

CHAPTER THREE

THE WOUND, THE KNOT, AND THE BOOK: MARIE DE FRANCE AND LITERARY TRADITIONS OF LOVE IN THE LAIS

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All happy families resemble one another; each unhappy family
is unhappy in its own way.

Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*

Tolstoy's opening words in *Anna Karenina* might well describe Marie de France's depiction of love in her *Lais*. All of the stories are about love and the suffering it engenders, yet each presents love's travails in a unique configuration. Rather than tell one long story, Marie assembles 12 tales that depict star-crossed lovers who endure love's pains, each in his or her own way. As she conveys not a single conception of love but a range of erotic, familial, social, and spiritual relationships, Marie draws upon and transforms a diversity of literary sources to portray men and women who struggle to fulfill their desires in the face of complex social constraints.

Virtually all scholarship on Marie's *Lais* considers love in some way.¹ From numerous perceptive studies, several key critical notions

¹ General studies of Marie's notion of love include S. Foster Damon, "Marie de France: Psychologist of Courtly Love," *PMLA* 44 (1929), 968–96; Roger Dubuis, "La notion de *druerie* dans les *Lais* de Marie de France," *Le Moyen Age: Revue d'Histoire et de Philologie* 98 (1992), 391–413; and Jean Flori "Amour et société aristocratique: l'exemple des *lais* de Marie de France," *Le Moyen Age: Revue d'Histoire et de Philologie* 98 (1992), 17–34; see also the individual essays in Jean Dufournet, ed., *Amour et merveille: Les Lais de Marie de France* (Paris, 1995). For a fundamental study of Marie's *Lais* in the context of her sources, see Ernest Hoepffner, *Les Lais de Marie de France* (Paris, 1971). Insightful readings of Marie's presentation of love to which this essay is particularly indebted are those of Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner, *Shaping Romance: Interpretation, Truth, and Closure in Twelfth-Century French Fictions* (Philadelphia, 1993), pp. 157–206; Simon Gaunt, *Love and Death in Medieval French and Occitan Courtly Literature: Martyrs to Love* (Oxford, 2006); H. Marshall Leicester, "The Voice of the Hind: The Emergence of Feminine Discontent in the *Lais* of Marie de France," in *Reading Medieval Culture: Essays in Honor of Robert W. Hanning*, ed. Robert M. Stein and Sandra Pierson Prior (Notre Dame, IN, 2005), pp. 132–69; Donald Maddox,

emerge: that Marie portrays love as suffering; that she depicts a good number of *mal mariées*; that women's words often instigate love affairs or dramatic action;² that the author grapples with the social necessity of sexuality, which is often portrayed androgynously;³ that writing, reading, and desire are closely linked in the *Lais*;⁴ that love, like language, is often fatal;⁵ that love, for Marie, should be a reciprocal passion rather than a courtly game;⁶ that love involves forging new identities;⁷ that Marie constructs a view of transgressive love that defies ecclesiastic, feudal, and courtly conventions;⁸ that the *Lais*, in their variety, constitute "une véritable réflexion sur l'amour."⁹ Yet the variety of Marie's collection makes it impossible precisely to "define" love outside of its unique poetic representation. The *Lais* invite us to examine the nature of their lovers' dolorous stories in each individual tale, as we propose to do in this essay. Although each poem deserves far more attention than we can provide here, we hope that our global, comparative approach to Marie's collection will illustrate many of her literary innovations and distinctive insights.

The flowering of vernacular literature in 12th- and 13th-century France and England heralded a profusion of writings about love. Ovid's *Ars amatoria* (*Art of Love*) and his *Remedia Amoris* (*Remedies*

Fictions of Identity in Medieval France (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 24–82; Milena Mikhailova, *Le Présent de Marie* (Paris, 1996); Anne Paupert, "Les femmes et la parole dans les *Lais* de Marie de France," in *Amour et merveille*, ed. Dufournet, pp. 169–87; Rupert T. Pickens, "Marie de France and the Body Poetic," in *Gender and Text in the Later Middle Ages*, ed. Jane Chance (Gainesville, FL, 1996), pp. 135–71, as well as studies of particular themes and *lais* that will be noted later.

² Paupert, "Les femmes et la parole."

³ Rupert T. Pickens, "The Poetics of Androgyny in the *Lais* of Marie de France: *Yonec*, *Milun*, and *The General Prologue*," in *Literary Aspects of Courtly Culture*, ed. Donald Maddox and Sara Sturm Maddox (Rochester, NY, 1994), pp. 211–19.

⁴ Robert Sturges, "Texts and Readers in Marie de France's *Lais*," *Romanic Review* 71 (1980), 244–64.

⁵ R. Howard Bloch, *The Anonymous Marie de France* (Chicago, 2003), pp. 83–110.

⁶ Dubuis, "La notion de *druerie*."

⁷ Maddox, *Fictions of Identity*.

⁸ Flori, "Amour et société aristocratique"; see also Sharon Kinoshita, "Two for the Price of One: Courtly Love and Serial Polygamy in the *Lais* of Marie de France," *Arthuriana* 8.2 (1998), 33–55. For a perceptive analysis of how Marie "problematicize(s) male sexuality within the larger thematics of marriage and erotics in a way that sets her apart from most of her contemporaries" (p. 150), see William Burgwinkle's insightful chapter, "Queering the Celtic: Marie de France and the Men Who Don't Marry," in his *Sodomy, Masculinity, and Law in Medieval Literature: France and England, 1050–1230* (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 138–69.

⁹ Laurence Harf-Lancner, trans., *Les Lais de Marie de France* (Paris, 1990), p. 16.

for Love), with their sharp wit and cynicism, inspired vernacular imitations and influenced amatory rhetoric in courtly fiction,¹⁰ as did the shape-shifting and sexually charged dramas of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.¹¹ One Ovidian disciple, Andreas Capellanus, in his *Art of Courtly Love*, presented lovers' dialogues and "cases" for debate, allegedly at the court of Marie de Champagne.¹² Translations of classical epics, notably the *Roman d'Eneas*, an idiosyncratic adaptation of Virgil's classic, enhanced the role of women and embellished the plot with Ovidian love casuistry.¹³ Chrétien de Troyes inaugurated a tradition of Arthurian romances that explored the conflict between chivalric duty and passionate love and invited debate about the tensions of gender.¹⁴ The troubadours and Northern French trouvères sang of desire for a lady who was usually unattainable.¹⁵ Tales about the legendary, tragic love between Iseut, wife of King Mark, and Tristan, Mark's nephew, circulated in many forms.¹⁶ Celtic lore depicted fairy lovers with marvelous powers who drew mortals to the other world, as in the anonymous *lais* of *Graelent* and *Guingamour*.¹⁷ A genre flourishing in the 13th century, the *fabliaux*, depicted men and women tripped up by their bodies

¹⁰ See Ovid, *The Loves; The Art of Beauty; The Remedies of Love; and The Art of Love*, trans. Rolfe Humphries (Bloomington, IN, 1957). Among the many studies of Ovid's medieval influence, see Peter Allen, *The Art of Love: Amatory Fiction from Ovid to the "Romance of the Rose"* (Philadelphia, 1992).

¹¹ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Rolfe Humphries (Bloomington, IN, 1955). Marie, whose knowledge of Latin is evidenced by her translation of *L'Espurgatoire Seint Patriz*, was clearly familiar with the Ovidian mythography. Ovidian tales circulated in the vernacular as early as the 12th century; see *Pyrame et Thisbé. Narcisse. Philomena: trois contes du XII^e siècle français imités d'Ovide*, ed. and trans. Emmanuèle Baumgartner (Paris, 2000).

¹² Andreas Capellanus, *The Art of Courtly Love*, trans. John J. Parry (New York, 1941). Andreas's work is probably posterior to the *Lais*, but it is indicative of the kind of amatory rhetoric that circulated in the courts of Eleanor of Aquitaine and her daughter, Marie de Champagne, in the late 12th century.

¹³ *Le Roman d'Eneas*, ed. Aimé Petit (Paris, 1997), see esp. lines 7952–9280.

¹⁴ For a recent study of Chrétien's romances that includes a bibliography of editions, see Norris J. Lacy and Joan Tasker Grimbert, eds., *A Companion to Chrétien de Troyes* (Cambridge, 2005).

¹⁵ See Simon Gaunt and Sarah Kay, *The Troubadours: An Introduction* (Cambridge, 1999).

¹⁶ On the evolution of the Tristan legend from early Old French fragments to contemporary culture, see Joan Tasker Grimbert, ed., *Tristan and Isolde: A Casebook* (New York, 1995).

¹⁷ See Alexandre Micha, ed. and trans., *Lais féériques des XII^e et XIII^e siècles* (Paris, 1992).

and appetites.¹⁸ By contrast, saints' lives celebrated men and women who renounced carnal pleasures for transcendent spiritual love.¹⁹ As we shall see, Marie draws on all these traditions in her *Lais*, even as she asserts her critical difference from each.

Social realities for aristocratic men and women in 12th-century Northern France and England often dictated that marriages be arranged for political expediency, to ensure the continuity of lineage under a system of primogeniture, rather than for love.²⁰ Noblemen representing powerful domains were expected to marry women of comparable or superior rank and produce heirs. The chastity of maidens was prized as a guarantor of legitimacy and genealogical purity; a young woman's choice of mate required parental sanction. A wife's fidelity in marriage was sacrosanct. Adultery was severely condemned within canon law, and customary law overlooked the crime of passion: a husband who discovered his wife and her lover *in flagrante delicto* was exonerated if he killed them at that moment. Yet even as powerful families sought to forge alliances through the marriage of their children—negotiating engagements well before a son's or a daughter's sexual maturity—the Church preached that marriages be based on mutual consent. Within religious orders, men and women took vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience to God, seeking spiritual solace to offset terrestrial strife. These complex social realities form the backdrop upon which Marie weaves her multi-stranded tales. Evidently well-versed in Latin literature as well as contemporary oral and written traditions, Marie approached her sources from a perspective that was unusual for her time. As one of relatively few authors to identify herself as female, she wrote within a literary culture dominated by men; she observed human nature and social institutions from the perspective of a woman who was both “on the margins” and inside medieval

¹⁸ For a representative selection, see Luciano Rossi and Richard Straub, ed. and trans., *Fabliaux érotiques: textes de jongleurs des XII^e et XIII^e siècles* (Paris, 1992).

¹⁹ The Anglo-Norman lives of St Laurent and St Catherine, roughly contemporaneous with Marie, are translated in Joceylm Wogan-Browne and Glyn S. Burgess, *Virgin lives and Holy Deaths: Two Exemplary Biographies for Anglo-Norman Women* (London, 1996). *La Vie de Seinte Audree*, attributed to Marie, will be mentioned later.

²⁰ For a classic statement of conflicting attempts by aristocratic families and the clergy to define marriage during this period, see George Duby, *The Knight, The Lady, and the Priest: The Making of Marriage in Medieval France*, trans. Barbara Bray (New York, 1983) and *Mâle moyen âge: de l'amour et autres essais* (Paris, 1988). Although Duby's portrayal of historical women has been questioned by some scholars, his analysis remains pertinent for the fictional world of the *Lais*.

domestic culture. We do not know what Marie's life experience may have been—whether she was or had been married, whether she lived in religious orders. But, perhaps reflecting the author's circumstances, the *Lais* convey empathy for those who find themselves as outsiders, for those who face public criticism for accomplishments or perceived differences, and for those who, because they suffer unjust restrictions, transgress certain social norms.

In the General Prologue of London, British Library, Harley 978, which is the only manuscript to contain all 12 *Lais*, Marie provides insights into her poetic approach towards love.²¹ Although the word *love* is neither mentioned nor announced as a theme, Marie implies that the Ancients, and by implication Marie herself, write “assez oscurement” [quite obscurely] (v. 12)—meaning that the matter was difficult to understand or quite literally dark—in a way that requires interpretation by readers who would add their own understanding, “de lur sen le surplus mettre” (v. 16). She also maintains that suffering [“dolor”] may be overcome and vice avoided if one undertakes a great work, “greuose ovre” (vv. 23–27). Finally, Marie establishes herself as something of a maverick who will not simply translate Latin works into the vernacular (as others have done), but will instead write down oral, Breton tales that she will “assemble” in a collection for the king, most likely Henri II Plantagenet (vv. 43–48). By suggesting that she will tackle difficult, dark subject matter in a way that will challenge her readers, that her poetic efforts—and the corresponding engagement of her readers—may overcome sorrow, and that her classical training will be filtered through popular, oral materials, Marie offers a particularly apt introduction to her original collection of love stories. When she asserts in the Prologue to *Guigemar* that men and women who have been praised may be the object of envy and attacked as if “bitten” by dogs (*Guigemar*, vv. 1–18), she implies that she has a personal stake in stories of those who are calumniated and wounded.

²¹ All citations are from Marie de France, *Les Lais de Marie de France*, ed. Jean Rychner (Paris, 1973). Translations into English are my own. I have also consulted Harf-Lancner, *Les Lais de Marie de France*.

I. Guigemar and the malady of love

Guigemar, the initial tale in the Harley manuscript, is a tale of sexual initiation that sets the stage for the stories to follow, establishing the narrator's themes and approaches and opening a set of questions about the characters' private desires and social obligations.²² With remarkable poetic insight and range, Marie draws from multiple social and literary registers. Into a feudal social setting, she incorporates Celtic myth, Ovidian motifs, and themes from the *Metamorphoses*. Her characters engage in love casuistry that echoes the *Roman d'Eneas*; the lovers' pains evoke the mutual suffering of Tristan and Iseut; and the final episodes portray military exploits typical of chivalric romance. *Guigemar* also introduces features that recur in other *lais*: talking animals (also in *Bisclavret* and *Yonec*); the *mal mariée* (as in *Yonec*, *Laüstic*, *Milun*); symbolic objects exchanged or communicated between lovers (in *Laüstic*, *Milun*, *Eliduc*); and, above all, passionate reciprocal love that is transgressive in some way (as in *Equitan*, *Lanval*, *Deus Amanz*, *Yonec*, *Laüstic*, *Milun*, *Chievrefoil*, and *Eliduc*). Marie's initial narrative presents love as a powerful constellation of pressures, urges, and desires apprehended through language and mediated through cultural signs and symbols.

Guigemar is an admirable young Breton knight much beloved by his family and countrymen. When he comes of age, he serves the king valiantly in war, but his natural disinclination for love makes him an outcast. Although Marie does not discuss the problem explicitly here, medieval readers would understand the pressures on such a nobleman to marry and produce an heir. Following his inclination to hunt rather than to search for love, Guigemar strikes an androgynous hind with an arrow that rebounds to wound him in the thigh. The dying hind prophesies that Guigemar can only be cured by a lady who will love and suffer for him as much as he will do for her. The story then recounts how the wounded knight finds the lady who cures him, loses her, and finally fights to win her back. This apparently simple quest unfolds as a series of complex moments in which Marie explores diverse conceptions of love.

²² On the hero's discovery of his sexual and social identity, see Rupert T. Pickens, "Thematic Structure in Marie de France's *Guigemar*," *Romania* 95 (1974), 328–41.

After Guigemar leaves the dying hind, he is conveyed in a marvelous ship to the land where he will discover love. Judging from the overlay of Celtic motifs, Marie seems to have set the stage for an elusive otherworld encounter with a mysterious fairy lady. Yet the realm that Guigemar enters is strikingly over-determined by literary conventions that hail from classical culture. Guigemar meets not a free spirit (as Lanval will) but a married lady locked up in a tower by a jealous husband and guarded by a eunuch, an old priest who has lost his "lower parts." Furthermore, the walls of the lady's chamber are painted with images that call conspicuous attention to Marie's manipulation of her classical sources: the murals depict Venus, goddess of love, demonstrating how men should maintain love and loyally serve her. The most remarkable feature of this *ekphrasis*, or written description of a work of art, is that Venus casts into the fire "le livre Ovide u il enseigne / comment chascuns s'amur estreine" [the book of Ovid where he teaches how each should struggle against love] (vv. 239–40) and excommunicates all those who would follow the book's teachings. The generic shift from the androgynous hind's amorous prophecy to the goddess of love's book-burning could not be more startling. Yet if the hind's words are mysterious, Venus's defiant gesture is equally inscrutable, as many critics have noted.²³ Which book of Ovid does she burn? The *Ars amatoria*, a cynical manual of seduction, or the *Remedia amoris*, which counsels men how to get over women? Who painted or commissioned the murals, the husband or the wife? By depicting Venus casting the unidentified book of a known misogynist author into the fire, Marie cunningly profiles her knowledge of classical love rhetoric and denounces its insidious effects. The close proximity of the scene of the hind, the *ekphrasis* of Venus and Ovid's book, and ensuing disquisitions on love by the characters and the narrator (vv. 379–526) foreshadow the way that Marie will transform literary

²³ Among the many critics who have analyzed this passage, see Herman Braet, "Note sur Marie de France et Ovide: Lai de Guigemar," in *Mélanges de philologie et de littératures romanes offertes à Jeanne Wathelet-Willem*, ed. Jacques de Caluwé (Liège, 1978), pp. 21–25; Logan E. Whalen, "A Medieval Book-Burning: Objet d'art as Narrative Device in the *Lai* of Guigemar," *Neophilologus* 80 (1996), 205–11; Robert Hanning, "The Talking Wounded: Desire, Truth Telling and Pain in the *Lais* of Marie de France," in *Desiring Discourse: The Literature of Love, Ovid through Chaucer*, ed. James J. Paxson and Cynthia A. Gravlee (Selinsgrove, PA, 1998), pp. 140–61; and SunHee Kim Gertz, *Echoes and Reflections: Memory and Memorials in Ovid and Marie de France* (Amsterdam, 2003), pp. 78–84.

conventions of love throughout the *Lais*. She fuses the *merveilleux* of oral Breton tales, which celebrate the ineluctable force of physical passion, with the rhetorical savvy of Ovid and his imitators, who attempt to control desire by verbal manipulation to their own ends. Even as she appears to reject the *Ars amatoria* and the *Remedia amoris*, she will exploit Ovidian amatory rhetoric throughout the *lais*, albeit often to denounce its negative effect. Furthermore, the plight of lovers and their symbolic objects from the *Metamorphoses* will infuse her plots, from the self-absorption of Narcissus (echoed here in the love-spurning Guigemar) to the thwarted adolescent love of Piramus and Thisbé or the resistant weaving of Philomena, as we shall see.²⁴

With a high degree of literary self-consciousness, Marie depicts love as a powerful force that is almost always apprehended through cultural symbols or linguistic signs. In a corollary gesture, the narrator often exploits poetic language or engages in word play to heighten or underscore emotional states. For example, when the dying hind speaks, she does so in terms that echo Ovidian and Tristanian suffering (see vv. 106–22), and her prophecy will be quite literally enacted by Guigemar: his physical *plaie* (wound) will become a metaphoric *plaie*, when he falls in love with the lady (see vv. 379–83).²⁵ This engenders a discursive *plait* [discussion] between Guigemar and the lady, who debate the merits of falling in love, both by themselves and with each other, before they consummate their passion (vv. 400–526); the prolonged process of falling in love and word play recalls the courtship of Lavinia and Eneas in the *Roman d'Eneas*.²⁶ Before the lovers separate (for both fear that they will be discovered by the husband), they seal their relationship with love-knots (*plait*, v. 559): the lady ties a knot in Guigemar's *chemise* that only she can untie; he fastens a belt around her waist that may only be opened by him (vv. 557–76).

The final third of the tale shifts to the register of chivalric romance. The lady escapes from her tower in search of Guigemar, but is captured by Meriaduc, who desires her as his own. The *lai* thus moves from Celtic tale where love is bestowed within a marvelous otherworld,

²⁴ Marie's complex debt to Ovid is explored at length by Gertz, *Echoes and Reflections*.

²⁵ For further exploration of this onomastic play, see Charles Mela, "Le Lai de Guigemar: 'selon la lettre et l'écriture,'" *Marche Romane* 30 (1980), 193–202; and Nancy Vine Durling, "The Knot, the Belt, and the Making of Guigemar," *Assays: Critical Approaches to Medieval and Renaissance Texts* 6 (1991), 28–53.

²⁶ See above, note 13.

through the *romans d'antiquité* where love inspires verbal play, to chivalric romance where the woman becomes a prize contested between knights. By deploying Celtic, Ovidian, and chivalric conventions as a backdrop for an engaging love story, Marie suggests that love is always apprehended through such cultural constructions.

The *Lais*'s poignant love scenes are often marked by self-consciousness on the part of the characters or the narrator that invite readers to step back from the narrative. For example, one of the most anticipated moments in *Guigemar* is the reunion of Guigemar and his lady in Meriaduc's domain after a separation of several years. The lady becomes pale at the very sound of Guigemar's name, but when Guigemar sees her, he does not immediately recognize her: "La dame vit et esgarda / E sun semblant e sa maniere; / Un petitet se traist ariere" [He saw the lady and observed her appearance and manner; he stepped back a little] (vv. 770–72). Guigemar thinks he must be fooling himself to imagine that this is his lady, for women look a great deal alike: "Femmes se ressemblent asez" (v. 779). Not even the test of the belt and the knot will convince Guigemar completely of her identity: "Li chevaliers s'esmerveillat; / Bien la conut, mes nequedent / Nel poeit creire fermement" [The knight was amazed; he recognized her, but nonetheless he could not really believe it (that it was her)] (vv. 812–14). Rather than rush into each other's arms after their long separation, the couple must confirm their identities by performing a rite of reciprocity and retelling their stories. As with their initial encounter, their reunion is a carefully orchestrated manipulation of signs which invite readers not simply to observe but also to interpret their affair, adding "le surplus" of their understanding (General Prologue, v. 16).

Guigemar's otherworld adventure ends abruptly in the public "real" world when he kills Meriaduc and destroys his castle, a solution befitting chivalric romance. The story is one of the few where the lovers are happily reunited as a couple in the end (others are *Lanval*, *Fresne*, *Milun*). But, as readers have noted, Guigemar's story leaves several threads untied.²⁷ The jealous husband remains a shadowy, if distant and unmentioned, menace; there is no word of marriage or children for Guigemar and his lady; and finally, there is no account of reunion with Guigemar's loving family from the *lai*'s opening lines. Marie's own discursive knot is both open and closed. Even as Guigemar discovers

²⁷ For example, see the remarks by Maddox, *Fictions of Identity*, p. 31.

his sexual identity and experiences reciprocal love, the story's loose ends point to questions that will be explored in other *lais*.

Not only for its motifs but especially for its narrative strategies, and like the classical painting that features on the lady's wall, *Guigemar* serves as *mise en abyme* of Marie's literary methods in the *Lais*. Marie approaches her sources not only as poetic "materials" but also as cultural frameworks in which her characters come to know each other and through which they must shape their lives. Sexual identity is not only corporeal but also cultural. Set within a specific geopolitical, socio-linguistic and generic context, each of the *lais* depicts love as a *force motrice* that cannot be divorced from the discursive systems and symbolic tokens through which it is experienced. Marie's enmeshed characters resourcefully manipulate verbal discourse and symbolic objects, seeking to shape their lives in ways that often transgress social norms. As she draws in distinctive ways on a rich treasure of literary sources, Marie portrays love as physical suffering, as a complex linguistic and cultural encounter, and as a fiction wrought by her own creative transformation—as wound, knot, and book—throughout the *Lais*.

II. *Smart woman, foolish choice: Equitan and Ovidian seduction*

If adulterous lovers find lasting "joie" in *Guigemar*, their passion leads to self-destruction in *Equitan*, a brief *lai* that turns the conventions of reciprocal love and fairy-tale endings upside down. Although *Equitan* predates the 13th-century's proliferation of *fabliaux*—short comic tales that often depict adulterers who selfishly pursue their pleasures with single-minded purpose—Marie's tale turns on the plot of the "trompeur trompé" [the trickster tricked or trapped by his own game] favored by that genre. The aphorisms that punctuate the tale link it to the tradition of moral exempla or fable in which Marie later excels. The tale begins in an idealizing mode whose praise of Equitan will soon become ironic: Marie extols the "prowess, courtesy, and nobility" (vv. 1–5) of the Bretons and announces that she will tell the story of a courtly king and ruler, Equitan. Like *Guigemar*, the hero is much loved by his countrymen. But unlike *Guigemar*, Equitan is overly fond of amorous activities; his knighthood is merely a pretext for his pleasure (vv. 15–16). Foolish, excessive love, the narrator warns, is dangerous (vv. 17–18).

With shrewd economy, *Equitan* recounts a seduction plot that backfires: a king who falls in love with the wife of his faithful seneschal contrives with the lady to kill the valorous husband, but the lovers' indiscretion results in their own painful deaths. At each step, Marie depicts characters caught up in amorous deceptions that go awry. Equitan covets his seneschal's wife on the basis of her reputation as a beauty before he has even seen her. His desire springs from lack of what he should not have; he goes hunting in a calculated move that leads him to the lady's house. The arrow that strikes him is not that of a marvelous hind, but of powerful "Amurs," a figure that evokes the strategic seductions portrayed in Ovid's *Art of Love*. *Equitan* delves headlong into the dangers of such love rhetoric as it explores the unfortunate consequences of a powerful man who convinces a beautiful, married woman to make a foolish choice.

Although Equitan initially realizes he should not compromise his faithful seneschal's wife (less for the trouble it will bring to her than for the pain it will cause her husband), he justifies his seduction by the specious reasoning that she is too beautiful to be unloved (vv. 79–82). Abusing the protection he owes his seneschal, Equitan goes so far as to convince himself that his vassal will not mind sharing the lady, to whom he does not have an exclusive right: "certes, jeo voil a li partir" [Indeed, I want to share her with him!] (v. 88). Manipulating the woman as an object to be shared—literally "parted" or divided—between two men, Equitan contrives to place the wife in the untenable position of Iseut, shared by Mark and Tristan.

Like Guigemar, Equitan is wounded by love (v. 60), and his "dolor" requires the same cure as Guigemar's: the love of the lady. But Marie deploys these images within a remarkably different register. Love's malady is recast as a crude strategy for seduction. Returning early from a hunt with his seneschal, Equitan pretends to be ill and takes to his bed, thereby enabling him to lure the lady in to his chamber so that he may tell her that he is "dying" of love for her (vv. 113–16).

Unlike other adulteresses in the *Lais*, this lady is not a *mal mariée*, entrapped by a jealous husband. Rather, she is overcome by the king's amorous rhetoric. In *Guigemar*, the hero quickly convinces his beloved that courtly banter is unnecessary for true lovers (see *Guigemar*, vv. 501–26). In *Equitan*, by contrast, the amatory debate is drawn out, precisely to emphasize the king's verbal manipulation (vv. 111–80). The wife's protestations that their affair would be unbalanced, shows that she understands exactly what is at stake: Equitan, powerful king,

takes advantage of his subaltern's wife, a lopsided arrangement that distorts the ideal of love between equals: "Amur n'est pruz se n'est egals" [Love is not good unless it is equitable/equally shared] (v. 137). The wife implies that rich men abuse their paramours, since they keep their lovers from others by force (vv. 146–48). But Equitan protests that only "burgeis" and never "fin curteis" seek to profit from love (vv. 150–54). In a parody of courtly obeissance, Equitan vows to play the subservient role: "vus seiez dame e jeo servanz, / vus orguilluse e jeo preianz" [you be the lady and I the servant, you the proud one and I the supplicant] (vv. 175–76). *Equitan* dramatizes not reciprocity in love, but the asymmetry of gender relations, here conspicuously upended. In a falling-in-love scene diametrically opposed to that in *Guigemar*, Marie depicts at length the abuse of seductive discourse: Equitan insisted so much—"tant ad li reis parlé od li / E tant li ad crié merci" [so much did he speak with her and so long did he cry for mercy]—that the wife surrendered—"E el sun cors li otria" [And she gave him herself, her body] (vv. 178–80). Although some critics have noted Marie's lack of sympathy for the adulteress, others have seen her as a victim who has little choice but to accede to the king's demands.²⁸

When the two lovers conspire to do away with the husband by arranging for him to jump into a scalding hot bath, they are caught not because they have plotted against the seneschal (presumably the king could have rationalized that murder as an accident) but because they could not resist indulging in their immoderate and foolish passion: they make love in the seneschal's bed, which is placed before the scalding bath. The seneschal appears unexpectedly, and the king mistakenly leaps into the burning tub "pur sa vileinie covrir" (v. 294, which implies both masking of his crime and covering of his genitals). Immediately understanding the plot hatched against him, the seneschal throws his wife head first into the boiling water, where she also dies. The ideal of reciprocity celebrated in *Guigemar* transmogrifies into a gruesome double death, underscored in a stark couplet: "Issi mururent ambedui / Li reis avant, e ele od lui" [Thus they both died, the king first, and she after him] (vv. 305–06).

²⁸ For the latter view, see Sharon Kinoshita, "Royal Pursuits: Adultery and Kingship in Marie de France's *Equitan*," *Essays in Medieval Studies* 16 (1999), 43–45; and Leicester, "Voice of the Hind," pp. 140–43.

Equitan portrays lovers who are equally and almost simultaneously destroyed by their unbridled passion. Manipulating amatory motifs and discursive conventions similar to those deployed in *Guigemar* to very different effect, Marie here recounts adultery as a tawdry affair. Devoid of marvelous intervention, set resolutely in the “real” world, *Equitan* dramatizes the abuse of royal power and amatory rhetoric in a sordid scenario wherein the two lovers suffer little for each other until their violent end. Self-interest and carnal pleasures trump sacrifice, until both the man and the woman burn in a torment of their making. The two opening *lais* of Harley 978 thus demonstrate how Marie’s characters can either deploy the rhetoric of love and negotiate its cultural signs to their own ends—as do the lovers in *Guigemar*—or be consumed by them, as in *Equitan*.

III. *Arthurian fantasies*: Lanval

In *Lanval*, Marie de France ventures into the world of Arthurian legend, which first inspired courtly fictions at about the time that Marie composed her *Lais*. In many Arthurian romances, such as Chrétien de Troyes’s *Erec et Enide*, *Cligés*, or *Yvain*, a knight sets out from Arthur’s court to accomplish feats of prowess, winning the hand of a beautiful maiden and the reward of a kingdom or territory; these fictions seem to express the erotic and social fantasies of aristocratic youth who competed for limited resources. Other romances, such as Chrétien’s *Lancelot* and *Perceval*, explore the moral challenges of knights as they attempt to exemplify chivalric honor, sometimes succumbing to sexual temptations or failing to pursue the right goal. Marie’s brief foray into Arthurian fiction, which almost certainly predates Chrétien’s account of Lancelot’s adultery with Guinevere, exemplifies the ambivalent capacity of courtly fiction both to reflect erotic fantasies and social desires and to probe the darker forces that subtend courtly society, where competition, sexual humiliation, and treachery threaten to undermine chivalric identity.

The eponymous hero has been forgotten by Arthur, who has distributed gifts of women and land to all his other knights. Sad and pensive, uprooted in a strange land with nowhere to turn, Lanval wanders off to a riverbank, where he encounters a retinue of beautiful ladies and a fairy lady who seems to be the answer to a landless bachelor’s wildest dreams: she says that she has come from afar for him, and when

he swears that he will do everything that is in his power for her, she grants him not only “s’amur et sun cors” [her love and her being] (v. 133) but anything that he may desire, provided that he keep their love a secret.²⁹ As long as their love remains hidden, male fantasy and female erotic desires seem to correspond with perfect reciprocity.

This dream of mutual love is undone by the desire of another woman, Arthur’s wife. Not unlike the fairy lady, the queen also offers her love to Lanval; she rather brazenly assumes that he will be delighted to take what she has to offer. When he rebuffs her—saying that he has no desire for her love and that he has long served the king—she accuses him of having no “talent” [desire] for women and of preferring the company of “vallez” [young men]—a charge that chagrins Lanval and prompts an overly hasty reply: he loves a woman whose simplest servant girl is more beautiful than the queen herself (vv. 219–302). Stung by this humiliating reply, the queen then falsely blames Lanval before the king of having attempted to seduce her, thus forcing the king to try Lanval for treason. Disconsolate because he has revealed the secret about his fairy lady, whom he has thus lost, Lanval reluctantly prepares to undergo a trial in which he must prove that his lady is more beautiful than Guinevere. Even though Lanval has broken his promise, the fairy lady and her lovely attendants appear in a remarkable procession before Arthur’s court that amply proves Lanval’s claims. The fairy lady’s pardon and generosity thus save Lanval from death, restoring his compromised masculinity and chivalric identity to superior status.

With a few swift strokes in *Lanval*, Marie represents the Arthurian world as a hierarchical society driven by competition and exclusion, where love functions as a fantasy linked to beauty and wealth. A marginalized, spurned knight finds a lady who offers him all that he desires; attacked as a homosexual and calumniated as a traitor by a scheming woman, the knight then vindicates his honor and masculinity when his generous lady love displays her beautiful body before admiring men.

As she ventures into Arthurian fiction at its inception and blends it with Celtic marvels, Marie creates a fantasy that hints at troubling

²⁹ On the fairy lover in Marie and other Celtic *lais*, see Laurence Harf, “La Reine ou la fée: l’itinéraire du héros dans les *Lais* de Marie de France,” in *Amour et merveille*, ed. Dufournet, pp. 81–108.

tensions in the “real” feudal world: that courtly society may be sapped by competition and exclusion; that female sexuality may bolster or threaten masculine identity; that heterosexuality may be imposed through shame; that true love may be difficult to sustain amidst such social pressures. As many critics have noted, the perfect, reciprocal love between Lanval and his fairy lady cannot exist in Arthur’s domain. At the end of the *lai*, Lanval departs on horseback with his lady to Avalon, thus escaping the injustice and hypocrisy of the courtly world. With this symbolic gesture, Marie de France takes leave of the domain of Arthurian romance; elsewhere, she explores other fictional terrains.

IV. Ovidian transformations: *Deus Amanz* and *Laüstic*

As we have seen, Marie’s relationship to Ovid’s works is ambivalent and complex. In *Guigemar*, she seems violently to reject his cynicism about love, and in *Equitan*, she portrays the dangers of Ovidian strategies of seduction: both these *lais* cast the *Ars amatoria* and *Remedia amoris* in a critical light. But other *lais* draw positively from the sexually charged dramas and poetics of transformation in the *Metamorphoses*. In *Deus Amanz* and *Laüstic*, Marie recasts themes and motifs from the *Metamorphoses* to portray love as a tragic, but transformative force.³⁰

Both *Deus Amanz* and *Laüstic* are set within carefully delineated geographic and social spaces—not the “other” world but the “real” world—in which an innocent passion is thwarted. As we shall see, as they demonstrate the power of tragic love to create memorials worthy of remembrance,³¹ both *Deus Amanz* and *Laüstic* exemplify the poetic process that Marie announces in the General Prologue, where a “granz bien” blossoms and flowers.

Deus Amanz tells the story of two children who love and die for each other. An over-protective and overly attached regal father, a widower, thwarts the earnest love of a young man for his daughter by

³⁰ On Marie’s transformation of Ovidian motifs in these *lais*, see Kristine Brightenback, “The *Metamorphoses* and Narrative Conjointure in ‘Deus Amanz,’ ‘Yonec,’ and ‘Le Laüstic,’” *Romanic Review* 72 (1981), 1–12 and Gertz, *Echoes and Reflections*.

³¹ On the importance of memory and commemorative objects as topic and poetic strategy in Marie, see Logan E. Whalen, *Marie de France and the Poetics of Memory* (Washington, DC, 2008).

imposing an impossible task that must be accomplished by anyone who asks for her hand in marriage: she must be carried without respite in her suitor's arms to the top of an imposing mountain that dominates the region. Not wishing to cause grief or to anger the father she loves, the young girl seeks out the help of her aunt in Salerno, who provides a *beivre* [potion] that will give her lover the *vertu* [strength] that he lacks.

But, as the narrator remarks in one of her rare first-person interjections, the potion is of little worth to the youth, since he lacks moderation (which would enable him to profit from the potion by remembering to drink it): "Mes jo creim que poi ne li vaille / Kar n'ot en lui point de mesure" (vv. 188–89). The "joie" the boy feels for the girl causes him to forget the potion (vv. 192–93), despite her repeated urgings. This *lai* is grounded in physical place and in explicitly corporeal struggles: the youth literally carries her body to the summit and expires when his heart leaves his body (v. 215). Having flung and spread ["espaundu"] the potion on the mountain, where it improves ["amendez"] the countryside and causes "meinte bone herbe" to grow, the girl lies down at the boy's side, embracing him and kissing him, touched in her heart by his "dol" [sorrow] until she dies by his side. Mourned by the disconsolate king and his neighbors, the lovers are buried in a marble sarcophagus on top of the mountain, which takes its name "Deus Amanz" from their adventure (vv. 250–51).

In this *lai*, the king's unreasonable love for his daughter, the daughter's obligation to her father, and the young suitor's imprudent "joie" all combine to create an enormous obstacle that no salutary medicine can overcome. The lovers' double death alludes simultaneously to both the tragedy of Tristan and Iseut (for whom a *beivre* has quite different effects) and the double suicide of Pyramus and Thisbé, young people who, as in *Deus Amanz*, brave opposition from their elders to love, and whose blood colors the fruit of the mulberry bush, a fertile symbol of death (as in *Metamorphoses* IV). In Marie's version, "meinte bone herbe" flower on the mountainside as a poignant symbol of life recalling death, echoing the "flurs" of the General Prologue, which spread ["esprendre"] when a "granz biens" is heard. Marie's poetic monument thus encompasses life and death, the buried lovers and the flowers that spring forth as a symbol of their enduring love.

Laüstic enacts another Ovidian transformation, this time fusing it with lyric conventions, blending elements of lovers separated by a wall, as in Pyramus and Thisbé, with the motif of a woman's weaving

to communicate her story, as in the tale of Philomela.³² Two knights live next to each other in St Malo; the valiant unmarried knight has so assiduously sought the love of his married companion's wife that she has fallen in love with him, because of all the good she has heard of him, and also because he lives next door. Communicating through her window over the high wall erected between their domains, lady and lover speak together and throw gifts across the barrier to each other; the lady is closely guarded by her husband whenever he is at home. One summer evening, the lady is drawn to the window by sweetly singing birds expressing "joie;" the bird song becomes a pretext for the lovers to speak together, and they delight in gazing at what they may not possess. As in many troubadour lyrics—a genre in which the nightingale features prominently³³—the lovers' desire remains unfulfilled.

Laüstic, however, casts lyric desire within a narrative frame: the lady leaves her husband's side in bed so often that he asks why she rises and where she goes. When the lady answers that the nightingale's song is so beautiful, delightful, and desirable that she is unable to keep her eyes shut—a response that evokes the deep pleasure of her love—the lord erupts in cynical laughter. Setting nets, traps, and glue on trees throughout the garden, the lord captures the poor bird and carries it triumphantly to the lady's chamber. With cruel sarcasm, he explains that he has trapped the bird so that it will no longer disturb her sleep; when the lady asks to hold the bird, he snaps its neck in his two hands and throws the body against her bosom, which is bloodied. As in *Deus Amanz*, the *lai*'s corporeal gestures are strongly portrayed; the "col" [neck] is snapped and thrown against the "cors" [person/body] (vv. 115–17).

The nightingale's demise means that the lady has no excuse to speak with her lover. Like Philomena, prevented from speaking with her sister when her brother-in-law rapes her and cuts out her tongue, the lady tells her story through textiles: "En une piece de samit / A or brusedé et tut escrit / Ad l'oiselet envelopé" [she wrapped the bird in a piece of silk embroidered with gold and writing everywhere] (vv. 135–37). She wraps the bird embroidered cloth, seemingly with her story written on it, and sends it to her lover. The lady's "escrit" echoes the motif of

³² See Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, VI, trans. Humphries, pp. 143–51.

³³ On the nightingale in troubadour lyric, see Wendy Pfeffer, *The Change of Philomel: The Nightingale in Medieval Literature* (New York, 1985); for her analysis of this *lai*, see pp. 164–67.

lovers' writing in many other *lais*, from *Chievrefoil* to *Milun*.³⁴ Here, the writing does not facilitate love but marks its end. When the knight receives the bird, he prepares a reliquary, studded with precious stones, and carries it with him always. No shape-shifting or miraculous germination occurs in *Laüstic*. Rather, the husband's sordid gesture in killing an innocent bird is transformed by the lady's creative act. The nightingale evokes at once passionate, unconsummated love, the jealous ire of the husband, and the lady's resourcefulness and artistry in conveying the bird and its story to her lover. The knight's subsequent creation of a tomb/reliquary/adorned enclosure encapsulates Marie's poetic commemoration even as it images the enclosure of desire within small, intimate spaces that characterizes this *lai*.³⁵

Both *Deus Amanz* and *Laüstic* transform Ovidian imagery to create new poetic symbols that immortalize tragic love. The tomb in *Deus Amanz* is enormous, overshadowing the entire town, symbolizing a perverse love that has obstructed the generation of a noble line. By contrast, the bird reliquary in *Laüstic* is small and delicate, evoking the fragility of love. The imposing mountain and the tiny reliquary both enclose dead bodies and convey memories of steadfast love. As does Ovid in the *Metamorphoses*, Marie transforms these tombs into enduring symbols. In *Deus Amanz*, the monstrous image of incestuous passion is embellished by the flowers of the children's enduring love. In *Laüstic*, a tribute to troubadour lyric, the bejeweled little bird commemorates and incarnates unfulfilled desire.

V. *Portrait of a marriage*: Bisclavret

Bisclavret, one of three *lais* that focus on marriage (the others being *Fresne* and *Eliduc*), presents a dark portrait of marital incompatibility and an intriguing twist on the conventional courtly love story. The tale begins where many romances end, with the apparently happy marriage of a well-regarded lady and highly prized knight. But the couple fails to live happily ever after, for the lady worries about her

³⁴ See Sturges, "Texts and Readers."

³⁵ On the importance of spatial relationships in this *lai*, see Evelyne Datta, "Le Lai du Laüstic: espace poétique où forme et fond fusionnent," in *Courtly Arts and the Art of Courtliness*, ed. Keith Busby and Christopher Kleinhenz (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 365–71.

husband's frequent prolonged absences. When she discovers the secret of his double nature—he becomes a werewolf three days a week—she plots to destroy him, enlisting a former suitor to steal his clothes so that the beast will wander forever in the wild. Betraying her original vows, the lady marries a man she has never loved.

The *bisclavret* [werewolf], meanwhile, is discovered on a hunt by the king, who shows the beast mercy and adopts him when he demonstrates courtly humility by kissing the king's foot (v. 148). The beast and king live in constant, close companionship; the werewolf sleeps next to the king and accompanies him everywhere. But when the knight who married his wife and the wife herself appear at court on separate occasions, the *bisclavret* becomes enraged, taking the knight in his jaws and biting off the nose of the wife. A wise man senses that the beast must have his reasons for attacking this couple; under duress and in fear, the lady confesses how she betrayed her husband. The werewolf discretely dresses in clothes returned to him and falls asleep, now a man, in the king's bed. The king finds the knight, whom he embraces "a hundred times" and restores to his former position. The wife is banished; bearing the mark of her bestiality, some of her female descendants are born without noses.

This *lai*, like the *bisclavret* himself, is something of an *intrus*—a story remarkable for the ways in which it does *not* conform to our expectations of a love story. Marie disrupts the conventional plot of tales told elsewhere: it is not a tale of tragic or thwarted love, not the typical tale of a *mal mariée* imprisoned by a jealous husband. The married couple exemplifies not mutual desire and courtly reciprocity but sexual fear and animosity, cruelty, and vengeance. In *Bisclavret*, the register of the marvelous conjures fears of savage male sexuality and of women's cruelty in responding to that dark image of masculinity. As it explores the antipathy that may occur in some marriages and heterosexual couplings, this *lai* also portrays in a positive light the homosocial bond at the heart of the feudal court. Marie recounts a "queer love story," in the words of William Burgwinkle.³⁶ After the failure of heterosexual love in marriage, the king befriends a beast who turns into a handsome knight; in the end, there is no discussion of marriage for the king's close male companion. In *Bisclavret*, Marie shows her willingness to explore love in its many dimensions, here

³⁶ See Burgwinkle, *Sodomy, Masculinity, and the Law*, pp. 165–69.

considering the possibility of a fundamental sexual incompatibility between an apparently happily married man, an excellent knight, and a fine woman.

VI. *The skeleton in the family closet: Fresne*

Fresne also tells the tale of a dark family secret, in this instance a sexual shame hidden by the wife. The eponymous heroine's mother, wife of a fine Breton nobleman, has calumniated falsely her neighbor who bore twins, by claiming that—according to popular wisdom—the new mother must have slept with two men. Although her husband chastises his gossiping wife for slandering their friends, the rumor sticks, and the new mother and her husband are socially ostracized. A year later, when the lady herself bears twins, she rues that her own words have turned against her. Fearing dishonor and banishment, she prepares to kill one of the baby girls. A sympathetic servant girl convinces the mother that this would be wrong and offers to carry the baby to a church, where she will be found and taken in. Before the mother gives up her child, she wraps her in a beautiful cloth from Constantinople and tucks in a ring: her noble birth will not be forgotten. The child, raised by an abbess as her niece, falls in love with a nobleman, Gurun, who is eventually pressured by his barons to find a suitable wife of proven lineage. The woman selected is none other than Fresne's twin sister, Codre (of whose existence Fresne is unaware). As she prepares her lover's nuptial chamber after his wedding, Fresne replaces the bed's shabby coverlet with her own precious cloth. The mother, who has previously remarked and admired Fresne's loving nature, recognizes the cloth and her daughter as her own.

Critics have rightly noted the importance of a network of female supporters and the self-sacrificing love of Fresne.³⁷ If the wife's betrayal of her husband led to permanent disfigurement in *Bisclavret*, a mark of shame passed down to successive generations, the mother's verbal abuse in *Fresne* is transformed through a series of generous acts: that of the servant girl who helps to give the child away; the abbess who raises her; and, especially, that of Fresne herself. The "joie" that

³⁷ See Michelle Freeman, "The Power of Sisterhood: Marie de France's 'Le Fresne,'" in *Women and Power in the Middle Ages*, ed. Mary Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski (Athens, GA, 1988), pp. 250–64.

describes the reactions of father, daughter, and the knight at the end of this *lai* (vv. 488, 491, and 498) is not the delight of sexual pleasure but, rather, the celebration of a new social cohesion. In a surprising and transgressive twist on feudal practice, the union of Gurun and Codre is dissolved to permit the marriage of Fresne and Gurun; Codre finds a suitable match.³⁸

Located resolutely within a “real” setting devoid of *merveilleux* and emphasizing positive changes in relationships, Marie’s *Le Fresne* departs from the paradigm of Arthurian tales, Tristanian tragedy, or tragic Ovidian transformations, and opens a horizon for the *roman réaliste*, where unmarried women often exhibit considerable resilience and resourcefulness.³⁹

VII. *Desiring heroines and their love children: Yonec and Milun*

Children play out complicated family scripts in two other *lais*, *Yonec* and *Milun*. Both these *lais* draw their ideas of love from a range of other texts and social situations. Rich with intertextual references, their primary source might be seen as Marie’s other *lais*. *Yonec* opens with a poignant description of a *mal mariée*, thus linking it to *Milun* and *Laüstic*, with which it shares a bird motif, and *Guigemar*. The heroine is remarkably outspoken and self-conscious about her imprisonment by her wicked older husband: she wishes that he were dead and longs for an adventure of the sort she has heard about in stories (85–108). The heroine’s desires thus explicitly evoke Marie’s own love stories as inspiration for her adventure and as Marie’s literary source.

The lady’s hopes are fulfilled when a magnificent hawk appears at her window, transforms himself into a handsome knight and, after briefly assuming the lady’s shape to receive communion, remains with her for some time as her lover, engendering the couple’s son, Yonec. Echoing *Laüstic*, the jealous husband conspires to kill the hawk, who travels back to his mysterious homeland to die, pursued by the lady who follows his bloody path. This is a particularly dark, sensual *lai*,

³⁸ See Kinoshita, “Two for the Price of One,” pp. 37–41.

³⁹ *Le Fresne* will inspire Renaut’s *Galeran de Bretagne*, and the protagonist resembles in some respects the heroine of *L’Escoufle*. On the maiden in Marie, see my “Transforming Maidens: Singlewomen’s Stories in Marie de France’s *Lais* and Later Courtly Fictions,” in *Singlewomen in the European Past, 1250–1800*, ed. Judith M. Bennett and Amy M. Froide (Philadelphia, 1999), pp. 146–91.

evoking the lady's fantasy, the shape-shifting of her hawk lover, and her courageous journey to find him in the Otherworld, where he dies. Marie draws on Christian imagery, on visions of purgatory, on the blood that links her to her lover's suffering and to the child that they will bear.⁴⁰ We cannot do justice to the richness of this *lai*, in which Marie strongly links desire and death. Skirting the possibility of a *Tristan*-like ending, where the lady would expire instantly with her lover, Marie imagines a future generation. The lady bears a son who discovers that Muldumarec is his biological father and who eventually slays the man whom he once considered his progenitor. The *merveilleux* in *Yonec* thus allows us to penetrate a dark otherworld. With its fantastic realization of the lady's wishes, its imaginative shapeshifting, its amalgamation of Christian morality and transgressive desire, and its vindictive killing of the husband, *Yonec* is one of Marie's most profound explorations of the joys and dangers of desire.

In the Prologue to *Milun*, the narrator states that whoever wishes to tell different stories must begin them in different ways and in a manner that is pleasing.⁴¹ Marie thus highlights the relationship of *Milun* to other tales in the collection, implying that there will be similarities as well as explicit differences. As in *Yonec*, one of Marie's literary sources for ideas about love in *Milun* can be said to be her other *lais*: *Milun* recasts elements from *Yonec*, *Guigemar*, *Laüstic* and other tales of *mal mariées* in a tale set resolutely within a "real" world where—perhaps rather surprisingly—benign forces prevail. *Milun* transforms the paradigm of star-crossed lovers who find joy only in death or in the exchange of a sterile object symbolizing absence. Underlining narrative "difference" from the start, Marie revisits and revitalizes images of death, separation, and loss depicted in her other *lais*.

The beautiful, courtly young daughter of a baron hears about an exemplary knight from Wales named Milun and sends him a message beseeching his love. As in *Yonec* and *Lanval*, the lady's desire initiates the union. But *Milun* does not transpire in an otherworld setting. The *lai* focuses on pragmatic concerns in a setting that readers would have recognized as similar to their own world: the lovers

⁴⁰ See Jeanne-Marie Boivin, "Bisclavret et Muldumarec: La part de l'ombre dans les *Lais*," in *Amour et merveille*, ed. Dufournet, pp. 146–68.

⁴¹ See Douglas Kelly, "'Diversement comencier' in the *Lais* of Marie de France," in *In Quest of Marie de France, a Twelfth-Century Poet*, ed. Chantal A. Maréchal (Lewiston, NY, 1992), pp. 107–22.

meet simply in an orchard next to her room, “delez sa chambre en un vergier” (v. 49), and their encounters are so frequent, that a pregnancy inevitably occurs: “Tant i vint Milun, tant l’ama / Que la dameisele enceinta” (vv. 53–54).

If *Yonec* portrays the mysterious depths of passion in an extraordinary and shape-shifting setting, *Milun* highlights the resourcefulness of ordinary lovers who confront dismaying real-life circumstances and solve problems with human ingenuity. Milun and the lady convey their son to Milun’s sister in Northumberland, outfitting him with a ring (given to the lady by Milun) and a letter that contains a written account of the father’s identity and the mother’s adventure. After the lady’s arranged marriage to another man, Milun tucks a message into the plumage of a messenger swan; the note informs the lady that she has the power to heal Milun or kill him, if only she could find a means (here described as “engin” [a clever means or device]) of writing back (v. 237). Marie emphasizes the lady’s *art* and *engin* in seeking out ink and parchment to write her first letter (vv. 252–54). The lovers correspond by means of this faithful swan, who feeds and fasts at three-day intervals at their behest. In several other *lais*, Marie portrays lovers as readers, writers, or storytellers (*Laüstic*, *Chievrefoil*, *Chaitivel*); as many critics have noted, the *Lais* explore the poetic links between desire and language.⁴²

In no other *lai* does the lovers’ correspondence occur so frequently, so concretely, and over such an extended period of time (20 years!), and in no other *lai* do amorous writing or mutual suffering bear such positive fruit. The couple’s son, who becomes a valiant young knight known as “Sanz Per,” learns about his father from the letter his mother wrote at his birth. When he unhorses his father in a battle where the two are very equally matched, Milun recognizes his son by the ring he wears.

This tale of resourcefulness, patience, and steadfastness in love reaches a remarkably satisfying conclusion. The lady’s husband having died, Milun and his lady are married by their own son, without parental sanction or advice of anyone else (vv. 525–30). The *lai* ends as “diversement” as it began: there is no violent exclusion of the third party (as in *Yonec*), departure to another world (as in *Lanval*), suspended resolution (as in *Guigemar*), or tragic separation (as in *Deus*

⁴² Bloch, *Anonymous Marie de France*, pp. 98–108; Sturges, “Texts and Readers.”

Amanz, *Laüstic*, as implied in *Chievrefoil*), or cruel punishment (as in *Bisclavret* or *Equitan*).

Children are rarely desirable outcomes of illegitimate love affairs and are even less frequently agents of their parents' re-unification; Marie has told a courtly tale "differently" and, it would seem, with great pleasure. She dares to imagine an illicit love that results in a long-term commitment, a sanctioned marriage, and an adult child who brings his parents together. This is the only tale that ends with an express avowal of the narrator's own *delit*: "E jeo, ki l'ai mis en escrit, / Al recunter mut me delit" [And I, who put the story into writing, took much delight in telling it] (vv. 533–34). By announcing explicitly the pleasure she has taken in writing the story, Marie reminds her readers of the General Prologue's declaration that a "grevoise ovre"—such as this couple's long separation and faithful correspondence—can deliver one from "grant dolur."

VIII. *Courtly competition, a dangerous game: Chaitivel*

In *Chaitivel*, as in *Lanval*, Marie depicts courtly competition, here with a distinctly morbid twist. She casts this curious love story within a setting that will become a stock feature of courtly romance: the tournament, where knights fight carrying the sleeve or colors of their lady, and where the most valiant knight will end up with the most beautiful woman. This is the sort of match arranged for the choice of marriage partner that Chrétien will portray in *Le Chevalier de la Charrete*, where Lancelot fights "at his worst" to please Guinevere and then beats all at her command.⁴³ In that tournament, we recall, Lancelot wins but disappoints all the ladies seeking husbands, since the best knight will marry no one. The tournament ends with the ladies declaring that none of them will marry that year.

In *Chaitivel*, one lady is loved by four knights and, because she cannot choose the best, she attempts to display equal affection for all. Each knight, in turn, vies to prove himself the best, even though he knows he is not alone. Marie's presentation emphasizes chivalric competition: she tells us half a dozen times how hard the knights work, how they

⁴³ Chrétien de Troyes, *Le Chevalier de la Charrete*, ed. Mario Roques (Paris, 1965), lines 5339–6006.

“espleitier” [work, endeavor] as hard as they can, how each wants to be first, and how each does the same thing to win her love (vv. 29–70).

The game ends badly, when three knights die in a tournament and a fourth is injured “par mi la quisse” [through his thigh] (v. 123)—an injury that symbolizes the sterility of courtly love as a game. The wound is not the beginning of the story (as was Guigemar’s *plaie*) but the dead end; it leads not to love, but only to a *plait* [discussion] about naming.

The lady decides to compose a *lai* about her sad situation and proposes to call it “The Four Sorrows,” since she has lost all her lovers. But the knight convinces the lady that his own fate is worse: he must endure forever his physical incapacity to love—no “joie” from hugs or kisses—and can do nothing but talk. The eponymous hero and his *lai* thus incarnate the very absence of physical passion, the emotional and corporeal nadir of the *Lais*.

Chaitivel is an anomaly in several respects. It involves no courtship, no evolution of love affair(s), and no talk about love until the final discussion about naming. The obstacle to the lovers’ happiness is not a constraining marriage or over-protective parent but, rather, the game of courtly meritocracy that awards the “best” knight to the most desirable lady. Marie seems to offer the hyperbolic dramatization of a social truth: the fierce competition among knights for scarce resources, either the most attractive parcels of land or the most desirable women, inevitably claims victims. As June Hall McCash has pointed out, both men and women lose out in this deadly courtly game.⁴⁴

Whether we read *Chaitivel* as a critique of chivalric competition or as an allegory of unfulfilled desire, where the only recourse is to write about what one has lost, this *lai* offers little consolation. Its most memorable image is an incurable wound that precludes physical “joie” or a new generation. *Chaitivel* is Marie’s most sterile depiction of love. When Marie says, “Ici finist, nen i ad plus, / plus n’en oi ne plus n’en sai / Ne plus ne vus en cunterai” [Here the tale ends, there is *no more*, I have heard *nothing more*, nor do I know *more*, nor will I tell you *more*; my emphasis] (vv. 238–40), she seems to be acknowledging that the reader—like the lovers—may find themselves wanting more. In *Chaitivel*, there is no *surplus*.

⁴⁴ June Hall McCash, “The Lady in *Chaitivel*: Villainous or Vilified?” *Medieval Perspectives* 14 (1999), 140–51.

IX. *The enigma of desire and death: Chievrefoil*

The imposing weight of the Tristan legend lies behind *Chievrefoil*, which is the shortest *lai* in the collection and the one with the most explicit literary source. The story of Tristan and Iseut circulated in Old French versions by Thomas and Béroul (now extant only in fragments) at roughly the same time that Marie composed the *Lais*. It tells how Tristan, nephew of King Mark, falls hopelessly in love with Mark's intended bride, Iseut, when the two drink a love potion intended for the royal couple. The lovers carry on an adulterous affair for years, experiencing both joyful trysts and painful separations. Tristan's unconsummated marriage to a second Iseut, Iseut aux Blanches Mains, leads to the lovers' tragic death: Tristan's wife, overcome with jealousy, does not tell her husband that his beloved Iseut is on her way to cure him of a hunting wound; he dies in sorrow before his lover can reach him, and Iseut la Blonde expires when she arrives to find Tristan dead. This tale of tragic passion, wherein the lovers are ultimately united only in death, is one of the most influential love stories in Western culture. Its bittersweet strains can be heard in many *lais*, but in none more poignantly or explicitly than *Chievrefoil*.

Marie begins her story *in medias res*, when Tristan has been banished by King Mark, who is angered because of his nephew's love for the queen. After a year's absence, Tristan lives without hope. Set against the backdrop of the lovers' impending tragic death, Marie's records a moment of intense "joie": a tryst in the forest that Tristan has arranged by writing his name and an enigmatic message on a branch of hazelnut that he lays in Iseut's path.

In no other *lai* do the written source, the oral legend, the characters' writing, and Marie's retelling meld so perfectly together. Marie's recasting of the story is less about the kind of relationship that Tristan and Iseut have—their actual words to each other are not recounted, and we do not see what happens during their tryst—than it is about the way that their love and the story about it are inseparable. Living legends, Tristan and Iseut embody the principle of tragic reciprocity, as summed up in the only direct speech act (which is Tristan's message on the stick) in the poem: "Bele amie, si est de nus: / Ne vus sanz mei, ne jeo sanz vus" [Beautiful lover, so it is with us: neither you without me, nor I without you] (vv. 77–78). This couplet elegantly states the ethos of reciprocity that Marie could be said to promote in the *Lais*.

Yet readers familiar with the legend know these poignant words foretell the lovers' reunion after death.

Like *Laüstic* and *Chativel*, the *lai* concludes with a self-reflexive gesture that recounts how Tristan composes a tale to commemorate the joy that he had with the queen and "pur ceo k'il aveit escrit" [the message that he wrote]. Marie portrays Tristan ultimately as a writer who composes a *lai* to ward off "grant dolor" until death will bring him closer to his lady.

The Tristan legend resonates, in different keys, in depictions of tragic love throughout the *Lais* (in *Deus Amanz*, *Laüstic*, and *Yonec*, for example). The notion of passion as dangerous and ultimately fatal was a powerful cultural construction in early vernacular literature, nourished by many classical myths, Celtic tales, and troubadour and trouvère lyrics. In her tribute to Tristan, Marie establishes her distance from this conception of love: *Chievrefoil* is her shortest *lai*, devoid of dialogue between the lovers that might engage us in their drama. Powerful as the fatal passion may be, Marie chooses to explore other scenarios—both tragic and life-altering—in her diversely spun tales.

X. *Eliduc, multiple and final perspectives on love*

Eliduc, the final and longest *lai* in the Harley manuscript, is an *assemblage* of perspectives on love that presents Marie's most complex weaving together of themes and recasting of sources. If *Guigemar* works as an opening up of problems that are suspended so that they may be more fully explored, *Eliduc* recasts earlier themes and moves toward a concluding synthesis, as in the last movement of a symphony. Like each *lai* before it, *Eliduc* depicts a love crisis in a unique configuration: this story tells the tale of an apparently good but childless marriage that sours when the husband, a good knight unfairly banished by his king, falls in love with the beautiful young daughter of his new lord. As she recounts the story of a man who serves two lords and loves two women, Marie draws upon the *Roman d'Eneas*, the *Tristan* legend, Ovidian love casuistry, and animal folk legends, as well as on themes, motifs, and perceptions of earlier *lais*; she concludes within the conventions of hagiography, a genre celebrating love for God. As befits the last tale in the collection, the main characters reflect upon the difficulties in which they find themselves with a remarkable degree of self-consciousness. The capacity of *Eliduc*, Guildeluëc (his wife),

and Guilliadun for moral reflection not only renders their choices and actions more poignant and memorable; it also invites readers to evaluate the nature of love throughout the entire collection.

In telling Eliduc's story, Marie traces the progressive moral decline of a man who means no harm but whose failure to speak the truth and to act decisively eventually produces an untenable situation for all. Wrongfully spurned by his king, Eliduc demonstrates his skill and cunning in outwitting and vanquishing the enemy of his new lord (in the longest presentation of military tactics in the *Lais*, surely inspired by the *romans d'antiquités*), proving that he is a brave, savvy leader. When he falls in love, he is overcome neither by enchantment, as is Guigemar, nor by base desire, as is Equitan. Rather, he is troubled ["en effrei," v. 315] by the beauty and sweet talk of an innocent maiden whom he knows he should not love. After his first encounter with the girl, he states clearly where his loyalties should lie. He repents for having wished that he met the girl earlier (vv. 320–22); he remembers his wife and the "bone fei" and loyal conduct he had promised her (vv. 323–26). Unlike Equitan, who also knows better, Eliduc does not seek out the maiden or attempt to seduce her. Rather, by accepting tokens of her love, he does nothing to prevent her from falling in love with him. Although he wishes to be faithful to his wife, he is unable to rid himself (the verb is "jeter," to throw off) of his love for the beautiful damsel, whom he desires to gaze upon and to embrace. Marie assures us that Eliduc does nothing to dishonor the girl (see vv. 473–74 and 575), but she also shows that he has clearly engaged her affections. Eliduc's words to the maiden fall just short of a declaration of love. He is grateful and happy that she loves *him*:

"Dame," fet il, "grant gré vus sai
De vostre amur, grant joie en ai;
E quant vus tant m'avez preisié,
Durement en dei estre lié." (vv. 519–22)

["Lady," he says, "I am very grateful for your love which brings me great joy; and since you have held me in such esteem, I ought to be very delighted."]

By telling her that he has pledged to remain with her father for one year and that, with her leave, he will stay no longer, he implies that he is in some way beholden to her (vv. 524–29). But when the term expires and his own lord calls him back, Eliduc realizes that he has made a terrible mistake in remaining so long and loving the girl: "Allas, fet il, mal

ai erré! / Trop ai en cest païs esté" (vv. 585–86). As is true of monologues throughout this *lai*, Eliduc's words reveal an acute awareness of his situation (see vv. 585–618): he must protect his wife; he cannot possibly remain here; Christianity prevents him from marrying the girl; everything is out of order: "De tutes parz va malement" (v. 603). Even as wants to do all he can to fulfill the girl's desires (vv. 616–18), Eliduc has allowed himself to get into a situation where he can satisfy neither woman, as this monologue poignantly dramatizes.

When Eliduc returns to Guilliadun's domain, after serving his original lord and reuniting in a perfunctory fashion with his wife, he does so incognito and under cover of darkness, stealthily arranging to carry his lover back with him. Eliduc's passive weakness becomes active deception. In so acting, he betrays the maiden, who has placed her innocent trust in her father, and the woman to whom he is already married. Guilliadun finally learns the truth about Eliduc when an angry sailor blames a storm at sea on the fact that Eliduc is married; she falls into a deep coma. (The aggrieved Eliduc commits murder by throwing the sailor overboard.) Eliduc carries his lover's body to a chapel, where he intends to bury her with great ceremony. Expressing regret that the girl ever met him—for she could have been a queen if she had not loved him—he vows to give up arms, become a monk, and to mourn each day at her tomb (vv. 937–50). He prepares to re-enact his passive remorse for the rest of his life.

If Eliduc wavers in moral uncertainty, Guilliadun cannot help herself from intensely loving a man about whom she realizes she knows nothing. From the start, the love-struck Guilliadun understands that she has embarked on a perilous venture. Perhaps more poignantly than any other character in the *Lais*, Guilliadun explicitly voices her vulnerability: "*Jo sui cheüe en malvés pleit! / Jeo eim le novel soudeier, / Eliduc, le bon chevalier*" [*I've fallen into a bad situation! I love the new mercenary, the good knight Eliduc; my emphasis*] (vv. 338–40). Her *malvés pleit* [bad situation] recalls the painful *plaies* of love that others endure throughout the *lais*.

Guilliadun also understands, with remarkable insight, that love's signs are deceptive. She knows that the fact that Eliduc accepts the ring and belt she offers him does not necessarily mean that he loves her, since there is no knight who would not accept such gifts (vv. 367–73); she would hate to be tricked: "*Mut harreie k'il me gabast*" (v. 374). Nonetheless, conscious as she is of the tokens' unreliability, she conveys the objects to Eliduc and continues to wonder whether he has

received them in recognition of reciprocal love, “pur druërie,” or if he has perhaps betrayed her “Peot cel estre, jeo sui traïe” (vv. 431–32).

Like Dido in the *Roman d'Eneas*,⁴⁵ Guilliadun finds that her heart has been overtaken by a man from another country, about whose social identity and plans she is ignorant:

Lasse! cum est mis quors suspris
 Pur un humme d'autre païs!
 Ne sai s'il est de haute gent,
 Si s'en irat hastivement... (vv. 387–90)

[Alas, how my heart has been surprised by a man from another country;
 I don't know if he is of noble station, if he will leave quickly...]

Her monologues reveal an acute awareness of the risk she takes in loving Eliduc—“Folement ai mise m'entente” [I have placed my love foolishly] (v. 392); her words to Eliduc convey her own sense of her credulousness and vulnerability (vv. 532–36). As much or more than other unmarried young women in the *lais* (among whom we count the *puceles* in *Deus Amanz*, *Milun*, and *Fresne*), Guilliadun understands that she surrenders to a man whose goodness she desperately needs to be true.

The third perspective is that of Guildeluëc, “ki mut est bele, sage e pruz” (v. 710), who is heartsick at and confused by her husband's lack of “joie” when he returns to her. If Guildeluëc might reasonably wonder whether Eliduc has placed his affections elsewhere, she proposes instead to exculpate herself before his people if he suspects wrongdoing on her part (vv. 725–26). Eliduc assures her that he suspects her of nothing, explaining rather that he has made a promise to return to the king, who needs him badly. This scene does not dramatize a wife's jealous questions, as was done in *Bisclavret*. But we know that Guildeluëc, described by Marie as “sage,” is no fool. She sensibly leaves the matter where it is: “A tant le lest la dame ester” (v. 740). Whether or not the couple understands the irony of their exchange, the rift between this long-married husband and wife is evident. Eliduc is in the morally fraught position of deceiving two good, beautiful women.

The final third of the *lai* thus balances three very different perspectives: that of the betrayed maiden; the remorseful, grief-stricken lover; and the wife troubled by her husband's lack of “joie” when she receives

⁴⁵ The parallels between Dido and Guilliadun were first drawn by Hoepffner, *Marie de France*, pp. 98–103.

him with delight. When Guildeluëc, aided by a messenger, discovers Guilliadun in the chapel, she wonders at the “merveille” of the girl’s lovely body, fresh as a new rose, and understands at once why the loss of such a beautiful woman has caused her husband to suffer. She declares that she herself will never again know “joie,” out of love and pity. Guildeluëc’s compassion for her husband and the maiden are markedly different from the jealous rage of Iseut aux Blanches Mains or the anger of Dido. In the single instance of enchantment in this worldly tale, Guildeluëc revives Guilliadun with a magic flower that a weasel has used to save its companion (the *belette*, weasel, significantly being a feminine animal in French). The scene thus mirrors and contrasts with the opening scene in *Guigemar*: the mutual wounding of hind and hunter that presaged suffering in love has been replaced by female *belettes* and a pair of ladies who heal, thus effecting a *mise en abyme* of this *lai*’s spiritual renewal and recalling numerous images of flowering and germination throughout the *Lais*.

In a collection of stories where monologues and dialogues are key, it is significant that the *Lais*’s final conversation takes place between two women who tell each other their stories, each from her own perspective. Guilliadun’s words are angry and accusatory: Eliduc has committed a sin by tricking her; she has been “vileinement descunseillee” (v. 1081) and “trahie” (v. 1083) [basely abandoned and betrayed]. She concludes with a blanket condemnation of men: “Mut est fole ki humme creit!” [Whoever believes a man is extremely foolish (or in more popular parlance, crazy)] (v. 1084).⁴⁶ Although she has emerged physically unscathed from a coma, she has no reason to rejoice in her new-found life; she remains emotionally vulnerable.

Guildeluëc’s verbal response is thus the salve that truly revives Guilliadun by rescuing her from despair. She explains that Eliduc has been joyless and despondent ever since he has returned with Guilliadun, whom he thought dead. Identifying herself truthfully [“veirement”] (v. 1093) as his wife, she expresses her “grant joie” that Guilliadun has returned to life and announces that she will return the girl to her “ami” and will release Eliduc from his obligation to her by taking the veil. Marie portrays Guildeluëc’s words as the balm that permits

⁴⁶ Hoepffner compares this accusation to the narrator’s condemnation of Dido in the *Roman d’Eneas*, “Fous est qui en fame se fie,” which Marie’s female character turns against a man; see Hoepffner, p. 103, n. 1.

Guilliadun to carry on: "Tant l'ad la dame confortee / Qu'ensemble od li l'en ad menee" [She greatly comforted the girl in this way until she brought her back with her] (vv. 1103–04). Performing a "greuose ovre," Guildeluëc's actions prevent further "dolor" for the maiden and her husband. She thus enacts Marie's opening words about creative activity in the General Prologue.

Eliduc ends with an exchange of words between women who articulate two different feminine perspectives on love that run throughout the *Lais*. Guilliadun utters the *Lais*'s most forceful condemnation of amorous discourse, those seductive words used by men to entice women into situations that imperil them. But Marie does not end with this dismissal of male or female desire. Rather, she follows it immediately with Guildeluëc's extraordinarily sympathetic acceptance of her husband's love for a younger woman. This comprehensive, compassionate, yet distanced approach to love mirrors the narrator's perspective throughout the collection. Rather than repudiate the joys and pains of sexual love, Marie contextualizes it within the life cycle of men and women as a *force motrice* of human activity, but as only part of the story.

Many critics have commented on Guildeluëc's admirable generosity, comparable and even superior to that of Fresne, constituting as it does the sacrifice of her own happiness for that of her husband and his beautiful young lover. No one, to my knowledge, has asserted that Marie may view this resolution less a sacrifice than a boon for Guildeluëc, who gets exactly what she wants: "Del tut le *voil* quite clamer / E si *ferai* mun chief veler" [*I want* to release him from all obligations, and *I will* take the veil; my emphasis] (vv. 1101–02). Without belittling her admirable compassion, it is possible to sense the ex-wife's relief that she is no longer bound to a man who has distanced himself from her, lied to her, and has all but repudiated her. Rather than express the suicidal rage of Dido or the murderous jealousy of Iseut, rather than sorrowfully resign herself to repudiation, Guildeluëc undertakes a "greuose ovre," choosing the moral high road. On her own initiative, she requests that Eliduc allow her to leave him and that he give her some of his land for an abbey. Eliduc provides for her as generously as the fairy did for Lanval: "Tute sa volenté fera / E de sa tere li durra" (vv. 1133–34) After numerous examples of other-world enchantment, the *Lais* end with a female fantasy fulfilled in the real world of property rights and monastic endowments. Building a church and subsidiary buildings on the site of the old hermitage, the newly

veiled woman transforms a tomb site into a living religious community that accommodates thirty nuns. Marie draws here not from courtly romance but from hagiography, which offers numerous examples of saints who eschew marriage to dedicate themselves to Christ. *La Vie de Seinte Audrée*, a late 12th-century vernacular life attributed to Marie, tells how Saint Audrey resists the sexual advances of husbands in two arranged marriages before earning the right to live on her own in religious orders.⁴⁷ The *lais*'s final image of desire depicts a woman who determines her own life in a female religious community: "sa vie e sun ordre establi" (v. 1144).

XI. Conclusion

Marie's brilliant *assemblage* of love stories serves as a critical *summa* of discourses about love in 12th-century France. From *Guigemar* to *Eliduc*, Marie recasts amatory conventions and amorous discourse, reworking and weaving together stories of love tokens, sexually symbolic beasts, and love-struck characters drawn from a wide spectrum of literary genres. As she recounts the diversity of ways in which human beings find themselves in love, Marie shows how lovers' stories are uniquely shaped by literary conventions as well as by social norms. If some lovers seem doomed to a tragic end from their first words, others manipulate the signs of love in surprising ways, transforming the social landscape, challenging readers to plumb the depths of their understanding, and charting a new path for later courtly fiction.

⁴⁷ A convincing argument in favor of the attribution of this *Life* to Marie de France is made by June Hall McCash, "La vie seinte Audree: A Fourth Text by Marie de France?" *Speculum* 77 (2002), 744–77. For an edition, see June Hall McCash and Judith Clark Barban, ed. and trans, *The Life of St Audrey: A Text by Marie de France* (Jefferson, NC, and London, 2006).