de mesparler. (*Guigemar* 5-18)
>
> (People ought to praise one
> who expresses himself well.
> But when there is in a land
> a man or woman of great talent,
> those who are jealous of her merit
> often malign her.
> They wish to diminish her reputation;
> this is why they take on the role
> of a cowardly, vicious dog
> who bites people treacherously.
> I am certainly not going to retreat because of this,
> if some clowns or tricksters
> wish to bring my project into disrepute.
> They have a perfect right to slander.)

In any case, Piramus's critique gives us an important external datum: Ravenel (46-53) argues in detail for a date of composition of the *Vie seint Edmund*, based on language and content, of around 1190-1200; Burgess and Busby (11) put it even earlier, at about 1180. Piramus "speaks of Marie not only as of one whose works were still familiar to the public, but as of a person still living" (Ravenel 52). This is an indication that the *Lais* were written sometime before 1180-90. Moreover, as Denis Piramus is associated only with England, the theory that Marie lived and wrote close to the Anglo-Norman court is substantiated.

1. 4. Marie the person, Marie the writer: Conclusions.

At the end of all this scrutiny and dissection of scant detail, it is important to remember that although we have created a possible, even probable picture of the author/translator Marie de France and her works, almost every "fact" remains uncertain. Bloch (1) admits that "concrete knowledge about her is so meager as to render imprudent anything but the most militant skepticism about almost every aspect of her life";[7] and Harf-Lancner retains a healthy hesitation:

> The three works were composed near the end of the twelfth century, by an author connected to England. […] It is thus a persuasive hypothesis that the three "Maries" are one and the same person, but this cannot be concluded with certainty. Nor is there any proof that these *Lais*, sometimes touted as a prime example of *écriture féminine*, were indeed written by a woman, in spite of the

[7] Bloch (3) summarizes: "Marie de France has been identified alternately as Marie de Champagne, the daughter of Aliénor d'Aquitaine and Louis VII (Winkler); as Marie de Compiègne mentioned in "L'Evangile des femmes" (Chabaille, Mall); as a nun named Marie who wrote a "Vie de sainte Audrée" (Södergard); as Marie de Boulogne, daughter of Stephen of Blois and Matilda of Boulogne and abbess of Romsey (Knapton); as the illegitimate daughter of Geoffrey of Anjou, the half-sister of King Henry II and abbess of Shaftesbury from 1181 to 1216 (Bullock-Davis [*sic*], Crosland, Fox); as the abbess of Reading, the place where the manuscript H of the *Lais* might have been composed (Levi); as the daughter of the Norman count Galeran de Meulan, the wife of Hugues Talbot, baron of Cleuville (Holmes, Flum)." Or, indeed, none of the foregoing.

> fact that miniatures have promoted this notion by depicting a woman seated at her desk, quill in hand (*Lais* 8).[8]

We are left with more or less certain dates of composition[9] and a minimal identification of the author and her world. Concretely, we are left with the writings themselves, which I hope reminds us that though we have not perhaps succeeded in identifying beyond any doubt the provenance of the vessel, the treasure within it still remains very much ours to explore and enjoy.

1. 5. The problem of the *Lais*.

The *Lais* hold a unique place in the oeuvre of Marie de France. I would justifiably raise the ire of all specialists who have concentrated on the *Ysopë* and the *Espurgatoire* if I were to

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[8] "Les trois oeuvres ont été composées à la fin du XIIe siècle, par un auteur lié à l'Angleterre. […] Il est donc vraisemblable que les trois *Marie* n'en sont qu'une seule, mais on ne peut l'affirmer. Rien ne prouve non plus que ces *Lais* dont on a parfois vanté l'écriture féminine ont bien été composés par une femme, même si des miniatures soulignent ce trait en représentant une femme assise, la plume à la main, à sa table de travail."

Baum is categoric: "Nothing compels the conclusion that this collection [the twelve poems in the Harley manuscript] is the work of a single author; nothing permits us to claim that this author was called Marie; absolutely nothing permits us to conclude that this author is the same person as Marie de France, author of the *Fables*" (218, "Rien n'impose la conclusion que ce recueil constitue l'oeuvre d'un seul auteur; rien ne permet d'affirmer que cet auteur s'appelle Marie; absolument rien ne permet de conclure que cet auteur soit identique à Marie de France, l'auteur des *Fables*."). Baum's position is justifiable but seems unnecessarily vehement; the fact that the traditional view cannot be proven does not mean that it must *ipso facto* be false.

[9] It was not until well into the eighteenth century that critics began to suggest that Marie de France was the author not only of the *Ysopë* (which was widely known and which is the one work to which is appended both the name "Marie" and the origin "de France") but also of the *Lais*; the *Espurgatoire* was later added to this list. It was thought at first that she wrote in the thirteenth century; further consideration of language and dialect as well as of literary dependence (Hoepffner) eventually put her near the end of the twelfth. Because it was possible to date the *Espurgatoire* rather definitely to around 1190 from its Latin sources, the debate was over the order of Marie's works. Warnke had put the *Lais* as the earliest, but Jenkins argued that the *Espurgatoire* used an older language, was less creative, represented Latin translation which the *Lais* abandoned, and showed more of a beginner's diffidence in its dedication than the *Lais*' confident presentation to the king (Jenkins 9-16; see Ravenel 3-4). Paris, in his review of Jenkins, responded that references to contemporary literature showed on the contrary that it was the *Lais* which tended to represent older forms, that the dedication of the *Espurgatoire* was to the nobleman who had commissioned it—how could she have dedicated it otherwise?—and that it was not that Marie had abandoned translation from Latin by the time of the *Lais* but rather that she had expressly not yet begun it. As for originality and creativity, Paris contended that such an evaluation would have to take into account the very different sources for each of Marie's works (Paris "Compte" 292-5). I would add that some uncertainty inheres in linguistic and dialectic analysis since language specifics, in the absence of the autographs, are an aspect of the copyist's era and situation as well as of the author's; also, a religious work such as the *Espurgatoire* tends to invite formal or traditional language, which can have the effect of archaizing.

Current scholarship accepts the *Lais* as the earliest, perhaps around 1165, and the *Espurgatoire* as the latest (1190 or so), with the *Ysopë* somewhere in between. These conclusions are based on Marie's own *Prologue* to the *Lais* which indicates that it is her first work, and the fact that Denis Piramus critiques the levity of her style as author of the *Lais*, which he would be unlikely to do if she had already produced her didactic and religious works. That the *Lais* show the influence of contemporary French romances such as *Brut*, *Thèbes* and *Eneas* (Hoepffner 58, 60, 170), but not of Chrétien de Troyes, places them "as early as the 1160s" (Burgess and Busby 14).

suggest that the merits of these compositions fall short of the *Lais*. The fact is that each of Marie's works displays both shared and peculiar aspects of her artistic mastery.[10] What distinguishes the *Lais* is rather their troublesome heterogeneity. This is not to say that the poems, as individual compositions, are clumsy or confusing. In terms of plot and narrative structure, it is absolutely the reverse: Marie's characteristic style is one of focused movement and cohesive, almost terse, development, in marked contrast to many of her imitators and successors who seemed unable to avoid random story excursions and irrelevant sermonic asides. Constance Bullock-Davies emphasizes that brevity and a sense of ordered dramatic presentation were keys to Marie's method ("Reassessment" 95-6); John Stevens notes that a poem of Marie is "an imaginative whole", "[n]ot a flawless unity, granted, in every case; but *grasped*" (11). It is not that the structure is maladroit but rather that the social, cultural and religious elements are ill at ease with one another. The *Lais* embody at once perpectives which seem temporally and morally contradictory. They are difficult to pin down, their unifying theme remains disputed, their moral stance appears inconsistent. Their treatment of standard tropes such as courtly love, marriage, Christian virtue and feudal obligation interrogate, or fail to satisfy, or perhaps exceed the expectations of, orthodoxy.

As I suggested above, traditional scholarship has (understandably) preferred analysis which reveals underlying structure, reduction to common elements and the reconciliation of apparent incoherences. With respect to the *Lais*, this has meant the quest to uncover some driving force, some unifying principle that essentializes Marie's focus, that harmonizes seemingly

[10] I admit, at least in a footnote, to my opinion that the *Lais* are her greatest accomplishment. I am in good company: de Riquer calls the *Lais* Marie's best known work and justifiably her most celebrated one (1); Hoepffner asserts that the *Lais* are unquestionably Marie's masterwork, which put her name on the same level as Chrétien de Troyes or Thomas d'Angleterre (166).

disparate elements into a cohesive theme. Was such an overt quest characteristic only of the scholarship of the past, a weakness of nineteenth-century philology and humanism? Undoubtedly, but it is evidently a covert tendency into which modern scholarship is just as prone to fall under updated rubrics. So, just what are the *Lais* of Marie about? Perhaps we would be surprised if all were not willing to agree with Glyn S. Burgess's very general assessment: "The theme of love is certainly the fundamental preoccupation of the *Lais*" (*Lais* ix). This is no banal observation in that the *Lais* were part of a crucial shift in literature, which previously concerned itself only with quests, activities of the gods, glorious battles and heroic last stands. The fact that every *lai* concerns a love affair is thus striking. Still, that umbrella verdict may not be specific enough to satisfy the analyst who seeks Marie's particular bent or the literary historian who strives to uncover her agenda. And though most agree that love was Marie's central motif, the conclusion is not universal. A little romance and a good deal of unhappiness, opined Paris (qtd in Bloch 4). True love and justice, said Hoepffner (171-7). The secular power of the nobles against the Church, says Kinoshita (41). A distinctly feminine silent space of creativity, suggests Freeman (878). Lessons for the clergy, says Maréchal (133). The Norman political agenda, argues Fisher (202). The exploration of semantic instability, Bloch (35) would maintain. The inevitability of suffering in love, conclude Burgess and Busby (28). And I add my perspective to theirs, and if I have the audacity to claim to see anything new it is because I am a dwarf standing on the shoulders of giants and only because of that position am I able to, like Marie, *gloser la lettre e de lur sen le surplus metre*, comment on the text and contribute something more to the meaning. Of course, I grossly oversimplify if I insinuate that these scholars see only one way of reading Marie, and I do them a grave injustice if I do not acknowledge that they nuance their

own interpretations while taking account of the interpretations of others. Indeed, much of what follows will consist of detailed (and appreciative) interaction with their perspectives. But Marie, says Bullock-Davies, "has become obfuscated by personal theories and analyses. These are legitimate and valuable in themselves but they are bound to be restrictive" ("Reassessment" 93). The inquirer is sometimes left with the notion of a sort of "best overall approach", a unified interpretive optic which attempts in one fashion or another to "make sense" out of Marie and to describe what her method and her message "boil down to". This might be acceptable, even positive, if these optics agreed with or at least permitted one another, but they do not, which signals a basic problem with such an approach. I do not mean to assert that all these claims are wrong, but on the contrary that they are all indeed *right*. All of these themes are found in Marie de France's *Lais*; all of them are trumpeted brashly or insinuated with the most subtle finesse. Scholars have two good reasons for arguing that some one of these themes is Marie's single purpose, the lens through which her *Lais* ought to be read. First of all, these themes are evident. Secondly, they tend to be somewhat exclusive one of the other. If I insist, for example, that Marie's *Lais* are "resolutely secular" (Kinoshita & McKracken 51), I cannot in the same breath demonstrate that they must be understood as primarily establishing "a context of Christian order" (Pickens 332). For the sake of logical coherence, I cannot leave her ethos in disharmony; I cannot interpret Marie in an inconsistent fashion; I cannot place side by side elements which do not meld.

But this, I shall argue, is precisely what I must do. Rather than searching for the key to synthesize awkward elements, I must allow her to deliberately position her incoherences, which

are real and ineffaceable, and are the mark neither of her incompetence nor of her arrogance but of her skill.

The first issue with the *Lais* of Marie de France is that they represent not one but several significant streams of influence. Scholarship certainly recognizes and explores, as we shall see in greater detail in the next chapter, the whirlwind of changes that produced, in a subsequent period of relative peace and leisure, the rich artistic creativity of the 1100s. The Normans conquered England and awakened an interest in the "matter of Britain"; translations of Greek and Roman classics from Latin versions were enriching the literary tropes and allusions available to the French-language writers/translators; expanding knowledge of the East opened up by the Crusades was providing a whole new body of information and tradition; and the Provençal *troubadours* were touting a poetry of romance centred on a knight's devotion to his lady. Subtly undergirding and coordinating these influences were developments in social structure: the rise of the feudal system with its codes of loyalty and reciprocity; the growing prominence of women in society (due to trends such as the veneration of the Virgin Mary, the spread of Provençal romanticism and the alliances through marriage of powerful political houses where both the husband and the wife retained political control over their respective domains); and growing power disputes between the nobles and the Church. Traces of all these factors can be detected in the works not only of Marie de France but also in those of Chrétien de Troyes, Thomas d'Angleterre and other writers/translators of this fertile period. I suggest, then, that there is little wonder that many of the artistic and social shifts, themselves frequently at odds with one another, should be reflected by certain internal conflicts in period literature.

The second issue is that neither Marie nor any other talented artist of the time was entirely a product of the above factors. The insight that makes a writer outstanding, even if it is not perceived on a cursory reading, is that he or she does not follow the predicted path, but injects something of herself, her own new way of observing, expressing, penetrating. Marie was not simply a passive recipient and transmitter of the mores of her day, but was an active observer, critic, arranger and creator. In the final analysis, aspects of the inexplicable and irreconcilable in her work may be found not in history, sociology, contemporary literature or linguistics, but simply in the inexplicable and irreconcilable person that was Marie.

The third issue, and the one which I will emphasize most strongly in the chapters to follow, is that Marie was a medieval translator. This means that she saw her role as legitimately inheriting and authoritatively bequeathing knowledge and tradition. On the other hand, it meant that she would in no way have seen herself as a sort of interlingual copyist. Unlike the status of translation in much of recent history, where it is held to be derivative and secondary (Venuti 7), in the Middle Ages it was considered part of the creative dynamism of languages and cultures in contact (Warren 51-2). The translator, far from being an invisible servant of the original text, became its authoritative voice, and the purpose of the translation was in the end not to supplement the original but to "substitute itself for its source and efface the presence of that source" (Copeland 202). I do not mean to suggest that medieval translation in general or Marie in particular felt no sense of obligation to acknowledge and to accurately reproduce the source text. The original texts and the inheritance that they passed down were themselves the ground of the translator's authority. Awareness of this is clear enough in Marie's treatment of her sources. In the *Lais* she constantly refers to the adventures of the Breton, Welsh and Norman personages

which gave rise to the stories which the Bretons transformed into *lais*, citing the well-known titles in translation but occasionally also in the original tongue. The *Ysopë*, her translation of the fables of the Aesop tradition, was based on a collection which had been translated into English by "the king Alfred" (*Ysopë*, *Epilogue* 16); although her English source is not extant, there are enough contemporary versions of the fables in Latin and in many other European languages to show that Marie took seriously her task of accurate interlingual transfer. And of Marie's *Espurgatoire*, Gaston Paris ("Compte" 291) judged that "Marie translated with the most painstaking fidelity"[11] to the Latin original, to the point where it is possible to find significance in the presence or absence of a single word in the Latin and French renditions (cf. Jenkins 11-13). Still, the sense that the translated text had the right to become the official version permeated the process. The medieval translator operated with ease within what appears to us today to be two opposing positions: the autonomy of the text, and the authority of the translator over the text—to the extent that it was the translator's task to reincarnate the text in the vernacular and thus to become the administrator of the text's authority for that linguistic audience; in fact, to become the author of the text in the target language. The connection between the words "author" and "authority" (*auctor* and *auctoritas*) is anything but coincidental when speaking of the Middle Ages.

Understanding the process of literary transfer through interlingual translation is always complicated, and it is even more complicated in the case of Marie's *Lais*, where the source was part of the oral tradition of a conquered minority group and where no examples of the originals or even of comparable texts are extant. Marie did not simply reproduce in French the old Breton

[11] "Marie a traduit avec la fidélité la plus scrupuleuse".

lais, but transformed them in two significant ways: she insisted that she had unearthed the stories that gave rise to the *lais*, and it is these stories that she wrote into poetry and not the *lais* themselves; and she translated selectively from the Breton corpus and placed its elements alongside elements of her Christian and feudal society and within the literary accents of her era, as well as within the framework of her own creative project. It is as a translator that the significance of Marie as a writer can be fully explored.

Now, it would be just as limiting and distorting to see Marie *only* as a translator as it would be to interpret her through any other single optic. My goal is rather to add a layer, a focused perspective, to the wealth of analysis and insight already offered concerning the *Lais*. It is important to continue to interrogate Marie as a writer, as a medieval aristocrat, as a woman, as a foreigner living abroad. She remains under the influence of her French ancestry and her Norman adoption, of her Christian upbringing and her aristocratic sympathies, of her classical training and her literary and historical interests. No less is she impelled by her own creative energy, by ambition, and by the sheer joy of storytelling. Yet all these factors find expression through the function of medieval translation. If I am successful in contributing anything to the discussion, it will be through concentrating on Marie as a translator, as one who brought together all of these elements, consciously and unconsciously, within the strictures of her environment and under the guidance of her own active genius, through the medium of interlingual and intercultural translation.

In addition to making the detailed investigation necessary to understand Marie as a medieval translator, that is, *talking about* the *Lais*, I wish to concentrate on what Marie actually does in her project, that is, *reading* the *Lais*. Separated as we are by almost a millenium from the

situation of composition, the former is (in my view) essential if we are to approach and interpret the poems. However, in that exercise the latter can be too easily attenuated or forgotten. It is primarily from Marie that we will obtain the answers to our questions if such answers are still available; and it will be more profitable to let Marie speak for herself than to offer yet another external portrait of a manufactured personality in a reconstituted world. It is her words, her turns of phrase, her allusions, her juxtapositioning of anomalous principles, her eclectic treatment of a mass of sometimes unconnected cultural materials, her refashioning of them or her respect for their integrity, which define her translation project and which result in the fascinating and sometimes problematic heterogeneity of the *Lais*. It is important, indeed critical, to separate the two elements, Marie's world and Marie's work, for it is possible in a concentration on what is typical of the twelfth century to bulldoze a path over what is atypical about Marie; conversely, there is a risk in simply reading Marie apart from her world that we will miss the richness of her allusions or replace them with our own. It must always be borne in mind that we are separated from her milieu by centuries—there is an emptiness for us of all that was immediately present to her; and that we are equally separated from her literature by centuries—there is a plethora for us of subsequent imitation, innovation, and interpretive baggage that did not exist for her. By concentrating too narrowly on the world of the twelfth century, we risk reducing Marie to a cultural artifact, limiting her expression to what the literary historian expects her to say rather than allowing her to articulate what she actually says. Contrariwise, if we assume that apart from that twelfth-century world she can be read through the conscious or unconscious accretions of eight subsequent centuries of literature and criticism, we risk missing her obvious tropes, and we risk in addition mining her for manifold messages that she would never have dreamed of

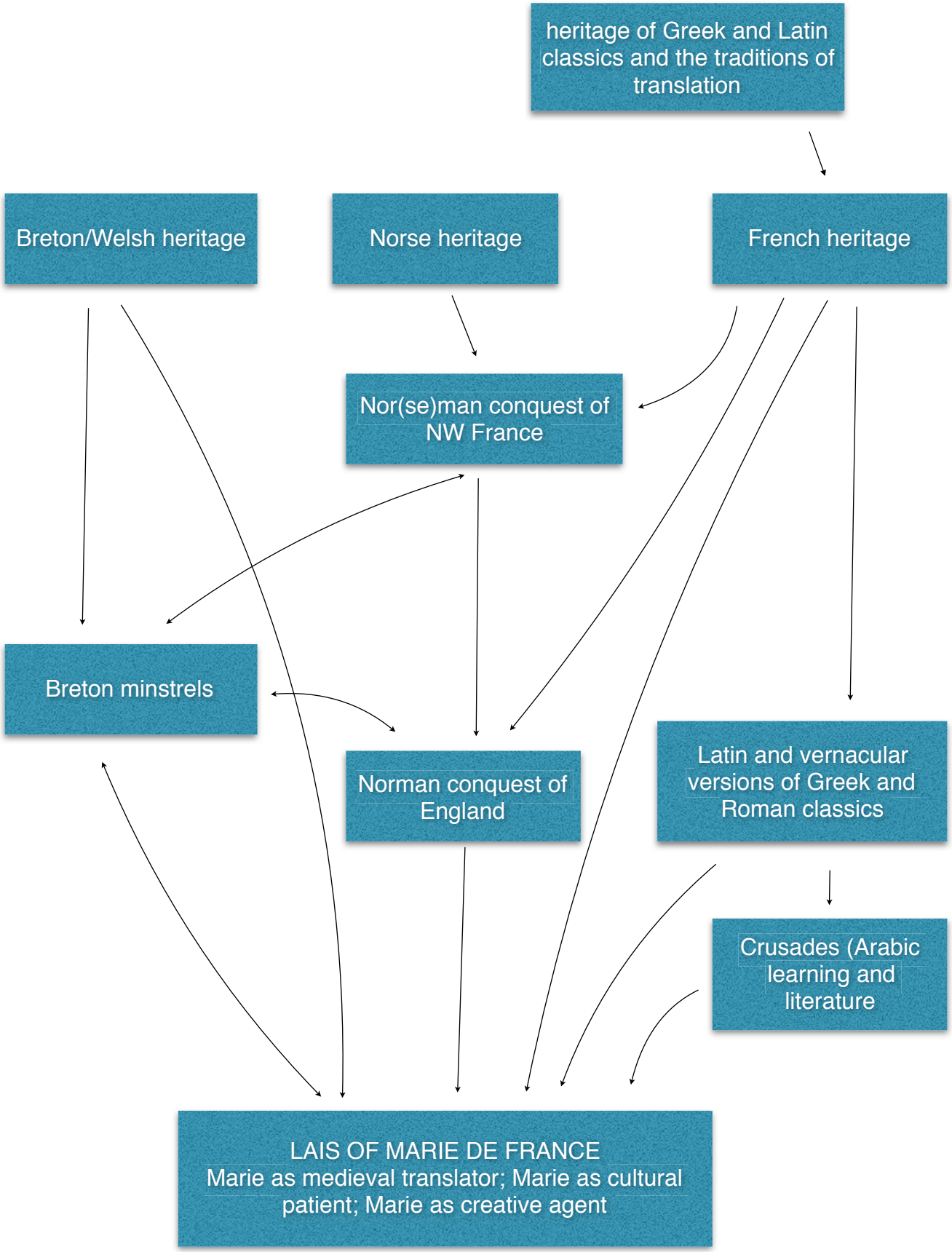
expressing. There are schools of interpretation that argue for the legitimacy of both positions and for everything in between, from philology to feminism, from Structuralism to Deconstruction. I wish to interrogate what it is that Marie says that provokes such varied reactions, such divergent interpretations and such fervent attempts to make her conform.

1. 6. Conclusions: Plan of the dissertation.

It is generally agreed that Marie did not invent the *lai*, but adopted it from an existing genre. Indeed, it is her own claim that her work is a translation and derives its authority from established, albeit oral, works; she insists repeatedly that her poems recount the true adventures from which the Bretons made their *lais*. Although a distinction is made among the terms *lai*, *conte* ("story") and *aventure* ("happening, event"), and it is acknowledged that Marie certainly transformed elements of the stories for literary, political or social purposes, there was an assumption that the Breton *lais* were translated by Marie into French, and that she represented a bridge in the transmission of this heritage: that there was therefore in the main a continuity, formally and thematically, between the Breton and the French *lai*. This has been contested in studies, beginning with Martín de Riquer's 1955 foundational analysis, which have better understood Marie's avowed archaeological project of recovering the stories behind the *lais* and retelling them in French poetic form. The notion, however, that the French *lai* is a transformed Breton *lai* still persists, that Marie represents the next historical stage in the incarnation of the genre. I will argue, however, that this continuity scarcely exists, that in fact Marie, if she did not create singlehandedly the genre of the Old French *lai*, was at least its earliest and most influential master. Rather than seeing mostly a continuity, I will argue for a far greater degree of discontinuity: Marie never translated the Breton *lais* nor claimed to have done so, nor did she

claim to write French *lais*; but rather she pieced together the stories from which the Bretons derived their *lais*, retold these stories in creative form and recast them in French verse. Thus a complicated musical performance with accompanying poetry in Breton or other languages became a fixed form of written French literature, performed only in the sense that it was generally read aloud. The issue of genre is in fact crucial to understanding heterogeneity in the *Lais*, for it determined Marie's approach to the entire process of translation: it is the key to nuancing the oversimplified extremes, namely, of the *Lais* as intralingual translation of intact Breton tales and forms, or of the *Lais* as literary constructs of Anglo-Norman feudal, courtly, and Christian society. The *Lais* of Marie de France cannot, of course, be either: they typically represent neither seamless tales of the adventures of the old Bretons nor seamless adaptations into the Christian world of western Europe. Nor does scholarship claim the one or the other, but it does divide and sometimes flounder in trying to explain, or explain away, the eclectic and often contradictory elements of culture and religion that jostle and poke at one another in the *Lais*, and the relationship of those elements to the now untraceable original tales. In fact, Marie stands in a complicated position of independent, dependent and influenced descent in the *lai* tradition. By unearthing the origins of the Breton tales, her work is a direct descendant of those original events and a first cousin of the Breton oral forms (a shared original dependence on the sources but a vertical independence of descent from them). At the same time she owes her (initial) understanding of the *lais* to contemporary forms (a horizontal influence and a temporal continuity of the Breton minstrels' *lais*). Then, she stands at a certain moment in a pan-European tradition of translation and scholarship but at an incipient moment in vernacular translation (the vertical transmission of authority and the horizontal adoption of a new corpus). Finally, her

telling results in great part from her own French and Anglo-Norman heritage (independent vertical descent and horizontal non-relation). Stated thus, my overview is already sufficiently confusing, and it is hoped that the following simplified diagrammatic representation will make it clearer. However, I cannot close this synthesis without the reminder that, difficult as it is to insert with sufficient emphasis into the diagram, Marie's own creative contribution must not be minimized.


heritage of Greek and Latin classics and the traditions of translation
Breton/Welsh heritage
Norse heritage
French heritage
Nor(se)man conquest of NW France
Breton minstrels
Norman conquest of England
Latin and vernacular versions of Greek and Roman classics
Crusades (Arabic learning and literature
LAIS OF MARIE DE FRANCE
Marie as medieval translator; Marie as cultural patient; Marie as creative agent

The rest of this work will examine in greater depth Marie and the problem of the *Lais* which has been evoked in this introductory chapter: the influences which shaped Marie from the outside as a thinker, writer and especially translator; the original form, performance and content of the Breton *lais* and the nature of Marie's normative and creative treatment of them in terms of translation, transformation and genre; a close reading of the *Lais* in order to better understand the eclectic and uneven methods by which Marie positions the varied elements of her tales: sexual passion, the Celtic supernatural, Christian morality, feudal obligation, and courtly love; and finally the ways in which Marie's *Lais* were received and in some cases altered and moralized in later translations and incarnations.

Chapter 2: A Woman of her Times: The Medieval World of Marie de France.

> Every writer is, to a very large extent, a prisoner of his own times and, more closely still, of his own experience. […] Any understanding of his work must be illumined by some knowledge of the life he lived.
>
> - Herbert F. Collins, *Guy de Maupassant: Contes choisis* vii

2. 1. Introduction.

Marie de France's *Lais* are fresh and captivating even almost a millenium after the date of their composition. Although they need no introduction to engage and entertain the modern reader, a great deal more can be reaped from her work by making the effort to enter her world. As Kinoshita and McCracken (11) observe, "Marie's position as a subject situated in late twelfth-century culture is crucial to understanding her treatment of institutions, social relations, and gender." Knowledge of the cultural, political and religious world of twelfth-century Europe and particularly of Anglo-Norman/Angevin England enables us to appreciate how Marie sometimes reproduces, sometimes subtly criticizes, sometimes even overturns the cherished conventions of her era. In this chapter, I propose to provide a concise general overview of the relevant distinguishing characteristics of northwestern Europe in the twelfth century and to suggest how these factors were represented in French literature.[12]

2. 2. The Crusades.

Tenth-century Europe saw an expansion of trade and travel as well a growing popularity of religious pilgrimages to Jerusalem and to other sites in the East sacred to Christianity. At the same time, friction between Turkish Muslims and the Byzantine Empire created an unease that prompted the Byzantine emperor to ask the West for assistance. These factors led to a call in

[12] General historical information in sections 2.2, 2.3, 2.5 and 2.7 comes from the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1986), articles "Clovis I", "Crusades", "feudalism", "Norman", "Norman Conquest", "Normandy"; and the *Cambridge Encyclopedia* (2000), articles "Crusades", "Norman Conquest", "Normandy", and "Normans"; more specific sources are identified in the text.

1095 by Pope Urban II for Christians to invade and take possession of the Holy Land. By 1099 armies of knights, accompanied by lesser soldiers, adventurers and fanatics, had gained control of several key regions in the Near East, culminating in the capture of Jerusalem and the slaughter of its Muslim and Jewish populations. The city of Edessa was retaken by the Turks in 1144, and this provoked Pope Eugenius III to call for a second crusade. A new army was raised, comprised of some 50,000 soldiers under the leadership of Louis VII of France and Conrad III of Germany, which was forced to retreat from Damascus in humiliation; between 1148 and 1187 the Turkish armies regained control of virtually all the territories that had been captured by the Crusaders. Over the succeeding decades, popes, kings and emperors incited knights, soldiers, peasants and even thousands of children to take up arms against the Muslims and to engage in endless indecisive battles and betrayals in the regions of Palestine and Egypt. The official Crusades came to an end in 1270, but ill-fated and unorganized expeditions continued to be launched for almost two centuries longer.

The political and cultural effects of the Crusades on European history and thought can hardly be overstated. For our purposes it will suffice to note that the Crusades inspired not only animosity against the East but also a profound interest in eastern learning and writings and a surgence of original literature. Fascination with the exotic East was expressed in the poem *Pèlerinage de Charlemagne à Jerusalem et à Constantinople*; written about 1140 in alexandrins. Moreover, the councils of war, single combats and large-scale battles of Christians against Pagans typical of the Crusades became the stock in trade of a new genre of French literature, the *chanson de geste*, or epic song: poetic works in decasyllabic verse glorifying martial bravery, victorious struggles and hopeless last stands. Among the best-known of these are the *Chanson de*

Roland, composed as early as the eleventh century, and the *Chanson de Guillelme* from the early twelfth. The Crusades also facilitated contact between northern and southern France and promoted the diffusion of the poetry of the Provençal *troubadours* among their northern counterparts, the *trouvères*.

2. 3. The Norman Conquest.

The *Nortmanni* or "Northmen", pirates from Denmark, Norway, and Iceland, began raiding the northern French coast in the eighth century, and over time established permanent settlements there. These settlements were officially ceded in 911 to the control of Rollo, chief of the largest band of settlers, by the Frankish king Charles III. Waves of Norse immigration followed and established the region, which became known as Normandy, as a powerful and almost independent duchy. The Normans were a daring people, courageous to the point of recklessness, but also remarkably quick to imitate and adapt. Within a generation or two they had undergone the transformation from seafaring pirates to mounted knights; they adopted the French language, the Carolingian feudal system and the Christian religion. They expanded their land base in northern France, and invaded and settled other parts of Europe, carrying with them all their newly acquired practices. Their most notable conquest during this period was that of England.

William, the only (and illegitimate) son of Robert, duke of Normandy (the great-great grandson of Rollo), succeeded to the duchy upon his father's death in 1035. Robert's aunt was Emma, wife of the English king Æthelred the Unready; their son Edward the Confessor, who was childless, is supposed to have named his kinsman William as heir to his throne around 1051. William reinforced this expectation in 1053 by marrying Matilda of Flanders, a direct descendant

of Alfred the Great; further support was declared in 1064 from another possible claimant, Harold earl of Wessex, who was closely related to both the Saxon and Danish rulers of England. However, upon the death of Edward in 1066, Harold declared himself king. William and his armies invaded and routed Harold's forces at the Battle of Hastings, and William was crowned king of England on December 25, 1066.

William and after him his sons William II Rufus and Henri I Beauclerc ruled until 1135, after which two of William's grandchildren—Matilda, named successor by her father Henri I; and Stephen of Blois, son of William's daughter Adela—disputed the succession. Stephen assumed the throne and was occupied for almost two decades with warfare against the supporters of Matilda. In 1153, they finally concluded a truce whereby Stephen retained kingship for the duration of his life but must name as his successor Henri of Anjou, son of Matilda by the Angevin count Geoffrey IV Plantagenet. Henri, as Henri II, became king of England in 1154. His son Richard Coeur-de-Lion succeeded him in 1189.

Although Henri II was the grandson of Henri I and son of the Empress Matilda, the traditional perspective, which generally follows the male line, designates Henri I as the last of the Norman kings and Henri II as the beginning of England's Angevin dynasty. It is important to keep in mind, however, that the cultural changes introduced into England by the Conquest continued in force. William and his successors took great pains to represent their rule of England as the legitimate and even peaceful descent of the throne (Stein 25), but this was a fiction: England under the Normans and the Angevins was an occupied territory, dominated by a small caste of rulers whose language was French and whose primary interests were continental. Within two decades of his coronation, William had replaced virtually all the Saxon nobility of England

with aristocrats from Normandy, Brittany and Flanders who were closely tied to him by feudal bonds. It is true that England during this period was a multilingual country, with French, Danish, and Celtic speakers, but the vast majority of the population was English-speaking with likely nothing more than a smattering of the language of the francophone elite (Stein 24).

The court of Henri II, especially after Henri's marriage to Aliénor d'Aquitaine, became noted for the blossoming of French literature. Hoepffner (12) insists: "And we are not at all speaking of minor literary figures. Rarely, if indeed ever, did a medieval court see such a collection of outstanding poets and influential works."[13] In particular, the conquest of England had exposed a new subject which immediately and lastingly fascinated Anglo-Norman, French and other European writers: the *matière de Bretaigne*, the Celtic stories about Arthur and his court, Tristan and his fated love, and the wonders of Breton fairies and Irish saints. The legends of the insular Bretons and Welsh, peoples who had been conquered first by the Romans and again by the Saxons and now a third time by the Normans, were about to explode into a popularity which they have continued to enjoy to the present day.

2. 4. Translation.

The common intellectual, literary and religious inheritance of Europe in the Middle Ages was embodied in the Latin language. It is often supposed that "classical Latin", the eloquent, potent and lofty tongue of Cicero, became degenerated over time into "vulgar Latin" and thence

[13] "Et nous ne parlons point des *poetae minores*. Rarement, sinon jamais, cour médiévale ne vit un ensemble pareil de poètes de valeur et d'oeuvres marquantes."

into various regional dialects, finally to settle into separate, mutually unintelligible languages.[14] But we must realize that the Latin of the Forum was not a maternal language but a highly elaborated, almost artificial linguistic code whose development had been unnaturally forced and hastened by contact and competition with its Greek model and whose structures were maintained by the prestige attached to rhetoric in the first-century Roman world; it was a learned language restricted to a highly educated elite (Pope 3-4). It was therefore not so much time as status and function which separated "classical Latin" from its vernacular counterpart. While Cicero wove a tapestry of argumentation through rigid and codified discourse, the ordinary citizen of his day conversed in a form of Latin that had evolved and been transmitted much more naturally. In fact, the literature which has survived to our time indicates that it is misleading to separate Latin into the dualities of "classical" and "vulgar"; it should rather be seen as a spectrum (Harris 14).

As the centuries passed and the Roman Empire spread and convulsed and finally crumbled, and with it disappeared standardized education, regional tendencies in language became increasingly salient. At the same time, the literary or "classical" language that had reached its most complex expression at the beginning of the Christian era maintained its niche as a separate academic and ecclesiastical code, virtually isolated from the normal development and evolution of "Roman" speech in the various post-Empire countries and territories. In the region of France, the plethora of Latin descendants were collectively referred to by the Latin term *lingua romana rustica* or by the vernacular appellation *roman*, so called because this everyday

[14] See, for example Hueffer 4, an evaluation typical of 19th-century philology: By the end of the fourth century, Latin "was no longer the idiom of Cicero and Horace. Familiar phrases, provincialisms and barbarisms had found their way into the written language. […] When with the already decaying language of the fourth and fifth centuries the variegated dialects of the conquering barbarians were mingled, confusion became worse confounded and linguistic chaos seemed at hand. It need not be said that for artistic purposes this mongrel type of speech became totally unfit."

speech was considered, in its direct and linear descent, to be the current manifestation of that same Roman language that was spoken by Caesar and his invading soldiers, but was necessarily contrasted with the conserved Roman language, Latin, in continuous use in institutional settings. By the twelfth century, the fiction of classical Latin as a living language could scarcely be maintained. Although it still linked Europe academically and religiously in the face of increasingly divergent vernacular tongues, even the well-educated secular elite found it foreign and the ordinary priest could but repeat garbled formulas (Perret 36-7). Verbal communication had developed far enough away from its ancestry to be necessarily classed as a different language.

It was inevitable, then, that Latin texts would need to be translated into vernacular languages in order to remain accessible; it was likewise entirely to be expected that those languages would develop their own forms of literary expression.

Originally, Roman translation had concerned the transfer of Greek texts into Latin. Rhetoric, or the art of speaking persuasively, held a central place in the Roman political system, and translation provided templates for orators to expand Latin expression from Greek models. The emphasis was on the development of rhetoric in Latin, not on the reproduction and preservation of Greek sources; the objective was to elevate the Latin language as the pinnacle of articulation to the point where its Greek inspiration could be forgotten. As Rita Copeland (30) puts it, "translation in Roman theory is figured as a pattern of transference, substitution, and ultimately displacement of the source."

Medieval translators inherited this model of substitution and displacement, but what is not always observed is that they realized it by a much different path: not through rhetoric but

through exegesis. Copeland meticulously traces the parallel decline of the Roman political system and of the importance of rhetoric. With the contemporaneous rise of Christianity, rhetoric lost its central hermeneutical function and became instead the servant of exegesis. That is to say, rhetoric as Roman political discourse once shaped meaning; now rhetoric as Christian preaching was shaped *by* meaning, the interpretation of sacred texts. This stance had far-reaching implications for medieval translation in general. Commentary in translation took over the aggressive function of rhetoric. Interpretation in the service of exegesis gave to the translator the rhetorical power to reshape and restate the text; in short, to appropriate and replace it. Translation, which started as a supplement to the authoritative source, eventually displaced that source and itself took on source-text authority in the vernacular. Thus medieval translation, through exegesis and commentary, achieved the same result of total displacement of the source as its Roman ancestor had done through rhetoric.

The medieval period was characterized by what Stierle (56) calls "vertical translation", the hierarchical transmission of the Latin heritage to those who saw themselves as its legitimate successors, whose task it was to interpret and amplify the original. While early Roman (and later, Renaissance) translation was "horizontal", the acquisition of material from a foreign language or culture regarded as equal or even superior, medieval translators saw their role not only as inheriting but as actually improving upon the source, expanding and refining its meaning. It is surely to this that Marie de France refers when she says:

> Custume fu as anciëns,
> ceo testimoine Presciëns,
> es livres que jadis faiseient
> assez oscurement diseient
> pur cels ki a venir esteient

e ki aprendre les deveient,
que peüssent gloser la letre
e de lur sen le surplus metre.
Li philesophe le saveient,
par els meïsmes l'entendeient,
cum plus trespassereit li tens,
plus serreient sutil de sens
e plus se savreient guarder
de ceo qu'i ert, a trespasser. (*Lais*, *Prologue* 9-22)

(It was the custom of the ancients,
as Priscian attests,
in the books which they wrote in olden times,
to speak quite obscurely
for the sake of those who were to come
and who would be constrained to study them,
so that they might be able to comment on them
and contribute more to their meaning.
The philosophers were aware of this fact,
they themselves understood it,
that the more time advanced,
the more people would be sophisticated in their understanding
and the more they would know how to avoid
going beyond the intended sense in what was written.

Medieval translation, then, was much more than language transfer. The transformation of knowledge linguistically, the transmigration of knowledge geographically, the accumulation of knowledge temporally and the refinement of knowledge rhetorically were all aspects of the medieval writer's consciousness, the awareness of participation in *translatio studii*, the movement of knowledge from one time, place, language or culture to another. Chrétien de Troyes summarizes this expansive view of translation in *Cligès* 30-39:

Ce nos ont nostre livre apris,
que Grece ot de chevalerie
le premier los et de clergie.
Puis vint chevalerie a Rome
et de la clergie la some,
qui ore est an France venue.

> Des doint qu'ele i soit retenue
> et que li leus le abelisse
> tant que ja mes de France n'isse
> l'enors qui s'i est arestee.
>
> (Our books have taught us this,
> that Greece held of gallantry
> and of learning the first rank.
> Then gallantry came to Rome,
> as did the pinnacle of learning,
> which now has come into France.
> May God grant that it be preserved within her
> and that our land may embellish it
> so that never from France may depart
> the honour that has come to rest here.)

Chrétien and others of his day saw the transfer of knowledge from East to West and from past to present as an inevitable socio-historical phenomenon in which linguistic translation, from Greek through Latin to French, must play an integral part. Formerly, throughout late antiquity and the early medieval period, what interest there was in classical learning had been disseminated through Latin texts; but as Latin lost ground even in educated circles to vernacular languages, linguistic translation became inseparable from *translatio studii*. To discover, to interpret and to expand "gallantry and learning" was to translate.

And so the twelfth century saw a veritable "wave of translations" (Kinoshita and McCracken 8) of Latin texts into French; a rediscovery, as well as a reapplication, of the classical world. These works purported to be trustworthy renditions of classical texts and indeed classical and medieval history; that they refashioned Greek tragedy or Roman epic into French romance complete with knights and barons and archbishops, feudal disputes and the passions of Provençal love poetry would not have struck the translators nor their readers as incongruous. The reinterpretation was conscious, aimed at enhancing both the entertaining and educative qualities

of the original narrative (see Yunck 38-40). Medieval exegetes did not trouble themselves with the consciousness, plaguing us since Schleiermacher, of reading their own history into the text; they simply made their history part of the interpretation, a dialectic condition rather than an accident of interpretation. The absence of any conflict over the process is "itself the productive ground for medieval interpreters" (Copeland 61-2). The concept of *translatio studii* conferred on medieval translators not just the power but indeed the responsibility to gloss the text, to consciously enter it and refine it. This, we must confess, is worlds away from current debates in translation theory. Whatever the approach under consideration today, it is generally the case that the priority is on how to most accurately and objectively represent the source text. Medieval translators had no such preoccupation. Rather, they were convinced that the purpose of translation was to engage their world in a dialogue with the world of the source, consciously or unconsciously importing their own story into the text's story. Yunck explains:

> [T]he twelfth-century romancers lacked the historical sense or historical orientation which dominates every educated man's world view today. The medieval romancer made no attempt to absorb and recreate the spirit of a historical past. Judgments of truth or falsehood were ethical, rather than historical, and perspective was pursued no more in time than in space. The historical past emerged, like the stylized background of the illuminators, as a depthless—or timeless—plane against which contemporary men moved, thought, and felt. (23)

It was the presupposition of medieval translators that the later treatment intended by the original author of a text was commentary, embellishment and appropriation according to increased understanding resulting from the passage of time and from continuous study. To avoid inserting themselves or their insights into the text on which they laboured would not necessarily have appeared to translators as a good thing and might have been perceived as a real shirking of their

responsibility. Yunck's comment above sets in relief the stark contrast between the premodern and the modern view of history and truth; but I am hesitant to adopt his value-laden language, as though the medieval translator "lacked" some critical perspective as the result of being insufficiently "educated". Nothing could be farther from the truth. It was not an inferior, but simply a different, world-view. Learned medieval thinkers perceived more the connection than the disconnection of their own life and times with the life and times of a temporally or geographically or culturally removed world. They began with the presupposition that culture, science and literature came to them in an unbroken and even ordained evolutionary line; it was not accidental but intentional that they should both inherit and augment them. Our own modern paradigm which strives fastidiously to avoid the arrogant assumption of commonality with the Other, while guarding us against the medieval error of unreflective appropriation and domestication of foreign knowledge, poses the danger of moving so far in the other direction as to represent an equally flawed perspective, that of unreflective rejection of commonality and the illusion of objectivity.

Translation from Latin versions of Greek and Roman classics furnished early French literature with some of its most important and creative works and most inspiring models; in addition, language and imagery from classical texts were put to widespread use in original compositions. Legends and epics of the classical world also provided a foundation upon which medieval writers in both Latin and French constructed an imaginative quasi-historical account of the continuity and transmission of civilization, *translatio studii*, from Greek antiquity to the European Middle Ages.

2. 5. The rise of the feudal order.

The Roman Empire had been based on a centralized government in which citizens owed allegiance to the state and were subject to taxes and duties in exchange for order and protection provided by public institutions. With the collapse of the western Empire and the predominance of independent warring tribes, this system broke down, and was only revived after many centuries in the sovereign nation-states of the early Modern period. In the meantime, nations tended to be bound together by ties of personal loyalty between chiefs and their soldiers, or by the granting of lands (fiefs) by a successful chieftain to his followers. It was the linking of these two practices in the Frankish kingdom of the eighth century which marked the beginning of European feudal society; the feudal order spread with Frankish conquests throughout Europe. Kings, rather than giving away land absolutely, now retained title and allowed tenure to landholders, called vassals, on the basis of fealty. Vassals were of three orders: sergeants performed ceremonial and administrative duties, knights provided military support, while ecclesiastics prayed for their benefactor. Powerful knights, lords in their own right, extended the system by following the king's example and distributing their tenure as fiefs to the soldiers, artisans and farmers under their influence and furnishing to them their protection in return. At the lowest level, peasants were little better than slaves and were forced to work the lord's land for their subsistence; but free vassals entered into a social and personal relationship of reciprocity with their lord, with well-defined obligations and benefits. As well as lands and churches, civil functions such as the administration of justice devolved from the royal court to the vassals. This often meant a fragmentation of power which in time led to the decline of royal authority and to the

establishment of virtually independent vassalic dynasties ruling large and powerful holdings of their own.[15]

In a feudal society, performance of military, ecclesiastical and judicial services and the reciprocal granting of lands, protection, honours and rewards were not seen as requirements of an abstract state but as personal obligations between a lord and a vassal. The royal court or the baronial castle became the location in which these relationships were exemplified. They were places of codified social refinement—"courtly" behaviour, the proper deference of a knight to his lord and the proper honour of a lord towards his knights, and the enshrining and nurturing of the characteristics which were responsible for their mutual prosperity: martial bravery, Christian devotion, loyalty and generosity. These royal or baronial courts were also, in the midst of an essentially tribal agricultural society based on peasantry, often the only places outside of the cloister in which refined and educated women were to be found in Christian Europe.

The feudal values of service, reciprocity, consecration to the arts of war and an almost passionate loyalty between lord and vassal exercised a profound influence over medieval literature, from tales of epic battles and rescues and risks, to homespun fables of peasant wit and maxims for surviving the exigencies of an avaricious lord. However, what is perhaps most striking about these values from a literary point of view is the manner in which they provided a framework for a new and altogether different sort of passionate attachment: the devotion of a knight to his lady according to the tenets of courtly love.

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[15] This is a summary of the features typical of European feudalism, but it should be noted that the system as it actually existed was neither uniform nor static; see for example Fourquin 377-395. The term assumes a homogeneity which can obscure the geographic variation and dynamic evolution of feudal societies. The point that I wish to highlight here is that the underlying principle of systems loosely known as "feudalism" was one of personal obligation between individuals rather than a convention of contributions and benefits between a citizenry and an abstract State, and that notions of a stable and codified feudalism were adopted by the literature of the period.

2. 6. The place of women in society.

In the eleventh and twelfth centuries, women began to take on more prominent roles in European society. To some degree this may be traced to the development of feudalism. The medieval castle became the focal point of the highly codified reciprocal obligations between a lord and his vassals, and refined manners evolved in order to reflect the nuances of these relationships (Lewis 12). The lady of the castle presided over this new civilized atmosphere and was able to participate in it in a fashion that might have been discouraged in a more barbaric tribal warriors' mess. A second way in which the feudal system affected the status of women was that they took on significance as tokens of familial, political and military alliances in strategic marriages. As it happened, women were far more than tokens in these situations, being indeed actors in their own right with awareness of their value and influence. It was often the case that a woman who married would retain authority in her territory of origin; thus at times both husband and wife exercised rule over separate regions, living apart for periods of time, a condition which reinforced her authority over the management of her own household and domain (Rumble xix).

The fact that some women now operated in the same political and economic spheres as men fostered a corresponding social interaction. Formerly divided by gender lines which reflected societal functions, men and women now met in courtly or aristocratic social gatherings, a practice that became popular particularly in Anglo-Norman England at the court of Henri I (Paris "Études" 520). High-born women were more likely to be active managers, well-educated and widely read. The reading of religious devotionals for their own benefit and for servants was a daily occupation, and as women became more interested in the arts, a number of such works were commissioned by them (Wogan-Browne). The expansion of the mindset of eleventh- and

twelfth-century western Europe triggered by the movement of peoples and by the rediscovery of classical learning birthed a general renaissance in aristocratic circles of intellectual interest, based in literature and translation, in which women took a central place (Hoepffner 8).

A profound change in the manner in which society perceived women and regulated the relationship between the sexes was also nourished by two movements: the veneration of the Virgin Mary, the mother of Jesus who was considered the ideal of womanhood and looked upon in some branches of Christianity as semi-divine herself; and the works of the Provençal lyric *troubadours*, who introduced a form of passionate love poetry which virtually idolized the "lady" and painted life without her love as blank misery. It is not likely that one of these movements was the cause of the other (Lewis 18) but their influence on each other was evident, especially in the manner in which Provençal poetry and its development into courtly love literature borrowed the language and even some of the ritual of divine worship to express devotion of the lover to the lady. Men who considered themselves at all well-bred were now required to show deference and politeness to ladies and to offer aid to any woman in need. "In this courtly society, the woman, who as we have already seen appears as the first and most influential instigator of the literary renaissance, now takes centre stage as the object of poetic reverence and the inspiration for heroic actions"[16] (Hoepffner 9).

2. 7. Christianity, morality and marriage.

In the early decades of this era, certain Jews became convinced that the reason that their god had long ago chosen their nation was not simply for its exclusive benefit but so that it could

[16] "Dans cette société courtoise, la femme, que nous venons déjà de voir apparaître comme première et principale inspiratrice du renouveau littéraire, prend la place centrale et devient l'objet des hommages poétiques et le but des actions héroïques."

bring forth a saviour for the entire world. This saviour would be the incarnation of all the eschatological hopes of the Jews (and indeed would claim to be the incarnation of their god himself); and these particular Jews (known around the world now as St Peter, St Matthew, St Paul among others) declared that they themselves had been taught and commissioned by this very saviour, who name was Jesus, who had been executed and then raised from the dead, and whose title was "messiah" or "christ".[17] The people who accepted "christ" as the divine world saviour were called "Christians" (*Acts* 11:26). Originating in the Near East in the early decades of this era and propagated by a zealous group of itinerant missionaries, Christianity grew in some three centuries from a persecuted sect to become the official faith of the Roman Empire.

In its acceptance by Rome, the simple, powerful, soul-transforming message of Jesus met the heritage of Greco-Roman philosophy and was itself transformed from a call for individual repentance and faithful action into a fully cohesive and articulated system of truth-statements about God's salvific relationship to creation, a system whose specific formulations must be endorsed by those claiming to belong to the ranks of the faithful.[18] For the majority of its followers and promoters, Christianity remained centred upon Jesus the Christ, but by virtue of its official status, the Church extended its power into the secular realm, and at times its leaders—since they saw themselves as representatives of God himself and not of human beings—asserted

[17] Hebrew מָשִׁיחַ ("messiah") and Greek χριστός ("christ") both mean "anointed one", referring to the Israelite ritual of pouring consecrated oil on a person to designate him or her to a high office such as priest or ruler. In Christianity, Jesus was considered to be anointed by God, his father, to fulfill the offices of universal saviour, priest and king.

[18] Penner (26-32), emphasizes the significance of the Enlightenment in the shift from Christianity as an activity of truth in life to a religion of assent to true propositions. I would underscore that this intitialy occurred in the transposition of Christianity as an Ancient Near Eastern religion to its seat in the Western empire and in the heritage of Greek philosophy, as Edwin Hatch conclusively argued in his 1890 *The Influence of Greek Ideas on Christianity*. However, until the beginning of the modern era, the propositions were only debated within the hermeneutic of the religion itself: Penner's contribution is to demonstrate that the Enlightenment innovation was to subject these propositions to critique outside of that hermeneutic, in a so-called "objective" arena of reason. He points out the fallacy of the assumption that such an arena could exist outside of any hermeneutic or language.

their right to govern those who held merely human authority. Christianity was thus strategically employed to contest and even to control political issues.

The continuing proselytizing efforts, the appealing message of love and forgiveness, and the association of the religion with the traditions of the great civilization of Rome ensured that Christianity survived and, after some setbacks, even spread as the Empire fell to barbarian tribes. In western Europe, Clovis and his Frankish armies, who conquered the Gallo-Romans and the Alemanni at the close of the fifth century and took possession of most of what is now France, converted to Christianity and established its enduring and official presence in the expanding Frankish territories. Christianity had reached England with the Romans in the early part of this era and began the process of transforming or effacing local beliefs. Later, missionaries sent by Pope Gregory to England succeeded by about the middle of the seventh century in thoroughly converting the Saxons; the result of these efforts was that the religious beliefs and practices of the pre-Christian inhabitants of England are now mostly a matter of conjecture (Whitelock 19-28). And we have seen that the Viking pirates who settled in what became Normandy adopted the Christianity of the Franks, along with everything else in their new culture, and maintained it in England after the Conquest. For the majority of the population of northwestern Europe, Christianity in the Middle Ages was, in a word, ubiquitous; whether a shallow overarching social convention or a more profound spiritual commitment, it affected every aspect of personal, community and political life (L'Hermite-Leclercq 217-218).

In common with virtually all religions, Christianity expected its adherents to conform to its standards. Typically, the primary requirement of a religion is fidelity to the god or pantheon of the faith community and obedience to his, her or their commands and expectations. In

Christianity's parent faith, the Israelite covenant of Moses, the people were enjoined never to worship the gods of other nations, a command which Christianity continued to enforce. This had some impact on the theology, literature and translation of the Middle Ages since it was not always clear whether the gods of the ancient Greeks and Romans and the shape-shifters and fairies of the Celtic world were mere empty myths, or genuine but more or less neutral entities, or actively malevolent demons. By the end of the medieval period the comfortable grey areas of tradition and superstition, dissected by theologians such as Thomas Aquinas, were resolving into black and white, and it was becoming problematic for literature to dabble simply for amusement in the perceived devilry of ancient or foreign peoples.

Christianity also adopted unchanged the bulk of its moral code from the Israelite religion: do not steal, do not murder, do not commit perjury—and do not commit adultery. Religions typically regulate sexuality and marriage, and neither the Israelite practice nor Christianity were exceptions in this regard. Both forbade sexual relations before marriage and outside of marriage. The law of Moses imposed penalties up to and including death for transgressions; Christianity proposed forgiveness for offenders and excommunication for unrepentant offenders.[19] In Israelite law, restrictions on the practices of polygamy, concubinage and divorce were also enacted, not only for the promotion of moral and spiritual purity but also to offer some measure of protection for women.[20] Christianity went further than its predecessor in this regard: Jesus condemned divorce and forbade remarriage.[21] The Church has wrestled (and continues to wrestle) with these

[19] "Excommunication" denotes the obvious sense of removal "out of the community", but in Christian teaching it means even more: loss of the right to participate in the "Communion" or Mass, the ceremony in which bread and wine symbolize, or become, the life-giving body and blood of the crucified Jesus which all true believers share (cf. *1 Corinthians* 5:9-13; 10:16-17).

[20] For example, *Exodus* 21:7-11; *Deuteronomy* 21:10-17; 24:1-4.

[21] Cf. *Matthew* 5:31-32; *Mark* 10:2-12. St Paul confirms this (*1 Corinthians* 7:10-11).

relentless prohibitions: did Jesus allow divorce and remarriage in certain circumstances, such as when a partner has committed adultery or is practicing some other heinous sin; should provision for ending a marriage be made in cases of non-fulfillment (sexual incapacity, sterility, failure to produce male heirs, etc.); should everything, including divorces and remarriages, be under the umbrella of Christian forgiveness rather than subject to harsh legalism?

Additional moral restrictions not stemming from the teaching of Jesus were gradually adopted by the Church. Polygamy and concubinage had been practiced among wealthier Israelites including such illustrious figures as Abraham, Jacob and David, and such relationships were nowhere condemned in Christianity's founding scriptures. Nevertheless, it became an unspoken and later a spoken assumption within Christianity that marriage was between one man and one woman and that anything other than this constituted adultery. A second assumption which gained great prominence was that although marriage represented an acceptable behaviour, an even better one was to abstain from marriage, thereby devoting oneself to allegedly higher and purer pursuits.[22] This movement undergirded monastic seclusion and spawned whole orders of women and men segregated from the opposite sex and consecrated to perpetual chastity. Eventually, celibacy was made not a voluntary sacrifice but a required condition for anyone holding priestly office in the Church. By the Middle Ages, some theologians were arguing that although sexual intercourse in marriage was encouraged for the purpose of procreation, it should

[22] This was not a view endorsed categorically by Jesus (cf. *Matthew* 19:10-12), but could be argued from a (mis)interpretation of St Paul. Paul affirmed that marriage should be the rule, though he would have preferred that everyone were single like himself (*1 Corinthians* 7:7); and it was his opinion that unmarried persons could live to a higher standard of Christian devotion since they were not distracted by the mundane responsibilities and attachments of marriage (*1 Corinthians* 7:32-34). What is not always acknowledged is that St Paul was not laying down general commands concerning marriage but specific advice to the people in the Corinthian church in view of a particular and limited period of stress, most likely persecution, which they were facing, and with which Paul thought they would be better able to cope if they were unencumbered by emotional ties (*1 Corinthians* 7:26, 29).

be free from any passionate attraction, which element would constitue evidence of depravity.[23] Clearly, a belief that sexual abstinence is the most exemplary mode of life implies of necessity that participation in sexual activity, even in marriage, must fall short of ideal practice; a further implication is that if people were to feel and to seek to express sexual passion, it should be excluded from the honourable and pure relationship of marriage and could only be realized in adultery.

In the twelfth century, marriages among the upper classes were arranged not on the basis of any sort of affection but for political advantage. They were unmade for the same reasons and subsequent marriages contracted in order to further political alliances, a practice which Kinoshita calls "serial polygamy". This calculated approach to marriage was decried by the Church, which, as the sole authority for the ratification of marriages, imposed increasing restrictions on the aristocracy. It was often possible to evade the Church's sanctions by seeking out the services of dissident clerics who were obligated to their noble patrons, and so the situation continued in some disarray through the later twelfth century (Kinoshita 33).

Religious poetry constituted the beginnings of original compositions in French, and both in translation and in original works religion tended to continue its dominance, as well as representing a substantial influence in virtually all other genres. Christian terminology and ritual furnished a model for the lover's worship of his lady in the lyric love poetry of the *troubadours* and in the new genre of courtly love. A certain moral ambiguity regarding the permanence of marriage and the place of love in the conjugal relationship are reflected in the literature of the day. Debate continues over the reasons for Chrétien's failure to complete *Le Chevalier de la*

[23] The notion actually goes back as far as St Jerome (qtd in Walsh 20) but became widely accepted in the Middle Ages especially because of the *Sententia* of Peter Lombard (see 2.8, e. below).

charrete, with some suggesting that it was his distaste for the theme of adulterous passion and others maintaining that it was his acknowledgement of the unequivocal position of the Church (Kibler *Romances* 14); in any event, marriage is represented much differently in his other works, which, though not necessarily positing passionate attraction, seem to value ardent mutual love, respect and fidelity. That Marie de France's treatment of marriage, sex and adultery was extremely complex can be illustrated by the fact that few agree on her position: for example, Walsh asserts: "In the *lais* of Marie de France adulterous relationships are condemned" (8), while Fisher counters: "Provided the marriage is a loveless one, the *Lais* have a sanguine attitude toward adultery" (208). Rather than avoid the confrontation of religion and sexuality, Marie seems at times to deliberately place them together: in *Le Fraisne*, as an example, a baron marries his beloved mistress's sister, then, when the sister relationship is revealed, divorces his wife and marries the mistress—all on a single day and all, it seems, with the participation and smiling approval of the local bishop. And in two other narratives (*Guigemar* and *Yonec*) the married heroine and her lover, who have just met for the first time scant hours before, engage in intercourse immediately after celebration of the Mass.

2. 8. The Provençal *troubadours* and the phenomenon of "courtly love".

In the Middle Ages, the southern half of France known generally as the Midi ('south") or as Provence, from its historic designation as the *provincia romana* (the "Roman province"), was an area of relative political stability, a generously temperate climate and a distinctive romance language, Provençal, sometimes called *langue d'oc*.[24] In the late eleventh century, there arose in

[24] The term *langue d'oc* derives from the language's expression for "yes", *oc*, evolved from [*h*]*oc* [*est*], "this is so", as opposed to the northern half of the country, whose language was French or *langue d'oïl*, where "yes" was expressed as *oïl*, from [*h*]*o*[*c*] *il* [*est*], "this, it is so". (It is, of course, not difficult to deduce how Old French *oïl* became Modern French *oui*.)

Provence a novel form of lyric poetry which celebrated the passionate love of a man for a woman as the highest ideal of human happiness. A group of itinerant poets called the *troubadours*, from all walks of life but many of noble birth, became the purveyors of this sentiment, and a ready welcome was offered to them in courts and castles throughout the south.

The concept of "romance",[25] the notion that love is central to self-actualization, that it motivates and produces humanity's best behaviours, and that life apart from love is blank and meaningless, is so much a part of modern literature and art and indeed modern life that its presence is scarcely questioned; it is usually assumed to be an intrinsic part of human nature. "If the thing at first escapes our notice," says Lewis (3), "this is because we are so familiar with the erotic tradition of modern Europe that we mistake it for something natural and universal and therefore do not inquire into its origins."

> [A] glance at classical antiquity or at the Dark Ages at once shows us that what we took for 'nature' is really a special state of affairs, which will probably have an end, and which certainly had a beginning in eleventh-century Provence. It seems—or it seemed to us till lately—a natural thing that love (under certain conditions) should be regarded as a noble and ennobling passion: it is only if we imagine ourselves trying to explain this doctrine to Aristotle, Virgil, St. Paul, or the author of *Beowulf*, that we become aware how far from natural it is. […] French poets, in the eleventh century, discovered, or invented, or were the first to express, that romantic species of passion which English poets were still writing about in the nineteenth. (3-4)

This is not to say that the ancients never wrote about love or passion. But Ovid and Catullus talked of obsessive, ribald lust (that, we must admit, *is* an intrinsic part of human nature and did not await any invention or discovery in eleventh-century France), while Plato saw human love as

[25] The language of *Rome* as it evolved in France, *roman* or *romanz*, was the language into which the stories of passion and derring-do were early composed/translated. A lengthy literary work in the vernacular such as those by Chrétien was called a *roman*, which remains the word in modern French for a "novel"; and naturally these love-and-adventure tales gave to English its word for that appealing code of attraction and interaction between the sexes, "romance".

an inferior step on the path to the divine (and whose object, in any case, was not a woman); Euripides and Sophocles may be read through a more romantic lens, but this is a revisionist misconception: they spoke not of an ennobling passion but of a tragic madness leading to disgrace and ruin. Moreover, marriage was traditionally not to promote love but to advance or cement familial, political or economic ties. Literature tended to celebrate quests and battles, gods and glory; and the highest emotional bonds were those of friendship and loyalty between men. If we find examples of what we now call romantic love in ancient literature, we must acknowledge that it is far from ubiquitous and constitutes an aside from the thrust of the work. The desperate, all-consuming passion in the songs of the *troubadours*, the deification of the object of love and the impossibility of envisaging life or joy without her was, at least in literature, indeed something new. "Real changes in human sentiment are very rare—there are perhaps three or four on record —but I believe that they occur, and that this is one of them" (Lewis 11).

As remarkable as the appearance of this sentiment was the speed with which it spread and the position that it established within the European imagination. Movement of peoples contributed to this, as noted above; the Crusades connected the northern *trouvères* with the southern *troubadours*. Even more significant may have been the movement of one particular person: Aliénor d'Aquitaine. "Granddaughter of the very Guillaume d'Aquitaine whom we understand to have been the earliest of the *troubadours*, Aliénor had grown up in those circles where Provençal lyric poetry was flourishing, at a court which was one of the most important centres of the new society of refinement and elegance"[26] (Hoepffner 11). In 1137, she married

[26] "Petite-fille de ce Guillaume d'Aquitaine que nous avons appris à connaître comme le plus ancien en date des troubadours, Eléonore avait grandi dans les milieux où s'épanouissait le lyrisme provençal, dans une cour qui était un des principaux centres de la nouvelle civilisation raffinée et élégante."

Louis VII and brought her admiration of the poetry of the *troubadours* to the French court. After some 15 years, she obtained a divorce and two months later married Henri Duke of Normandy and Count of Anjou, who became Henri II of England in 1154. Thus she again transported her attachment to the literature of the Midi to a court where it was to find an illustrious home. Rumble asserts (xix-xx) that "a mere list of twelfth-century works written at her request, or dedicated to her, or containing flattering references to her beauty and liberal patronage, would be voluminous." Perhaps even more influential, he continues, was the imitation of her courtly manners and pursuits throughout western Europe. Meanwhile, her daughter Marie, Countess of Champagne, as devoted to literature as her mother, was promoting the new fusion of *troubadour* passion and northern elements in her own sphere (see Paris "Études" 523); it was at the countess Marie's request and under her auspices that Chrétien de Troyes would write one of the quintessential works of courtly romance, *Le Chevalier de la charrete*.

What brought about this original Provençal expression is, it seems, a question impossible to answer. What can be observed are those influences which must have encouraged it and which quickly adopted and shaped it so that it came to its fullest and most enduring expression in northern France as what is now (rather imprecisely) known as "courtly love":

a) Of primary importance was the rediscovery of Ovid's love poetry. In Europe in general and in the north of France particularly, Ovid was "the most popular Classical writer throughout the twelfth century" (Kibler *Romances* 7). The degree to which the Middle Ages took seriously Ovid's racy satire is debated; there is no question, however, that it provided a foundation for the codification of the unchained passion of troubadour poetry. Its influence is plain in early French romances, certainly in Chrétien de Troyes (who translated Ovid) and in Marie de France, and

culminates in the *De arte honeste amandi* of Andreas Capellanus. Written near the end of the twelfth century, the *De arte* is clearly modelled on Ovid, especially on his *Ars amatoria* and the *Remedia amoris*. Andreas Capellanus may have written under the auspices of Marie de Champagne (Rumble xx; Kibler *Romances* 14) who, perhaps in seriousness but more likely as an entertaining form of social debate, presided over "courts of love" which rendered judgements on questions of propriety and obligation between lovers. Andreas begins by defining love as

> an inborn suffering which results from the sight of, and uncontrolled thinking about, the beauty of the other sex. This feeling makes a man desire before all else the embraces of the other sex, and to achieve the utter fulfilment of the commands of love in the other's embrace by their common desire.[27]

He explains how to kindle it among couples of various ranks, then gives the rules of love. Love inspires the highest and noblest behaviours in humankind and is therefore to be prized above all other pursuits. Extramarital relationships, which would be condemned by conventional morality, God looks upon leniently since they promote love. The writer continues in a second book to tell how to preserve and accentuate love as well as how to diminish it. His third section somewhat paradoxically condemns the teachings of the first two and enjoins responsible Christian, moral, social and misogynistic behaviour. Whether Andreas Capellanus offered a tongue-in-cheek satire of the whole notion of courtly love (Rumble xvi) or an essentially realistic view of the contemporary aristocratic perceptions of love in literature and perhaps in life (Lewis 33), he at

[27] Andreas Capellanus, *De arte* 1.1, Walsh's translation. "Love", as embodied in the *troubadours* and "courtly love", is simply dedicated sexual attraction dressed in refined language and manners, and thus is not to be confused with the definition that St Paul gives in *1 Corinthians* 13 or with a more rounded perspective of romantic or conjugal love which would include not only sexual attraction but also intellectual compatibility, companionship, and mutual benelovence. Robertson (202-3) notes that Andreas seems to have drawn his definition of love from popular twelfth-century works by Ailred of Rievaulx and Peter of Blois. "It is fairly certain, therefore, that the definition was a commonplace in clerical circles at the time Marie wrote" (203).

any rate illustrates the discussion reflected in the aristocratic gatherings of the day and the strange sympathy and incompatibility of a religion of love with Christianity.

b) The north also saw the fusion of *troubadour* love poetry with the themes of the *chanson de geste*, the epics of Crusader bravery and battles. While the southern poets concentrated virtually exclusively on the passionate and almost hopeless attachment of the lover to his idolized beloved, the northern *trouvères* tended to round out the male character, presenting as equally important his value as a warrior. Hence the creation of the ideal chivalrous knight; he will be miserable and incomplete until he learns to rise to the challenges both of passionate devotion and martial excellence: "it is by persevering through painful ordeals that he will find happiness at last in the union of love and valour"[28] (Harf-Lancner *Lais* 16).

c) The *matière de Bretagne*, the tales of the Celts that came to dominate French literature after the Norman conquest of England, adopted the dress of passionate love and courtly manners and soon became the central vehicle for their expression. Paris ("Études" 530-2) insists that it is to the melding by Aliénor in the Anglo-Norman court and by the countess Marie in Champagne of the Provençal influence with the Celtic legends that we owe the eternal connection of courtliness, love and knightly bravery in the Breton world. Already in the middle of the century, Wace had refashioned the legendary British chieftain Arthur as the paragon of chivalry (9731-9786); at Arthur's coronation even the peasants were more courteous and courageous than the knights of other lands (10499-10501). This theme was only to grow. Chrétien, through the

[28] "c'est au terme de douloureuses épreuves qu'il trouvera enfin le bonheur dans l'alliance de l'amour et de la prouesse", in reference to the knight Guigemar. She adds, "this is precisely the moral of the romances of Chrétien de Troyes" ("c'est exactement la morale des romans de Chrétien de Troyes").

romance of Lancelot and Guinevere, "made courtly love a virtually indispensable element of the stories of the Round Table"[29] (Paris "Études" 534).

d) The feudal order provided a perfect framework by which to systematize the passionate devotion of the *troubadours*. Lewis (2) notes, "The whole attitude has been rightly described as 'a feudalisation of love'." The lover is subject to his beloved as a knight is to his lord; he must always perform what is commanded and may never waver in loyalty. Similarly, the lady must grant to her lover the reward for his devotion, the *guerdon*, just as a lord must grant reciprocal advantages to his knights in return for their service (Kinoshita and McCracken 54). The lover must always exemplify courtliness: the values of bravery, honesty, generosity and deference towards ladies which represent the refinement of the court. The fact that the object of love was almost always a married woman (which will be discussed in greater detail below) was itself oddly connected to feudal principles: it was considered part of a knight's expression of fealty to his lord that he should be devoted to the lord's wife—to consider any other woman as more beautiful was disloyalty (Kinoshita and McCracken 58; cf. *Lanval* 321-330). The feudal system gave shape and structure to the wild passions of the southern lyric poets and united them to the codified reciprocal obligations of the lord-vassal relationship.

e) Christianity, as we have seen, was ubiquitous, and coloured virtually every aspect of medieval life. Lewis (2) ennumerates the four defining characteristics of courtly love as "Humility, Courtesy, Adultery, and the Religion of Love." The first two (and partly the third) pertain to the influence of feudalism. But why devotion to the lady involves the moral judgement of adultery is not only because the knight was expected to be dedicated to his lord's wife, but

[29] "il a fait de l'amour courtois un élément presque inséparable des romans de la Table Ronde".

because there was a strong opinion in medieval theology that a married couple were not to be passionately attached to one another. Sexual relations within marriage were allowed to be pure, even grudgingly encouraged for the purpose of procreation. Nevertheless, the union of passion with sexuality was considered sinful, even within marriage, since sexual desire was seen as the mark of a fallen and corrupt humanity. Peter Lombard, bishop of Paris in 1159 and author of four books on patristic theology which became "the basic texts for theological instruction throughout the entire Scholastic period"[30] (*Grand Larousse* 8. 486) declared: "passionate love of a man's own wife is adultery" (in Lewis 15). Since passion was becoming universally celebrated in the popular poetry of the *troubadours* and *trouvères* while passionate sexual relations were officially discouraged, the devotion of courtly love was by logical necessity directed toward one who was unattainable, not the wife of the lover and most likely the wife of another man. It can be seen that such a desire set the stage for a love which was by its very nature impossible if it were to remain within the context of honour and Christian morality. According to Daniel Heller-Roazen (7-8), courtly love hovers in what medieval philosophers defined as "contingency", what is capable of being and not being. As a desire manifestly unholy in the eyes of the Church, courtly love paradoxically took on the trappings of holiness; not as a form of Christianity nor even as a mockery of Christianity but as a rival (Lewis 21), an escape from an actual religion of demanding austerity into an imaginative religion of delight. In spite of this inherent hostility, Christianity provided a whole terminology of abject service and devotion to the literature of love; indeed, the flagship works of courtly love are replete with religious imagery (cf. Hatto 14-18). The relationship of the lover to the beloved is often pictured as worship: Lancelot, when finally

[30] "ils furent la base de l'enseignement théologique durant toute l'époque scolastique".

the opportunity comes to consummate sexually his love for Arthur's wife, "adores her and bows down before her."[31] The deity of the religion is Cupid, the God of Love, whose service is a mixture of vassalage and mystical spirituality. Brownlee (122), speaking of the *Roman de la Rose*, states it thus: "the God of Love requires the Lover to perform an amatory version of the feudal ceremony of homage, as he solemnly enters into the god's 'service'—becomes the 'man' of this 'lord'." Andreas Capellanus (I.vi. 246) goes so far as to declare that if a person refuses this passionate love, there is no chance for salvation after death.

What we have called "courtly love", then, is a useful generalization which refers to the re-embodiment of the Provençal love-lyric theme within the courtly and feudal literary world of medieval northern France and Anglo-Norman England. Burgess and Busby (24) offer an excellent (and suitably vague) working definition:

> The love is always between persons of an exalted social status, often adulterous (a young wife closely guarded by a jealous old husband), nearly always problematic in some way or another, always profound and always refined. Despite having a cerebral appearance due to an extreme formalism, the love is not platonic, the physical union being discreetly alluded to as the ultimate goal for the sake of effect rather than out of prudishness.

The earliest appearance of the term *cortez' amor* seems to have been in a poem by the *troubadour* Peire d'Alvernhe (around the middle of the twelfth century); Gaston Paris was the first to use *amour courtois* as a specific term in literary analysis in his 1883 study of the plot of Chrétien's *Le Chevalier de la Charrete* (see Cartlidge 5). The concept was further systematized by Lewis in a 1936 study of medieval allegory, in which he developed his schema of courtly love from an examination of *Le Chevalier de la Charrete*, *De arte honeste amandi* and *Le Roman de la Rose*. It is to these two scholars, or at any rate to subsequent interpretations of them, that we

[31] "si l'aore et se li ancline" (*Le Chevalier de la charrete* 4652).

owe the idea of courtly love as a somewhat rigid social code actually practiced by and relatively binding upon knights and ladies of the Middle Ages.

Since that time the term has become the target of some controversy and contempt. Kibler (*Romances* 14) describes two opposing schools of thought: the "*realists*" who believe that courtly love existed in the social practice of the medieval aristocracy and was accurately reflected in its literature; and the "*idealists*" who claim that, if it existed, it was ironic and little more than a parlour-game. "In retrospect," comment Burgess and Busby (27), "it seems difficult to conceive why the ideas propounded by Gaston Paris and C. S. Lewis ever gained such general acceptance, unless it be that most readers of medieval literature read nothing but the stories of Lancelot and Guinevere and Tristan and Iseult." Yunck (28) scoffs: "Whether there is any historical or literary reality corresponding to the popular term *courtly love* seems highly debatable." He dismisses Lewis's succinct and rigid four-fold summary of the notion, and further opines: "Gaston Paris unwittingly did literary history a notable disservice when he coined, many years ago, the phrase 'amour courtois'" (29).

While I will make some defense of the term "courtly love" and of the contributions of Gaston Paris and C. S. Lewis to our understanding of the concept, I confess that the Paris/Lewis model leaves us with two problems. The first is their choice of primary materials. Walsh (6) argues that the promotion of the theory of "courtly love" in its fully developed form (the *troubadour* exaltation of passion, feudal chivalry, and quasi-religious adoration) can be found in only three documents: Chrétien's *Le Chevalier de la charrete*, Andreas Capellanus's *De arte*

honeste amandi, and Guillaume de Lorris's *Le Roman de la Rose* (6).[32] If these are in fact the works upon which Paris and Lewis primarily based their analyses, it is likely that "courtly love" will appear far more homogenous and structured than it actually was in literature in general.

The second problem is the way in which their limited model has been extrapolated by later scholarship without due reference to the more nuanced acknowledgements of variation by both Paris and Lewis. While it is true that these two authors concentrated on the aforementioned works and tended to see them as both typical and serious representations of "the characteristics of the theory of love as it existed in the general mind of the period" (Lewis 33; cf. Paris "Études" 529-530), they were aware that this was but a sampling, albeit in their argument a pivotal one, selected from a wide spectrum. Paris ("Études" 522) positioned the obsession with courtly love not in upper-class life as a whole but specifically in the literary gatherings where everyone was rushing to indulge in the new mode of passion-poetry:

> In the north just as in the south, princes, high-ranking barons, great ladies all set out to be poets; and there also love was the theme of this fashionable poetry, love of the sort that the *troubadours* had promoted, love that created the appeal and the risk of meetings in high society, love illicit and clandestine, and at the same time love considered to be an art and a virtue.[33]

With respect to Marie de Champagne's "courts of love", Paris was cautious as to what degree they might have represented real life, concluding that since they were always anonymous, "it follows that these judgements could have no real force and were no more than intellectual games,

[32] To these I, along with Burgess and Busby (27), would add the *Tristan* legend, though more in terms of its influence on the literature than its own embodiment of courtly love—the lovers do not fall hopelessly and obsessively in love through mutual attraction but through the ingestion of a magic potion.

[33] "Dans le nord comme dans le midi, les princes, les hauts barons, les grandes dames se mettaient à *trouver*, et là aussi l'amour faisait le fond de cette poésie de société, et c'était l'amour tel que l'avaient présenté les troubadours, l'amour qui faisait le charme et le danger des réunions mondaines, l'amour illégitime et caché, et en même temps l'amour considéré comme un art et comme une vertu" ("Études" 522).

at least as far as specific cases were concerned. But the general trend which they demonstrated went somewhat beyond this definition"[34] (529). Lewis, too, was careful—except, I admit, in the matter of his four-fold rubric—to steer clear of oversimplifications and categorical generalities.[35] Comparing the attitude of Ovid in the *Vita Nuova* and the use of religious language in the *Concilium in Monte Romarici*, he maintains that the degree of satire in medieval love poetry ran the entire gamut: "Dante is as serious as a man can be; the French poet is not serious at all. We must be prepared to find other authors dotted about in every sort of intermediate position between these two extremes" (21).

Furthermore, if Paris and later Lewis did concentrate too narrowly on just a few works, it must be acknowledged that this concentration reflects the centrality and popularity of these works in the Middle Ages and hence, at least to some degree, the actual scope of their influence. The legend of *Tristan*, Chrétien's *Le Chevalier de la charrete*, Andreas Capellanus's *De arte honeste amandi*, and (in the following century) de Lorris's *Le Roman de la Rose* were among the most popular works of their day and exerted a lasting influence on literature. *Tristan* appears in multiple French translations, versions and fragments, and in the signal Old German translation of Gottfried von Strassburg. *Le Chevalier de la charrete* was commissioned by Aliénor d'Aquitaine's daughter Marie Countess de Champagne, and the *De arte honeste amandi* records many of her opinions on the proper conduct of a love affair. *Le Roman de la Rose* was "the most

[34] "il suit de là que ces jugements ne pouvaient avoir aucune application et n'étaient que de purs jeux d'esprit, au moins en ce qui concerne les cas particuliers. Mais la tendance générale qu'ils expriment dépassait quelque peu cette définition".

[35] For example, he is anxious to "avoid that fatal dichotomy which makes every poem either an autobiographical document or a 'literary exercise'—as if any poem worth writing were really the one or the other" (22). He contrasts the treatment of the theme of love in Chrétien's *Erec* and in *Charrete* (26); he acknowledges that, although the latter is the pinnacle of the expression of courtly love, the work itself resists such a convenient analysis. "It is [Chrétien's] fate to appear constantly in literary history as the specimen of a tendency. He has deserved better. And the tragedy of the thing is that he himself was never really subdued to that tendency" (24).

widely-read of all medieval works in the *langue d'œïl*" and "the first of French classics"[36] (Boutet 1,984). This means that, whether for pure amusement or for more serious purposes, the codified system of courtly love was known, discussed and promoted in the courts and literary centres of Angevin England and France.

Current scholarship is perhaps too quick to dismiss the contribution, controversial and problematic but invaluable, made by these authors to our understanding of medieval life and literature. However, using them to neatly encapsulate the formalization of "courtly love" would be a mistake—*our* mistake. Yunck (29) complains: "Scholars and critics, like others, are often at the mercy of the phrase makers"; Burgess and Busby (24) seem willing to admit that scholars and critics may have to bear some responsibility in the matter: "Too loose and frequent use of the word by scholars is at least partly to blame."

Notwithstanding the clutter of critical debris clinging to the terminology, we have arrived at a general understanding of how courtly and feudal life influenced the perspective on love as it was expressed in the literature of the period. Landmark works include the *Roman de Thèbes*, a free translation from sometime before 1150 of the first-century *Thebaid* of Statius. Although still strongly tied to the *chanson de geste*, it is distinguished by a shift to octosyllabic verse, hints of courtly love and a significant place given in the narrative to the female personages and their decisions. Wace's *Brut*, translated in 1155 from a Latin original, adds creative details about the supreme refinement of Arthur's court. Around the same time was composed the *Eneas*, based on Virgil's *Aenid* but combining for the first time in French literature the valiant warrior of the *chanson de geste* with the passionate and introspective lover of the southern poets; the element

[36] "C'est le livre en langue d'oïl le plus lu de toute la littérature médiévale"; "le premier de nos classiques."

of passionate romance introduced into the Aenid story by the *Eneas* poet "wrought a revolution, and all the later French romancers of the twelfth century, including Chrétien, became its debtors" (Yunck 28). Thomas d'Angleterre's *Tristan* celebrated a fateful love story, melding the Celtic tradition with the obsessive bond of the Provençal *troubadours*. It was perhaps in Chrétien de Troyes that the most skilled expression of the gallant warrior and the haunted and desperate lover appeared fully integrated into the Breton legends of Arthur and his knights. Marie de France, in her little tales which naturally develop less psychological depth than the longer *romans* of Chrétien, nevertheless seized upon this combination with equal proficiency. Although it is probably a healthy counterpoint to keep in mind, as Yunck argues, that "love in the courtly literature of twelfth-century France has as much variety as that in most other literatures" (29), and that a too-rigid identification of a writer or of a genre with the vague, sometimes misleading and certainly now loaded term "courtly love" is to be avoided, a firmer grasp of the issues of love in literature and of the phenomenon known to us now, for better or worse, as "courtly love" will help us to perceive how Marie amuses herself with lighthearted courtly tales, or how she engages the profound intensity of courtly passion, or alternately, how she holds up the inevitable outcomes of courtly love to ridicule.

2. 9. Conclusions: The convergence of influences in the twelfth century.

The latter half of the twelfth century in France and England was a time when relative peace and prosperity followed upon great changes, and an educated elite had leisure to indulge in creative activity. This expressed itself in a blossoming of literary production from courts and from abbeys, from men and from women, from pious tutors and from pure entertainers; the great writers of what Charles Homer Haskins has called the "Renaissance of the twelfth century"

would mark western literature for centuries to come. A vast number of significant translations as well as original works were appearing in French, works which celebrated the rediscovery of classical learning, incorporated foreign concepts, and established all-new subjects for exploration and new genres in which to house them. While I have treated each of these elements separately, I believe that it has become evident throughout the discussion that they are intertwined in complicated and important ways. It is not possible to consider the Crusades apart from Christianity and the place of the knight in feudal society; courtly love cannot be understood outside of the newly elevated status of women and the revolutionary poetry of the troubadours; nor can we divorce the embodiment of societal characteristics in literature from the contemporary philosophy of translation. The richness of twelfth-century life with its harmonies, intersections and collisions of significant trends could not but imprint itself upon contemporary art. Now that we have established at least in brief the broad outlines of what society looked liked in England and France in the twelfth century and how it was reflected in the literature of the era —having come to understand what might be *expected* from the literature, as it were—I wish to spend the rest of this investigation in examining just how Marie de France in her *Lais* often did the *unexpected*: toying with, circumventing, criticizing or rejecting generic, cultural and religious standards.

Chapter 3: Normative and Creative Translation: The Breton *Lais* Before Marie, and After.

3. 1. Form of the Celtic *lais*: Speculation and deduction.

I will insist throughout this study that the form and content of the Breton *lai* as we know it, that is, as a genre of French literature, is due, if not solely, at least primarily, to the translation project of Marie de France. To analyze her work as translation and to attempt to better understand the nature of the transformation, we must begin with the question: What were the Breton *lais* like before French literature took them over?

Constance Bullock-Davies summarizes the artefactual evidence succinctly:

> No example of an original Breton lay has come down to us, a fact sufficient to arouse our curiosity, since there is ample evidence to prove that, as a form of entertainment, it was not only extremely popular in its day, but left a lingering memory of itself in our literature for several centuries. ("Form" 18)

The only surviving examples are in translation into Old French (and thence into Old Norse and Middle English; French was the intermediary language, which indicates that the "Breton *lai*" became a characteristically French genre).

The etymology and exact meaning of the term *lai* are uncertain and still contested. The generally accepted view is that it is a Celtic word related to the Irish *laid* "song".[37] Context in Old French romances indicates that the *lai* was a musical composition for the harp or other

[37] Cf. for example Rohlfs 74. Others have suggested that *lai* is not Celtic but comes into French from late Latin *leodus* (from classical Latin *laudis*) or from Latin by way of Germanic *leodus*/*lessus* (Bloch 29-30); or from the Latin *laicus* (Baum qtd in Cook and Tveitane xvi).

instrument, perhaps accompanied by a poem or song, composed to preserve and celebrate an important story or event.[38] Hoepffner supposed the Breton *lais* to have been

> musical compositions of an apparently very peculiar nature, peddled by "Breton" peformers […T]hese fragments of music, perhaps without lyrics, were ostensibly connected to some extraordinary event, the memory of which they were intended to hand down to posterity… In this way, the musical *lai* was linked, probably by its title, to the story that recounted the event in question[39] (Qtd in de Riquer 1).

Marie's own use of the term certainly agrees with this description:

> De cest cunte qu'oï avez
> fu Guigemar li lais trovez,
> que hum fait en harpe e en rote;
> bone en est a oir la note. (*Guigemar* 883-886)
>
> (From this tale that you have heard
> was composed the *lai* of *Guigemar*,
> which is played on the harp and the rote;
> it is a pleasure to listen to its tune.)
>
> Pur la joie qu'il ot eüe
> de s'amie qu'il ot veüe
> e pur ceo qu'il aveit escrit,
> si cum la reïne l'ot dit,
> pur les paroles remembrer,
> Tristam ki bien saveit harper,
> en aveit fet un nuvel lai. (*Chievrefueil* 107-113)

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[38] For example, Chrétien de Troyes, *Erec et Enide* 6168-9, 6179-81: *Novele par le païs vole/qu'ainsinc est la chose avenue.* […] *Et les dames un lai troverent/que le Lai de Joie apelerent,/mais n'est gaires li laiz seüz*. ("The news spread quickly throughout the land that this was how the matter turned out. […] And the ladies composed a *lai* which they called *The Lai of Joy*, but this *lai* is now all but forgotten.").

Additional light may be shed on the term by a near-contemporary source, the Norse translations of many French *lais*, from sometime after 1226. Translators and editors Cook and Tveitane explain that the translator uses *ljóð*, *ljóðsǫngr* (song), *strengleikr* (stringed instrument) and *strengleiks ljóð* interchangeably to represent the French *lai*. They conclude that the translator "understood the word 'lai' in three senses: (1) as a melody to be played on stringed instruments, (2) as a lyric to be sung to a stringed instrument, and (3) as a narrative tale" (Cook and Tveitane 4 n. 1).

[39] "des compositions musicales d'un caractère assez étrange, semble-t-il, colportées par des musiciens 'bretons' […] ces morceaux de music, peut-être sans paroles, étaient censés se rattacher à quelque événement extraordinaire dont ils devaient transmettre le souvenir à la postérité… De la sorte, le lai musical se trouvait attaché, par son titre, sans doute, à un conte qui racontait l'événement en question".

(For the joy that he had experienced
in seeing his beloved
and for the message that he had written:
just as the queen had requested,
to preserve the memory of the message,
Tristan, who was a skilled harpist,
composed a new *lai* about their meeting.)

That it was a musical form implies that if it included lyrics, they would have followed patterns in the original language dictated not only by semantics but also by prosody, metre, rhyme and other stylistic constraints; likewise, the receiving language, inasmuch as the transfer was also into a verse form, if not still a musical one, was bound by its own set of poetic parameters. As we shall see, however, it is possible that the *lai* in French translation developed its own patterns with scant reference to the highly technical and expressive original.

Marie's *Lais* in Old French are possibly the earliest extant texts which translate, or represent, or form a link with, or at least refer to, the Celtic *lais*. (The discussion of genre in 3.3 below will explain the use of attenuating language here.) In terms of form, Marie's *Lais* are rendered in octosyllabic rhyming verse; this indicates that the translations must have been radical reformulations, since it is unlikely that the Celtic originals had been cast in the same mould.[40] With respect to content, which will be examined in greater detail in 3.2 below, the same sort of creative reinvention seems to have been at work: the abundance of elements in these works which are layered from other, generally later, literary, cultural, religious or linguistic strata indicate that Marie did not see herself as strictly bound to represent the Breton perspective in all its ancient purity. In short, the project was looser than the term "translation" might suggest in our

[40] French octosyllabic verse was at that time still relatively new (*le Roman de Thèbes*, around 1150, was an early example) and was a more flexible structure than the *chanson de geste*'s stately decasyllabics; note that the first octosyllabic poems were renditions of Latin exemplars and were thus uninfluenced by any Celtic forms (see Hoepffner 17-18).

day, although theorists and practitioners of the translation of poetry will be acquainted with the thorny interlingual and intercultural challenges. If Marie was attempting the transfer of the actual formal genre of the Breton *lai*, a position which scholarship does not maintain and which I would contest, she could expect to come no closer than what Jakobson (131) terms "creative transposition". As a medieval translator, Marie did not distinguish the shades or gradations from literal to paraphrastic which preoccupy us today, seeing her work as firmly situated within the tradition established by the translation of Latin classics into vernacular languages.

It is unlikely that she was working with versions of the *lais* already being performed in French, but was instead dependent on Breton and Welsh oral renditions. That Marie was acquainted with Celtic languages is obvious in the *Lais*; that she was fluent in them is generally supposed but unproven. Some (e.g., Freeman 865) are hesitant to assert that she possessed any more than the superficial knowledge typical of the Anglo-Norman court, suggesting that she may rather have been dependent on oral (or more rarely, written) summaries of the tales in French. It is true that Marie was more explicit in the *Ysopë* and the *Espurgatoire* than in the *Lais* that the work was an interlingual translation, although, in the *Prologue* to the *Lais*, the manner in which she situates her translation of the *lais* as a parallel to Latin translation is deliberate. Gottfried von Strassburg's *Tristan und Isolt* (3625-6) suggests that the very best Celtic minstrels could extemporize *lais* in French as well as in other languages. This, if an accurate representation of the Breton bard, would appear to be exceptional; the usual depiction of the art in the literature is as a musical performance, perhaps with Celtic-language accompaniment. Marie's fear that the Breton *lais* would be lost (cf. *Prologue* 39-40), a fear which, if she was referring to their contemporary incarnation, turned out to be justified, supports the premise that they were

circulating only in a restricted and disappearing form and language. If the tales already existed in French and in writing, both her motivation, to save them from oblivion, and her labour, to render them in French, would seem to be not entirely reasonable.[41] Her own witness as to form, and by implication to language, is that she had heard the *lais* recounted by Breton minstrels, and she occasionally gives the Celtic title to the poems.[42]

This raises questions about the linguistic situation in Marie's society. If a translation was needed for an audience unacquainted with the Celtic languages, why give the titles in Breton? Conversely, if Marie and some significant portion of the court had listened with pleasure to the Breton minstrels performing their songs in the original languages, what need was there for a translation? It seems that the *lais* were already disappearing in Marie's day as the art-form

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[41] In one case at least Marie drew on written as well as oral sources: in *Chievrefueil* 5-7 she claims, *Plusur le m'unt cunté e dit/e jeo l'ai trové en escrit/de Tristam e de la reïne* ("Many have recounted and told it to me, and I have found it written, about Tristan and the queen"). Thomas d'Angleterre also cites written sources for his version of the Tristan legend (2104-2120). Tristan, however, was the subject of a lengthy and very popular romance already circulating in several versions (although the episode recounted in Marie's *lai* is not extant in any other source).

Martín de Riquer (14) suggests that *Guigemar* was also obtained from a written source, based on line 23: *sulunc la letre e l'escriture* ("according to the letter and the writing"). This is a possible interpretation, followed by Baum (38, who tries to use it to demonstrate contradictions between the General *Prologue* and the introduction to *Guigemar*), but it is also possible that Marie intended simply "according to written standards", referring to the parameters of her own project and not to the incarnation of the original *lai*. This is the position preferred by Paris and Warnke (qtd. in Baum 38).

The question of written versus oral sources is further clouded by Marie's use of *oïr* and the practices of medieval performance. We know that Celtic bards performed the Breton *lais* and that no written examples of them have survived. It is therefore most likely that when Marie says, *Des lais pensai qu'oïz aveie* (*Prologue* 33), she means just that: "I thought of the *lais* that I had heard" in oral performance. Yet she addresses her readers in Bisclavret 315: *L'aventure qu'avez oïe* ("The events that you have just heard"), as though the audience had listened to, rather than read, her poem; to some degree this would also be true, as compositions such as Marie's were intended to be read aloud to the court, nobles or other interested literati. (For a delightful discussion of the orality of Marie's poetry, see Bullock-Davies "Reassessment" 96-99.)

[42] *Bisclavret a nun en Bretan,/Garulf l'apelent li Norman* (*Bisclavret* 3-4: "The name in Breton is 'Bisclavret'; the Normans call it 'Werewolf'"); *L'Aüstic a nun, ceo m'est vis,/si l'apelent en lur païs;/ceo est russignol en Franceis/e* nihtegale *en dreit Engleis*; *Un lai en firent li Bretun/e l'Aüstic l'apelë hum* (*Aüstic* 3-6, 159-160: "Its name is the 'Aüstic', as I understand it; thus they call it in their country; the word is 'nightingale [rossignol]' in French, and '*nihtegale*' in good plain English"; "The Bretons made a *lai* about it and called it the 'Aüstic'.").

As an alternate title to *Eliduc* Marie reports *Guildeluëc ha Guilliadun* (*Eliduc* 22), which must also have been the Breton title—*ha* is Breton for "and".

In addition to *Aüstic*, there is one other instance where she gives the English translation: '*Gotelef' l'apelent Engleis,/'Chievrefueil' le nument Franceis*" (*Chievrefueil* 115-116: "The English call it '*Gotelef*', the French name for it is 'Goatleaf' [*Chievrefueil*]."). (*Translation note:* 'Goatleaf' is the literal translation of OF *chievrefueil*; the ordinary Mod Eng equivalent is 'honeysuckle'.)

peculiar to a subjugated minority, but that the musical form was highly appreciated and that the essence of the stories were known to the listeners and enjoyed by them. Perhaps a modern equivalent would be English-speaking audiences attending great Italian operas, admiring the music and being acquainted with the basic plot-lines of the librettos, but, excepting an ever-dwindling cognoscenti, unable to understand the words and needing some form of translation for the works to survive in English-speaking popular culture. Thus, the Breton titles of the *lais* are not simply exoticism, nor are they for an audience whose multilingualism included Celtic languages (Marie's careful inter-lingual definitions suggest otherwise), but were intended to connect Marie's written verse to the oral poetic and musical compositions known by her audience (Harf-Lancner *Lais* 13; Hoepffner 46). It would be misleading to say that Marie was naming the oral source-text of her written poem, but (as will be seen below in the discussion of genre, 3.3) it is rather that she makes explicit the relationship between the story she is telling and the *lai* which the Bretons made from the same story: her poem is a first cousin, not a direct descendent, of the *lai*.

Rumble is sceptical that the form of the French *lai* was in any significant way constrained by the remnants of its Celtic performance; of the French *lai* he observes: "even the earliest of its remaining written examples are already late and betray the embellishments of conscious literary hands" (xiii). The vague indications which appear in *Horn et Rimenhild*, Gottfried von Strassburg and Thomas d'Angleterre of the form and performance of the *lais* lead Rumble to opine:

> Such enigmatic allusions suggest that by mid-twelfth century the oldest tradition of the lay may already have been so locked in the past that Thomas and other poets of his time knew only dimly the exact means of its original performance. […

> T]heir references to older tradition often seem calculated merely to enhance the archaic flavor of their own narratives, which were conventionally set in the long ago and far away. (xiv)

Bullock-Davies ("Form") takes a different approach to the references to *lais* in Gottfried von Strassburg's *Tristan* and in *Horn et Rimenhild*, analyzing the descriptions of the performances with the aim of uncovering information about the technical aspects of *lai* performance as well as an explanation of why the Celtic musical *lai* disappeared. Gottfried (basing his German translation of *Tristan und Isolt* on the French version by Thomas d'Angleterre) recounts the encounter of Tristan with a Welsh harper in King Mark's court, and Tristan's subsequent performance:

> ein meister siner liste
> der beste, den man wiste;
> der selbe was ein Galois (3509-11)
>
> (a master of his art,
> the best anyone knew of;
> he was a Welshman.)
>
> 'Meister,' sprach er, 'ir harphet wol;
> die noten sint rehte vürbraht
> seneliche und alse ir wart gedaht
> de macheten Britune
> von minem hern Gurune
> und von siner vriundinne.' (3520-5)
>
> ('Master,' he said, 'you play the harp well.
> You produce your melodies correctly
> and with the sensitivity they were meant to have.
> They were composed by Bretons
> about my lord Gurun
> and his lady-love.')
>
> ursuoche und notelin genuoc
> seltsæne, süeȝe, guote.
> hie mite wart ime ze muote

umbe sine leiche von Britun. (3552-5)

(he struck up some preludes and phrases,
fine, sweet, and haunting,
recapturing
his *lais* of Breton.)

nu Tristan der begunde
einen leich da laȝen klingen in
von der vil stolzen vriundin
Gralandes de schoenen.
do begunde er suoȝe doenen
und harphen so ze prise
in britunischer wise,
daȝ maneger da stuont unde saȝ
der sin selbes namen vergaȝ. (3582-90)

(But now Tristan was beginning
a *lai*, letting it come ringing in,
about the haughty mistress
of Graelent the Handsome.
He made such excellent sweet music
and so played his harp
in the Breton style
that many a man sitting or standing there
forgot his very name.)

riliche huop er aber an
einen senelichen leich als e
de la curtoise Tispe
von der alten Babilone.
den harpheter alse schone
und gie den noten so rehte mite
nach rehte meisterlichem site,
daȝ es den harpher wunder nam;
und als eȝ ie ze staten kam,
so lie der tungenderiche
suoȝe und wunnecliche
sine schanzune fliegen in.
er sanc diu leichnotelin
britunsche und galoise
latinsche und franzoise
so suoȝe mit dem munde

daȝ nieman wiȝȝen kunde
wederȝ süeȝer wære
oder baȝ lobebære,
sin harphen oder sin singen. (3612-31)

(In fine style he struck up
a second *lai*, moving like the first,
about noble Thisbe
of Old Babylon.
He played it so beautifully
and went with his music
in so masterly a fashion
that the harpist was amazed.
And as he came to the places,
the accomplished youth
sweetly and rapturously
let his song come flying in.
He sang the air of his *lai* so beautifully
in Breton, Welsh,
Latin, and French,
so sweetly with the mouth
that no one could tell
which was sweeter
or more deserving of praise,
his harping or his singing.)[43]

A shorter passage in *Horn* is less detailed but tends to reinforce aspects of the above narrative:

Lors prent la harpe a sei qu'il la veut atemprer.
Deus! ki dunc l'esgardast cum la sout manier,
cum ces cordes tuchout, cum les feiseit trembler,
asquantes feiz chanter, asquantes organer,
de l'armonie del ciel il poust remembrer.
Sur tuz homes ki sunt fet cist a merveiller.
Quant ses notes ot fait, si la prent a munter
e tut par autres sons les cordes fait soner.
Mut se merveillent tut qu'il la sout ai bailler.
[E] quant il out issi fait, si cumence a noter

[43] English translations of Gottfried are based on Hatto's prose translation 89-90, with reference to Bullock-Davies "Form" 19-21, and modified by myself to represent the verse structure of the original *Tristan und Isolt*.

> le lai dunt orains dis de Batolf haut e cler
> si cum sunt cil Bretun d'itiel fait costumier.
> Apres en l'estrument fet les cordes suner
> tut issi cum en vois, l'aveit di tut premier.
> Tut le lai lur ad fait, n'i vout rien retailler.
> E Deus! cum li oians le porent dunc amer. (2830-45)
>
> (Then he took up the harp which he proceeded to tune.
> God! if only you could have watched the skill with which he handled it,
> how he stroked the strings, how he made them tremble,
> sometimes playing a melody, sometimes strumming chords,
> you would have thought you were remembering the music of heaven.
> This made all those present to marvel.
> When he had played these tunes, he made the most of his instrument
> and plucked the strings through one melody after another.
> All marvelled greatly at how well he manipulated it.
> And when he had done thus, he began to pick out the melody of
> the *lai* of which I just spoke, of *Batolf*, loud and clear
> in precisely the manner that the Bretons are accustomed to do.
> Afterward he made the strings of the instrument sound out
> all the story just as he had told it first with his voice.
> He recounted all the *lai* to them, he would leave no part of it out.
> And God! how the listeners were moved then to admire him!)

If it is assumed that these are general, perhaps uninformed, descriptions of harping and singing a *lai*, drawn from older and poorly understood passages or traditions, Rumble is correct that they are vague and somewhat confusing. What comes through clearly is that the *lai* is an art difficult to master and highly regarded when done well, associated primarily with Celtic performers; it appears that both harping and singing are integral to the performance. However, there is an emphasis in Gottfried on sensitivity to the *noten* which is but partially explained by the observation that this was how the composers, the Bretons, intended them to be played; *Horn* picks up on the same emphasis with *noter* "in precisely the manner that the Bretons are accustomed to do". Manifestly, the Breton style was both distinctive and admired, but its distinctiveness is not explained in the texts. In both cases the voice seems to introduce a

counterpoint to the melody played on the harp. What is meant by Gottfried's "letting it come ringing in", "as he came to the places", and "let his song come flying in"; and by *Horn*'s "he made the strings of the instrument sound out all the story just as he had told it first with his voice" is unclear. In sum, these incidental descriptive phrases are either deliberately vague, intended to evoke a lost art, or are part of a more specific narrative whose larger context, not evident to the modern reader, made sense to the medieval audience.

It is this latter possibility which Bullock-Davies explores by examining an old musical form still known among Welsh harpists, known as "*penillion*-singing:

> The principal melody is not the one sung by the singer, but the one played on the harp. It is, therefore, the reverse of the usual method of singing to accompaniment, in which the instrument accompanies and is subsidiary to the vocalist. A second peculiarity is that the singer does not sing to the melody being played on the harp, nor does he, like an ordinary singer, take pride of place in the performance. It is the harp which is important and which leads. The harpist plays his own melody completely independent of that of the singer; the singer sings to a separate melody that can either be a 'set' one, that is, one that has already been composed to 'harmonize' with the chosen melody of the harp, or else, if he be a skilled *penillion*-singer, he can improvise a melody which he himself 'harmonizes' with the one being played on the harp. The way in which these two separate melodies synchronize is by ensuring that the accents in the *penill* or stanza fall on those in the music. A third peculiarity is that the singer does not commence at a fixed point in the accompaniment, but, according to his discretion, enters into or, 'flies in' to the harp melody at whatever place he judges will be most appropriate. […] A fourth peculiarity is that the tempo need not be the same for harp and singer. […]
>
> If Tristan and Horn played and sang in a way resembling this still unique mode, a good deal of the ambiguity would disappear from the descriptions of their performances. ("Form" 23-4)

Bullock-Davies suggests that *penillion*-singing, which goes back to the seventeenth century, may have older roots which are reflected in these descriptions. The implications of this possibility are

important and far-reaching; light may be shed on a number of problematic issues concerning both the execution and the content of the *lais*.

Without question, a musical form which requires the musician to play a complicated song while at the same time, in a related but distinct tempo, singing a descant which recounts, possibly extemporaneously, a story in fine poetry, presents unimaginable challenges and would be restricted to the most gifted of performers. It would be no surprise, therefore, that it may have dwindled among the conquered and partially assimilated Celts, that it would not readily catch on among musicians who had not been brought up to it, and that imitations of it by lesser artists would quickly bring it into disrepute.

A style of performance analogous to *penillion*-singing provides a meaningful and explanatory context for Gottfried von Strassburg's description of Tristan and the Welsh harpist's recital, as well as making sense of the less detailed account in *Horn*. There would appear, in fact, further precisions to the general remark of performance "in the style of the Bretons": "letting the melody come ringing in", "coming to the places" and "sounding out the story with both harp and mouth" would be, not confused snatches of ancient knowledge imperfectly understood, but quasi-technical observations of the point and counterpoint of harp and voice in telling the story.

Bullock-Davies draws upon a third *lai* to support and refine this perspective, one whose only surviving version is in the *Strengleikar* (an early thirteenth-century collection of Old Norse translations of Old French *lais*, including eleven of Marie's), but was apparently originally composed in French and tells the genesis story of a Breton *lai*. The *Strandar lioð* or *Lai of the Coast* tells of a *lai* commissioned by William the Conqueror sometime between 1072 and 1084 on one of his annual sojourns in England. He was delayed by weather from returning to

Normandy and so spent some time hunting and hawking, an experience which he enjoyed so much that he, having been an ardent admirer of the Breton *lai* since his youth, wished to have it immortalized in a commemorative *lai*. The *lai* was composed by the "Red Woman" and was considered the best example of her art: she taught it meticulously to William's best harpists and it became part of the standard repertoire of any accomplished Breton minstrel from that time on. Bullock-Davies draws from this account certain insights. That William was passionately fond of the Breton *lai* since his youth suggests that the form was well known from as far back as the beginning of the eleventh century;[44] his admiration for it may also have contributed to its enduring popularity in the Anglo-Norman court. Moreover, the subject of the *lai* celebrated in the *Strandar lioð* was neither Celtic nor romantic; what made it a "Breton *lai*" was clearly its form and arrangement (Bullock-Davies "Form" 25-27).

Reading these descriptions of *lai* composition and performance drawn from sources contemporary with Marie de France in the light of Bullock-Davies's insights, several very significant points emerge which have a bearing on our inquiry:

1) A "Breton *lai*" was not necessarily about Breton themes, legends, or fairy marvels, but rather was a musical genre of story-telling/poetry composition[45] which embodied certain technical aspects of performance and was characteristic of adept Celtic minstrels. The passage from Tristan confirms this: both *Graelent* and *Thisbe of Babylon* are considered classic examples

[44] Bullock-Davies notes Marie's references to *li ancien*: cf. *Milun* 532: *firent un lai li anciën* ("the people of old made a *lai*"), *Eliduc* 1: *D'un mult anciën lai Bretun* ("About a very old Breton *lai*") and 1182-3: *li anciën Bretun curteis/firent le lai pur remembrer* ("the Bretons of old, a noble people, composed this *lai* as a memorial").

[45] I admit to the temptation to use the term "rapping" here; there are strong similarities in terms of rhythmic extemporaneous poetic creation with musical accompaniment. The principal differences are that in the *lai*, the voice came in and out on a different arrangement than the music, and the instrument was considered as important in relating the story as the voice.

of the Breton *lai*, though the latter is unconnected in terms of culture or historical tradition with the Celts. This is also true of the *Strandar lioð.*

2) The accepted vocal portion of a *lai* was not restricted to a Celtic language, but could be delivered in any language in which the performer was sufficiently versed to recite or compose the stanzas—Tristan, for example, sang in Breton, Welsh, Latin and French. This suggests as well that the libretto could have been adopted from the poetry of other languages and cultures.

3) The poetic or vocal element of the *lai* could bear a metre and arrangement to some degree independent of or complementary to the musical portion.

4) It might have been the case that some *lais* had no vocal part but were entirely instrumental, or could be performed in that fashion, rehearsing through the title and the musical composition alone the memory of the *aventure*. The passage in *Horn* may support this, as the audience seemed to instantly recognize and to marvel at the *lais* Horn played even without, or before, adding any vocal part.

5) Reworking/retelling the event-story that gave rise to the *lai* was not considered an adulteration of the tale but a mark of the greatest creativity; though fixed stanzas were probably common among minstrels, a harpist who could generate original lyrics on the spot would be highly regarded. To put this another way, the event or tale commemorated by the *lai* (the *aventure)* and the artistic form of the telling (music and rhythm) were more important to *lai* performance than the arrangement of a set vocal text.

These factors suggest that in terms of form, Marie was operating within the framework of the Breton *lai* when she researched the *aventure* and retold it in original verse in another language. Given the technical challenge of performing a musical *lai* and the limited cultural and

artistic foundation for transmitting the tradition, Marie's fear that the Breton *lais*—and with them the *aventures* they commemorated—might pass from human memory was a reasonable one. If she transformed the genre from an oral Breton or Welsh musical performance to a recitation of a fixed French literary text and thereby perhaps played a part in hastening the extinction of the earlier incarnation, there is no reason to think that this action was either artistically illegitimate or culturally antagonistic. Quite the contrary: it re-incarnated a culture's achievement that otherwise almost certainly would have disappeared, leaving only the trace of a meaningless word, *lai*.

Still, to whatever degree in keeping with the cultural aims of the original *lais* Marie's formal transposition may have been, the content—their adoption, adaptation or transformation—is another matter.

3. 2. Content of the Celtic *lais*.

One must not too quickly assume that the subject matter of the *lais* in French faithfully reproduced that of the Celtic originals. Undoubtedly a great deal can be gleaned from Marie herself on that issue, due to her avowed aim of unearthing the stories which lay behind the legends recounted in song in her day, and her further aim of safeguarding the tales from oblivion. However, determining precisely which elements represent the originals from which she worked remains somewhat speculative. I will argue in the course of this work that it was her desire to preserve some of these factors intact which lends the incoherence, and hence the flavour of authenticity, to her project. Nevertheless, it appears to have been Marie's poems that established the *lai de Bretaigne* as a French genre, which then inspired other French authors/translators to produce reworked versions of her narratives or to undertake the translation and versification of

other legends.[46] Early collections of the *lais* in other languages (Old Norse and Middle English) constitute no real independent witness, since they were avowed translations of their French models and were close to them both formally and temporally.[47] What may have constituted the original content is only recorded in the most general terms: in their earliest appearances, Breton minstrels were associated with the legend of Tristan and with tales of Arthur's knights, Erec and Perceval (Hoepffner 40-41). Somewhat after Marie's time, the *Roman de Renart* from the early thirteenth century presents a character who impersonates a Breton minstrel and is asked about his repertoire; he replies that his *lais* tell of Merlin and Forcon (?), of king Hector and of Tristan, Chevrefoil, and St. Brandan.[48] Whether this caricature represents a long tradition of Breton *lais* or is itself dependent on the French tradition, especially Marie, cannot be known.

Other great writers of Marie's era were also already treating the Breton legends and the minstrels who performed them more as archaeological resources than as contemporary expressions. Wace contains the earliest references to the travelling minstrels and their entertainments, predating Marie's *Lais* by perhaps a decade, but he was somewhat critical of their tendency to sensationalize their tales:

> En cele grant pais ke jo di,
> ne sai si vus l'avez oï,

---

[46] As an example, cf. O'Hara Tobin's comments on the relationship of *Doon* to *Milun*: "[T]here are just too many resemblances between *Milun* and *Doon* to maintain that the author of *Doon* had not been influenced by *Milun*. Nevertheless, the presence of certain unique details would indicate that he made use of Marie's work only as the starting point for his own" (57). ("[I]l existe trop de ressemblances entre *Milun* et *Doon*, pour que l'auteur de *Doon* n'ait pas été influencé par *Milun*. Néanmoins l'existence de quelques détails divergents suggérerait qu'il ne s'est servi de l'oeuvre de Marie que comme point de départ.")

[47] For example, the Middle English lay *Sir Launfal* declares, "Thus seyd the Frenssch tale" (474). This is in fact an erroneous claim to authenticity, since it refers to a blow given in a tournament (cf. also 576, citing textual authority for a jousting duel: "In tale as hyt ys telde"); in the source story, Marie de France's *Lanval*, there are, remarkably, no tournaments, battles or combats.

[48] *Savez dire bon lait briton/et de Merlin et de Forcon,/del roi Hector et de Tristam,/de Chievrefol et de Bridam* (*Le Roman de Renart* MS. O, 2396-9). Some mss. read 2398: *del roi Artu*.

> furent les merveilles pruvees
> e les aventures truvees
> ki d'Artur sunt tant recuntees
> ke a fable sunt aturnees.
> Ne tut mençunge, ne tut veir,
> tut folie ne tut saveir.
> Tant unt li cunteür cunté
> e li fableür tant fablé
> pur lur cuntes enbeleter,
> que tut unt fait fable sembler. (9787-9798)
>
> (In that great country of which I speak,
> I do not know if you have heard this,
> wonders were experienced,
> and adventures celebrated in song
> that are recounted so often about Arthur
> that they are turned into fables.
> Not all lies, not all truth,
> not all foolishness, not all wisdom.
> So many tales have the storytellers spun
> and the romancers have fancied so much
> in order to embellish their tales
> that they have made them all to seem like fables.)

Chrétien de Troyes (*Erec et Enide* 19-22) also disparages the minstrels:

> D'Erec, le fil Lac, est li contes,
> que devant rois et devant contes
> depecier et corrompre suelent
> cil qui de conter vivre vuelent.
>
> (This is the tale of Erec, son of Lac,
> which in the presence of kings and counts
> is often butchered and corrupted
> by those who recount tales only to earn their living.)

while Thomas d'Angleterre claims to have chosen his version of *Tristan* from the best information found among the professional minstrels:

> Entre ceus qui solent cunter
> e del cunte Tristan parler,
> il en cuntent diversement:

oï en ai de plusur gent.
Asez sai que chescun en dit
e ço qu'il unt mis en escrit,
Mé sulun ço que j'ai oy
nel dient pas sulun Breri,
ky solt lé gestes e lé cuntes
de tuz lé reis, de tuz lé cuntes
ki orent esté en Bretaingne. (2110-2120)

(Among those who make it their practice to tell stories
and to speak of the tale of Tristan,
they recount it in various ways:
I have heard versions from many people.
I know quite well what each one says
and what they have put in writing,
but according to what I have heard
their versions do not follow Breri,
who knew the noble deeds and the stories
of all the kings, of all the counts
that had been in Britain.)

Thomas's comments, penned around 1170—around the same time as or a little later than Marie's *Lais*—reveal that the legends were already not only circulating in oral form but also beginning to be found in writing.[49] The creative potential of the *matière de Bretagne* was just on the verge of blossoming, while its traditional vehicle, the musical *lai* in Breton, was about to disappear forever.

French writers of the twelfth century, then, depict the early Breton *lais* as compositions dealing generally with traditional Celtic themes and often imbued with touches of the *merveilleux*, or supernatural wonders, Celtic legends of spells, fairies and corporeal transformations. However, we have seen that the distinctive element of a Breton *lai* was its style of performance, especially the point and counterpoint of instrument and voice. Contemporary

[49] This seems true of at least the longer romances and perhaps the Tristan story in particular; cf. Marie's only unequivocal reference to a written source in *Chievrefueil* 6.

lais were not restricted to Breton legends, as the *Strandar lioð* or *Thisbe of Babylon* demonstrate. It was rather the complete change in form (from Breton harping to French octosyllables) which signalled a new genre. Indeed, some of the *Lais* of Marie recount non-Breton tales: *Les Dous Amanz* takes place in "Neustrie" (Wace's archaic term for Normandy before the invasion); *Chaitivel* in Nantes (the plot of which hinges on a quintessential question of "courtly love"—far from the world of the Breton *merveilleux*); *Le Fraisne* and *Milun* take place in the two *Bretaignes* but are not specifically Breton (in fact, the dénouement of *Milun* occurs in Normandy). Still, Marie's refrain regarding each of these adventures, regardless of the ethnic origin of the tale, is that *un lai en firent li Bretun* ("the Bretons made a *lai* about it", *Les Dous Amanz* 5) or *firent un lai li anciën* ("the people of old made a *lai*", *Milun* 532). Whether a specifically Breton story or not, it was from the Breton versions of these tales that Marie claims to have taken her own, so the issue of transformation remains: is this the story that they told, or is it Marie's story?

3. 3. The question of genre.

Possibly within Marie's lifetime and surely due primarily to the influence of her own publication, the *lai* became a standard of literature in Old French. That is to say, the *lai* was transformed from a musical performance to a written short romance. We have seen above that the content of an original Breton *lai* was not necessarily Celtic; the *aventure* that gave rise to a *lai* could be anything from Thisbe in Babylon through Lanval the knight of King Arthur to William the Conqueror's successful week of hunting. But the fact is that the *lai* was no longer primarily a musical form, and a complete reversal had taken place: from a harp or psaltery performance commemorating an event, with or without fixed or spontaneous vocal stanzas, the *lai* became a

set narrative of the event, with or without musical accompaniment. The only element that may have concretely survived the transformation between these two forms was the title.

Moreover, in spite of the fact that the *lais* that have come down to us are all narratives, nothing bars us from supposing, as discussed above, that some original Breton *lais* were entirely instrumental (non-vocal) performances that recalled through their title and their music a known and celebrated *aventure* (adventure, event, happening) or *conte* (story). A more modern analogy might be Mendelssohn's Symphony No. 5, "Reformation", a lengthy orchestral piece which recounts without words or voices, but through musical expressivity and allusions to known tunes, such as those of Martin Luther, the event of the Protestant Reformation. If this were the case with any of the *lais* upon which Marie worked, that is, that they were instrumental compositions which celebrated but did not retell in words an important story, it would underscore Marie's desire to preserve stories that might otherwise soon be lost for lack of investment in fixed, repeated form, and it would also help to explain why Marie insists that she has researched and is retelling the tale that gave rise to the *lai* rather than translating the *lai* itself. Freeman observes that Marie, unlike her contemporaries, does not cite the text of her source (865), and is "evasive about whether she intends to translate Breton *lais*" (862). We have seen indications that there may have been instances where the text of the *lai* was not a fixed, hence not a citable one; there also may have been cases where there was no text at all but simply the memory of a story. This would mean that Marie, far from being "evasive", was giving to the source all possible credit while at the same time being constrained by the very nature of the source to create from her own imaginative resources the structured *conte*, the story or the fixed text, which now commemorated the *aventure* in literary form.

We must also clarify the relationship of the medieval translator to his or her source. It is true that the translator's authority derived from the source and that at times translators took pains to name the authoritative text,[50] but it was just as common, *pace* Freeman, for translators to fail to do so so: the unknown Norman poet who, sometime after 1150, translated and adapted the Latin *Aenid* into the Old French *Eneas* makes no mention of the Latin text nor of its celebrated classical author Virgil; the clerk who transformed the *Thebaid* into the *Roman de Thèbes* in the years before 1150 makes only a late and passing allusion (line 7823) to the first-century Latin original by Statius, as though it were an incidental source; Wace, in his 1155 *la Geste des Bretons*, or the *Brut*, self-identifies as a translator (7) but is silent about his Latin source, the *Historia regum Britanniae* by Geoffroy de Monmouth. This is not because these writers deliberately obscured the origins of their works in an attempt to plagiarize—the concept scarcely existed in that era—but because the hallmark of originality in the Middle Ages was the creative reworking of existing texts (Weingartner xxiii). Originality as it is valued today, a departure from the established canon, was hardly a recommendation for a medieval work, which depended for its authority on how well it integrated the literary tradition, and for its originality on how well it recomposed and reinterpreted the material. The latter was not insignificant; the element of passionate romance incorporated into the *Eneas*, for example, was revolutionary. And Marie, in

[50] For example, in addition to Thomas d'Angleterre cited just above, 3.2, note Chrétien de Troyes: *Ceste estoire trovons escrite,/Que conter vos vuel et retreire,/An un des livres de l'aumeire/Mon seignor saint Pere a Biauvez./De la fut li contes estrez,/Don cest romanz fist Crestiiens* (*Cligès* 18-23; "This story we find written that I wish to tell and narrate to you in one of the books in the library of the church of my lord Saint Peter at Beauvais. From there the story was taken from which Chrétien made this romance."); *comance Crestïens son livre;/ matiere et san li done et livre/ la contesse, et il s'antremet/ de panser si que rien n'i met/ fors sa painne et s'antancïon* (*Lancelot le chevalier de la charrete* 24-28; "Chrétien begins his book; the material and the interpretation, to him gives and grants the Countess, and he undertakes to ensure that he add nothing save his labour and vigilance"); and Gottfried von Strassburg: "I began to search assiduously both in Romance and Latin books for the true and authentic version of Tristan such as Thomas narrates, and I was at pains to direct the poem along the right path which he had shown" (translated by Hatto, Gottfried Hatto 43).

introducing a literary French version of the Breton *lais*, instituted a new and enduring genre of French poetry and exerted enormous influence on the form and content of narrative and romance for decades, indeed centuries, to follow.

What makes the *Lais* a thornier area in this regard is that, unlike the histories and epics, there are no extant originals against which to compare and analyze Marie's reinterpretation. What is more, the *lais* were the heritage, not of the dominant and ubiquitous line of Rome and Greece but of a dominated and disappearing people and their art; and what the translator did with this heritage revisioned or remade it without possibility of appeal.

So what precisely is the relationship between the original Breton *lais* and the *Lais* of Marie de France? To describe the convergent elements of the project—the musical poems sung by the minstrels, the stories from which they arose, the historical or legendary events which gave rise to the stories, and Marie's versions of them in *romanz*—Marie uses three terms: *lai*, *conte* and *aventure*. *Lai*, as noted above, was probably a Breton word which seems to have designated a musical composition celebrating a memory, played on the harp or other instrument and perhaps accompanied by a sung poem. The other two words, *conte* and *aventure*, are French. *Conte* is the tale as it is structured in story form (*conter*, *raconter* and English "recount" are all related words); and *aventure* (from *avenir*, "to happen", and close to its English cognate "adventure") is the event or series of events which inspired the tale.

Although she may not have been as meticulous as the modern investigator might like in delineating the three terms *aventure*, *conte* and *lai*, I believe that Marie was reasonably clear:

> De cest cunte qu'oï avez
> fu Guigemar li lais trovez (*Guigemar* 883-4)

(From this tale that you have heard
was composed the *lai* of *Guigemar*)

L'aventure qu'avez oïe
veraie fu, n'en dutez mie.
De Bisclavret fu fez li lais. (*Bisclavret* 315-317)

(The events that you have just heard
really happened—of that you may be certain;
and from them was composed the *lai* of Bisclavret.)

Une aventure vus dirai,
dunt li Bretun firent un lai […]
Cele aventure fu cuntee,
ne pot estre lunges celee.
Un lai en firent li Bretun (*Aüstic* 1-2, 157-9)

(I will tell you an adventure
from which the Bretons made a *lai* […]
That which happened was noised abroad;
it could not long be concealed.
The Bretons made a *lai* about it)

This is overwhelmingly the stance she took, that her project was to unearth the events (*aventure*) which gave rise to the story, or tale (*conte*), and to tell it as the historical reality behind the traditional Breton musical poem (*lai*) sung or played by minstrels. These three elements, then, and not just the third one, informed her approach. The musical *lais* of the minstrels inspired her, but it was not these that she translated, nor did she claim that her translations were themselves *lais*. It was the *conte* that had become established around an *aventure*, or indeed her own *conte* that she built about the *aventure*, that she composed in French narrative verse, in the same way that the Breton minstrels had composed an entirely different genre, the *lais*, from the *aventures* and their *contes*.

To assure ourselves of the soundness of this basic analysis before looking at passages which demand a detailed exegesis, it will be worthwhile to examine more of her compositional frames:

> Les contes que jo sai verais,
> dunt li Bretun unt fait les lais,
> vos conterai assez briefment. (*Guigemar* 19-21)
>
> (The tales which I know to be true,
> from which the Bretons have composed their *lais*,
> I will recount to you in a few words.)
>
> Issi avint cum dit vus ai.
> Li Bretun en firent un lai (*Equitan* 317-318)
>
> (And so it happened just as I have told you.
> The Bretons made a *lai* about it)
>
> Quant l'aventure fu seüe
> coment ele esteit avenue,
> le lai del Fraisne en unt trové (*Le Fraisne* 533-5)
>
> (When these events became known,
> how they had taken place,
> they composed the *lai* of *The Ash Tree* about them)
>
> L'aventure d'un altre lai,
> cum ele avint, vus cunterai (*Lanval* 1-2)
>
> (The events from another *lai*,
> how they took place, I will recount to you)
>
> Jadis avint en Normendie
> une aventure mult oïe […]
> Un lai en firent li Bretun:
> des Dous Amanz reçut le nun […]
> Pur l'aventure des enfanz
> a nun li munz des Dous Amanz.
> Issi avint cum dit vus ai:
> li Bretun en firent un lai (*Les Dous Amanz* 1-2, 5-6, 251-4)

(In olden time in Normandy there occurred
an adventure that became well known […]
The Bretons made a *lai* about it:
it was given the name *The Two Lovers* […]
Because of what happened to the children
the mountain now bears the name of The Two Lovers.
Thus it happened just as I have told you;
The Bretons made a *lai* about it)

Puis que des lais ai comencié,
ja n'iert pur nul travail laissié;
les aventures que j'en sai,
tut par rime les cunterai […]
Cil ki ceste aventure oïrent
lunc tens aprés un lai en firent (*Yonec* 1-4, 559-560)

(Seeing that I have begun on the *lais*,
no amount of labour will now intimidate me;
the adventures that I know about,
I will recount them all in rhyme […]
Those who heard this adventure
made a *lai* about it a long time afterwards)

D'un mult anciën lai Bretun
le cunte e tute la raisun
vus dirai, si cum jeo entent
la verité mun esciënt. […]
l'aventure dunt li lais fu.
Si cum avint vus cunterai,
la verité vus en dirrai. […]
De l'aventure de cez treis
li anciën Bretun curteis
firent le lai pur remembrer (*Eliduc* 1-4, 26-28, 1181-3)

(About a very old Breton *lai*
the story and all the circumstances
I shall tell you, just as I understand
the truth, to the best of my knowledge. […]
the events about which the *lai* was composed.
Just as they took place, I will recount to you,
I will tell you the truth about it. […]
From the adventure of these three people
the noble Bretons of old

made the *lai* as a memorial)

She tells each story in her own words and in her own form, which may bear only a distant relationship, if any, to the words and forms chosen by Breton minstrels to tell the same story. It is not the words nor the form which link Marie's project to the Breton *lais* but the shared story about an important memory, and the title which evokes it.

What we have seen thus far continues to support the premise that Marie did not translate *lais*, nor did she call her own compositions *lais*. Rather, she translated the stories (or retold the stories) of the events about which the Bretons had composed *lais*; her works were not *lais* but short romance narrative poems—first cousins, not direct descendants, of the *lais*. This does not mean that they were not translations in the medieval sense, nor that they effaced the elements of the original stories. As Bullock-Davies puts it, "It may be that, now and then, she adhered a little too closely to her originals but that was by no means an altogether bad thing, because, by so doing, she has transmitted to us the true flavour of the *aventure* in both its strength and its weakness" ("Reassessment" 99). It is rather that the translations were based upon and reproduced, not the *lais*, but the events and their stories from which the *lais* were composed.

The distance between the Breton *lais* and Marie's verse narratives becomes even more explicit in three of the poems: *Milun*, *Chaitivel* and *Chievrefueil*. In these narratives, Marie

declares that in addition to relating the events of the story memorialized in a well-known *lai*, she will also provide a meta-story on the origins and circumstances of its composition:[51]

> Ici comencerai Milun
> e musterrai par brief sermun
> pur quei e coment fu trovez
> li lais ki issi est numez (*Milun* 5-8)
>
> (At this point I shall begin *Milun*
> and I shall explain in a few words
> why and how it was composed,
> the *lai* that is thus named)

Even more overt in this regard is *Chaitivel*:

> Talent me prist de remembrer
> un lai dunt jo oï parler.
> L'aventure vus en dirai
> et la cité vus numerai
> u il fu nez, e cum ot nun (*Chaitivel* 1-5)
>
> (I was moved by a desire to call to mind
> a *lai* of which I had heard spoken.
> I shall tell you the events of it,
> and I shall give you the name of the city
> where it was composed, and how it got its name)

Chaitivel, in fact, contains an extended conversation between the heroine and the miserable surviving suitor about the plan to compose a *lai* and what that *lai* should be titled (203-237). The lady chooses the title *Quatre Doels* ("Four Sorrows") since she sees herself as the pathetic victim of the drama, three of her suitors having been killed and the fourth maimed and impotent; events

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[51] The *Strandar lioð* or *Lai of the Coast* follows this pattern as well: although called a *lai*, it does not in fact translate the *Lai of the Coast* but is a poem (in Norse, presumably translated from French) which recounts how the original Breton *Lai of the Coast* came to be composed and how it subsequently influenced the music of the period. We conclude that the *Strandar lioð* is not an other-language version of the Breton *lai*, nor is it a *lai* in its own right (in the contemporary sense of the term); it is, like Marie's poems, an archaeological project researching the story of or about a *lai* and rendering that story in rhyme. Cook and Tveitane (201) note that the *Strandar lioð*

> displays an extreme form of this 'self-conscious' tendency of the lais to account for their origin. The adventure itself is sketchily presented, non-romantic, and without interesting plot structure, while greater importance is given to the circumstances of the musical composition.

which burdened her with four griefs. The fourth suitor, comparing the lady's robust health and bright future with his own crippled and gloomy condition, does not feel for her all the pity that she feels for herself, and suggests rather than the *lai* commemorate his fate, *Le Chaitivel* ("The Wretch"). Marie's poem is thus not the *lai* nor a translation of it, but the meta-story of the events leading up to the composition of the *lai* and the justification by each side for his or her own different title. We may also note that this adds further weight to the premise that the music and the title were the focus of a Celtic *lai* and that lyrics, if included, were secondary: both of the contenders in this *lai* seemed to assume that it was the title that would crucially determine whose story would be perpetuated to posterity.[52]

Likewise, the plot of *Chievrefueil*, which may have represented the substance of the Breton *lai*, is sandwiched between the commentary/origin story at the beginning and ending of the poem. Marie explains that her narrative will relate how the *lai* of *Chievrefueil*, evidently known and appreciated by her audience, came to be composed:

> Asez me plest e bien le vueil
> del lai qu'um nume Chievrefueil
> que la verité vus en cunt
> coment fu fetz de quei e dunt.
> Plusur le m'unt cunté e dit
> e jeo l'ai trové en escrit
> de Tristam e de la reïne […]
> Pur la joie qu'il ot eüe
> de s'amie qu'il ot veüe
> e pur ceo qu'il aveit escrit,
> si cum la reïne l'ot dit,
> pur les paroles remembrer,
> Tristam ki bien saveit harper,
> en aveit fet un nuvel lai.

[52] A similar issue is discussed in *Eliduc* 21-26: the *lai* used to be named *Eliduc* after the hero, but later came to be called *Guildeluëc ha Guilliadun*, since it was the two women who were the prime movers of events. In this case, however, later history seems to have reverted to the original title.

Asez briefment le numerai:
'*Gotelef*' l'apelent Engleis,
'Chievrefueil' le nument Franceis.
Dit vus en ai la verité,
del lai que j'ai ici cunté. (1-7, 107-118)

(It gives me great pleaure, indeed I am eager
with respect to the *lai* that people call "Goatleaf"
to tell you the truth about it,
how it was composed and about whom and from what circumstances.
Many have recounted and told it to me
and I have found it written
about Tristan and the queen […]
For the joy that he had experienced
in seeing his beloved
and for the message that he had written:
just as the queen had requested,
to preserve the memory of the message,
Tristan, who was a skilled harpist,
composed a new *lai* about their meeting.
I will give its title succinctly enough:
The English call it '*Gotelef*';
the French name for it is 'Goatleaf' [*Chievrefueil*].
I have told you the truth
about the *lai* that I have recounted here.)

Marie's general *Prologue* confirms the picture that we are drawing with respect to the relationship between the Breton *lais* and her narrative poems:

Des lais pensai qu'oïz aveie.
Ne dutai pas, bien le saveie,
que pur remembrance les firent
des aventures qu'il oïrent
cil ki primes les comencierent
e ki avant les enveierent.
Plusurs en ai oïz conter,
ne vueil laissier ne obliër.
Rime en ai e fait ditié,
soventes feiz en ai veillié. […]
m'entremis des lais assembler,
par rime faire e reconter (23-42, 47-8).

> (I considered the *lais* that I had heard.
> I had no doubt, I knew quite well
> that they had made them as a memorial
> of the adventures that they had heard,
> those who first composed them
> and published them in time past.
> Many of them I have heard recounted;
> I do not wish that they should be neglected and forgotten.
> I have made rhyming compositions of them;
> I have spent many sleepless hours on them. […]
> I undertook to bring together the *lais*,
> to compose them and to tell the tales in rhyme).

I reiterate, then, based on her own use of terminology and her careful and consistent explanations, that Marie did not translate the *lais*, but the stories of the events behind them or the stories of the circumstances surrounding their composition. Nor did Marie claim that her poems were *lais* or versions of the *lais*. Her work was indeed a tribute to the Breton *lais* and a commemoration of the tales which they celebrated, but it was a distinctly different artistic genre. The *lais* were highly complicated musical pieces composed as memorials of noteworthy events; Marie's poems were analogous literary memorials of these events.

How, then, did Marie's *Tales of the Bretons in French Verse*, if you will, come to be called the *Lais of Marie*? How did her work found a genre of French literature, short romances in rhyme, called the *lais de Bretaigne*? And how is it that generations of readers and scholars have assumed that Marie wrote *lais*?

We have seen that Ernest Hoepffner conjectured a form of the original Celtic *lais* which aligns with the deductions of Constance Bullock-Davies, that is, that the *lais* were primarily musical compositions that commemorated events, and that the story of the event itself, the song or poem, was not fixed nor even necessarily part of the performance. He summarizes, after a

careful examination of mentions of *lais* and minstrels in the literature leading up to Marie's writings:

> It would be possible to conclude from these texts that the *lai* in its early form was an instrumental composition, not a vocal one: the *lai* was originally played, not sung. […] Nonetheless, this conclusion is not absolutely certain. The passages cited are in no way exclusive of the notion that singing could accompany the tune executed on the harp, rote or hurdy-gurdy.[53] (Hoepffner 43)

However, in reflecting on the transformation of the memory-stories of the *lais* into French, he argued that it was Marie's own use of the word that changed its sense from musical performance to narrative poem:

> But unconsciously Marie comes to apply the word, as a sort of shorthand, to the stories themselves that she was recounting; and it was these stories which came to be understood, rightly or wrongly, as representing the defining characteristic of the musical *lais*. This is why she announces, for example, "I will tell you the *lai* of *The Ash Tree*", or "Since I have undertaken to compose *lais*, I do not wish to leave out *The Bisclavret*". The word thus ends up designating Marie's tales themselves, that is, these rather unusual stories that our poet has told in her little poems.[54] (Qtd in de Riquer 1-2)

This has become the received opinion, where the question of genre or of Marie's use of the word *lai* is raised at all. Harf-Lancer concludes, based on these same texts (*Le Fraisne* 1-2 and *Bisclavret* 1-2 and comparing *Chievrefueil* 118-119): "But it does happen that Marie, like the anonymous authors of other *lais*, denominates the stories themselves as *lais*"[55] (*Lais* 13).

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[53] "On pourrait en conclure que le lai était primitivement une composition instrumentale, et non vocale : le lai était d'abord joué, et non chanté. […] La conclusion n'est toutefois pas d'une certitude absolue. Les passages cités ne s'opposent point à l'hypothèse qu'un chant pouvait accompagner l'air exécuté sur la harpe, la rote ou la vielle."

[54] "Mais insensiblement Marie en arrive à appliquer le mot par commodité aux contes mêmes qu'elle racontait et qui passaient, à tort ou à raison, pour se trouver à la base des lais musicaux. Voilà qu'elle annonce par exemple: 'Je vous dirai le lai du Frêne', ou: 'Puisque j'ai entrepris de faire des lais, je ne veux pas oublier le Bisclavret'. Le mot finit donc par désigner les récits même de Marie, c'est-à-dire les contes d'un caractère assez particulier que notre poétesse a racontés dans ses petits poèmes."

[55] "Mais il arrive à Marie, tout comme aux auteurs des lais anonymes, de désigner les récits eux-mêmes comme des lais".

Burgess and Busby also refer to *Bisclavret* 1 as well as to *Yonec* 1 to conclude that Marie's "new poems can equally well be regarded as lays" (8); in their view, from the musical Breton versions Marie's poems "represent a more literary stage in the development of the genre" (25) rather than a distinct genre in their own right. Freeman observes more cautiously: "I also recognize the difficulties presented by a few passages in which Marie seems to claim that her poems are, themselves, *lais* and ought to be considered as such" (862).[56]

As I believe I have demonstrated above, Marie's uses of the terms *lai*, *conte*, and *aventure* are generally straightforward, and there emerges a fundamental consistency in her employment of them which tends to contradict Hoepffner's interpretation and that of many who have followed this line of thinking. His observation, however, even if depending on only one or two passages, is not ill-conceived. As de Riquer (5) observes, if Hoepffner's understanding of *Le Fraisne* 1-2 is correct, then so also is his conclusion that Marie applied the term *lai* to her own story. The manuscript Harley 978, the only complete collection of all twelve poems and the *Prologue*, gives *Le Fraisne* 1-2 as follows:

> Le lai del Fraisne vus dirai
> sulunc le cunte que jeo sai.
>
> (I shall tell you the *lai* of *The Ash Tree*
> according to the story that I know.)

Martín de Riquer points out that the manuscript S gives a reading of these lines in keeping with Marie's use of *lai* elsewhere:[57]

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[56] She comes to the determination, however, that "Marie does not name her poems *lais*", but the reason she gives for this was that Marie was "deliberately elusive about such an appellation" (877).

[57] Pickens (qtd in Freeman 862) argues that S represents a more authentic manuscript family since it leaves implicit the relationship of Marie's poems to the *lais* which H tries to make explicit. This is a sound principle of textual criticism, but Freeman counters that the terminology remains "more ambiguous than one might wish" (862).

> Du lai del Freisne vus dirai
> sulunc le conte que jeo sai.
>
> (I shall tell you about the *lai* of *The Ash Tree*
> according to the story that I know.)

"Now, this does not signify that the author is going to tell the *lai del Fraisne* but rather that 'she is going to talk about the *lai del Fraisne*', which is a very different matter"[58] (de Riquer 5). In de Riquer's view, the fact that the initial word of the poem (which would begin with an illustrated letter in a manuscript) consists of a brief monosyllable increases the likelihood of a copyist's error. In any event, I suggest that we would move onto insecure ground if we were to reverse our assessment of Marie's meaning on the basis of a disputed reading.[59]

Hoepffner's interpretation of his second citation, from *Bisclavret* 1-2, is more problematic. Marie's text reads:

> Quant des lais faire m'entremet,
> ne vueil ubliër Bisclavret.

De Riquer (7-8) rejects Hoepffner's interpretation of *Bisclavret* 1, observing that in ms. S the beginning lines of *Bisclavret* are missing, and asserts that the reading of ms. H should not

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[58] "Lo que no significa que la autora va a relatar el *lai del Freisne* sino que 'va a hablar del *lai del Freisne*', cosa muy distinta."

[59] Note that ms. N, the Uppsala or Old Norse folio 32b, agrees with S in this instance: *⟨H⟩ER sægir nu annan atburð annarrar sogu ok var af þessare þat lioð gort er brættar kalla æski⟨u⟩ lioð* ("Here is told another adventure of another story, and from this one was made the lai which the Bretons call 'Lai of the Ash'." Translated by Cook and Tveitane 45).

Even if we accept the reading of H 978, Hoepffner's interpretation of it is not the only reasonable one: the second line, *sulunc le cunte que jeo sai*, mitigates an overly forced understanding of the first, *Le lai del Fraisne vus dirai*, since it means of necessity that what Marie will tell will be based primarily on the story and not on the *lai*; at most it could be argued that she is giving her own researched version of the *lai*. I consider it better to interpret *Le Fraisne* line 1 in the light of line 2 and of Marie's consistent use of the terms *lai* and *conte* elsewhere. The same observations hold for *Chievrefueil* 117-118: *Dit vus en ai la verité,/del lai que j'ai ici cunté*. It is worth remarking that here again ms. S has a different reading, one which accords with de Riquer's position: *Dit vus en ai la verité,/del lai dont j'ai ici cunté* (Freeman 863).

overturn what Marie has already made abundantly clear in other poems and in particular at the end of *Bisclavret* itself, where Marie explains:

> L'aventure qu'avez oïe
> veraie fu, n'en dutez mie.
> De Bisclavret fu fez li lais
> pur remembrance a tuz dis mais. (*Bisclavret* 315-318)

De Riquer contends:

> These lines demonstrate clearly that Marie de France makes no claim to have authored any *lai*, that she in no way considers her story a *lai*, and that what she has just narrated is the *aventure*. In the first line of *Bisclavret* there is, then, an error, and as such it cannot be alleged as an argument in favour of a position consistently and strictly opposed to all the affirmations of the author.[60] (8)

The notion that clear usages should have interpretive priority over obscure ones is hermeneutically sound, but it is not an entirely satisfactory resolution since it leaves at least one passage in one manuscript that seems to say that Marie considered herself to be writing *lais*. Of course, it must be acknowledged—which, frankly, de Riquer is loath to do—that even careful writers do not always and without fail use words in a careful way. If the reading of the Harley manuscript for *Bisclavret* line 1 is accepted, the question centres around what Marie meant by *des lais*. It is critically important to read this in Old, and not Modern, French.

Rohlfs (85) is clear that the use of *de* here cannot be partitive, which scarcely existed at the time (see also Kibler *Old French* 171-3). Note in addition that *des* had not yet generalized to an indefinite sense; the indefinite plural, rarely used, was *un*/*uns*/*unes*, (Einhorn 15, 18-19). This is to say that Old French *des* was a contraction of *de les* in which both words, the preposition and

[60] "Estos versos revelan claramente que María de Francia no se atribuye la paternidad de ningún *lai*, que en modo alguno considera que su relato es un *lai* y que lo que acaba de narrar es l'*aventure*. En el verso primero de *Bisclavret* hay, pues, un error y no puede aducirse como argumento en pro de una opinión constante y tajantamente contraria a todas las afirmaciones de la autora".

the definite article, were understood to retain their integrity and value (Harris 78). If *de* is taken in this passage as part of the verbal syntagma *faire des lais*, then whether it is a verbal clitic, yielding the sense "to work on the *lais*", or a fully functioning preposition, giving something like "to draw material from the *lais*", is very difficult to determine. In any case, it introduces a prepositional group, and not a direct object; what it cannot mean is "to compose (some) *lais*".

"To work on the *lais*", or "to draw material from the *lais*" is exegetically sound as long as the unmarked reading of Marie's poetic arrangement in fact yields *de* after *faire* syntactically, in other words, *faire de les lais*.[61] But it is just as likely—probably more so—that in an unmarked word order, *de* follows *m'entremet* both as an enclitic preposition completing the sense of the reflexive verb, that is, *s'entremetre de*, meaning "to trouble oneself about, to see to, to concern oneself with" (Studer and Waters 391), and as a metrical or verbal particle introducing a following object infinitive (see Kibler *Old French* 117-118, 172). This would probably echo Marie's usage in the *Prologue* to the *Lais* 47: in her poetic structure, Marie says there *m'entremis des lais assembler*. In prose or unmarked order this might have been *m'entremis* [*d'*]*assembler* [ ] *de les lais*, "I undertook [to] assemble [a collection] from the *lais*", with ellipses of the first *de* and of a nominal direct object; but more natural is *m'entremis d'assembler les lais*, "I undertook to bring together the *lais*". The same usage can be seen in the *Epilogue* to Marie's *Ysopë* 11-12: *m'entremis de cest livre feire/e de l'engleis en romanz treire*, where the first preposition *de*

[61] This is the only reading considered by Freeman (863-4), based on an occurrence of the expression *faire de* in Chrétien and on Marie's oft-repeated assertion that the ancients *en firent un lai*, made a *lai* of, or about, or out of the *aventure*. She reads *Yonec* 1 in the same way, that is, as *comencier* + *de* as a full preposition "from" + noun [+ ellipsed object], rather than as *comencier* + *de* as a particle introducing an infinitive [+ ellipsed verb] + noun. Either reading is possible; the second may be more likely, as the word order in the *Prologue* 47 shows. Kibler (*Old French* 191) gives an example of *de* introducing the infinitive from *La Vie de Saint Thomas Becket*: *Tost furent apresté de grant mal comencier*, which in unmarked order is clearly *Tost furent apresté de comencier grant mal* (verbal group + particle introducing the infinite + infinitive + nominal object of the infinitive).

clearly links the reflexive verb with the two objective infinitives; the second and third prepositions *de* and *en* delineate the relationship between the two languages. Thus *cest livre*, in spite of following *de* in poetic arrangement, is the direct object of both of the infinitives in unmarked order: *m'entremis de feire cest livre, e m'entremis de treire cest livre de l'engleis en romanz*. To apply all this to our present problem, that is, *Bisclavret* 1, reading *s'entremetre de* as a verbal group would give from Marie's poetic *Quant des lais faire m'entremet* the unmarked order *Quant m'entremet de faire les lais*, "Since I am concerning myself with making the *lais*".

The sense of *Yonec* 1, *Puis que des lais ai comencié*, is even less evident since there is an obvious ellipse. We recall that the Old French preposition does not yield the meaning "Since I have begun some *lais*", that is, *des*, not being partitive nor indefinite, cannot introduce a direct object; but it cannot be determined if *de* should be connected to the nominal group *les lais* in relation to a missing nominal direct object ("Since I have begun [my narrative poems] from the *lais*"), or to the verb *comencier*, indicating an absent infinitive such as *faire* ("Since I have begun [to make] the *lais*"). If we accept the latter interpretation, we must admit that Marie declares that she is making *lais*. Nevertheless, such a strict interpretation would require ignoring the immediate context:

> Puis que des lais ai comencié,
> ja n'iert pur nul travail laissié;
> les aventures que j'en sai,
> tut par rime les cunterai […]
> Cil ki ceste aventure oïrent
> lunc tens aprés un lai en firent (*Yonec* 1-4, 559-560).

As de Riquer persuasively argues (14), it is the *aventure* that gave rise to the *lai*, which others composed and which she has heard; it is the *aventures* that she will retell as stories in verse (*tut*

par rime les cunterai). So, even if an analysis of *Bisclavret* 1 and *Yonec* 1 yields the probability of *les lais* as the direct object of a following infinitive, we can conclude that Marie claims to write *lais* only by entirely decontextualizing these single lines. The context virtually forces us to read *faire les lais* as something like "do the *lais*, make the *lais* [my project]", in other words, use the *lais* as the point of departure for her archaeological translation work. This agrees with *Prologue* 47-48: *m'entremis des lais assembler/par rime faire e reconter*, "I undertook to bring together the *lais*, to set them in rhyme and to recount them." This interpretation is supported by all of Marie's non-controversial frames and by contextual reading; it is opposed to an interpretation of *faire les lais* as "compose the *lais*".

An example of imprecise usage is found at the end of *Milun*. As cited above, Marie begins the poem by declaring that she will tell the story from which the *lai* of Milun had been composed (5-8), but ends with:

> De lur amur e de lur bien
> firent un lai li anciën;
> e jeo ki l'ai mis en escrit
> el recunter mult me delit. (*Milun* 531-4)
>
> (About their love and their happiness
> the people of old made a *lai*;
> and I who have put it down in writing
> have had great pleasure in the telling.)

I suggest that it would be straining Marie's usage at this point to insist that she simply recorded the *lai* itself as composed by the minstrels of a former time; rather, she has preserved the story behind the oral *lai* in written form. The *recunter* ("telling") and the delight it gives must refer to the process of writing creatively. De Riquer insists that the only possible interpretation of these lines is that Marie told the tale in written form which the people of old had composed in *lai* form;

he points out that any other interpretation would be disallowed by *Milun* 1-8 (9). This is a strong argument since, as we shall discuss below, the beginning of *Milun* reveals that Marie is deliberate in her creative refashioning of the tales.

At the end of this examination, then, I conclude that there is no question but that Marie has been clear in the main as to the relation of her poems to the Breton *lais*. She did not translate the *lais* nor did she designate her own poems as *lais*. De Riquer comments:

> [W]e may wish that Marie de France had been more informative about the *lais* and that she had explained in detail her position with respect to them and revealed to us the precise sense of the narratives. But let us not forget that Marie de France writes for an audience that knows exactly what a *lai* is, for an audience that without a doubt is acquainted with the *lais* from which she will assemble the stories that follow; for an audience, in any event, to whom it will never occur to confuse with a *lai* these *contes* in octosyllabic rhyming couplets.[62] (15)

This final argument is perhaps the most important of the many assembled here. If any of our surmises about the form of the Breton *lai* have so much as approached the mark, it is unimaginable that either Marie or her hearers could have construed her courtly fresh French rhymes as belonging to the genre of the strikingly peculiar traditional strains of the Celtic harpists. It is certainly unthinkable that Marie, poet, researcher and self-styled cultural conservationist, should have confounded the issue, expressly or not, either in her own mind or in that of her hearers. The intricacy of these latter stages of this discussion may have thrown up some dust, obscuring the earlier conclusions that in virtually every case, Marie's uses of the

[62] "[D]esearíamos que María de Francia se extendiera más sobre los *lais* y que precisara con detalles su actitud frente a ellos y nos revelara el exacto sentito de las narraciones. Pero no olvidemos que María de Francia escribe para un público que sabe exactamente qué es un *lai*, que sin duda alguna conoce los *lais* sobre los cuales montará los relatos que siguen; para un publico, en fin, que jamás se le ocurrirá confundir con un *lai* estos *contes* en pareados octosilábicos."

terms *lai*, *conte* and *aventure* have been clear and consistent; the rare doubtful token may provoke debate, but hardly contradiction.

Nonetheless, while I therefore cannot agree with Hoepffner's view that Marie was inconsistent in her use of the term *lai* and applied it at times to her own work, neither can I absolve Marie as categorically as does de Riquer from some responsibility for the confusion that followed and for the fact that the genre of French literature that narrated short romances in octosyllabic verse became known as the *lai de Bretaigne*. If her general usage can be established and her allegedly ambiguous uses clarified, it remains, as we have seen from this detailed investigation, that an ordinary reading can on occasion leave a sufficiently vague or even misleading sense of the word to result, over time, in misapplication of the term. O'Hara Tobin comments: "Despite the fact that Marie herself did not identify her poems as *lais* and that the exact sense in which she used the term remains ambiguous, it is from her work that the term *lai* came to refer to a narrative composition"[63] (9-10).

Perhaps the principal reason for the resulting confusion is that there was at the time no name for what Marie was doing. Baum states the problem astutely: "We can see, then, that Marie's immediate sources, the *contes d'aventure*, are designated by a precise and unequivocal term: *lais*. We remark conversely the lack of a precise term designating Marie's poems, the products of her poetic effort"[64] (35). I maintain that she founded a genre, short narrative poems with a Celtic flair; and the absence of any standard designation for it left a void, one which the

[63] "Quoique Marie elle-même n'ait pas qualifié ses poèmes du nom de *lai* et que le sens même du mot soit resté ambigu chez elle, c'est à partir de son oeuvre que le terme *lai* aura acquis son sens d'oeuvre narrative."

[64] "On peut donc constater que les sources immédiates de Marie, les *contes d'aventure*, sont désignées par un terme précis et unique: *lais*. On constate d'autre part l'absence d'un terme précis désignant les poèmes de Marie, le résultat de son travail de poète."

known and precise term *lai* was quick to fill. Surely it would not have done so if the original Breton *lais* had continued to be practiced in all their admirable and alien uniqueness. But as it was, even in Marie's day the *lai*'s incarnation as a Celtic musical genre was waning and perhaps disappearing. The great popularity of her poems, attested by Denis Piramus, would mean that there had to be some way to refer to them; the cumbersome "Marie's poems inspired by the stories behind the Breton *lais*" could not have been long in giving way to the simple designation "Marie's *lais*". This is what seems to be taking place within Denis Piramus's text itself, perhaps a testimony to the shift that was occurring in Marie's own lifetime. In his first use of the term *lai* in the *Vie Seint Edmund* 35-7, it is reasonable to apply the same grammatical and contextual arguments that we have deduced concerning Marie's use:

> E dame Marie autresi,
> ki en rime fist e basti
> e compassa les vers de lais
>
> (Likewise the lady Marie,
> who wrote and fashioned in rhyme
> and structured these lines from *lais*).

The sense has arguably shifted in lines 46-48:

> Les lais solent as dames pleire
> de joie les oient e de gré,
> qu'il sunt sulum lur volenté
>
> (The *lais* are generally pleasing to the ladies;
> they hear them with joy and willingness,
> since these works are suited to their desire).

Denis Piramus's initial comments make it plain that Marie's poems are original compositions (*en rime fist e basti/e compassa les vers*) based on, taken from or written about (*de*) the *lais*, but his later observations introduce an undeniable ambiguity. *Les lais* either refers to the themes of the

Breton minstrels' performances; or to those themes as found in Marie's poems; or, as is most likely in the context, to the poems themselves. Burgess and Busby claim that Denis Piramus's comments demonstrate that Marie's "poems were regarded by her contemporaries as *lais*" (11), but if by "contemporaries" we mean the audience that first heard the poems, I find the logic of de Riquer's argument against this contention (15, cited above) irrefutable. However quickly the change in the word's use took place (and from Denis Piramus's text it appears to have been in progress within not much more than a decade; in that sense I allow that it may have involved her "contemporaries"), it was not immediate.[65] Still, for the generations to follow, the only elements that survived from what had been a distinct genre in the Celtic culture were the titles and the stories; the only remaining memorials to the *lais* were the narrative poems, eventually themselves misleadingly called the *lais*, of Marie and other medieval French poets. But if it was Marie who sowed the seeds of later confusion and misappellation, it was not she herself nor her immediate readers who were themselves confused.

The opening lines of *Milun* constitute a significant contribution to this discussion. They form a commentary on her work from the author herself, in which she lifts a corner of the veil to reveal her inner reflections on translation and composition, making explicit the distance between her sources and her creativity:

> Ki divers cuntes vuelt traitier,
> diversement deit commencier
> e parler si raisnablement

[65] At about this same time, the poet Gautier d'Arras makes a comment (*Ille et Galeron* 931-6) similar to Piramus's about *lais* that were filled with fantasy and nonsense; his position seems to be that his version purifies earlier extravagances (undoubtedly Marie's). The same logic applies to this reference, namely, that though Marie's French verse romances could not have been construed as *lais* on their initial appearance, the form very quickly adopted and then fully appropriated the generic title. Gautier unequivocally calls his own work a *lai*: "*car a s'onor voel faire .i. lai/de Galeron, seror le duc,/et d'Ille, le fil Eliduc*" (131j-133: "for in her honour I wish to compose a *lai* about Galeron, the sister of the duke, and Ille, the son of Eliduc").

que il seit plaisible a la gent. (*Milun* 1-4)

(Whoever wishes to present a variety of tales
must begin them in various ways,
and put such thought into the way they are told
that the result gives people pleasure.)

Marie is aware that she is working with a corpus whose themes, stock elements and story arrangements, stripped of the musical inventiveness of the original form and set down in the potential sterility of the page, might become somewhat bland and repetitive. She therefore assumes artistic control over the discourse, remaining faithful to what her investigations have demonstrated to be the underlying facts, but exercising the medieval exegete's authority over their transfer and interpretation. Her poems, which we cannot now avoid callling *Lais* if we are not to wind up in terminological paralysis, were not *lais*, nor were they intended to replace the Celtic musical genre of *lais*; they were, however, intended to be the authoritative voice of the Breton tales in her own language and culture. To paraphrase John Stevens (3), if a *lai* of the Celtic minstrels was a song that told a story, a *lai* of Marie is a story that tells a song.

3. 4. To Remember: Conservation, transformation and assimilation.

The theme of remembrance is a strong one in Marie. We have seen in the introductory chapter that one aspect of remembrance was deeply personal: Marie was unwilling to have her renown purloined or her abilities passed over. More prominent still, however, is the goal of preserving her source material. As the self-appointed spokesperson for a disappearing art form and for the heritage of a subdued people, Marie consciously constructs a memorial:

Des lais pensai qu'oïz aveie.
Ne dutai pas, bien le saveie,
que pur remembrance les firent
des aventures qu'il oïrent

cil ki primes les comencierent
e ki avant les enveierent.
Plusurs en ai oïz conter,
ne vueil laissier ne obliër. (*Prologue* 33-40)

(I considered the *lais* that I had heard.
I had no doubt, I knew quite well
that they had made them as a memorial
of the adventures that they had heard,
those who first composed them
and published them in time past.
Many of them I have heard recounted;
I do not wish that they should be neglected and forgotten.)

The conservatory effort has a twofold basis: one is the original intent of the composers of the *lais* who "made them as a memorial of the adventures that they had heard"; the second is Marie's acknowledgment of that original purpose and her desire to reproduce and maintain it: "I do not wish that they should be neglected and forgotten." She admires the custom of memorializing significant events in art and sees herself as an important link in a praiseworthy project:

Mult unt esté noble baron
cil de Bretaigne, li Bretun.
Jadis suleient par pruësce,
par curteisie e par noblesce
des aventures que oeient,
ki a plusurs genz aveneient,
faire les lais pur remembrance,
qu'um nes meïst en ubliance.
Un en firent, ceo oi cunter,
ki ne fet mie a ubliër […] (*Equitan* 1-10)

(Noble barons indeed were
those of Breton, the Bretons.
In times past it was their custom in their valour,
their courtesy and their nobility,
from the adventures they heard about
which happened to various people,

> to compose *lais* in order to memorialize them,
> so that no one should consign them to oblivion.
> One of them they wrote, this one I have heard told,
> which must not be forgotten […])

Marie considers important not only the adventures commemorated by the *lais* but also the circumstances surrounding their composition, as she explains in *Milun*, *Chaitivel*, *Chievrefueil*, and *Eliduc*. It may be, as suggested above, that some of these *lais* were instrumental performances without an accompanying recitation and Marie was concerned that the memory of the events that occasioned them was in danger of being lost; others may have been but brief records of events around which Marie found more details to interest her, as the beginning of *Milun*, for example, indicates:

> Ici comencerai Milun
> e musterrai par brief sermun
> pur quei e coment fu trovez (*Milun* 5-7)
>
> (At this point I shall begin *Milun*
> and I shall explain in a few words
> why and how it was composed)

Milun records not only the framing narrative of the birth of a child and the separation and eventual reunification of the father and the son but adds the remarkable and tender story of the twenty-year love affair between the parents, sustained by the messenger swan. *Chaitivel* narrates the fate of the lady's four lovers and adds the meta-tale of the debate over the name of the *lai*, underscoring the importance of the title for the message to posterity. *Chievrefueil* tells how the (musical) *lai* of that name came to be composed, on the occasion of a signal sent by Tristan to the queen carved on a hazel branch; like the honeysuckle which entwines the hazel and cannot survive if torn from it,

> ‘Bele ami, si est de nus:
> ne vus senz mei ne jeo senz vus!’ (77-78)
>
> (“Dear love, thus it is with us:
> neither you without me nor I without you!”)

It is tempting to think of Marie’s work as ethnographic. After all, Marie was concerned that a nation’s stories, embodied in an admired but threatened form, might be doomed to disappear. Kinoshita and McCracken suggest that with her choice of the Breton *lais*, Marie “emerges as an anthropologist *avant la lettre*” (26). I believe that this is an interesting lens through which to explore the connections between Marie’s avowed goals and her actual literary constructs, and it may help us to understand her motivations in the late twelfth-century Anglo-Norman context. However, it is an optic which, I suggest, must be applied with great caution. I suspect that the concept of anthropology as it exists today could scarcely have been possible before the Enlightenment. The preservation of the memory of events or legends, the rescue of wonderful and entertaining tales from oblivion, must not be confused with the recording, as objectively as possible, traditions of a people *as perceived by those people or as enshrined within their own culture*. Anthropology has its own peculiar challenges of objectivity and interference, with none of which Marie wrestled. She had no qualms about resetting, reworking and recreating the *lais*. Shirin Azizeh Khanmohamadi, who likens the *Lais* to “an early form of salvage anthropology: the salvaging of native materials against the losses born of colonial incursion” (51), nevertheless astutely nuances such a view:

> Marie links her interest to that of Breton barons of yore: she, like them, wants to memorialize a precious Breton past lest it be forgotten. But in so doing, Marie has seamlessly overlaid Breton poetic production with her own, eliding the large passage of time and space that separate the supposedly shared

> investments of ancient Breton barons and a present-day French woman living and writing her Breton lais in England. (50)

Imposing upon Marie an ethic of modern scholarship is a critical mistake in interpreting her as a medieval writer and translator. It was rather her task, as she saw it, to uncover the fascinating memories of the Celtic communities that had inspired the *lais*, to draw them out of their original languages and to reconceive them in French, and to "contribute more to their meaning" (*Prologue* 16) by enriching their details with all the accoutrements of her own culture and understanding.

It has been demonstrated above that Marie did not preserve the genre of the Breton *lai* and apparently made no attempt to do so. The point is not a moot one. If Marie translated, not the Breton *lais*, but the original stories that gave rise to those *lais*, as well as she could reconstruct them, this sheds important insight into her task of "remembering". It is not the preservation of an art form but the constituents of a culture, its peculiar stories and distinctive characteristics, which she transported bodily and at times almost incongruously into Old French octosyllables and into her world of Norman feudality, Christian morality and romantic chivalry. The new setting is the element that confuses the issue. There are thus several aspects of Marie's work that cannot be reconciled with a modern view of anthropology. She did not attempt to preserve cultural artifacts contextually intact but transferred them (in true Norman fashion) into her own world; she did not (necessarily) value the stories for their own sake, nor for the sake of cultural preservation, but for their nostalgic charm and their entertainment value. Literature, including translation, transforms existing structures to create something new; it is reductive to interpret literary works as ethnographic artifacts.

Marie was not an anthropologist because she implies that the traditions of the Bretons are legitimately hers to exploit. In the *Prologue*, Marie carefully sets the stage for her project by first evoking the usual process of translation from Latin. Then, announcing her choice to translate from a vernacular language, she uses the established medieval position of the translator/writer, who was the authoritative voice of ancient knowledge for a contemporary society, to assign to the Breton *lais* a legitmate space in the translator's library. It is arguable that through this act she bestows on the voice of the Bretons a canonical status equal to the Latin classics (Copeland 118). Yet it cannot be forgotten that these two cultures were in a very unequal position (see Asad 156-8), with French the language of the conquerors and their court, and Breton that of a thrice-conquered minority—the Normans were but the latest on a list that included the Saxons and before them the Romans. This gave Marie power over the transfer that she would never have had if dealing with a Latin source. Breton and French were likewise unequal in their relationship to Latin, which stood in vertical or hierarchical position with respect to French (see Stierle 56). That is to say, the French translators saw themselves as the legitimate possessors of the Latin heritage by right of an assumed direct descent.[66] Marie's choice subtly implies a corresponding position for Breton, as though she had the right to these tales by some sort of natural succession. With Marie's turn from Latin to Breton as an equally legitimate source, and her expectation of equal renown for the work, she adroitly assumes not only a shared status between Latin and Breton but also a shared commonality and continuity, as though the Breton texts, like the Latin ones, were intrinsic to the cultural heritage of the Normans.

[66] Cf. Copeland (97): "In the Middle Ages, Latin as the established intellectual language does not represent a historically 'foreign' culture to be absorbed, imitated, and appropriated […] Latin culture is a privileged stratum *within* larger cultural communities, and its privilege rests on its symbolic and practical value as a force of continuity against both geographical and historical distance. Latin ties Western Europe together and links modernity with pagan and Christian antiquity."

In this regard, it is noteworthy how often and in what manner Marie inserts herself into her poems. "Who is this author", marvel Burgess and Busby (8-9), "who sprinkles the prologues and epilogues so liberally with verbs in the first person and even intervenes on occasion to make comments within the tales?" She consistently employs such locutions as:

> En Bretaigne maneit uns ber,
> merveille l'ai oï loër (*Bisclavret* 15-16)
>
> (Once there lived in Bretagne a baron,
> whom I have always heard praised highly)
>
> Ceo m'est a vis, an e demi
> fu Guigemar ensemble od li (*Guigemar* 535-6)
>
> (As I understand it, a year and a half
> Guigemar spent with her)
>
> En Bretaigne ot quatre baruns,
> mes jeo ne sai numer lur nuns (*Chaitivel* 33-4)
>
> (In Brittany there were four barons,
> but I don't know their names)
>
> D'un mult anciën lai Bretun
> le cunte e tute la raisun
> vus dirai, si cum jeo entent
> la verité mun esciënt (*Eliduc* 1-4)
>
> (About a very old Breton *lai*
> the story and all the circumstances
> I shall tell you, just as I understand
> the truth, to the best of my knowledge)

There is a continual intimation that the narrator not only personally heard the tales but also shared a heritage with the places and people in them. Since the frame-narrator is explicitly Marie the author, this gives more than verisimilitude to the stories; it insists on a personal connection to them, the unarticulated and unproven idea that the national memory belongs to her and her

people. She promotes an assumption that to turn to the Breton tales for her sources is not to turn outside of her own cultural space.

And so the Breton *lais* are retold in the guise of the Christian feudal world of the twelfth century—and under the inspiration of Marie's particular artistic gifts. This can only become a criticism of her integrity if we are unable to at least make the attempt to step outside of modern sensibilities in order to see the world as she saw it.

3. 5. Marie de France on truth, history and the supernatural.

Marie's avowed project of retelling the tales of the Breton *lais* in fresh and engaging ways (*Milun* 1-4) might seem to impugn her accuracy as a translator or her veracity as a historian. Yet as a medieval writer and translator, her commitment to accuracy was not to the reproduction of the genre but to the representation (in its literal sense, the re-presentation) of the true events that inspired the genre, first in Celtic singing and harping and now in the reading of French octosyllables. This raises the question of her conception of truth.

Truth was central to Marie's archaeological, translational and compositional project. She declared herself scrupulous about the accuracy of her versions of the adventures of the Bretons:

> Les contes que jo sai verais,
> dunt li Bretun unt fait les lais,
> vos conterai assez briefment. (*Guigemar* 19-21)
>
> (The tales which I know to be true,
> from which the Bretons have composed their *lais*,
> I will recount to you in a few words.)
>
> L'aventure qu'avez oïe
> veraie fu, n'en dutez mie.
> De Bisclavret fu fez li lais. (*Bisclavret* 315-317)
>
> (The adventure that you have just heard

really happened—of that you may be certain.
From it was composed the *lai* of Bisclavret.)

Dit vus en ai la verité,
del lai que j'ai ici cunté (*Chievrefueil* 117-118)

(I have told you the truth
about the *lai* which I have recounted here.)

D'un mult anciën lai Bretun
le cunte e tute la raisun
vus dirai, si cum jeo entent
la verité mun esciënt. (*Eliduc* 1-4)

(About a very old Breton *lai*
the story and all the circumstances
I shall tell you, just as I understand
the truth, to the best of my knowledge.)

Marie often employed the verb *avenir* or the related noun *aventure* to affirm her truth claims, implying that the stories which she told arose from historical events:

Issi avint cum dit vus ai.
Li Bretun en firent un lai (*Equitan* 317-318 and *Les Douz Amanz* 253-4)

(And so it happened just as I have told you.
The Bretons made a *lai* about it)

l'aventure dunt li lais fu.
Si cum avint vus cunterai,
la verité vus en dirrai. (*Eliduc* 26-28)

(the events about which the *lai* was composed.
Just as they took place, I will recount to you,
I will tell you the truth about them.)[67]

The protestation of ignorance was also an appeal to truth. This period literary device was characteristic of Wace, who repeatedly insisted that he could say no more since he knew no more

[67] For further examples, see *Guigemar* 23, 25, *Equitan* 5-6, *Le Fraisne* 533-4, *Lanval* 1-2, *Les Douz Amanz* 1-2.

and would not be led by creativity into inaccuracy (cf. *Brut* 1528-1536, 1578, 1618, etc.). By refusing to go beyond her sources and her knowledge, Marie was implicitly declaring that what she was able to attest was the truth:

> Nuls n'en oï puis plus parler,
> ne jeo n'en sai avant cunter. (*Lanval* 663-4)
>
> (No one has since heard anything spoken about them,
> nor do I know anything more to tell of them.)
>
> En sa cuntree ot un barun,
> mes jeo ne sai numer sun nun. (*Milun* 21-22)
>
> (In his land there was a baron,
> but I do not know his name.)
>
> Ici finist, il n'i a plus:
> plus n'en oï ne plus n'en sai
> ne plus ne vus en cunterai. (*Chaitivel* 238-240)
>
> (Here ends the tale, there is no more;
> I have not heard more of it nor do I know more about it
> nor will I tell you any more of it.)

Not everyone accepted Marie's protestations of accuracy. Gautier d'Arras, a contemporary who composed the verse romance *Ille et Galeron* (a moralized reincarnation of Marie's *Eliduc*), was undoubtedly referring to her work when he boasted:

> Grant cose est d'Ille et Galeron:
> n'i a fantome ne alonge
> ne ja n'i troverés mençonge.
> Tex lais i a, qui les entent,
> se li sanlent tot ensement
> com s'eüst dormi et songié. (931-936)
>
> (It is a remarkable fact about *Ille and Galeron*:
> the story contains no fantasy nor empty verbiage
> nor yet will you find there any lies.
> There are such *lais* that, whoever hears them,

they all seem to the listener just as
though he had slept and dreamt.)

And Denis Piramus, as we have seen, scoffed at the truth value of the *Lais*:

E dame Marie autresi,
ki en rime fist e basti
e compassa les vers de lais,
ke ne sunt pas del tut verais; (*la Vie Seint Edmund le rei* 35-38)

(Likewise the lady Marie,
who wrote and fashioned in rhyme
and structured these lines from *lais*,
which are not in the least true;)

We might protest that Denis Piramus, setting out to record as faithfully as possible the deeds of a pious historical personage, is unreasonable in charging the author of a collection of Celtic fairy tales with falsehood. But this is to misread both the contextual notion of a fairy tale and the issue of genre. Marie saw no need to explain or excuse a Celtic shape-changer confessing the Christian creed; or a Breton nobleman marrying a woman and then divorcing her immediately to marry her sister, all with the blessing of the Church; or a knight abandoning his oath of fealty to follow his fairy lover to Avalon—anachronistic or incongruous elements which Marie narrated with a deceptive facility and a wide-eyed protestation of truthfulness.

In modern English usage, a fairy tale is a story about mythical beings or events understood to belong only to the imaginary realm of legends. If we do not make a conscious effort to situate ourselves otherwise, this is how we will hear the term even in the context of a twelfth-century poet. At best, we may think of Marie as a folklorist like the Brothers Grimm. But the gulf that separates her from her later analogues is an impassable one: the Enlightenment, the dividing line between the premodern and the modern worldview. We cannot argue that to Marie

de France or to Denis Piramus, fairies were mythical or incredible, or that they were part of the lore of a long-gone and superstitious age. Fairies were rather reportedly, and perhaps actually, part of the reality of the old Celtic world. It is not that Marie was simple-minded or credulous, nor is it that she necessarily accepted the presence of fairies and werewolves in her own Christian present or even that she wholeheartedly gave them credence in the Celtic past; it is that she did not approach the domain of wonders with the prejudicial and unreflective rejection that is characteristic of post-Enlightenment rationalism. The premodern thinker did not neatly compartmentalize the whole of life—work, faith, community, science, love, wonders—into the divisions of real, improbable and impossible, nor, perhaps even more importantly, into the realms of objective public and subjective private. Myron Penner observes that "the shift to modernity uninstalls the premodern self from the hierarchical cosmos of harmonized meanings and corporate socioreligious identity in which everything is well-ordered and has its place and reality is fundamentally *enchanted*, even mysterious" (28). It is this sense of the presence of enchantment in the world all around that modernity has lost and for whose incorporation the paradigm of rationalism possesses no tools.

Furthermore, medieval writers who researched and recreated stories of the past did not differentiate between genres of didactic history and entertaining fiction, or it may be more accurate to say, all composition about the past was expected to be more or less historical and didactic as well as entertaining. We have seen that Thomas d'Angleterre and Gottfried von Strassburg sought the most reliable versions of the *Tristan* story, and both Wace and Chrétien de Troyes bemoaned the way in which the minstrels distorted and commercialized the Breton tales. They did not excuse the bards as purveyors of the genre of fiction but accused them as peddlars

of cheap effects which distorted the facts. Their complaint was based on their conviction that the "original" stories about Arthur and the Bretons were essentially *true*. In that sense, Denis Piramus's accusation against Marie was not that she told incredible Breton fairy stories, but that her interpretations were not restricted to a more pious perspective and her style was too extravagant, too geared to delight and titillate and shock, to be considered a truthful rendition.

I am not stating that Marie believed in werewolves or shape-shifters or the fairy-land of Avalon. Reading Marie, however, certainly yields no indication that she did not—not, perhaps, as part of her own world, but as part of the marvelous world of the pre-Conquest Bretons. This opinion must remain conjecture, not only because of the impossibility of entering the writer's mind and of the inadmissibility of claiming to do so, but also because of the nature of her work as entertaining literature, whose degree of seriousness cannot be gauged at this distance in time and thought (cf. Cameron 41).

Moreover, the heralds of rationalism were beginning to show themselves in the twelfth century. If the medieval mind did not unthinkingly reject the supernatural, no more did it unthinkingly accept it. The French translator of the *Aenid* exemplifies this hesitation, seeming embarrassed by Virgil's frequent references to pagan religion and eliminating much of them in his *Eneas*; he did not seem to understand that Virgil's accounts of the miraculous were more a literary device than an exposition of cosmology (Yunck 10-11). That medieval poet preferred either to excise completely or to replace with a natural explanation most of the story elements involving an intervention by the gods. Unfortunately, naturalizing the supernatural, Yunck laments, "is accompanied by a somewhat blighted imagination" (11). It is to Marie's credit that she did not succumb to this tendency; along with Chrétien and other writers of the *matière de*

Bretaigne, the *merveilleux*, far from being eliminated or even grudgingly admitted, was openly celebrated.

Of the modern exclusively rationalistic paradigm, Penner cautions:

> [H]uman reason always operates within a specific theoretical, physical, and social environment, including a constitutive set of practices. […] The human capacity to reason is a helpful—and indispensable—tool that helps us navigate our lives, but its value is firmly rooted in the social practices that give it its theatre of operations and in the language through which we express ourselves in them. (71)

We are unable, then, to evaluate Marie's attitude toward history, truth or the *merveilleux* without recognizing that our own approach to the question is preconditioned by post-Enlightenment rationalistic assumptions, intellectual protocols and even the structures of our language. That we cannot, and indeed should not, entirely free ourselves from these is evident, but awareness of them will help us to better appreciate the critical intellectual skills of Marie and her contemporaries.[68]

A second trend was appearing in tandem with rationalism: the pressure to make literary expression conform to the Christian worldview. After criticizing the *Lais* and the *Partenopeus* for their levity, Denis Piramus commends the serious and salutary nature of his own work (59-98). Gautier d'Arras clearly prefers his own sanctimonious hero Ille (3591-3609) to Marie's flawed Eliduc. The author of the *Eneas* pauses for a sneer at faith in the pagan gods (9443-8). Courtly love made a ludicrous truce with religion: Andreas Capellanus decreed that it is an attribute of courtliness to speak well of the clergy (I.vi. 160-1), and that the glorious adulterous passion

[68] Hoepffner (80-81, 145) infers that Marie introduces the theme of the *merveilleux* in *Yonec* 95-104 and in *Bisclavret* 259-260 as a precaution against taking the tales too seriously, but this flies in the face of her assertion in *Bisclavret* 315-316 regarding the certain truth of the tale and of the frame which she provides in *Yonec* 5-8 and 559-562 that implies the story's historicity; moreover, it assumes what is not evident, namely, that for Marie the *merveilleux* was necessarily fiction. If indeed Marie was skeptical of the supernatural elements, she does not allow this skepticism to appear to the reader and thus adds verisimilitude and immediacy to her narratives.

between a married woman and her lover must come to an end if one of them sins against the Catholic faith (II.iv. 1), a position which Walsh calls an "astonishing degree of self-deception" in a priest (23). Even the Celtic otherworld felt this influence. To be accepted as a lover, fairies occasionally had to demonstrate their fidelity to the Christian faith (Harf-Lancner *Lais* 191 n. 5). The imprisoned wife in Marie's *Yonec* demands this of her shape-changing lover (*Yonec* 141-192), but, as so often in Marie, the morality rests ambiguous, since immediately after confesssion of the creed and reception of the Mass, the fairy lover and the wife engage in adulterous sex. In contrast to Andreas Capellanus, Marie makes no effort to justify this anomalous commingling of conditions. She may often leave the reader perplexed as to her stance, but never derisive as to her sincerity. Nor did she guard her tongue from disparaging the clergy, as *Guigemar* 255-8 demonstrates. Marie was capable of Christianizing without moralizing, or rather, it must emerge just what her own version of morality was.

3. 6. Conclusions: The Breton *lais* after Marie.

Lais are no longer what they were when Marie started, and they very quickly made particular and expanding spaces in their adoptive environment, becoming a popular and evolving French genre in their own right. "In the new language the text not only is transformed in itself and in its genre but enters into networks of intertextual affiliation that create very different meanings out of even its smallest elements" (Stein 33).[69] Whatever the *lais* had been in Breton and Welsh, among twelfth-century French authors/translators they immediately began to resemble Marie's written short narrative romance poems. Along with other French romances, *lais* (including many of Marie's) were translated into Old Norse and into Middle English, where they

[69] Stein is speaking of Wace's *Brut*, but I believe it applies perfectly to Marie's *Lais* as well.

exerted a strong influence on writers as pivotal as Chaucer. By the beginning of the thirteenth century, it appears that the memory of the *lai* as a musical foreign-language performance was fading; according to the anonymous *lai* of *Tyolet*, there was already forming a tradition that, as with all venerable sources of knowledge in the Middle Ages, there was a Latin repository of the Breton *lais*:

> A la cort erent racontees,
> si conme eles erent trovees;
> Li preude clerc qui donc estoient
> totes escrire les fesoient;
> mises estoient en latin
> e en escrit em parchemin,
> por ce qu'encor tel tens seroit
> que l'en volentiers les orroit.
> Or sont dites e racontees,
> de latin en romanz trovees;
> Bretons en firent lais plusors,
> si con dïent nos ancessors. (25-36)
>
> (At the court [these adventures] were recounted,
> just as they had been composed;
> the wise scholars who were present there
> caused them all to be written down;
> they were put into Latin
> and written on parchment,
> for such time as was yet to be
> when someone would eagerly plead to hear them.
> Thus they are told and recounted
> composed in Romance from the Latin;
> the Bretons made many *lais*,
> just as our ancestors say.)[70]

[70] Similarly, the contemporary *lai de l'Espine* 2-8 implies that *lais* were collected in written form, although the language is not reported: "*les aventures trespassees/qui diversement ai contees,/nes ai pas dites sans garant;/les estores en trai avant/ki encore sont a Carlion/ens el moustier Saint Aaron*" ("the adventures that took place, which I have recounted in various ways, I have certainly not told without foundation; I am revealing the stories about them which are kept at Caerleon in the monastery of Saint Aaron").

In the thirteenth century, French *lais* constituted an even broader genre including more *fabliaux*-like stories, that is, burlesque tales of comic obscenity which were a far cry from the courtly elegance of Marie's poems (Burgess and Busby 34-5). If what came to be known as the *lais* of Marie no longer resembled the intricate performances of the Breton bards, the *lais* of a century after her day certainly began to distance themselves from hers.

The artistic transformation performed by Marie, based on the technical nature of the musical *lai* itself, was the legitimate act of a twelfth-century bard. Our examination and tentative conclusions regarding the form of the original *lais* suggest that it would be presumptuous to conclude that Marie's reincarnation of the Breton tales in octosyllabic French literature was an unwarranted appropriation of endangered cultural distinctiveness. If there is good reason to suspect that the Breton *lai* as a musical performance encouraged the retelling of the libretto in new words, a new language and even a new metre, Marie's poetic transformation was in the best tradition of its interpreters. Marie's poems were clearly not *lais* to her or to her immediate hearers, but it is no surprise that they quickly came to fill the space and to appropriate even the generic title of the disappearing Breton genre.

The refashioned content raises more problematic cultural issues. Stierle concludes tersely: "Translation here means appropriation. Marie is not so much translating but inventing the written *lai* and its new world of passionate love beyond the world of courtly love. The surplus here is not a surplus of interpretation but one of imagination" (61). That Marie's translation of the *lais* turns out to be an act of aggression as Steiner (313-314) defines it, a seizing and carrying away, is evident. But we cannot leave this portion of the discussion without acknowledging that what Marie accomplished was also a work of remarkable creative power. In

invading and appropriating the Breton *lais* she made a felicitous transformation which would re-embody the Breton original in a new form and would leave its mark on French literature for as yet uncounted centuries. If not only the performance of the tales but the tales themselves were at risk of disappearing, Marie did more than rescue them from oblivion: she set them centre-stage in the traditions of European literature. Steiner observes that in such a case "language was 'new'; or, more accurately, the poet, the chronicler, the philosopher gave to human behaviour and to the current of mental experience an unprecedented 'second life'" (23). That second life was a tribute and turned out to be an enduring memorial to the Breton culture. There was, however, a cost: the assumption, whether conscious or not, that the Breton heritage could be adopted by the francophone Normans.

What has become of the Breton *lai*? It has become the *lai* of Marie de France, the Old French *lai*, the genre of French, not Celtic, poetry called the "Breton *lai*." Though I shall, with reluctance but for the sake of intelligibility, speak as do all other interpreters of the "*lais*" of Marie de France, I shall continue to insist that neither Marie nor her initial audience could ever have confused her charming little French narrative poems with a genre so utterly foreign and distinct. It was because of Marie, however, that the name of that genre was rapidly and irrevocably assumed by short verse romances. Marie has transformed a heritage, she has founded an altogether new genre, she has made the Breton *lai* an integral part of French cultural expression.

Chapter 4: Reading the *Lais* in their Diversity

4. 1. Introduction

In this chapter, I wish to read the juxtaposition of elements in the *Lais*, the harmonies and disharmonies of Marie's translation project. Scholars have devised numerous schemata for dividing the *Lais* of Marie de France into workable groups for effective analysis. Some critics are content to examine them in the order in which they appear in the manuscripts; it is not certain that this arrangement represents anything more than historical accident.[71] A popular proceeding is to separate them into supernatural tales and mundane tales. Such a division is problematic in that it is unreflectively modern: we have seen that the premodern thinker did not conceive of the natural and supernatural realms as a dichotomy. Some advise analysis according to the order of composition, yet even the most insightful assessment of vocabulary and grammar, historical allusions and literary influences can offer nothing more than intelligent speculation in this regard. Others suggest groupings according to plot similarities, such as successful love, tragic love, parents and children, and so on. To date, there is no consensus.

And here I acknowledge that I myself had originally set out to analyze the elements of Marie's work by distributing the *lais* into sections according to their major themes: Celtic myth, courtly love, feudality, religion. I admit to great sympathy with those scholars whom I have respectfully criticized for their tendency to try to force the reading of the *Lais* through some

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[71] See Burgess (*Lais* 1-2): Only the manuscript Harley 978 (H) contains all twelve *lais* plus the *Prologue*. Manuscript S contains 9 of the *lais* (*Bisclavret* and *Les Dous Amanz* are incomplete) but in a different order than H and interspersed with anonymous *lais*. Manuscripts A and L include *Guigemar*, *Lanval*, and part of *Yonec*. Manuscript N, the Uppsala manuscript in Old Norse, has translations of eleven of Marie's *lais* (*Eliduc* is absent), again in a different order and interspersed with other works.

Regarding Harley 978, Burgess reasonably argues the possibility that this manuscript may represent Marie's own ordering of her assembled works, at the point when it was ready to be dedicated to the king. Several of the *lais* indicate internally that they were intended to form part of a collection (cf. *Guigemar* 19-20; *Equitan* 5-7; *Bisclavret* 1-2; *Yonec* 1-4; *Milun* 1-2); and the separate *Prologue* may have been added to the anthology as the final editorial touch.

organized optic; I was attempting to do it myself. It seemed at first blush to be the only efficient way to make sense of this heterogenous collection. But the *Lais* of Marie just won't have it. They resist categorization. Does *Equitan* go into the courtly love section, because of its depiction of passionate obsession and the sophistry of justified adultery, or into the feudality section because of how poignantly it evokes reflection on the responsibilities of a lord to his vassal, or yet into the section on religion because of its clear moral message and biblical subtext? Should I designate *Bisclavret* as a direct descendant of the pagan folklore of antiquity, when the inspiration for its fabula so evidently comes from the Bible story of Samson and Delilah? Does *Lanval* belong in the semi-historical Breton world of Arthur more than in the Norman feudal world of kings and knights or in the Provençal courtly world of love or in the Celtic fairy world of Avalon?

All this is not to say that some of the *lais* do not have prominent or even overarching themes. Questions of passionate devotion dominate *Chievrefueil* and *Aüstic*, debate over the proper conduct of suitors preoccupies *Chaitivel* and *Eliduc*, the triumph of true love is celebrated in *Le Fraisne* and *Milun*, and the shades of a numinous otherworld swirl throughout the story of *Yonec*. It would not be incorrect to assemble at least some of the *lais* according to their principal concerns. I hesitate nevertheless to do this. In analyzing the *lais* based on some thematic criterion, the danger is that less salient themes may be muted or obliterated, or that an impression may be created of greater homogeneity and thematic unity than is actually the case. The reality of the *Lais* is that major themes are made poignant by minor ones, clear messages are nuanced by contradictions, dogmas and certainties are continually undermined. It is difficult to accurately

represent the *Lais* if the goal is reduction and synthesis. By contrast, it is delightfully easy to read them.

In the pages that follow, I will examine aspects of the *Lais* that are remarkable for their angularity, and that may consequently reveal something about the discrete and varied elements which Marie the translator and poet had at her disposal and the creative ways in which she situated them within cohesive narratives. The analyses will follow the order in which the *Lais* appear in the thirteenth-century manuscript Harley 978; if this represents nothing more than the random arrangement of some unknown copyist, it at least has the virtue of being eight centuries closer to the event than any artifice I might construct. Even taking the *lais* one by one, it is extremely difficult to treat aspects thematically. I shall attempt nonetheless to look at the way in which individual *lais* deal with major themes, with apologies in advance that I will find it necessary to return to features in the narratives that incorporate multiple messages within a given passage.

My argument—which, due to our temporal distance from the moment of composition and the lack of source-language documents, cannot be proven beyond question but is suggested by close reading and supported by analysis—is that it will become possible to identify, at least tentatively, aspects of the oral or traditional "texts" from which Marie made her translation and to distinguish those translated elements from the transposed, enriched and altered settings which represent the author's worldview, influences and personal creativity. "Marie leaves several clues in her versions of the *lais* which lead us to believe that she was following closely the plots of her originals", Bullock-Davies ("Reassessment" 96) observes. The fact that these distinctions can still be perceived in the finished work implies first of all that somewhere at the heart of the tale is

the story that Marie translates, a composition made by others and rendered by her into French; and secondly, that around this central fabula are crafted and grafted a plethora of features introduced by Marie. The very technique of preserving, rather than effacing, the discrete boundaries of these varied constituents is what gives to her twelfth-century tale its powerful and evocative flavour of authenticity and nostalgia.

4. 2. Ambiguity in Relationship, Gender, and Worship: *Guigemar*.

The origins of this story are not known, though the proper names and locations indicate a purely Celtic source.[72] The story is said to take place during Hoël's rule of Brittany (*Guigemar* 27). Although there were early Celtic chieftains and later historic Bretons of this name, it is likely that Marie had in mind Hoël the nephew of King Arthur, described in Wace's history (*Brut* 9140; 10107-10122; etc.). The name "Guigemar" was also known historically in Brittany in the Breton form "Guihomar".[73] It may be another form of "Guilemer" who appears in Chrétien's *Erec* (1950-4) as lord of the isle of Avalon, friend of Morgain the fairy and brother of Graislemier; in Marie's version, however, Guigemar has a sister but no brother (*Guigemar* 34-37). It is remarkable that Guigemar's sister "Noguent" (a name that has no antecedent in literature) is named although she plays no part in the story, whereas even the principal female characters in most of the *Lais* remain anonymous; Brugger (236) concludes that this is a name

[72] Hoepffner (83) immediately references Hippolytus (see Ovid, *Metamorphoses* XV) and king Mérian in Wace (*Brut* 3673-3682), but the parallels are far from exact. Hippolytus the hunter refuses the advances of his father's wife (we are perhaps closer to *Lanval* here than to *Guigemar*), while the handsome hunter Mérian is passionately attached only to his own wife. In neither case is their self-restraint presented as a fault. If the fabula, or Marie's rendering of it, traces back to these sources, she has entirely transformed the trope to conform to (many of) the demands of courtly love. The resemblance to Mérian is in fact greater in the love-awakened and courtly Guigemar of the second part of the *lai*, who refuses the advances of any lady other than his true love.

[73] Sergent mentions a Hoël who was assassinated at Nantes in 981, another Hoël, lord of Léon in the early eleventh century, a third who was duke of Britain at the end of the eleventh century and a fourth, the duke's son who succeeded him (26). He notes that Guihomar was a common name among the lords of Léon in the eleventh and twelfth centuries (30).

that Marie remembers from the oral recitation of the Breton minstrels, probably retained in the original *conte* to distinguish a particular "Guigemar" from other personages of the same name. Guigemar and his family, then, may reflect part of the translated core in Marie's rendering.

The story shares common themes with Celtic legends, such as the hunt that leads to a magical encounter and the ship that navigates without a crew (Sergent 33, 46; Harf-Lancer *Fées* 221-241). We are, at least in the first half of the narrative, firmly within the Breton world of wonders. Guigemar's quarry, the androgynous deer, pronounces a fateful prophecy over Guigemar's future; and the ship takes him over the sea to an unspecified land which might be Britain or might be part of the fairy realm (cf. *Lanval* and *Yonec*). But Marie's is anything but a pure representation of the old Breton rendition. From the beginning she juxtaposes into the primitive tale, without ceremony, plot elements tied to courtly love, classical poetry, Norman feudality and Christianity, and transforms it into her own eclectic narrative. It might be argued that the story had already undergone such a transformation and that Marie but translated a finished version, yet the newness in her day of all the factors extraneous to the Celtic myth and her insistence that she did her own research into what lay behind the performed Celtic *lais* indicate that the additions were her own doing.

Marie is one of the first European writers to require that her protagonists combine both valour and amorous passion. As we have seen in chapter 2.8, the fully developed expression of what has come to be called "courtly love", the highly formalized ensemble of obsessive sexual attraction combined with feudal chivalry and quasi-religious adoration, cannot be said to have dominated twelfth-century French romance literature; nevertheless, it left its mark to a greater or lesser degree on popular works, and a writer such as Marie de France would be well versed in its

tenets. It comes as no surprise that various features of courtly love surface in almost all of the *Lais* and, in what I believe to be Marie's characteristic fashion, are treated with a lack of consistency from poem to poem that, taken as a whole, ends up critiquing all the delightful strengths and ridiculous pitfalls of the movement.

In the *lai* of *Guigemar*, the intitial stages of the courtly romance are concordant with the formalized perspective. At the outset, Marie declares that although Guigemar is the handsomest lad in the realm (*Guigemar* 38), wise and valiant (43), beloved by all (44), and unequalled in martial prowess (55-6), he has a flaw which all condemn: he is not interested in love (57-68). This is not a fault by old Celtic standards nor even by those of earlier European culture—in the case of the warrior, the saint, the demigod, it would rather have been closer to a virtue—but here we witness the grafting of the new theme of courtly love. A portent forces Guigemar to face this fault: On a hunt, he brings down an antlered doe with an arrow, but the arrow rebounds from the animal to pierce his thigh. The doe prophesies that Guigemar's wound will never be healed until he and a lady have suffered unimaginably for love. This is a basic premise of courtly love, that it is a form of suffering (Andreas Capellanus I.1; cf. *Guigemar* 483-6). A wounded thigh probably indicates sexual impotence as well as martial incompetence (cf. *Chaitivel* 122-4, 220-3); the prophecy implies that Guigemar will enjoy neither sexual fulfillment nor physical prowess, the two components of true chivalry, until his ambition is combined with an elevated passion. The lady that he is destined to desire is no rosy peasant girl of folk tradition nor warrior princess of old northern sagas, but "a high-born lady, noble, courteous, beautiful and wise" (*Guigemar* 211-212; *une dame de halt parage,/franche, curteise, bele e sage*): the perfect heroine of courtly romance. She is married to, and imprisoned by, a jealous old husband—the common trope of the

mal-mariée, the beautiful woman unfortunately, and by extension unjustly, caged in an unhappy marriage (see *Yonec*, *Aüstic*, *Milun*, *Chievrefueil*). The extension is an emotional, not a logical or moral one: the reader is encouraged to assume that because the lady is unhappy, whatever means she exercices to achieve happiness are justified; this is one of the literary techniques which lead to moral incoherence. The lady's situation ensures that the love relationship will be adulterous, which is practically a requirement of courtly love (Andreas Capellanus I.vi. 367-398). However, Marie implies at the end of the story that Guigemar and the lady marry, or at least come together in some official fashion (*Guigemar* 838-845; 879-882), and this would run contrary to the fully developed "rules" of courtly love, since passionate love was believed by many to be sinful in marriage (see above, chapter 2.8, e). Andreas Capellanus even asserted that if lovers marry, it must mark the end of their love (II.iv. 4; II.vii. 41-2).

Still, as noted above, Marie does no more than imply an official consummation of the love between Guigemar and the lady. In fact, the actual status of their final relationship remains quite ambiguous. *Guigemar* can be seen as a *lai* in two parts, the first of a wanderer finding passion in the arms of a married lady and the second of a knight who wins his maiden fair;[74] I suggest that the two are tied together by a silent transition: the flight of the lady in the magic

[74] Hoepffner's theory (82-3) is that *Guigemar* was originally two unconnected tales, one imbued with the old Breton *merveilleux* and the other a story of knight errantry without a trace of the supernatural, and that it may have been Marie who formed them into one. This is perhaps too categoric an analysis. A trace or two of the primitive tale may remain in the second part: when the unmanned ship arrives in Brittany and is discovered by Mériaduc, he finds in it the lady *ki de belté resemble fee* (*Guigemar* 704; "whose beauty was that of a fairy"); and the lover and his lady are revealed to one another by the knots which they alone can loosen, which must surely retain the idea of magic. Moreover, even in the first part of the *lai*, few fairy elements have been preserved beyond the speaking deer, the unmanned ship, and perhaps the two golden basins of water that the women bring to cleanse Guigemar's wound, evoking the common Celtic association of fairies with water (*Guigemar* 369-370; cf. *Lanval* 61-62)—but I would suggest that the connection is a tenuous one. Harf-Lancner's analysis (*Fées* 221-2) of the white doe as the avatar of a Morganian fairy who draws her human lover into the otherworld seems to recover older elements of the tale. Additionally, if the lady was a fairy, the reception of the mass (*Guigemar* 437, 465) would carry a special significance, proving that she was not a devilish being but was a worshiper of God and hence a suitable lover for a Christian knight (Harf-Lancner *Fées* 391-2; see the discussion in 4.8, *Yonec*, below).

ship, a scant one-line episode (*Guigemar* 688) with the power to bury forever the constraints of her past. The lady arrives in Brittany and is courted by Mériaduc, but eventually locates Guigemar, who must defeat his rival and rescue the lady from his hands. This is all related in a delightful and well-paced narrative of passion, intrigue, warfare and true love, all without any mention or even apparent awareness that the lady is already a married woman. Such a resolution was far from accepted practice in Marie's day, and from the diametrically opposite treatment a related theme receives in *Eliduc*, we must conclude that here the curtain of silence, once passed through, is intended to enable us to pursue unquestioningly the progress of the story and to read the second half as though the lady were a damsel to be wooed and won. Marie may be using the alterity of the Breton world, its differing morality, to leave unexplained elements that would be irreconcilable in her own day (Kinoshita 34, 40) and through the judicious use of silence eliminates, without our awareness, the ramifications of the lady's past. Somehow, the reader accepts the congruence of incongruous elements. Upon what must have been a rather basic and perhaps brutal myth of passion and pursuit in the fairy world has been layered courtly manners and tradition; and the reader arrives happy and satisfied at the dénouement without realizing that some very troublesome incoherences have been invoked and left unresolved.

If the conventions of courtly love are confused in *Guigemar*, at times the even more conventional divisions of gender seem deliberately blurred. The talking doe which Guigemar shoots is accompanied by its fawn, yet bears the antlers of a buck (*perches de cerf out en la teste*, *Guigemar* 92). The hunt for a remarkable white beast is a folkloric figure, but here Marie fashions a unique scene. Kinoshita and McCracken's conclusion that the doe represents female

powerlessness seems hasty.[75] In fact, the setting for the hunt is the pursuit of a great stag (*Guigemar* 81), and Guigemar, we are told, is a passionate hunter (80) who would be unlikely to choose a doe as his target or to mistake a female animal for a male. The ambiguity seems too studied to be carelessness or mere effect. I suspect that the androgynous deer embodies precisely that duality which Guigemar lacked: the embracing of the complete life consisting of both male and female, further illustrated by reproduction and family in the form of the fawn. It is all this that Guigemar had thus far rejected and that he would destroy within himself just as he was destroying its symbol, the portent-pronouncing deer. The translation of the Celtic hunt for the white stag becomes a transformation in which the animal incarnates the ideal of twelfth-century Anglo-Norman courtliness; this is a remarkable example of the crossroads of translation and composition in Marie.

This interpretation is reinforced by the fact that Marie provides another gender-ambivalent personage as the reverse image of the double-sexed doe: the unsexed priest. The very antithesis of full male-female vitality is the sterile guardian placed over the lady to ensure that love has no access to her: a priest who has "lost his lower members" (*Guigemar* 257; *les plus bas membres out perduz*). While Guigemar must assume responsibility for the death of gender completeness in his life, the lady is passively subsumed under gender absence in the hollow shell

[75] This incident in the narrative leads Kinoshita and McCracken into a rather ill-advised discussion, apparently in an attempt to read aspects of the *Lais* through a feminist optic. They note that the stricken doe cries "Alas", and suggest that for Marie it is a repeated motif, an expression of female despair, occurring six times in five of the *Lais* (185-189). *Equitan* 69, it is claimed, is "the lone example of a male character crying 'Alas!' Typically, it is women who bemoan their powerlessness before a fate that has befallen them" (187). But the facts are starkly otherwise. There are at least thirteen occurrences of "Alas!" in eight of the *Lais* (*Guigemar* 106, 399; *Lanval* 353; *Equitan* 69, 224; *Fraisne* 73, 355; *Yonec* 71, 257; *Milun* 133; *Chaitivel* 147; *Eliduc* 387, 585): there are three male characters who cry "Alas!" in direct speech, as well as several women, the narrator on a few occasions with reference generally to men, and the androgynous doe. A more accurate overall survey undermines the quick assumption that the antlered doe represents an unequivocal gender.

of illusory masculinity. Again, there is a transformation of a translated element: a Catholic priest from (I suspect) a Breton warrior-guard.

The priest and his ward introduce yet another muddied theme in the *lai*, that of religion. If the magic ship arrives at a Celtic otherworld, it is not entirely incongruous but still noteworthy that the setting is supplied with the established trappings of Christianity: a priest, a chapel, and regular divine services.[76] What is more remarkable is how those trappings are positioned with respect to the lady. There is but one means of ingress, guarded night and day, to her garden and chamber—her joy and her bed (*Guigemar* 223-4): through the chapel of the priest (*Guigemar* 233). From here, the priest would administer the sacred service to the lady and her companion as well as bring them their meals (*Guigemar* 259-260). Marie does not seem to show the respect to the clergy that Andreas Capellanus (I.vi. 160-1) considered a mark of true courtliness: she notes that had the priest not lost the function of his genitals, he would never have been trusted in close proximity to the lady (*Guigemar* 257-8).[77] The other side of the garden was thought to be secured by the sea (*Guigemar* 225-8). The lady is therefore placed so that the only route to her is through the front door, by permission, as it were, of traditional masculine dominance and the lifeless façade of religion—or through the back door, by an unauthorized entrance, from the wild inpredictability of nature or from the machinations of supernature (see Régnier-Bohler 464-5) in the guise of the magic ship that brings the wounded Guigemar to the lady.

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[76] Christianity reached the Celts of western Britain by the late Roman era; but it is unlikely that their fairy world was similarly converted at so early a date!

[77] Of course, it may be that Marie was representing the excessively jealous and suspicious nature of the husband who selected such a guardian, and not offering a narrator's aside on the trustworthiness of the clergy. Still, the general impression is left that a priest would not be a good choice as warder of a beautiful young woman unless some dysfunction precluded sexual activity. Marie also constructs religiosity as the obstacle to true love and joyful sex in *Yonec* 59-64. This does not mean that Marie is at all the enemy of genuine piety, but rather of religious tradition that stands in the way of love.

The omnipresence of Christianity is shown in the very natural way in which the characters combine pious activity with impious goals. Guigemar, aboard the magic vessel and in agony, implores God to lead him to port and to grant him healing of the wound (*Guigemar* 200-203). The narrative reference is incidental, as though it is to be expected that God would aid him by leading him to his destined married lover who would become, through her passion for him, the agent of divine healing. Guigemar implores her help in God's name (*Guigemar* 333-4); as she relates her own unfortunate circumstances she calls down the judgement of God upon the priest who keeps her incarcerated (*Guigemar* 348); and Guigemar begs her in the name of God to accede to his love (*Guigemar* 513). All this is not coherent in Christian terms, and we may speculate that the Breton *aventure* upon which Marie based her *conte* did not necessarily imply the connivance of the Christian God at adultery; Marie's translation and appropriation resets the original tale in incongruity, and her skill retails it with apparent fluency.

With the same facility of composition Marie arranges two opposing religions side by side, those of Christ and of Venus:

> Li sire out fait dedenz le mur,
> pur metre i sa femme a seür,
> chambre; suz ciel n'aveit plus bele.
> A l'entree fu la chapele.
> La chambre ert peinte tut en tur.
> Venus, la deuesse d'amur,
> fu tresbien mise en la peinture:
> les traits mustrot e la nature
> cument hom deit amur tenir
> e leialment e bien servir.
> Le livre Ovide, u il enseigne
> coment chascuns s'amur estreigne,
> en un fu ardant le getout,
> e tuz icels escumenjout,
> ki ja mais cel livre lirreient

ne sun enseignement fereient.
La fu la dame enclose e mise. (*Guigemar* 229-245)

(The lord had constructed within the walls,
in order to securely confine his wife there,
a bedchamber; there was not one more beautiful under heaven.
At its entrance was situated the chapel.
The bedchamber was decorated all around with paintings.
Venus, the goddess of Love,
was admirably displayed in the artwork:
she was revealing the characteristics and the nature of love,
how one must hold fast to love
and serve it faithfully and well.
The book of Ovid, the one that teaches
how one must bring love under fierce restraint,
she was casting into a blazing fire,
and was excommunicating all those
who had ever read this book
or had followed its teaching.
It was there that the lady was placed and imprisoned.)

The chapel of the Catholic faith is juxtapositioned, both metaphorically and literally, against the temple of Venus. What place the Roman Venus would have held in Celtic mythology is problematic but not insurmountable, since Roman influence in Britain dated back more than a thousand years before Marie's time. Conversely, we would be stretching plausibility to the breaking point to suggest that Ovid figured in the original Breton tale; with the religious incoherence is also introduced a literary one. Marie is clearly spooning into the *aventure* generous servings of classical material that the recent flood of translations had brought into the centre of literary taste and popularity. Ovid wrote not only the *Ars amatoria* but also the *Remedia amoris*, the "Cures for Love", which latter volume Marie depicts as enraging the goddess. It must not escape us that that rage is described in Christian terms: the offending book is consigned to the fires of hell, as it were, and those who have followed its precepts are "excommunicated",

which is a Christian practice of formally excluding offenders from salvific membership in the Church. Here, rejection from salvation and community is reserved for those who offend against love. This is paralleled in Andreas Capellanus (I.vi. 246), who alludes to *Psalm* 6:6 and reaches this same inexorable judgement: there is no possible redemption even in the afterlife for the one who has sinned against love. Marie thus christianizes the commentary, if not entirely the content, of both Celtic morality and classical literature.

The religion of Love is not a parody but a rival of the Christian one (Lewis 21). The reader may not immediately notice the incongruity of their side-by-side placement, but she or he surely senses the competition between them. The goal is to reach the lady's bedchamber, the temple of the worship of love. Ostensibly, this is only possible through the chapel, limited to the husband and the priest; that is, through marriage, through the sanction of the organized Christian church, through what in this tale is clearly authoritarian, lifeless, loveless, oppressive, that which forces the lady and her speaking heart into the silence of death. But Marie shows us another entrance to the temple, offering direct access for the one who "holds fast to love and serves it faithfully and well", through a destiny foretold and facilitated by magic, through the grace of a Christian God whose answer to the lover's prayer (*Guigemar* 200-203) transcends the constraints of His institutionalized worship.[78] Breton legend, classical poetry and Christian liturgy come together for a not very logical but nevertheless delightful romp.

In fact, the most striking sacred clash in the *lai* of *Guigemar* implicates not only the Christian deity and the Roman goddess but also, in a less clearly defined sense, the old Celtic one. The Breton tradition probably preserved a view of sexuality that differed in some respects

[78] For (adulterous) love as the answer to devout prayer, see also *Yonec* 95-110. Both of these passages are echoed in Andreas Capellanus I.vi. 322-3.

from that of European Christianity, although very little is known about this since the Celtic tradition was oral and in any case information about the ancient British Celts comes only from their conquerors: the Romans, Saxons, Normans and, culturally and religiously, the Christians. Ancient Irish law (see Ginnel 211-214) may suggest some parallels to Breton and Welsh practice, since the Irish, themselves Celts, were never part of the Roman Empire, and at a relatively early date—by the seventh century—began to preserve their traditions in writing. Marriage was a somewhat loose contract and divorce or separation were relatively easy; the main consideration in conjugal arrangements or dissolutions was the welfare of children, who were considered the responsibility of the clan as well as of the individual parents. Perhaps for this reason, illegitimacy does not appear to have carried the stigma, legal and moral, which it generally conferred in other contemporary societies (see Kinoshita 40). Polygamy and concubinage were practised, as was the custom of abducting and wedding the wife of an enemy. Polyandry may also have occurred, and women had more power over their choices and their property than in any European culture of Roman heritage. With these cultural differences in view, it is conceivable that the ancient stories from which the Bretons composed their *lais* and Marie her poems embodied a view of sex and marriage that was less rigid and restrictive than that of Anglo-Norman Christianity.[79] We may speculate, for example, that in the primitive form of the *Guigemar* adventure, old Celtic values were integrated as a matter of course, such as the practice of polyandry, the ease with which women could divorce their husbands and marry again, and the possibility of a man

[79] Kinoshita (40, 53 n. 20) amasses a number of bitter Anglo-Norman criticisms of Irish marriage customs, and remarks that these were tied to critiques of the Bretons and Welsh as well. This suggests that the Celts as a whole shared common practices alien to the gallicized and christianized invaders, and gives weight to the validity of seeking insight into pre-Conquest Breton social observances from old Irish law. Of course, attribution of excesses or debauchery is part of the vilification of the cultural "other", but it is noteworthy that the criticisms, their malevolence apart, targeted divorce, remarriage, polygamy and concubinage.

marrying his enemy's wife. Marie's laconic treatment of the lady's departure from her husband and her freedom to seek Guigemar may then represent aspects of the story which the poet simply adopted from her source and chose not to embellish or explain—in other words, which she more or less simply translated; the sequence becomes problematic only because Marie constructed the overall setting of the tale in her Christian and chivalric milieu.

Some perspectives of sexual passion and expression, then, we may attribute to the goddess of the Bretons, some to the goddess of Ovid's racy satire who eventually became the medieval spokesperson for the melding of Provençal passion and feudal chivalry. How the lady found the moral locus to leave a cruel husband and to publicly accept a new lover must derive from the former; how the knight became obsessed with the woman and through her love became healed and whole is contributed by the latter. Still, in the final analysis, neither of them can peacefully cohabit with Christian morality.

This does not appear to discourage Marie. In the primitive tale that she translates, the warrior surely took possession of the girl; and the courtly romanticism with which she adorns her adaptation also admits that sexual intercourse is the ultimate reward for chivalrous dedication (e.g., Andreas Capellanus I.vi. 470-1, 543). What renders this development incoherent is its adjacence to Christian piety. The morning following Guigemar's arrival, the lady goes to mass (*Guigemar* 437, 465), and immediately afterwards accepts Guigemar as her extramarital lover (528-534),[80] moving directly, as it were, from the rites of Christ to those of Venus, from the

[80] The linking of Christian faith, the service of the mass and adulterous sex becomes even more explicit in *Yonec* (142-198). Both in that passage and here, the mass trope probably resulted from the conjunction of Celtic and Christian elements, in that by the twelfth century, Celtic fairies sometimes had to prove their adherence to the Christian God before they could be accepted as lovers (Harf-Lancner *Fées* 391-2).

worship of one god to the worship of another; with, somewhere behind it all, the old Celtic goddess of fertility directing events from her own temple lost in the shadows of time.

Examined with any real closeness, this weaving of worldviews will not hold water, and collision is inevitable. Old Celtic morality as it was no doubt celebrated in the original stories could not be reconciled to the highly regimented code of the converted and assimilated Normans. Nor was the courtly ideal, the adoration of another man's wife, compatible with the adoration of a morally austere God.[81] So why does Marie put all this so blithely together? We might suppose that she was merely parroting the current, if untenable, literary fashions of the day. But this will not answer. There was as yet no typical pattern of Breton tales that Marie might have been following—it was Marie herself who was in the vanguard of introducing the Breton themes to French literature. If aspects of a Celtic moral code survive here and there in the *Lais*, it is not because Marie satisfactorily reconciles them but because she preserves them intact, more concerned with their ring of authenticity than with whatever incoherence may result from their unpolished inclusion. No more can it be argued that Marie was simply adapting her tale to the expectations of courtly love. The reality is that though Marie does seem to justify the adulterers

[81] Courtly love as a literary or social phenomenon seems to have struggled with this reality and attempted to establish some sort of reconciliation between passion and piety, but without any real success. The closest approach to a reconciliation may have been to leave the situation in unresolved tension. It can certainly be argued that Chrétien's *Charrete* and de Lorris's *Roman de la rose* were deliberately left unfinished, testifying to the impossibility of any resolution (see Kibler *Romances* 14; Lewis 122); and Andreas Capellanus's *De arte* certainly recants in Book Three everything that the chaplain has trumpeted in One and Two. If these works are the "bibles" of courtly love, they offer no answers. As for *Tristan*, though it generated a literature of courtly love, it provides no insight into natural human emotions, passions and decisions since the devotion of the lovers was the result of the accidental ingestion of a potion.

Andreas Capellanus was aware that adulterous devotion was contrary to Christian morality, but taught that since such devotion inspired the highest and noblest in humanity, God considered the immoral aspect venial (I.vi. 472-3). The sophistry, the arrant hypocrisy of this position is so blatant that I am persuaded that Andreas, a witty and talented writer, could not really have been so inconsistent. I suspect rather that the first two books were meant to be an entertaining, tongue-in-cheek survey of the phenomenon of courtly love, nowhere openly ridiculing but everywhere allowing the ridiculous to appear; his third book I take to express an attitude of the sort, "It will by this point be obvious that devotion to the god of Love is not all the poets make it out to be; let us now explore the concept more soberly."

in this story, she does not always do so. She is not always—I would have to declare that she is not often—uncritically supportive of the tenets of courtly love. *Chievrefueil* celebrates them; *Chaitivel* ridicules them; *Aüstic* critiques them; *Equitan* condemns them. So it is not only insufficient but in fact misleading to maintain that Marie approves the lovers' path in this *lai* because it complies with the rules of courtly love. Marie, I reiterate (in case my patient reader has lost sight of the point I am attempting to make throughout this entire work), cannot be easily reduced, categorized, synthesized. We may retrace the provenance of numerous elements within the poems back to their sources in the various streams of traditions and social forces, but the placement of these elements in the narrative is all the author's; and the fact that their placement is angular and original obviates the thesis that she was following established patterns.

So we must conclude that Marie supports the lovers in *Guigemar* not because she unthinkingly observes the rules of courtly love, nor because she tries to uphold some standard of Christian morality, nor because she seeks to reproduce ethnograpically the customs of the ancient Bretons. Her attitude must be otherwise grounded; there must be other factors. And indeed there are. If Marie layers elements drawn from her world upon the primitive tale, she also layers upon those elements interpretations which could only have been drawn from her own heart and imagination.

To begin, there is constant compassion for the *mal-mariée*. In *Guigemar*, as in *Aüstic* and *Chievrefueil*, this is evoked simply by the description of the lady's situation and the husband's jealousy and vindictiveness. In *Yonec*, Marie comments that the one who gave the beautiful young woman as wife to the old baron "committed a great sin" (*grant pechié fist*, 28); the implication is that the making of their marriage was a crime not only against nature but also

against God. The lady of *Milun* laments that she is surrounded by guardians "who always hate wholesome love and take delight in unhappiness" (*ki tuz jurs heent bone amur/e se delitent en tristur*, 145-6). Marie is not blindly supporting her female cast, as is evident by her scorn and contempt for other protagonists (see e.g., *Bisclavret* and *Chaitivel*); the fact is rather that she considers imprisonment in a loveless marriage unnatural, unjust and irreligious. God and the right are on the side of the lovers.

Then, Marie constructs a sense of destiny alongside human decision that carries characters and readers forward, always in suspense but always hopeful. This is introduced as early as line 57 of *Guigemar* where we learn of Guigemar's disinterest in love. Without much explanation, Marie suggests that it was a fault of Nature in Guigemar's formation (*de tant i out mespris Nature*), a move which tacitly places the responsibility in hands greater than his own. That events are foreordained for him and that he must submit to their unfolding is articulated more fully in the antlered doe's prophecy. Volition and predestination then commence a blurred cooperation as the wounded and semiconscious Guigemar boards the unmanned (hence uncontrollable) magic ship; its destination is already determined but its passenger has made the choice to embark. And even more human choice is involved in the giving and receiving of the pledges of love, the knotted shirt and belt. Fortune and her famous wheel (*Guigemar* 538-540) act for the discovery of the lovers by the husband; but too much is now at stake for us to doubt that human perseverance and divine providence must surely work together for the lovers' benefit. Marie balances the roles of destiny and of will in this story with finesse: the reader is not led into apathy because all acts are predetermined nor into hopelessness because the characters stand raging but impotent against an inanimate but inexorable universe. One senses at all times that

decisions matter, but that somewhere out there, a wise and benevolent force (perhaps God) is working with the human characters to bring about success.[82]

Finally, Marie is clearly sympathetic to true love. Her heart is with the lovers; she is convinced that Fate, God, the inherent justice of the cosmos, must side with them. It seems oxymoronic that the key to happiness is found in faithful adherence to one's marital infidelity:

> Ceste amurs sereit covenable,
> se vus amdui fussiez estable.
> Vus estes bels, e ele est bele! […]
> Ki un en puet leial trover,
> mult le deit servir et amer
> e estre a sun comandement. (*Guigemar* 451-3; 493-5)
>
> (This love would be ideal
> if you were both resolute;
> you are handsome, and she is beautiful! […]
> Whoever can find a loyal [lover]
> must absolutely serve and love him
> and do his bidding.)

This may hold echoes of the primitive tale, and it certainly embodies the contradictions of courtly love. Marie thus shares with the latter the belief that because love is good, it is prized in both the human and the divine spheres regardless of whether or not it appears to break the rules. But for Marie the issue runs deeper than this. She sees true love as holding a sacredness of its own, transcending the conventions which are too often subject to abuse and are employed to thwart justice rather than to establish it. Other *lais* will reveal that this does not mean that for Marie, passion justifies all; and here (*Guigemar* 487-493) she is careful to clarify that she is speaking of real love and not of cheap sexual conquests that become fodder for ignoble boasting and coarse jokes: "That is not love, but rather foolishness, wickedness and

[82] Destiny also plays a role in *Le Fraisne* and *Yonec*.

debauchery" (*Guigemar* 492-3; *n'est pas amurs, einz est folie/e malvaistiez e lecherie*). Base lust is wrong not because it seeks sexual fulfillment but because it masquerades as love. Genuine love does not subvert justice, nobility or godliness; because love equals truth, it establishes them.

In conclusion, a close reading of *Guigemar* discloses a number of inconsistencies without thereby really diminishing the reader's pleasure in the tale—quite the reverse, in fact. Marie's success comes not from seamlessly integrating the various streams but from leaving them relatively intact and allowing them to retain their breath of authenticity. The old Breton *aventure* that gleams through at every moment because translated with some measure of fidelity—the stark otherworldly features, the ancient morality, the plot rooted in forceful action—functions roughly but effectively within a framework of chivalry and piety, the whole of which is held together by Marie's very personal views on love, honour, holiness and justice, and worked into the tapestry of her literary art.

4. 3. What's Wrong with a Little Sex and Murder? The Enigma of *Equitan*.

Equitan does not seem to be a peculiarly Breton tale, although Marie characteristically insists (in both the introduction, 1-12, and the conclusion, 317-320) that she is retelling the events about which the Bretons made a *lai*; this reinforces the supposition that in its original incarnation, "Breton *lai*" referred not to the subject matter but to the performance genre characteristic of Celtic minstrels. The word *nanz* (*Equitan* 12) is uncertain and could be a form of French *nains* ("dwarves"), situating *Equitan* in the fairy realm and probably in the Celtic tradition. However, there are no pressing linguistic reasons to force such a conclusion and the rest of the story does not offer any indications of an otherworld setting. It is thus more likely that

nanz represents *Nantais*, citizens of the city of Nantes at the mouth of the Loire.[83] Along with *Bisclavret* and *Chaitivel*, *Equitan* constitutes one of the three *lais* which portray the woman as a guilty party. It is much more common for Marie to present her as the heroine, as victim of love's passion, of her own inexorable fidelity or of a brutal husband, as we have seen in *Guigemar*.

Equitan is perhaps the least cherished of Marie's *lais*, considered somewhat coarse and heavy-handed. It is a short, almost *fabliau*-like narrative in which little sympathy is created for the characters and the moral is forced with scant finesse upon the reader. The plot is rather contrived and unlikely; this may be discerned in other *lais* but here it would seem that Marie makes no effort to attenuate it with realistic details and motivations. Hoepffner considered it the poorest of her *lais* in terms of literary value (158); Jeanne Wathelet-Willem thought that it verged upon bad taste and implausibility (qtd in Sergent 70). "The delightful *Lais* of Marie de France are often puzzling", wrote D. W. Robertson (202), "but this one seems fairly transparent." Nevertheless, attempts to render a simple analysis leave interpreters at odds and suggest that, like the other *lais*, it is not as artless as it first appears.

Attempting to find the folktale that lay behind Marie's version has not been fruitful. Hoepffner (154) signalled the parallel in Wace to King Arthur's father, Uther, who seduced Ygerne the wife of his vassal the count of Cornwall (see *Brut* 8572-8818). Sergent (65-66) protests that there are more differences than similarities: unlike *Equitan*, a child is born from the union of Uther and Ygerne, and the parents are not punished. He argues (70-76) that *Equitan* is based on a Welsh myth called "Math fils de Mathonwy", a branch of the *Mabinogi*.

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[83] Marie may consider this to be part of *Bretaigne la Menur*; in *Chaitivel* 9 she says, "*En Bretaigne a Nantes maneit* […]".

I suspect that all these tales trace back to a much earlier archetype, the biblical story of King David's adultery with Bathsheba, the wife of his loyal friend Uriah the Hittite (*2 Samuel* 11:1-12:25). Though differing in detail and in outcomes, the point of departure for these stories is identical, the king who takes his loyal follower's wife; and many elements of the biblical narrative surface in the later legends. David, destined to be king of Israel but on the run for his life from its current king, Saul, was supported by an outlaw band of troops led by some thirty faithful heroes, extraordinary friends and warriors, of whom Uriah the Hittite was one (see *2 Samuel* 23:8-39). Later, when David was established as king, he was relaxing on his rooftop at home while his armies were off fighting, and saw Uriah's wife Bathsheba bathing. (Here appears the bathtub image, though in a much different context!) He desired her and sent to have her brought to the palace. Bathsheba became pregnant as a result of their union and so David plotted to have her husband killed. After Uriah's death, David married Bathsheba. As punishment, God decreed that the child born from their adulterous betrayal would die. More than this, David would live to see the rest of his life troubled by warfare and another man publicly take his wives.[84] David and Bathsheba's next child, Solomon, became king after David.

The connections are evident: the king who becomes sexually enamoured with the wife of his trusted vassal and friend; the king who pursues pleasure when he ought to be at his duty; the adulterer who plots the death of his friend to free his lover for himself. The union leading to the birth of a celebrated king resurfaces in the story of Uther and Ygerne; punishment by death and ignominy follow in Equitan's adventure. The lineage of the tale from the biblical record to the Celtic world is not extant, but the ubiquity of biblical motifs, the familiarity of the David and

[84] This dark prophecy was fulfilled by David's own rebellious son Absalom (*2 Samuel* 16:22).

Bathsheba affair and the universally resonant plot of a love triangle suggest that the crucial elements would readily provide part of the framework of any such narrative. Perhaps the most important common factor in the histories of David and Equitan is the sense of outrage which does not clearly resolve into a condemnation of one particular aspect of the crime but hovers over all three: the betrayal, the adultery, and the (attempted) murder. If Marie at all shaped her poem from this source, it complicates the interpretation by introducing a subtext of biblical morality into an otherwise entirely secular tale.[85]

It is this lack of clarity which, in my opinion, raises the *lai* of *Equitan* at least some distance above the critiques levelled at its literary lapses. The moral indeed is a simple one:

> Ki bien voldreit raisun entendre,
> ici purreit ensample prendre:
> tels purchase le mal d'autrui,
> dunt tuz le mals revert sur lui. (*Equitan* 313-316)
>
> (Whoever would be willing to listen to reason
> may draw a lesson from this story:
> the one who seeks to bring about another's harm
> brings thence all that harm back upon himself.)

The moralistic explicitness and the patronizing tone disguise the true question: What precisely does Marie mean by *le mal*? To some, it is clear that the typical Provençal view of unrestrained passion is condemned (Hoepffner 158-9), while some argue that the feudal code is abrogated (Sergent 65); to others it is the adultery which falls under Marie's scorn (Walsh 8), to still others it is the attempted murder (Burgess & Busby 30). One of the difficulties in determining Marie's attitude is that, unlike in other *lais* where she enters the narrative to add her own perspective

[85] In at least two other cases, Marie, without naming sources, modelled her love problem on a biblical narrative: Lanval's encounter with Guinevère echoes the rejection by Joseph of Potiphar's wife, and Bisclavret's betrayal by his wife follows the story of Samson and Delilah. However, even if the David and Bathsheba story did not form a conscious or unconscious background to Marie's *Equitan*, it would be hazardous to contend that any work composed in Angevin England by a person such as Marie would be altogether free from a subtext of biblical morality.

(e.g., *Le Fraisne* 355-8; *Bisclavret* 218; *Les Dous Amanz* 188; *Yonec* 228, 556), in *Equitan* she is as a rule absent and speaks only through the words and actions of the characters. There are two exceptions to this: one is the moral cited just above; the other is an introductory comment about the nature of love:

> Cil metent lur vie en nuncure,
> ki d'amer n'unt sen ne mesure;
> tels est la mesure d'amer
> que nuls n'i deit raisun guarder. (*Equitan* 17-20)
>
> (They play recklessly with their lives
> who have of love neither judgement nor prudence;
> such is the nature of love
> that no one subject to it may hold on to reason.)

The word-play on *mesure* is impossible to reproduce in English. The basic meaning of *mesure* is "measure, dimension", hence "extent, limit"; perhaps "limitation, prudence, moderation". The usage in line 18 is a rather stock expression, *sen e mesure*, which seems to mean something like "understanding and sensible behaviour"; the second usage is related to another fairly common locution, *en tels mesure*, "in such a way", which here probably yields "love works in such a manner".[86] The *double-entendre* is important, enabling us to restate Marie's apparently contradictory dictum as something like: "Love requires great understanding and self-control; for it is the nature of love that it escapes all too easily from the control of our better judgement." *Mesure* is an important concept in Marie, signalling the importance of self-control and of discretion in courtly love (*Les Dous Amanz* 188-9; *Yonec* 205-6; cf. *Guigemar* 213; *Lanval* 143-150; *Chaitivel* 119).

[86] See the excellent discussion in Burgess (*Lais* 35-42). Lines 17-20 may be, as Hoepffner (154-5) suggests, an echo of *Eneas* 1881-2: *de sa vie n'a el mes cure:/amors nen a sens ne mesure*.

These two maxims are the only narrative asides in the *lai*, and in them must be contained Marie's viewpoint, if such is to be found. It is not self-evident that she is condemning the unrestrained passion of courtly love, for she commends it elsewhere. Significantly, in *Yonec* she rejoices with the lovers' sexual pleasures even while depicting the lady as a virtual nymphomaniac;[87] the narrative insists not that she should at all restrain her lovemaking but that she must be prudent so that they should not be caught at it (*mes tel mesure en esguardez/que nus ne seium encombrez*, *Yonec* 205-6). As in *Equitan*, love itself is not the problem, but love's effect on circumspect behaviour. As for the matter of the relative stations of Equitan and the seneschal's wife, the question was still open; Andreas Capellanus devoted several dialogues of Book I to the problem of love between ranks,[88] and Marie herself debates rather than resolves the issue in this *lai*. It is not clearer that Marie censures the king for a crime against feudal obligation. Equitan is aware of both sides of the issue: he knows that he would be wronging his vassal to make love to his wife; but he also knows that it is a crime for a beautiful woman not to experience passionate love (*Equitan* 75-93). This is sophistry, and Marie probably intends that we should think so. Still, she celebrates elsewhere the love affair between a queen and the most loyal knight of her husband the king (*Chievrefueil*); we would require more evidence that she condemns the devotion here. Nor can we be certain that Marie denounces the couple's adultery; there are

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[87] *Sun ami vuelt suvent veeir/e sa joie de lui aveir;/des que ses sire s'en depart,/e nuit e jur e tost e tart/ele l'a tut a sun plaisir./Or l'en duinst Deus lunges joïr!* (*Yonec* 223-8: "She wants to see her lover often and to have her joy in him; the moment her lord departs, both night and day, both early and late, she has him altogether at her pleasure. Now, may God grant that she enjoy this for a long time!").

[88] Dialogue D (I.vi. 166-195) describes a nobleman addressing his suit to a commoner, which turns out unsuccessful; F (281-321) is a member of the high aristocracy to a commoner, which is equally unsuccessful; G (322-400) may have derived from the same questions that preoccupy Marie in this *lai*, the suit of a high aristocrat to a lower-rank noblewoman. This dialogue includes the discussion of whether or not passionate love is admissable between married partners; a decision from the countess Marie de Champagne declares that it is not. The implication is inescapable that the suitor is addressing himself to a married woman and this may imply the suit of a lord to the wife of one of his own vassals.

sufficient examples of her approval throughout the *Lais*. As we have seen in *Guigemar*, for example, love that is true carries its own sanctity and justice. Burgess (*Lais* 40-41), following Pickens, suggests that it was not the love but its context that constituted the crime: Equitan and the lady wronged the husband because he was a courtly, loyal and industrious knight and there was therefore no excuse for the wife looking elsewhere. My own sense of morals certainly agrees, and I suspect that we are told of the seneschal's sterling qualities (*Equitan* 21-24) so that we might reach this conclusion. Nonetheless, I cannot affirm without doubt that this is Marie's position; in *Aüstic* we are presented with a woman who falls in love with her neighbour even though her husband was a knight of impeccable reputation.[89] Finally, that Marie condemns the attempted murder is not an unassailable assertion. This might seem a ridiculous point to attempt to make—surely Marie is opposed to murder!—but it is worth observing that in *Eliduc*, the eponymous hero, upon being reprimanded by a sailor for attempting bigamy, murders the sailor and casts him overboard, all without receiving any punishment in the story or any hint of censure whatsoever in the narration (*Eliduc* 835-864). One is left rather with the impression that he did a noble and manly thing in striving to protect the sensibilities of his deceived bride-to-be. The differences are important: Equitan and the seneschal's wife plot the murder in the most cold-

[89] If we have read *Aüstic* we of course retain the image of the husband's brutal slaughter of the nightingale before his wife's eyes and we understand Marie's sympathy with the heroine; still, it should be remembered that when we are introduced to the *dramatis personae* of that little *lai*, all that we are told of the two gentlemen is that *pur la bunté des dous baruns/fu la vile bons li nuns* (*Aüstic* 11-12, "because of the goodness of the two barons, the reputation of the town stood high"). The husband's brutal act comes after he has caught his wife in one of her nightly rendezvous, blowing kisses, as it were, across the garden wall, and she has lied to him about it. As is usual with Marie, the "moral of the story" is not entirely clear. Nevertheless, that we perceive Marie's sentiment in *Aüstic* but not in *Equitan* is noteworthy. Of *Equitan* Hoepffner (158) observes with some sensitivity: "Thus we never sense in this *lai* that undercurrent of secret sympathy that Marie accords elsewhere to unfortunate lovers, even when they are guilty" ("Aussi ne sent-on jamais dans notre lai ce courant de sympathie secrète que Marie accorde ailleurs aux amants malheureux, même quand ils sont coupables").

blooded fashion, while Eliduc reacts in a rage,[90] and this may be crucial for Marie. And further examples are not wanting: in *Yonec*, the son of the lady and her lover decapitates his mother's husband, thus fulfilling divine vengeance (*Yonec* 534, 547-550); and in *Milun*, the son of the lady and her lover vows to kill his mother's husband, which noble and generous resolution turns out to be unnecessary since, to everyone's delight, it is discovered that the husband has already died (*Milun* 497-516).

And so, *pace* Robertson, it does not appear that *Equitan* is so very "transparent" after all. In the final analysis, we remain rather uncertain of Marie's principal message. By her two editorial insertions we understand that love without sense and discretion is potentially ruinous, and that those who plot evil for another have that evil rebound upon themselves. Yet what in her mind constitues the "evil" rests debatable. Burgess (*Lais* 40) comments insightfully that *Equitan* "is a representation of the destructive power of love, when the characters are not protected and aided by some form of divine or supernatural power, as they are in lays such as *Guigemar* and *Yonec*." This begins to pierce to the heart of the matter; I think that we may go a step further and see it as a lesson of what results from the principles of courtly love when the characters are not *actively seeking* divine or supernatural aid, or at least, seeking the good as opposed to pure self-gratification. Marie may be demonstrating that the tenets of passionate attraction could be used to justify all manner of evil, from betrayal through adultery to murder; that the rules for love as they were discussed in theory by the literary elite of the day might look alarmingly different if they were to be applied in real life; that it is ludicrous to imagine that laws of personal interaction

[90] Or so a good lawyer should insist; in the narrative, Eliduc wishes to attack the man immediately but is delayed by caring for his unconscious beloved. It is only after he has been distracted for some time and has become convinced of her death that he then approaches the sailor and murders him.

have existence in some abstract amoral, nonreligious vacuum and that they could be implemented apart from wholesome inner motivations and aspirations. The shallow dimensions of the actors, unquestionably impoverishing the *lai* in many respects, may nonetheless be a deliberate, tacit commentary on the fact that every rule must be interpreted, and that the realization of the rule depends not so much on the sophistry of its articulation as on the character of its performer. What had as its basis the translation of a Nantais tale as sung by minstrels has been turned into a thought-provoking and even disturbing critique of the application of the principles of courtly love. It turns out that what appeared to be the obvious moral of the story is but the surface of that critique. The reader is left to search out for himself or herself what that might mean in terms of literature and life.

4. 4. New (or Perhaps Very Old) Ideas about Marriage: *Le Fraisne*.

Le Fraisne is a story unknown to us from other sources, although old *lais* about the male protagonist, Gurun, were apparently in circulation. Sergent (80) notes that *Gurun* is a Breton name and cites the *lai* composed by Yseult in Thomas d'Angleterre's *Tristan* (834-843) about the sad fate of *Guirun*, as well one of the *lais* in the Old Norse *Strengleikar*, the *Guruns lioð*; and we have already observed in Gottfried von Strassburg's *Tristan und Isolt* (3524-5, see 3.1 above) the Welsh harpist who performs the *lai* of *Guirune* and his lady-love. None of these stories correspond to Marie's poem.

Marie places *Le Fraisne* near Dol in *Bretaigne* (*Le Fraisne* 3, 52, 253, 371-2), that is, Brittany. Hoepffner (109-110) insists that there is nothing particularly Breton about the tale

except the setting,[91] but we recall that a "Breton *lai*" referred to a performance genre and not necessarily to specifically Celtic content. And with respect to the latter, it would be precipitate to conclude that, because the story in its present form includes no fairy elements or overtly Breton themes, it was not inspired by a Celtic narrative. In point of fact, traces of the Celtic world may lie not very far beneath the surface, especially regarding the perspectives on marriage. I suggest that we are once again in that muddled region where Marie begins with a translation and ends with a composition, importing genuine and preserved elements of an ancient tale into a reworked scheme that scarcely permits them to remain without sounding a few jarring notes.

We must try to resituate ourselves in a Middle Ages mentality if we are to perceive this dissonance. The medieval Marie tells a tale, ostensibly ingenuous yet detailed and nuanced, which in the modernity of its underlying fabula scarcely challenges our sensibilities. The plot pattern—boy and girl meet, fall in love and overcome all obstacles to arrive at last at the altar—has been the mainstay of romantic fiction for so many centuries that today's reader may fail to remark certain features.

Love continues to be Marie's central concern, but from an entirely different perspective. First we must take note that, in contrast to the two preceding *lais* (along with a great deal of contemporary literature), the theme of courtly love has virtually disappeared. Absent are the arrows of Amor, the incessant pangs of longing, the illicit and yet somehow sanctifying passion between the unfortunate married beauty and the valiant knight.

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[91] Hoepffner argues that no aspect of the fairy world appears in *Le Fraisne* or *Milun* and that Marie does not mention the Bretons specifically as she does in other instances, and concludes: "In these narratives Marie no longer draws on any Breton story" (109: "Marie, ici, ne renvoie plus à quelque conte breton"). In contrast, Sergent (82-98) finds Celtic motifs in all the major elements of the story from the names of the characters and the twin birth through the symbolic and sacred nature of trees to the "husband with two wives" theme. He suggests that in the primitive version Gurun may have been the god of thunder and Fraisne a goddess.

Then, the theme of love innocent in its inception and leading to marriage was no commonplace to Marie's aristocratic readers. Marriages in the upper classes were arrangements whose purpose was to further loyalties, connections, income and power. "In this view, marriages contracted for political and familial gain excluded the possibility of true love, which by definition had to be unconstrained and freely chosen" (Kinoshita 33). As we have seen, the passionate obsession celebrated by the *troubadours* was kindled and maintained by the voluntary acts of devotion and reward that could only exist outside of the compulsory union of marriage. So the twelfth-century literature of love was not about marriage—not between the lovers, at any rate. Marie's *Le Fraisne* (along with Chrétien's *Erec* and *Yvain*) seems to resist this trend. The absence of overt themes of courtly love and the emphasis on love's reward in marriage underscore a foreign source for the translation.

Finally, the Church was not as complacent about concubinage, divorce and remarriage, and marriage within prohibited degrees as Marie represents. She would have us believe that Gurun donates to an abbey for the sole purpose of seducing a young girl there, takes her as his mistress (the long-standing sexual liaison between Fraisne and Gurun is admired in all respects except that it cannot produce a suitable heir), then marries a lady, discovers that his mistress is the lady's sister, upon which he quickly divorces his wife and marries her sister, his mistress—not only escaping through all this the censure of the Church, but garnering its positive blessing in the person of Gurun's good friend and jack-of-all-marriages, the archbishop of Dol. Scholars have attempted to understand this unrealistic representation. That a medieval nobleman should have conducted his personal affairs in such a way is not improbable; it is the acquiescence of ecclesiastical authority which is incongruous.

Throughout the twelfth century, the Church put increasing pressure on the aristocracy to conform to the sacred view of marriage as limited and indissoluble, while the secular powers continued to use marriage, divorce and remarriage as a means of advancing political alliances (Duby). Urban T. Holmes (337-8), attempting to demonstrate that Marie was not instructed in religious matters, points out that in ecclesiastical law, if the groom was discovered sleeping with a relative of the bride after the vows but before consummation,[92] the marriage would be invalidated. Now, since Fraisne and Gurun apparently did not sleep together after the ceremony, Holmes believes that Marie simply misunderstood the niceties of church law. Chantal Maréchal (140), who tries to show that in *Le Fraisne* Marie was writing a sort of "case study" to illustrate applicable marriage edicts for the benefit of the clergy, cites a dissolution of a marriage ordered by Pope Calixtus II in 1121 where it became known that the man had slept with a relative of the wife before the marriage, and concludes that *Le Fraisne* is in perfect agreement with twelfth-century canon law. In the opposite corner, Kinoshita (34) calls *Le Fraisne* "a startlingly cynical view of the sexual politics of the feudal aristocracy" and sees the *lai* as deliberately promoting the agenda of the secular nobles against the Church; she argues that Marie legitimizes practices unacceptable to Christianity by recoding them as traditional Breton mores (40-41).[93]

There is no question that all of these avenues of research provide insight into the complexity of the influences on the writing of the poem, the resources upon which Marie may have drawn consciously or unconsciously, and the possible reactions in certain quarters to the

[92] Note that in the ecclesiastical law of the period, a couple was considered married after the exchange of vows even if they did not consummate their union sexually, and divorce would be required to set aside the marriage.

[93] Marie used an actual situation, the bishopric of Dol, which was at that time under Henri II's control and an area of political tension. Church authorities at Dol were incessantly involved in political and ecclesiastical machinations and reproaches. As an example, "Archbishop Juhel was excommunicated twice: by Pope Leo IX (1050) for having bought his office from the count of Brittany, and again by the great reformer Gregory VII (1076) for publicly marrying" (Kinoshita 39).

publication of the narrative. Indeed, as I have insisted in my introductory chapter, a thorough knowledge of Marie's contemporary world is essential to fully understanding and enjoying her work. Nevertheless, there are two problems with reading *Le Fraisne* through one or more of these optics.

The first problem is that these interpretations approach the tale as though it were entirely a product of the late twelfth-century imagination, and assume that all explanations and resolutions can be found in contemporary politics and culture. But if we take at face value Marie's claim that the *lai* of *Le Fraisne*, and her poem about it, are based on an *aventure* that took place "in days of old" (*jadis*, *Le Fraisne* 3), we may conclude that the incongruities result not from the poet's meddling in ecclesiastical law but from temporal and cultural displacements. Marie is translating a story from a different time and a different morality, and subsequently inserting it into a narrative framework that includes all the institutions with which her contemporary audience is familiar. The interpretive issues flow simply from the fact that it does not belong there. In my view, these incongruencies are forceful reminders that the project of the *Lais* was at its base a translation, ultimately reworded in French verse and (to a significantly greater or lesser degree, depending upon the individual *lai*) adapted to twelfth-century ornaments, but still and always a translation.

The second problem is that if we attempt to force *Le Fraisne* to be "about" one of these social agendas—canonical law, priestly instruction, aristocratic ambition, Norman expansion—we go too far. It just does not work; it is not reading the *lai*. Taking the story as a whole, it is not about these things. There is no ruling from the hierarchy that forces the dissolution of the marriage to Coldre on the grounds of the degree of affinity; there is no political, social or

monetary advantage for Gurun in divorcing Coldre and marrying Fraisne (they are twin sisters, after all!); there is no clever lesson on church polity—there seems rather to be a remarkable indifference to it; there is no clear way in which Anglo-Norman interests in Brittany are promoted.[94]

Surely Hoepffner has it right when he concludes that in *Le Fraisne*,

> Marie wishes to depict, above all else, the ideal picture of the loving woman. Both "nature" and "nurture" have contributed equally to form this sweet and gentle soul whose modest charm gains for her the affection of all who come to know her, despite the obscurity of her origins.[95] (122)

The most passive of Marie's heroines (Burgess *Lais* 131), her submissiveness does not cross the line into dumb servitude since she devotes herself not to a cruel and neglectful brute but to one who has loved her with kindness and constancy from the beginning. Her humility and willingness to serve are perhaps hyperbolic, yet she remains both a believable and likeable character in whose happy lot the reader rejoices.

Two other themes, typical of Marie in their subtle contrariness, merit attention: destiny and piety. With regard to the former, as we have already seen in *Guigemar*, fortune and human choice work hand in hand. *Le Fraisne* is a series of determined coincidences: two sets of twins, two sisters, two trees, two weddings. The poem is a story of meaningful decisions—malice,

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[94] I suppose one might argue that Marie is careful not to be too overt concerning whatever agenda she might be promoting and that the notions she supports are presented under the mildest and most disinterested light. Fisher maintains that when it comes to advancing the Norman position, "Marie is a mistress of subtlety" (203). If there really is some underlying cause which Marie espouses in *Le Fraisne*, her subtlety is excessive to the point of being self-defeating; no one can ascertain what stand she is taking on what issue. In any event, this seems to me to be a case of not seeing the forest for the trees: the intricacies of politics and religion, interesting though they are, do not preoccupy Marie. The story is about the medieval ideal of womanly love. The *Lais* of Marie are not pamphlets and *Le Fraisne* is no exception.

[95] "Marie veut ici représenter avant tout l'image idéale de la femme aimante. 'Nature' et 'nourriture' (éducation) ont contribué au même degré à former cette âme douce et tendre dont le charme discret lui vaut l'affection de tous ceux qui l'approchent, malgré l'obscurité de sa naissance."

infanticide, love, sacrifice, forgiveness—within a fateful framework. Most pointed in this regard is Fraisne herself: the foundling child with her silk cloth and her ring is clearly marked for a preordained position, yet it is one that she can only reach through willing sacrifice.

The cooperation of piety with divine activity to achieve morally ambivalent results is also characteristic of both *Guigemar* and *Le Fraisne*. Though almost tacit in the latter, it is built into the very structure of the carefully-crafted narrative. There is a mirroring of plot elements which frames the tale into a series of disasters and reversals: the unwanted twin is cast out, to be reunited with her mother at the end; the baby is rejected, to become loved and exalted; the abandoned girl receives a desperate and almost hopeless benediction from a servant, to rise to the benediction of an archbishop. Destiny and God blur together to bring about a morally unorthodox resolution, in that Fraisne's eventual happiness could be construed to be the result of, or at least in harmony with, the maid's prayer:

> 'Deus', fait ele, 'par tun seint nun,
> sire, se te vient a plaisir,
> cest enfant guarde de perir!' […]
> Entre ses braz a pris l'enfant,
> de si qu'al fraisne vint corant.
> Desus le mist; puis le laissa;
> a Deu le veir le comanda. (*Le Fraisne* 162-4, 171-4)
>
> ("God," she says, "by your holy name,
> Lord, if it pleases you,
> keep this child from death!" […]
> She took the child in her arms,
> and came running up to the ash-tree.
> She placed her up in the tree and left her there,
> commending her to the true God.)

Consequently, the willing involvement of the archbishop of Dol probably has less to do with Marie's covert politics than with her artistry as a storyteller—and her personal conviction that God sides with the lovers.

And so Marie once again upholds honest devotion even if it does not fit with the strictures of the society into which she herself chooses to force it; once again she seems to translate more or less faithfully the original plot features of an old Breton tale even though they wind up clogging the works from time to time. The project, ostensibly unfolding in a world very much like her own, stops short of assimilation and retains the cultural angularity of translation. Her sensitive narration and her convincing presentation of a veritable window on the "days of old" more than compensate for whatever inconsistencies the church lawyers may be left to wrestle with after the fact.

4. 5. Transformation, Restoration, Vindication: *Bisclavret*.

The legend of the werewolf was widespread and popular in European folklore,[96] and Marie acknowledges this:

> Jadis le poeit hum oïr
> e sovent suleit avenir,
> hume plusur garulf devindrent
> e es boscages maisun tindrent. (*Bisclavret* 5-8)
>
> (In days past, accounts of this were told,
> and often it was wont to happen:
> many a man became a werewolf
> and dwelt in the forests.)

In this particular case, Marie indicates that the *Bisclavret* poem was derived from a Breton tale (*Bisclavret* 15, 259-260), and there is all the more reason to accept this claim since it is one of

[96] For a summary of the literature, see Sergent 100-101; Harf-Lancner *Lais* 117 n. 1.

only three *lais* that are titled in the Breton language.[97] Nevertheless, if the core of Marie's poem was Celtic, her version is layered, as we have already seen in the previous examples, with the accoutrements of her own world.

The language in which is described the unraveling of the husband/wife relationship and the sharing of the secret which leads to treachery is surely, as Hoepffner (146) has noted, based on the biblical story of Samson and Delilah. Samson, gifted by God with amazing strength, is a terror to the enemies of his nation. However, his mistress, in the pay of his enemies, worms his secret from him: if he does not keep the peculiar customs which pertain to his religious vow—one of which is that he must never cut his hair—he will lose all his extraordinary strength. As he sleeps, she cuts his hair and hands him over to his captors to be put into slavery (*Judges* 16:4-21). While the basic plot of Bisclavret's discovery and betrayal may have belonged to the original legend, we may suppose that Marie adds resonance with echoes of the well-known biblical narrative.[98]

Courtly love resurfaces in this *lai* in the classic love triangle wherein a neighbouring knight adores the baron's wife. She accepts his love only after her devotion to her husband is alienated upon learning of his transformation.

> 'Amis', fet ele, 'seiez liez!
> Ceo dunt vus estes travailliez

[97] *Aüstic* ("Nightingale") is another; and after Marie introduces the *lai* of *Eliduc*, she explains how the title was changed from the name of the hero to those of the heroines, *Guildeluëc ha Guilliadun* (22; *ha* is Breton for "and"): this, then, is the third Breton title—it is apparently the title Marie gave to it, even though (perhaps after her time) it was the masculine name that stuck. In addition, we might arguably include *Guigemar*, *Lanval*, and *Yonec*, whose titles are the names of the Breton protagonists.

[98] Hoepffner (150) finds another biblical allusion in the fate of the mutilated and exiled wife: the story of Cain, marked and banished after killing his brother Abel (see *Genesis* 4:8-16). Hoepffner sees in the mutilation a somewhat questionable literary taste, which convinces him that it was not Marie's invention but rather an element of the original tale with which she was working—possibly a legend explaining a recurrent deformity in some local family of note (148).

vus otrei jeo senz nul respit;
ja n'i avrez nul cuntredit.
M'amur e mun cors vus otrei:
vostre drue faites de mei!'
Cil l'en mercie bonement
e la fiance de li prent,
e el le met a sairement. (*Bisclavret* 111-119)

("My friend," she says, "rejoice!
That prize for which desire torments you
I grant to you without any delay;
you shall have no further opposition.
My love and my body I grant to you:
Make me your mistress!"
He thanks her for this enthusiastically
and receives her pledge
and she takes his oath.)

The language employed here reflects the motifs of courtly love: the sweet suffering of obsessive desire, the granting of love as a just reward for devotion, the passion shared by a knight and his married mistress. The exchange of oaths reminds us that courtly passion has been called the "feudalisation of love" (Lewis 2); vocabulary such as *fiance* ("pledge") and *sairement* ("oath") underscores the fact that "Marie's concept of love between men and women relies heavily on the terminology and spirit of the feudal contract" (Burgess *Lais* 156). As in other *lais*, however, Marie's notion of successful love (even if, as in this case, she is unsympathetic to the characters) leads to matrimony, which was not the pattern of courtly love in its most regulated form.

Feudality proper would not have formed a part of the original fabula if it was indeed an old Breton tale, but Marie smoothly adapts her narrative to contemporary Norman practices. Bisclavret is described as the chivalric ideal:

En Bretaigne maneit uns ber,
merveille l'ai oï loër.
Beals chevalier e bons esteit

> e noblement se cunteneit.
> De sun seignur esteit privez
> e de tuz ses veisins amez. (*Bisclavret* 15-20)
>
> (There lived in Brittany a baron
> whom I have heard most highly praised.
> He was a handsome and worthy knight
> and always conducted himself in a noble manner.
> With his lord he was on the best of terms
> and was esteemed by all his neighbours.)

Marie goes on to say that (unlike Guigemar) the baron also exercised his tender side, being very much in love with his noble and beautiful wife (*Bisclavret* 21-23). Valour and passion combine to paint the picture of the perfect knight according to the standards of late twelfth-century romance. Marie thus evokes sympathy for what might otherwise be perceived as a horrible freak, and ensures the readers' support for her protagonist. But she does this, be it noted, by depicting him not as a Celtic warrior but as the finest of the contemporary Anglo-Norman feudal nobility. She furthers the tale's placement in her era by constructing the royal festival as a gathering dictated by feudal duties:

> A une curt que li reis tint
> tuz les baruns aveit mandez,
> cels ki furent de lui chasez,
> pur aidier sa feste a tenir
> e lui plus bel faire servir. (*Bisclavret* 186-190)
>
> (The king held his court
> to which he had summoned all the barons,
> those who had been granted fiefs from him,
> to help him to celebrate his festival
> and to serve him the better.)

All this resituates the source tale in the courtly and feudal world of twelfth-century Anglo-Norman England and France.

The description of the werewolf also turns out to be a commingling of perspectives. Sergent (102) distinguishes two types of werewolves in the literature: the vicious anthropophage, typical of continental legends; and a milder sort, characteristic of Irish tales, which retains human reason while in wolf shape and restricts itself to eating other animals. Sergent concludes that it is the latter that Marie depicts, thus demonstrating a link between her story and Celtic tradition. Once again, however, the link is not so transparent. It is true that the lycanthropic baron tells his wife: "I survive on prey and plunder" (*Bisclavret* 66; *s'i vif de preie e de ravine*); the king declares, when the werewolf bows before him: "It has the intelligence of a human being" (*Bisclavret* 154; *Ele a sen d'ume*); and the courtiers later attest to the werewolf's peaceable nature: "Never has it touched a person nor shown any viciousness" (*Bisclavret* 245-6; *Unkes mes huma ne tucha/ne felunie ne mustra*) apart from the attacks on the lady and her new husband, actions which were considered significantly out of character. On the other hand, Marie frames the werewolf narration with this description:

> Garulf, ceo est beste salvage;
> tant cum il est en cele rage,
> humes devure, grant mal fait,
> e granz forez converse e vait. (*Bisclavret* 9-12)
>
> (The werewolf is a wild beast;
> while the fury possesses it,
> it devours people, does great harm,
> lives and runs in great forests.)

I suggest that Marie has brought together the two traditions. The attitude and activity of Bisclavret in the narrative represents a core of translation of the original Breton fabula, while Marie's frame-narration sets the story within a broader context which represents her own Franco-Norman and European inheritance.

The marital procedures may represent the less than formal practices of twelfth-century Europe, still in transition as the Church exerted growing pressure on the upper classes to avoid divorce and remarriage, but are more likely to reflect an earlier or foreign morality. Marie tells us that Bisclavret vanishes from the neighbourhood and that sometime later his wife is married to her lover, the treacherous knight, a marriage permitted because of the disappearance of her husband (*Bisclavret* 127-134). Following this event, Bisclavret encounters the king, which takes place after "a full year passed" (*Bisclavret* 135; *Issi remest un an entier*). While it is not clear from what point the year dates, it is likely that since the narrative returns to the fate of Bisclavret, it signifies a year since his disappearance. In any case, a relatively short period of time seems to have elapsed since the opening events of the story, too short for the missing husband to be presumed dead and the wife to be considered a widow, legally or religiously eligible for remarriage. Rather, this continues the theme seen already in *Guigemar* and *Le Fraisne* of successive marriages, perhaps reproducing with some accuracy the Celtic cultural model; an element such as this that clashes with the poem's new setting is a reminder that the project of the *Lais* is at bottom a translation. The marriage sequence in *Bisclavret* follows the same pattern as in *Guigemar* and *Le Fraisne* but does not have the same tone: this *lai* differs from the others in that Marie does not convey a conviction of the justice and sanctity of the marriage. It is habitual with Marie to rejoice in the triumph of true love; here, her sense of justice is satisfied instead in the revenge that Bisclavret takes on the wife, a wife unfaithful in every sense of the term.

Bisclavret is indeed a work of translation, adaptation and appropriation, adorned with Marie's "surplus of meaning", but its transformation does not obtrude with such insistence as it does in some of the other *lais*. It is as if the original story naturally predominates and the

layerings of later cutural perspectives do not create any aggressive incoherence, only adding generally harmonious embellishments to the existing fabula. The adaptation is smoother since less has called for the poet's alteration. As we shall see below in 4.13, the reverse is true in *Eliduc*: the adaptation is smoother because it comprehends far more literary intervention; the layering has taken over to make a seamless story—one that has lost much of its authenticity and verve. *Bisclavret* retains not only a strong and fast-paced story line but the earthy savour of an old, darkly magical tale brought to life and light.

4. 6. Love Has the Highest Claim: *Lanval*.

One of the brightest treasures among the *Lais*, *Lanval* is a superbly-crafted tale of love, betrayal, and the supernatural. What I find remarkable in a close reading of the poem is that although the story is set squarely within the Breton world of *merveilles* and the legendary Arthur's court, Marie has no recourse to epic battles, single combats, quests or giants. Without a sword drawn or a single drop of blood spilled, the poet holds the reader rapt from beginning to end through a series of escalating discourse encounters that advance the narrative and increase the suspense, from the secret tryst at the stream through the private dispute with the queen to the public debate in the courts of law.

Lanval's relation to Breton themes is evident, although its precise connection to other *lais* of the period has long been disputed. The anonymous *lai* of *Graelent* shares enough elements to be considered another version of the same story—Sergent (119-133) details at great length and with almost bewildering complexity the torturous and contradictory history of the scholarly debate over the relationship between *Graelent* and *Lanval*, with its double-edged arguments and repeated reversals of position—while the anonymous *lais* of *Guingamour* and *Desiré* draw on

the identical rubric of a fairy and a knight who fall in love but whose continued relationship depends on the knight's discretion. Hoepffner suggests (57) that *Graëlent* shows some dependence on Marie, but that both may trace back to a common parentage in the Germanic legend of Galand the blacksmith. O'Hara Tobin concludes (32) that *Lanval* was likely the primary inspiration for *Graelent*, *Guingamor* and *Desiré* but that these *lais* incorporated other influences as well. William C. Stokoe Jr, among others, insists that aspects of *Graelent* represent the older version of the tale into which courtliness and the Arthurian material had not yet made their entrance (Sergent 123-4). In any event, the basic story of the fairy and the mortal who embark on a secret love affair is replete in Celtic tradition (Sergent 136-170; Cross 594-599). That Marie made use of an old Breton tale is confirmed not only by the abundant instances of this theme that have survived in Irish literature but also by its existence in an old Welsh story: "[E]ven among the wreckage of Welsh tradition proof exists that the fairy mistress in the world of mortals was known to the Celts of Britain" (Cross 599).

What is striking about Marie's version is just what we have come to expect: The primitive fabula that constitutes the basis of her translation has been layered with classical, courtly, Christian and feudal elements, not all of which can arrange themselves with any comfort in the Breton setting. Classical references are handled adroitly:

> La reïne Semiramis,
> quant ele ot unkes plus aveir
> e plus puissance e plus saveir,
> ne l'emperere Octovian
> n'eslijassent le destre pan. (*Lanval* 82-6)
>
> (Not queen Semiramis
> at the pinnacle of her wealth,
> power, and knowledge,

nor the emperor Augustus
could have afforded even the right-side panel [of her tent].)

Hoepffner reminds us (61) that though such comparisons may now seem banal, Marie was a pioneer in exploring and exploiting the rediscovered classical world and that she made use of its images with grace.

Moreover, the fact that *Lanval* unfolds in the court of King Arthur while the related anonymous *lais* take place in the court of some unnamed Breton king indicates that it was Marie's own idea, apparently drawing on Wace's interpretations of the *matière de Bretaigne*, to add her own *surplus de sen*, resetting the story of the *lai* and peopling it with illustrious figures such as Arthur, Gawain and Yvain. Hoepffner intimates that this may be the first use of the Arthurian material in medieval romance, an Arthurian novel "*avant la lettre*" (58). It is impossible not to see from the vantage point of eight centuries later how significant was this choice. Marie, if not the first, was undoubtedly one of the first to introduce Arthur and his knights to a reading public who to this day show no sign of wearying of the theme.

Arthur as a Welsh leader and warrior, perhaps even a semi-divine defender of the Britons, may have appeared in insular texts as early as the eighth or ninth centuries, traditions upon which Geoffroy de Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae* might have depended. Geoffroy depicted Arthur as one of the greatest of British rulers and began the transformation of Arthur from Celtic chieftain to chivalrous king (Paris "Études" 520-1). Wace translated Geoffroy's history almost two decades later, around 1155, and his *Geste des Bretons*, or the *Brut*, was responsible for restyling Arthur as the courtliest of knights and for introducing the Round Table and many other

significant details which became part of the Arthurian cycle. Marie, along with Chrétien, completed this transformation.

Classic tensions of the new theme of courtly love are present in this story. Lanval is invited to enjoy the pleasures of his fairy lady and accept her riches but only on the condition that he never reveal their relationship. Discretion, says Hoepffner, is one of the essential laws of courtly love and its infraction is unpardonable. "To boast about one's lady was, in the eyes of courtly society, one of the worst crimes that a lover could commit against the one who had granted him her favours: the authors [of the day] are unanimous in condemning it" (69).[99] While Marie clearly has sympathy for her sinning character here, she also seems to regard the fairy's incensed reaction as reasonable. Elsewhere (*Guigemar* 478-492) she has already censured as foolishness and degradation the purely sexual conquest of beauty for the sake of boasting—which is what courtly love is immediately reduced to if it becomes bandied about in conversation. Lanval's true crime was not his insult to the queen, which, as it turns out, was justified—his lady was indeed more beautiful than she—but his indiscretion in mentioning his lady. And so Lanval is saved from the consequences of his capital offense not by justice but by mercy and love.

The second aspect of courtly love that is explored in this poem is that of the love triangle between a knight, his lady and her husband. Guinevere the queen conceives a passion for Lanval and declares to him his good fortune in being permitted to devote himself to her. He must articulate his acknowledgement, both in compliment to the lady and in fealty to her husband, his

[99] "Se vanter de sa dame était aux yeux de la société courtoise un des pires crimes que l'amant pût commettre envers celle qui lui avait accordé ses faveurs. Les auteurs sont unanimes dans sa condemnation."

Leo Spitzer (30-31) argues that this is the fundamental message of the poem. See *Lanval* 322, 369, 379, 443, 640.

lord the king. This he cannot do, and a veritable battle of words ensues. "The scene is developed masterfully. The replies follow one upon the other, swift and brutal. The tone becomes more and more violent, the retorts more and more scathing"[100] (Hoepffner 63). With the queen's taunt that Lanval prefers boys to women,[101] Lanval takes the fatal step: "When he heard this, he was furious. He was quick to respond, but he spoke from his anger, a constant source of regret to him afterward" (*Lanval* 289-292; *Quant il l'oï, mult fu dolenz./Del respondre ne fu pas lenz;/tel chose dist par maltalent,/dunt il se repenti sovent*). This clash of weapons is entirely verbal, with nevertheless the thrusts, ripostes and wounds no less real than if they were physical. Now, not only has he transgressed the law of love (and his mistress's injunction) in boasting of his lady's superiority, but has also grossly insulted the queen, his proper object of devotion, and by association has insulted the king and even compromised his loyalty to him (see Kinoshita and McCracken 58).

The queen's reaction to Lanval's rejection is called the "Potiphar's wife" trope after the biblical story of Joseph and the wife of his master Potiphar (see *Genesis* 39). Joseph, great-grandson of the Israelite patriarch Abraham, was sold by his jealous brothers into slavery in Egypt. He became a trusted manager in the household of Potiphar but was continually importuned by Potiphar's wife to become her lover, which he consistently refused to do out of respect for his master and presumably under the restraint of his moral code. On one occasion, the wife made a passionate grab for him and was left holding the fleeing Joseph's clothing, which

[100] "La scène est conduite de main de maître. Les réponses se succèdent, rapides et brutales. Le ton devient de plus en plus violent, les ripostes se font de plus en plus cinglantes."

[101] The alleging of this preference is also construed as a reproach in the *Roman d'Eneas* 8565-8621 and 9119-9188.

she then used as evidence that he had attempted to rape her and had run, fearing discovery, only when she screamed. Potiphar had Joseph imprisoned.

This may be the only biblical subtext in Lanval, but the usual tensions between Breton custom, courtly love and Christian morality exist. The relationship between Lanval and his fairy mistress includes an unabashedly sexual aspect.[102] Cross commented a century ago that the fairy presents herself to Lanval "in shocking deshabille" (609):

> Ele just sur un lit mult bel
> (li drap valeient un chastel)
> en sa chemise senglement.
> Mult ot le cors bien fait e gent.
> Un chier mantel de blanc hermine,
> covert de purpre Alexandrine,
> ot pur le chalt sur li geté;
> tut ot descovert le costé,
> le vis, le col e la peitrine:
> plus ert blanche que flurs d'espine. (*Lanval* 97-106)
>
> (She was lying on a magnificent bed
> (the linen alone was worth the price of a castle)
> wearing only a chemise.
> Her body was well-formed and graceful.
> A precious cloak of white ermine,
> adorned with Alexandrian purple,
> she had cast over herself for warmth;
> but had entirely uncovered her side,
> face, neck and breast;
> her skin was whiter than hawthorn flowers.)

Following their exchanges of words of love, Lanval begins to reap the pleasures of their relationship:

> Delez li s'est el lit culchiez:
> Ore est Lanval bien herbergiez

[102] Bibring ("Le chevalier" 6) maintains that the sexual liaison is the central aspect of the relationship, constituting the knight's pleasure, his sexual identity, and the material manifestation of his psyche. This is typical of the role of fairies in the literature of the period; cf. Harf-Lancer *Fées* 17.

ensemble od li. La relevee
demura jusqu'a la vespree,
e plus i fust, se il poïst
e s'amie li cunsentist. (*Lanval* 153-8)

(He lay down in the bed at her side:
Now Lanval has found a good place to stay
with her. The afternoon
he spent there until evening,
and would have remained longer, had he been able
and had his lover permitted him.)

This behaviour was not unusual in the romances of the day and for that matter was not categorically censured in real life, but it did conflict with a ubiquitous Church's perspective on morality. It is probable that here we draw close to the translation of the story behind the Breton *lai*; Marie was simply preserving the plot movement of the primitive fabula in this encounter. No more was the queen's proposition an acceptable one according to Christian standards, although in this case it is the later fashion of courtly love which provokes the conflict; we are likely further from translation and closer to composition. Unlike many other *lais*, the moral incoherence in *Lanval* is not overt, as Marie avoids any particularly religious allusions.

Still, Marie does not leave courtly love without critique. Bibring notes ("Le chevalier" 6) that although the queen's expression of love to Lanval is in due courtly form, the offering itself is not: it was considered a bold and uncourtly usurpation of the masculine role for the woman to be the first to declare one's love. Why then would it be acceptable for the fairy to take the initiative but not for the queen?[103] I suggest that there are two reasons for this. One is that the fairy who comes into the world of mortals to seek her lover is an established Celtic theme and Marie

[103] Hoepffner (61) speculates that courtly love was still in its incipient stages at the time of the writing of *Lanval* and its precepts had not yet formalized into rules.

reproduces it here (see Cross 611-612).[104] The second reason is more subjective: in my opinion, Marie contrasts the behaviour of two queens and represents the one as truly courtly while the other has but a courtly veneer which dissipates the moment that she is thwarted. Somehow, in the masterful scene in which the fairy declares her love for Lanval, I as the reader accept that she has the perfect right to command his love, her manner exemplifying only grace, restraint and respect. The queen, on the other hand, leaves me perplexed at her bold, almost abrasive demand, and offended at her easy and arrogant assumption of acquiescence. It is the poet's pen that triumphs over literary constraints: though both women execute the same demand, the one is decorous and the other is not, because that is how Marie wants us to see them; in one case rising above and in the other falling beneath the standards of courtly love.

Feudality is central to *Lanval*, yet, like courtly love, its code is startlingly undermined. Lanval is an exemplary knight "for his merit, for his generosity, for his beauty, for his valour (*Lanval* 21-22; *pur sa valur, pur sa largesce,/pur sa bealté, pur sa pruësce*). A foreigner of royal descent, he has attached himself to the court of King Arthur. Yet when Arthur rewards his vassals (a ceremony described by Wace 10149-52, 10197-8), Lanval is forgotten, leaving him both dishonoured and destitute. The theme of the knight neglected by his lord serves here to motivate Lanval's dispirited wandering. Note that this aspect of the plot does not contradict feudalism but merely underscores its duties and lapses; Marie, like her audience, expects that Arthur will properly honour his vassals and is affronted when he fails to do so. In the same manner, Lanval's abandonment by his comrades, the king's over-zealous pursuit and the barons' restraint all speak to the very real processes and tensions of the feudal system in operation. Indeed, as Sergent (133)

[104] *Lanval* has elements both of Mélusinian (the fairy who enters the world of mortals to seek a lover) and Morganian (the fairy who draws a mortal lover into the world of fairy) tales; see Harf-Lancner *Fées* 9-10.

summarizes, this structure "more closely reproduces the customs of the twelfth-century Anglo-Norman world than the Celtic royal courts of Ireland or Wales as the documents represent them to us."[105] It would therefore be tempting to conclude that Marie, following her sources in Wace and importing the social realities of her own culture, simply retold the old Breton tale in an Arthurian vein while resetting the whole according to the conventions of Anglo-Norman and Angevin feudality. But she does not do this. The climax of the tale entirely overturns feudal priorities: Lanval, the sworn knight of his liege lord Arthur, abandons without word or leave his king, court and adopted country to follow his love into the fairy world of Avalon, from which he never returns. Marie clearly believes that true love, a more solemn priority than courtly love, is also a higher obligation even than chivalric fealty (see Kinoshita and McCracken 62-3, 75).

Through a three-stage layering of speech acts from intimate to private to public, from the pavillion of a supernatural queen to the castle of a very mortal one to the courts holding the power of life and death, Marie de France has constructed one of her richest tales. Retaining the original sense of wonder of the fairy come to search for Lanval and his ultimate destiny in a world beyond ours, as well as introducing themes from other ancient streams, she has again juxtaposed her own world, its motifs, expectations and values, against the early tradition, and once again with great success.

4. 7. The Need for Moderation: *Les Dous Amanz*.

Les Dous Amanz is the only *lai* whose *aventure* Marie overtly specifies as having an origin outside the Breton tradition:

Jadis avint en Normendie

[105] Arthur's court "rappelle davantage les moeurs du XIIe siècle en milieu anglo-normand que les cours royales celtiques d'Irlande ou du Pays de Galles, telles que les textes nous les font connaître."

> une aventure mult oïe
> de dous enfanz ki s'entramerent,
> par amur ambedui finerent.
> Un lai en firent li Bretun:
> des Dous Amanz reçut le nun.
> Veritez est qu'en Neüstrie,
> que nus apelum Normendie […] (*Les Dous Amanz* 1-8)
>
> (In olden time in Normandy there occurred
> an adventure that became well known
> of two young people who loved each other;
> through love, both came to their end.
> The Bretons made a *lai* about it:
> it was given the name *The Two Lovers*.
> It is true that in Neustrie,
> which we now call Normandy […])

It is perhaps for this reason that it shows almost no trace of the peculiarities which I am investigating in the *Lais*. That is to say, it belonged already to the tradition of northwestern Europe of which Marie and her people had been part for a millenium, and thus came more naturally to the pen of our author. It was, however, apparently an old and venerated tale which interested the Breton minstrels, and Marie insists twice (*Les Dous Amanz* 5, 254) that "the Bretons made a *lai* about it". Their version may well lie directly behind Marie's translation and adaptation: they seem to have introduced no peculiarly Celtic motifs, and what Marie brings to it in terms of contemporary culture is light.

Pîtres, the city where the story of the king and his lovely daughter takes place, still stands at the confluence of the Seine and the Andelle rivers; and above the valley rises a 138-metre peak capped by the priory of the Two Lovers, built in the twelfth century (Harf-Lancner *Lais* 169 n. 1). A case such as this, where Marie's information can be verified and turns out to be entirely reliable, induces us to be, as Sergent (193-4) observes, all the more inclined to trust Marie's

accuracy where supporting evidence has been lost in time. The likelihood is that Marie, native of "France" (the region around Paris) and inhabitant of England, actually travelled through this part of Normandy once or several times. The older name for Normandy, *Neüstrie*, (*Les Dous Amanz* 7-8) was probably gleaned from Wace (10319-10320).

The precise origin of the *aventure* has not been identified, but the theme of the father too attached to his daughter to let her marry and the setting of an ordeal to prove the lover's worthiness is widespread. While the tale has only a few points of resemblance with Ovid's *Piramus and Thisbe* (*Metamorphoses* IV. 55-169), it is possible that Marie was influenced by the latter and shaped her description of the capable and energetic heroine from Thisbe, who took the initiative at all times in her love affair. Marie's heroines are typically resourceful and embued with agency, and one is tempted to suppose that such a perspective would have appealed to her. Certainly, the girl in this adventure takes upon herself to conceive, motivate and execute all the important details, and gives up only when all hope is gone. On the other hand, this may simply be the representation of the girl's character as the old tale embodied it. It is also worth remembering that there are numerous examples of bold and decisive female characters in Celtic tradition (see Cross 611-612); this aspect may be the imprint of the Breton minstrel version.

Marie interprets the fatal decision of the youth to continue the climb without the aid of the potion under a rubric which could hardly fail to evoke reflections on courtly love:

> mes jo criem que poi ne li vaille,
> kar n'ot en lui point de mesure. (*Les Dous Amanz* 7-8)
>
> (but I fear that it can be of little use to him,
> for he had no moderation.)

We have already seen what havoc a lack of *mesure* can wreak in *Equitan* 17-20, where Marie has observed that passionate love, by its very nature without *mesure*, is in need of it if it is not to lead to mindless self-destruction. In *Yonec*, the fatal train of events is set in motion because the lady fails to obey her lover's warning to keep secret their love: "But be so discreet about it that we may not be troubled" (*Yonec* 205; *Mes tel mesure en esguardez,/que nus ne seium encumbrez*). Further, although not using the term *mesure*, *Chaitivel* 119 illustrates the concept by presenting the four suitors as allowing their passionate attachment to the lady to set aside any care for their own lives: "Very foolishly they let themselves go far from their companions […]" (*Trop folement s'abandonerent/luinz de lur gent* […]). This calls to mind *Eneas* 1881-2: "She no longer has any concern for her own life; love has no judgement nor prudence" (*de sa vie n'a el mes cure:/amors nen a sens ne mesure*, echoed in *Equitan* 17-20). The source of Marie's poem may have followed the identical plot line of the youth who refuses to take the potion, but her choice of the term *mesure* for her translation is significant.

We may only speculate (as does Hoepffner 128) that the potion of the original *aventure* was a marvelous one provided by a fairy or, perhaps in later versions, a magical one brewed by a sorceress, which Marie has attenuated into an herbal draught with remarkable restorative and nourishing properties. If she did alter the tale in this fashion, it is probably not in any dismissal of the *merveilleux*—*Guigemar*, *Bisclavret*, *Lanval* and *Yonec* make it abundantly clear that she does not feel compelled to rationalize away the supernatural—but in order to more pointedly hinge the plot upon the youth's lack of restraint.

Marie's touch, as far as it can be identified it in this narrative, is light; and the short and focused story, hardly detouring for feudality, courtly love, the *merveilleux* or religion, provokes almost none of the angularities saliently present in most of her poems.

4. 8. The Hand of God in Love, Vengeance and Destiny: *Yonec*.

Yonec, I maintain, is the *lai* in which my central argument, that Marie translated genuine and scarcely altered motifs and story-lines from Celtic tales and imported them into the literary and cultural framework of the feudal and courtly Christianity of her own day, is most clearly demonstrated. Those portions of the tale of *Yonec* which spring from Breton legend are scarcely disguised,[106] while the window-dressing of the twelfth-century stands in stark contrast. Not in spite of this, I insist, but because of it, is this Marie's most successful poem. Though lacking the rich classical ornamentation of *Guigemar* or *Lanval*, there is both a mystical Celtic presence that transports the reader into a shadowy realm on the border of another reality, and all the Anglo-Norman paraphernalia of châteaux, chivalry and sacred devotion at their romantic best. These two worlds, juxtaposed with a lack of polish which speaks authenticity far more than maladroitness, are evoked with a power and charm that are unequalled, in my opinion, in any other *lai*. For uniting them is a quintessentially human story of anguish, passion, and sympathy.[107]

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[106] Hoepffner (80-1) believes that "[i]t is to her credit that she reproduced here again the Breton tale in a form probably very like its early incarnation, that she preserved the fairy elements without seriously minimizing them", and that though distancing herself carefully from a too-decided position with regard to their reality (see footnote 67 above), "she presents, without any extensive modification of its essential character, the tale of the *merveilleux*" ("On lui fera un mérite d'avoir reproduit, ici encore, le conte breton dans une forme sans doute très voisine de la forme primitive, d'en avoir conservé les traits féeriques, sans trop les démarquer. […] elle présente, sans beaucoup le modifier dans son fond, le conte merveilleux […]".

[107] Cf. Hoepffner (81): "Though less brilliant than *Lanval*, the *lai* of *Yonec* proves to be significantly richer in true humanness; and in its veins flows a more lively and generous blood" ("Moins brillant que Lanval, le lai d'Yonec se révèle bien plus riche que lui de vérité humaine et dans ses veines coule un sang plus vif et plus généreux").

Yonec can be rightly called the counterpart to *Lanval* (Hoepffner 72), both of them tales of the *merveilleux*. Lanval, the disconsolate male protagonist, is sought out by a queenly fairy lover from the other world, and through his inability to conceal the joy that his love gives him loses her; while the miserable lady of *Yonec* is wooed by a supernatural king, and loses him through the same failure to hide the visible effects of love's pleasures. They differ in their dénouement, however: Lanval appears to regain his love, while Muldumarec's lady must rejoice only in the satisfaction of the revenge executed by the son she bore to him. Moreover, *Yonec* includes the odd and evidently transformed scene in which the lady pursues her lover out of her own world and into his.

Toponyms place *Yonec* unequivocally within *Bretaigne*, though some confusion has been introduced, either through Marie's uncertain grasp of the geography or from differing streams of tradition upon which she may have drawn. Sergent (223-5) examines the place-names with care: *Bretaigne* (*Yonec* 11) could refer either to Great or Little Britain; *Carüent* (*Yonec* 13) is readily identified with Caerwent in the south of Wales, but Marie positions it upon the river *Duëlas* (*Yonec* 15), which is in Armorican *Bretagne*. There was an ancient city on the Duelas called Caerleon (derived, according to Sergent 224, from the Roman *castra legionum*); we note that later in the tale (*Yonec* 473-4), Marie tells of "the feast of Saint Aaron, which used to be celebrated at Caerleon" (*la feste seint Aaron,/qu'on celebrot a Karlion*). It is possible that Marie obtained this information from Wace (5589-5590, 10211-227), who is referring to the Welsh Caerleon. Thus, by a confusion of place-names, Marie situates the story near Caerleon in Wales, which suits the other geographical indications of the tale, and ancient Caerleon in Armorican *Bretagne*, on the river Duelas. Sergent concludes:

> [T]his constitutes the most convincing proof that she was able to draw upon many versions of the Breton tales/*lais*, one situating the story in Brittany, another in Wales. The argument is thus strengthened that she did indeed hear the Breton *lais* performed by itinerant bards, at the English court and at the courts of counts, but that it is likely that she herself knew very little about the Armorican peninsula. (225)[108]

We may recall that with respect to the mention of Guigemar's sister Noguent (*Guigemar* 34-37; see 4.2 above), Brugger (236) concluded that it was likely a detail which, entirely irrelevant to the plot, indicated that Marie had heard the *lai* recounted in oral recitation or performance. In the same manner, the odd contradiction of geographical detail here supports the contention that Marie's basic stories constitute translations, whose unfolding may be manipulated and elaborated in the transfer but whose elements actually derive from older and perhaps multiple versions of the legends and stories of another people.

There is no reason to doubt the fabula's Celtic origin. The human-bird transformation is common to both Irish and Welsh mythology. Sergent (230-236) finds in the Irish story of the imprisoned girl *Mess Buachualla*, which may date as far back as the 9th century, the basic elements of *Yonec*: An imprisoned girl, whose lover reaches her in the form of a bird, impregnates her and prophesies about their son. Sergent (241) cites Cross's contention that in Irish tales, as in *Yonec*, there is no notion of the metamorphosis being due to an evil spell (like the much later French fairy tale *L'Oiseau bleu*) or to a druidic interference, but rather to the intrinsic nature and power of the shape-shifter. While there is not extant an identical tale from the earlier Celtic tradition—that is, Marie was not writing a later version of, say, *Mess Buachualla*—

[108] "[O]n a là la meilleure preuve qu'elle a pu utiliser plusieurs versions de contes/lais bretons, l'un situant l'affaire en Bretagne, l'autre au Pays de Galles. Il se confirme ici qu'elle a pu entendre des lais bretons racontés par des musiciens-chanteurs itinérants, à la cours d'Angleterre et aux cours comtales, mais qu'elle n'a connu sans doute que bien peu la péninsule armoricaine elle-même."

it is nevertheless clear that these elements were found in Celtic legends well before the *Lais* of Marie, reinforcing the supposition that she reproduced/transformed the *contes* of the minstrels as she claimed.

Perhaps more remarkably than any other of the *Lais*, *Yonec* is imbued with the *merveilleux*. Marie reveals that the story unfolds in *Bretaigne* "in days of old" ("*jadis*", *Yonec* 11), the very place and time where one might expect wonders to have taken place. Yet the female protagonist, in a soliloquy within the story, longs for the marvelous and apparently bygone "days of old" ("*jadis*", *Yonec* 96):

> Mult ai oï sovent cunter
> que l'em suleit jadis trover
> aventures en cest païs,
> ki rehaitouent les pensis.
> Chevalier trovoënt puceles
> a lur talent, gentes e beles,
> e dames truvoënt amanz
> beals e curteis, pruz e vaillanz,
> si que blasmees n'en esteient
> ne nuls fors eles nes veeient.
> Se ceo puet estre ne ceo fu,
> se unc a nul est avenu,
> Deus, ki de tut a poësté,
> il en face ma volenté! (*Yonec* 95-108)
>
> (Many times have I heard it told
> that it was customary to experience in olden times
> in this land remarkable happenings
> that rejoiced the heart.
> Knights would find damsels
> to their liking, noble and lovely;
> and ladies would find lovers,
> handsome and courtly, gallant and brave;
> and therein they would incur no reproach
> for none but they perceived them.
> If it can be, or ever was
> that such an adventure happened to anyone,

may God, who has power over all things,
grant my desire in this!)

This is surely an odd and delightful insertion of the translator/poet into the text: it is not the lady who longs for the days of wonders, for she lives in them!—it is Marie who unleashes the poetic flow of her own fascination with the Breton *merveilleux*, and in a masterful feat of narration transports herself and her listeners into the "now" of the narrative where a miraculous event overtakes them just as it may have done to those of former times.

The imprisoned lady is aware that a supernatural reality was once part of the ordinary culture of the land in which she lives, and she has a focused notion as to the aspect for which she longs: the valiant knight-lover who will be visible only to her. The transformation between bird and man is, as noted above, common in Celtic tradition. The hawk-man Muldumarec exemplifies all three strands of what became the medieval literary fairy tradition: he pronounces portents over the child to be born (*fata*, the Fates, or the fairy-godmother motif); he enters the world of mortals to take a lover (the *Mélusinian* motif, after the pattern of the fairy Mélusine); and he draws the lover back into his own world (the *Morganian* motif, named after the fairy queen of Avalon). The former is the inheritance of Antiquity, the latter two are a product of the erotic imagination of the Middle Ages drawn from older popular and folk tradition (Harf-Lancer *Fées* 9-10). All three of these motifs appear, though much less markedly, in *Guigemar* and *Lanval*: A prophecy reveals Guigemar's fate, after which he is drawn by a magic ship to the land of his destined lover, a land that was probably the fairy otherworld in the primitive fabula and whence the lady emerges afterward to be reunited with him; while Lanval's lover comes from fairy-land to seek him out, foretells the limits of their relationship, and finally draws him away to her own

land. Both *Guigemar* and *Lanval* are situated within the Arthurian world, and the fact that *Yonec* is placed into no such framework accentuates the impression that here Marie's translation is even closer to the original *conte*.

There is an additional sequence (*Yonec* 341-458) that must retain a strong element of the primitive fairy tale: the lady follows her fatally-wounded lover back to his country through a tunnel. She leaps from her window, perhaps in an attempt to commit suicide, for the obstacle has heretofore been sufficient to prevent her escape—it involves a fall of twenty feet: "it is a wonder that she does not kill herself" (*Yonec* 342; *c'est merveille qu'el ne s'ocist*). The trail of blood leads her to a hill in which there is an entrance into a dark tunnel; she goes straight through and emerges into an open prairie, in the middle of which is located a walled city with magnificent buildings all of gleaming silver. Upon entering the city, she sees no one. She finds the palace and at last comes upon her dying lover in a room adorned with gold and blazing candles. After receiving his prophecy of the vengeance that will be enacted through their son, his magic ring which will prevent any censure on the part of her husband, his sword, and a cloak, she departs and returns through the tunnel to her home. The tunnel seems to represent the passage to another world. A subterranean home of the gods was widely present in Celtic legend, as was the idea of a land of the gods in a great open country beyond the sea (see Sergent 228-9; 250-1; the latter concept may survive in vestigial form in *Guigemar*); the lady's exit from the hill to find a city on the open plain may be the admixture of both of these motifs. Like the confusion of toponyms, this commingling of Breton traditions suggests that Marie drew on more than one source for her translation. It is noteworthy that the placement of Muldumarec's domain within the fairy otherworld disappears in the later part of the story, when the lady and her family travel by road to

Caerleon and discover the people of Muldumarec's kingdom near that city; as the tale progresses, Marie clearly becomes preoccupied with the theme of vengeance and justice at the expense of the *merveilleux*. This mirrors the almost complete disappearance of the *merveilleux* in the second half of *Guigemar* and shows that Marie, unlike some of her contemporaries and imitators who exploited supernatural elements for effect, tended to engage most fully with the human side of her narrative.

The rest of the story plays out the destined vengeance, a vengeance finally executed beyond the life of the lovers by their son Yonec, thus weaving intricately an otherwise straightforward quest for true love into a rich and complex tale of vindication in this world and the next that overturns contemporary norms and expectations. Within this short narrative are comprised some 25 years of life, death, destiny and continuity, the power of true love, the melding of here with other, now with eternity. This complexity is, I suggest, enhanced both by Marie's masterful poetic treatment of the translated material and by those perspectives which she has layered on to the original Breton *conte*.

We first see this conscious layering in the prayer of the lady, discussed above; that is, her desire to experience the marvels of olden days even though, according to the setting of the story, she must herself have been living in those olden days. Thence are added further accoutrements of twelfth-century Anglo-Norman life to the Celtic adventure. One such layering is a light literary touch, almost incidental, of triple gradation.[109] After wandering about the deserted fairy city, the lady enters the palace and comes first upon a room with a sleeping knight, then a second chamber, again with a knight asleep, before finding in the third room her lover at the point of

[109] Hoepffner (65-66) finds the roots of the literary device in the old *Tristan*.

death. In *Lanval* 474-608, the triple gradation is used for increasing the sense of grandeur when the fairy queen, after the arrival of two ranks of stunningly beautiful handmaidens, finally herself appears. Here its application is less obvious and at first sight seems almost obtrusive. However, it adds to the sense of disturbing otherworld reality and augments the suspense as the empty city yields to two solitary sleeping knights and then to the revelations of the dying lover, finally to break into the peal of bells and the chorus of lament which the lady hears rising from Muldumarec's stricken people as she hastens back along her way.

Motifs typical of what we have been loosely calling "courtly love" are not absent from the narration and must represent Marie's cultural-literary dressing upon the translated core. The trope of the *mal-mariée* (cf. *Guigemar*, *Aüstic*, *Milun*, *Chievrefueil*) receives all the brush-strokes of contemporary literature: the imprisoned young wife, victim of an older, jealous husband, imprisoned in silence and spied on by the elderly female relative; the woman whose beauty and passionate sexuality is thrown away until they should be coveted and enjoyed by a valiant knight. In her successful love affair, her sexual abandon is celebrated, not censured:

> Sun ami vuelt suvent veeir
> e sa joie de lui aveir;
> des que ses sire s'en depart,
> e nuit e jur e tost e tart
> ele l'a tut a sun plaisir.
> Or l'en duinst Deus lunges joïr! (*Yonec* 223-8)
>
> (She wants to see her lover often
> and to have her joy in him;
> the moment her lord departs,
> both night and day, both early and late
> she has him altogether at her pleasure.
> Now, may God grant that she enjoy this for a long time!)

Clearly, Marie did not prevaricate over the rightness of sexual pleasure: "in her *lais*," affirms Bibring, "the passion of the flesh, if it is performed from love and with enjoyment, is noble."[110]

As usual, however, Marie is not content to reproduce a literary model. In *Yonec*, the lady's hunger for sex reveals a deeper and more abiding hunger for a meaningful relationship on every level. In point of fact, Muldumarec and the lady appear to have founded just such a relationship in what turned out to be their very brief time together, whose devotion, virtually religious in its commitment, endured some fifteen to twenty years after the death of the fairy king, and indeed survived the death of both partners in the destiny of their son. Marie overturns the stereotype, common in some of the *troubadour* poems and within certain literary streams of her day, of the insatiable woman. Rather, the yearning and the appetite of the lady are trumpeted as manifestations of an essential power for love, truth and justice that long outlives its physical expression.[111]

What is censured, however, is the lady's inability to keep to the *mesure*. Marie does not suggest that she ought to rein in her passion but that she must be cautious in order that they not be caught (*mes tel mesure en esguardez/que nus ne seium encombrez*, *Yonec* 205-6). As in *Equitan*, it is love's effect on prudent behaviour that leads to ruin (cf. also *Guigemar* 213; *Lanval*

[110] "dans ses *Lais*, la passion charnelle, si elle est exécutée par amour et avec plaisir, est noble" (Bibring "Scènes" paragraph 2 non-paginated).

[111] See Bibring "Scènes" paragraph 13 (non-paginated): "*Yonec* is the *lai* that explores feminine desire since it acknowledges the essential, existential force which bursts forth from woman" ("*Yonec* est le lai du désir féminin puisqu'il reconnaît la force essentielle, existentielle, qui jaillit de la femme").

Gardès-Madray and Tronc (373) see in *Yonec* two criteria that they find characteristic of Marie: a respect for personal choice and depth of feeling regardless of legal and societal standards, which conforms to the principles of courtly love; and a love that can only be fully achieved outside of the possiblilities of this life. I continue to argue that trying to establish criteria that are "ever-present features in Marie's work" ("critères constants chez Marie de France") results in oversimplification; however, I am impressed by Gardès-Madray and Tronc's analysis which demonstrates the tension between Marie's use of courtly parameters and her presentation of a quest for "a love indissociable from death: the desire will only be fulfilled, then, in a world that escapes from the 'here and now', a place where Celtic mythology and the Christian supernatural come together" (374: "un amour indissociable de la mort: l'accomplissement du désir s'effectuera donc dans un monde qui échappe au *hic et nunc* et où se rejoignent mythologie celtique et merveilleux chrétien").

143-150; *Les Dous Amanz* 188-9; *Chaitivel* 119). Courtly love did not condemn unbounded passion or obsessive sexual desire but judged without mercy its vaunting, its cheapening, and its discovery (Hoepffner 69, 78). In this respect, Marie here reproduces the literary convention of her day.

The Christian religion abuts with jarring incongruity against the flow of this tale. In the introductory lines it is declared that the person who gave the beautiful girl to such an old man "committed a great sin" (*Yonec* 28; *grant pechié fist*), which implies not just a social crime but a moral and religious one.[112] The lady's soliloquy echoes this sentiment:

> Maleeit seient mi parent
> e li altre comunalment,
> ki a cest gelus me donerent
> e a sun cors me mariërent! (*Yonec* 85-88)
>
> (Cursed be my parents
> together with the others
> who gave me to this jealous man
> and paired his body in marriage with mine!)

Similarly, a curse is pronounced by the imprisoned wife in *Guigemar* 348 against the priest who guards her. As in that *lai*, so here one of the obstacles to true love is presented as an overtly, and possibly overly, religious person: The elderly sister-in-law who acts as keeper over the young woman goes off to another room to read her psalter (*Yonec* 59-64), finally allowing the girl a moment to pray and in fact to receive the answer to her prayer. The implication is that the trappings of religion oppose love and their removal opens the way for it. It cannot be concluded from this, however, that Marie is against true religion, as she seems to admire, here and elsewhere, an honest faith in God. What is more, the removal of religion's external constraints

[112] *Pechié* can signify "wrongdoing" or "disaster", but the usual connotations are moral and religious (cf. Studer and Waters 433; Greimas 448).

releases the sufferer to offer a cry to God from the heart, what may be Marie's conception of true religion. In any case, though compassionate Christian thinkers of the twelfth century might regret the fate of the *mal-mariée*, Christianity nowhere condemned arranged marriages nor those with a disparity of age or temperament or a lack of passionate desire.[113] It certainly did not justify adultery on the basis of ill-suited marriage partners (L'Hermite-Leclercq 236-7).

The lady offers her earnest prayer for a secret lover, an otherworldly knight who would be invisible to eyes other than hers, to satisfy the sexual and emotional longings unfulfilled by an elderly and insensitive husband: "May God, who has power over all things, grant my desire in this!" (*Yonec* 107-8; *Deus, ki de tut a poësté,/ il en face ma volenté!*).[114] This is a mixture of an older Celtic morality and a more recently-arrived Christian spirituality. The response to the prayer is remarkable not only because it implicates the Christian God in providing an adulterous lover for the lady,[115] but also because it juxtaposes two foreign systems: The lover furnished by Christian providence is a Celtic fairy king and shape-shifter. God, in Marie's version, is master over the Breton world of marvels, and its powers work in harmony with his own.

The hawk-man has loved only the lady for a long time and has come to claim her; he had awaited only her prayer (*Yonec* 129-138; cf. *Lanval* 110-116). The lady interposes a proviso: he must declare his belief in God (*Yonec* 143). This he is more than willing to do:

> "Dame", fet il, "vus dites bien.
> Ne voldreie pur nule rien

---

[113] Love between partners is indeed fundamental in the Christian concept of marriage (see for example *Ephesians* 5:33; *Titus* 2:4), but as discussed above (Chapter 2.8, a), love as a fervent commitment to the well-being of another is not to be confused with the twelfth-century courtly definition of love as a maddening sexual obsession.

[114] Already seen in *Guigemar* and *Le Fraisne* is the expectation that God responds favourably to fervent prayers which grant adulterous lovers their satisfaction; see *Guigemar* 200-203, 333-4, 513; *Le Fraisne* 162-4, 171-4 and the discussion on these passages above.

[115] See *Guigemar* 200-203 and comments above, 4. 2.

que de mei i ait achaisun
mescreance ne suspesçun.
Jeo crei mult bien al creatur,
ki nus geta de la tristur
u Adam nus mist, nostre pere,
par le mors de la pume amere;
il est e iert e fu tuz jurs
vie e lumiere as pecheürs.
Se vus de ceo ne me creez,
vostre chapelain demandez!
Dites que mal vus a suzprise,
si volez aveir le servise
que Deus a el mund establi,
dunt li pecheür sunt guari.
La semblance de vus prendrai:
le cors Damedeu recevrai,
ma creance vus dirai tute.
Ja de ceo ne serez en dute!" (*Yonec* 149-168)

(My lady", he says, "that is well spoken.
I would not wish that for any reason
there should be occasion
to suspect me of unbelief.
I believe with all my heart in the Creator,
who rescued us from the sad state
into which our father Adam placed us
by biting into the bitter apple;
he is and will be and was for ever
life and light for sinners.
If you do not believe me in this,
call for your chaplain!
Say that an illness has come upon you,
therefore you wish to have the service
that God has established for the world,
through which sinners are restored.
I shall take your likeness:
I shall receive the body of the Lord God,
all my creed I shall declare before you.
Then you will have no doubt about it!")

The lady agrees and this plan is followed, entirely convincing her of the acceptability of her lover. Immediately thereafter, she lays down with him in laughter and play and intimate

conversation. "Never have I seen such a beautiful couple!" exclaims Marie (*Yonec* 196; *unkes si bel cuple ne vi*). Even the striking proximity of the mass to adulterous sex in *Guigemar* (465-534) is in no way as explicitly underscored as it is here.

Harf-Lancer (*Marie* 191 n. 5; *Fées* 381-409) posits that medieval tales tended to christianize the fairies of older folk origin. In this case, it is an attenuated christianization (Harf-Lancer *Fées* 386) since the fairy world has not been fully integrated into Christian cosmology; rather, the fairy, who still belongs to his own ancient pagan sphere, acknowledges the sovereign power and truth of the Christian God. The reception of the Mass, as noted in *Guigemar*, was considered proof that a supernatural being was not devilish but acceptable to God, and thus a suitable lover for a Christian (Harf-Lancner *Fées* 391-2). It is significant that Marie was among the very first to adapt the Celtic fairy to Christian sensibilities, and this suggests just how close she was to her Breton source.

As the lady has prayed that God would bring her a lover, so the narrator adds her prayer that God would prolong her sexual and emotional pleasures: "Now, may God grant that she enjoy this for a long time!" (Yonec 228; *Or l'en duinst Deus lunges joïr!*). This sort of enjoyment, even within the bounds of marriage, was strictly opposed to the long-standing position of the Church; severe thinkers allowed sexual intercourse only for the purpose of reproduction, and even moderate theologians who approved of sexual intercourse within marriage as an expression of conjugal love nevertheless stopped far short of promoting unrestrained gratification since it was considered a mark of a fallen, perverse nature (see Cartlidge 30). Here the prayer is even more singular in that it is on behalf of an adulterous liaison. Marie goes far beyond Andreas Capellanus's qualified "courtly" position that adulterous devotion is tolerated by God since it

exalts love (I.vi. 472-3); she represents the pleasures of adulterous sex as a positive divine blessing. It is one, moreover, that extends from the spiritual into the physical realm: The very day following her encounter with the hawk-man, the lady, long languishing and sickly, arises in perfect health (*Yonec* 217). It is, of course, this notable transformation in her well-being that betrays her.

The final clash with Christianity is the poem's attitude toward justice and revenge. The biblical book of *Proverbs* 6:27-35 grants to a husband the right to exact vengeance upon the man who has committed adultery with his wife. This rather severe stance tended to be upheld in medieval literature, which presented the wronged husband as justified in putting both his wife and her lover to death (Duby 220). The situation is quite the opposite in *Yonec*. Here it is the husband who, in seeking to catch and punish his wife's lover, has acted wrongfully, and God himself ordains and performs the penalty of death upon him:

> "Beals fiz", fet ele, "avez oï
> cum Deus nus a amenez ci!
> C'est vostre pere ki ci gist,
> que cist villarz a tort ocist.
> Or vus comant e rent s'espee;
> jeo l'ai asez lung tens guardee." (*Yonec* 533-538)
>
> ("My dear son", she says, "you have heard
> how God has led us here!
> It is your own father who lies here,
> whom this old man killed unjustly.
> Now, to you I hand over and entrust his sword;
> I have kept it long enough.")

After revealing the whole story, the mother collapses, dead. Yonec then cuts off his step-father's head: "with the sword of his father he thus avenged both him and his mother" (Yonec 549-550; *De l'espee ki fu sun pere/a dunc vengié lui e sa mere*). As in *Guigemar* and *Le Fraisne*, God is at

work in destiny to bring about justice for the honourable lovers. Not Chrétien de Troyes nor Thomas d'Angleterre went so far as to attribute to God the design and execution of a vengeance killing (Hoepffner 79). The penultimate movement of the poem, just before Yonec is made king in the place of his father, is that his mother is buried beside the body of her lover, and Marie offers her prayer: "May God be gracious to them!" (*Yonec* 556; *Deus lur face bone merci!*). As discussed in *Guigemar* (4.2 above; see Ginnel 211-214; Kinoshita 40, 53 n. 20), old Celtic sexual morality and tradition differed markedly from Christian: Multiple partners, successive partners, marriage to the captured wife of an enemy and a greater freedom of choice for women were aspects of a cultural and religious system that had its own particular parameters. Moreover, ancient Celtic society inherited from its tribal past the notion that wrongs against individuals were as much sins to be punished through private vengeance as they were crimes to be regulated by community authority (*Ancient Laws* cxxii). The God of vengeance in *Yonec* would be more suitably a Celtic than a Christian one.

Marie does not automatically side with the woman, the lovers, the Church, or societal or moral convention. Her position appears to be conditioned rather by the nature of the *conte* itself and by her own ardent sympathies: with the *mal-mariée*, with true and noble lovers, with justice as she sees it, with true religion—again, as she sees it. In *Yonec*, it appears that the original tale prevails and Marie reproduces in an arguably faithful translation both the plot and the mores of another place and time. Her own cultural and literary additions are effected with a sort of violence to the original story and its morality, forming an incomplete cultural translation that shows the marks of both the origin and the destination. Rather than sink the tale into incoherence, this process highlights its authenticity, deepens the resonance of sympathy with

problematic characters and actions, and causes *Yonec* to stand out, even in a collection so illustrious as the *Lais*.

4. 9. Neighbourly Love, Courtly Love and Christian Love Collide: *Aüstic*.

Aüstic[116] is one of the rare *lais* whose title is in the Breton language and is the only *lai* for which Marie includes the title in three languages, Breton, French and English:[117]

> Une aventure vus dirai,
> dunt li Bretun firent un lai.
> L'Aüstic a nun, ceo m'est vis,
> si l'appelent en lur païs;
> ceo est russignol en Franceis
> e *nihtegale* en dreit Engleis. (Aüstic 1-6)
>
> (I shall tell you an adventure
> about which the Bretons composed a *lai*.
> It is called the *Aüstic*, I believe,
> thus it is named in their country;
> that is "nightingale" [*rossignol*] in French
> and *nihtegale* in plain English.)

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[116] See Harf-Lancer *Lais* 211; Sergent 272: This *lai* appears in Old French only in the manuscript Harley 978, and there the Breton word is represented as *le laustic* with either two or three syllables (*laustic*, *laüstic*); Warnke's edition of the text established the separation of the article to restore the Breton *aüstik*.

[117] There are but two occasions when Marie gives an English translation: here and *Chievrefueil* 115-116. She also gives the English place-name in *Milun* 9 and *Chievrefueil* 16, *Suhtwales* (South Wales). *Aüstic* and *Bisclavret* are the only *lais* titled in Breton. Marie also gives the alternate Breton title for *Eliduc*, *Guildeluëc ha Guilliadun*, (*Eliduc* 22). In the final analysis, although Marie's work is an interlingual translation into a multilingual society and she is clearly aware of the other languages involved, references to them are infrequent.

Oddly, these rare forays into multilingualism have impressed scholars beyond measure. Khanmohamadi (52) speaks of "Marie's numerous and otherwise unmotivated translations of French and Celtic words into English in the Lais"; McCracken (207) feels that Marie "frequently demonstrates her linguistic knowledge by indicating the English or Breton translations of French words she uses"; and Fisher (205) declares: "These are poems acutely aware of linguistic difference, a number of them even bearing multiple titles in several languages." Elsewhere, she argues somewhat enigmatically that Marie practically ignores English, which "suggests a deliberate blindness indicative of unease" (203).

Despite the impression that some readers seem to have obtained of a significant multilingualism in the *Lais*, the actual tokens are so sparse that any conclusions either about Marie's linguistic mastery or linguistic hostility must be tentative at best. In any event, Marie was in the vanguard of valorizing translation from vernacular sources and moving away from Latin; Collette (375) observes astutely: "The ultimate linguistic distinction of late medieval England is not English from French, so much as an alignment of English with French as vernaculars that stand in opposition to Latin."

Characteristically, Marie declares that the story was made into a *lai* by the Bretons (*Aüstic* 2, 159), and the tale takes place in the Armorican town of St Malo (*Aüstic* 7). Beyond this, we must confess that there is nothing distinctly Celtic at all about this little adventure. Nor are there any traces of the tale in Celtic tradition; the plot appears in western European guises but always later than Marie and suggesting the influence of her poem (Sergent 272-3), although lacking its charm and subtlety (Hoepffner 140).[118] In any event, the trail begins at Marie and it may be best to content ourselves with her claim that she obtained the story from oral performance; she may have been the first to record it in written form.[119]

If the story is a simple one and exemplifies the patterns of courtly love—the married lady adored by a chivalrous knight and persecuted by a jealous husband, the remains of love's memory enshrined as a sacred relic—there is reason to suspect that Marie has subtly undermined the schema as she does in *Equitan*, though with a lighter, more humorous touch. It is true that the lady's husband will reveal himself to be suspicious, jealous and brutal; but this is only after the lady has given him some provocation. Indeed, at the beginning of the tale we are told that because of the goodness of the husband and his bachelor neighbour, the town had the finest reputation (*Aüstic* 7-12); we can hardly sympathize with the lady, at any rate at the commencement of the narrative, as an oppressed *mal-mariée* (see Fisher 210). This is the first instance of subversion of the tenets of courtly love. And surely there is some cynical humour, even bathos, in the lady's reasons for falling in love:

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[118] There are likely, as Murray (7-11) suggests, descriptive and motivic influences from Ovid's Philomela (*Metamorphoses* VI) such as the nightingale and the cloistered lady sending out her story woven upon a cloth. The stories, however, are fundamentally dissimilar.

[119] Freeman (867) makes a delightful analogy between the translation of the silent bird into the speaking cloth and finally into the jewelled gold box and the translation of the *aventure* into oral performance and finally into the permanence of a new genre, the romance narrative, Marie's *lai* itself.

> Li altre fu uns bacheliers,
> bien coneüz entre ses pers,
> de pruësce, de grant valur
> e volontiers faiseit honur.
> Mult turneiot e despendeit
> e bien donot ceo qu'il aveit.
> La femme sun veisin ama.
> Tant la requist, tant la preia
> e tant par ot en lui grant bien
> qu'ele l'ama sur tute rien,
> tant pur le bien qu'ele en oï,
> tant pur ceo qu'il ert pres de li. (*Aüstic* 17-28)
>
> (The other was a bachelor,
> well known among his peers,
> a knight of valour, of great merit
> and ever willing to act with honour.
> He was always jousting and spending freely
> and giving liberally of his possessions.
> He fell in love with his neighbour's wife.
> So often did he ask, so often did he plead,
> and so much was there in him to admire greatly
> that she began to love him above all else,
> as much for the good that she heard about him
> as for the fact that he lived so near to her.)

The proximity of the knight, a flippant and shallow reason for falling in love, is the second twist on the passion of the *troubadours* and courtly love, which celebrated *amor de lohn*, love separated by great distance (cf. Murray 7; Andreas Capellanus I.vi. 364). Marie seems to play ironically with this notion by underscoring the gulf set between the pair by the separating wall (*Aüstic* 55-56). The nightly rendezvous and the nocturnal bird song also reverses the *troubadour* theme of the *aube*, or dawn, in which the trysts of the lady and her lover are interrupted by the coming of day, often signalled by the singing of the birds (Sergent 273-4). Then, there is a transgression of marital faith which has a price—death, enacted upon the bird rather than the lovers; as they do not actually consummate their relationship sexually, Marie is somewhat lenient

towards them, but clearly less sympathetic than in other *lais*. It also appears that the knight is something less than an ardent admirer since he accepts without protest the end of their relationship, and one may detect some sarcasm in Marie's observation, "he was no ill-bred nor sluggish fellow" (*Aüstic* 148; *ne fu pas vileins ne lenz*), regarding his rather passive preparation of a golden reliquary for the nightingale's remains. In the end, the *troubadour* celebration of passionate sexual obsession has overturned a marriage, a trusting fellowship of two warriors and presumably the reputation of an entire town, a sad commentary on the ultimate results of courtly devotion. It is as though the basic (love?) story of the Breton *lai* has been interpreted within the framework of courtly love and then reinterpreted by Marie as a critique. As in *Equitan*, she follows the principles, discussed with delight in the social gatherings of the aristocracy, to their logical conclusions in real life.

K. Sarah-Jane Murray (2) sees in *Aüstic* an even deeper critique, in which courtly love is set against the ethics of Christianity. We have observed in *Guigemar* and *Yonec* that Marie sees an exaggerated or empty piety as a wicked hindrance to true love, but it has also been clear that she evidences a firm belief in God's benevolent providence and even interference on behalf of truth and justice, layering upon the Celtic tradition a sincere respect for the Christian deity derived from her own society and, quite probably, from her own faith. It cannot be coincidence that "He loved his neighbour's wife" (*Aüstic* 23; *La femme sun veisin ama*) so obviously calls to mind, and so blatantly contradicts, one of the biblical Ten Commandments, "You must not covet your neighbour's wife" (*Exodus* 20:17). Since the Ten Commandments are "arguably the most famous and widely read passage of the Old Testament, [this] creates an important ethical dimension to the story" (Murray 2). Moreover, Jesus summarized all the commandments into

two: "Love the Lord your God", and "Love your neighbour as yourself" (*Matthew* 22:37-39). Here, Murray (5) discerns "a witty and fabliau-esque sense of humor underlying the whole passage. The lady's love for the neighboring knight effectively and facetiously mocks and perverts the Gospel commandment". It has not been my contention that adultery in the *lais* constitutes Marie's own interpolation but rather reproduces in translation the underlying fabula, very possibly a Celtic one, with its differing morality; still, it is the case that Marie at times sympathizes with the adulterous lovers and even declares that the Christian God is on their side. Love is right, even holy, when it is passionate, fitting, faithful and honourable, regardless of the marital situation of the lovers; and love is wrong, both morally and religiously, when it is unsuitable, self-seeking and unjust, even within a legitimized marriage. Murray (5) sees this story rather as "a critique of selfish love in contrast with the ideal of selfless love in other *lais.*"

Additional biblical contradictions are present. The lady, confronted by her husband, lies to him (*Aüstic* 83-90), contravening another of the Ten Commandments, "Do not give false evidence" (*Exodus* 20:16), while the husband's anger (*Aüstic* 92, 114-120) transgresses numerous biblical injunctions (e.g., *Matthew* 5:22; *James* 1:19-20). Murray (11) concludes that the story taken from the *lai*, "composed for a medieval and Christian audience, is filtered through the omnipresent biblical narrative", and illustrates the message of *James* 1:14-15: "Temptation comes when anyone is lured and dragged away by his own desires; then desire conceives and gives birth to sin, and sin when it is full-grown breeds death."

After the tensions and dramas of the previous *lais*, *Aüstic* may be considered a story in which almost nothing happens, a little comedy of manners which intrigued the Bretons enough to memorialize it in a *lai*. We can hardly doubt that Marie's poetic translation retains and probably

augments the charm of the original. But it may be the humorous, satirical and borderline scathing critiques of courtly love and its underlying ethics that elevate Marie's version into an enduring tiny masterpiece.

4. 10. A Family Reunited: *Milun*.

Not many of the characters in the *lais* are named, and *Milun* stands out even in that rarified collection in that "Milun" is the only personal name appearing in the entire *lai*. It is arguably a form of Old Breton or Old Cornish *milin* or Old Welsh *melen*, "yellow" (Sergent 279). It is also close to the Latin *miles*, "soldier", which is attested in medieval South Wales as a proper name (Sergent 280). Like the preceding *lai*, *Aüstic*, the character and the setting of *Milun* are Celtic but there are no distinctively Celtic features in the narrative. Marie does not specify that it was a Breton composition, although that is true for fully half of the *lais* (cf. *Le Fraisne*, *Bisclavret*, *Yonec*, *Chaitivel*, *Chievrefueil*); in most cases, it is evident by names, setting, themes and plot that the *aventure* is of Celtic origin. The geographical world of *Milun* is unquestionably Breton, but its cultural world seems firmly to be the feudal and courtly one of the Anglo-Norman twelfth century.

The provenance of the story is not known. It shares characteristics with other *lais*, such as love that is born, negociated and accepted before the lovers even meet (as in *Equitan*, *Le Fraisne*, and *Eliduc*), and the lady who takes the initiative in the relationship (cf. *Lanval*, *Eliduc*). The pattern of *Le Fraisne* is especially analogous: a child who must be hidden to save the reputation of the mother, the baby wrapped in rich cloth and later identified by a gold ring, the joyous reunification of the child with the parents, a love affair happily ending in marriage. The theme of the armed confrontation between father and son goes back to Greek legend, though

Marie may have drawn upon a more recent source, *Gormont et Isembart*, a *chanson de geste* from around the beginning of the twelfth century. The battlefield of the earlier tale has become the chivalric tournament field in the *lai* (Hoepffner 117).

Marie explains that the story she will tell lies behind a *lai* which was composed by bards of long ago:

> Ici comencerai Milun
> e musterrai par brief sermun
> pur quei e coment fu trovez
> li lais ki issi est numez.[…]
> De lur amur et de lur bien
> firent un lai li anciën (*Milun* 5-8, 531-2)
>
> (At this point I shall begin *Milun*
> and I shall explain in a few words
> why and how it was composed,
> the *lai* that is thus named. […]
> About their love and their happiness
> the people of old made a *lai*)

This is an example of the poet's frequent archaeological bent, in which the *lai* itself (which may have been a narrative song or simply an instrumental composition) is her point of departure to unearth the story that gave rise to it. If we sense that we may have a translation which remains close to the Celtic source in *Bisclavret* or *Yonec*, for example, we have in *Milun*, *Chaitivel*, *Chievrefueil* and *Eliduc* not only the *conte* which retails the *aventure* but also the circumstances of its conception as a musical performance. Moreover (as discussed in Chapter 3.3 above), the beginning of *Milun* provides a valuable insight into Marie's perception of her connection with the source material and her views on translation and creativity:

> Ki divers cuntes vuelt traitier,
> diversement deit commencier
> e parler si raisnablement

> que il seit plaisible a la gent. (*Milun* 1-4)
>
> (Whoever wishes to present a variety of tales
> must begin them in various ways,
> and put such thought into the way they are told
> that the result gives people pleasure.)

Marie is clear that a translator who is working with potentially repetitive forms and themes ought to inject a certain original variety if she expects to retain her audience. This does not mean that she does not regard her work as translation, but rather that she sees herself in the tradition of medieval translation (see Chapter 2.4 above), not only free to interact with the text but indeed responsible to add commentary, dialectic interrogation and extended meaning to it (*Prologue* 15-23).

Milun is a very human story, unadorned with the *merveilleux*. The message-bearing bird, a motif present in less realistic form in the poetry of the *troubadours*, is here remarkable for the rationality of the explanation of its behaviour;[120] and the actions and interations of the characters, their encounters, separations and reunification, though recounted with freshness and sensitivity, are common patterns. Hoepffner (124) is right when he observes that *Milun* is free of the artifices of courtly love; that is to say, the plot nowhere hinges upon its exaggerated or artificial constructs. The courtly and feudal Anglo-Norman literary world— passionate attraction, adultery, love from afar, tournaments and chivalry—is everywhere present, but only as the setting of the plot and not as its engine. In the foreground is rather a woman who overturns the conventions of courtliness by declaring her own feelings first, a couple who are linked not only

[120] Bibring ("Scènes" paragraph 15 non-paginated) makes the insightful observation that with the swan's hunger and the lovers' attraction, "Marie de France makes a distinction between need and desire, the one inferior and animal, the other delicate and human" ("Marie de France forge une différence entre le besoin et le désir, l'un inférieur et animal, l'autre délicat et humain").

by their love but also by the result of its impetuosity, a love that endures for two decades and leads at last to the rediscovery of family unity and to a long-delayed marriage. A love affair resulting in an illegitimate birth is not common in courtly romance, since the Anglo-Norman world took lineage far too seriously for it to be a subject for light entertainment; that this occurs here and in *Yonec*, and is a real concern in *Le Fraisne*, reinforces the claim that these tales are of Celtic origin (Kinoshita and McCracken 75-82), from a culture where succession was the affair of the community as well as of the individual. Moreover, marriage was not the inevitable "happy ending" to courtly romance. As we have already seen, Marie has her own notions as to the passionate strengths and destructive weaknesses of courtly love's tenets.

Marie's sense of justice is always prominent and always idiosyncratic. Murder, reprehensible in *Equitan*, is here, as elsewhere (*Yonec* 547-550; *Eliduc* 859-864), accepted as a salutary act if it promotes the well-being of lovers for whom the poet has sympathy:

> Li fiz respunt: "par fei, bels pere,
> assemblerai vus e ma mere.
> Sun seignur qu'ele a ocirai
> e espuser la vus ferai." (Milun 497-500)
>
> (The son responds, "By my faith, my dear father,
> I shall bring you and my mother together!
> The lord whom she has, I shall kill
> and shall unite her to you in marriage.")

Clearly, the lady's husband has committed the capital crime of marrying. Nothing is actually said about his character except that he was "a baron, a very wealthy man of the country, very powerful and greatly renowned" (*Milon* 124b-126; […] *barun,/un mult riche hume del païs,/mult esforcible e de grant pris*). The refrain of the *mal-mariée* is taken up by the lady early in the poem (133-148), but it should be noted that at this point in the narrative she has not yet married

and there is no invective directed against the future husband; it is rather a lament against her fate, to be bound in her heart to a love which all around her would oppose. Nevertheless, the passage leaves an impression in the reader's mind, a vague sense of the lady's unjust imprisonment and forced submission to an unsuitable lord; an impression, however false, that invites our enthusiastic support for the proposed murder. Fortunately for all, it turns out that the husband has died and so the son is free to unite his parents. There may be an older and sterner moral code that persists here.

Whatever the original fabula may have been about which "the people of old made a *lai*", *Milun* as Marie presents it is a tightly-crafted narrative that rarely unsettles the courtly and feudal world of the twelfth century, revealing the brush-strokes of her adaptation and but faint traces of its Celtic heritage. Still, those traces, a faintly alien code of morality, passion and justice, remain unapologetically as features of the story and assure its origins not only as a poem of Marie but as the *aventure* of a Breton *lai*.

4. 11. Courtly Love is a Sad Story: *Chaitivel*.

The tale of the *Chaitivel* takes place "in Brittany, at Nantes" (*Chaitivel* 9; *En Bretaigne a Nantes*). The location is repeated in line 33: "In Brittany, there lived four barons" (*En Bretaigne ot quatre baruns*). Beyond this, there is nothing distinctly Breton about the tale. Far from the world of Arthur and the wonders of an age long gone, *Chaitivel* explores a theme more fitting to the sophistic mock-debates of Andreas Capellanus. Nor does Christianity, at the very least a subtext in the other *lais*, make so much as an appearance here. Neither Sergent (291-2) nor Fisher (210) uncover any sources for this *lai* nor any similar contemporary examples or reincarnations; Hoepffner suggests that this must be a current romance, debated among the

literary afficionados of Marie's own day (160). Still (see Chapter 3.1 above), the medieval European subject matter does not mean that Marie did not draw this poem from an actual Breton *lai*, that is, from the repertoire of Celtic minstrels. As evidenced by the *Strandar lioð*, commissioned in the eleventh century to memorialize William the Conqueror's pleasurable week of hunting, the term "Breton *lai*" referred primarily to form, that is, to an intricate musical composition performed on the harp; lyrics may or may not have accompanied. The title and the music linked a *lai* to its event, underscoring the importance of selecting the most fitting title. In *Chaitivel*, this argument occupies a significant place: the lady wants her sorrows of bereavement commemorated, while the surviving knight believes that his story should be the one that comes to mind when the *lai* is called for and played (*Chaitivel* 201-237). Like *Milun*, *Chievrefueil* and *Eliduc*, *Chaitivel* seems to be not only a translation of the narrative which recounts the event evoked by the *lai* but also an investigation into the circumstances of its composition.

Chaitivel is almost purely a problematic of *fin' amors*: who is more greatly to be pitied, the lady who lost her lovers or the lover who is too damaged to love his lady? The poem is replete with the paraphernalia of courtly love. The lady is described as an ideal, if unstable, heroine (*Chaitivel* 9-32); the barons are likewise paragons of courtly virtues (*Chaitivel* 33-40). She distributes her *druëries* (*Chaitivel* 57, 68-9; the tokens of her favour), and incites her admirers to outdo themselves in tournaments (*Chaitivel* 63-66). In this they lack moderation, incurring disastrous results (*Chaitivel* 119-126).

It is an examination of a problematic of *fin' amors* but not a sympathetic one. Marie's decisive heroines of other *lais* stand in contrast to this beautiful but vacuous and vacillating lady, unwilling to sacrifice the attention of four knights to enjoy the true love of one, eager to

encourage their rashness to the point of self-destruction, and pitying only herself after their brutal deaths and injury. The two titles, *Quatre Doels* or *Chaitivel*, are the two possible responses to the problematic, the question of who is most to be pitied. Marie acknowledges that the *lai* has been performed under both titles and that both are appropriate to the story (*Chaitivel* 233-236), but her own title as well as the decision of the protagonists (*Chaitivel* 229-230) and her indication of the "usual title" (*nun en us*, *Chaitivel* 237) leave little doubt that whatever sympathy she has (and no surplus is evident) is withheld from the shallow heroine.

It was noted that *Milun* is remarkable for the fact that the only proper name in the entire *lai* is that of the eponymous hero. More remarkable still is that there are *no* proper names in *Chaitivel*—not even of a male character. Kinoshita and McCracken (174-185) observe that the literary technique of repetition in Marie can lead to non-differentiation—recall *Guigemar* 779: "All women look more or less alike" (*femmes se resemblent asez*)—and this reaches its peak in *Chaitivel* with the four unnamed suitors who are so uniformly courtly that there is nothing, not even a name, to distinguish them in the lady's eyes. The anonymous knights are silenced permanently by death or injury, a fate which is the direct result of their excessive obsession with the practices of courtly love. The unhappy surviving knight is impotent both physically and sexually (which is probably the significance of the wounded thigh; cf. *Guigemar* 96-117; *Chaitivel* 122-4, 220-3), and doomed to sorrow; his last recourse is that the lady should speak for him in a *lai* (*Chaitivel* 121-4, 207-228), a reversal of the roles in *Chievrefueil* (110-113). Marie's tone may be humorously critical in the earlier part of the *lai*; towards the end it becomes acridly so. Surely there is a sneer of contempt at the lady who takes such self-indulgent pleasure in the distinction of losing four lovers in one day and thus being burdened with an attention-attracting

grief (*Chaitivel* 195-202). The consequence, it seems, of the immoderate and selfish pursuit of the so-called lofty values of courtly love is trivializing, silencing, emasculating, and destroying (see Goeres 298-300).

It is certainly possible that, from the fantastic that is almost considered a necessary element of a *lai*, however absent it may be in many instances, we have come here to the historical, to an event that actually occurred in Nantes and was celebrated in a Breton musical performance. However, the degree to which Marie's poem may be called a translation, in the sense of a linguistic transfer of a text (broadly speaking) from one language to another, must be interrogated. Marie declares that the *lai* had been performed under two different titles, and so was apparently well known, at least in certain circles. Yet the number of lines that deal with the *lai*'s conception, naming and composition (8 lines at the beginning and some 35 lines at the end) suggest that the performed *lai* was about the core events, the story of the lady's admirers and their doleful end, whereas Marie's poem is about how those events led to the composition of the performed *lai*. As presented by minstrels, it may have been primarily an instrumental work; if there was an accompanying lyric narrative, it must have been briefer than Marie's poem and probably included only the esssential *conte*. But all this is tentative; it is equally possible that there was no actual "text" and that Marie's poem is a creative retelling of the *aventure* and its *conte* which were celebrated but not retailed by the *lai*. Elsewhere (*Milun*, *Chievrefueil*, *Eliduc*), Marie is clear that her investigation and subsequent literary production are an archaeological project, unearthing and preserving traditional stories that lay behind a disappearing performance genre.[121] It is impossible, then, to determine in what form Marie may have recovered such stories

[121] For a discussion of Marie's *Lais* as "salvage anthropology" see Chapter 3.4 above.

or to what extent her poem constitutes a translation from an existing text, oral or written, especially in instances such as this where her avowed purpose is to reveal the meta-story about the genesis of the *lai* and where so little of the original Celtic *conte* shows through. In any event, it is likely that it is Marie herself who conveys the attitudes and critiques which permeate this tale, in which her penchant for following the principles of courtly love to their logical and repellent conclusions, already seen in *Equitan* and toyed with in *Aüstic*, is evident.

4. 12. How a *Lai* Came to be Composed: *Chievrefueil*.

This, the shortest of Marie's *lais*, recounts an episode from a romance so well known to her audience that it needed no contextualization. The story of Tristan and Iseut, perhaps unlike many of the other adventures presented in her collection, was already circulating in written as well as oral form. The *lai* about which she will relate the origin story was composed by Tristan himself, according to her testimony, and she gives the title in two languages: "The English call it '*Gotelef*'; the French name for it is 'Goatleaf' [*Chievrefueil*]" (Chievrefueil 115-116; *'Gotelef' l'apelent Engleis, 'Chievrefueil' le nument Franceis*). Possibly she heard it performed in English as well as French. This is the only *lai* for which Marie specifically claims written as well as oral sources:[122] "Many have recounted and told it to me, and I have found it written" (*Chievrefueil* 5-6; *Plusur le m'unt cunté e dit/e jeo l'ai trové en escrit*).

The name *Tristam* (*Chievrefueil* 7 etc.) is Celtic in origin, and was in fact the name of some of the Pict kings from the sixth to the eighth centuries, while *Mars* (*Chievrefueil* 11, "Mark") has been associated with western Breton since the ninth century (Sergent 299). The queen is not named, but her servant *Brenguein* is (*Chievrefueil* 90). The English toponym

[122] See the discussion in footnote 41 above.

Suhtwales (*Chievrefueil* 16, "South Wales"), birthplace of Tristan, has already appeared in *Milun* 9 (cf. *Chievrefueil* 105: *Wales*); and *Tintagel* (*Chievrefueil* 39) is on the north coast of *Cornuaille* (*Chievrefueil* 27, "Cornwall"). The *lai* is thus situated, as indeed all other versions of the cycle confirm, within the Celtic world. The characters and places are historic; over the centuries the fabula took on the accoutrements of myth (Sergent 300-302).

The *lai* is named for the relationship between the honeysuckle (Old English *gotelef*, corresponding precisely to the Old French *chievrefueil*, "goatleaf") and the hazel:

> D'els dous fu il tut altresi
> cume del chievrefueil esteit
> ki a la coldre se perneit:
> quant il s'i est laciez e pris
> e tut entur le fust s'est mis,
> ensemble poeent bien durer;
> mes ki puis les vuelt desevrer,
> la coldre muert hastivement
> e li chievrefueilz ensement.
> 'Bele ami, si est de nus:
> ne vus senz mei ne jeo senz vus!' (*Chievrefueil* 68-78)
>
> (Of these two lovers it was altogether
> like it was with the honeysuckle
> that would fasten itself to the hazel:
> when it has taken hold and laced itself upon it
> and entwined itself all around the branch,
> the two plants can live long together;
> but if someone then tries to separate them,
> the hazel dies quickly
> and the honeysuckle in the same way.
> "Dear love, thus it is with us:
> neither you without me nor I without you!")

The Tristan cycle is considered one of the quintessential romances of the fully-developed expression of courtly love; indeed, it is one of the very few works of the period which can be said to represent courtly love as a cohesive social or literary phenomenon. As argued throughout

this work, what came to be codified as the principles of courtly love in Andreas Capellanus were interrogated in Marie's poems. In my view, it is problematic in the Tristan saga that the obsessive adulterous love results from the ingestion of a potion and not from a passion kindled by the nature of the lovers' contact: By definition it is not courtly love since it is not free. Sergent, following Hoepffner, points out that neither Marie's version nor that of Thomas d'Angleterre, who was likely influenced by Marie, includes the potion (Sergent 297). This might suggest that they were thus able to represent the lovers as overpowered by their feelings and not by herbal concoctions; but Marie's picture of Tristan and Iseut is but a tiny anecdote in a much larger romance, while the fragment that remains to us of Thomas's version takes up the story long after the episode of the birth of the lovers' mutual passion. Moreover, the potion is present in Gottfried von Strassburg, who claims to have based his German translation on Thomas (Gottfried *Tristan und Isolt* 131-154).

There is an enduring lyric beauty to Marie's rendition, and one senses the flow of her sympathy for the star-crossed lovers. It is not self-evident that such would be Marie's attitude, since a passionate attachment to another when one is married to a faithful spouse is elsewhere viewed with disfavour, for example in *Bisclavret*; and the betrayal of feudal loyalty between a king and his most trusted vassal forms at least a major part of the crime in *Equitan*. In the Tristan romance, King Mark is deeply attached to his wife and has had the greatest confidence in his nephew and vassal Tristan; Marie's sympathy seems somewhat inconsistent. Of course, it might

be argued that she transmits the tone of her sources, but of this nothing can be known for certain.[123]

As elsewhere (*Milun*, *Chaitivel*, *Eliduc*), Marie states that her task is not simply the reproduction of the *lai* or its *conte*, but also an investigation into the circumstances of its composition. The plot of *Chievrefueil*, which I suspect constitutes Marie's translation of the sources to which she refers in lines 5-6, occupies lines 11-106, placed between the commentary/ origin story at the beginning and ending of the poem. In itself, this aspect of the project specifies a certain distance from the sources and underscores Marie's creative contribution. It also blurs the distinction between the written poem, the performed *lai*, and the *aventure* that inspired its story. This is an instance where one might assume that the *lai* was an entirely instrumental composition, to be played on the harp. Yet the multiplicity of oral *contes* and even written sources indicates that there was a more or less established "text" of this story. It would be helpful to the modern investigator if this particular episode of the Tristan romance appeared in any other extant version; unfortunately, it does not.

There are *lais* such as *Guigemar*, *Le Fraisne* and *Yonec* whose intriguing incoherence declares at every turn the juxtapositioning of cultural, religious and literary motifs and make it possible to ascertain with some degree of probability what the original Celtic tale might have looked like and what Marie must have grafted into the story—in other words, what she translated and what she added; there are others, such as *Chaitivel*, which seem to come out of an

[123] Cf. Fisher (209-210): "Whereas the wives in *Guigemar* and *Yonec* are obviously mistreated, there is little to suggest that Iseult or the lady in *Laüstic* are being routinely abused. Similarly, though *Eliduc* is obviously uncomfortable with its hero's maintaining relations with two women, *Chaitivel* fails to judge its heroine for almost identical practice. Of course, tradition prompts us to side with Tristan and Isolde against King Mark, and the husband in *Laüstic* does lash out unpleasantly, but these are by no means the only interpretations available. We side with the lovers because the context conditions us to do so. Were we to encounter the stories among *exempla* of people punished for faithlessness, the default reading would no doubt take the husband's side."

established cultural or literary tradition, and whose unity is so integral that nothing more than speculation and the sifting of minor clues is possible. *Chievrefueil* belongs to this latter, and I would say much smaller, category. It is easy to admire Marie's literary art in this poem; on the other hand, determining what elements of the story pre-existed in the versions upon which she relied and what elements she herself created and inserted is a difficult, not to say an insoluble problem.

4. 13. Transformation from Breton to Norman Complete (and the Wonder Lost): *Eliduc*.

Following *Chievrefueil*, the shortest of Marie's *lais*, *Eliduc*, the longest, concludes the collection. I confess that in my view, it suffers by comparison with the other poems. It lacks the quality which I find most distinctive about the *Lais* of Marie, the sense of unpolished authenticity and rugged, almost defiant non-conformity. I have argued that there are many of the *lais* that scarcely disguise the origin and character of their disparate elements even if in the final pastiche those elements do not cohabit peacefully; and that there are on the contrary one or two *lais* whose elements do not appear to derive from multiple origins and which, for that reason, resist a compartmentalizing analysis. *Eliduc* belongs to neither of these groups. It is rather a story whose original elements have been, not placed side by side with incongruous contemporary motifs, but rather fully transformed to cohabit in an almost seamless, though regrettably somewhat banal, unity with their adopted milieu. The analysis of constituent elements and subsequent transformation is arguably objective, while the preference is entirely subjective—I miss the Marie who did not stoop to rationalizing, compromising or accommodating.

If *Yonec* shows Marie at her ingenuous best, delighting in both the unaltered elements of the Breton legend and the familiarities of her own society, and creating thereby a sort of collage

of discrete literary and cultural images that remain unresolved in their contradictions and authentic in their flavours, *Eliduc* is the diametric opposite: a story completely assimilated, with names and locales indubitably Breton but with all aspects of plot and character transformed to read smoothly within a twelfth-century Anglo-Norman literary context. "In *Eliduc*," concludes Fisher (211), "the *Lais* seem finally to retreat into the security offered by the patriarchal, feudal, and colonial structures that provide the framework for meaning in the intertwined worlds of life and literature." It is the only *lai* to overtly articulate the incompatibility of the old Breton world and the new Norman one, the only *lai* that vanquishes the norms of Celtic morality and the values of courtly love under the dictates of the feudal system and the Christian religion. It emphasizes piety by wrestling with questions of right and wrong in love relationships and tying those questions directly to the constraints of Christianity. Nobility and integrity clash with deceit and self-interest at every turn. The solutions to the dilemmas created by these oppositions are problematic. *Eliduc*, I maintain, is the example of what happens when the cultural translation goes too far: elements which co-existed in an ill-defined truce in other *lais* are explicitized here and hence impossible to reconcile without sophistic sermonizings and improbable resolutions. Stevens observes that, in her usual style,

> Marie does not allow herself to be drawn into discussions of feeling. This is striking, especially in a twelfth-century author who is so centrally concerned with fine feelings. It could be said generally of Marie that she distils or represents, scarcely ever discusses or analyses, feeling. (4)

In *Eliduc*, this conciseness is not as evident; she gives way to lengthy monologues and dialogues exteriorizing the characters' grapplings with feelings, passages more typical of Chrétien, and handled less adroitly (in my view) than he succeeds in doing. It is the only *lai* to show the age

when Christianity has finally triumphed over the values of both Breton morality and courtly love: the less restrictive Celtic marital practices are recoded under a serial polygamy enabled by retirement to the religious life, and the full-blown language of *courtoisie* serves only to disguise the fact that its fundamental tenet, adulterous love, has been abandoned. The *lai* itself ends up being internally consistent, but notably inconsistent with the other examples in the collection. The chilling *merveilleux* of *Yonec*, the flexible morality of *Guigemar*, the adulterous courtly love of *Chievrefueil*, the alarming ecclesiastical inconsistencies of *Le Fraisne*, the feudal transgression of *Lanval*: all these tensions have been left far behind in *Eliduc*.

Having vented my critiques, I must now observe that this is a work of detailed narration and remarkable psychological depth. Marie succeeds in writing her longest poem with a focused theme and a dose of suspense which holds the reader's attention to the end. I compare it with her other short romances and find it wanting; if I compare it with the anonymous *lais* of the period I find in it her characteristic artistry that unifies its elements and the poetic grace that raises it above its imitators. I cannot deny that some critics rate it among her best.[124] It is not quite like her other poems—but if I expect this *lai* to follow some sort of pattern established in those examples, I have as yet much to learn about Marie. She has already declared that any author who expects to retain the interest of her readers must weave variety into the material (*Milun* 1-4); this singularity that is *Eliduc* is in many ways but another manifestation of the fertility of Marie's creativity. Although her hero does not arouse my pity, he at least demands my honest sympathy; his very human character resonates with greater reality and insight than the rather one-

[124] E.g., Hoepffner 104, 108; Stevens 21.

dimensional champions of the earlier *chansons de geste* or the later rectified and stuffy knights of some of Marie's successors.

In keeping with her editorial framework in most of the *lais*, Marie claims an old Breton source for *Eliduc*:

> D'un mult anciën lai Bretun
> le cunte e tute la raisun
> vus dirai, si cum jeo entent
> la verité mun esciënt. […]
> De l'aventure de cez treis
> li anciën Bretun curteis
> firent le lai pur remembrer (*Eliduc* 1-4, 1181-3)
>
> (About a very old Breton *lai*
> the story and all the circumstances
> I shall tell you, just as I understand
> the truth, to the best of my knowledge. […]
> From the adventure of these three people
> the noble Bretons of old
> made the *lai* as a memorial)

As in *Milun*, *Chaitivel*, and *Chievrefueil*, she intends not only to translate the tale that inspired the Breton minstrel performance but also to provide a meta-story about the circumstances of its genesis.

The *lai* was known as *Eliduc*, after the hero, but Marie indicates that it has become more well-known by the names of the two heroines, *Guildeluëc ha Guilliadun* (*Eliduc* 22). *Ha* is Breton for "and"; the inclusion of the simple conjunction qualifies this as one of only three *lais* to which Marie gives a Breton title (along with *Bisclavret* and *Aüstic*).[125]

> D'eles dous a li lais a nun
> Guildeluëc ha Guilliadun.

[125] It was perhaps after Marie's time that the masculine name came again to identify the poem, a possible indication that there was later an attempt to downplay the prominent female perspective in the *Lais*; see Chapter 5.2 below.

> ‘Eliduc’ fu primes nomez,
> mes ore est li nuns remuëz,
> kar des dames est avenu
> l’aventure dunt li lais fu. (Eliduc 21-26)
>
> (From these two women the *lai* takes its name
> *Gulideluëc ha Guilliadun*.
> At first, it was known as *Eliduc*,
> but its name is now changed,
> since it is really through the agency of these ladies that have taken place
> the events about which the *lai* was composed.)

The personal names, then, are all Breton (Sergent 316-317), as are the toponyms. *Bretaigne* (*Eliduc* 5) signifies “Brittany”, while *Logres* (*Eliduc* 7) indicates Arthurian Britain; the presence of numerous independent and warring kinglets (*Eliduc* 89-90) suggests the period soon after Arthur’s withdrawal to Avalon and before the great conversion under Augustine (Wace 13275-13818). *Toteneis* (“Totnes” *Eliduc* 88), near *Excestre* (“Exeter” *Eliduc* 91), on the south coast of Devon, is where Brutus was supposed to have arrived at the very beginning of Britain’s legendary history, as well as the port at which Ambrosius Aurelius and his brother Uther Pendragon landed when they came to recapture Britain from Voltigern (Wace 1053; 7587). Adorned with Celtic nomenclature and unfolding in locales steeped in Celtic tradition, there is nevertheless nothing particularly Breton about the story of *Eliduc*.

A single trace only of the *merveilleux* may be discerned in the tale: the marvellous flower which the weasel administers to revive its expired mate and which Guildeluëc seizes and employs to bring Guilliadun out of her deathlike sleep (*Eliduc* 1032-1066). If this were originally a supernatural element, it has been attenuated here, like the potion in *Les Dous Amanz*, to a remarkable but perhaps entirely natural herbal remedy.

What the original moral perspective of the Celtic tale might have been before its complete transformation can only be guessed at. We have seen that Celtic culture was much more accepting of divorce, remarriage, polygamy, polyandry and concubinage than any society of Roman heritage and certainly more so than Christian society (see Ginnel 211-214 and 4.2 above). The "husband with two wives" theme was a common one in medieval literature and the usual solutions were less ethereal than Marie's: the first spouse died, or was rejected in order to make room for the next, or the second was taken on along with the first, knowingly or unknowingly. We have seen all of these situations in the *Lais*. Here, however, Marie's presentation is so layered with courtly and Christian presuppositions that any such solution would be impossible. In fact, so distinct is Marie's dénouement that scholars have suggested two classifications of the medieval theme of the husband with two wives: that found in all occurrences outside of Marie, and that found in Marie's *Le Fraisne* and *Eliduc* (see Sergent 318).

Numerous lengthy passages, more than 375 lines altogether or a good third of the *lai*—half of the poems in the collection do not contain so many lines in total—explore the classic tensions of courtly love (273-538, 571-618; 654-702; 935-950; etc.). Passion whose fulfillment would entail adultery, the reticence of the lady to declare her feelings first, attraction as a great and terrible torment, the priority of true love over every other consideration, all these concepts are expressed in a language that embodies the literary spirit of the day. What is striking is that while Marie seems to exalt the experience of these feelings, she flatly rejects the resolution of them according to the expectations of courtly love. Of course, she has never advocated that lovers are obligated by destiny to yield blindly to their adulterous physical passion. But she does

seem to conclude in *Guigemar*, *Le Fraisne*, *Lanval*, *Yonec*, *Milun* and *Chievrefueil* that true love by its honest and liberating nature is its own justification and sanctification.

In *Eliduc* this is not the case. We might be tempted to assume that this is partly because the one who would be betrayed is noble, faithful and worthy, as in *Equitan*, but this consideration does not give her pause in *Chievrefueil*, and is problematic in *Aüstic* and possibly *Milun*. It may be suggested that Eliduc's chivalric nobility will not allow him to transgress the knightly code, yet we have seen this cast to the wind in *Lanval*. And to suppose that Eliduc acts in accordance with accepted religious standards flies in the face of the devout sincerety and even ecclesiastical collusion in the very non-standard practices of *Le Fraisne* and *Yonec*. In fact, these two powerful presences of twelfth-century Norman England, feudality and Christianity, not only affront but indeed subjugate both the Celtic legend and the courtly practice to a degree not seen in any other of Marie's poems.

The overwhelming passion celebrated by the Provençal *troubadours* became adapted by the *trouvères* of the north to conform to feudal expectations; as noted above, the ensemble of literary and perhaps social constructs that are known under the rubric of "courtly love" have been called the "feudalisation of love" (Lewis 2). That is to say, passionate love did not come into conflict with feudality in northern France and Anglo-Norman England but rather took on its forms and adornments; true love could be properly expressed only by the ideal knight. Now, whereas in *Lanval* the call of true love trumps feudal obligation—where, I argue, Marie retains the conflict inherent in the collision of Celtic and French norms, and the movement of the old Breton tale prevails over the constraints of its chivalric adoptive milieu—in *Eliduc* true love must wait upon the demands of feudal responsibility. Our hero feels all the powerful drawings of

love towards the daughter of his British sovereign, but cannot permit himself to act upon them, not only because of his commitment to his wife but also because of his position as vassal of the lord:

> mes ja ne li querra amur
> ki li aturt a deshonur,
> tant pur sa femme guarder fei,
> tant pur ceo qu'il est od li rei. (*Eliduc* 473-476)
>
> (But never will he seek for himself a love
> that leads to his dishonour,
> both to keep faith with his wife
> and to perform his duty to the king.)

After confessing to himself an all-consuming love which he suspects will be the death of both him and Guilliadon, Eliduc determines, upon receipt of an urgent call for his immediate return from the king of Brittany who had banished him in disgrace, to leave her:

> E nepurquant aler m'estuet;
> mis sire m'a par brief mandé
> e par sairement conjuré (*Eliduc* 594-596)
>
> (And yet it is necessary that I go;
> my liege lord has sent a letter to command my presence
> invoking my oath)

Not even his beloved's pleading that he should take her with him nor her declaration that, with all joy gone, she will kill herself, can persuade Eliduc to falter in his responsibility to her father:

> Bele, jeo sui par sairement
> a vostre pere veirement
> (se jeo vus en menoe od mei,
> jeo li mentireie ma fei)
> de si qu'al terme ki fu mis. (Eliduc 685-689)
>
> (My dear, I am, by my oath,
> truly bound to your father
> (if I took you with me,

I would betray my fealty to him)
until the end of the agreed period.)

Not here is Tristan's covert meeting with the queen behind the king's back, nor the precipitous departure of Lanval from Arthur's court to follow his fairy lover to Avalon. Both Celtic impetuosity and courtly passion take second place to feudal fidelity.

Even more powerful is the full assimilation of the story to the Christian world-view. In *Eliduc*, it appears that both old Celtic morality and contemporary courtly intrigues are forced to bow to the constraints of Christianity:

Jeo ne puis mie remaneir,
ainz m'en irai par estuveir.
S'a m'amie esteie espusez,
nel suferreit crestiëntez.
De tutes parz va malement.
Deus, tant est dur departement! (*Eliduc* 599-604)

(I cannot remain a moment longer;
it is necessary that I go away.
If I were to marry my beloved,
Christianity would not permit it.
My situation is going altogether wrong.
God, how hard is parting!)

The sailor's discovery that Eliduc is committing some sort of bigamy again sets up a direct opposition, this time with the addition of the folkloric motif of ridding the doomed ship of its fateful passenger. In this instance, the direct source is probably the biblical story of Jonah (*Jonah* 1:4-16), thus further strengthening the Christian perspective:

Sire, ça enz avez od vus
cele par qui nus perissuns.
Ja mes a terre ne vendruns!
Femme leial espuse avez
e sur celi altre en menez
cuntre Deu e cuntre la lei,

> cuntre dreiture e cuntre fei.
> Laissiez la nus geter en mer,
> si poüm sempres ariver. (*Eliduc* 832-839)
>
> (My lord, you are bringing along with you
> her whose fault it is that we are perishing.
> Never shall we reach the land!
> You have a wife, a faithful woman,
> yet in addition to her you are taking another
> against God and against the holy law,
> against the right and against honour.
> Now, let us cast her into the sea,
> thus we can arrive at our destination immediately.)

To take a second wife while the first remains alive and faithful constituted a form of adultery which was particularly heinous in the eyes of the Church, bigamy, and recalls the notorious battle over Philip I of France's repudiation of his first wife to marry a second and the pope's incessant

condemnation of his action (Kinoshita 46). The sailor's accusation casts light upon the legal and moral transgressions of Eliduc's ill-conceived project.[126]

This is made even more explicit when Guildeluëc decides to retire into the religious life in order that the fulfillment of Eliduc's love will not contravene the Christian faith nor the practices of the land (which are derived from it):

> car n'est pas bien ne avenant
> de dous espuses meintenir,
> ne la leis nel deit cunsentir. (*Eliduc* 1128-1130)
>
> (for it is neither right nor seemly

[126] The news that Eliduc is in fact married hits the accused but entirely innocent girl with such force that she swoons into a coma resembling death. Eliduc, after concluding that his beloved must have died, transfers his own culpability to the sailor, murders him and casts him overboard. The doomed man was probably no chance hireling:

> Puis s'est apareilliez d'errer
> e quel gent il voldra mener.
> Dous suens nevuz qu'il mult ama
> e un suen chamberlenc mena
> (cil ot de lur cunseil esté
> e le message aveit porté)
> e ses esquiërs sulement;
> il nen ot cure d'altre gent.
> A cels fist plevir e jurer
> de tut sun afaire celer. […]
> En la nef entrent demaneis;
> n'i ot hume se les suens nun
> e s'amie Guilliadun. (*Eliduc* 749-758; 810-812)
>
> (Then he prepared to travel
> and chose the people that he wished to take with him.
> Two nephews who were very dear to him
> he brought along, and his own chamberlain
> (he who had been privy to their communication
> and had carried the message)
> and his squires; these only,
> he had no desire to bring anyone else.
> These he made to pledge and swear
> to keep the matter secret. […]
> They boarded the ship immediately;
> there was not present a single person save his own men
> and his beloved Guilliadun.)

It is a possible conclusion, then, that the man whom Eliduc killed was one of his own hand-picked and most trusted followers who had begun to question the rightness of their cause and whose doubts were confirmed by the storm. If that is the case, yet another biblical subtext, that of King David and his murder of his faithful follower Uriah the Hittite (*2 Samuel* 11:1-12:25; cf. *Equitan*) is introduced. However, it is also possible that the insistence that Eliduc was accompanied only by his own men referred only to the travelling company and not to the ship's complement.

> for a man to have two wives,
> nor can the Christian faith permit it.)

This is not the law of the old Celts in any way that it might be recovered, nor is it recognizably any law of love as celebrated by courtly poets; it is simply the implementation of Christian dogma.[127]

Within such parameters, which exclude polygamy, divorce, and remarriage, the answer to the dilemma is not obvious. Of course, according to the teaching of Jesus, the mischief was already done: "You have heard that they were told, 'Do not commit adultery.' But what I tell you is this: If a man looks at a woman with a lustful eye, he has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (*Matthew* 5:27-28). Hoepffner, sympathetic to the portrayal of Eliduc's plight, nevertheless adjudicates: "Outwardly he observes a faithfulness which inwardly he has already betrayed; he believes that he is keeping within lawful limits a love that is in fact already unlawful and reprehensible" (105).[128]

Marie's solution is one that was known to, but not really approved by, the Church. David d'Avigny (77) notes:

> In the sublimated regions of romantic fiction we find symptoms of the feeling that marriage was not necessarily for life. In the twelfth century there was still an idea that one was released from even a long-standing and consummated marriage if one's spouse entered a religious order.

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[127] Greimas (345) gives as the first definition of *loi*, *lei* "Religion, foi"; likewise Studer and Waters (414-415) associate *lei* with the Latin *lex* and propose both "law" and "Christian religion? [*sic*]". Harf-Lancner (Marie de France, *Lais de Marie de France* 325) translates line 1130 (*ne la leis nel deit cunsentir*) as "et la religion ne saurait l'admettre". In contrast, Burgess and Busby (Marie de France, *The Lais of Marie de France* 125) choose the more neutral sense of *lei*: "nor should the law allow it." It seems clear both from the context of this *lai* and from the general connotations of the word that the laws of Christianity are being invoked; cf. *Eliduc* 837-8, and 602 where the prohibition is rendered explicit as a Christian one.

[128] "Extérieurement il observe une fidélité qu'il a au fond déjà trahie ; d'autre part il croit tenir dans des limites permises un amour qui est en fait déjà illicite et coupable."

This was strongly disputed in theological circles (Kinoshita 48); generally, the Church insisted on the indissolubility of marriage. The notion of withdrawing from marriage into the religious life was no provision for a subsequent relationship, and was only permitted if the decision was mutual and if both of the partners entered religious orders (Cartlidge 82). As in *Le Fraisne*, Marie conspicuously manipulates concepts of religious acceptability, not, in my view, in order to advance the political and feudal agenda of the nobility as Kinoshita (49) suggests, but simply to facilitate the progress of true love. The insistence in the final lines of the poem upon the happiness of all concerned in their irregular choices and especially upon the benevolence and sacred devotion of the characters hints that Marie was trying to sweep under a carpet of good works and pious prayers the enduring guilt of the serial marriages in the eyes of contemporary religion.

While I find it unfortunate that Marie appears to have smothered the old Breton tale under the confines of Christian morality, it must be noted that Marie's is at least a reasonably successful attempt to celebrate both human and divine love and to bring courtly passion and its fruition within the parameters of religion, a task which both Chrétien de Troyes and Guillaume de Lorris left unfinished and which Andreas Capellanus in his third book completely abandoned. It would be a mistake to suppose that Marie is trying to show that spiritual desire is superior to natural; in fact, Guildeluëc becomes a nun for the express purpose of enabling Eliduc and

Guilliadun to fully consummate their natural love.[129] Marie is rather attempting to craft a way in which both religious and courtly devotion can cohabit in an ordered, feudal and Christian world; and if her solution is not without flaw, it is nevertheless superior to anything devised by even the greatest writers of her era.

4. 14. Conclusions: Unity in Diversity.

At the termination of this detailed examination of the poems, and with, I dare to hope, a somewhat better understanding of Marie's resources and method, we are still no closer to synthesizing what the *Lais* are "about". Marie's poems are almost uniformly concise, concentrated, evoking images rather than proliferating words, creating feelings as opposed to describing them. They are void of extraneous material and sensational effects; they tell their stories in real language, they employ felicitous rhymes in well-paced narratives. Yet at the same time they are a collage of distinct images, sometimes contradictory, often enigmatic or anachronistic, and virtually always showing the trace of their original contours. This unity in diversity exists, as I have demonstrated in the above analyses, because Marie started (as she claimed) with materials that were the heritage of peoples and cultures that had preceded hers in the British Isles and the Armorican peninsula; she translated these materials largely intact, at least with such integrity that they leave their imprint clearly in most of the poems; and to these

[129] Kinoshita argues, "If *Eliduc* is meant as a reaffirmation of the primacy of spiritual over temporal values, it is a remarkably ineffectual one" (50). I do not think it is so meant. I concur rather with Bibring ("Scènes" paragraph 2 non-paginated): "But, contrary to the affirmations of theological rhetoric, the renunciation of the flesh should not take place before the experience of the flesh. I understand "a better existence" not in the sense of a superior principle, but in the sense that there is an evolution from one type of existence to another: there is a time for the physical, and when the moment is right and the scope of the action is just, the physical is as noble as the spiritual which will come to replace it" ("Mais, contrairement à ce qu'affirme le discours théologique, le renoncement à la chair ne doit pas se faire avant l'expérience charnelle. J'entends « existence meilleure » non pas dans le sens d'une supériorité de principe, mais dans le sens où il y a une évolution entre deux types d'existence : il y a un temps pour le charnel, et quand le moment est le bon et la mesure est juste, le charnel est tout aussi noble que le non charnel qui le remplacera éventuellement").

she added resonant materials drawn from the life, literature and religion of her own culture, again recognizably intact; so that any disagreable incongruence of the final result is far outweighed by the earthy honesty of the elements and the engaging movement of the whole.

That this approach was successful is attested by the great popularity of the *Lais* in her day and by the number of colleagues, imitators and successors that rode the wave of the French literary phenomen known as the "*lai de Bretaigne*" in the decades that followed. But just as enigmatic as her work was its later reception. Evidence of Marie's translation approach has been found in a close reading of the *Lais* themselves; if the interpretation of this evidence is accurate, we may expect to find further indications of it in the way in which later French literature and foreign-language translations grappled with and attempted to resolve the heterogenous and sometimes incoherent cultural and moral pastiche that is the *Lais*.

Chapter 5. The *Lais* in Later French and in Translation: Making an Honest Man out of Marie

5. 1. Introduction

The distinctive feature of Marie's composition in the *Lais* (beyond her artistry as a writer, of course) was her translation method, that is, her practice of repositioning, without extensive adaptation, elements of the original fabulae within the setting of the feudal, courtly and Christian world of twelfth-century Anglo-Norman England. This embued the literary product with a subtle (and at times unsubtle) underlying ambiguity, the result of colliding worlds, the equilibration of which Marie left to the reader.

This turned out to be a task that not all medieval followers of Marie undertook with willingness or insight. If it is indeed the case that Marie was instrumental in crafting a new genre, a certain amount of disruption could be expected to follow. A genre is necessarily situated in its enunciative context and constitutes "an unspoken discursive contract" (Maingueneau 66);[130] that is, its works are pre-formed to fit into an established category of discourse and their interpretation is conditioned by extra-textual conventions that frame both the specific genre and the meta-genre of literature as a whole. A new genre either violates the contract or, at best, must negogiate a new one. In the original language, the work and its imitations may be mistaken for an existing category, or forced willy-nilly into one; the situation can be even more bewildering in translation, where the receiving culture may not even possess the categories from which the new form has evolved.

[130] "contrat discursif tacite"

Marie's *Lais*, by virtue of their merit, managed to establish themselves as a new genre. However, imitators did not always understand that the *Lais* were more than new or newly-discovered stories: they were a *new way of telling* stories, a commingling of translation and creation that was based on a collisive pastiche of ancient and contemporary, foreign and domestic, and that was insouciant of the possibility of resulting incoherence. For these reasons, writers within the Anglo-Norman tradition (which eventually included Middle English) saw the *lais* primarily as rollicking good tales of the Arthurian days of old, while foreign-language translation (into Old Norse) preserved the sense and movement of the originals conservatively but naïvely, sometimes missing the underlying critique and reading the texts from within the agenda of the receiving culture. Even so, the later *lais* tended to follow, if with less finesse than Marie, her practice of juxtaposing the old stories into the contemporary world.

The manuscript tradition suggests that the *Lais* of Marie de France were not widely copied or distributed, but the literary tradition reveals their profound influence on subsequent literary production and exposes the continuing attempts to clarify the poet's ambivalent positions: to moralize, feudalize, masculinize and harmonize the message of the *Lais*. The quest to pin Marie down which persists in modern scholarship seems to have started right from day one.

5. 2. The *Lais* in later French literature.

Marie was not the only writer to compose short French narrative verse based on the Breton *lais*, though she was, if not the first, at least among the first and surely the most influential. Beyond the twelve that are traditionally attributed to Marie, some twenty-three Old French narrative *lais* are extant; in many cases the authors are unknown (Burgess "Anonymous"

117).[131] It is surely too general, indeed too harsh a critique to say with Foulet that the anonymous *lais* are mediocre imitations that "have no other value than to show us how the readers of the thirteenth century understood Marie",[132] and it is not unanimously conceded that the anonymous *lais* were dependent upon or even necessarily posterior to Marie's.[133] Nonetheless, Marie was the real master. Themes considered typical of the "Breton *lais*", such as the *merveilleux*, courtly passion, warfare and tournaments, were handled with finesse and restraint by Marie, while in the anonymous poems they dominate the story lines more or less coarsely, with random magic, battle scenes, and rapes, to the detriment of psychological depth, irony and thematic richness (see O'Hara Tobin 77-80; Burgess "Anonymous" 126-145).[134] *Doon* contains clear borrowings from *Milun* as well as traces of other *lais* of Marie's (O'Hara Tobin 57; Burgess "Anonymous" 155); *Melion* probably follows *Bisclavret* (Hoepffner 149). *Guingamor* and *Graelent* are undeniably linked with *Lanval*, though the direction of influence is still disputed; *Tydorel* echoes the theme of the fairy father and human mother found in *Yonec*. Even where lengthy similarities between Marie's *lais* and the anonymous poems are lacking, discernable influences of vocabulary and phrasing are common.

A rather pointed attempt to clarify Marie's moral ambiguity was Gautier d'Arras's *Ille et Galeron*, composed around 1175 and called by its author a "*lai*" (*Ille et Galeron* 131j), although

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[131] For the texts of the anonymous *lais* discussed in this section, see O'Hara Tobin.

[132] Qtd. in O'Hara Tobin 21: "Foulet les tient pour des imitations médiocres qui 'n'ont d'autre intérêt que de nous montrer comment les lecteurs du XIIIe siècle comprenaient Marie'".

[133] Burgess ("Anonymous" 153-6) supposes that the evidence puts Marie's *lais* somewhat earlier than the anonymous *lais*, but cautions against any simplistic categorization of dependence. O'Hara Tobin reaches the general conclusion that while Marie and the other authors may have drawn on various sources, sometimes similar and sometimes varied, the other *lais* were probably later than Marie's and in most cases influenced directly or indirectly by hers (81). Hoepffner (57, 140, 149) tends to hold a similar position.

[134] For the viewpoint that the more artless, basic style found in *Graelent* and *Guingamor* has great appeal and is in some ways superior to Marie's embellished and artful elegance, see Weingartner xviii-xxiii.

it extends to some 6,600 lines. "It has long been observed that *Ille et Galeron* takes up the main lines of Marie de France's *lai* of *Eliduc*. Whether Gautier drew from the same source as Marie or, as seems more likely, he had her poem itself in his mind, he refashions the story of Eliduc in his own way" (Delclos and Quereuil viii).[135] He does not do this, however, without taking a quick swipe at other poets. The similarity of his criticism to that of Denis Piramus (*La Vie seint Edmund le rei* 35-38) suggests that it was aimed at the same target, namely, Marie:

> Grant cose est d'Ille et Galeron:
> n'i a fantome ne alonge
> ne ja n'i troverés mençonge.
> Tex lais i a, qui les entent,
> se li sanlent tot ensement
> com s'eüst dormi et songié. (931-936)
>
> (It is a remarkable fact about *Ille and Galeron*:
> The story contains no fantasy nor empty verbiage
> nor yet will you find there any lies.
> There are such *lais* that, whoever hears them,
> they all seem to the listener just as
> though he had slept and dreamt.)

The all-too-human, selfish and vacillating nature of Marie's protagonist Eliduc leaves us in suspense right up to the end as to the moral resolution and romantic outcome of the *lai* of *Eliduc*. But Gautier never permits us to fear for the character of his hero, who is impeccably upright, chivalrous, modest and Christian (e.g., *Ille et Galeron* 210-258; such lengthy eulogies are pervasive). His heroine is likewise a model of beauty and virtue (*Ille et Galeron* 899-905) who, unlike Marie's Guilliadun (and other of her flawed female characters), would not for the world be the first to declare her love (*Ille et Galeron* 1221-1226). Passionate love often sets itself

[135] "On l'a depuis longtemps remarqué, *Ille et Galeron* reprend en grande partie la trame du lai d'*Eliduc* de Marie de France. Que Gautier ait puisé à la même source que Marie ou que, plus probablement, il ait à l'esprit l'oeuvre même de la poétesse, il refait à sa façon l'histoire d'Eliduc."

against the pillars of decent society, right, law, reason and the priest (*Ille et Galeron* 4653-5), but Ille would never allow such passion to lead him into a wrong relationship as did his father, Eliduc. This stands in sharp contrast to Marie, whose concept of love, as Burgess ("Anonymous" 138, following Jean Flori), notes, is "innovatory and subversive, as it is in opposition both to the teachings of the Church and to the power structure of contemporary society."[136] Ille does undergo a great struggle, but there is never the slightest indication that he might lose the battle against temptation or even that the temptation has any real appeal for him. Gautier, with manifold commentaries and sermonic asides, leaves the reader in no doubt as to the inner moral rectitude and the outer moral conduct of a true knight and a true lady. If Marie's solution to the love triangle in *Eliduc* is somewhat contrived, Gautier's is even more stilted and notably less satisfying.

Sylvia Huot traces Marie's influence in later *romans*, especially the thirteenth-century *Galeran de Bretagne* by Renaut, based on *Le Fraisne* and influenced by other *lais* (193-5); the fourteenth-century *Renart le Contrefait*, which includes modified versions of *Laüstic* and *Bisclavret* and influences from *Yonec* and *Guigemar* (195-199); and the *Roman de Perceforest*, written around 1340, wherein certain episodes seem to be modelled on *Yonec* and perhaps influenced by *Milun* (199-202). Huot argues that later authors who made use of Marie's œuvre tended to present something of "an expurgated version" (202, with reference to *Yonec*) that avoided problematic issues in the *Lais*. For instance, whereas Marie's *Yonec* ends with God's vengeance fulfilled through the murder of the husband by his illegitimate stepson and with the

[136] I caution, however, that even in this instance we must be careful not to generalize: Marie's representation of love typically interrogates religious and social structures and often undermines them—but not always. It is the unpredictability of her position more than a particular position which distinguishes her from the rather woodenly consistent and self-righteous Gautier.

adulterous couple united in a beatific death, *Perceforest*'s Passelion and Dorine are joined in legitimate marriage after the husband dies of natural causes (200).

The strong and noble female agents typical of Marie's *Lais* have also faded from the stage:

> The *Renart le contrefait* poet drew on at least two, and probably as many as five, of Marie de France's *lais*, concentrating them into an intricately constructed illustration of the wiles of women and the dangers of marriage. His fusion of narrative motifs from different *lais* allowed him to amplify the antifeminist and antimatrimonial implications of his source texts: it is as though the *Lais* have been mined for those episodes in which adultery is most disruptive, and husbands most grievously wronged. (Huot 199)

Hoepffner (149) concurs that both *Melion* and *Renart le contrefait* miss the point of *Bisclavret* by taking it as a cautionary tale against trusting one's wife. Both the anonymous *lais* and several of the later *romans* appear to lose the balanced and sympathetic portrait of women that is present in the *Lais* of Marie. It is certainly difficult to imagine Marie writing the defense of women that comes from the lips of Graelent's king:

> Ne m'aimme pas de boine amor
> qui ma femme dist deshonor.
> Ki volentiers fiert vostre cien,
> ja mars querés qu'il vos aint bien. (*Graelent* 545-548)
>
> (He has no great love for me
> who speaks to dishonour my wife.
> If someone enjoys beating your dog,
> never believe that he loves you well.)

If *Graelent* is, as it appears, influenced by *Lanval*, there is a marked shift from the attitudes found in Marie's *lai;* there is a certain misogyny that seems to represent at best a misunderstanding and at worst a deliberate misconstrual of her nuanced and insightful characterization.

Popular as were the *Lais* in Marie's day and influential enough to give impetus to a whole literary movement, the instances of reproductions, large-scale imitations or reworkings of the actual *Lais* of Marie were nevertheless not numerous. Fisher maintains that this is because later writers were disturbed by Marie's literary, social and moral ambiguity:

> *Laüstic* has a few later spin-offs (though with the ending rewritten to unite the lovers), but no contemporary analogues or sources have been discovered; *Chaitivel* has neither sources, nor analogues, nor imitations, and, although the Tristan legend was well known, the encounter described in *Chevrefoil* is unique to the *Lais* [… W]e have received only shards and fragments of narrative, whose isolation from broader hermeneutic frameworks frustrates meaning. By removing those structures according to which value is judged, the *Lais* achieve only dislocation, incomprehension, and unease. (210)

This observation substantiates the contention that Marie founded a genre which was not pre-coded for unreflective reception within the existing literary system and hence resisted facile absorption and imitation.

By and large, French literature that took up Marie's material did not recapture her subtlety. Attempts to clarify her troublesome and sometimes incoherent stances tended to smooth out the cultural and moral inconsistencies at the price of coarsening the representation of the miraculous, manhood, womanhood and religious devotion. The comparison of Marie's *Lais* with the later poems and romances reminds us that she did more than simply retell a good fabula in good poetry; she placed together the translated fabula with rich cultural elements of her own choosing, creating intriguing tensions which explored and questioned, affirmed and destabilized the values of her society.

5. 3. The *Strengleikar*: The *Lais* in Old Norse translation.

In the thirteenth century, the king of Norway, Hákon Hákonarson (ruled 1217-1263) became fascinated with the literature of France and Anglo-Normandy. Hákon was anxious to move his warrior state into medieval European feudalism and chivalry; and the *matière de Bretaigne* and courtly romances, with Arthur as the model of the ideal king dispensing justice, grace and civilization, were propitious for this end (Goeres 284). Among a number of works such as the Tristan saga and Chrétien's *Yvain*, Hákon commissioned the translation of some twenty-one French *lais*, including eleven of Marie's (*Eliduc* is absent), into the Norse language:

> *En bok þessor er hinn verðulege hacon konongr let norrœna or volsko male ma hæitia lioða bok* (This book, which the esteemed King Hákon had translated into Norse from the French language, may be called "Book of Lais".) (Cook and Tveitane xiv)[137]

The translator of the *lais* is not known for certain but may be the "brother Robert" who translated Tristan in 1226 and the later "abbot Robert", translator of the *Elis saga* (*Elie de Saint Gilles*); there are, however, indications of different writing styles and possibly different dialects which suggest that a single translator for the whole work is unlikely (Cook and Tveitane xv, xxviii). Although the collection is untitled and the Prologue suggests a title such as *lioða bok* ("Book of *Lais*"), it has become known in scholarship as the *Strengleikar*, from the Old Norse word for "stringed instruments" which is occasionally used in the translation to refer to the *lais* (Cook and

[137] All translations from the Old Norse *Strengleikar* into English in this chapter are by Cook and Tveitane. As I am not myself adept in Old Norse, I rely on this 1979 Norwegian-American collaboration, which remains the standard English translation of the *Strengleikar*. The reader should note that the following analyses are based on the English translation and may therefore reflect some of its choices of representation rather than strict nuances of the original. With this limitation in mind, I have attempted to seize the general tone of passages and to build my conclusions on the Old Norse translator's avowed additions in the *Strengleikar* and on clear and striking departures from Marie's poems.

Tveitane 4). Unlike translations of the *lais* into other European languages, where versification was maintained or adapted, the Old Norse collection is in prose.

The Prologue to the translation is in two parts, the first of which is the translator's comments, followed by an abridged version of Marie's *Prologue* to the *Lais*. Goeres (284) observes that "the Old Norse translator appropriates the Anglo-Norman, female-authored prologue and refashions it for a new audience of male, Norwegian courtiers." There are certainly distinct differences of emphasis, both between the two sections of the Prologue (the translator's own introduction and the portion translated from Old French), and between Marie's original and its representation in Norse. Marie took the view that knowledge was on the increase and that human wisdom was becoming ever more refined and resplendent (*Prologue* 5-22). She declared that the *lais* had been composed by people in former times who wished to memorialize important events (*Prologue* 34-38), and that her own purposes in translating them were to add to the sum of human knowledge, to train herself through hard work, to make a name for herself, and to preserve the tales from oblivion (*Prologue* 1-4, 23-33, 39-40). The Norse translator, on the contrary, seems to see the primary purpose of the *lais* as one of spiritual edification, transmitted through what is understood to be a long and masculine tradition, and perpetuated in order to fight against an inevitable decay of knowledge and righteousness; and he expends no small amount of effort to argue this:

> And because many marvelous things and events unheard of in our time took place in olden days, it occurred to us to teach men living and those to come these stories, which men of great learning made about the deeds of those who lived in olden days, and which they had written down in books as an everlasting reminder, as entertainment, and as a source of great learning for posterity, so that each man could amend and illumine his life with the knowledge of past events, and so that that will not be concealed in later times

> which happened in the remote past, and so that everyone might consider with full knowledge and strive with all his strength, and accomplish and achieve with every opportunity to prepare and improve himself for the kingdom of God by means of fitting behavior and good deeds and a holy life's end. For deeds and nobility and every kind of goodness, which embellished and adorned the lives of those who pleased God and those who in olden days earned fame and favors by means of achievements in this world—these things are disappearing more and more as the days of this world march on. (*Strengleikar* 5)

Arguably, the positioning of learning and teaching exclusively in the hands of "men" (which represents accurately the Old Norse in this passage) may be no more than accepted style, the general practice throughout many centuries of history and across many languages of using masculine forms to signify humanity in general. However, it is clear from the Norse version that the translator had before him in French the general *Prologue* to the *Lais*, wherein Marie twice uses feminine forms to refer to herself (*Prologue* 53, 54); and the naming of "Marie" in *Guigemar* 3 and her reference to *hume ne femme de grant pris* ("a man *or a woman* [emphasis mine] of great merit", *Guigemar* 8) are absent from the Norse rendition. It appears, then, that the translator, by insisting on only masculine forms, made a choice to suppress overtly female references in the source text (Goeres 284).

The translator marks the shift from his own interpolation with "Here ends this prologue, and next comes the beginning of the lais" (*Strengleikar* 7), and the succeeding paragraph constitutes his translation of the general *Prologue* to the *Lais* of Marie. The Norse version is somewhat shorter than Marie's, and the same change of emphasis, from knowledge and literature to edification and spirituality, is evident. Marie begins, *Qui Deus a duné esciënce* (*Prologue* 1; "Those to whom God has given knowledge"), and this, probably a variation on a conventional device (cf. *Le Roman de Thèbes* 1), is her only mention of God. The *Strengleikar*, on the other

hand, adds "God" into the translation three more times: in Marie's lines 3, 4/5 and 44. Then, Marie's lines 4-8, in praise of knowledge:

> ainz se deit voluntiers mustrer.
> Quan uns granz biens est mult oïz,
> dunc a primes est il fluriz,
> e quant loëz est de plusurs,
> dunc a espandues ses flurs. (*Prologue* 4-8)
>
> (thus one must willingly make these gifts known.
> When a great good is much heard,
> it produces its first blossoms,
> and when it is praised by many,
> then it opens up into full flower.)

become in the Norse translation an ode to the moral betterment of one's fellow man:

> it is proper that they reveal to others with good will that which it pleased God to grant them. Then they will bear leaves and blossoms like the most splendid tree, and as their goodness becomes known through the improvement of others, so will their fruit become fully ripe and nourish other people. (*Strengleikar* 7)

It is clear from the outset that the Norse translator intends to implement, or at the very least believes himself to discern, a didactic and moralizing agenda in the *lais* he is about to translate, and is determined to present to the Norwegian court an edifying model of modernization.

In spite of this, there are only a few instances of moral alterations in the *Strengleikar*. In general, it is what one might call a conservative translation, representing with accuracy and with only minor embellishment the content and the wording of the French source texts (see Cook and Tveitane xxvii-xxxi). Changes are usually stylistic: the translator tends to reduce long descriptions, psychological reflections and minor details and to add in bombastic personal addresses and praises and a certain repetitive vehemence in declarations. For this reason, *lioða*

that lack significant material from their source *lais* usually end up nonetheless about the same length.

Instances of sexual immorality and its relation to Christianity do not seem to offend the Norse translator inordinately. If certain passages are dropped (for example, the description of lovemaking in *Guigemar* 529b-534 versus *Strengleikar* 27; or the occasional meetings of the lovers in *Milun* 285-288 in addition to their correspondence by swan, as against *Strengleikar* 189), others are retained with equal or increased explicitness (compare *Yonec* 170-231 with *Strengleikar* 235; or *Le Fraisne* 509-512 with *Strengleikar* 63). Still, there are some indications that the Old Norse version tried to articulate a more Christian perspective. Marie has the lady of *Chaitivel* say *Les morz ferai ensevelir* (*Chaitivel* 161; "I shall have the dead buried"), which in the Norse becomes "But to those who were buried today God has shown great and gracious mercy" (*Strengleikar* 147).[138] When Marie's Lanval simply denies any homosexual interest, *'Dame', dist il, 'de cel mestier/ne me sai jeo niënt aidier* (*Lanval* 293-294; "My lady," he says, "regarding that practice, I know nothing of how to go about it"), the Norse adds a line of more vehement denial: "'Lady,' he said, 'I have never taken part in such activity, and I never have anything to do with such wickedness" (*Strengleikar* 217). And perhaps the most notable change is that the *Strengleikar* excises God from the vengeance of Yonec upon his stepfather and omits the reference to the mother and her adulterous lover lying together in the tomb under God's mercy (*Yonec* 533-556; cf. *Strengleikar* 245). The translator does add, however, as though a little nervous about the morality of the tale he has just rendered: "May God be a granter of mercy to him for whom this book was put into Norse" (*Strengleikar* 245).

[138] The translator probably conflated line 161 with line 172: *Deus lur face bone merci!* ("May God be gracious to them!")

What does appear to confuse the *Strengleikar* translator is Marie's subtlety and ambiguity. The translation eliminates the snide comment in Marie that the woman in *Aüstic* fell in love with her neighbour not only because of his great worth but also because he lived so close (*Aüstic* 28), and further suggests that the woman really was listening to the songs of a nightingale as opposed to expressly deceiving her husband (*Strengleikar* 103). Likewise, the lady of *Chaitivel* is presented as remarkably sensitive and gracious (*Strengleikar* 143-145); absent are Marie's insinuations that she is vacuous and selfish. It is as if the translator seizes upon these *lais* as models of courtly behaviour and entirely misses the critique, looking to the *lais* for examples to hold up to his society rather than for interrogations of values.

While in general the translator, after having identified his contribution to the Prologue, does not insert himself into the text,[139] this policy is cast off at the end of *Equitan*, where he adds two full sections (sections 11-12, *Strengleikar* 79-83), almost a quarter of the translated text's total length, which sermonize heatedly against covetousness, murder, deceit, ingratitude and violation of feudal obligation, drawing liberally on the Bible and on St Augustine, throwing in some quotes in learned Latin, and promising the worst of judgements upon those who will not learn from the story. The addition begins and ends with "he who translated this book" (*Strengleikar* 79, 83), thus unequivocally marking off the tirade as the translator's own contribution. It is interesting that adultery does not seem to figure in the list of sins, except as an infringement upon another man's possessions (*Strengleikar* 79; it seems that adultery is wrong primarily because it violates a man's exclusive possession of his wife). Rather, the condemnations group around the notion of a person's duty towards others. This indicates that the

[139] A brief and rather charming exception is the translator's testimony at the end of *Bisclavret* that in his youth, he himelf had been a witness to a werewolf's transformation (*Strengleikar* 99).

translator was more concerned about the values of a noble and courtly society than about particular sins as proscribed by the Christian religion.

The most cursory reading of Marie's *Equitan* makes it clear that it is a tale with a moral. Nevertheless, my analysis above (4.3) reveals that the more one seeks to articulate that moral, the more it escapes precise identification—it is unclear just what aspect of wrongdoing Marie condemns, leaving it rather to the reader to reflect upon the range of eventual corruptions resulting from a close observance of the principles of courtly love. The Old Norse translator seems to have struggled profoundly with this ambiguity and felt compelled to make clear exactly what he thought the *lai* taught.

Marie's nuanced and occasionally incoherent complexity was in some cases richer than the Old Norse translator was prepared to explore. The *Lais* were ostensibly structured in obvious settings and predictable patterns, whereas in fact they subtly interrogated and undermined those very patterns through the juxtaposition of contrary elements, *reductio ad absurdum* of received principles and undecided representations of character. The translator of the *Strengleikar* perceived those tensions only when they were most evident, almost pedantic in the original; where they were lightly and ironically traced, he seems to have missed them altogether.

5. 4. The *Lais* in English Literature: The "Breton Lays".

It is not surprising that, with their oft-recurring theme of the legends and great heroes associated with insular Britain, the Old French *lais* should persist in the imagination of the English even after the end of Norman rule. However, the transformation into Middle English was characterized by a certain recovery, as it were, of the roots of the *lais*: From musical and poetic performances originating in a distant Celtic past, they had become French literature entertaining

the Anglo-Norman elite; now as English poems of the fourteenth century they were returning to lay audiences of the lower classes, and losing in the process their aristocratic associations and sophisticated intrigue (Rumble xvi-xvii). The studied courtliness and subtle psychology of the longer *romans* were falling out of favour as an ever-growing literate consumer base found them too far divorced from their own reality to be taken seriously, while the more direct short narrative *lais*, with their aptness to dramatic recitation and their adaptability to cruder, earthier interpretations, survived well in popular culture.

There are some eight Middle English "Breton lays" that survive in one or more versions, composed in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and purporting to be translations or retellings of the French genre. Two of these, "Lay le Freine" and "Sir Launfal" (by way of the earlier and shorter "Sir Landevale"), are obvious adaptations of Marie's poems, and others contain elements which may be traceable to her influence or may be drawn from common folkloric and romantic motifs. However, like the later French productions, some of the Middle English lays are rougher than Marie's *lais*, often characterized by rape, warfare, single combat and quests; a sort of popular caricature of their models.

The single surviving manuscript of "Lay le Freine" is incomplete, breaking off after 340 lines (which corresponds to about line 364 in Marie's); it is "a relatively close translation of Marie de France's 518-line poem" (Laskaya and Salisbury 61), and shows consciousness that its audience no longer reads French:

> Bifel a cas in Breteyne,
> whereof was made *Lay le Frain*;
> in Ingliche for to tellen ywis
> of an asche for sothe it is ("Lay le Freine" 23-26)

(An adventure took place in Brittany,
from which was composed the *lai du Fraisne*;
of course, to express this in English
one would say "ash tree", for that is the meaning.)

The Middle English version of this poem is perhaps a little baudier on at least one occasion. Marie had described Gurun's seduction of Fraisne discreetly:

Soventes feiz i repaira.
A la dameisele parla;
tant li preia, tant li premist
qu'ele otria ceo que il quist. (*Le Fraisne* 281-4)

(Many times he visited there
He spoke to the girl;
so much did he beg her, so much did he promise her
that she granted that which he desired.)

A certain lusty abandon is betrayed in the Middle English version:

Oft he come bi day and night
to speke with that maiden bright;
so that, with his fair bihest,
and with his gloseing, atte lest
hye graunted him to don his wille
when he wil, loude and stille. ("Lay le Freine" 287-292)

(Often he came by day and night
to speak with the fair maiden;
with the result that, because of his pleasing promise
and flatteries, at last
she permitted him to do as he wished,
whenever he wanted and in whatever manner.)

Another slight change is introduced in the passage where the barons importune their lord to choose a legitimate bride (*Le Fraisne* 324-8). To the feudal expectations, the English translator adds ecclesiastical norms:

His knightes com and to him speke,
and holy chirche comandeth eke,

sum lordes douhter for to take,
and his leman al forsake ("Lay le Freine" 311-314)

(His knights came and told him,
and the holy church commands this as well,
to take as his wife some lord's daughter,
and to give up his mistress.)

Because the manuscript is incomplete, it is not known how the translator might have treated the successive weddings that conclude the French version. However, the faithfulness of the extant translation to the French source and the indications from the edge of the missing folio suggest that in both length and content, the "Lay le Freine" represents with only minor variations Marie de France's *Le Fraisne*.

"Sir Landevale", probably written in the early fourteenth century, is an essentially faithful poetic translation of Marie's *Lanval* with some distinguishing features. The lay perpetuates a tradition in which King Arthur is more or less passive and inept, manipulated by his wife Guinevere, who is despised as wantonly promiscuous ("Sir Landevale" 295-300; see Laskaya and Salisbury 204). The sharp barb about Lanval's homosexual preferences (*Lanval* 283-4) is dropped, or at most merely implied ("Sir Landevale" 226). A short passage is added in which Guinevere makes a last desperate attempt to bolster her accusation upon the arrival of the fairy queen's maidens ("Sir Landevale" 415-422). Marie's extensive courtroom scenes are greatly abridged, but the poem concludes with the addition of a lengthy exchange between Lanval and his love, wherein the outcome of the romance is clarified: Landevale expressly gains the fairy queen's pardon and declaration of abiding devotion ("Sir Landevale" 503-524). There is neither prologue nor epilogue.

"Sir Launfal", from the late fourteenth century, exists in only one manuscript (Laskaya and Salisbury 201). It is one of only a couple of Middle English lays whose author identifies himself: "Thomas Chestre made thys tale" ("Sir Launfal" 1039). The lay follows *Lanval* and "Sir Landevale" closely enough to show its direct dependance; it also drew upon the French *lai* of *Graelent*,[140] and includes some elements which must rely upon a source or sources now lost, if they did not spring from the imagination of the poet himself. *Lanval* is 664 lines in length, and "Sir Landevale" is about 540 lines; "Sir Launfal" is considerably longer at 1,046 lines. It is distinguished by a more popular tone (it is notably less "courtly" than Marie's *Lanval* or the more conservative translation "Sir Landevale"; see Laskaya and Salisbury 203-4). Unlike *Lanval*, which depends entirely upon discourse to move the plot, "Sir Launfal" incorporates a tournament ("Sir Launfal" 433-489) and a jousting duel ("Sir Launfal" 505-612). Launfal's encounter with the queen ("Sir Launfal" 637-708) expands the preliminary gathering into a dance that goes on all day and into the night, and their stormy interview, following the pattern of "Sir Landevale", does not record the accusation of Lanval's homosexual preferences.

Although "Sir Launfal" exhibits tastes and literary styles that differ greatly from Marie de France's focus on the psychology of love, it is with respect to these very differences that the author appeals overtly to the authority of the French original. When Sir Launfal receives a resounding blow from the Earl of Chester during the tournament, the writer adds the commentary: "Thus seyd the Frenssch tale" ("Sir Launfal" 474); similarly, the account of the jousting duel with Sir Valentine is allegedly established by the source text: "In tale as hyt ys telde" ("Sir Launfal" 576). Neither of these events nor the scenes in which they occur appear (as

[140] For example, the appearance of Launfal's disconsolate steed "Every yer, upon a certayne day" ("Sir Launfal" 1024), left behind when Sir Launfal is taken into fairyland, echoes quite precisely the ending of *Graelent* (710-726).

far as is known) in any former recounting of the story, and certainly not in Marie's version, though both the title and the general content of "Sir Launfal" insist particularly upon that connection.

The English lays, purportedly based on French renditions of old Celtic tales, continue Marie's practice of adapting and juxtaposing contemporary elements and popular motifs into the primitive fabulae. They differ from hers, however, in two ways: They lack, in my view, her subtlety and insight; and they were conceived in an era that was already unconsciously "post-Marie"; that is, they followed more or less unreflectively a literary path created and established by Marie de France. Marie innovated and disturbed; the authors of the Middle English lays repeated and comforted.

Because of this, the Middle English lays do not demonstrate the sort of indignant reaction to Marie de France's cultural and religious incoherence that appears in some passages of the French *lais* and *romans* and the Norse *Strengleikar*, works that were situated temporally, geographically and literarily within conscious proximity to Marie's *Lais*. Effacements, additions and alterations in the English versions result, I suspect, from their separation from their French models by some two centuries of important cultural, political and linguistic transformations. They reflect the poets' vision of their own developing English society and literature rather than any conscious response to provocative questions of a distant Norman past. By the era of the Middle English lays, Marie's once-problematic representation of the old Breton world had become standard literary fare.

5. 5. Conclusions: The *Lais* from Cutting-Edge to Cliché.

Marie's translation strategy of positioning authentic but incongruent elements together and of thereby questioning the established norms of literature, culture and religion came upon an audience unequipped to decode it but ready to enjoy it. The innovative *Lais* quickly occupied a central place in French literature and inspired imitations, spin-offs and "improvements" on the part of writers who did not incorporate or even necessarily understand what it was that made the *Lais* unique. Marianne Fisher (210) concludes:

> Rigid value systems are here replaced with a sliding scale that admits all the indeterminacies and contradictions of human experience. Even today, such ambiguity is heralded as revolutionary in cultural production. In the Middle Ages, it was equally startling, and evidence suggests that audiences were unsure what to make of it.[141]

In some later French incarnations, Marie's tasteful forays into consentual sex became virtually or actually rape scenes, adulterous love was sanitized to avoid social scandal, flawed and agonizing heroes ceased to doubt and conformed eagerly to Church regulations, and sensitive and active women characters were diminished while the (infrequent) female villains were taken as the archetype. The pastiche of incongruent elements lost its power to interrogate and became instead the stock-in-trade of the genre. With this shift the uncanny, unsettling wonder disappeared, and was replaced by magic, battles, and bawdy entertainment.

The Old Norse translation of the *Lais* reproduced the stories with accuracy and restraint, but tended to miss the subtler semantic cues which undermined surface structures. Marie, ahead of her time, was already piercing the façades of the high fashions of her culture while Norway,

[141] Fisher analyses the *Lais* through the lens of Pierre Bourdieu's *doxa* and *habitus*; here she is referring in particular to *Aüstic*, *Chaitivel*, and *Chievrefueil*. Of the other *lais*, she argues: "The majority of the lays articulate either submissive or subversive responses to established social structures. In this way, they remain within the boundaries of *doxa*, since even resistance is a form of acknowledgment of that which is being opposed" (209).

anxious to begin the process of adopting those very fashions, received with a somewhat uncritical admiration the ostensible values of the world they were about to enter. Where Marie was nuanced she was taken as straightforward; where she moralized, her moral was not considered sufficiently clear. The Norse translation seems to have assumed that Marie described the world as it was, not fully realizing that because of her translation approach she described the *worlds* as they were, drawn from their respective realities and starkly collated together in cohesive narrative poetry, their very positioning next to one another destabilizing the presuppositions and certainties of each in isolation.

The inconsistent pastiche of those worlds had become a somewhat unified if unreal world in its own right, a heritage of the literary tradition, by the time of the Middle English Breton lays. These fast-paced English narrative poems recaptured something of the folk roots of the original Breton performances, but they were irrevocably marked by the genre of the French *lai de Bretaigne* which had made of Celtic fairies, Arthurian adventures, Norman feudality, Christian devotion and passionate love indispensable ingredients of the long-gone and legendary world of "the lay".

Chapter 6. General Conclusion.

I came to the *Lais* of Marie de France for the pleasure of reading them; I come to the end of that reading with my expectations more than satisfied, for they not only provide the promised entertainment, but also give rise to broad reflection, provoke critical thinking and promote a wider, more tolerant, and more joyous view of the world.

No one, I will wager, can read the *Lais* of Marie de France without being struck by the odd and often incongruous combinations of temporal, cultural and religious elements. A magic ship carries a knight to another land, perhaps another world, to his destined married lady who lives beside a Christian chapel and whose boudoir is a temple to Venus. A metamorphosing hawk-man flies to a secret rendez-vous with his married and oppressed beloved, and their sexual relation is sanctified by his confession of committed and vibrant faith in God. The Welsh chieftain Arthur appears as a courtly Anglo-Norman king managed by his vindictive wife. The noblest of knights who exceeds all the expectations of chivalry abandons without a word or a moment's hesitation his feudal duties. Murdering the husband of one's father's mistress cathartically rights the wrong. And so on.

If Marie were simply a poet, we might surmise that she is strong on imagination and weak on cultural awareness; if she were a historian, we might conclude that she is creative but ill-informed. If she were an anthropologist, we would be forced to condemn her, despite the charm of her works, for the contamination of endangered cultural artifacts; if she were a (modern) translator, we would suspect either her corrupt sources or her unwarranted, anachronistic and inaccurate intrusions.

If Marie were the champion of "courtly love", we might expect some sort of standardized characterization and predictable resolution. If she were the spokesperson for Christian morality, we would surely see the inevitable sermonic asides and consistent judgements. If she were but the transmitter of Celtic perspectives, if she were nothing more than the lobbyist for the Norman nobility, if she were only the propagandist for Angevin expansion, if she were essentially the earliest European channeling of *écriture féminine*, if she were the herald of a deconstructionist approach to semantics, if she were—whatever we may wish to reduce her to, the *Lais* would look very different and would never have incited such diverse and staunchly partisan interpretations.

Understanding Marie as a medieval translator, as a gifted and innovative French poet, as a noblewoman, as an artist of the greatest creativity, is to see her as genuinely relying upon existing oral texts, drawing her authority from both her sources and her own position as translator and mediator for the vernacular audience, and situating herself within the tradition of *translatio studii*, the inexorable movement of knowledge through time, space, understanding and rhetoric. It is therefore not her failing nor her idiosyncracy to update and to reset the text for a medieval readership, but her task. In this she followed the pattern. However, what generally distinguished her methodology—indeed, I argue, what constituted her genius—was her unwillingness to entirely subsume any authentic participating schema in the story to any other. Celtic morality does not become Christian morality. It remains true to the customs of the Bretons as reflected in their tales. This is why it resonates with such evocative power. Nonetheless, it does not overturn Christian morality, which, omnipresent in Marie's society and taking its rightful place in the medieval translated text, stands beside its Celtic counterpart, cohabits uneasily with it, contradicts it, condemns it, but does not efface it. Feudality is everywhere in the

Lais and regulates proper conduct, but its expectations are tacitly contradicted when it comes up against a higher demand, that of true love. Murder is wrong, although it appears that on some occasions it is right. The bliss of adulterous passion is glorious when it celebrates truth and freedom from oppression; that same passion is abominable when it is divorced from excellence of character and reliance upon the Almighty.

In fact—and this is the point which I have striven to make throughout this investigation, that every categorical assessment of Marie must be qualified—the conclusions of the above paragraph are themselves over-generalizations. They are very true of *Yonec* and scarcely at all descriptive of *Eliduc*. Marie's *Lais* run the entire gamut, which is again a misleading statement in that it suggests that they can be positioned in graduated arrangement along a spectrum; it is rather that they can be located as distinct points somewhere across a great plain that crosses or effaces or fuses borders of time, space, culture and religion.

My goals in this undertaking have been 1) to free Marie' *Lais* from the restriction of being read through any single perpective, as sound and illuminating as that perspective may be with respect to its particular focus and method; 2) to draw together valuable perspectives without allowing their possible mutual incompatibility to eliminate their contributions from the discussion—it is Marie, after all, who is inconsistent, not the analyses of the various and varied aspects of her composition; and 3) to read the *Lais* and all their interpretations through the umbrella lens of medieval translation. I acknowledge the very real danger that this latter strategy should become as narrow and blinkered as any other single approach, and I have struggled to make it inclusive rather than restrictive, using it to shed light upon perspectives that otherwise might have seemed contradictory and hence mutually exclusive, receiving and synthesizing a

wider range of interpretations through an overall translation approach than would be possible through a single literary or cultural approach. The attentive reader will note that after having interrogated various scholarly contributions regarding a too-narrow overall perspective on the *Lais*, I have relied extensively and gratefully on those very contributions to examine and illuminate specific and focused aspects of Marie's poems and to integrate them into a broader perspective which, if not entirely coherent, represents with accuracy the undeniable and delightful incoherence of Marie de France. Indeed, it is my sincere hope that this re-examination of Marie that takes medieval translation as its general paradigm and Marie's creativity as its subject contributes to a new reading that embraces and benefits from the widest range of scholarly research on the *Lais*.

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APPENDIX: Summaries of the *Lais*

1. *Guigemar* (886 lines). Marie commences the *lai* of *Guigemar* with a short general prologue, telling of her determination to do justice to a great subject and to persevere in spite of the envy of lesser artists. Then her story begins: Long ago in Brittany, Guigemar, son of a respected baron, grows up to be outstanding in every way except that he has no interest in love. This is an uncourtly fault for which all reproach him. One day, while hunting, he encounters and shoots an antlered white doe. Though the animal is fatally brought down, the arrow rebounds from it and pierces Guigemar through his thigh; and the dying beast prophesies that the wound will not be healed until he and a woman suffer the deepest pains of mutual love.

Guigemar leaves the forest and, coming to the sea, goes aboard a magic unmanned ship to an unknown port, with a castle, garden and tower next to the dock. This is the domain of an old lord jealous about his young bride, whom he has imprisoned under the watch of his niece and an impotent priest. The woman and her maiden companion discover the arrival of the ship, awaken the unconscious Guigemar and bring him inside to care for his wound and to hide him from the jealous husband. Guigemar and the lady fall intensely in love, swear their undying fealty and indulge in the pleasures of their relationship for about a year and a half. They give each other tokens of their love: she ties his shirt in a knot which only she can undo, and he puts a belt around her which only he can remove. Alas, they are discovered by the husband, who vows to kill Guigemar but is dissuaded and allows him to leave on the magic ship.

Back in Brittany, all the ladies try to undo the shirt knot of the sorrowing Guigemar but are unsuccessful. Meanwhile, after two years of close imprisonment, the lady escapes the tower and boards the magic ship which takes her to Brittany, to the castle of Mériaduc, who is in the

middle of a war with a neighbouring lord. Mériaduc falls in love with her but cannot undo the belt. He organizes a tournament, and all the knights round about assemble, including his friend Guigemar with more than a hundred of his men. Guigemar meets his lady-love but does not recognize her, since "women look more or less alike." Then they both undo the charmed knots and are reunited. Mériaduc, in his desire for the lady, forbids the relationship. Therefore Guigemar departs, and all the knights who had come for the tournament join with him. They offer their service to Mériaduc's enemy, beseige Mériaduc's castle and finally overcome and kill him. Guigemar and his lady live happily ever after. This adventure inspired the *lai* of *Guigemar*, a delightful musical composition.

2. *Equitan* (320 lines). The eponymous protagonist of the *lai* of *Equitan* is king of the *Nanz*, over-enthusiastic in pursuit of pleasure and drawn to his kingly duties only when the exigencies of war make them unavoidable. He falls in love with the wife of his faithful seneschal; and though he does not wish to wrong his vassal, he also thinks it wrong that such a beautiful woman should not be passionately loved, and imagines that courtly values can have no virtue if she does not experience love. He propositions the lady and they agree to become secret lovers although unequal in station. Meanwhile, the courtiers reproach the king for failing to marry and provide an heir. The lady laments, believing that he will abandon her now, but he declares that if she were free he would marry her. So she plots to kill her husband in a boiling bath. The baths are prepared, one normal, one boiling. But Equitan and his love cannot resist a session in bed while the lady's husband is absent. He returns unexpectedly and Equitan, in confusion, leaps into the boiling bath and is killed. The seneschal, realizing the plot, throws his wife in also. The moral is that whoever plans evil for others sees it come back upon himself.

3. *Le Fraisne* (536 lines). The wife of a knight slanders her neighbour who has twins, claiming that it proves that she slept with two men. Then she herself gives birth to twin girls and, to save herself from the humiliation of her own calumny, determines to get rid of one of them. Her maid suggests that the child be taken to a convent and left there. The baby is wrapped in an expensive Constantinople silk and given an engraved gold ring, so that those who find her will know she was nobly born. The child is then abandoned outside the convent, suspended in an ash tree. The abbess adopts her and presents the child as her niece, giving her the name Fraisne ("ash tree").

Fraisne grows into a beautiful girl. Gurun, a neighbouring lord of the finest reputation, falls in love with her, meets secretly with her and finally convinces her to come away with him and be his mistress. She lives with him for a long time, gaining the esteem of all who meet her. But Gurun's barons reproach him for not selecting a bride within his rank and producing a legitimate heir. He is eventually persuaded, and the lady he decides to marry is, though the relationship is suspected by no one, Fraisne's twin sister Coldre ("hazel tree"). Coldre's mother resents the presence of the mistress and wants her driven out, but Fraisne's devoted service even to the new fiancée wins the mother over. Fraisne sees that the marriage bed has not been decorated so she puts her Constantinople silk on it. The mother recognizes the silk, asks to see the ring, and confesses that Fraisne is her daughter. All agree that the marriage to Coldre should be set aside and that Fraisne and Gurun should wed.

4. *Bisclavret* (318 lines). *Bisclavret* is the Breton word for "werewolf", a man who becomes a savage and deadly beast. One old story tells of a Breton baron who would disappear for three days every week, distressing his loving wife. She tasks him until he finally reveals to

her that he transforms into a werewolf, hunting in the forest; and that he stores his clothes (without which he would not be able to return to human form) under a rock near a chapel. This revelation so terrifies his wife that she secretly engages a knight who has long loved her to go and steal the clothes. When the husband cannot be found, she is declared free and marries the knight.

One day the king is out hunting, and his hounds bring Bisclavret to bay. When the beast perceives the king, he renders him homage. The astonished king prevents the killing of the werewolf and brings him back to the castle where he lives peaceably.

At a royal festival the knight who has betrayed Bisclavret arrives. The werewolf tries to maul him and is restrained with difficulty; the knight escapes and those who are present are mystified. On a later occasion the wife visits the king; Bisclavret attacks her and tears off her nose. The courtiers are about to destroy the creature when one argues that there must be some good reason for the changed behaviour. Torturing the wife, they learn the whole story, return Bisclavret's clothes and restore him to his humanity. The wife and her new husband are banished. Of their numerous descendants, many of the female line are born without a nose.

5. *Lanval* (664 lines). King Arthur gives rewards and presents to all his favoured knights but one, an illustrious but lone foreign knight named Lanval. Lanval rides off in despair. Stopping in a field near a stream, he is accosted by two marvellously beautiful maidens, who lead him to the pavillion of their mistress, a fairy queen who loves and has sought out Lanval. Lanval and the lady yield to their passionate mutual attraction, and she promises him her love and the granting of all of his desires—on the condition that he never reveal their relationship.

Upon his return to the court, the queen makes advances to Lanval which he refuses, claiming that he would not wish to betray the king. Stung by his rejection, she taunts him, and in anger he reveals that he loves someone immeasurably superior to herself. Mortified, the queen vows to have him punished, and accuses him before the king of vilely insulting her. Arthur has Lanval charged by the court and a day is set when he must prove the superior beauty of his love or accept the sentence of death. Day after day, Lanval cries for his love but she will not show herself. The court is about to condemn Lanval when the handmaidens of the lady and finally the lady herself appear, and all agree that Lanval is in the right. Abandoning his courtly obligations, he departs with his fairy mistress for Avalon.

6. *Les Dous Amanz* (254 lines). This story took place in Normandy, but the Bretons made a *lai* from it. A king has a beautiful daughter and because she is his only comfort, he does not want to lose her through marriage. He is reproached for this, so he proposes an ordeal: if any suitor can carry the girl to the peak of the nearby mountain without stopping to rest, he will prove himself worthy of her. Many try but none succeed.

A young nobleman of the region falls in love with the princess but knows that he would never be permitted to marry her. She suggests that he visit a relative of hers in Salerno who can provide an herbal potion that will give him the strength to carry her to the mountain peak. He makes the journey, obtains the potion and returns. The king agrees to let him attempt the ordeal. All of the king's vassals and friends assemble to witness the essay. The young man takes up the princess in his arms—she has been fasting to make herself as light as possible—and begins the ascent. He seems to do well at first but eventually begins to tire. She then urges him to take the potion, which he does not do, overconfident in his ability. He actually carries her all the way up

to the peak but collapses there, lifeless. When she realizes that he is dead, she casts away the vial of potion (making that whole region thereafter extremely fertile) and dies beside him of a broken heart. The king and the city mourn her and make a double tomb on the mountaintop for them.

7. *Yonec* (562 lines). The elderly lord of Caerwent marries a beautiful young woman but is extremely jealous; he imprisons her under the guard of his aged sister. This situation endures some seven years. One spring, she laments her plight and prays to God to give her an adulterous knight-lover as celebrated in the Breton tales of old. Her prayer is answered: a goshawk flies to her window and transforms into a handsome knight. Before she will accept him, however, he must prove that he believes in God. He recites the creed, transforms into her shape and takes the mass. Then they make love. But he cautions her to exercise the greatest discretion with respect to their relationship. The hawk-man, who is a fairy king named Muldumarec, comes to her at her lightest bidding and they enjoy the pleasures of love. However, the lady now appears so well and happy that her husband's suspicions are aroused. He plants his sister in hiding when he goes away and she sees all that is taking place. So the husband prepares traps to catch the hawk.

The lover appears and is mortally wounded in one of the traps, a fate against which he had warned her. Still, he comforts her with the prophecy that the child she will bear from their union will be named Yonec and will avenge them both. Then, bleeding, he departs. She leaps from the high window and follows the trail of blood to a city where she finds her lover the king dying on his bed. He begs her to leave because his devoted people will justly blame her for his death. Since she is afraid to return, he gives her a magic ring which, as long as she wears it, will keep her husband in forgetfulness of the whole affair. He also entrusts his sword to her, to be given to his son. One day, he prophesies, they will come to an abbey; they will see his tomb and

hear the story of how he was killed unjustly, and the son will avenge them. She returns home and suffers no reproach.

Yonec grows to be a valiant knight. One day he and his mother go to a festival and then are given a tour of an abbey. They arrive before a tomb; the prior explains that it is the tomb of their beloved king who was killed for love of a woman. The people now have no lord but await the coming of the promised son. At this the mother reveals the whole story, declares that God has ordained this fatal moment, and then falls dead on the tomb. The son kills his step-father with his father's sword, and becomes lord of the city.

8. ***Aüstic*** (160 lines). A knight and his wife live right next door to an unmarried knight. Because the woman has only heard good things about the bachelor and because he lives in such a handy location, she falls in love with him. They do not actually meet but they speak and look continually through the window and throw each other gifts. One spring night the husband catches his wife at the window and asks what she is doing. She says she is kept awake by the pleasure of listening to the nightingale singing. The husband and his servants construct traps and capture the nightingale, which he brings to her and kills, throwing it at her so that its blood stains her dress over her heart. She knows her lovemaking is over, so she puts the carcass in a silk wrapping embroidered with the story and sends it to her lover. He, a man of no ordinary nobility and courtesy, has a little reliquary made of gold and jewels in which he puts the wrapped body of the bird and which he keeps forever close.

9. ***Milun*** (534 lines). Milun, born in South Wales, becomes a redoubtable knight. A baron's daughter hears of his prowess and writes to him to offer her love, so he writes back and falls in love with her. They meet in her garden, so often and with such ardour that the girl

becomes pregnant. She fears severe reprisals, so she proposes to have the child in secret and to convey it by Milun to her noble sister in Northumbria. She sends also a letter of explanation and Milun's ring, which the child is to receive at his coming of age. Then Milun goes abroad to achieve glory, and his lady remains, given in marriage to a grand lord.

Milun returns, and he and his lady re-establish contact by means of messages attached to a swan. To encourage its cooperation, they each feed it well, then deprive it of food and send it to the other so that the swan will return to the place where it expects to be fed upon arrival. They communicate in this way for twenty years, as well as manage to meet on occasion.

The son grows to be a valiant knight, popular and invincible at tournaments. Milun hears talk of this strange knight and is jealous of his repute, so he heads for Brittany, determined to defeat him and then to prosecute a search for his son. He passes a winter there, then in the spring attends an international tournament at Mont St Michel. There he is unhorsed by his son, and in the event they come to know and love each other. The son vows to kill his mother's husband so that Milun and she can be together. But upon arriving in Wales they learn that the husband is already dead, so the son unites them in a marriage ceremony.

10. *Chaitivel* (240 lines). A beautiful lady of Nantes is loved by four noble suitors. She cannot choose between them so she encourages the courtly address of each. At a tournament, they exceed the bounds of discretion in their ardor to impress her; three of the four are killed and the fourth is wounded through the thigh, ending both his martial and sexual potency. The lady builds tombs for the three and cares for the fourth. She wants to compose a *lai* to commemorate her grief and call it "The Four Sorrows" (*Quatre Doels*), but the surviving knight insists that it be named after his own misery and called "The Wretched One" (*Chaitivel*).

11. *Chievrefueil* (118 lines). An episode from the famous story of Tristan and the queen and their great love. King Marc has banished Tristan because of Tristan's love for Marc's wife. Tristan then lives in the forest to be near the queen. He hears that the king is holding a Pentecost feast at Tintagel and realizes that the queen in travelling there will pass through the forest and be able to receive a message from him. He writes to her on a hazel stick signalling that he cannot live without her and must see her. Receiving and understanding the message, she arranges to meet with him, where they have great joy in freely conversing. She gives him advice on how to be reconciled with the king and he then returns to Wales where he awaits his recall. Being skilled on the harp, he composes, at the queen's request, a *lai* to commemorate their meeting.

12. *Eliduc* (1184 lines). Marie's introduction explains that Eliduc was the most valiant and courtly knight in Brittany, deeply in love with his well-born and gracious wife Guildeluëc. During foreign service he falls in love with the princess Guilliadun. Originally the *lai* was named *Eliduc* but since it is really about the actions and excellences of the two heroines, it is now called *Guildeluëc and Guilliadun*.

Eliduc was in great favour with the king of Brittany, but malicious slander has ruined his reputation and he is unjustly banished. After swearing undying fidelity to his wife, he parts for Logres (England) and takes service with a king who is at war with his neighbour because he has refused to give his daughter to that neighbour. On the occasion of an enemy attack, Eliduc leads a clever ambush and is victorious despite the fact that his troops are outnumbered. The king is delighted and swears Eliduc to a year's service as his principal vassal.

The king's daughter Guilliadun, unaware that Eliduc is married, falls in love with him. He likewise falls in love with her, though neither wish to reveal the state of their feelings. Eliduc

mourns his lot: he sees himself as most unfortunate in having promised his wife to be faithful, and finds himself fettered by his nobility which precludes dishonouring his wife through adultery or breaking faith with his lord through seduction of the daughter. Eliduc and Guilliadun finally confess their mutual love and she, still ignorant of the wife in Brittany, is confident that before the end of the year's sworn service he will have made her his bride.

Meanwhile, the king of Brittany, facing likely defeat by an enemy, repents of his distrust and recalls Eliduc. Eliduc informs his current lord of his need to depart immediately. Upon learning of this, Guilliadun is stricken, but then agrees that her lover may go provided he return to her at a set date. Eliduc returns home, resolves the king's crisis, treats his wife with polite and preoccupied disinterest, and then returns to England at the fixed time.

Eliduc arranges to take Guilliadun away with him, and they depart at night on his ship. A violent storm threatens the life of all on board and one of the sailors declares that it is because of Eliduc's sin in running off with Guilliadun when he has a wife at home; he demands that the girl be cast overboard. At the news that Eliduc is married, Guilliadun falls into a deathlike coma. Eliduc murders the accusing sailor, throws the body into the sea and skilfully pilots the ship to shore.

The girl still shows no sign of life so Eliduc takes her to a hermit's chapel near his home. The hermit has just died and Eliduc does not want to precipitately bury the daughter of a king, so he leaves her in the abandoned chapel, visits her each day to mourn, and in his devotion to her neglects his wife. Guildeluëc sets a servant to spy on him, discovers his secret and visits the girl herself. So struck is she by her beauty that she understands all. She observes a weasel revive its dead mate with a powerful herb, and snatching the flower puts it in the girl's mouth. Guilliadun

awakens and recounts her tale of woe to Guildeluëc, who reassures her by declaring that she will take religious vows so that her husband may be free to take another wife. She then summons Eliduc and presents to him his true love.

Guildeluëc becomes a nun, and Eliduc builds her a convent and endows it. Then he and Guilliadun are married. After many happy years together, Eliduc decides also to withdraw into the religious life; Guilliadun follows suit. He builds a monastery nearby to which he retires; Guilliadun joins the convent of Eliduc's former wife, and the three spend their remaining years in prayer for one another.