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REALITY AND CONVENTION IN THE LAIS OF MARIE DE FRANCE

by

LINDA KAY COFFER TWIFORD

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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

THESIS COMMITTEE

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Love is universally recognized as the central theme of the Lais of Marie de France, although there is much disagreement as to its nature and significance. The vast majority of scholars sees it as an elevating force and as the primary motivating factor in the lives of the characters of the collection: it is considered the source of strength and determination for idealized knights and ladies who perform heroic deeds and demonstrate magnanimous spirits. The purpose of this study is to investigate the idealized elements which are so often emphasized by critics, to compare their importance to that of the realistic aspects of the Lais, and in so doing to reevaluate the conception of love, keeping in mind such basic human needs as tenderness and intimacy as well as the conventions of courtly love and romance. A brief review of relevant critical opinions will serve as a point of departure to help the reader focus on that which is original in this interpretation.

E. Talbot Donaldson draws a sharp distinction between historical reality and literary convention in the Middle Ages. He concludes that idealized love relationships are an integral part of the conventions
of courtly love literature but that they do not reflect the reality of interpersonal relationships of the period. He places the Lais in the category of "literature of courtly love" with such works as Guillaume de Lorris' Roman de la rose and Chaucer's Franklin's Tale which are totally removed from the psychological realities of love relationships. For Donaldson, "sublimation" or idealization of love is the most significant characteristic of this body of literature and such mundane issues as adultery are extraneous and hardly worth discussion. He sees Marie's characters as falling in love "naturally" because of mutual esteem and attraction.¹

Sidney Painter in a study of courtly love as an element of chivalry cites the Lais as a valuable source for the student of courtly love: "In them he [the reader] can see how certain ideas of the cult had become deeply implanted in the mind of a highly intelligent noblewoman."² He refers to them as "charming" and "the most delightful literary productions of the twelfth century," primarily because of the author's skillful blending of the principles of courtly love in the mysterious atmosphere of Celtic folklore. For Painter, Marie's conception of love is relatively simple: "its basis is physical attraction to youth and
beauty but it leads to a total commitment of one's self to another.3 To support his view he refers to Eliduc, a tale in which a wife is willing to withdraw into a convent when she sees that her beloved husband would be happier with another woman.

Howard Robertson insists on the "purity and naturalness" of love as it appears in the Lais. It is a sentiment which has more affinity with the Other World than with our own and in fact is quite vulnerable to the injustice and cruelty of the real world:

Pure, disinterested, heartfelt love is consistently a value in the lais of Marie de France. So rare a possession is it in the real world, that... it is more clearly the property of the Other World. Bringing such love into contact with the real world, however, risks its destruction as in Yonéc. Flight to the Other World preserves love for Lanval; only the greatest fidelity saves the love of Guigemar and his lady.4

Hoepffner also uses the term "natural" to describe love as it is presented in the Lais. To it he adds the adjectives "naive" and "spontaneous." He goes on to say that although it is an exalting sentiment which leads to heroic exploits and sublime sacrifices, it also leads to the most abominable crimes because of the power it exercises over its votaries.5

Moshé Lazar, like Painter, uses the Lais as a model of courtly love literature. He concedes that
love as it is presented by Marie can lead to suffering
but that it is the source of all joy and the raisin de
vivre. He eschews questions of morality to insist on
it as an intense and reciprocal relationship: "La
fin'amors (adultère par son essence même, mais non pas
considerée comme immorale par les troubadours ni par
Marie), si elle est loyale et sincere, intense et reci-
proque, dit en substance notre poëtesse, triomphe de
tous les obstacles, de la morale sociale comme de la
morale religieuse."  

Jacques Ribard\textsuperscript{7} also sees the \textit{Lais} as being
strongly influenced by the conventions of courtly love.
He says that Marie is not an orthodox follower of the
traditions, but manifests at least four of its major
elements in her conception of love: (1) love is not a
feudal contract but a free choice based on admiration
of another person's qualities; (2) it must be kept
secret; (3) it is enhanced by obstacles (Ribard refers
to "le thème de l'amour de loin"); (4) it is an adul-
terous relationship.

Emanuel Mickel is in direct opposition to these
critics, for to him the concept of courtly love is
"singuily out of focus with the treatment of love in
most of the lais."\textsuperscript{8} He is somewhat moralistic in his
analysis: Love is approved when it is of high quality
and condemned when it is only concupiscence or selfish
love." Mickey has made a significant contribution to criticism interpreting the nature of love in the Lais by emphasizing repeatedly in his book and articles the suffering caused by love; yet he still insists on an idealized conception of love. He sees forces outside the lovers as the source of their pain and destruction for love itself, incompatible with selfish motivation, inspires commitment and self-sacrifice:

"It becomes clear that the loyalty and faith of the true lover has as its object the consideration and happiness of the person he loves. Marie illustrates clearly the miraculous power of this love to overcome worldly suffering... .The reader is made to see that there is only one love worthy of the name and that this love transcends suffering, in that its happiness resides not in the self, but in the happiness of another. Marie has indeed brought the reader full cycle. The suffering from what is often called love is present in every lai, but the means of overcoming this suffering is beautifully illustrated.  

Mickel's contention that love as it is presented in the Lais inspires altruism and intimacy is striking and incompatible with the present study which sees idealized love and intimacy as rarities in the collection.

Like Mickel, D. W. Robertson denies a positive influence of courtly love on the Lais, seeing Marie's treatment of chivalry and courtesy as ironic. He finds the lays "didactic" and moralizing," but because of the unpleasant connotations associated with these words he
prefers to use different terminology to express the same idea: "Perhaps it would be better to say that Marie shaped her story in such a way that it would illustrate in terms of concrete particulars familiar to her audience something she regarded as a respectable and useful philosophical idea."  

S. Foster Damon in a well-known article deceptively entitled "Marie de France: Psychologist of Courtly Love" agrees with Mickel and Robertson that the love relationships of the Lais are not typical of courtly love traditions. Instead, says Damon, Marie presents a highly complex, individual emotion, and her conception of love is "realistic" as opposed to "idealistic". The lays are primarily character studies, and their major interest to the modern reader is their presentation of provocative, well-developed characters. Damon is quite preoccupied with the originality of the Lais; his concern with their conception of love is secondary. He goes into great detail to show that Marie intentionally created parallels among the stories by placing different heroes and heroines (lovers) in identical or similar situations and resolving the plots in analogous or opposite ways, depending on the demands of psychological consistency in the various characters she has created. Damon sees the lays as independent of conventions and idealization. For him Marie is a "realist" and a "moralist": 
No elaborate formality confused her; no intoxicating ideal fooled her. Real love interested her above all things; true lovers always had her sympathy. But love was not the source of all good: it might elevate, it could also brutalize... Always Marie kept in touch with men and women as they actually are; cool of brain, tender of heart, keen of eye, she knew her world and recorded it faithfully. This constant reference to reality is precisely what made her lays seem so fresh in her day as well as in ours... For the lays are primarily human."  

Robert Green also deals with reality in the Lais, but his meaning of reality and his method are entirely different from those of Damon. He uses Freudian archetypal symbols to interpret the mysteries and supernaturalism of the lays and thus to penetrate psychological reality as it is presented by Marie de France, According to his interpretation the predominant theme of the collection and one presented in some form in every lay is the emotional development which comes to an individual as a result of love. He breaks down this general theme into the following components: (1) the necessity for freedom of choice in love, (2) the requirement that sexual passion be present as the initial basis for a relationship, (3) the need for detachment from parental bonds which become inhibiting either through too much love (Les Deus amanz) or through too little (Le Fresne), (4) the need for commitment in love, and (5) the rejection of secrecy as a
force in love. These five subdivisions of the major theme recur throughout the lays, but each lay seems to concentrate on particular ones. Grouping the lays thematically, Green divides the collection into three categories: (1) lays dealing with the theory of love, (2) lays concerning the growth of love, and (3) lays of love as an apotheosis and transcendence of death.

Considering these critics as exemplary of the body of scholarship on the conception of love in the Lais, we see that the majority of critics sees them as typical of the traditions of courtly love or of the idealized world of romance. In all of these studies we find references to the power and ennobling qualities of love—how it leads to altruism and self-sacrifice for example. We also hear much about the "charm" of the lays, the "harmony" and "fairy tale atmosphere" that characterize them.

An objective reading of the Lais, one which does not attempt to make them conform to the conventional literature of the 12th century, reveals a striking propensity toward physical and psychological violence and disintegration. If we study the interpersonal relationships in the light of the fulfillment man seeks in intimate relationships, we see that love as it is presented in the Lais is basically unsatisfying and can be destructive. We find parents who abandon (Le Fresne) or
enslave (Les Deus amanz, Yonec) their children, lovers who are readily willing to abandon their love in the face of obstacles (Laustic, Guigemar), wives who plot to kill their husbands (Bisclavret, Equitan), suggestions and accusations of incest and homosexuality (Les Deus amanz, Guigemar, Lanval), and unmitigated egotism in love relationships (Chaitivel). The motif of disintegration permeates the collection in numerous forms, from the unexplained disappearance of characters to the seemingly unnecessary dissolving of relationships, and to direct attacks on the personal integrity of individuals which lead to a sense of dehumanization.

The principal source of the incongruity between the trends of criticism and the text itself seems to lie in the tendency of critics to overemphasize the ideal nature of the Lais perhaps resulting from familiarity with the theory surrounding romance and courtly love literature which sees idealism as fundamental to romance and courtly poetry. In spite of the years of scholarship and volumes of pages dedicated to the study of courtly love and medieval romance, neither term can be said to have a widely accepted definition. At the recent Second Triennial Congress of the International Courtly Literature Society (March 31–April 2, 1977) over 175 scholars gathered to discuss literature associated with courtly traditions, yet no one attempted to
assign the term a precise definition. There seemed to be a general assumption that everyone accepted such basic characteristics as the elevated place of women, love-service, the necessity of obstacles, the all-importance of love in life, and its ennobling nature. In a somewhat witty chapter entitled "The Myth of Courtly Love," E. Talbot Donaldson states the reasoning behind scholars' reluctance to define the term: "The fact is that a definition of courtly love based on all the literature of the Middle Ages is too broad to be useful, while one derived from only selected primary documents fits well only those documents from which it has been derived."\(^{14}\) After studying many definitions of courtly love based on troubadour poetry he says that the poets do seem to share one tendency and that is "to sublimate their love." To explain his generalization he quotes the Oxford English Dictionary: "'they act upon [it] so as to produce a refined product;' or they 'transmute [it] into something higher, nobler, more sublime or refined;' or they 'refine [it] away into something unreal or non-existent; reduce [it] to unreality.'"\(^{15}\)

Responsible critics have been equally reluctant to define the literary romance, but there are several important works dealing with its nature and tendencies. In his study of themes and approaches in medieval romance, Professor John Stevens says that romance as a
genre is characterized by conventions, motifs, and archetypes which have been created specifically because of their ability to portray the essential nature of the "romantic experiences." The experiences which he sees as fundamental to romance and those which most claimed the attention of romance writers in the Middle Ages are love, social virtue, valor, integrity, and religious questing. Among the most common motifs according to Professor Stevens are the mysterious challenge or call, the first sight of the beloved, the lonely journey through a hostile land, and the fight with the enemy who is often a monstrous creature.\textsuperscript{16} The experiences and motifs of romance—both of medieval romance as a period style and of romance as a permanent form of expression—have at least one quality in common: idealism.

Idealism is generally accepted as being the principal characteristic of romance. Professor Stevens says that the characters of romance are "white and black, good men and bad men, saints and devils. Wick-
edness is idealized as well as goodness."\textsuperscript{17} In the glossary of \textit{Anatomy of Criticism} Northrop Frye describes romance as "the mythos of literature concerned primarily with an idealized world." In the chapter entitled "Theory of Myths" he places romance on a scale between myth and naturalism, using the term to
mean "the tendency . . . to displace myth in a human direction and yet, in contrast to 'realism' to conventionalize content in an idealized direction."\(^{18}\)

Idealism as it appears in romance literature can perhaps best be described by contrasting it to realism. To quote a definition used by Urban T. Holmes in his article "Realism in Twelfth-Century Literature," realism is "that element in art which is concerned with giving a truthful impression of actuality as it appears to the human consciousness."\(^{19}\) He specifies that realism describes normal situations and average characters in ordinary settings and that it refuses to use farfetched images and metaphors. Idealism, then, as its opposite, would be concerned with giving an impression of objects, situations, and characters as the human consciousness desires them to be. Idealism presents characters of extraordinary abilities in situations that do not occur in everyday life.

In his discussion of courtly romance, Erich Auerbach is more specific in his use of the term "idealism":

The fairy-tale atmosphere is the true element of the courtly romance, which after all is not only interested in portraying external living conditions in the feudal society of the twelfth century but also and especially in expressing its ideals... The values expressed in it [the courtly romance]---refinement of the laws of combat, courteous social intercourse, service of women---have
undergone a striking process of change and sublimation in comparison with the chanson de geste and are all directed toward a personal and absolute ideal–absolute both in reference to ideal realization and in reference to the absence of any earthly and practical purpose. 20

The values of an idealized world are those of self-realization and fulfillment for the hero and are totally removed from political, economic, and other practical or social purposes. Auerbach, who has studied in depth the representation of reality in Western literature, continues, pointing out the minimal role that realism plays in courtly romance:

Where it depicts reality, it depicts merely the colorful surface, and where it is not superficial, it has other subjects and other ends than contemporary reality. . . For it [courtly romance] has a great power of attraction which, . . . is due especially to two characteristics which distinguish it: it is absolute, raised above all earthly contingencies, and it gives those who submit to its dictates the feeling that they belong to a community of the elect, a circle of solidarity. . . set apart from the common herd. 21

According to these critics, then, neither courtly love nor romance literature is an artistic transformation of reality but an escape from reality into a world of fantasy whose values are idealistic. What is particularly arresting in the work of Marie de France is the way she brings the two worlds together. She is unwilling to leave the world of reality, that is, of
characters with human foibles who find themselves in mundane situations, in order to enter into an idealized world; yet she freely uses the motifs and conventions of courtly love and romance literature.

The relative importance of convention and idealization in comparison with the elements of realism varies from lay to lay. Efforts to generalize about the collection as a whole have tended to distort the true nature of the work and have led to a general neglect of certain elements such as the motif of disintegration, the tendency of the narrator to introduce idealistic settings and characters before undermining them with realistic details or ironic statements, violence, and the unsatisfying nature of love, in particular the lack of intimacy. The lays will be studied in the order of their position on a scale ranging from Le Fresne at the pole of realism to Yonec at the pole of convention and idealism.

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<th>REALISM</th>
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<td>Le Fresne</td>
<td>Les Deus Amanz</td>
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<td>Equitan</td>
<td>Chaitivel</td>
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The scale, original to this study, ranks the lays between the extremes of realism and idealism according to the following criteria: (1) the presentation and use of descriptions of characters, setting, and material objects; (2) the role of irony and more specifically the attitude of the narrator toward the characters and the action of the story; and (3) the conception of love.

"Realism," as a pole of the scale takes on a wider meaning than that offered by Professor Holmes ("realism is that element in art which is concerned with giving a truthful impression of actuality as it appears to the human consciousness")\(^{19}\). It is the tendency to reduce characters, actions, and motives to their most trivial, mundane, or self-serving significance. In *Le Fresne*, for example, the mother's decision to destroy her baby to save her reputation is realistic as opposed to idealistic in that it is inspired by thoroughly selfish motives. The conception of love is realistic in *Equitan* in that the relationship between the king and lady is entirely physical and abuses the diligent, faithful seneschal. In *Laustic* there are idealized elements in the presentation of the characters and in the use of the conventional motif of the nightingale, but these elements are consistently undermined by the irony of the narrator.
On the idealistic end of the scale we have the incredibly beautiful wealthy fairy mistress in *Lanval* and the bird-lover in *Yonec*. In both of these tales the conception of love is an idealized one, insisting on the reciprocity and intimacy of the relationships. There are supernatural creatures in *Guigemar* and *Bisclavret*, but these tales are held to a more central position on the scale by the unheroic nature of the central character in the former and by the psychological and physical cruelty of Bisclavret and his wife in the latter.

The principal value of the scale is that it indicates clearly the inadequacy of critics' generalizations about the idealistic nature of the collection as a whole. Furthermore, it emphasizes elements which have not been sufficiently recognized by critics heretofore and which will be discussed in the following chapters: the subtle irony of the narrator, the motif of disintegration, and violence.
NOTES FOR CHAPTER I


3. Ibid., 131.


10. Ibid., 120-121.


14. Donaldson, Speaking of Chaucer, 156.

15. Ibid., 157.


17. Ibid., 169.


21. Ibid., 136.
CHAPTER 2

LE FRESNE AND THE MOTIF OF DEHUMANIZATION

Le Fresne is the lay the furthest removed from traditions of courtly literature and medieval romance. A major part of its action takes place in Brittany, but there are no traces of Celtic legend or magic of any kind. In his study of sources Mickel is unable to identify specific works which may have influenced Le Fresne but he says that it is related to the folk tradition of the Scottish ballad Fair Annie.¹

Judith Rothschild sees concealment, gradual revelation and recognition as the main motif of the lay.² Certainly these elements exist in the work and on the most obvious level, but pointing them out does little to enhance our understanding or appreciation of the story. "Gradual revelation" and "recognition" imply little more in Rothschild's use of the terms than simply becoming aware of who a person is; she is not referring to the self-realization inherent in patterns of initiation or individuation, a common theme in romance. A more subtle and revealing motif that permeates the lay is that of dehumanization. As this tale eschews the ideal to emphasize the real, it manifests a preoccupation with
that which is unhuman or inhumane in its conception of love, descriptions, and characterization.

A text particularly well-suited for studying Marie's conception of love, Le Fresne deals with at least four types of love relationships: brotherly love, maternal/filial love, erotic love, and love of God. In spite of differences necessitated by the variety of love relationships, the overall presentation of love is quite uniform. It seems to have the same motivation and limitations no matter who is involved in the particular relationships.

Emanuel Mickel sees love in Le Fresne as an idealized, ennobling sentiment. More specifically, he sees this lay as a study of charity, an illustration of its "magnificent beauty" and "miraculous power". He interprets the ending as the triumph of selflessness over selfishness and an example of virtue rewarded on earth as well as in heaven:

It is at this point that Fresne's act of charity, emblematic of the nature and quality of her love, produces a miracle. Fresne's personal sacrifice of one of the two possessions she has, and one of the two links to her identity and past, for the sake of the happiness of the one she loves, literally restores to her the heritage she lost through her mother's lack of charity. In a sense, through her love Fresne restores the nobility of person and name which the mother had caused her to lose. In addition, Fresne saves her mother by moving her to confession. . .
An analysis of the text, however, does not corroborate Mickel's interpretation of love as such a lofty sentiment. Instead, love relationships seem to be tenuous, dissolving in the face of obstacles or disappearing as characters vanish inexplicably from the story. They seem to be motivated by self-interest and for that reason are characterized by a lack of intimacy. Partners in a love relationship are simply not interested in exploring the depths of each other's personalities or in fulfilling each other's needs; they show concern and affection only when it is to their advantage or liking to do so.

Brotherly love is best considered in the relationships between Fresne's father and his neighbor who has twin sons, between Fresne's mother and the lady who gives birth to the twins, and between Fresne and the knights of Dol. At the beginning of the lay, before we have a clear idea of what might be the nature and role of love, we witness what at first seem to be the signs of a true friendship between two knights. One knight is so elated at the birth of twin sons that he wants to share his joy with a friend. Not only does he want to share the excitement of the news but he also wants to share his sons with him: he names a son after his friend and asks him to take part in the boy's education. In the following passage the three words in the first two lines which relate to joy and the exclamation in the fifth
line set the tone:

Sis sire en est liez e joianz;
Pur la joie que il en a,
A sun bon veisin le manda,
Que sa femme deus fiz euz:
De tant de force esteit creuz;
L'un li tramettra a lever;
De sun nun le face nomer.4 (12-18)

The friend briefly shares in the joy of the new father: he thanks God for his friend's blessing and gives a horse to the messenger. Yet this suggestion of mutual joy and sharing ends abruptly, quelled by the lord's wife.

The description of the latter is quite striking. It is the only totally negative description we have of a major character in the Lais. Usually characters are described in traditional, flattering generalities even if their actions later in the tale prove them to be scoundrels (the husband in Laustic, the wife in Bisclavret, etc.). Our initial exposure to this woman, however, is quite effective in creating an unfavorable portrait of her. We hear a laugh whose meaning, originally ambiguous, becomes very clear in the five lines which follow:

La femme al chevalier s'en rist,
Ki juste lui al mangier sist,
Kar ele e rt feinte e orguilluse
E mes disanz e enviuse.
Ele parlat mut follement. (25-29)

She goes on to say that the new mother must have had two lovers since there can be no other explanation for the birth of twins. The effect of the slanderer's accusation
is striking and is another revealing example of the nature of brotherly love and kindness in the society of this lay. The new mother had had an excellent reputation, but now suddenly not only has she lost her good name, but she is hated by every woman in the land. The malicious nature of this lady is in marked contrast to the mutual joy expressed earlier by the knights, but the knights' love is compromised more significantly by their own reactions to the lady's invidiousness. The husband makes only a feeble effort to rebuke his calumnious wife and does nothing to aid his friend after the damage has been done. Even more surprising is the new father's reaction which, as the narrator points out, is entirely inappropriate:

Quant il l'oi dire e retraire,  
Dolenz en fu, ne sot que faire;  
La prode femme en hai  
E durement la mescree,  
E mut la teneit en destreit  
Sanz ceo qu'ele nel deserveit. (58-64)

Fresne's friendship with the knights of Dol is equally ephemeral. We are told initially that she is loved by the knights of the city and the servants of Gorun's castle for her nobility of character:

Li chevaliers ki l'anmena  
Mut la cheri e mut l'ama,  
E tuit si humme e si servant;  
N'i out un seul, petit ni grant,  
Pur sa franchise ne l'amast  
E ne cherist e honurast. (307-312)

But they love her only until they realize she may be an indirect threat to them. When Gorun's fortune changes
and his vassals fear he may die without a male heir (since Fresne has been barren), leaving their land in disorder, they insist that he dispose of Fresne and marry a fertile woman. When Fresne ceases to be a threat, however, and they believe she will not retaliate, they become once again her loving friends and admirers:

Quant ele sot ke il la prist,  
Unques peiur semblant ne fist;  
Sun seignur sert mut bonement  
E honure tute sa gent.  
Li chevalier de la meisun  
E li vadlet e li garchun  
Merveillus dol pur li feseient  
De ceo ke perdre la deveient.  

Parental or filial love is best studied in the relationships between Fresne and her mother, between the abbess and Fresne, and between the porter who finds Fresne and his daughter. In none of these relationships do we find anything which might be considered an acceptable, much less idealized version of parental or filial love. The rapport between Gorun and his rebellious vassals could perhaps have been studied here, but it is no more exemplary than these.

The monologue at the end of which the calumnious lady arrives at a solution to the problem she has created for herself is the passage the most indicative of Fresne's mother's priorities. After a cold, calculating and lucid commentary on her predicament she decides how she will protect herself from her own mistakes:

Lasse, fet ele, que feraï?  
James pris ne honor n'avraï!  
Hunie sui, c'est veritez!
Mes sire e tuz sis parentez
Certes jamés ne me crerrunt,
Des que ceste aventure orrun;
Kar jeo meismes mejugai,
De tutes femmes mesparlai.
Dunc ne dis jeo que unc ne fu
Ne nus ne l'avium veu
Que femme deus enfanz eust,
Si deus humes ne coneust?
Ore en ai deus! Céo m'est avis.
Sur mei en est turnez li pis!
Ki sur autrui mesdit e ment
Ne seilt mie qu'a l'oil li pent;
De tel hume peot l'um parler
Ki mieuz de lui fet a loer.
Pur mei defendre de hunir,
Un des enfanz m'estuet murdrir. (773-792)

The total dependence of a newborn on its mother is emphasized ironically here by the mother's decision to dispose of one of her children permanently. No mention is made of any feelings of tenderness or responsibility of the mother toward the infant—the baby is looked upon as a possession, an inanimate object to be discarded since its presence will do more harm than good.

The selfish cruelty of the mother is often overlooked by critics. Mickel for example, projecting his own humanitarian feelings into the text, interprets the discomposure of the mother as grief at the loss of a child. In summarizing the story he does not even mention the fact that it is she who plans to murder the baby: "In grief she wrapped one of the babes in a particularly elegant blanket and left a ruby ring (given to her by her husband) tied to the child's arm to indicate that she was of good family." His use of the terms "in grief" and "babes" clearly indicates that his sympathy is with
the lady and that he would like to dispose the reader positively to her.

Perhaps because we do not see any interaction between Fresne and the abbess theirs also seems to be a problematic relationship. We are not sure why the abbess is so eager to bring the foundling into her household since she shows decided interest in the circumstances under which the child was discovered: she is preoccupied with the fact that she comes from "a good family" but shows no concern for her as an individual. Fresne in return seems to feel no obligation to her benefactor. She is content to have an illicit affair in the convent, yet equally willing to run away when Gorun invites her to live with him. After her departure from the convent, there is no more mention of the abbess, who disappears from the tale. She serves a necessary function, then is forgotten.

Like the abbess, the couple who had male twins and the boys themselves undergo a dehumanizing process and also disappear from the story. It is as though these people have importance only as long as they contribute to the main characters. Not significant enough to merit a logical exit from the action of the tale, they serve merely as pawns at the disposal of the story.

The relationship between the porter and his daughter is no more tender or personal than that between Fresne and the abbess. When the old man finds the child
he commands his daughter in a very abrupt manner to feed and bathe her:

Fille, fez il, levez, levez!  
Fu et chaundele m'alumez!  
Un enfant ai ci apporté,  
La fors el fresne l'ai trouvé  
De vostre leit le m'alaitiez!  
Eschaufez le e sil baignez!

All we know about the daughter is that she is able to meet her father's demands. If this lay depicted an idealized conception of love, surely these relationships would be more fruitful.

The eros relationship is introduced by the traditional uninformative descriptions of the lovers. It is only when Fresne moves into the role of lover that we have the expected description of her as the most beautiful and well-mannered girl in the land (and later her sister merits the same superlatives):

En Bretaine ne fu si bele  
Ni tant curteise dameisle;  
Franch e esteit e de bone escole,  
E en semblant e en parole.  
Nuls ne la vit que l'amast  
E merveille ne la preisast.  

(237-242)

Gurun's description is even briefer:

A Dol aveit un bon seignur:  
Unc puis ne einz n'i ot meillur!  
Ici vusnumerai sun num;  
El pais l'apelent Gurun.  

(243-246)

Before seeing Fresne he falls in love with her merely from hearing others talk about her. From the beginning we realize that he is as calculating as Fresne's mother. He devises a plan whereby he will have occasion to meet the abbess's protegee without appearing to be particularly
interested in her. He carefully avoids arousing the woman's suspicions, knowing they could thwart possible future activities. He therefore arranges to stop by the convent on the way home from a tournament as though to thank God for keeping him safe during the jousts. After he meets Fresne he decides to realize his fantasies but knows that frequent visits will look suspicious. Again, like Fresne's mother, he is able to invent a practical solution that is totally free from any moral complications:

Pur avoir lur fraternité,  
La ad grantment dol soen donné.  
Mes il i ad autre acheisun  
Que de receivre le pardun! (267-270)

There is some ambiguity as to the meaning of the word fraternité but his basic plan is quite obvious. If it means connivance, we know he simply bribes certain willing nuns to have access to Fresne; if it means good will, then we know he has generously given enough to be a welcome guest at all times. In either case, the emphasis is on the material.

Gurun is no less realistic and calculating in his dealings with his lover. First he seduces her with words, then, at the right moment, begins a physical relationship. When he becomes sure of his influence over her he cajoles her into running away with him. Again there is absolutely nothing idealistic about his approach: he tells Fresne very matter of factly that the abbess would be quite angry if she were to become pregnant while still living in the
convent!

Quant a seur fu de s'amur,
Si la mist a reisun un jur:
"Bele, fet il, ore est issi
Ke de mei avez fet ami.
Venez vus ent del tut od mei!
Saveir poez, jol quit e creie,
Si vostre aunte s'aperceveit,
Mut durement li pesereit,
S'entur li feussez enceintiee
Durement sereit curuciee!
Si mon cunseil crere volez,
Ensemble od mei vus en vendrez. (274-286)

There is obviously nothing mysterious or elevating about this love relationship whose mundane characteristics are emphasized at every turn. It is also a fragile relationship: Gurun does not resist when his vassals insist that he dispose of Fresne. They have a replacement for her which he accepts passively. He does express pleasure when the girls' mother decides that Fresne will be his wife, but at this point the twins seem to be almost interchangeable to him, since he will passively accept either.

The tree metaphor used by his vassals emphasizes the tendency to depersonalize and dehumanize the two women by referring to them as vessels of fertility:

La Codre ad nun la damsele;
En cest pais nen ad si bele.
Pur le freisne que vus larrez
En eschance le codre avrea;
En la codre ad noiz e deduiiz;
Li freisnes ne porte unke fruiiz. (335-340)

The term en eschance indicates that the women are simply commodities and in fact, as the vassals inform Gurun, he will be making a particularly good deal with La Codre: she is the sole heir of a rich man, and thus brings with her a sizeable portion of land.
The last type of love relationship—love of God—is based on equally utilitarian principles. There are many references to God's name but only one instance of a sincere prayer, and that by a minor character. When the demoiselle deposits Fresne at the convent she prays that God will protect the infant:

Devant l'us s'est aresteue,  
L'enfant mist jus qu'ele porta.  
Mut humblement s'agenuila;  
Ele commence s'oreisun:  
"Deus, fait ele, par tun seint nun,  
Sire, si te vient a pleisir,  
Cest enfant garde de perir!" (158-164)

In general, the characters of this lay are practical and calculating or passive so that they do not need the help of divine intervention. The malicious mother says she prefers to face the wrath of God for killing her infant rather than to damage her reputation and lose her social status:

Pur mei defendre de hunir,  
Un des enfanz m'estuet murdir;  
Mieuz le voil vers Deu amender  
Que mei hunir e vergunder. (791-794)

Gurun capitalizes on his hypocritical piety to obtain the opportunity to seduce Fresne. The narrator seems to be amused by the ingenuity of his scheme and in no way offended by his sacrilege. She says that he gave generously to the abbey and not for the pardon of his iniquities, indicating the irony involved in the fact that he contributes to the abbey to buy the opportunity to sin:

Pur avenir lur fraternité,  
La ad grantment del soen done,
Mes il i ad autre acheisun
Que de receivre pardun! (267-270)

Realism then, manifests itself in this lay basically through the pragmatism of the characters and the generally mundane nature of the love relationships. However, there is also an emphasis on the material and a predilection for details in descriptions of physical objects which contribute to the tone of the work. For example, at a moment which should exert tremendous psychological stress on the mother, there is a distracting detailed description of how she prepared Fresne before abandoning her:

En un chief de mut bon chesil
Envolupent l'enfant gentil,
E dessus un paile roë;
Ses sires li ot aporté
De Constantinoble, u il fu;
Ungues si bon n'orenent veu!
A une piece d'un suen laz
Un gros annel li lie al braz;
De fin or i avoit une unce,
El chestun out une jagunée,
La verge entur estoit lettré. (121-134)

The effect of the precise detail is to prevent any increase in emotional intensity by insisting on the physical level. The porter continues the preoccupation with the material--before he sees the baby he notices the fine cloth in which she is wrapped:

Sur le freisne les dras choisi;
Quidat k'aukuns les eust pris
En larecin e ileoc mis:
D'autre chose n'ot il regard (184-187)

And his daughter is particularly impressed by the appurtenances that accompany the baby:
Entur sun braz treve l'anel,
Le palie virent riche e bel:
Bien surent cil a escient
Qu'ele est nee de haute gent.  \(207-210\)

Rather than reacting emotionally to the abandoned child, they preoccupy themselves with the material details.

The most striking description in the lay is that of the demoiselle's trip from her Breton home to the abbey where she deposits Fresne. She leaves at night, taking the large road into the forest, following the noise of barking dogs. She arrives at sunrise at a beautiful and very rich convent:

La nuit quant tut fu aseri,
Fors de la vile s'en eissi.
En un grant chemin est entrée,
Ki en la forest l'ad menée
Parmis le bois sa veie tint;
Od tut l'enfant utre s'en vint.
Unques del grant chemin n'eissi.
Bein loinz sur destre aveit oi
Chiens abaier e coks chanter:
Iloc purrat vile trover.
Cele part vet a grant espleit,
U la noise des chiens oieit.
En une vile riche e bele
Est entrée la dameisle.
En la vile out une abeie
Durement riche e bien garnie.  \(137-152\)

The passage is unique in this lay in that it recalls the traditional aura of *aventure* in medieval romance. The act it describes is also unique in that it is the sole completely altruistic gesture in this story. The mood of the passage, however, is undermined by the last two lines of the description (not cited above) which tell us that there are nuns and an abbess in the convent:

Mun escient, noneins i ot
E abesse kis guardot.  \(153-154\)
Judith Rothschild, reacting to these lines, says: "It is as if Marie had to come into the story not only to corroborate the girl's knowledge concerning the convent, but also to reassure the reader that there really would be someone at the convent to take care of the infant, soon to be deposited at that very place." It seems however that the emphasis here as throughout the lay is just the opposite: people do not care about others unless they intend to gain something from them. Mentioning such superfluous details and not mentioning the moral issues and psychological impact of what is going on seem to inflate the importance of physical detail at the expense of more humane concerns.

In most interpretations of Le Fresne the mother is considered the dominant and by far the most interesting character. Some critics have even gone as far as to say that Fresne is not developed as a personality but, following the Gresilda archetype, is a paragon of wifely submission to an arbitrary, unloving husband. Another interpretation is possible, however, especially in a text riddled with irony as are the Lais. Rather than being a passive victim, Fresne could be seen as an ambitious character who presents a facade of passivity in order to obtain her goals. Nowhere do we have any specific insight into Fresne's true feelings about her two rejections. All we have is a description of her physiognomy and demeanor:
Quant ele sot ki il la prist,
Unques peur semblent ne fist;
Sun seignur sert mut bonement
E honure toute sa gent. (351-354)

The members of the household are so amazed that they do not know how to react to such willingness to self-sacrifice:

Ne fist semblant que li pesast
Ne tant qu'ele se curucast
Entr la dame bonement
Serveit mut afeitieement.
A grant merveille le teneient
Cil e celes ki la veeient. (377-382)

The mother is so impressed she states that if she had known Gurun's mistress beforehand she would never have tried to take Gurun away from her (not realizing the double truth of her statement).

When the night of the wedding day comes Fresne calls the new chamberlains into the couple's bedroom ostensibly to teach them how Gurun likes the bed made. When they put his spread on the bed she becomes very sad because the spread is just not good enough. After all, it is only un viel bofu, that is, an old silk cloth with threads of gold:

Li dras esteit d'un viel bofu
La dameisele l'ad veu:
N'ert mie bons, ceo li sembla;
En sun curage li pesa. (399-402)

This reaction is particularly striking when we realize that she has not shown any emotion whatsoever over leaving the abbey or losing her lover to another woman.

This scene is more interesting and perhaps more consistent with its context if we consider Fresne's
reaction to the loss of her lover as a successfully
calculated plan to win back Gurun and to outwit her
overbearing mother. Perhaps she did not know the
identity of the family involved, but she did know the
basic Biblical principle of the effect of turning the
other cheek or going the second mile.

In the end, according to this interpretation,
Fresne has the last laugh on everyone, by accomplishing
her own goals, maintaining a reputation as the epitome
of unselfishness, and avoiding the unresolved problem
of her barrenness. She certainly upsets the entire
order of things. Her sister is forced to spend one
night as the wife of a man who will soon cease to be her
husband since the archbishop for some unknown reason
decides to postpone the annulment until the day follow-
ing the wedding:

L'ercevekes ad cunseilée
Que issi seít la noít laissié;
El demain les departira,
Lui e cele espusera
Issi l'un fet e graanté.
El demain furent deseivre. (499-504)

Her poor father is utterly confused. When his wife tells
him the story of how she deceived him, abandoned their
newborn, and how one of his daughters is married to a man
who loves and is loved by the other daughter, his reac-
tion is simple, totally inappropriate, and consistent
with the conception of love in the tale and with the
irony of the scene:

De ceo sui liez! (485)
He is oblivious to the implications of the situation in the personal lives of the members of his family.

Thus we have seen that love in *Le Fresne* is far from being an idealized force. Parents reach out to or reject their children according to their own needs, and children—when they are not passive, undeveloped characters—respond in kind by disregarding their parents' wishes or feelings. Loyalty in friendship is nonexistent. Love of God is impossible for characters who cannot even love their fellow man. Erotic love is the satisfaction of desire, the particular vehicle of satisfaction being an unimportant issue. Individuals, then, are depersonalized in love relationships and the relationships themselves are tenuous and motivated by self-interest.
NOTES FOR CHAPTER 2


5. It is interesting to note that in the scene which clearly points out the fragility of the knights' love for Fresne we also witness their nonheroic attitude toward Gurun. When danger arises nothing is said of their oaths of military aid to him or of their concern for him as an individual; he is simply a source of order and protection.

6. Emanuel J. Mickel, Jr., Ibid., 77-78.

CHAPTER 3

EQUITAN: ROMANCE OR FABLIAU

Equitan, by far the most unpopular lay, has suffered many insults from critics. In general it is criticized for being blatantly didactic and for following the traditions of the fabliau. Hoepffner calls it "un médiocre fait-divers sans grandeur qui fournirait plutôt matière à un fabliau ou à un conte drolatique qu'à un de ces contes sentimentaux qui sont dans la manière de notre poétesse." Jeanne Wathelet-Willem says it is "lourd, maladroit, sent le procédé d'école," though she does attribute to it limited literary value. Mickel sees love in Equitan as entirely motivated by cupidity and carnal pleasure. The lovers are killed at the end not because of their adulterous love but because they planned to murder the senechal: "the lovers speak of loyalty and plan treachery. And because love leads to an act of crime, they are punished." D. W. Robertson, in a typically Robertsonian interpretation, agrees with Hoepffner that the lay condemns courtly love and that it is "didactic and moralizing." Moshé Lazar disagrees, saying that Equitan is in no way a condemnation of la fin'amors. His reasoning, however, is somewhat specious: "Comment parler ici d'amour coupable chatié, de théories provençales condamnées,
lorsque le texte lui-même affirme qu'il s'agit de l'illustration d'une maxime: celui qui cherche à nuire à autrui, tout le mal retombe sur lui." In fact, the love casuistry presented in the lay is all that saves it, says Lazar, from being "un fabliau de peu d'intérêt." 6 Pickens, in a more recent article is defensive of Equitan: It exemplifies the psychological and narrative subtlety typical of Marie, and 'faults' in the tale such as the lack of verisimilitude in the lovers' plot are not due to Marie's lack of concern for construction and should be attributed to defects in the characters themselves rather than to ineptitude on the part of the author". 7 After a brief description of the manuscripts of the Lais Pickens concludes that Equitan has a particular function in the work as a whole. Following and in conjunction with Guigemar which is the first lay, it serves to introduce and set the tone for the entire collection. Whereas Guigemar offers an example of fate bringing good fortune to lovers, Equitan shows that love can also result in adversity. For him it is the outcome which constitutes the essential difference between the lays, and not the conception of love.

Convention and reality then, have long been pertinent issues in the study of this lay. Critics have tried to assess Marie's stand on conventional courtly love as it is presented here and criticized her preoccupation with the mundane, corporeal, and didactic in the realistic
spirit of the fabliau. Actually, what she has done in Equitan is not essentially different from the technique we will see in other lays, but her integration of the traditional and realistic is much less dexterous. Rather than compromising the ideal subtly or ambiguously with elements of realism as we see in other lays (Le Fresne, Eliduc, and Laustic especially), the two are juxtaposed incongruously in this lay and the final effect is a disunited whole.

The prologue to Equitan, consisting of the first eight lines, has led to much speculation, but no one claims to have found a definitive explanation for it. It is a tribute to the Bretons and an introduction to the lay as a literary genre; thus it says absolutely nothing specific about this tale:

Mut unt esté noble barun,
Cil de Bretaine, li Breton!
Jadis suleient par pruesce,
Par curteisle e par noblesce,
Des aventures, qu'ils dient,
Ki a plusieurs gens avenaient,
Pere les lais pur remembrance.
Qu'um nes meist en ubliance.8

Virtually every other lay begins with a reference to a specific Breton or Celtic legend,9 but none of the other introductory lines to the Lais is as abstract and irrelevant as this:

Guigemar
Les contes ke jo sai verraiz,
Dunt li Bretun unt fait les lais,
Vus conterai assez brièvement.
El chief de cest commencement,
Solunc la lettre e l'escriture,
Vos mosteraie une aventure
Ki en Breaitgne la Menur
Avint al tems anciennur. (19-26)\textsuperscript{10}

Le Fresne

En Bretaine jadis manient
Dui chevalier; veisin est eient.(3-4)

Bisclavret

Quant des lais faire m'entremet,
Ne voil ublier Bisclavret;
Bisclavret ad nun en bretain,
Garwaf l'apelent li Norman, (1-4)

En Bretaine manoit uns ber. (15)

Lanval

L'aventure d'un autre lai,
Cume ele avint, vus cunterai.
Faiz fu d'un mut gentil vassal:
En bretons l'apelent Lanval. (1-4)

Les Deus Amanz

Jadis avint en Normendie
Une aventure mut oie
De deus enfanz ki s'entreamerent;
Par amur ambedui finerent.
Un lai en firent li Bretun:
De Deus Amanz recuit le nun. (1-6)

Yoniec

En Breitainge manoit jadis
Uns riches hum, vielz e antis. (11-12)

Laustic

Une aventure vus dirai
Dunt li Bretun firent un lai. (1-2)

Although the introduction to Milun has no specific allusion to Breton legends, it is interesting to consider it here, because in it we are told that a writer who is composing various tales for an audience must find a variety of ways to introduce them in order to please the
public. Thus rather than mention Breton or Celtic legends she tells us the hero was born in southern Wales:

Ki divers cuntes veut traitier
Diversement deit commencer
E parler si rainablement
K'il seilt pleisibles a la gent.
Ici commencerai Milun
E musterai par brief sermun
Pur quei e coment fu trovez
Li lais ki issi est numez.

Milun fut de Suhtwales nez. (1-9)

Chaitivel

En Bretaine a Nantes maneit
Une dame ki mut valeit. (9-10)

Chievrefoil begins and ends with references to the widespread popularity of the Tristan story. Rather than mention the Breton or Celtic origin of the legend, here (as in Milun), Marie tells us the hero was from "Suht-wales" (16) and that he is there at the opening of the lay.

Eliduc

D'un mut ancien lai bretun
Le cunte e tute la reisun
Vus dirai,. . . . (1-3)
En Bretaine ot un chevalier.. (5)

The beginning of Equitan, then, is particularly striking in comparison to those of the other tales. It is probably the singularly most unlikely place for recognition of the prowess, courtesy and nobility of the Bretons, for in this tale we find the most despicable "Bretons" of the Lais. Equitan and his mistress have few redeeming features if we use as criteria the dictates
of conventional Christian morality. The introduction refers to the *aventures* so typical of medieval romance, but they are totally absent from the tale. We are told Equitan likes to hunt, a traditional activity for a medieval *seigneur* or *chevalier*, but we learn that to this hero the hunt is simply a means for pursuing lecherous pleasure. He hunts in the area around his senechal's home in order to meet the latter's wife, and he schedules a hunt with the senechal then feigns illness in order to be alone with her. Equitan and the lady plan the execution of the loyal husband and vassal without wincing, and they look upon murder as the logical solution to their problem. When the senechal's wife asks Equitan to help her kill her husband, he responds coldly and politely that it will be an easy task:

    E si de ceo l'aseurast
    Que pur autre ne la lessast,
    Hastivement purchacereit
    A sun seigneur que morz sereit.
    Legier sereit a purchacier
    Pur ceo k'il li vousist aidier. (231-236)

The opening lines, then, seem to be a superficial link with traditions of medieval romance--and in particular Celtic folklore and chevalric ideals--that is not corroborated by the tale itself.

At least two other passages share the dubious distinction of seeming noticibly out of focus with the rest of the text, thus creating a humorous effect here.
whereas they would be taken quite seriously in a more traditional text. The first, Equitan's monologue in which he laments his destiny, is comical when placed in its context. The King is murnes e pensis (60), and since he cannot sleep he proclaims the following monologue which is quite long in comparison with other passages of direct discourse in the Lais:

Allas! fet il, queils destinee
M'amenat en ceste cuntree?
Pur ceste dame qu'ai veue
M'est une anguisse al quor ferue,
Ki tut le cors me fet trembler:
Jeo quit que mei l'estuet amer.
E si jo l'aim, jeo ferai mal:
Ceo est la femme al seneschal;
Garder li dei amur e fei
Si cum jeo voil k'il face a mei.
Si par nul engin le saveit,
Bien sai que mut l'un pesereit.
Mes nepurquaut pis iert asez
Que pur li seie afolez.
Si bele dame tant mar fust,
S'ele namast e dru n'eust!
Que devendreit sa curteisie,
S'ele n'amast de druerie?
Suz ciel n'ad humme, s'el l'amast,
Ki durement n'en amendast.
Li senechals, si l'ot cunter,
Ne l'en deit mie trop peser:
Suls ne la peot il pas tenir;
Certes, jeo voil a li partir! (65-90)

The king touches upon many of the most common motifs of courtly literature. He blames fate for his predicament, for having brought him into this country to meet and fall in love with another man's wife. His love was stimulated by seeing her and thus entered through his eyes and went directly to his heart which it wounded. His love brings about a dilemma for it is in strict opposition to the good faith he owes his loyal vassal.
But how can he deny himself this love knowing he could not live without the senechal's wife? Besides, every beautiful woman must have a lover. What would become of her curteisie if she did not? Surely the senechal must understand if he wants to share her with him. The protest against destinee is amusing when we remember to what trouble he went to arrange to meet his senechal's wife; since he carefully planned his hunting trip so that he would be invited to her chateau, he was hardly the victim of some mysterious goddess of Fortune.

After the monologue he sighs the traditional sigh before returning to his rational, calculating mentality to ask himself why he is suffering so; after all, the lady may readily accept him as her lover. He certainly does not intend to expend his emotional energy in vain:

\[
\text{Apres parlat e dist: "De quei}
\text{Sui en estrif e en effrei?}
\text{Uncor ne sai ne n'ai seu}
\text{S'ele fereit de mei sun dru;}
\text{Mes jul savrai hastivement.}
\text{S'ele sentist ceo que jeo sent,}
\text{Jeo perdreie ceste dolur.} \quad (91-97)
\]

He then plans exactly how he will arrange to meet the lady in private to declare himself and seduce her—a plan which he carries out to the letter.

The second, briefer passage, which uses standard Ovidian vocabulary, is equally conspicuous for its lack of harmony with the rest of the text. It mentions Cupid explicitly and uses Ovid's love-malady metaphor:
Amurs l'ad mis en sa maisniee!
Une seete ad vers lui traite
Ki mut grand plaie li ad faite:
El quor li ad lanciee e mise.  

(55-58)

Given the descriptions we have of the king and the propensity which he has for the pursuit of the pleasures of love, we wonder why Cupid would waste an arrow on him. Guigemar, as we shall see, needs the stimulus; Equitan does not. From the first, his sensuality and aggressiveness in the pursuit of love are emphasized:

Equitan fut mut de grant pris
E mut amez en sun pais.
Deduit amout e druerie
Pur ceo maintint chevalerie.  

(13-16)

Ja, se pur ostier ne fust,
Pur nul busuin ki li creust,
Li reis ne laissast sun chacier,
Sun deduire, sun riveier.  

(25-28)

When he learns that his seneschal has a beautiful wife, he desires her physically and begins to plan his pursuit and conquest:

Le reis l'oi sovent loer;
Soventefez la salua,
De ses aveirs li enveia,
Sanz veue la coveita,
E cum ainz pot a li parla.  

(39-43)

Since we know that Equitan is quite a debaucher, we might at first imagine that Cupid's arrow was intended to cause him, for once, to love in a sincere way or to receive the same frivolous treatment from a lady that he has shown to so many, but such is not the case. Throughout the lay, the physical and illicit nature of the lovers' relationship is emphasized. No statement or
action elevates it above the level of the satisfaction of physical desires. The lovers share in the pleasure and consequences of their relationship: neither can be considered a victim of the other.

We must conclude, then, that the Cupid passage is as inappropriate to its context as are the opening lines and Equitan's lament against destiny. One of its metaphors, however, reappears as a theme elsewhere in the text.

The first association of illness and love is part of Equitan's scheme to seduce his seneschal's wife: he feigns illness on a hunting trip to return to the castle to be alone with the lady. The poor, gullible seneschal, is the only sincere, altruistic emotive figure in the lay; he regrets his lord's physical discomfort, not realizing that he trembles from sexual desire for the vassal's wife:

Dolenz en est li senescaus;
Il ne seit pas queils est li maus
De quei le reis sent les fricuns: li
Sa femme en est dreite achesuns. (107-110)

Equitan returns to the castle and sends for the chate-laine to "comfort" and "amuse" him and thus we have an association between the satisfaction of erotic love and illness. During his plea to her he uses the traditional line of reasoning of the courtly lover by telling her he will surely die if she does not reciprocate his love:
During this interview he repeats the same theme in what turns out to be a description of l'amour courtois par excellence, although this love-service is never manifest in the lay:

Ma chiere dame, a vus m'ustrei:
Ne me tenez mie pur rei,
Mes pur vostre hume e vostre ami.
Seurement vus jur e di
Que jeo ferai vostre pleisir.
Ne me laissez pur vus murir!
Vus seiez dame e jeo servanz,
Vus orguilluse e jeo preianz! (169-176)

Later, when the lady becomes a little unsure about the durability of the relationship and seems to be having greater aspirations, that of becoming queen, for example, she uses the same traditional tactic:

Pur vus m'estuet aveir la mort. (219)

The relationship is dependent in a more direct and less traditional way on the association between love and death. The lovers are able to meet because the king locks himself in his room regularly, ostensibly to be bled. The physical analogy between losing body fluid in bleeding and in making love should perhaps be considered another association of illness and love in this story which puts so much emphasis on the corporeal. The narrator reinforces the linking of love and death by announcing to us early in the text that the lovers will
die for their love, a technique found only here and in

Les Deus amanz:

. . . Mut s'entramerent,
Puis en mururent e finerent. (183-184)

The ending of the lay is the most striking non-
traditional use of the traditional association of l'amour
et la mort. There is nothing noble or tragic about the
lovers' deaths. The wife does not even have the oppor-
tunity to die of chagrin after the death of her lover.
Instead, she is forced head first into a tub of boiling
water. The scene, entirely improbable, is a scene of
farce. The image of the nude king leaping joinz piez
from the bed to the tub is particularly amusing:

Li senescals hastis revint;
A l'hus buta, cele le tint.
Icil le fiert par tel hair,
Par force li estut ovrir.
Le rei e sa femme ad trovrez
U il gistent, entr'acolez.
Li reis garda, sil vit vinir;
Pur sa vileinie covrir
Dedenz la cuve saut joinz piez;
E il fu nuz e despuillez,
Unques garde ne s'en dona:
Ileoc murut e escauda. (287-298)

Sa femme prent demeintenant,
El bain la met le chief avant.
Issi mururent ambedui,
Li reis avant e ele od lui. (303-306)

The presentation of the main characters is another
element which contributes to the disunity of the lay.
Marie usually introduces characters with a totally ideal-
listic description, then subtly compromises the original
idealization through the actions of the characters them-
selves and through ambiguous statements of the narrator.
Her technique here, however, is different. In the characterization of Equitan she juxtaposes incongruous statements so that the final delineation of character is disjointed. The inconsistency in Equitan is that he has an excellent reputation and is loved by his subjects, yet is known for being a lecher and is condemned by the narrator. First of all, we see he is known as sovereign judge in his land as well as king:

D'Equitan, ki mut fut curteis,
Sire des Nauns, jostise e reis.
Equitan fu mu de grant pris
Et mut amez en sun pais.  (11-14)

Then we learn that his principal pastime is the pursuit of pleasure:

Deduit amout e druerie,
Pur ceo maintint chevalerie.  (15-16)

The passages could be linked by the idea of love if we understood the "mut amez" in line 13 to refer ironically to his pursuit of pleasure as described in lines 15-16 rather than to his administration of order and justice as described in the previous lines, but there is still inconsistency because nowhere in the text do we see Equitan perform in any way the responsibilities of a king. This description is followed by a moralistic condemnation by the narrator:

Cil metent lur vie en nuncure
Ki d'amur n'unt sen ne mesure;
Tels est la mesure d'amor
Que nuls n'i deit reisun garder. (17-20)

The character of the lady is disconcerting because of the emphasis on her physical existence and her
preoccupation with social status and the material. Her introductory description is longer than that of any other heroine and more parts of her body are mentioned than usual, although we still have only a vague description of her:

La dame ert bele durement
E de mut bon affeitement.
Gent cors out e bele faiture,
En li former uvrat Nature;
Les oilz out veirs e bel le vis
Bele buche, nein bien assis:
El reaume n'avelt sa per! (31-37)

Equitan's reaction when he first sees her confirms the narrator's description and emphasizes her physical beauty:

Mut la trova curteise e sage,
Bele de cors e de visage,
De bel semblant e enveisie. (51-53)

Her role as an object of physical desire is emphasized even in the scene where she cries and asks Equitan to help her kill her husband. She is presented in an enticing way, with allusions to the pleasure she could offer her lover if she were not so distressed:

E el li duit joie mener,
Baisier, estreindre e acoler,
E ensemble od lui jurer,
Forment plura e grant deol fist. (205-209)

In her discussion of love with Equitan she is preoccupied with her idea that true love can exist only between equals, not between a king and the wife of a seneschal, and with thoughts of wealth and status in general:

Amur n'est pruz se n'est egais,
Mieuz vaut uns povres hum leals.
Si en sei ad sen e valur,
E greinur joie est de s'amur
Qu'il n'est de prince u de rei.
Quant il n'ad leaute en sei.
S'aukuns aime plus hautement
Qu'a sa richesce nen apent,
Cil se dute de tute rien!
Li riches hum requide bien
Que nuls ne li toille s'amie
Qu'il voelt amer par seignurie! (137-148)

Even Equitan notices her obsession when he indirectly refers to her attitude as "bourgeois."

Ainz est bargaine de burgeis,
Ki pur avere ne pur grant fieu
Mettent lur peine en malveis lieu.(152-154)

In spite of its numerous amusing aspects, the lay is disappointing as a whole. The passages dealing with traditional topics and situations of romance and courtly love are neither integrated into the text nor successfully ironic. The characters are, like Equitan, inconsistent, or like the wife of the senescal they are more or less one-faceted.
NOTES FOR CHAPTER 3

1. The main objection to the intrusion of the traditions of the fabliau into the realm of romance is that the fabliau deals with all levels of society and usually with ignoble deeds whereas romance deals principally with the aristocracy and with heroic deeds. According to Professor Holmes the fabliau is a "droll story, a conte-à-rire, treating of adultery, wantonness, corruption of the clergy, and other fabellae ignobilium; at times it was a good-natured farce." Urban T. Holmes, Jr., History of Old French Literature (New York: Russell & Russell, 1962), 200.


4. Emanuel J. Mickel, Jr., Ibid., 107.


8. Moshe Lazar in opposition to all other scholarship on the manuscripts of the Lais relies solely on this passage to support his idea that this was the first lay written: "Il semble même que ce soit le premier lai com-posé par Marie; les vers d'introduction nous expliquant la nature du lai en général, croyons nous, confirment cette supposition." Ibid., 195.

9. Holmes points out that even though not all of her stories are of Celtic origin, Marie may have heard them from Breton or Celtic bards, or she may have been simply taking advantage of the current popularity of Breton material. Ibid., 186.

10. For an explanation of why the tale itself begins with line 19 and why lines 1-18 should be part of the "Prologue," see the first note on Guigemar, p. 238 in Rychner's edition of the Lais.

11. The choice of the word fricuns adds to the irony of the passage since we know the king will be "warm" at the end of the lay.
CHAPTER 4

LES DEUS AMANZ AND THE MOTIF OF DISINTEGRATING RELATIONSHIPS

Les Deus amanz is a tale inextricably affiliated with traditional medieval romance. It has specific parallels with two contemporary romances which were familiar to virtually all educated people of the 12th century and has basic affinities with the genre as a whole. Courtly love plays no role in this tale because the branch of romance to which it is related is that area which deals with tragic love. There is no room here for the superficialities of courtly love such as games of love-service controlled by coquettish women and casuistic debates discussing the nature and privileges of love. However, it is far from pure idealism: although the plot and themes are basically those of traditional romance, the atmosphere is compromised by a preoccupation with apparently insignificant material reality, by a nonidealized conception of love, and by the theme of futility and disintegration.

Les Deus amanz is analogous in several ways to Tristan et Iseut and Pyramus and Thisbe which were widely read romances of the 12th century.¹ All three are stories of lovers who work together to surmount the obstacles that separate them. In all three the lovers come quite close
to achieving their goal by overcoming the original obstacle—a father figure—but are finally defeated by unforeseen events and die in each other's arms. In each case the man dies a violent death and the woman dies in sympathy, being unable to live without her lover. Although they are defeated in this world, they are buried in a common tomb which becomes the sign of the ultimate triumph of love. In *Tristan et Iseut* and *Les Deus amanz* there is a benevolent female figure who creates a magic potion which in neither case has the opportunity to bring about the intended good. In *Pyramus and Thisbe* and *Les Deus amanz* the youth of the lovers is emphasized to intensify the tragic emotions associated with their death and to further inculpate the father figure who separated them.

The narrator of *Les Deus amanz* helps to create the fairy tale atmosphere of romance by her introduction of setting and character:

\[\text{Jadis avint en Normendie}\
\text{Une aventure mut oie}\
\text{De deus enfanz ki s'entreamerent!}\
\text{Par amur ambedui fninerent.}\
\text{Un lai en firent li Bretun:}\
\text{De Deus Amanz recuit le nun.}\
\]

\[\text{Veritez est ke en Neustrie,}\
\text{Que nus apelum Normendie,}\
\text{Ad un haut munt merveilles grant:}\
\text{Lasus gisent li dui enfant.} \quad (1-10)\]

She tells us that the action took place long ago in "Neustrie," using the ancient name for Normandy to insist upon the remoteness in time of the story. The reference to the
Bretons seems almost gratuitous and not ironic as is the case for Equitan: scholars have not found Breton sources for this tale, and Marie clearly states that the action took place elsewhere. Apparently she is simply capitalizing on the mysterious, adventurous aura surrounding Breton folklore to enhance her work. The detail of the geographical setting which adds to the romance atmosphere is an allusion to a "marvelously" huge mountain towering over the city where the story takes place. Announcing the outcome in the opening lines—a technique used only here and in Equitan—emphasizes the traditional nature of the tale whose ending everyone knows before it takes place as is usual in romance, and lends it a certain air of fatality typical of many romances, Tristan et Iseut in particular.

The introductory description of the daughter is typical of romance and of the Lais in that it presents an idealized view of the girl, but it is even briefer and more abstract than usual:

Li reis ot une fille bele
E mut curteise dameisele. (21-22)

As we will see, this description is appropriate because the emphasis is on her relationship with her father; her existence as an autonomous individual with needs and desires is reduced to a minimum.

The initial description of the lover is significant principally because it shows his ambitious aspirations to distinguish himself above all other knights at the court,
even though he is very young and inexperienced. He is a count's son who has come to the court to train under the best knights in the land:

    El pais ot un damisel,
    Fiz a un cunte, gent e bel.
    De bien faire pur aver pris
    Sur tuz autres s'est entremis.  (57-60)

Proving onself to be extraordinary, "different from the common herd," as Auerbach says, is a characteristic of the hero of romance. Later in the story when he makes a trip to Salerne, the purpose of which is secret, rather than departing in a clandestine way, he departs with quite a show of pomp, not wanting to miss an opportunity to distinguish himself:

    Hastivement s'est aturnez
    De riches dras e de diniers,
    De palefreiz e de sumiers;
    De ses hummes les plus privez
    Ad lidanzeus od sei menez.  (132-136)

The magic potion concocted by the aunt is another element which has the potential to distinguish the hero. He simply has to drink it for his body to become invigorated and fortified enough to undertake any task at hand:

    Par mescines l'ad esforcié.
    Un tel beivre li ad chargié,
    Ja ne serat tant travaillez
    Ne si ateinz ne si chargez,
    Ne li resfreshist tut le cors,
    Neis les vaines ne les os,
    E qu'il nen ait tute vertu
    Si tost cum il l'aura beu.  (143-152)

When he announces that he will accept the challenge of carrying his lover to the summit of the mountain without stopping to rest, he is ridiculed, although kindly, by the king who reminds him of his youth and inexperience
which are in marked contrast to the strength and wisdom
of those who have already failed at the task:

    Li reis ne l'en escundist mie,
    Mes mut le tent a grant folie,
    Pur ceo qu'il iert de jeofne eage!
    Tant prudence vaillant e sage
    Une asale icel afaire
    Ki n'en purent a nul chief traire!  (159-164)

The mocking of course serves only to enhance the chal-
lenge.

Reputation or public opinion in general is as
important to the king as to the apprentice knight,
although for different reasons. Whereas the young man
wants to distinguish himself, the king wants to maintain
the order and harmony of the society of which he is the
head. An harmonious aristocratic society is a mainstay
of traditional medieval romance. There is often discord
within a given group, but the movement is from disharmony
to harmony. In Les Deus amanz when the unhealthy nature
of the king's relationship with his daughter becomes
evident, the entire kingdom, feeling threatened, voices
displeasure and criticism. Judging himself to be as
incapable of relinquishing his jealous possession of his
daughter as of bearing the disapproval of society, he
decides he must find a way to make the girl undesirable:

    Plusur a mal li aturnerent,
    Li suen meisme le blamerent.
    Quant il oi qu'hum en parla,
    Mut fu dolenz, mut li pesa.
    Cumenc a sei a purpenser
    Cumment s'en purrat delivrer,
    Que nuls sa fille ne quesist.  (33-39)
His solution also adds to the romance atmosphere of the tale. He makes a proclamation throughout the land which will challenge many a knight to test his abilities, thus instigating the kind of activity which is common in Yvain, Le Chevalier de la charrette, and Tristan et Iseut, but which is rare in the Lais:

\[
\begin{align*}
E\,\text{luinze}\,\text{pre} & \text{se manda z dist}, \\
Ki\,\text{sa fille} & \text{vedreit aveir} \\
\text{Une chose seust de veir;} & \\
\text{Sortit esteit e destine} & \\
\text{Desur le munt fors la cité} & \\
\text{Entre ses braz la portereit} & \\
\text{Si que ne se resposerait.} & (40-46)
\end{align*}
\]

Although we are told that many seasoned knights accept but fail to fulfill the challenge, we witness the effort only once, when the hero strives to win his beloved. This scene which is the climax of the story is quite unusual in the Lais in that it is truly a dramatically visual scene presenting a crowd of cheering people in a wide open space with a huge mountain in the background. It is also unusual in that it presents an aventure, fundamental to medieval romance, but rare in the Lais. The king's obvious excitement, perhaps anticipation, alerts the reader to its very special nature:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Ses hummes mande e ses amis} & \\
\text{E tuz ceus k'il poeit aveir} & \\
\text{N'en i laissa nul remaneir.} & \\
\text{Pur sa fille, pur le vallet} & \\
\text{Ki en aventure se met} & \\
\text{De li porter en sum le munt,} & \\
\text{De tutes parz venu i sunt.} & (166-172)
\end{align*}
\]

The actual beginning of the ordeal is even more dramatic. We are given graphic details about the setting. The
movement of the characters is presented as being quite ceremonious, thus giving the impression that something significant is taking place:

\begin{align*}
\text{Al jur, quant tuit furent venu,} \\
\text{Li damisels premiers i fu,} \\
\text{Sun beivre n'i ublia mie.} \\
\text{Devers seigne, en la praerie,} \\
\text{En la grant gent tute asemblee,} \\
\text{Li reis ad sa fille menee.} \\
\text{N'ot drap vestu fors la chemise} \\
\text{Entre ses braz l'aveit cil prise.} \quad (177-184)
\end{align*}

The tension mounts as the couple ascends the mountain and the young man weakens but refuses to drink the potion in spite of the Princess' urging. The tale ends with the traditional idea of commemorating this "idealized" love by the construction of a common tomb for the lovers, by naming the mountain after them and implicitly by composing the lay.

The importance of material reality is limited in \textit{Les Deus amanz}. Since specific details and references to material objects are rare, we would expect the few passages which are preoccupied with physical reality to be particularly significant, but this is not always the case. As we have seen, the setting of the lay is in several ways typical of romance. The story took place long ago; it is in some way associated with the Bretons; the physical setting is dominated by a huge, mysterious mountain. But the description of the setting is disrupted by a relatively long passage telling us about a city the king had built near the mountain:
Pres de cel munt a une part.
Par grant cunseil e par esgart,
Une cite fist faire uns reis,
Ki esteit sire des Pistreis;
Des Pistreis la fist il numer
E Pistre la fist apeler.
Tuz jurs ad puis dure li nuns;
Uncore i ad vile e maisuns.
Nus savum bien de la contree
Que li Vals de Pistre est nomee.  (11-20)

The passage is tedious with its repetition of the word "Pistre" and is entirely irrelevant to the story, since after a lengthy explanation there is no subsequent mention of the city. The passage raises questions for which it provides no answers. One wonders why a king would have a kingdom before he had a city and why the narrator would feel the need to explain to the reader that the valley in which the city of Pistre is found is called the Valley of Pistre. These lines apparently contribute little to the tale, disturb momentarily the atmosphere of the lay, and witness Marie's unpredictable preoccupation with reality.

Two other passages dealing with physical reality have a different effect. They both contribute in a significant way to the tale, and are striking for the blunt, earthy manner in which they convey their message. We learn in a brief passage that in order to help her lover the Princess dieted to become as light as possible:

La dameisele s'aturna
Mut se destreinst e mut juna
E amaigrir pur alegier,
Qu'a son ami voleit aidier.  (173-176)
The thought of a Princess of a medieval romance engaged in the mundane activity of dieting is amusing but significant when we remember she would not make the sacrifice her lover asked of her. The dieting becomes a rather feeble substitute: she will deprive herself of food, but not leave her father as her lover requested.

The even briefer description of the death of the young man has a similar effect. After what seems to be months of preparation before undertaking his task and after an impressive dramatic beginning of his journey and actual ascent, he is not even given time to respond emotionally to his feat; his heart ruptures from over-exertion and he dies instantly:

Sur le munt vint; tant se greva,
Ileoc chei, puis ne leva;
Li quors del ventre s'enparti.  

The graphic detail of the physical reaction of the heart seems to emphasize the fact that the heart had no emotional reaction.

The conception of love in Les Deus amanz is the element which distinguishes it most obviously from traditional romance. In Pyramus and Thisbe the point of the tale seems to be the persistence and power of love:

...Their nearness
Made them acquainted and love grew in time,
So that they would have married, but their Parents forbade it. But their parents
Could not keep them from being in love:
Their nods and gestures showed it. You Know how fire suppressed burns all the Fiercer. There was a chink in the wall Between the houses, a flaw the careless
Builder had never noticed, Nor anyone else,  
For many years, detected, but the lovers  
Found it—love is a finder always—  
Used it to talk through, and loving whispers  
Went back and forth in safety.  

Because of their love they find a way to overcome the  
barriers that separate them, and they leave their homes  
and families. Love inspires each of them to care more  
about his lover than about his very life. Simply  
hearing Thisbe's name seems to have been enough to recall  
Pyramus from the dead for a last glimpse of his beloved  
or at least to sustain him so that he could have one last  
moment of communication with her before dying:

   Filling the wounds with tears, and kissed  
His lips cold in his dying. "O my Pyramus,"  
She wept, 'What evil fortune takes you from  
Me? Pyramus, answer me! Your dearest  
Thisbe is calling you. Pyramus, listen,  
Lift up your head! He heard the name of  
Thisbe, and he lifted his eyes, with the  
Weight of death heavy upon them, and saw  
Her face, and closed his eyes.  

In Tristan et Iseut the lovers undergo endless  
ordeals, encounter countless risks, and sacrifice eternity (according to some versions) for just a few moments  
together. Tristan suffers physical wounds, alienates  
his uncle whom he loves, risks being burned at the stake,  
and in fact dedicates his life to the pursuit and protection of Iseut. She likewise, although in a more  
passive role, consecrates her life to her lover. The  
last monologue of Iseut points out clearly the all-  
importance of love in their lives, love as an intimate  
relationship between two particular people, neither of
whom could survive without the other:

Elle entre dans la chambre de Tristan; elle le voit étendu sur un aïs couvert d'un paile rayé. Elle s'agenouille piteusement, lui prend les mains: "Ami Tristan, dit-elle, quand je vous vois mort, je n'ai plus de raisons de vivre. Vous êtes mort pour mon amour, et je meurs de tendresse et du regret de n'avoir pu confort, joie et santé. Maudite soit cette tempête qui me fit demeurer en mer! Si je fusse venue à temps, je vous eusse rendu la vie, et vous eusse parlé longuement, doucement de nos amours; je vous eusse rappelé nos aventures, nos joies et nos peines, tout ce qui fut notre étrange destinée. Puisque je n'ai pu vous rappeler à la vie, qu'au moins je vous rejoigne dans la mort, que j'aie confort avec vous, comme autrefois, du même breuvage. Alors elle l'accoste, lui baise la face et les levres, l'embrasse étroitement, s'enlace à lui corps à corps, bouche à bouche, et à ce moment jette un long soupir; son coeur lui manque et l'âme s'envole: Iseut est morte pour son ami."

How pale is love in *Les Deus amanz* by comparison, for in the lay it is an egocentric and feeble emotion.

The love relationship between the king and his daughter is one of dependency. The father will go to great pains to prevent her from marrying because he believes he cannot live without her. The princess has taken over her dead mother's role in her father's life to the point that society is scandalized. She stays near him night and day and "comforts" him since he has lost his wife:

Fiz ne fille fors li n'aveit;
Forment l'amot e chierisseit.
De riches hommes fu requise,
Ki volentiers l'eussent prise;
Mes li reis ne la volt doner,
Kar ne s'en poeit consirrer.
Li reis n'aveit autre retur,
Pres de li esteit nuit e jur.
Cunfortez fu par la meschine,
Puis que perdue ot la reine.  

The passage suggests an incestuous relationship but remains ambiguous. It is clear, however, that the relationship is unhealthy. When the king realizes he is scrutinized and criticized by his subjects, he looks for a plan whereby no one will ask him for her, but never shows any concern for her needs or desires. She is treated like an object in that she is interchangable with her mother and is carted half-way up the mountain and dropped many times by unidentified suitors. She does not even express her feelings toward her father's covenant, but accepts passively and completely his every dictate. She falls in love with the count's son because of his personal virtues and because her father likes him very much:

Pur ceeo ke pruz fu e curteis  
E que mut le preisot li reis  
Li otria sa druerie.  

When the young lover asks her to go away with him she responds with an incredible refusal—perhaps unique in romance—which begins by stating that she realizes he is not strong enough to carry her up the mountain as her father requires and proceeds to say that she cannot leave her father because of the pain it would cause both of them:

Amis, fait ele, jeo sai bien,  
Ne n'i porteriez pur rien:  
N'estes mie si vertuus!  
Si jo m'en vois ensemble od vus,
Mis pere avreit e doel e ire,
Ne vivreit mie sanz martire.
Certes tant l'eim e si l'ai chier,
Jeo nel vodreie curucier. (93-100)

Her dependence on her father and lack of devotion to her lover are equally striking, especially in comparison to the sacrifices made by Thisbe and Iseut.

Her lover is no more devoted than she. Whereas she is torn, however unequally, between her father and her lover, he is torn between his reputation or personal pride and her. The first description we have of him mentions his ambition to distinguish himself before mentioning his love for the princess. Indeed his love for her must be considered a means of attaining his primary goal:

El pais ot un damisel,
Fiz a un cunte, gent e bel.
De bien faire put avei- pris
Sur tuz autres s'est entremis.
En la curt le rei conversot,
Asez sovent i surjurnot.
La fille al rei aama,
E meintefez l'areosuna
Qu'ele s'amur li otraist
E par druerie l'amast. (57-66)

His philosophy is certainly foriegn to that of the typical hero of romance, the fighter of dragons who pursues aventure, for he does not want to take chances:

La suffrancce mut lur greva,
Mes li vallez se purpensa
Que mieuz en voelt les maus suffrir
Que trop haster e dunc faillir. (75-78)

The death scene is typical of romance in that the hero dies a violent death and is lamented lavishly by the princess who lies beside his body to embrace and kiss him.
It is atypical, however, in that there is no communication between the lovers in the scene leading up to the death, no last glimpse as we see in Pyramus and Thisbe or Tristan. As the lovers ascend the mountain they become more and more separated in spite of their physical proximity. The first time she asks him to drink the potion he refuses and refers to the crowd of spectators, thereby showing he is not thinking of her. Subsequently he does not even respond to her pleas. He arrives at the summit and dies without her understanding at first what has happened:

Ele senti qu'il alassa.
"Amis, fet ele, kar bevez!
Jeo sai bien que vus alasiez.
Si recuvrez vostre vertu!"
Li damisels ad respundu:
"Bele, jo sent tut fort mun quer,
Ne m'arestereie a nul fuer
Si lungement que jeo beusse.
Pur quei treis pas aler pesse.
Ceste genz uns escriereient.
De lur noise m'esturdireient;
Tost me purreient desturber.
Jo ne voil pas ci arester."
Quant les deus parz fu muntez sus,
Pur un petit qu'il ne chiet jus.
Sovent li prie la meschine:
"Amis, bevez vostre mescine!"
Ja ne la volt oir ne creire;
A grant anguisse od tut li eire.
Sur le munt vint; tant se greva,
Ileoc chei, puis ne leva"
Li quors del ventre s'en parti. (194-215)

There is a pervasive suggestion of futility or disintegration which disrupts the atmosphere of the tale. People, objects, and ideas circulate athwart one another rather than to move together in an integrated pattern.
The king's covenant which pacified his kingdom is totally selfish and seems sadistic. Men are asked to carry a young woman in their arms up the side of a "marvelously" high mountain only to find they cannot reach the top in order to win the reward. It is as though the king is using his daughter to prove all other men less potent than he. The task itself takes neither intelligence nor skill, only endurance. One wonders what happens to the girl each time she is dropped half-way up the mountain by her collapsed suitor.

The potion designed to bring about the fruitful union of the lovers is used instead for growing flowers on a hill. The fact that a substance designed to bring about an intimate relationship is used to grow wild flowers at the top of a very high hill is another example of the failure of love relationships in this tale. The young quester's choice not to drink the potion seems gratuitous. Critics have traditionally based their interpretations of this scene on the lines explaining that the youth died because of his intemperance (185-189). Moshe Lazar says that his death was caused by the sin of excessive pride. Mickel draws a parallel with the Narcissus legend to show the purpose of the lay is to point out the futility and vanity of a love of démesure. Judith Rothschild has a more original but less convincing interpretation: "Arriving half-way up the hill and not using the potion does not... indicate hubris, but simply
forgetfulness, because of waking sensuality." Given
the uncommited nature of love, the youth could certainly
not be showing an excess of love, and if he is showing
an excess of pride, his sacrifice is futile since no
one will ever know of his choice not to use the magic
potion.

The personal relationships are perhaps the most
disconcerting aspect of the tale and do the most to
disrupt its tendency toward the ideal. Romance typically
moves toward uniting couples, although sometimes in death.
Here, however, each character makes obstacles for the
others. The king's challenge is thrown at the boy three
times, followed each time by a statement that reminds him
he is not strong enough to accomplish it. The girl
refuses to run away with her lover but devises a plan to
thwart her father's wishes. The young man refuses to
take the potion in spite of his lover's requests. Con-
sequently, everyone is dissatisfied in the end. The youth
has neither his pride nor his lover; the princess has
lost her lover and abandoned her father; and the king
finds himself in the situation he feared the most: he is
alone.
NOTES ON CHAPTER 4

1. Serge believes the lay was influenced by Ovid's Pyramus. C. Serge, "Piramo e Tisbe nei Lai di Maria de Francia," Studi Lugli-Valeri (Venezia, 1961), 845-853.


The inclusion of Chievrefoil in the collection of course indicates Marie's familiarity with the Tristan legend.

2. "It has long been recognized that there is nothing Breton about this tale, yet Marie attributes it to them" Emanuel J. Mickel, Ibid., 85.


4. Marie presents the same idea in Milun (11.285-288), but does not exemplify it there or in Les Deus amanz.

5. Ovid, Ibid., 84.


CHAPTER 5

CHAITIVEL: LOVE AS A SOURCE OF DESTRUCTION

In Chaitivel we have a blatantly ironic treatment of the conventions of courtly love and romance. Whereas in several lays idealisms are presented then subtly undermined by realistic or ambiguous statements, here they are used overtly to show the futility of conventional behavior and its consequences to personal lives in the real world. The image of the nightingale (symbol of love) enclosed in a reliquary at the end of Laustic could be interpreted as a sublimation of love, but it could also indicate its annihilation. The entrance of the characters into the cloisters at the end of Eliud could be considered a passage from physical love to love of God, or an indication of the unsatisfying nature of love relationships in general. Love, which as a courtly ideal is an elevating force, can be quite destructive when it becomes adulterated by motives that are less than ideal or when it must confront the realities of everyday existence as it does in Chaitivel. Rather than inspiring noble, generous deeds and uniting people in fulfilling relationships, it serves as an obstacle to the individuation of personalities and to the development of intimate relationships.

Relatively little critical work has been done on Chaitivel. Emanuel Mickel, who has searched for sources for all the Lais, recognizes no direct links between this tale
and the folklore in which he finds antecedents for other
stories by Marie. Like most scholars he places it in
the category of literature on the theory of love with
works such as Andreas Capellanus' *De arte honeste amandi.*¹
Moshé Lazar places it under the rubric of "love casuistry,"
insisting however that it is not intended to be a condem-
nation of courtly love.² Instead, it is meant to condemn
inhumanity as we see it in the attitude and actions of the
heroine. What he does not point out is that when convien-
tional characters are presented and conventional behavior
maintained in the face of realistic demands, they will
always be inhuman. It is only when they are placed in a
primarily ideal setting as found in traditional romance
or courtly literature that they constitute an acceptable
form of behavior.

The initial description of the heroine of *Chaitivel*
is not unlike those found in most other lays; she is
beautiful, intelligent, and well-mannered:

\[
\begin{align*}
& \text{En Bretaine a Nantes maneit} \\
& \text{Une dame ki mut valeit} \\
& \text{De beaute e d'enseignement} \\
& \text{E de tut bon effetement.} \\
\end{align*}
\]

(9-12)

She has the effect of the lovely lady in courtly litera-
ture; when any man sees her he instantly falls in love
with her and dedicates his time to pleasing and pursuing
her:

\[
\begin{align*}
& \text{N'ot un la tere chevalier} \\
& \text{Ki aukes feist a presier,} \\
& \text{Pur ceo qu'une feiz la veist,} \\
& \text{Ki ne l'amast e reqeist.} \\
\end{align*}
\]

(13-16)
Her attitude toward her suitors is ambiguous at this point. Rather than being the cold, haughty lady who puts obstacles between herself and her lovers in order to try their love, she encourages them all. She cannot love so many men but she does not want anyone to die from heartbreak because she refuses his love:

Ele nes pot mie tuz amer  
Ne el nes vot mie tuer.  

(17-18)

While being metaphorical, the use of the verb tuer is also ironic when considered in the light of the outcome of the story. Warnke prefers another reading of the manuscripts:

Ele nes pot mie tuz amer,  
N'el nes volt mie teuser.  

(17-18)

This version is also ironic and ominous since we see it is her reluctance to make a choice that brings about the destruction of her lovers and her own bleak situation at the end of the tale. Warnke's version is more suggestive of the fact that her reluctance to refuse suitors may not be inspired by altruism, and as is clear later, she is thoroughly selfish. The narrator ostensibly endorses her attitude with a theoretical statement justifying the propriety of her behavior:

La dame sait a celui gré  
De sue boîne volonté  
Pur quant, s'ele nel veolt oir,  
Nel deit de paroles leidir,  
Mes enurer e tenir chier,  
A gré servir e mercier.  

(23-28)

The lady will choose to love whomever she wishes, but just because she does not choose to love someone does not mean
she should insult him. Instead, she must continue to show him honor and gratitude. At this point we return to the narrative to see the consequences of a lady who out of unmitigated vanity is unable to make any choice at all.

The pursuit of love is the principal occupation of the characters of this tale. There is no king or lord to indicate a government, family ties, or foreign wars. The heroine is sovereign and the main goal of society is to please her:

La dame dunt jo voil cunter,
Ki tant fu requise d'amer
Pur sa beaute, pur sa valur,
S'en entremistrent nuit e jur.  (29-32)

The absence of a subject for the verb s'entremettre suggests she is the object of general attention. The four knights who are the heroes of this tale have not been introduced at this point.

Fully aware of her worth and role in society she preoccupies herself trying to decide which suitor to favor. Originally this choice is presented as a reasonable subject of cerebration:

La dame du de mut grant sens:
En respit mist e en purpens
Pur saveir e pur demander
Li que ils sereit mieuz a amer.  (49-52)

But it is referred to several times throughout the short text and soon we realize that the selection is an end in itself and that no choice will ever be made:
Tant furent tuit de grant valeur,
Ne pot eslire le meillur.
Ne volt les treis perdre pur l'un.  (53-55)

After three suitors have died and one is maimed, she
cannot decide which one to pity the most:

Ne sai lequel jeo dei plus pleindre.  (157)

When they are living she spends her time encouraging
them with smiles, acts of friendship, and written
messages:

Bel semblant feseit a chescun,
Ses drueries lur donout,
Ses messages lur enveiout.  (56-58)

It is suggested that she calls the tournament to have the
occasion to see her lovers in action to help her decide
which is the most worthy (71-82). When the knights are
injured or killed their bodies are placed on their shields
in traditional fashion and are carried to the lady. In
equally traditional fashion she faints upon learning their
plight. Soon after recovering, however, she becomes
engrossed in activity, once more "caring" for the four
victims. She announces her plans and then sets out to
accomplish them. She first oversees the preparation of
the bodies of the dead knights and their burial in a
wealthy abbey:

Puis fist les autres cunreer.
A grant amur e noblement
Les aturnat e richement;
En une mut riche abeie
Fist grant offrendre e grant partie
La u il furent enfui.  (166-171)
She convokes learned doctors to try to cure the injured knight and visits him daily:

Sages mires aveit mandez,
Sis ad al chevalier livrez
Ki en sa chambre jut nafrez
Tant qu'a garisun est turnez.
Ele l'alot veir sovent
E cunforttout mut bonement. (173-178)

Her final activity of the story is her decision to compose a lay and to name it.

By this point the reader realizes that throughout the tale there has been much discussion of love and much activity, but no personal interaction. A typical scene is that of the tournament where the knights are jousting and the lady is isolated in a tower watching them, trying to decide which she should choose to love:

La dame fu sur une tur,
Bien choisi les suens e les lur;
Les druz i vit mut bien aidier,
Ne seit le queil deit plus preisier.(107-110)

The only allusion to love-making is that of the invalid knight who in a lamentation describes the kind of relationship he would like to have with his lady (220-222).

Two key passages indicate in a particularly graphic way the lack of any manner of communication or even commiseration between lady and lover in this tale. The heroine's long monologue mourning the death of three of her suitors and the injury of the fourth is an example of the lady's preoccupation with herself. The narrator ironically introduces the passage by stating that the lady lamented each of her lovers by name:
Quant ele vient de paumeisun,
Chescun regrette par sun nun.
"Lasse, fet ele, que ferai?
James haitiee ne serai.
Ces quatre chevaliers amoue
E chescun par sei cuveitoue.
Mut par avez en eus grant bien!
Il m'amoent sur tute rien;
Pur lur beauté, pur lur pruesce,
Pur lur valur, pur lur largesce,
Les fis d'amer a mei entendre.
Nes voil tuz perdre pur l'un prendre!
Ne sai le queil jeo dei plus pleindre,
Mes ne m'en puis covrir ne feindre:
L'un vei nafré, li trei sunt mort,
N'ai rien el mund ki me confort." (145-160)

Not only is she blatantly impersonal, but she is also thoroughly egocentric in her concerns. She wonders what she will do (147) and mourns that she will never be happy (148). When she says she loved them, she refers to the suitors as a group (149), not as individuals. She ends the lament by saying she cannot be comforted. The mourning of the knights' peers is exaggerated and dramatic in the traditional way—and a marked contrast to that of the selfish lady:

La noise leval e li criz,
Unques les autres ne duterent.
Pur la dolur des chevaliers
I aveit iteus deus millers
Ki lur ventaille deslacierent,
Chevoiz e barbes detrahierent;
Entre eus esteit li doels communs. (131-139)

The ego centricity of the lady and the lack of intimate interaction are obvious in the closing scene of the lay, the only one where we witness direct communication between lady and lover. On one of her daily visits to the injured knight we see how she comforts him:
Un jur d'esté, après mangier,  
Parlot la dame al chevalier.  
De sun grant doel li remembrot,  
Sun chief e sun vis en baissot;  
Forment commencet a poder.  
E il la prist a regarder;  
Bien apareit qu'ele pensot.  
Avenaument l'areisunot:  
"Dame, vus estes en esfrei!  
Que pensez vus: Dites le mei!  
Lessiez vostre dolur ester:  
Bien vus devriez conforter!" (181-192)

She enters the room despondent, thinking of the tragedy  
that occurred at the tournament and of her great loss.  
Her head is bowed and she does not speak to the invalid.  
Finally, in pity for her who has come to comfort him, the  
knight speaks up and tries to console her. In response  
she tells him she is thinking of his friends!

---Amis, fet ele, jeo pensoue  
E voz compainuns remembrue. (193-194)

When we consider the limited possibilities of communication  
between the lady and the invalid, her thinking and speaking  
about the others to him is quite cruel; yet she is so  
insensitive, she is not aware of her cruelty. She continues  
in the same vein by reminding him that she is not just any  
lady; she in particular does not deserve such a fate:

James dame de mun parage,  
Ja tant n'iert bele, pruz ne sage,  
Teus quatre ensemble n'amer  
Ne en un jur si nes perdra. (195-198)

Before going on to discuss her plans to compose a lay, she  
makes a brief allusion to the invalid in a subordinate  
clause which reduces him to an even less significant role:

...Fors vus tut sul ki nafrez fustes. (199)
Already physically castrated, he is now mentally castrated. In a desperate effort to demand some sort of recognition from the lady for his dedication and suffering, he reasons and pleads with her to name her lay after him, not after all four knights: he has suffered the most. Her terse affirmative response evinces her egocentric attitude: "ceo m'est bel" (229). She will do so because the idea pleases her, not because he deserves it; yet we see that in the introduction and the conclusion of the lay, both titles are used.

In studying the text as an example of conventional courtly relationships we see that the end result is separation and destruction: the sovereign, distant lady remains just that; the obsequious knights are killed or mutilated. If we consider it as an example of the quest, the organizing principle of romance, the ending is no less sterile.

As in most romance, there is a central quest in Chaitivel: the knights' vying for the lady's favor. The quest is identified at the beginning of the lay and the principal aventure, the tournament, is designed to further it. For all their striving, however, the knights make no progress whatsoever and at the end of the tale are all destroyed. Not only do the knights not attain their goal, they do not even overcome anonymity. Their anonymity is particularly ironic in this lay where there is a preoccupation with names: the tale has two names, whereas the
kings have none: it is personified whereas they are dehumanized:

L'aventure vus en dirai
E la cite vus numerai
U il fu nez e cum ot nun;
Le Chaitevel l'apelet hum,
E si i ad plusieurs de ceus
Ki l'apelent Les Quatre Deules. \(3-8\)

The lady consistently refuses to recognize distinctions among the knights. Even when three are dead and one is injured she speaks of them as indistinguishable members of a group. At the beginning of the lay they are introduced as being four barons with exactly the same idealistic qualities:

En Breitaine ot quatre baruns,
Mes jeo ne sai numer lur nuns;
Il n'aveient gueres d'ee
Mes mut erent de grant beauté
E chevalier pruz e vaillant,
Large, curteis e despendant.
Mut par esteient de grant pris
E gentil hume del pais. \(33-40\)

Characters of other lays are introduced in the same way.

The two knights of Laustic are introduced as a pair:

En Seint Mallo en la cuntree
Ot une vile renumee.
Dui chevalier ilec maneient
E deus forz maisuns i aveient
Pur la bunte des deus baruns
Fu de la vile bons li nuns. \(7-12\)

The Breton knights in Le Fresne are also presented initially as having exactly the same qualities:

En Bretaine jadis maneient
Dui chevalier; veisin esteient.
Riche hume furent e manant,
E chevalier pruz e vaillant. \(3-6\)
In those lays, however, the knights are developed in the stories as distinct individuals. In Chaitivel the fact that there are four characters who are never individualized is quite striking. The impression is almost one of crowding as they move en masse through the lay. There is a certain amount of character delineation, but it relates to the group as a whole. We see for example that they are quite vain. Each continues to pursue the lady not only because he wants her love, but also because he is confident he can win out over his rivals:

Icil quatre la dame amoent
E de bien fere se penoent;
Pur li e pur s'amur aver
I meteit chescuns sun peoir.
Chescuns par sei la requereit
E tute sa peine i meteit;
N'i ot celui ki ne quidast
Que mieuz d'autre n'i espleitast.(41-48)

A l'assembler des chevaliers
Voleit chescuns estre primiers
De bien fere, si il peust,
Pur ceeo qu'a la dame pleust. (63-66)

Even when they act as individuals they do exactly the same thing:

Tuit la teneient pur amie,
Tuit portouent sa druerie,
Anel u mance u gumfanun,
E chescuns escrito sun nun. (67-70)

At the tournament their performances are reported as being indistinguishable; together they win all the prizes:

La dame fu sur une tur,
Bien choisi les suens e les lur;
Ses druz i vit mut bien aidier,
Ne seit le queil deit plus preisier.(107-110)
Si quatre dru bien le feseient,
Ki ke de tuz le pris aveient.  (115-116)

When they are defeated they are described as being defeated all together:

A traverse furent perdu
E tuit quatre furent cheu.  (125-126)

Not only do they behave in the same way, but the lady treats them in exactly the same way:

Bel semblant feseit a chescun,
Ses druries lur donout,
Ses messages lur enveiout.  (56-58)

When they learn from one another that she shows them all the same acts of kindness and sends them all the same messages, they react identically; each continues to pursue her, believing he can win her from the others. Even when three are dead but one is still living she refers to them as her four misfortunes ("quatre dols"). In protest, the living knight reacts hastivement, insisting that she make a distinction between him and his deceased peers, but ironically, he concludes that he would rather be dead, that is, once again totally indistinguishable from the others. The proposed quest, then never progresses beyond the incipient stage and the circumstances surrounding it are thoroughly ironic: not only are the knights destroyed in a tournament designed to give them the opportunity to distinguish themselves, but they are killed by accident:

Cil ki a mort les unt nafrez
Lur escuz unt es chans getez;
Mut esteiint pur eus dolent:
Nel firent pas a escient.  (127-130)
Those who killed them are so bereaved they throw their arms in the field and join the two thousand other knights who are taking off their armor and tearing out their hair in grief (131-139).

In Chaitivel we have traces of conventional literature in the archetype of the lady who receives the love-service of submissive knights and for whom love is the primary preoccupation of life, as well as in the aventure and quest typical of romance. The conventions, however, are in no way idealized and the conception of love serves to alienate the tale from the pole of idealism on the scale. The destructive nature of the pursuit of love is evident in the final scene where we witness a solitary, disappointed lady selfishly lamenting her great losses and a young knight finally giving up his vain effort to win the favor of a lady. As pitiful as the scene could be, its tone is ironic and not tragic because the characters are presented as decision makers in the real world, not as victims of some mysterious destiny or some fatal sentiment.
NOTES ON CHAPTER 5

1. Emanuel J. Mickel, Jr., Ibid., 93.
CHAPTER 6

LAUSTIC: VIOLENCE AND INDIFFERENCE IN LOVE RELATIONSHIPS

In Laustic we enter once again, on one level, the idealized world of conventional romance and courtly love. Although we are a step closer to this idealized world than in Chaitivel, the tendencies to realism and irony are still clearly present, for the most part, in the comments of the narrator and the actions of the characters, as opposed to the setting and descriptions of characters.

At the most general level we find the geographical setting somewhat abstract. The city where the story takes place is in the Saint Malo region, but the only other detail given is that it is renowned for the virtue of the two knights who are the heroes of the tale—that is, the emphasis is on the reputation of the knights rather than on any concern to localize the setting. The time setting is no less conventional. It is the summer of some unidentified year when all the flowers are in bloom and the birds are singing sweetly. The narrator says that it is only natural for people to fall in love in such a setting.

The description of characters, all of whom are unnamed, is equally illusory. The lady is sage, curteise e acemee (14). Her most outstanding quality is that she is always attired in the latest fashion. Her lover is no less worthy. Known for his prouesse and hospitality, he has
proved his knightly skills in many a tournament and he is known for his largesse. All we are told about the husband at this point is that the city benefits from his good reputation and that he has a strong house and a beautiful wife.

The love relationship is characteristic of the courtly tradition in that it is based on mutual esteem; it is secret--perhaps enhanced by being an amour de loin, --and it is the source of great happiness. Lines 24-26 tell us that the lady loved the knight above all else in the world because of his innate goodness, his reputation, and because he pursued her so insistently. Lines 29-36 tell us that the lovers wisely guarded the secret of their love. They were able to do so quite well because of the proximity of their homes and bedrooms. Because of the great care they took, their love was not even suspected. Lines 45 and 46 tell us that their joy was almost complete:

N'unt gueres rien ki lur despleise,
Mut esteient amdui a eise. (45-46)

As Moshé Lazar points out, lines 84 and 85 closely resemble the axiom of troubadour poetry which says that he who has never known the joy of love has never known real joy.¹

Il nen ad joie en cest mund
Ki n'ot le laustic chanter. (84-85)

The lovers remain up to the very end true to their courtly virtues. When the knight hears of the cruel
destruction of the nightingale, which since Antiquity has been associated with lovers in literature, he is dolez but does nothing unbecoming a courtly lover. In fact, the final image of the tale might represent the ultimate sublimation of their love which is already remarkable for its independence from physical attraction or pleasure: the knight has the body of the bird enclosed in a luxurious shrine which he will carry with him in religious fashion the rest of his life.

The first discordant note which interrupts the conventional, idealized atmosphere comes in line 23 in a brief passage where the narrator tells us of the conventional courtly virtues of the knight, we learn:

La femme sun veisin ama.

It is as though loving a neighbor's wife is as admirable a quality as having an excellent reputation, being generous, or winning jousts. Certain scholars do believe that adultery is a necessary element of courtly love. However, the fact that Marie consistently undermines the conventional material and nowhere suggests that adultery is necessary, valued or condemned supports the impression that this line is carefully placed to produce a subtle humorous effect, or at least to make the audience skeptical of the idealized setting and characters.

Shortly afterwards, a similar effect is created as the narrator enumerates the reasons for which the lady loves the knight. She loves him more than anything else
in the world because he has pursued her insistently, because of his inherent goodness, because of his excellent reputation, and as much as anything else because he lives next door. The arbitrariness of the last reason is amusing and certainly calls into question the preceding ones. Being unconventional, it is the most striking reason and outweighs the others in the mind of the reader.

After speaking of the ease with which the lovers communicate and the mutual satisfaction that their communication brings them, we learn exactly how they go about it; they stand at their respective windows and toss treasured objects back and forth. This limited interchange could not constitute satisfactory communication and the reader has by now learned not to accept at face value the words of the narrator when she says a couple is happy. Immediately after we learn that their joy is almost complete, we are told that the only obstacle is that the lady is strictly guarded whenever her lover is in town. Then of course we wonder just when it is they meet and how secret their love really is. This state of affairs recalls a previous line which describes the physical setting of the lovers' meetings. We are told that their love has never been discovered or even suspected because their bedrooms are quite close and there are no separations between them, except a gray stone wall. The presence of the wall recalls the Pyramus
and Thisbe story, but a comparison of the wall's importance in the two works points out clearly that we are dealing here as in _Les Deus amanz_ with an entirely different conception of love. In Ovid's tale it is used to show that true love overcomes all obstacles:

But their parents could not keep them from being in love: their nods and gestures showed it—
You know how fire suppressed burns all the fiercer.
There was a chink in the wall between the houses,
A flaw the careless builder had never noticed,
Nor anyone else, for many years, detected,
But the lovers found it—love is a finder, always
Used it to talk through, and the loving whispers Went back and forth in safety.²

In _Laustic_, however, the wall is simply an element of the physical setting; the adjectives "gray" and "stone" emphasize its physical reality.

Two interpretations could be given to the fact that the lovers make no effort to overcome the obstacles that separate them, that is, to establish intimacy. One interpretation is that love is enhanced by being the conventional _amour de loin_. The other is that love in this tale is actually a rather banal sentiment that does not inspire courage or determination to overcome obstacles. The lovers are satisfied with the quality of communication they attain by tossing objects back and forth between their windows. Although the first interpretation is possible, the second is supported by the fact that the lovers are satisfied with total and permanent separation at the end of the lay: they make no effort to remain in contact in any way.
The lovers' communication becomes increasingly problematic and amusing as the tale progresses and the obstacles accumulate. After the narrator tells us that no one could stop the lovers' meetings, we learn that the lady sleeps in the same bed with her husband and leaves his side every night to see her lover from the bedroom window. The husband is of course suspicious of his wife's continual insomnia and has asked her many times why she leaves their bed during the night. To say he is a potential obstacle is of course an understatement; yet in the tale he is not recognized as such.

Whereas the idealized and conventional aspects are concentrated at the beginning of the lay, which is primarily descriptive in nature, the realistic elements dominate the second half which is primarily narrative. The reaction of the lady to the cruel murder of the bird, for example, is attenuated, certainly not mysterious or dramatic as one would expect in a work which is supposedly closely linked to the lyric poetry of provençal courts and to a literature which in the twelfth century is developing its capacity for psychological analysis. Nowhere does she manifest anger directly against her husband. She cries and curses those who set the traps for the bird, but immediately afterwards she engages herself in planning how she will send the corpse to her lover. The description of her activity is striking because of its detail. The preoccupation with the material aspect of the gift she sends and the
mechanics of sending it seem quite trivial in comparison with the emotions one would expect to witness at such a traumatic moment. A similar effect is created in *Le Fresne* in the passage where the mother preoccupies herself with the material aspects of abandoning her child. Pyramus and Thisbe become more emotionally involved in their daily tirade against the wall that separates them than do Marie's characters at moments of peak trauma. The lines which describe the lady's actions step by step are typical. They are comprised of a series of seven subject-verb-complement constructions. They are not even irregular in their rhythm; they show no lyricism:

Un suen vaslet ad apelé  
Sun message li ad chargié,  
A sun ami l'ad enveié.  
Cil est al chevalier venuz,  
De sa dame li dist saluz,  
Tut sun message li cunta,  
Le laustic li presenta.  

(138-144)

The reaction of the lover is even more striking for its prosaicism. The narrator tells us that the story of the death of the bird grieved the knight, but he was neither slow to react nor vileins in his response. At this point the reader would expect, in a more conventional work, to hear of some courageous or noble effort on the part of the lover to free his lady from such a cruel husband, plans to reestablish contact in some new way, or at least an outpouring of distress at learning of his great loss. Instead he begins immediately to give orders to have an elaborate casket made for the bird. It is to be constructed
of fine gold and precious jewels and he will carry it with him always. Considered in the light of the sacred and the profane, this final image of the symbol of the expression of love securely sealed in an elaborate box could represent the final triumph of love over worldly obstacles, the final passage of the lovers' relationship into sacred time and space. Here, however, where material reality seems to have displaced all expression of feeling and where the profane dominates, the effect is quite different. The bird, which at one time provided the opportunity for the expression of love, is now decaying in a box whose overpowering physical splendor makes the lovers' emotional relationship look quite pale in comparison.

In contrast with both the idealistic and realistic elements of Marie's work are the acts of violence whose presence has not been sufficiently recognized because stark violence does not conform to the conventions of courtly literature nor to the "realism" which Marie is said to represent. By far the most remarkable and dramatic events in the Lais fall into this category. To name only a few, there is a husband's murder of his wife by drowning her in boiling water in Equitan, a mother's decision to kill her newborn to save her reputation in Le Fresne, a husband's tearing off his wife's nose in Bisclavret, the murder of an innocent sailor in Eliduc, the mutilation of the bird-lover in Yonc, the queen's accusation of homosexuality in Lanval, etc.
Laustic also has its share of violence. The first sinister note comes with the first interview we witness between husband and wife. When the lady tells her husband that she gets up during the night because of the pleasure she derives from hearing the nightingale sing, he laughs cruelly and becomes obsessed with the idea of capturing the bird. The enumeration of the contraptions and plans devised to catch it (95-100) emphasizes the husband's cruel obsession. As we shall see, a similar device is used in Yonec for the same purpose. A tone of sadistic pleasure dominates the scenes following the conception of the plan. The husband is obviously delighted that the bird has been caught alive. He takes great pleasure in telling his wife ironically that the bird will no longer disturb her sleep and in killing it with his own hands while she looks on. After the bird has been killed the lady asks the husband for it. His giving her the body could be considered an ironic twist to the courtly tradition of a lover's submission to his lady's every request, but it is more striking as an act of brutality: he hurls the body of the bird at his wife's breast and stains her dress with its blood.

As we have seen in Laustic, Marie deals with situations, characters, themes, and symbols reminiscent of conventional courtly literature, yet she constantly disturbs the courtly atmosphere of her tales with unexpected comments and details or by her characters' actions and
words which are inconsistent with the idealized and conventional elements. The result here as in other lays is that there is often an obvious contradiction between what the narrator says is taking place and what we see taking place. This ambiguity is maintained throughout the Lais by a careful integration of conventional and realistic elements which are irregularly interrupted by violent words, thoughts, and deeds.
NOTES ON CHAPTER 6


CHAPTER 7

ELIDUC: SUBLIMATION OR DISINTEGRATION OF LOVE RELATIONSHIPS

In Eliduc we come closer to the traditions of courtly and romance literature, and as might be expected, their influence necessitates a reduction of our knowledge of the physical and psychological realities of the tale. From the beginning there is an emphasis on the conventional. The lay is linked in the opening lines to the vast body of Celtic folklore. The setting is therefore of course en Bretaine, with two excursions to the besieged castle of the king of Exeter. Some of the most significant scenes take place in mid-ocean and in a chapel secluded in a Breton forest near the sea. Each character is introduced with brief and thoroughly predictable statements. Of Eliduc we learn:

Pruz e curteis, hardi et fier
.................................
N'ot si vaillant hume el pais (6-8)

Of the at-this-point-unnamed Guildeluec we are told she is "noble e sage,/De haute gent, de grant parage," and finally, of Guilladun we are given the most cursory description:

Fille ert a rei e a reine
.............................
El reaume non ot plus bele! (16-18)

Absolutely no concrete details are offered.
Eliduc's reputation and abilities as a knight are irreproachable. He becomes an invaluable vassal to the kings for whom he fights in this lay. Each king entrusts his land to Eliduc whenever he must himself be away. In fact, Eliduc is so beloved of the Breton king that he becomes the object of jealous slander. Aside from his favor with the king he is intimidating in his own right to his peers, none of whom dares to cross him to his face:

N'i ot si hardi forestier
Ki cuntredire l'en osast
Ne ja une feiz en gruscast. (38-40)

When he fights for the king of Exeter we see his reputation as a warrior is quite valid; he uses excellent strategy to defeat the enemy by attacking the knights in a moment of relaxation. He is also an excellent leader: he encourages his men and instructs them thoroughly. He reminds them of the service they owe to their king and informs them of all the details of his plan of attack, down to the detail of exactly when and what should be shouted at the enemy to throw them even further off their guard.

After his military successes Eliduc remains true to the ideals of knighthood through his generosity. Refusing to benefit materially from the losses of his enemies, he takes only that which he needs and distributes his rightful share to other warriors and to his prisoners.
Eliduc is no less worthy for his manners, adhering to the protocol of the courtly knight and lover. When he arrives at the land of the king of Exeter and learns that a war is in progress, he wants to participate immediately but conducts himself properly: he sends a message to the king offering military aid but assures the king that if his aid is not desired he wants simply to pass through his land unharmed.

When he visits Guilladun his behavior is equally conventional. He brings with him a chamberlain whom, out of timidity, he sends in to the lady's bedroom while he lags behind:

Quant en la chambre dut entrer,
Le chamberlenc enveie avant,
E il s'alat aukes targant
De ci que cil revint ariere.  (286-9)

The significance and presentation of love are also dominated by courtly characteristics. Love is recognized as essential to the very lives of the lovers. While they are still in the early stages of their relationship, Guilladun manifests the standard symptoms: she cannot sleep; she turns pale and sighs. She confides to her chamberlain that if Eliduc does not return her love she will surely die:

Que s'il ne m'aime par amur,
Murir m'estuet a grant dolur.  (348-9)

Without love, life cannot be happy.

S'il est curteis, gre me savra
...E s'il n'ad de m'amur cure
Mut me tendrai a maubaillie  
James n'avrai joie en ma vie.    (399-400)

She is quite certain of her specific desires:

Ele l'amat de tel amur,   
De lui volt faire sun seigur.  
E s'ele ne peot lui aveir,  
Une chose sace de veir:  
James n'avra humme vivant.    (512-517)

Cupid himself is named as being the instigator of this malady:

Amurs i lance sun message  
Ki la somunt de lui amer,  
Palir la fist e suspirer.    (304-306)

The love relationship is no less significant to Eliduc who makes the following statements to Guilladun:

Vus estes ma vie e ma morz,  
En vus est trestuz mis conforz.  (671-672)

... Mes jeo ferei vostre pleisir  
Que ke me deve avenir.    (677-678)

Even the conventional tokens—rings and belts—are exchanged by the lovers.

In each of these categories of conventions, however (description of characters, manners, and the conception of love), are elements which compromise the conventional, idealized atmosphere. When evaluated on the basis of their behavior, the male characters are certainly not the courageous, faithful beings the narrator tells us they are, for they are indecisive and have great difficulty remaining true to their word. The Breton king entrusts his entire kingdom to Eliduc when he is away; yet he believes those who slander the vassal without giving
Eliduc the opportunity to defend himself. As soon as he finds himself in need of Eliduc's services, he recalls him to the court and exiles Eliduc's enemies who had not been able to protect his property. Eliduc himself is on many accounts a less than ideal knight and lover. In the first descriptions we have of him we are told of his military valor and of the reputation he has earned among his peers. Yet when he has lost favor with the king because of slanderers, rather than making a serious effort to defend his honor or being content with his personal confidence in his own worth, he leaves the country entirely. His farewell speech to his closest friends is that of a defeated man who feels that he has been wronged. He assures them that his disgrace has nothing to do with his service; the love of an important man is simply not a dependable commodity:

    Del rei sun seignur lur mustra
    E de l'ire que vers lui a
    "Mut li servi a sun poeir,
    Ja ne deust maugre aveir.
    Li vileins dit par repruvier,
    Quant tence a sun charuier
    Qu'amur de seignur n'est pas fiez.(57-63)

The king of Exeter's love and respect for Eliduc are also ambiguous. We are told he is delighted when he receives Eliduc's offer to aid him militarily and he prepares for him a most hospitable welcome. On his arrival, however, Eliduc is not even invited to his home, but is asked to stay in the home of a bourgeois:
Quant li reis vit les messagiers,
Mut les ama e les ot chiers.
Sun cunestable ad apelé.
E hastivement comandé
Que cunduit li appareillast
E ke le barun amenast;
Si face osteus appareiller
U il puissent herbergier;
Tant lur face livrer e rendre
Cum il vodrunt le meis despendre.
Li cunduiz fu appareilliz
E pur Eliduc enveiez
A grant honor fu receuz:
Mut par fu bien al rei venuz!
Si ostels fu chies un burgeis.  (118-132)

The last line is really quite unexpected, for in the 12th century the bourgeois or city dweller has no social status whatsoever. In fact he is almost unknown in courtly and romance literature. The effect of this line is enhanced by its position in the passage: one naturally assumes that the "osteus" referred to in line 124 is in the palace of the king, especially considering the importance of hospitality in medieval values. Line 132, then, which indicates that Eliduc will lodge with a bourgeois, seems totally inconsistent with the preceding lines and actually seems to negate them entirely. However, such an unexpected statement which disrupts a passage by introducing noncourtly elements is typical of the Lais. We have seen this procedure in Laustic for example, where, after an idealistic description of their relationship, we are told the lovers fall in love because they live next door. We witness a similar effect in Guigemar where the "mysterious" magical ship is described in minute, realistic detail.
Although the role and presentation of love are dominated by conventional motifs, there are certain elements which represent ironic twists to a standard courtly relationship. Adultery and secrecy for example are often found in courtly literature; yet in Eliduc these aspects take on unconventional forms. In this lay it is the lover who is married, not the lady. And the secret is not the existence of their relationship which the two lovers hide from the lady's husband or from society in general. Instead, it is the fact that Eliduc is married that he hides from his lover. It is also rare in courtly literature for a lady to openly solicit a relationship with a man as Guillardun clearly does. She begins by confiding her feelings to her chamberlain and soon asks him to speak to her beloved on her behalf. Subsequently she becomes so impatient that she takes the matter into her own hands entirely.

Although love is the central theme of the Lais as an integral work, another theme dominates this particular lay: the theme of truth or faithfulness, a quality of unlimited importance in a society the maintenance of whose order is contingent upon pledges of faith. As can be seen in the quotations in the following paragraphs, the frequency of words related to truth and faithfulness is striking. The theme as it develops in this tale can be divided basically into four categories: (1) the truth of the tale itself, (2) a vassal's faithful service to
his lord reciprocated by the lord's faith in and protection of his vassal, (3) Eliduc's promises to women, and (4) women's promises to Eliduc.

Throughout the Lais Marie assures us at regular intervals that the stories she tells are true. She has heard most of them allegedly from Breton bards and is writing them to preserve them in an accurate form. In the opening lines of Eliduc Marie clearly states that what she has to say is true to the very best of her knowledge:

\[
\begin{align*}
& D'un \text{ mut ancien lai bretun} \\
& Le cunte e tute la reisun \\
& Vus dirai, si cum jeo entent \\
& La verite, mun escient. \\
\end{align*}
\]  

(1 - 4)

After the standard descriptio of each character and a brief summary of the plot, she once again, before beginning the narration of events, assures us that she is telling the truth:

\[
\begin{align*}
& L'aventure dunt li lais fu \\
& Si cum avint vus cunterai, \\
& La verite vus en dirrai. \\
\end{align*}
\]  

(26-28)

Another interesting fact comes out in this introductory passage: the lay, Marie tells us, was originally called Eliduc, but the name was changed to Guildeluce, ha, Guilliadun since in truth the lay is about the two women. Both the fact that the title was changed and the fact that she feels the need to inform her audience of the change seem to indicate an aspiration to accuracy, ironic or not, on the part of the author/narrator.
There is much talk about loyalty between lord and vassal in *Eliduc*. The first mention of the subject describes Eliduc's relationship with the Breton king. Eliduc serves him faithfully and the king loves and trusts him in return:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Elidus aveauit un seignur,} \\
\text{Rei de Brutaine la Meinur,} \\
\text{Ki mut l'amot e cherisseit,} \\
\text{E il leaument le serveit.} \\
\text{U que le reis deust errer,} \\
\text{Il aveauit la tere a garder.} \\
\end{align*}
\]

(29-34)

An analogous relationship develops when Eliduc is in Exeter. He proves his loyalty to the king who reciprocates by trusting and honoring his vassal:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{La fiance de lui en prist} \\
\text{De sa terre gardien en fist} \\
\end{align*}
\]

(269-270)

In some ways he seems to value this bond highly and claims to be willing to die in the service of the king if necessary. When Guillardun tries to convince him to take her with him he says that he cannot because of his sworn allegiance to her father.

Eliduc expects other knights to strive to achieve the same idea. In the passage where he encourages the knights of Exeter and reminds them that they owe faithful service to their king, he also assures them of his own loyalty as their leader:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Si le devez porter grant fei.} \\
\text{Venez od mei la u j'irai,} \\
\text{Si fetes ceo que jeo ferai.} \\
\text{Je vus asseur leaument.} \\
\end{align*}
\]

(192-195)
He trusts his own men as well. He feels perfectly confident of his dear friends and vassals when he goes to England:

Sa femme en la terre larra;  
A ses hummes cummandera  
Que il la gardent leaument.

The loyalty demanded and shown later in the story is more difficult to evaluate. On his second trip to Exeter, Eliduc takes with him only his most trusted followers. This is the trip where he helps Guilladun escape from her father's house to come to Brittany with him. To keep her from learning he is married, he requires his men to swear an oath of secrecy:

Deus suenz nevuz qu'il mut ama  
E un suen chamberlonc mener,  
Cil ot de leur conseil este'  
E le message avet porte. . .  
A ceus fist plevir e jurer  
De tut son afaire celer.  

(751-758)

The men seem to be in a situation where they must compromise knightly ideals, especially that of loyalty, no matter which course of action they take. If they keep their oath they become accomplices to Eliduc's dishonesty to Guilladun. If, on the other hand, they break their oath and reveal to Guilladun Eliduc's secret, they have committed the serious offense of breach of faith to a lord.

The murder of the sailor brings into sharp focus the irreconcilable issue of loyalty as it is presented in the tale. While at sea, Eliduc and his party encounter a storm which in Christian and Celtic literature is traditionally a providential sign that Eliduc's relationship
with Guilladun is condemnable. The sailors naturally become increasingly afraid as the storm worsens, and one of them, thoroughly panicked, cries out:

James a tere ne vendrums!
Femme leal espuse avez
E sur celi autre emmenez
Cuntre Deu e cuntre la lei,
Cuntre dreiture e cuntre fei;
Lessiez la mis geter en mer!
Si poum sempres arriver. (834-840)

The frightened sailor points out the indisputable fact that his lord's bringing back Guilladun is clearly an illegal and immoral act. When Eliduc thinks that Guilladun has died, although in actuality she has only fainted, he hurls abuses at the sailor who revealed his secret, then kills him with one stroke of an oar before kicking his body into the ocean:

Fiz a putain, fet il, mauveis,
Fel traitre, nel dire meis!
Si m'amie leust laisser,
Jeol vus eusse vendu chier. (843-846)

Cil ki ensemble od lui l'emporte
Quidot pur veir k'ele fust morte.
Mut fet grant doel, sus est levez,
Vers l'escipre est tot alez,
De l'avirun si l'ad feru
K'il l'abati tut estendu;
Par le pie len ad jeté fors,
Les undes en portent le cors. (857-864)

This reaction is certainly violent and extreme. Eliduc's use of the word traitre emphasizes the irony of the situation and thus the injustice involved. The action of kicking the body into the sea emphasizes the cruel inhumanity of a lord who punishes his "disloyal" vassal. The incident is particularly difficult to interpret because the
narrator seems to condone Eliduc's reaction by not commenting on it. She presents it as though it were the only natural reaction to expect from a knight. Jacques de Caluwe uses the incident to support his thesis that Marie's conception of love and happiness is not based on any consistent moral code and in fact is quite abstract. He says the fact that the ship comes to shore safely supports his contention that Marie approves of Eliduc's behavior. To further support his viewpoint he remarks that the sailor's plea to throw Guilladun overboard is entirely illogical: Guilladun has not knowingly committed any wrong; Eliduc is the guilty party.¹ Brewster Fitz strongly disagrees with Caluwe by stating that Marie's conception of love "is grounded in a rigorous interpretation and fulfillment of moral and feudal law."² He states further that Eliduc is "the most explicitly pious of Marie's texts" because of its use of the theme of sacrifice in a manner parallel to the sacrifice of Christ.³ Ignoring totally Eliduc's faithlessness, Fitz says that the sailor makes himself "the sole guilty passenger in the boat" by breaking the oath of silence made to Eliduc before the departure for England.⁴ Once again there is no single valid interpretation, and the ambiguity which surrounds the theme of loyalty becomes an inherent aspect of the text. Marie has used elements of traditional romance and courtly literature to create a situation which in the end is far from traditional.
Other incidents continue the theme of disloyalty or faithlessness in a work which superficially has much to say about loyalty. Guilladun's chamberlain turns out to be less than trustworthy as a mediator between the two lovers, for he delivers Guilladun's gifts to Elduc as she asks him to do but does not return with a complete and accurate report. He does not even tell her that Elduc had tried to reciprocate with gifts that he (the chamberlain) refused. A somewhat analogous situation exists in Yvain where Lunette manipulates the communication between Yvain and Laudine, but the total effect is quite different. Chrétien is developing Lunette as an intelligent, witty character and creating amusing scenes, whereas Marie does not develop her character enough to allow us any insight into his psychology. He is a one-faceted character who does little to further the story, and his unexplained disloyalty to his mistress is perhaps the only interesting aspect of his character.

Another incident, insignificant as an isolated detail, takes on significance in this context. The king of Exeter evinces his lack of faith in Elduc when the latter goes out to battle. As soon as Elduc is out of sight, the king decides that he must be a traitor who has come to lead away his best men:

Li reis esteit sur une tur.
De ses hummes ad grant pour,
D'Elduc forment se pleigneit,
Kar il guidout e si cremeit
Que il eit mis en abundun
Ses chevaliers par traisun

(227-232)
This detail undermines the passage where the king praises Eliduc and where they speak of their mutual loyalty.

The most interesting single example of breach of faith between lord and vassal is the case of Eliduc who commends Guilladun to God in the hermit's chapel, vowing to enter a monastery the day he loses her. When she is restored to consciousness the oath is not mentioned again, but there does seem to be a feeble or perhaps ironic attempt made to keep the oath. When Guilladun recovers, Eliduc withdraws her from her position in front of the altar where she seemed to be a sacrificial victim and constructs a convent near the chapel to offer Guildeluec as a substitute sacrifice, since she has now become the more convenient victim. Eliduc keeps the second part of his oath in an equally questionable manner. He does finally withdraw into the monastery, but only after he has enjoyed both of his wives for as long as he chooses to do so. In the end, therefore, we see that Eliduc was faithful to his oath, but he hardly conforms to the tradition of the self-sacrificing knight who is willing to die for his lord or his honor.

Duplicity also characterizes Eliduc's loyalty to women. He speaks of himself as being a totally trustworthy husband and lover. As he leaves his home to escape the slanderers, he reassures his grieved wife that he will be faithful to her:

*Mes il l'aseurat de sei*  
Qu'il li porterat bone fei. (83-84)
The narrator tells us that Eliduc and Guildeluec have long been faithful spouses:

\[
\text{Ensemble furent lungement,} \\
\text{Mut s'entremerent leaument.} \quad (11-12)
\]

His actions, however, indicate that his record for loyalty to women is even less impressive than that of his loyalty to men. During his sojourn in England Eliduc periodically thinks about Guildeluec and has feelings of remorse, but these moments are deemphasized and often explained away by the narrator. No effort is made to analyze or even describe in detail the mental debates said to be plaguing Eliduc: their psychological and moral implications are totally ignored. Immediately after a passage describing Guilladun's sincere delight upon learning that Eliduc will be in her father's service for at least a year, there comes a series of lines presenting Eliduc's dilemma:

\[
\text{Mut se teneit a maubailli,} \\
\text{Kar a sa femme aveit premis,} \\
\text{Ainz qu'il turnast de sun pais,} \\
\text{Que il n'amereit si li nun.} \\
\text{Ore est sis quors en grand prisun!} \\
\text{Sa leauté voleit garder} \\
\text{Mes ne s'en peot nient jeter} \\
\text{Q'il nen eimt la dameisle,} \\
\text{Guilladun ki tant fu bele,} \\
\text{De li veeir e de parler} \\
\text{E de vaisier e d'accoler.} \quad (462-472)
\]

No solution or decision is offered. Instead, we learn that although Eliduc loves Guilladun he has never done anything which might dishonor her. Thus the central issue is circumvented and his deception as to his marital status is brushed over as an unimportant issue. The fact that the lovers have had no physical relationship is an irrelevant
fact. The sensuality suggested in lines 471-472 points out clearly that Eliduc's thoughts are not pure, and these lines are immediately followed by the statement that the lovers have been chaste physically. The opposition of the two pairs of lines, joined by the conjunction _mes_ indicating a contrast, is the closest we have in the text to a commentary on the validity of the honor and loyalty dealt with here:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Sa leauté voleit garder,} \\
\text{Mes ne s'en peot nient jeter} \\
\text{Que il nen eint la dameisle,} \\
\text{Guilliadun ki tant fu bele,} \\
\text{De li veeir e de parler} \\
\text{E de baisier e d'acoler;} \\
\text{Mes ja ne li querra amur} \\
\text{Ki li aturt a deshonur,} \\
\text{Tant pur sa femme garder fei,} \\
\text{Tant pur ceo qu'il est od le rei. (422)}
\end{align*}
\]

The passage, then, begins and ends with the theme of Eliduc's desire to be faithful, but it also contains suggestions of the elements which lead to his faithlessness—Guilliadun's beauty and Eliduc's desire.

In this context later references to Eliduc's loyalty stimulate a more skeptical reaction from the reader who now understands that there is a great divergence between Eliduc's reputation and statements about loyalty on the one hand and the reality of his life on the other. When he tells Guilliadun that he wants there to be total confidence between them, the reader is amazed by the audacity required for him to make such a statement when he has not even told her that he is married:
Vus estes ma vie e ma morz,  
En vus est trestuz mes conforz  
Pur ceo preng jeo cunseil de vus  
Que fiance ad entre nus.  

Another line, which is striking to the reader conscious of the duplicity involved in the theme of loyalty as it is developed in the text, comes when Eliduc returns to Exeter to pick up Guilladun to take her home with him. As soon as he arrives he sends her a message that he has returned, thereby observing his covenant.

Si li manda que venuz fu,  
Bien ad sun covenant tenu.  

Again, the loyalty involved here remains superficial: he has returned as he had promised to do, but no mention is made of the fact that he has returned under false pretexts.

One final example of a statement about loyalty, which becomes amusing in this text because of the irony involved, comes at the end of a passage where Eliduc is lecturing to Guilladun about the duties of a loyal vassal. He is attempting to explain to her why he can neither remain in Exeter with her nor take her with him. The reason is simply this:

Kar ne voil ma fei trespasser  

The relationship between women and loyalty is much different. The women seem to function more spontaneously than do the men; that is, they seem to react naturally to the reality of a given situation rather than to react in a conventional way. Guilladun certainly makes fewer pretenses to uphold traditions than does Eliduc. She is
unimpressed when he begins to discuss him dilemma created
by the loyalty he owes to her father and his love for her;
she brings the matter down to a more personal level:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Od vus, fet el, men amenez,} \\
\text{Puis que remunique ne volez,} \\
\text{U si, ceo nun, je m'ocirai} \\
\text{James joie ne bien n'aurai.} 
\end{align*}
\] (679-682)

The women are more trusting as well as being more
trustworthy. While Eliduc is lying to Guilladun, she
shows and verbalizes complete faith in him:

\[
\text{Sur tute rien vus aim e crei} \quad (536)
\]

The lovers exchange promises of loyalty, and it is inter-
esting to note that Guilladun comes close to fulfills
her promise to die if she cannot have Eliduc's love. Her
behavior is more consistent with her promises than that of
Eliduc who profits as much as possible from each of his
realionships with lord and lady.

When, however, Guilladun realizes that she has been
deceived, she responds again with what seems to be a sponta-
taneous reaction. She becomes angry and feels desperate,
realizing she has become dependent on an undependable
relationship:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Trahie m'ad, ne sai que deit.} \\
\text{Mut est folo ki home creit.} 
\end{align*}
\] (1084-1085)

Guildeluec's reactions are more difficult to interpret
and consequently more interesting. With them we return to
the realm of ambiguity. Like Guilladun she is totally
trusting. When Eliduc returns from England she immediately
notices his coldness toward her, but she does not even
consider the possibility that he has been unfaithful to her; she assumes that he suspects her of infidelity. Her reaction to the discovery of Guilladun is bizarre. She sits down in front of Guilladun's body to contemplate the situation before ostensibly showing great sympathy for her young rival:

Ele comencet a plurer  
E la meschine regreter.  
Devant le lit s'asist plurant.  

(1029-1031)

In the well-known weasel episode she helps revive Guilladun. Faced with the latter's accusation of treachery against Eligius, Guildeleuc comes to her husband's defense. Surely Eligius has been treacherous to wife and lover, but Guildeleuc justifies him and like Fresne shows what could be interpreted as thoroughly unselfish love and self-sacrifice for her beloved:

Bele, la dame li respunt  
N'ad rien vivant en tut le munt  
Ki joie li feist avoir. ..  

(1085-1087)

Que vive estes grant joie en ai!  
Ensemble od moi vus emenerrai  
E a vostre ami vus rendrai.  

(1098-1100)

Such unmitigated love and self-effacing humility are more suitable to hagiographic literature than to romance or courtly literature. In this context, however, her reaction could be interpreted as less than pure altruism. If we assume that she is an inventive person, we could also interpret her withdrawal into the convent as an act calculated to assure Eligius's eternal damnation. By encouraging him to maintain a relationship which according to Christian
principles is adulterous, she is retaliating for his rejection of her. Given this interpretation, she also has used a facade of total loyalty to attain her goals. Unlike Eliduc's, however, her decision to withdraw into the convent remains totally uncompromised. It comes at the end of a lay in which we have witnessed Eliduc's selfishness and deception. Her own record is flawless, and particularly because of the self-sacrifice involved, the act seems to gain for her a position of triumph over Eliduc who has met his nemesis without even knowing it.

The end of the lay, then, could be interpreted in either of two ways. The final separation of all three characters can be seen as a sublimation of human love and as a step toward reconciliation with God. It can, on the other hand, be seen as a complete disintegration of human relationships, an example of the inability of Man/Woman to establish real intimacy and to show true loyalty to another person.
NOTES ON CHAPTER 7


3. Ibid., 549.

4. Ibid., 546.
CHAPTER 8

GUIGEMAR: A RELUCTANT HERO

Celtic folklore and medieval versions of classical mythology, such as the Pyramus and Thisbe story, exercised an important influence on the Lais of Marie de France. This influence can be seen for example in the setting of Guigemar whose action takes place "in ancient times" in "Brittany the minor." The central objects and characters of this tale are well-known in medieval romance: the enchanted forest where the hero encounters a white doe, the doe-fairy herself, the mysterious ship that propels and directs itself, the wondrous bed that induces a deep sleep, a young and handsome Hippolytus-type hero on whom Love is avenged, and a beautiful maiden of noble family married to an old jealous man who locks her up in a dungeon. One also finds in this lay the motifs said to be the most common of romance literature: the mysterious call or challenge, the first sight of the beloved, the lonely journey through a hostile land and the fight with the enemy. These motifs, however, are presented in an unconventional manner, characterized by the way in which they are used to create a fictitious world that is never totally removed from common daily living and practicalities of the physical world.
The prologue of the entire collection which immediately precedes *Guigemar* emphasizes the practical, social value of the lays, but it makes no mention of the conventional fantasy and magic that Marie weaves into her narratives. She explains here why she has undertaken the task of composing the lays--primarily she seems to be responding to an intellectual/moral noblesse oblige:

\[
\text{Ki Deus ad düné escience} \\
\text{E de parler bone eloquence} \\
\text{Ne s'en deit taisir ne celer,} \\
\text{Ainz se deit voluntiers mustrer. (1-4)}
\]

Marie's pride, self-confidence, and belief in her own intellectual and moral superiority as well as her straightforwardness are evident here. She implicitly compares herself with no trace of humility to the poets of Antiquity, highly revered during the twelfth century. She subscribes to the idea of Priscian who believes, given the fact that intelligence develops with time, that the moderns by necessity surpass the Ancients. In the first eighteen lines of *Guigemar*, which seem to be a continuation of the prologue, Marie says she knows what happens to men and women "de grant pris" who create great works:

\[
\text{Cil ki de sun bien unt envie} \\
\text{Sovent en dient vileinie;} \\
\text{Sun pris li volent abeissier;} \\
\text{Pur ceo comencent le mestier} \\
\text{Del malveis chien coart, felun} \\
\text{Ki mort la gent par traisun. (9-14)}
\]

Such preoccupations with philosophical questions, literary traditions, and jealous rivalries are of course foreign to an idealized world characterized by the "absence of any
earthly and practical purpose,¹ and would serve as a poor introduction to a conventional romance.

Inferring a recommendation that poetry be used as a remedy against idleness and vice, E.R. Curtius sees in lines 23-27 of the prologue a Christian exhortation to avoid slothfulness. According to him, Marie wrote the lays to occupy her own time and thus to shun evil that results from idleness. These lines, however, seem to emphasize the didactic purpose of her composition and to continue the idea of her moral obligation to share with others the "flowers" (cf.11.5-8) of her intelligence. She has undertaken the composition of a serious work because she knows that in studying and understanding such a work people will learn to defend themselves from vice and to avoid great sorrows. In either case these lines clearly indicate that the author intends her work to be didactic.

The tone of the prologue is ostensibly serious but amusing in lines 28-32 where Marie states that she had considered using her talents to translate some good Latin works into "romanz." Seeing, however, that so many of her contemporaries were engaged in translations, she decided to be more original. Here then is another indication of her pride and preoccupation with mundane issues. Remaining on the level of the earthly and practical, she makes no effort to idealize the conception of her work: in the first lines of the tale Marie emphasizes the travail involved in composing the lays; nowhere does she suggest divine inspiration or
any sort of mysterious or mystical source to her writings. She says she has burned the midnight oil many a night recalling and putting into a good form the tales she has heard.

The tone of the prologue announces two of the qualities which distinguish Marie's lays from other examples of medieval romance: the tendency to present objects, emotions and characters to a large extent as they are seen in real life and to reduce them to their most trivial level. If one compares this prologue to the opening lines of Le Chevalier au lion or to those of Le Chevalier de la charrette, this tendency becomes more evident. In the opening lines of Le Chevalier au lion Chrétien criticizes his contemporaries for their manners and the way in which they have derided love, but the overall tone is light and his criticism serves as a good point of departure for a tale which idealizes friendship, love, and honor. He neither moralizes nor tries to set up any sort of relationship—didactic or other—between the tale and practicalities of the everyday world:

Mes or i a molt po des suens
Qu'a bien pres l'ont ja tuit lessiee,
S'an est Amors molt abesseee,
Car cil qui soloient amer
Se feisoient cortois clamer
Et preu et large et enorable;
Or est Amors tournee a fable
Por ce que cil qui rien n'en santent
Dient qu'il aiment, mes il mantent,
Et cil fable et mançonge an font
Qui s'an vautent et droit n'i ont.
Mes or parlons de cez qui ancor durent,
car molt valt mialz, ce m'est a vis,
uns cortois morz o'uns vilains vis.
In this poem he delves into the magic world of Arthur and his knights in the first line. His reference to contemporary reality does not distract from the mood of the tale; rather it enhances its idealized atmosphere. In the opening lines of *Le Chevalier de la charrette* Chrétien tells his audience his source and motivation for writing this particular poem, but again his tone is light and amusing. He flatters his patroness and declares to be in her service, thus thematically linking the reference to his own life and writing to the poem. He avoids allusions to practical matters such as his literary heritage or to any possible didactic function his poem might have in order to emphasize his devotion to "ma dame de Champagne" and his desire to please her.

Once she begins to relate the "adventures" of Guigemar, Marie progresses in a systematic fashion. Before narrating the action, as in other lays, she gives the setting and presents the initial group of characters. The first lines dealing with setting (24-26)—a cursory identification of a conventional setting—are typical of romance. The following lines, however, are concerned with details totally irrelevant to the tale: the name of the king of the land (Hoillas), the extent of martial activity in his kingdom ("Sovent en peis, sovent en guere"), the name (Ordials) and holdings (Liun) of a certain lord who is an intimate friend of the king. As the presentation of details continues, it is stated that Ordials has a wife, a beautiful daughter and
a handsome son. The daughter's name is Noguern and the son's Guigemar. At this stage there is no focal point. The audience's attention is spread among all these characters, and it is only gradually that Guigemar emerges from this pleasant but ordinary setting to become the hero of the tale. One expects the author at some point in the story to make use of the background information she has presented, but she never does. These details, which are superfluous to the adventure, seem to lend a degree of geographical and historical verisimilitude to the setting. They are foreign to courtly romance as it remains true to type and actually undermine its traditionally mysterious aspects. Auerbach describes a typical romance setting:

All the numerous castles and palaces, the battles and adventures, of the courtly romances--especially of the Breton cycle--are things of fairy land: each time they appear before us as though sprung from the ground; their geographical relation to the known world, their sociological and economic foundations remain unexplained. . . . It is from Breton folklore that the courtly romance took its elements of mystery, of something sprung from the soil, concealing its roots, and inaccessible to rational explanation; it incorporated them and made use of them in its elaboration of the knightly ideal; the matièrê de Bretagne apparently proved to be the most suitable medium for the cultivation of that ideal.

Although Marie's lay is generally considered to be in the tradition of the courtly romance because of her treatment of the subject matter, the end product does not follow Auerbach's description of traditional romance literature. In fact, at times she seems to make an effort to render her material
accessible to rational explanation. Let us consider for example the conventional scene where the two lovers are pale and trembling face to face, each longing to declare his love to the other. Instead of unreservedly accepting the convention, the author makes an effort, perhaps an ironic one, to explain why Guigemar is so afraid:

En grant effrei erent amdui.
Il n l'osot nient requere;
Par cee qu'il ert d'estrange tere
Aveit pour, s'il mustrast,
Qu'el l'enhaist e esloinast.

She then generalizes and presents the Ovidian philosophy of love:

Mes ki ne mustre s'enferté
A peine en peot avenir santé.
Amur est plaie dedenz cors... (476-483)

There seems to be then an effort here to give a rational, practical explanation to a conventional scene.

Although certain quest motifs are present in the adventure, Guigemar does not seem to be engaged in a quest. He is not much affected psychologically by the "call", showing neither surprise nor fear when the doe he shoots leads him to a magical creature; he even verbally rejects the spell which the magical animal has cast on him. His only concern is his physical pain and his desire to save his life:

Guigemar fu forment blesciez;
De cee k'il ot est esmaiez.
Comencat sei a purpenser
En quel tere purrat aler
Pur sa plaie faire guarir,
Kar ne se voelt laisser murir.
Il set assez et bien le dit
K'ünke femme nule ne vit
A ki il aturnast s'amur.
Ne kil guaresist de dolur. (122-132)

Guigemar's journey to the castle where he meets his lover and his first enemy could almost be a parody of the "perilous journey" of the ambitious knight in a conventional romance. When Yvain hears Calogrenant's description of the magic fountain he immediately sets out to conquer the knight that guards it, wanting to earn this victory before Arthur and the other knights make the journey to the forest of Brocéliande. Guigemar's journey is in sharp contrast. After binding his wound and much complaining, Guigemar crosses the forest and wanders upon a "green pathway" which leads him out of the wooded area into a plain where he sees a mountain and a cliff with a channel running beneath it. In a harbor he sees the magical ship, boards it and unknowingly begins the next stage of his journey. When he finds himself at high sea he is confused, sorrowful, and afraid. He prays to God to bring him safely to port, then goes to sleep. It is quite clear that Guigemar is helpless and that he is making the journey in spite of himself ("Suffrir li estuet l'aventure" 199). The reluctant hero makes no decisions and shows no volition. When the ship arrives at the castle, his soon-to-be lover awakens him and invites him to stay with her. When he is discovered, he leaves his mistress with surprisingly little resistance for a trained and experienced knight, and he makes no effort to return to her. After two years it is she who escapes from prison and travels to the
land of Meriaduc where they are eventually reunited.

The ideal knight, by contrast, is not in any sense "lost" or even passive. He is not a wanderer but a quester, although the object of his quest is not always specific; he has a vocation. Throughout an adventure he matures as a result of his experiences. Although he is an idealized character he achieves a progressively higher degree of perfection. Guigemar, however, changes very little. He does change from misogynist to lover, but his change is passive. Little takes place in the tale as a result of his own initiative. Even his two confrontations with the enemy (if indeed the scenes can be termed "confrontations") are passive; he never actually fights. He starves Meriaduc in order to make him surrender. When he surrenders Guigemar kills him. Guigemar's behavior is certainly inappropriate according to knightly codes but perhaps realistic. Lancelot is sorely distressed when he finds himself bound by a promise to kill his opponent, and there is no question of innocent victims in his case. Guigemar's other enemy, his lover's husband, disappears mysteriously so that Guigemar does not have to confront him again after he wins the lady from Meriaduc.

The attitudes and actions of Guigemar resemble only faintly the archetypal pattern of the romance hero. The narrator says that Guigemar is extraordinary, as all romance heroes must be; yet she does not portray him doing anything out of the ordinary. The praise of the narrator is, how-
ever, unobtrusive. She does not insist on the superiority of the hero nor use any hyperbolic examples or analogies to portray his greatness. She simply says that he is the most handsome young man in the land. To support this statement, rather unconvincingly, Marie says that he was so beautiful that his mother loved him extraordinarily and that he got along with his father quite well. In lines 53-56 Guigemar is said to be the best knight in four provinces, but again there is no supporting evidence. He goes to Flanders to earn a glorious reputation, yet at the height of his career he decides to return home to visit his parents and sister for a month. His career is summed up succinctly. There is no mention of any battles or jousts; he is never described dressed in his armor. The fact that he left his career as a knight to visit his family is in sharp contrast with the behavior of Yvain, a more conventional knight in romance who was so involved in knightly activities that he forgot his wife. A casual visit home hardly seems appropriate material for a romance. The author could have easily brought him by an adventure to the forest where he eventually meets the doe-fairy. There is ample occasion within the limited scope of the tale to present Guigemar engaged in knightly activities. He is summoned to the land of Meriaduc to participate in a tournament; yet the tournament is only briefly mentioned as is the period in Flanders.

Guigemar is even less idealized as a lover. At the beginning of the lay, society is so amazed at his lack of interest in love that he is suspected of homosexuality:
Like Gurun and other characters of the Lais he shows no commitment in love. During a period of bliss, for no apparent reason, he exchanges pledges of faith with his lover, and goes as far as making the very unexpected move of locking her in a chastity belt when there are no plans for separation. When he sees her by chance at Meriaduc's court he does not even know her. He does not recognize her until he realizes he is the only knight able to unfasten her chastity belt. Ironically, Meriaduc--the enemy--shows more commitment in love for the lady than does the hero.

Just as Guigemar is scarcely idealized in a positive direction, his enemies are scarcely portrayed as demons or villains. The husband of Guigemar's lover is the archetypal viel gelus who appears in numerous romances, but the author presents him with such tolerance that she seems almost sympathetic toward him. She sees his jealousy as the natural, common lot of old men in love:

\[
\text{Gelus esteit a desmesure.} \\
\text{Kar ceo purporte la nature} \\
\text{Ke tuit li viel soient gelus--} \\
\text{Mult het chacuns ke il seit cous--,} \\
\text{Tels est d'eage le trespas!} \quad (213-217)
\]

When he discovers Guigemar he does not punish him but allows him to depart.

Meriaduc is even less villainous. He is the enemy only because he loves the same woman as does the hero of the tale.
He plays a role similar to that of Méléagant in *Le Chevalier de la charrette*, but he is a much different character in that he does not even capture the lady: it is she who comes to him while in search of Guigemar. He treats her kindly and sincerely wants her to return his love.

Marie's treatment of certain conventional scenes does not follow the archetypal patterns of romance any more closely than does the presentation of her characters or the conception of love. A comparison of Perceval's arrival at the castle of the Fisherking to Guigemar's arrival at the castle where he finds the woman who cures his supernatural wound will serve as an example. As Perceval is journeying home to see his mother he encounters a fisherman who offers him a night's lodging and directs him to his house. That evening Perceval is received in a hall by his host. As they talk, a squire comes in carrying a magnificent sword; it has a handle of gold and is kept in a gold-embroidered sheath. The sword is a gift which the host's niece has sent to him, but it is destined to be Perceval's:

Biax frere, ceste espee
Vos fu voee et destinee,
Et je weil molt que vous l'aiez.

Shortly afterwards a squire crosses the room carrying a white lance from which blood is dripping. Perceval is quite curious to know the meaning of the lance, but not wanting to be discourteous, he asks no questions. Soon two more squires enter carrying magnificent candelabra and behind them, a beautiful maiden carrying a Grail which shines so brightly
that it dims the candelabra by comparison. She is followed by a maiden carrying a silver platter. The next morning Perceval's curiosity overcomes his courtesy, and he determines to ask the meaning of all the mysterious objects he has seen, but the castle is now deserted. He finds his horse ready and rides out. As he departs the drawbridge rises after him. He calls out but no one answers. Nearby in the forest Perceval meets a lady who is astonished to see that Perceval and his horse are so fresh when there is no lodging within forty leagues. The entire castle scene is shrouded in mystery that defies a clear-cut interpretation. It is rich in imagery that piques the imagination and that suggests a mystical interpretation. The meaning of the scene has a much larger significance than that of a single event in the life of a hero.

Although the castle scene in Guigemar is necessarily limited in scope, its orientation is completely different from that of Le Conte du graal. The author is preoccupied with presenting as complete and as realistic a picture as possible in a short description. She explains that the city where Guigemar lands is the capital of the country and that here he will be cured. She describes clearly the physical quarters of the lady and her general living conditions:

Ainz le vespre ariverat
La ou sa guarisun aurat,
Desuz une antive cité,
Ki esteit chiefs de cel regné.
Li sires ki la mainteneit
Mult fu vielz hum, et femme aveyt
Une dame de haut parage,
To make a similar point concerning Marie's use of imagery one might compare her presentation of the fairy-doe or the magical ship to Chrétien's treatment of the Grail, the cart Lancelot chooses to ride in or even Yvain's lion. Whereas Chrétien's images accrue wide, perhaps universal meaning through the reactions they effect in their respective stories and by the allusions made to them by the narrator, Marie seems to minimize the scope of meaning her images take on. After the fairy casts a spell on Guigemar she is never mentioned again, not even to explain how she leaves the scene of her injury. The magic ship is presented in its physical detail as one might describe a ship to someone who wishes to visualize it. Its beauty does not remain abstract and mysterious as does the grans clartez of the Grail:

El Hafne out une sule nef,
Dunt Guigemar choisi le tref.
Mult esteit bien apparillez;
Defors e dedenz fu pelee,
Nuls hum n'i pout trover jointure.
N'i out cheville ne clozure
Ki ne fust tute de benus:
Suz ciel n'at or ki vaille plus!
La veille fu tute de seie:
Mult est bele ki la depleie!

.................................
En mi la nef trovat un lit
Dunt li pecul e li limun
Certainly it is a marvelous ship, but the detailed description calls attention away from the suffering hero and thereby distracts from the quest. The same tendency to undermine the emotional or mysterious effect of a passage by padding it with precise details or allusions to material reality exists in most of the other Lais on this end of our scale and is one of the features which distinguish them from the more idealistic tales.

In Guigemar, then, we have such conventional elements as the doe-fairy, the magic ship, allusions to jousts and military reputations, and such conventional scenes as the arrival of the knight at a mysterious castle. The final effect, however, is not that of traditional romance. The hero's interest in love and war--mainstays of romance--is tenuous: he is a reluctant hero, a hero in spite of himself.
NOTES ON CHAPTER 8

1. Erich Auerbach, Ibid., 134. The paragraph from which this sentence fragment comes is quoted in Chapter 1.
CHAPTER 9

BISCLAVRET: AN EXAMPLE OF INTIMACY

Bisclavret has attracted relatively little attention from critics. Salvatore Battaglia has studied its sources and believes Marie used directly or indirectly Pliny's Historia naturalis in which she could have learned about the werewolf and the myth of the faithful dog who remembered his master's assassin after many years.\(^1\) Mickel contrasts it to Le Fresne, for to him Fresne is the epitome of loyalty and charity, whereas the wife in Bisclavret is infidelity and treachery incarnate.\(^2\) For Judith Rothschild the point of the lay is that Bisclavret "craved" tenderness, curteisie, and understanding, yet could not get them from his self-centered wife. She finds a "relative scarcity of personal reactions and emotions reported in this narrative."\(^3\) Moshé Lazar compares it to Equitan, since in both lays a woman is punished not for her adulterous love as some may think but for her treachery.\(^4\)

Although this lay has been somewhat neglected and has not traditionally been considered key to an understanding of Marie's work, it takes on an entirely different significance if in reconsidering it, we focus not on the treachery and unfaithfulness of the wife but on human interaction in general. With this point of view we see that although the tale
is quite pessimistic concerning the possibilities of erotic love, it is here that we find the most idealized relationship in all the Lais.

In one way Bisclavret is the most "courtly" of the Lais, in that it is the only one which presents an idealized court. In all of the other tales in which a king appears, the monarch is an ineffectual or evil character, certainly not a source of justice and order. In Les Deus amanz the king is a widower who has developed an unhealthy relationship with his daughter and whose principal preoccupation seems to be how he can keep her for himself. The result of his unnaturally possessive attitude is the death of the beloved young woman. In Eliduc the Breton king is quite arbitrary in his show of favor, exiling the hero because of unfounded rumors, then begging him to come back when he needs his military skills. The English king is engaged in a war against one of his daughter's suitors and cannot seem to protect himself effectively before the arrival of Eliduc. Later in the lay his own daughter runs away from home and he disappears inexplicably into oblivion. In Lanval Arthur is not fair to the hero who is his dedicated vassal: he ignores him entirely when it comes time to bestow rewards and he is manipulated by a dishonest, lecherous wife. King Mark is only a shadowy figure in Chievrefoil, but in keeping with the legend he is hardly a man in control of his household. In Equitan appears the most despicable king of all, one who spends most of his time in the pursuit of pleas-
ure. He abandons the government of his kingdom and the administration of justice to his seneschal; he lies and attempts murder to attain his ignoble goals.

In contrast to his peers in the *Lais*, the king of Bisclavret is a paragon of royal virtues. We see him engaged in royal activities such as hunting and hosting a feast for his vassals. A sensitive man who is touched by Bisclavret's tenderness, he strives to be just and to maintain order. When he first sees Bisclavret, he is moved by what he thinks is the animal's supplication for mercy and responds not only by freeing the besieged "wolf" but also by terminating his hunt for the day in honor of the remarkable animal:

Ceste merveille esgardez  
Cum ceste bete s'humilie!  
Ele ad sen d'hume, merci crie,  
Chaciez mes tuz ces chiens ariere!  
Si gardez que hum ne la fiere!  
Ceste beste ad entente e sen.  
Espleit mis! Alum nus en!  
A la beste durrai ma pes  
Kar jeo ne chaceraï huis mes.  

(152-160)

He continues to be amazed by the animal, and when he becomes convinced of his love and dedication, he rewards him with a place of honor in his household. When, however, the animal appears to abuse his host's hospitality, that is, when he attacks his wife and her lover, the king takes steps to correct what is thought to be inappropriate behavior. When Bisclavret attacks his former wife, the king himself threatens him with a whip and when the new husband is the victim, the monarch listens to a wise old counselor who advises him to investigate and find out why the animal would attack these
two individuals. What is conspicuously absent from the court is a display of material wealth, women, and war. There are conventional aspects to the love relationship between Bisclavret's wife and her lover, but these are not emphasized in the text. The relationship is one of love-service where the male submits himself to the will of his lady; she is disdainful and refuses him for a while before giving herself to him. She, however, is the only female in the text and is certainly not an idealized example of womankind. There is no mention of war since the emphasis is on human interaction within the court.

From the beginning, then, the focus is on the psychological. The dearth of specific details and in particular of physical objects is striking. The most precise description is the passage in which Bisclavret tells his wife where he hides his clothes, and this one is instigated by the wife who wants to know exactly where they are so that she can remove them. The representatives of material reality mentioned can be enumerated since their number is so limited: Bisclavret's clothes, those the lover/husband wears to the royal feast, the chapel, the king's castle, Bisclavret's home, the whip the king uses to threaten Bisclavret, the unidentified riche present the wife offers to the king, the bedroom and bed of the king, and Bisclavret's land which is restored to him at the end of the lay. Since we know almost nothing about the physical existence of these objects we are forced to concentrate on the significance of their presence in the lay.
The king is associated with the whip and the land, that is, he is the administrator of justice and, a wise one at that, since he refrains from punishing the innocent Bisclavret and ultimately rewards him by giving him land, whereas he exiles the wife. The lady with her lover who is merely a pawn, controls the clothes and the generous gift. She violates the sanctuary of the chapel by taking Bisclavret's clothes which represent his very identity. She and her lover disguise their true nature in beautiful apparel which is particularly significant in contrast to Bisclavret's nudity and the lack of any allusion to the king's clothing. The rich present she offers the king, but which he apparently does not have time to accept before Bisclavret attacks her, is in direct opposition to the nonverbalized but sincere plea for mercy and the affection Bisclavret offers the king when these two meet in the forest. The three enclosures--Bisclavret's castle, the chapel in the forest, and the bedroom of the king in the royal castle--seem to be the domain of Bisclavret since he is the only character who enters all three. The transfer from his home where he is chased specifically from the bedroom by his wife's statement that she will no longer sleep with him (100-102), to the bedroom and the very bed of the king who welcomes him with an enthusiastic show of affection, represents his move from an unsatisfying, destructive relationship to one of real intimacy.5

The descriptions of characters are equally striking for their lack of detail for they are even fewer here than
usual. The introductory description of Bisclavret emphasizes his goodness, noble conduct, and his relationship with his lord and peers:

En Bretaine maneit uns ber!
Merveille l'ai oi loer
Beaus chevaliers e bons esteit.
De sun seinur esteit privez
E de tuz ses veisins amez. (15-20)

The word merveille is used an inordinate number of times in this short lay to insist on the fact that we are dealing with something very special.

The wife's description is even more cursory. No explicit mention is made of her beauty, and she does not merit the standard "Dans le royaume elle n'avait pas de per" which is found in most of the descriptions of female characters, sometimes even of more than one in a single lay (Le Fresne for example):

Femme ot espuse mut vailant
E xi mut feseit beau semblant. (21-22)

The redundancy of "femme ot espuse" and the ambiguity of the expressions "vailant" and "faire beau semblant" add to the impact of this description. "Vailant" can mean "of great value," but it can also mean "strong, robust and violent." If we adopt the second meaning, we see that there is a suggestion that this lady (femme) has a tendency to be less than supportive and submissive (vailant) as a wife (espuse). Her beau semblant seems to be a role she plays since it is introduced by the causative faire.

Although the descriptions of the characters correspond to the characterizations developed in the story, a rarity
in the *Lais*, it is only when we see individuals interact that we become aware of exactly what motivates them. In addition to the one-to-one interaction there are parallel interactions which are also enlightening. In the opening scene we see Bisclavret as an opposite to his wife as they interact, and this scene becomes even more revealing when we compare it to the interaction between Bisclavret and the king. We learn a little more about the wife as she interacts with the king and this interchange is interesting in comparison to the interaction of the king as a ruler (as opposed to friend) and Bisclavret.

In the opening scenes Bisclavret comes home after one of his mysterious three day absences. He is *jouis e liez* (30). His wife seems to have planned an effective confrontation, for she approaches him in a coquettish way pretending to be afraid of provoking his anger:

> Sire, fait el, beaus duz amis,
> Une chose vus demandasse
> Mut volentiers, si jeo osasse,
> Mes jeo creim tant vostre curut
> Que nule rien tant ne redut

Evidently she knows him well for he is inticed and responds exactly as she wishes:

> Quant il l'oi, si l'acola,
> Vers lui la traist, si la beisa.
> "Dame, fait il, car demandez!
> Ja cele chose ne guerrez
> Si jo la sai, ne la vus die.

She then asks her question--where does he go?--pointing out that this is a life or death issue for her:

> Bien tost en puis avoir la mort.
She is so afraid when he leaves, she claims, that she does not know what to do, and she suggests that he may even have a lover.

It is interesting that from the beginning, the problems generated by Bisclavret's transformations are presented as the result of the wife's lack of tolerance and her treachery. Bisclavret is depicted in a totally positive way, as though there were nothing offensive about turning into a werewolf or as though he were not responsible for the transformations. We do not know exactly when or why the metamorphosis takes place. There are no references to the moon or ancestral curses which might control him. His mysterious disappearances are introduced with the initial description of his wife and are presented as her problem:

Femme ot espuse mut vailant
E ki mut feseit beau semblant.
Il amot li e ele lui,
Mes d'une chose ert grant ennui,
Qu'en la semeine le perdeit
Treis jurs entiers, qu'el ne saveit
U deveneit ne u alout,
Ne nuils des soens nient n'en sout.  

Bisclavret responds defensively to his wife's question, saying that he cannot tell her where he goes for he would risk alienating her:

Dame, fet, il, pur Deu merci!
Mal m'en vendra si jol vus di,
Kar de m'amur vus partirai
E mei meismes en perdrai  

However, she turns out to be by far more effective than he in attaining her goals. She succeeds in changing his mind through flattery and feminine wiles:
Suvente feiz li demanda,  
Tant le blandi e losenga,  
Que s'aventure li cuntza!  
Nul chose ne li cela

He answers, by contrast, in a very matter-of-fact way:

Dame, jeo devienc bisclavret.

Out of its context this response could be quite amusing. It is true that Marie often uses understatement and inappropriate affect to create humor, but the point here seems to be that he answers honestly and straightforwardly in contrast to the beguiling ways of his wife. After she has received the information she desires, she changes her demeanor abruptly. She is no longer a shy, helpless and provocative female. She presses him with questions which she asks in a straightforward manner. When she comes to the question of where he hides his clothes, however, once again he resists but explains to her exactly why he cannot answer her question:

Kar si jes eusse perduz  
E de ceo feusse apareuxz,  
Bisclavret sereie a tuz jurs.  
Ja nen aureie mes sucurs.  
De si k'il me fussent rendu  
Pur ceo ne voil k'il seit seu.

In the face of resistance she reverts to her coy attitude and feigns hurt feelings:

Sire, la dame li respunt,  
Jeo vus eim plus que tut le mund!  
Nel me devez nient celer,  
Ne mei de nule rien duter:  
Ne semblereit pas amistiê!  
Qu'ai jeo forfait? Pur queil pechiê  
Me duitez vus de nule rien  
Dites le mei, si ferez bien!  
Tant l'anguissa, tant le suzprist,  
Ne pout il faire, si le dist.
Certainly he cannot resist such a plea; once again he gives in, explaining explicitly where he hides his clothes. At the end of the scene the wife is planning how she can separate herself from Bisclavret.

One naturally thinks of the Sampson and Dalila story when reading this scene; only Bisclavret was not quite so sharp as Sampson who resisted three times before abdicating to a treacherous female.⁶ As the story continues we become increasingly aware of the lady's complete lack of sincerity.

Once the wife has determined she needs outside help, we have the unexpected entry of a lover into the story. He seems to have appeared upon need and to be entirely at the disposal of the lady, although we are told that he has pursued her for some time. She sends him a message saying she is finally granting his requests. She says she gives her love and body to him, and they make an oath of mutual faith before she tells him what demands she will make of him:

Un chevalier de la cuntree,
Ki lungement l'aveit amee
E mut preiee e mut requise
E mut duré en sun servise,
Ele ne l'aveit unc amè
Ne de s'amur aseuré.
Celui manda par sun message,
Si li descovri sun curage:
"Amis, fet ele, seiez liez!
Ceo dunt vus estes travaillez
Vus otri jeo sanz nul respit;
Ja n'aurez nul cuntredit
M'amur e mun cors vus otrei:
Vostre drue fetes de mei!"
Cil l'en mercie bonement
E la fiance de li prent.
E el le met par serement.  (104-119)
As soon as she has his pledge, she begins to manipulate him. The two transitive constructions in the following passage point out the fact that he is her man, to be commanded as she pleases:

   Vers la forest li enseigna;  
   Pur sa despuille l'enveia.  (123-124)

After the wife has in effect destroyed her husband by depriving him of his identity, the narrator focuses on the interaction between Bisclavret and the king in his role as true friend. In their first encounter as beast and man Bisclavret is in a desperate situation: he has been tracked all day by the royal hunting party and can no longer elude the ravenous dogs. As a last resort to save himself, he somehow manages to approach the king and beg for mercy:

   Des que il a le rei choisi,  
   Vers lui curut quere merci!  
   Il l'aveit pris par sun estrié,  
   La jambe li baisse e le pié  (145-148)

The scene could easily lend itself to a humorous and frenetic reaction on the part of the king who naturally would be terrified for a cornered beast to grab his foot. There is a trace of humor in the calm, symmetrical line describing the king's reaction--Li reis li vit, grant pour ad (149)--but the emphasis is on the magnanimity of the king which is actuated by the behavior of Bisclavret. There seems to be a very special communication between the two.

The king is even further amazed when Bisclavret follows him. The text which says he does not want to be "separated" from the king recalls the passage where the wife
was looking for a means to "separate" herself from her husband:

Li bisclavret le vet suivant:
Mut se tint pres, n'en voult partir,
Il n'ad cure de lui guerpir. (162-164)

The kind ruler responds to the beast's signs of affection and brings him to the royal castle to be an honored and loved member of the household:

Li reis l'enmeine en sun chastel.
Mut en fu liez, mut li est bel,
Kar unke mes tel n'ot veu.
A grant merveille l'ot tenu
E mut le tient a grant chierté
A tuz les suens ad comaundé
Que sur s'amour le gardent bien.
E ne li mesfacent de rien,
Ne par nul d'eus ne seit feruz;
Bien seit aberrierz e peuz.
Cil le garderent volentiers.
Tuz jurs entre les chevaliers
E pres del rei s'alout cuchier.
N'i ad celui ki ne l'ad chier,
Tant esteit francs e deboneire;
Ungues ne volt a rien mesfaire.
U ke li reis deust errer,
Il n'out cure de deserver;
Ensemble od lui tuz jurs alout:
Bien s'aparçeit que il l'amout. (165-184)

This passage is unique in the Lais as a description of love and intimacy. We are not told abstractly that the king loved him; we are told he provided for him, protected him, kept him near his person. The line which says that Bisclavret was beautiful to him (166) is particularly striking. The story, in an obvious parallel with the tale "Beauty and the Beast," stresses the importance of loving the inner man exactly as he is. The fact that the two beings involved are man and beast or simply men, emphasizes the altruistic nature of the love. Judith Rothschild refers to the theory
that Marie is dealing with homosexuality in Bisclavret. To support the theory, which in the end she neither accepts nor denies, she refers to the phrase "to devour men," used in the opening lines (11), which could hint at such a relationship. Equally suggestive, she says, are the fact that Bisclavret sleeps "close to the king" (177) and that the king embraces him while he is sleeping on the royal bed (300-301). Only when accumulated out of context, however, are these facts in the least convincing. The emphasis of the text is on the ideal nature of this love relationship while physical reality is deemphasized throughout the lay.

When the king first meets the lover and the wife in turn, the interaction is quite different. The lover who is now husband comes to the royal feast "Richement e bien aturnez" (192), making a marked contrast to Bisclavret's beastly form. Whereas Bisclavret inspired mercy and love, the new husband inspires the wrath of Bisclavret who attacks him savagely. The king protects his guest but does not punish Bisclavret because he is suspicious of the courtier who aroused his pet.

The king first meets the wife on a hunting trip in the same forest where he met Bisclavret and as usual he is accompanied by his cherished pet. When she hears he is coming to the forest near her home, she puts on her finest clothes and goes to meet him and to offer him a riche present. She provokes a rage in Bisclavret even more violent than the one shown against her husband: Bisclavret tears off her
nose. The king is quite confused, not understanding how his beloved compagnon could be so violent. On the advice of a wise old man who shows great kindness and faithfulness to Bisclavret, the king puts the lady under much pressure to reveal the truth of her story. This scene recalls the one where the king and his hunters tracked and cornered Bisclavret, thinking him to be a normal wolf. The fact that Bisclavret's ordeal was terminated by clemency and the wife's by exile is a significant commentary on the value of sincerity.

The tale closes with a recognition scene in which Bisclavret is rewarded and the wife, punished. It is interesting to note the particular development of this scene which seems to be designed to emphasize an act of kindness inspired by the hero and the sincere love which exists between Bisclavret and the king. When the wife is coerced into confessing her treachery and presenting Bisclavret's clothes, everyone is surprised that he does not put them on. Then the same wise old man who advised the king earlier points out that he must be embarrassed and suggests that the king take the knight to his bedroom to be restored to his proper form in private. With this minor manipulation of the plot then, the scene where the king recognizes his beloved old friend in his new friend takes place in the king's own bedroom and on his bed to indicate the intimacy of the relationship involved.

Indeed the friendship between the king and Bisclavret is the most idealized of the Lais, for it does not depend
on physical beauty, filial or conjugal responsibilities, or on fulfillment of any practical need. It is an intimate relationship inspired by mutual esteem and is strong enough to endure moments of uncertainty.
NOTES ON CHAPTER 9


2. Emanuel J. Mickel, Jr., Ibid., 109.


5. Judith Rice Rothschild points out that the king replaces the wife in the hero's life. Ibid., 134.

6. Moshé Lazar is the only critic I have discovered who makes the analogy between the two stories. Ibid., 194.

7. Judith Rice Rothschild, Ibid., 137.
CHAPTER 10

MILUN: THE TECHNICALLY HAPPY ENDING

The most striking feature of Milun is its ending: in spite of the fact that a happy ending is characteristic of romance, it is the only one of the Lais which terminates in a resolution that is fortunate for all the characters. Equitan, Bisclavret, and Yonec end in violence—with an act by the hero calculated to avenge some wrong that has been committed against him. The endings of Laustic, Chaitivel, Chievrefoil, Les Deus amanz, and Eliduc are characterized by the separation of lovers through death (Les Deus amanz, Chaitivel), jealous husbands (Laustic, Chievrefoil), or lack of commitment on the part of the lovers (Eliduc). In Guigemar, Le Fresne, and Lanval, there is reconciliation of the main characters, but only at the expense of the minor characters. Meriaduc and all his men are destroyed before Guigemar is reunited with his lady. Codre's marriage is dissolved abruptly when Fresne is recognized as a long-lost daughter. Lanval and his mistress abandon this world entirely in order to find happiness, leaving behind them a furious queen and an ineffectual king who must deal with his irrate wife. Although there is at the end of Milun a death which helps bring about the reconciliation of the lovers, it does not disturb the atmosphere, for it is the death
of a person who is only mentioned, not present, in the lay, and one whose cause is totally independent of the plot or characters of this tale.

The happy ending of Milun is accompanied by other conventional and idealistic elements. The hero and his son are idealized as knights and their relationship is presented as something quite out of the ordinary. The idealism centered around the hero and his son is compromised, however, when it comes into contact with the lady. She tends to be realistic in the sense of reducing situations to their physical, mundane reality which totally ignores their possible desirable aspects. Thus Milun's love, when it comes into contact with her, is not the same idealistic sentiment that exists between father and son. It becomes a superficial relationship which is maintained by communication through various third parties--messengers. In light of its context the reconciliation of the parents by the son at the end might be interpreted not as the definitive union of knight and lady but as a refusal of intimacy, the establishment of a relationship of three people because it is impossible to establish a satisfactory relationship between two.

Longer, yet more limited in scope, the descriptions of the hero are somewhat different in this lay from those of other lays. Rather than being described as an all-around perfect man, Milun, is blessed with the talents of a warrior. Because of his excellence as a knight, he has earned a reputation not only in his own country but in surrounding
countries as well. He is envied by peers and admired by princes:

    Milun fu de Suhtwales nez.
    Puis le jur k'il fu adubez
    Ne trova un sul chevalier
    Ki l'abatist de sun destrier.
    Mut par esteit bons chevaliers,
    Francs e hardiz, curteis e fiers.
    Mut fu coneuz en Irlande,
    En Norweje e en Guilderlande;
    En Logre e en Albanie
    Eurent plusur de lui envie.
    Pur sa pruesce iert mut amez
    E de muz princes honurez.

(9-20)

The listing of place names in the description introduces one of the major themes of the lay—that of voyaging. The hero, his son, the numerous messengers, and in particular the swan are in constant motion throughout the lay. Travel, especially to foreign countries, tends to enhance the heroes by attributing to them a certain grandeur and power that other knights do not possess. What is noticeably absent from the descriptions are the attributes of a lover. We are told Milun has the psychological qualities of being "Francs e hardiz, curteis e fiers," but these are general characteristics important for building relationships with other knights as well as with ladies. Unlike most heroes of romance, little is known of his physical appearance. When the aunt-guardian tells Milun's son about his father, she points out the same qualities—military ability and reputation:

    E cum il est bons chevaliers,
    Tant pruz, si hardiz e si fiers,
    N'ot en la terre nul meillur,
    De sun pris ne de sa valur.

(297-300)
We witness Milun's pride and ambition later when he hears of the knight who seems to be surpassing Milun's own reputation:

Milun oi celui loer
E les biens de lui recunter.
Mut ert dolenz, mut se pleigneit
Del chevalier ki tant valeit:
Pur tant cum il peust errer
Ne turneier n'armes porter,
Ne deust nuls del pais nez
Estre preisiez ne alosez!
D'une chose purpensa:
Hastivement mer passera,
Si justera al chevalier
Pur lui leidir e empeirier.
Par ire se vodra cumbatre:
S'il le poet del cheval abatre,
Dunc serat il en fin honiz. (341-358)

He becomes quite agitated and obsessed with the idea of defeating and shaming the young warrior. "Pur leidir e empeirier" and "Par ire se vodra cumbatre" are unexpectedly hostile statements and again point out what is important to Milun.

The son eventually surpasses the father in deed and reputation. His qualities are more diversified than those of his father, although he also seems to lack an interest in love relationships. We know nothing of his physical attributes or his qualities as a lover. From his birth he is treated in a special way. Like that of Tristan, his birth is surrounded by a certain tension and excitement since he also must be sent away to be reared far from home. The detailed descriptions of his parents' plans and their execution lay the groundwork for the idealized portrait of the son as a young knight. When he is born, his mother plans for his
education and eventual reunion with his father (67-86). The preparation of the infant for the voyage to a foreign country shows he is someone extraordinary. His father's gold ring is hung on a chain around his neck along with a silk bag containing a letter written by his mother which relates his story. He is wrapped in a white cloth, then placed in a cradle. A very fine pillow is placed under his head and a fur cover is placed over him (96-104):

Al col li pendirent l'anel
E une aumoniere de seie
Avoec le brief, que nuls nel veie;
Puis le cuchent en un bercel,
Envolupé d'un blanc lincel.
Dedesuz la teste a l'enfant
Mistrent un oreiller vaillant
E dessus lui un covertur
Urlé de martre tut entur.  \(96-104\)

The rich detail of the description and the fineness of the materials involved contribute to the elevated impression we have of the youth. The description of the journey to the foreign land is equally enhancing. The child is cared for in a very special way during the voyage:

Set feiz le jur se resposoent;
L'enfant feseient aleitier,
Cuchier de nuvel e baignier.
Tant unt le dreit chemin erré
Qu'a la dame l'unt comandé.  \(110-114\)

According to plan, when the son comes of age he is informed about his parents' identity. He is particularly struck by his father's reputation and is inspired to seek his own fortune to be worthy of such a father:

Mut se deit hum preisier petit,
Quant il issi fu engendrez
E sis pere est si alosez,
s'il ne se met en greinur pris
Fors de la terre e del pais.  \(306-310\)
Like his father he is most anxious to establish his reputation. The morning after he learns of his identity, he sets out to cross the sea and to show that he is a worthy son.

He soon surpasses all the men of the land not only as a knight but also as a humanitarian. He is generous with his belongings and with those of others. Winning from the rich to give to the poor, he is such an ideal knight that he earns the name "Sans Pair:"

Dreit en Brutaine en est alez.
La despendi e turneia,
As riches hummes s'acuinta.
Unques ne vint en nul estur
Que l'en nel tenist al meillur.
Les povres chevaliers amot;
Ceo que des riches gaainot
Lur donout e sis reteneit
E mut largement despendeit.
Unques sun voil ne surjurna:
De tutes les teres de la
Porta le pris e la valur.
Mut fu curteis, mut sot honur.
De sa bunté e de sun pris
Veit la novele en sun pais
Que uns damisels de la tere,
Ki passa mer pur sun pris quere,
Puis ad tant fet par sa pruesce,
Par sa bunté, par sa largesce,
Que cil ki nel seivent numer
L'apeloent partut "Sanz Per." (320-340)

The magnanimity of "Sans Pair" is most evident in the scene of the combat between father and son, an archetypal scene of romance which links the tale to conventional literature. It leads directly to the recognition scene and is the foundation of the idealistic love relationship which develops between father and son. In spite of the hostility Milun expressed toward the young knight when he learned of his reputation, he is filled with admiration when he first sees
him, although he still does not know who he is.

 Mut li fu bel et mut li plot.  

(412)

It is at the moment when the son is generously returning his horse to the defeated older man that Milun notices the ring which he believes he recognizes as his own. To verify his assumption, he asks the boy about his identity. Milun's reaction on finding his son witnesses a sincere outpouring of emotions which is rare in the Lais:

Quant Milun l'ot issi parler,
Il ne poeit plus escuter:
Avant sailli hastivement,
Par le pan del hauberc le prent.
"E Deu! fait il, cum sui gariz!
Par fei, amis, tu es mis fiz!
Pur tei trover e pur tei quere
Eissi uan fors de ma tere."  

(467-474)

It recalls the most idealized relationship of the collection—the scene where the king of Bisclavret recognizes his long-lost knight and friend. The son responds with commensurate love and enthusiasm:

Quant cil l'oi, a pié descent,
Sun peire baisa ducement;  

(475-476)

This scene seems even more remarkable when we see the effect it has on the spectators at the tournament: happiness and tenderness spread throughout the crowd:

Mut bel semblant entre eus feseient
E iteus paroles disseient
Que li autre kis esgardouent
De joie e de pitié plurouent.  

(477-480)

Father and son leave the battlefield to go to an ostel to visit leisurely. After learning the circumstances which developed after his birth, the son decides to unite his parents by killing his mother's husband. Milun, obviously
no longer jealous of the youth's reputation, consents to the plan and the two start the journey home to effect the reconciliation of the entire family.

Supporting the idealistic atmosphere, a motif of happiness or pleasure runs throughout Milun and points to the happy ending of the lay. It is usually associated with the scenes of reunion or communication. When the lady first communicates with Milun, she says she will love him if it would please him to be her lover; Milun is very happy to receive such an offer:

Por sun message li manda
Que, si li plëst el l'amera.
Milun fu liez de la novele,
S'en merciat la dameisele³

(27-30)

When the lady receives his response, she is equally happy:

Mut fu la dameisele liee
De l'amur issi otrize

(47-48)

Milun is delighted when his swan returns to him with a message from his lady:

En la vile e en la meisun
Descent devant les piez Milun.
Quant il le vit, mut en fu liez!
Par les eles le prent haitiez

(263-266)

The recognition scene between father and son is the most effusive demonstration of happiness, but the mother shows her pleasure also:

Mut par fu liee de sun fiz
Ki tant esteit pruz e gentiz

(523-524)

The narrator contributes to the motif in the introduction and conclusion of the lay where she expresses her desire to please her audience:
Ki divers cuntes veut traitier
Diversement deit comencier
E parler si rainablement
K'il seitz pleisibles a la gent
Ici comencerai Milun

De lur amur e de lur bien
Firent un lai li auncien,
E jeo, ki l'ai mis en escrit,
Al recunter mut me delit.

A scene which marks a transition between the ideal and that which undermines it is the scene where Milun's messenger delivers the swan to his lady. It is one of the most interesting scenes of the Lais. The arrival of a knight at a chateau is another archetypal scene of romance as we have seen in the discussion of Guigemar. Three of the most famous of such scenes are Perceval's arrival at the Fisherking's castle, Yvain's arrival at Laudine's castle and Lancelot's arrival at Gorre. Often the hero must perform some feat to enter. Yvain must endure the storm caused by placing water from the fountain on the perron and fight the knight who comes out to meet him; Lancelot must walk the sword bridge. These scenes are particularly fascinating because they are usually shrouded in mystery. The hero does not know what to expect before he arrives, and usually neither he nor the reader understands everything that takes place. Perceval for example is totally baffled by his experiences in the Fisherking's castle and the significance of Laudine's fountain defies a rational explanation.

The feat which Milun's messenger must accomplish before entering is one that requires wit rather than might: he must think of some way to gain entrance not only into the castle,
but also into the lady's chamber. His solution is imaginative and effective. He tells the porter he is a bird catcher and would like to present to the lady a lovely swan he caught south of Karlion. He offers the gift, he says, in hopes that it will win him the good will of the knights of the castle and safe passage through the land. The porter tells him that no one is allowed even to speak to the lady but that he will try to obtain access to her for him. To the surprise of the messenger and the reader, he is escorted to the lady's apartments with no problems:

En la sale vint li portiers,
N'i trova fors deus chevaliers;
Sur une grant table seeient,
Od uns eschês se dedueient.
Hastivement retourne ariere,
Celui aumeine en teu maniere
Que de nului n'i fu sceuz,
Desturbez ne apareceus.
A la chambre vient, si apele;
L'us lur ovri une pucele.
Cil sunt devant la dame alê,
Si unt le cigne presented.  (195-206)

The mystery of the scene is why an unidentified bird catcher would be allowed to enter the lady's chamber and the significance of the two knights playing chess in the room through which the messenger passes. They certainly are a potential threat to the fraudulent bird catcher who is smuggling a love letter to the lady; yet they are never mentioned again.

Although the scene has parallels with the typical scene of romance, it obviously diverges in that a messenger—an apparently insignificant character—accomplishes it. Rather than enhancing the hero, it detracts from the main characters.
Unlike typical romance, there is no dialectic of characters in Milun—they cannot be divided into groups as being for or against the hero. Ostensibly the lady's father and husband are the enemies of the lovers but they are presented either neutrally or positively in the tale. We know nothing about the father except that he is a baron and that he has a daughter:

En sa cuntree ot un barun,  
Mes jeo ne sai numer sun nun;  
Il aveit une fille belle. . .

(21-23)

No mention is made of his restricting his daughter in any way or of his knowingly placing obstacles between her and her lover. We are never told why the relationship must be kept secret. As far as we can tell from the text, Milun and his lover may simply have never asked for permission to marry (or perhaps the theme of secrecy is another example of the influence of conventional literature). Her husband is no more despicable than her father:

Sis peres li duna barun,  
Un mut riche humme del pais.  
Mut esforcible e de grant pris.  

(124-126)

He also presents no real threat to the lovers. We are told they meet many times since lovers who really want to get together can always find a means:

Ensemble viendrent plusurs feiz  
Nuls ne poet estre si destreiz  
Ne si tenuz estreiment  
Que il ne truisse liu sovent.  

(285-288)

He even dies inexplicably at the end, allowing the hero and heroine to be united but also eliminating the possibility of a triumphant reunion scene.
The beloved herself, who should be an idealizing force according to standard romance structure, undermines the atmosphere surrounding the heroes. Her initial description, although typical, is quite brief, especially in comparison to those of her lover and son:

En sa cuntree ot un barun,
Mes jeo ne sai numero sun nun;
Il aveit une fille bele
E mut curteise dameisele. (21-24)

When she learns that she is pregnant, she is horrified. She never considers the baby a fruition of her love or a physical link with her lover, as a more idealistic heroine might do. She imagines all kinds of social and physical punishment which she may have to endure as a result of her relationship with Milun:

Quant aparceit qu'ele est enceinte,
Milun manda, si fist sa pleinte,
Dist li cument est avenu:
S'ounr e sun bien ad perdu,
Quant de tel fet s'est entremise;
De li eart faite granz justise:
A gleive serat turmentee
U vendue en autre cuntree. (55-62)

One naturally wonders who is going to mete out this punishment; she is obviously not regulated too closely at the present. When her father announces her upcoming marriage she once again is quite distressed and the reader assumes she is chagrined at the thought of being separated from Milun. It soon becomes clear, however, that her motives are even less noble and idealistic in this case. As the text continues, we understand that she is disturbed not because the marriage will separate her from her lover but
because her new husband will discover she is not a virgin:

Sis peres li duna barun,
Un mut riche humme del pais,
Mut esforcible e de grant pris.
Quant ele sot cele aventure
Mut est dolente a demesure
E suvent regrette Milun,
Kar mut dute la mesprisum
De ceo qu'ele ot eu enfant;
Il le savra demeintenant.
"Lasse, fet ele, que ferai?
Avrai seignur? Cum le prendrai?
Ja ne sui jeo mie pucele;
A tuz jurs mes serai ancele....

(127-136)

Unlike the heroes who are free to travel around and win a reputation, her only move is from her father's house, and that is a passive move. She constantly refers to her own suffering, calls for death at least twice, and dramatizes her misery:

Ainz ai asez sur mei gardiens
Vieuze jeofnes, mes chamberleins
Ki tuz jurz heent bone amur
E se delitent en tristur.
Or m'estuet issi suffrir,
Lasse! quant jeo ne puis murir.

(143-148)

Her instructions to Milun on how to transport and deliver the baby to her sister show a strong sense of responsibility toward the baby, but no tenderness. The number of details offered, the tautology, and the mention of her own suffering add to the coldness of the passage:

Quant li enfes, fait ele, ert nez,
A ma serur le porterez
Ki en Norhumbre est mariée,
Riche dame, pruz e senee,
Si li manderez par escrit
E par paroles e par dit
Que ceo est l'enfant sa serur,
S'en ad suffert meinte dolur.
Ore gart k'il seit bien nuriz,
Queil ke ço seït, fille u fiz.
Vostre anel al col li prendrai
E un brief li enveierai;  
Escriz i ert li nuns sun pere  
E l'aventure de sa mere.  
Quant il serat granz e creuz  
E en tel eage venuz  
Que il sache reisun entendre,  
Le brief e l'anel li deit rendre,  
Si li cumant tant a garder  
Que sun pere puisse trover.  

The conception of romantic love when brought into contact with this character loses its idealistic aspects. From the beginning it is presented as being rather arbitrary. It is the lady who initiates the relationship with Milun--she hears about him and "falls in love" with him before seeing or even communicating with him:

Ele ot oi Milun nomer,  
Mut le començat a amer  
Par sun message li manda  
Que, si li plest el l'amera.  

Milun's response is as arbitrary and superficial. Not only does he immediately grant her his love, at least verbally, but he also promises that he will never leave her, a promise he will make no effort to keep:

Milun fu liez de la novele,  
S'en merciart la dameisele;  
Volentiers otriat l'amur:  
N'en partirat jamés nul jur!  

The description of their trysts in the garden is amazingly cursory, terminating in an announcement of the lady's pregnancy which is presented in a very abrupt, matter-of-fact manner:

Delez sa chambre en un vergier  
U ele alout esbanier,  
La justouent lur parlement  
Milun e ele bien suvent.  
Tant i vint Milun, tant l'ama  
Que la dameisele enceinta.
Even more succinct is the allusion to the lovers' communication over a twenty year period:

\[
\text{Vint anz menerent cele vie} \\
\text{Milun entre lui e s'emie} \\
\text{Del cigne firent messagier.} \quad (277-279)
\]

The brevity of these passages helps reduce the love relationship to insignificance in the tale.

There is no struggle within the hero between love and reputation. When he learns his lover is pregnant, he responds coldly to her appeal. When she enumerates to him the tortures she may have to endure because of their relationship, his response is quite attenuated and passive:

\[
\text{Milun respunt que il fera} \\
\text{Ceo que ele cunseillera.} \quad (65-66)
\]

She gives him explicit instructions on how the baby should be delivered to her sister, using the second person imperative to indicate that he should make the delivery himself. He does receive the baby personally from the lady's servant but has his messengers carry out the task. He begins to prepare for a journey of his own to seek his fortune (121-122).

The most arresting aspect of relationships in general and in the love relationship between Milun and his lady in particular is the use of a third party to communicate. In some cases the messengers are essential to communication but often they are not. In almost every case there is an unexpected preoccupation with the messenger or the delivery of the message, especially when we consider the brevity of the passage dealing with the direct communication of the lovers.
The lovers first communicate by way of messengers and letters. In the lady's description of how the baby should be given to her sister, there is a preoccupation with delivering her message orally and in writing. After the delivery is made we are told the messengers return home, as if this were not an obvious detail (119-120). When Milun first decides to use the swan to deliver messages to his lover, he summons his messenger, and in the only allusion to clothing in the lay, commands him to change his clothes since he will deliver a message to the lady's castle (167-168). The scene of the supposed bird catcher at the lady's castle is certainly a principal scene. The lady's reaction also adds to the significance of messages and messengers in the tale:

El le receit mut bonement.
Le col li manie e le chief,
Desuz la plume sent le brief;
Li sancs li remut e fremi:
Bien sot qu'il vint de sun ami. (216-220)

Al primier chief trovat "Milun";
De sun ami cunut le nun:
Cent feiz le baise en plurant,
Ainz qu'ele puist dire avant! (227-230)

Such an outpouring of emotions, uncommon in the Lais, automatically recalls the recognition scene, obviously a more personal contact, between Milun and his son. For some unknown reason she keeps the swan with her for a month, even though she is told it needs to fast only three days before returning. She uses "art e engin" to obtain ink and paper for writing. Instructions on how to starve the swan before
allowing it to return with a message are repeated. The final reference to messengers and messages is particularly revealing. When Milun and his son are on their way home to kill the mother's husband they by chance run into a messenger who tells them that the lady's husband has died suddenly and that now she is available to marry Milun.

Here as in other uses throughout the tale a messenger obviates a direct confrontation and alienates people who are communicating. If Milun and his lover are reconciled in marriage at the end, it is because they have recovered a third party to help them maintain distance and to avoid an intimate relationship.
NOTES ON CHAPTER 10


3. Words have been underlined by the critic to emphasize the motif in question.

4. The idea that love overcomes obstacles is the central theme of the passage quoted from Ovid's *Pyramus* and *Thisbe* in the chapters on *Laustic* and *Les Deus amanz*. The idea is not, however, exemplified by the love relationships we see in the *Lais*. 
CHAPTER 11

CHIEVREFOIL: CONVENTIONS IN THE MAKING

Chievrefoil also deals with a novel means of communication between lovers but stands apart from Milun as well as from the rest of the Lais. It holds a problematic position in a study of the use of reality and convention in Marie's work. The lay, being one of the earliest extant versions of the Tristan legend, is believed to be a source for many romances and thus an integral part of the tradition. It is therefore difficult to evaluate the role of conventional romance in its creation since the Tristan legend, to which it is inextricably tied, is one of the principal creators of convention.¹

Perhaps because of its brevity Chievrefoil is the best known of the Lais, despite being the most atypical. In it we do not find the humor or subtle irony characteristic of most other lays. Because it is only a fragment of a legend, it has no descriptions of characters or setting which Marie uses for specific artistic purposes in all other lays; it depends on the legend for characterization and for setting. What little characterization is present in the text is consistent with the legendary material. Tristan is presented as a totally committed lover who suffered much for his love; he is not a passive victim. When his situation becomes
intolerable he sets out to visit Iseut:

En sa cuntree est alez,
En Suhtwales u il fu nez.
Un an demurat tut entier,
Ne pot ariere reperier;
Mes puis se mist en abandun
De mort e de destruction.

Tristram est dolenz e pensis,
Pur ceo s'esmut de sun pais
En Cornwaille vait tut dreit
La u la reine maneit. (15-20,25-28)

We do not witness his skills as a warrior, but we do witness his cleverness. He goes incognito to find Iseut and inconspicuously asks local peasants with whom he resides for information about the king's activities:

En la forest tuz suls se mist:
Ne voleit pas qu'hun le veist.
En la vespree s'en eisseit,
Quant tens de herbergier esteit.
Od Paisanz, od povre gent,
Perneit la nuit herbergement;
Les noveles lur enqueret
Del rei cum il se cunteneit. (29-36)

He is no less ingenious in finding a way to make the Queen aware of his presence and to do this he uses the skills for which he is known in the legend. After the remarriage of Meliadus he went to live at the court of the King of France to avoid his jealous stepmother. While there he learned the skills of hunting and of life in the woods which he uses to deliver the message to his lover on the road to Tintagel. He is even more skilled as a musician. According to the legends, he used the harp and the rote in several of his aventures. When he first met Iseut he was disguised as a minstrel and won her favor as well as that of her mother through his musical abilities. Once when Iseut was cap-
tured, he played enchanting music to lure her captor back to the court at Cornwall. In Chievrefoil we are told he wrote this lay and put it to music to immortalize his meeting with the queen and the words he spoke to her:

E pur ceo k'il abeit escrit
Si cum la reine l'ot dit,
Pur les paroles remembrer,
Tristram, ki bien saveit harper,
En abeit fet un nuvel lai. (109-113)

The queen and the king scarcely appear in the lay but their appearances confirm the traditional characterization. Iseut recognizes her lover's message readily and responds skillfully when she stops her retinue in the woods:

La reine vait chevachant.
Ele esgardat tut un pendant,
Le bastun vit, bien l'aperceut,
Tutes les lettres i conut.
Les chevaliers ki la meneont
E ki ensemble od li erroent
Cumanda tuz a arester:
Descendre voet e resposer.
Cil unt fait sun commandement.
Ele s'en vet luinz de sa gent;
Sa meschine apelat a sei,
Brenguein, ki mut ot bone fei.
Del chemin un poi s'esluina. (79-91)

She is even followed by Brengwain, her faithful maid of honor whose mere name recalls the love potion since she is the one to whom Iseut's mother entrusted it for the sea voyage to Cornwall. In two brief allusions to King Mark we see two of his most characteristic attributes, jealous anger toward Tristan who loves his wife and compassion for his beloved nephew:

Li reis Marks esteit curuciez,
Vers Tristram sun nevu iriez;
De sa tere le cungea
Pur la reine qu'il ama. (11-14)
Tristram en Wales s'en rala
Tant que sis uncles le manda.  
(105-106)

Because the text is an isolated episode it is difficult
to evaluate the development of the story. References to
the past and to the future link it to the complete legend
and suggest dimensions not explicitly present in the lay.
In the prologue we are told of the final outcome of the
lovers:

E jeo l'ai trové en escrit
De Tristram e de la reine,
De lur amur ki tant fu fine,
Dunt il eurent meinte dolur,
Puis en mururent en un jur    
(6-10)

At the beginning of the story we are told of Tristan's exile.
In the passage describing his scheme to attract Iseut's at-
tention, we have another allusion to the past:

Autre feiz li fu avenu
Que si l'aveit apeareu-
De sun ami bien conustra
Le bastun, quant el le verra.     
(57-60)

In the last line before the epilogue there is an allusion to
a future reunion of the lovers:

Tristram en Wales s'en rala
Tant que sis uncles le manda.  
(105-106)

The presentation of the physical setting is equally de-
pendent on the legend. In other lays there are descriptions
of the topography of the setting (the mountain in Les Deus
amanz, the river in Yonec, etc.), but here we have simply
references to well-known sites in the Tristan legend such
as Cornwall, Tintagel, and the forest, which was often a
meeting or hiding place for the legendary lovers.
The courtly atmosphere is explicitly present in the lay. Mark, although duped in this episode, is depicted as a king at the head of a court. When a knight angers him, he exiles him, even if the knight is his nephew. For Pentecost he decides to move the entire court to Tintagel for a celebration:

Ceo li dient qu'il unt oi
Que li barun erent bani,
A Tintagel devient venir:
Li reis i veolt sa curt tenir;
A Pentecuste i serunt tuit,
Mut i avra joie e deduit,
E la reine i sera. (37-43)

The fact that the peasants report to Tristan about the activities of the king and that the lords are all preparing for the trip and the festivities indicate that there is much excitement in the air concerning the court. We have a glimpse of the royal cavalcade when the queen orders her party to stop so that she may dismount and retire into the woods for a brief rest.

Like the characters and the setting, the conception of love in Chievrefoil seems to have little if any originality in relation to the myth from which it derives. Marie apparently faithfully used the legendary material of some unidentified source to write a tale which became a major vehicle of the Tristan legend in the Middle Ages. She did not introduce into it the elements which are typical of love as we find it in the other tales: dissatisfaction, disintegration, and destruction are not presented here as the inevitable consequences of love relationships. There is no
direct reference to the love potion in *Chievrefoil*, but there are suggestions of the fatal nature of love. It is characterized as being a reciprocal, painful relationship which is the central issue of life and the cause of death of each of the lovers. It is plagued with obstacles which serve only to enhance the lovers' determination. When Tristan is exiled he goes home, but his suffering is so great that he is compelled to return to Cornwall:

En sa cuntree en est alez,
En Suhtwales u il fu nez.
Un an demurat tut entier,
Ne pot ariere reeprier;
Mes puis se mist en abandun
De mort e de destructiun. (15-20)

Tristan est dolenz e pensis,
Pur ceo s'esmut de sun pais.
En Cornwaille vait tut dreit
La u la reine maneit. (25-28)

The stealth he employs to obtain a meeting with the queen—hiding during the day, staying with the peasants, placing the secret signal in the queen's pathway—serves to emphasize the danger involved. In the prologue the narrator sets the tone which is maintained throughout the lay:

Plusur le m'unt cunté e dit
E jeo l'ai trové en escrit
De Tristram e de la reine,
De lur amur ki tant fu fine,
Dunt il eurent meinte dolur,
Puis en mururent en un jur, (5-10)

In an abstract statement she points out that the pain experienced by Tristan and Iseut is the lot of any faithful lovers:

Ne vus esmerveilliez neent,
Kar cil ki eime lealment
Mut est dolenz e trespensez
Quant il nen ad ses volentez. (21-24)
Because of the all-importance of love in their lives it necessarily leads to death:

Ceo fu la summe de l'escrit.
Qu'il avoit mandé e dit
Que lungen ot ilec esté
E atendu e surjunné
Pur espier e pur saveir
Coment il la peust veeir,
Kar ne poeit vivre sansz li.
D'euls deus fu il tut autresi
Cume del chievrefoil esteit
Ki a la codre se perneit:
Quant il s'i est laciez e pris
E tut entur le fuss s'est mis,
Ensemble poeint bien durer,
Mes ki puis les voelt desevrer,
Li codres muert hastivement
E li chievrefoilz ensemene.
"Bele amie, si est de nus:
Ne vus sanz mei, ne jeo sanz vus." (61-78)

When they must part after their brief meeting in the forest, they both leave in tears.

In contrast to the suffering, they experience moments of joy together:

Dedenz le bois celui trova
Que plus amot que rien vivant:
Enter'eus meinent joie mut grant.
A li parlat tut a leisir
E ele li dit sun pleisir. (92-96)

Pur la joie qu'il ot eue
De s'amie qu'il ot veue. . . (107-108)

These moments, however, only intensify the suffering of separation.

Chievrefoil seems to have received more critical attention than any other lay and critics have been singularly preoccupied with interpreting lines 51-78 which describe the message Tristan places on the pathway for Iseut. The controversial problem is how much was written on the hazel bark.
The text presents in 17 lines (61-78 quoted above) the message that Tristan communicated to his lover after having said that Tristan carved his name on the branch:

Une codre trenched par mi,
Tute quarre le fendii.
Quant il ad pare le bastun,
De sun cutel escrit sun nun.  

(51-54)

Leo Spitzer reacts as follows to those critics who believe the entire message was written on the stick: "Et pourtant combien il est peu vraisemblable que Tristan ait pu faire tenir tant de choses sur une baguette de coudrier!" He concludes that Tristan simply wrote his name on the stick and that Iseut was inspired by her love for Tristan to understand the implications of the sign. Léopold Sudre suggests that there must have been some previous communication between Tristan and Iseut that would alert the queen to the presence and significance of the stick. Lucien Foulet supports this interpretation saying that the message would have to be given explicitly to the queen:

Si attentive que fût Iseut, pouvait-elle se douter que son ami était soudainement revenu d'exil après une longue année d'attente? Ne risquait-elle pas de passer à côté de la branche sans la voir? Prévenue au contraire, elle ne pouvait manquer de reconnaître un signal que Tristan avait au contraire autrefois employé avec elle.

He bases his interpretation on the presence of the verb mander which he translates literally into modern French. Elizabeth Francis supports this interpretation by a systematic study of the words summe, escrit, and mander in the Lais. Grace Frank believes the problem is one of insisting on a rational interpretation of the text: "The crux of the
difficulty, it seems to me, lies in a needless realistic position regarding lines 51ff. She finds the idea of a previously sent letter "awkwardly prosaic" and "unartistic." She prefers to interpret it in the whole context of the romance legend where almost anything is possible:

...in short, then, I believe that Chievrefueil, a little gem of synthesis, compression and clean-cut narration, derives from one of the longer versions of the Tristan legend. Marie tells us of a single meeting between the lovers and, like any good writer of short stories, she makes this one significant scene embrace the past and foreshadow the future.

Anna Granville Hatcher also reacts negatively to what she calls the previous critics' "conformity to verisimilitude and situations of everyday life." Ironically, what bothers her is the same sort of concern: she finds "something incongruous (not to say indiscreet) in the idea of Tristram busily covering a large piece of wood with a message, and then leaving this conspicuous object by the highway as an advertisement of his relations with the Queen!" For her, only the name was written on the branch. Jean Frappier has equally practical objections: "Comment croire qu'Iseut, à une certaine distance, et du haut de sa monture, a lu un assez long message dont la rédaction complète aurait forcément occupé les quatre faces du bâton?"

Two studies which stand out in the controversy are those by Gertrude Schoepperle and Maurice Cagnon who both find a solution to the problem by studying the Celtic folklore traditions to which the Lais are related. To
Schoepperle the entire message was written on the stick and, in Celtic tradition, left in the pathway for the queen:

The considerations which incline us to the belief that the Tristan episodes in question are based on Celtic traditions are: first, there are other traces in the story of Tristan, of his Celtic origin; second, the episode in question has been shown to be a relic of a pre-French stage of the tradition; third, the Irish parallels to the incident include not only both the carved bit of wood and the device of leaving it upon the path, but the employment of it, through the appeal to the peculiarly Irish superstitions, to bring about the halt of a hostile army. Our reconstruction of a pre-extant form of the story, however, although it falls in perfectly with the facts of the development as we have been able to trace it in the extant ones, with the evidence of the Irish parallels and with general probability, proves no more than that the Chievrefoil episode may be a survival of some such specifically Irish practise as we have seen in the Táin episodes.¹⁰

Maurice Cagnon takes this study a step further, hypothesizing that Tristan wrote the message in a hermetic language of Celtic poets:

The tradition that Tristan was a poet and composer of songs is well known, and it does not seem rash to assume that he would therefore be supposed to have learned this hermetic language of the fili. . . . Thus there is no incongruity or indiscretion in his leaving by the road such a message for Iseut, as he would have done so with the full assurance that no one else in the retinue was capable of reading it.¹¹

He explains that Tristan was Iseut's teacher while he was at the Irish court and could have taught her the language. He gives examples of long messages being written with only a few notches. Cagnon concludes the defense of his inter-
pretation by calling upon tradition to support his view:

For we are not here dealing with reality, but with poetry, and in the traditions concerning Celtic poets, every aspect of such writing is, as we have attempted to demonstrate, considered to be true. If we can believe Marie herself, she is telling us la vérité, which has come to her from many sources, about a lay focused upon Tristan and Iseut. Surely, it is only to be expected that a traditional story centered around a secret message from a Celtic poet to a Celtic poetess should be consistent with that store of Celtic traditions about secret writings and poetry, and it would be astonishing only if it were otherwise.12

What is interesting and relevant about the controversy to this study is that it should arise concerning the only passage in Chievrefoil which is not strictly consistent with other versions of the Tristan legend. As the tale diverges from convention, critics, depending on their interpretation of the collection as a whole, seem to take one of two positions: they try to interpret the problematic passage by making a place for it in the convention or they explain it with a practical, realistic interpretation. Scholars seem to be uncomfortable with the thought of Marie's maintaining a certain tension between reality and convention in each of the Lais and with the thought that the relative importance of these two elements varies greatly within the collection.
NOTES ON CHAPTER 11


2. Leo Spitzer, "La Lettre sur la baguette de coudrier dans le 'Lai du Chievrefeuil'," Romania, LXIX (1946-1947), 80.


7. Ibid., 410-411.


12. Ibid., 254-255.
CHAPTER 12

LANVAL: A SYNTHESIS OF IDEALIZED ELEMENTS

Because of the tendency of criticism to overemphasize the idealism of the Lais and to generalize about the conception of love in the work as a whole, while ignoring its diversity to individual stories, the uniqueness of Lanval and Yonéc has not been sufficiently recognized. In part because of setting and sources they are the most idealistic of the Lais. As in other tales Marie presents precise details and descriptions, but the effect here is different because the choice of details is different. Instead of creating a more complete representation of reality by describing at length visible details of a scene, the text presents details which enhance the idealization of the characters and setting.

The setting seems more complete than usual in Lanval because of the legends surrounding the places and characters involved. The story begins during a holiday season, that of Pentecost. Arthur, who has been fighting the Scotts and Picts, has temporarily established his court at Carlyle and during the festivities is distributing lands and women to his vassals to reward them for faithful service to their lord. In lieu of the cursory, superlative descriptions of the main characters which we find in the opening lines of
most other lays, we have here simply an allusion to King Arthur as "Artur, li pruz e li curteis," since everyone knows who he is and what is his reputation. Throughout the lay there are allusions to the Table Roûnde, and certain conventional Arthurian characters such as Guenevere, Yvain and Gawain. The setting, then, has automatically the sense of a past and a future found in only one other lay, Chievrefoil.

The setting is traditional in that there is a complete court with king, queen, lords and ladies who are engaged in the courtly activities of fighting, loving, conversing courteously and admiring one another's beauty and prowess. When a group of knights takes a walk in the garden beneath the window of the queen, Guenevere notices them and descends with her most beautiful and charming maidens who are received enthusiastically and decorously by the knights:

Li chevalier encuntre vunt,
Ki pur eles grant joie funt.
Il les unt prises par les mains;
Cil parlemenz n'iert pas vilains! (249-252)

Lanval, even when caught off guard by the presence of ladies, is quick to collect himself and practice the good manners expected of one of Arthur's knights. When he is lying on the ground by a river contemplating his bleak future, he jumps to his feet quickly and puts all despondent thoughts out of his mind when two ladies appear unexpectedly:

Eles s'en sunt alies dreit
La u li chevaliers giseit
Lanval, ki mut fu enseigniez,
Cuntre eles s'en levad en piez. . . . (65-68)

The entire trial scene exemplifies the courtly/chivalric ideals of Honor, Justice and Generosity. The king is out-
raged that one of his vassals would break faith by daring to dishonor and insult the queen. Lanval's peers show love and recognition to the accused for his prowess and generosity by offering themselves as guarantors for him and encouraging him through his difficult hours. The speech of the Duke of Cornwall, calling tactfully for Justice to the king, queen and to Lanval, states clearly that the ideals must be maintained at the court of King Arthur no matter who is involved in a particular case:

Ja endreit nus n'i aura faille,  
Kar ki qu'en plurt ne ki qu'en chant,  
Le dreit estuet aler avant.  

(434-436)

Characterization in Lanval also follows the conventions of traditional romance and is much different from that of most other lays. In conventional romance the characters tend to be all good or all bad. Northrop Frye, perhaps oversimplifying to make a valid point, sums up the situation well, before presenting examples to validate his generalization:

The central form of romance is dialectical: everything is focussed on a conflict between the hero and his enemy, and all the reader's values are bound up with the hero.¹

The characterization of romance follows its general dialectic structure, which means that subtlety and complexity are not much favored. Characters tend to be either for or against the quest. If they assist it they are idealized as simply gallant or pure; if they obstruct it they are caricatured as simply villainous or cowardly.²

Characterization as a general rule in the Lais does not follow this tendency. The viel gelus in Guigemar is treated rather sympathetically by the narrator who says he cannot
help himself; it is only natural for an old man in love to be jealous. When he catches Guigemar with his wife he lets him go, making no reprisal, then disappears conveniently from the story. The reader cannot help but be shocked by the violence of the seneschal's reaction when he finds Equitan in bed with his wife. His method of killing her is cruel and ignoble. In Fresne the mother is the principal villain, yet she is allowed to repent at the last moment and have all her desires fulfilled. The other characters such as the father, the abbess and Codre are so passive we cannot evaluate them. In Bisclavret although the narrator is sympathetic to the hero, the reader cannot find the lady utterly at fault for trying to free herself from her werewolf husband. In Les Deus amanz there are neither heroes nor villains. The aunt is the only character who contributes in an uncompromised way to the goal of uniting the lovers; even the lovers make specific moves to thwart their union. Eliduc does not in any way follow a dialectical pattern. The two women are rivals, yet show no animosity toward each other and are united in the convent in the end. Eliduc is in some ways the enemy of each woman though at the same time is husband and lover. The sailor whom Eliduc kills for revealing his secret has the sympathy of the reader because of the unnecessary brutality of the hero. In Laustic the two knights are originally presented as being equally handsome, generous and preux, yet the story itself creates a much different impression. In Milun the husband could be
considered the lovers' enemy and in fact is threatened by the hero, yet he has done nothing to create the unfortunate situation—Milun's mother chose to marry him while her lover was away. He does nothing to agitate the lovers and dies unexpectedly but conveniently so that the lovers may be reconciled.

The characters in Lanval, however, can easily be divided into diametrically opposed groups. Favoring Lanval we have the fairies and most of the knights of the land. Opposing him are the king, who acts out of ignorance; the queen, who acts out of egotism and malvolence; and the sycophantic knights, who want simply to be on the side of the king. This polarization is supported by the actions and words of the characters as well as by the attitude of the narrator. Lanval is presented as an ideal warrior and lover. He is physically attractive, wealthy since he is a king's son, and a worthy vassal. He breaks his word to his lady but he does so in an impetuous moment for which he repents many times. He is loved and respected by such famous knights as Yvain and Gawain, who are also idealized. When the queen tries to seduce him he responds nobly at first; he does not insult her until she forces him into defending himself against the accusation of homosexuality:

Dame, fet il, lessiez m'ester!
Jeo n'ai cure de vus amer.
Lugement ai servi le rei;
Ne li voli pas mentir ma fei.
Ja pur vus ne pur vostre amur
Ne mesferai a mun seigneur.  (269-274)
The narrator is totally sympathetic toward Lanval. She emphasizes the fact that he does not deserve the neglect he has received from his lord and openly solicits sympathy for him:

Seignurs, ne vus esmerveillez:
Hum estrange descunseillez,
Mut est dolenz en autre tere,
Quant il ne seït u sucurs quere! (35-38)

When Lanval's situation is good, she celebrates his fortune with exclamations and favorable adjectives:

Grant joie en eurest li vassal!
Entre eus dient qu'ore est gariz
Lanval, li pruz e li hardiz. (514-516)

The queen is incriminated by her actions as well as by her words and attitude. She is quite supercilious and seems to believe that the court should revolve around her desires. When she accosts Lanval in the garden, she is sure he will accept her offer:

Ma druerie vus otrei
Mut devez estre liez de mei!

Her reaction to his refusal is thoroughly vicious:

Lanval, fet ele, bien le quit,
Vus n'amez queres cel deduit.
Asez le m'ad hum dit sovent
Que des femmes n'avez talent!
Vallez avez bien afeitez,
Ensemble od eus vus deduez.
Vileins cuarz, mauvels faillez,
Mut est mis sires maubaillez,
Ki pres de lui vus ad suftet,
Mun escient que Deu en pert. (277-286)

The theme of unnatural love appears elsewhere in the Lais but its treatment is entirely different. In Les Deus amanz the narrator implies an incestuous relationship; society accuses the king of unnatural attachment to his daughter and
the story corroborates the implications. In Le Fresne a
mother contemplates infanticide and abandons her child. Be-
fore the fairy casts a spell on him, Guigemar, a Hippolytus
figure, has no interest in women. In Lanval, however, the
accusation, coming from a single source and in no way vali-
dated, serves only to further incriminate the malicious queen.
Her hypocrisy and childishness contribute to the negative
portrait. When she is refused, she runs to her room crying
and goes to bed, vowing not to get up until the king punished
Lanval:

La reine s'en part a tant,
En sa chambre s'en vait plurant;
Mut fu dolente e curuciee
De ceo k'il l'out si avilliee.
En sun lit malade cucha;
Jamés, ceo dit, ne levera,
Si li reis ne l'en feseit dreit
De ceo dunt ele se pleindreit. (303-310)

When Arthur returns home she falls down at his feet feigning
to be horrified by Lanval's alleged attempt to seduce her.
Later, during the trial scene, Justice must be precipitated,
says Arthur; the queen is becoming angry because she is hun-
gry:

Puis ad tuz ses baruns mandez,
Que li jugemenz seitz renduz:
Trop ad le jur estê tenuz,
La reine s'en curuçot,
Que trop lungetment jeunot. (542-546)

The structure of the tale also follows that of conven-
tional romance. Again, we use Frye whose generalizations
about the structure of romance are based on a more extensive
familiarity with the mode than those of many critics. To
Professor Frye the successful completion of the quest pro-
vides the structure for romance and this is accomplished in three stages. The first stage, which he calls the *agon* or conflict, is that of the perilous journey and minor adventures. The second stage is that of the crucial struggle where usually either the hero, his opponent, or both die. This is called the *pathos* or death struggle. The final stage is the exaltation of the hero, the *anagnorisis* or discovery. The *agon*, says Frye, is often initiated by "a sharp descent in social status, from riches to poverty, from privilege to a struggle to survive. . ." Lanval's *agon* is initiated by Arthur's neglect to reward his faithful vassal whose situation is quite unfortunate and unfair:

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Fiz a rei fu, de haut parage,
Mes luin ert de sun heritage!
De la meisniee le rei fu.
Tut sun aveir ad despendu,
Kar li reis rien ne li dona
Ne Lanval ne li demanda.
Ore est Lanval mut entrepris,
Mut est dolenz, mut est pensis!
Seignurs, ne vus esmerveillez:
Hum estrange descunseillez,
Mut est dolenz en autre tere,
Quant il ne sejt u sucrets quere! (27-38)
```

Thoroughly conscious of the gravity of his problem and of his helpless solitude, he leaves the city which is in the midst of festivities. He takes a ride in the country near a stream where he encounters his *aventure*. The turning point comes as he is riding along and his horse begins to stumble inexplicably. When he stops to let his horse rest, he meets the maidens who lure him to the fairy mistress who changes his fortune and leads him to the *pathos*. The death struggle is of course the confrontation with the queen and the
subsequent trial. It is during this phase that the two poles of the dialectic are in sharpest contrast. The climax of this phase is the scene where Lanval desperately calls his mistress, crying and pleading with her to have mercy on him, but she does not answer. Although Lanval is not primarily concerned with saving his own life, the reader is conscious of the fact that only the fairy mistress can save the falsely accused hero. The pathos is resolved by the appearance of the fairy before Arthur. She unveils herself with a dramatic gesture which reveals to all her unsurpassed beauty, and she vindicates Lanval:

Devant le rei est descendue,
Si que de tuz iert bien veue.
Sun mantel ad laissié cheeir,
Que mieuz la peussent veieir. (603-606)

The anagnorisis comes in the very last scene where Lanval jumps on the back of the fairy's horse as she rides off to Avalon. In the last lines the narrator tells us that he was never heard of again, indicating his disappearance was a definitive apotheosis:

Od li s'en vait en Avalun,
Ceo nus recurent li Bretun,
En un isle ki mut est beaus.
La fu raviz li dameiseaus!
Nuls hum n'en oi plus parler
Ne jeo n'en sai avant cunter. (641-646)

The idealized atmosphere of romance is enhanced by superlative statements and hyperbolic comparisons emphasizing the beauty, wealth, and grandeur of the idealized characters, especially those of the fairy and her retinue. Marie uses superlative statements in descriptions of char-
acters in most of the other lays, but here she does not com-
promise them by creating ineffectual or despicable characters
or by using the same superlative statement about several
characters in one story. When Lanval puts on his new clothes,
he is truly a sight to behold:

Quant il fu vestuz de nuvel
Suz ciel nen ot plus bel dancel. (175-176)

Although statements like this are common in the Lais
the difference here is that the characters react in a way
to the hero which indicates that he really is extraordinary,
that the claim is true. When we first enter the fairy's
tent we are told that neither the queen of Semiramus nor the
Emperor Octavian at the height of their wealth could have
afforded a small portion of what Lanval's lover had in her
tent (82-86). A few lines later the claim is made even more
pervasive:

Sur ciel n'ad rei kis l'esligast
Pur nul avere ki il i donast! (91-92)

All of the descriptions of the fairy are riddled with super-
latives. Not only is she herself the wealthiest, most
beautiful creature in the universe, but all of her appur-
tenances are likewise. Neither king nor count, unless he
sold all of his possessions, could ever hope to own a white
palfrey like the one she rides at the end of the lay. The
description of her hair is a striking variant of the super-
lative comparison:

Filz d'or ne gette tel luur
Cum si chevel cunte le jur! (569-570)
The conception of love in Lanval, while not strictly following the conventional patterns of courtly love or tragic love, is thoroughly idealized. It is ideal not in the sense of rising above physical attraction to a spiritual love, but in being an elevating sentiment, one strong enough to inspire total commitment on the part of the lover, to the point of being more important than his very life. It has several of the obvious characteristics of courtly love in that the woman is the dominating member of the couple and the love must be kept secret, but it is reciprocal and the lady constantly rewards her lover without placing unnecessary obstacles in his path. From the beginning the fairy has an all-engrossing effect on Lanval. Seeing her maidens and receiving her initial invitation confuse the hero to the point that he forgets his horse which passes directly in front of him in a field:

Li chevaliers od eles vait  
De sun cheval ne tient nul plait  
Ki devant lui pesseit el pré.  

(77-79)

The propinquity of the two words cheval and chevalier emphasizes the humor involved in a knight's forgetting his horse. During their first visit he declares he is ready to leave everything and do anything for her:

Bele, fet il, si vus pleiseit  
E cele joie m'aveneit  
Que vus me vouissez amer,  
Ne savriez rien comander  
Que jeo ne face a mun poeir,  
Turt a folie u a saveir.  
Jeo ferae voz comandemenz;  
Pur vus guerpriai tutes genz.  
Jamés ne quier de vus partir,  
Ceo est la rien que plus desir!  

(121-130)
This is not an empty statement for we see, when he returns to the court, that he voluntarily isolates himself from the other young knights and ladies to contemplate his lover:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Lanval s'en vait a une part} \\
\text{Luin des autres; ceo li est tart} \\
\text{Que s'amie puisse tenir,} \\
\text{Baisier, acoler e sentir;} \\
\text{L'autrui joie prise petit,} \\
\text{Si il nen ad le suen delit.}
\end{align*}
\]

(253-258)

When he is compelled to leave her, he departs reluctantly, turning around often to gaze desirously at her tent, fearing that he will not be able to relive the delight he experienced during their first visit (194-196).

Love has a generalized ennobling effect on the lover. Not only is he extremely happy, but he is also generous and altruistic in sharing his new fortune:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{N'ot en la vile chevalier} \\
\text{Ki de surjur ait grant mestier} \\
\text{Que il ne face a lui venir} \\
\text{E richement e bien servir.} \\
\text{Lanval donout les riches duns,} \\
\text{Lanval aquitout les prisuns,} \\
\text{Lanval vesteit les jügleurs,} \\
\text{Lanval feseit les granz honurs!} \\
\text{N'i ot estrange ne privé} \\
\text{A ki Lanval n'eust doné.} \\
\text{Mut ot Lanval joie e deduit;} \\
\text{U seit par jur u seit par nuit,} \\
\text{S'amie peot veeir sovent,} \\
\text{Tut est a sun comandement.}
\end{align*}
\]

(205-218)

The repetition of his name in four successive lines (209-212) indicates his new-found power which is referred to again in line 218 and which is in contrast to his previous helplessness. When Lanval believes he has lost his love he loses his will to live. His friends care for him daily to keep him alive and sane:
Mut l'unt blasmé e chastié
Qu'il ne face si grant dolor,
E maudient si fol de amur.
Chescun jur l'aloent veeir,
Pur ceo k'il voleient saveir
U il beust u il mangast:
Mut dotouent k'il s'afolast! (407-414)

When he realizes that the fairy has come back to claim him, his spontaneous reaction at the mere sight of her is a dramatic indication of his love. He still has no thought for his own life:

Lanval l'oi, sun chief dresça,
Bien la cunut, si suspira;
Li sansc li est muntez al vis.
De parler fu aukes hastifs:
Par fei, fet il, ceo est m'amie!
Or ne m'est queres ki m'ocie,
Si ele n'ad merci de mei,
Kar gariz sui quant jeo la vei! (593-600)

Although Lanval’s reactions are the clearest index of the extent and nature of his love, there are other pertinent passages throughout the tale. The description of his meal with the fairy for example is highly unusual for the Lais because Marie rarely mentions, even in her more realistic tales, such mundane daily activities as eating, sleeping, and cleaning. Here however the description turns into another example of the pleasure the hero derives from his love:

Puis li aportent a mangier.
Od s'amie prist le super:
Ne feseit mie a resuser!
Mut fu serviz curteisement
E il a grant joie le prend.
Un entremés i ot plenier,
Ki mut pleiseit al chevalier,
Kar s'amie baisout sovent
E acolot estreitement! (180-188)
The use of the term *joie* is particularly interesting. In line 184 it seems to refer to his approval of the meal, but the remainder of the passage clarifies that the *joie* is the sensual pleasure he derives from his lover as an *entremes*.

Descriptions in general play a role in *Lanval* different from that in more realistic lays. Whereas they often tend to undermine the idealistic atmosphere by providing realistic details, as in the description of the ship in *Guigemar*, or by distracting from what logically would be a moment of psychological intensity, as in the scene of the mother's abandoning her daughter in *Le Fresne*, here they serve to idealize the characters and setting. The details offered in the descriptions of this lay depict for the most part rare and luxurious items which contribute to the magical, exotic aura surrounding the fairy mistress and her maidens. There is an insistence on clothes here for example which exists in no other lay. In each of the three descriptions of the fairy maidens coming to the court during *Lanval*'s trial, we are given details about their attire and the objects or animals accompanying them:

Unkes n'en ot veu plus beles!
Vestues furent richement,
Laciees mut estreitement
En deus biauz de purpre bis;
Mut par aveient bel le vis!
L'eisnee portout uns bacins
D'or esmeré, bien faiz e fins;
Le veir vus en dirai sanz faile:
L'autre portout une tuaile. (56-64)

"Laciees mut estreitement" indicates the sensual beauty of the maidens. The basin and towel serve no practical pur-
pose because they are not mentioned again and there is no indication that Lanval washes himself before seeing the fairy mistress. They are instead an indication of how close-ly Lanval scrutinizes the ladies (noticing which one is older) and an example of the wealth of the fairy since the basin is made of very fine sculpted gold. The second pair of fairy maidens arrive on "deus beaus palefreiz." They are dressed in purple taffeta but still reveal provocatively "lur char nues." The maidens who immediately precede the mistress are the most enticing of all. They arrive on Spanish mules and are dressed in silk coming from the Orient. The reaction of the vassals at the court is proof of their beauty:

Deus puceles de gent cunrei,  
Vestues de deus palies freis- 
Chevauchent deus muls espagneis- 
Virent venir la rue aval.  
Grant joie en eurent li vassal!  

The two primary descriptions of the fairy mistress have the same effect. The details about the fairy herself are abstract: she is more beautiful than a rose or fleur de lis in summer. But the gold eagle, white ermine, purple silk and warmth of the coverlet which is worth more than a chateau serve to enhance her beauty and wealth almost beyond imagi-

Un aigle d'or ot desus mis'  
De cel ne sai dire le pris,  
Ne des cordes ne des peissuns  
Ki del tref tienent les giruns:  
Suz ciel n'ad rei kis esligast  
Pur nul avezir k'il i donast!  
Dedenz cel tref fu la pucele;  
Flur de lis e rose nuvele,
Quant ele pert al tens d'esté,
Trespassot ele de beauté.
Ele jut sur un lit mut bel-
Li drap valeient un chastel-
En sa chemise seinglement.
Mut ot le cors bien fait e gent!
Un chier mantel de blanc hermine,
Covert de purpre alexandrine,
Ot pur le chaut sur li geté;
Tut ot descovert le costé,
Le vis, le col e la peitrine:
Plus ert blanche que flur d'espine! (87-106)

The final description of the lady (547-74) is equally enticing and exotic. The horse she rides is such a wonder that no count or king could afford it unless he sold all his property. Her attire is a simple chemise which exposes half of her body. On her wrist she carries a sparrow-hawk, and she is followed by a greyhound.

The romance atmosphere of *Lanval*, then, is supported even by its descriptions. The final effect of the tale is one of harmony: setting, characterization, structure, and descriptions all contribute to make it one of the two most idealized of the *Lais*. 
NOTES ON CHAPTER 12


CHAPTER 13

YONEC AND THE MOTIF OF LA PRISON HEUREUSE

As in Lanval we also come close to conventional romance and an idealized conception of love in Yonec. It is true that in Lanval we find the basic structure of romance and the dialectical characters, but here those qualities are even more pronounced and they are placed in a dream-like atmosphere that Lanval does not have. The sumptuous decor of the fairy mistress's tent and her amazing beauty are almost overpowering; they lend a certain exotic luxury to the atmosphere, but do not create the mysterious, dream-like aura that we find in Perceval for example. Although the ending of Yonec is not a happy one, it is the most satisfying of the Lais. In Milun we have seen that the ending is technically happy--since father, mother and son are reconciled--but that it is unsatisfying because until the end the characters carefully maintain obstacles to their union. The reader feels no "relief" at the reconciliation of half-hearted lovers.

To say that Yonec falls into the category of conventional, idealistic romance does not mean, however, that it eschews the realistic descriptions, unexpected minor details, and often mundane characters that are typical of most other lays; it only uses them differently. In Laustic the actions of
the characters and comments of the narrator undermine the idealized descriptions of the heroes and heroine. In Guigemar specific, irrelevant information about the setting, the hero's family and some of the "mysterious" objects such as the magic ship detract from the atmosphere of the tale. In Equitan and Bisclavret the treachery of wives to noble husbands debases the conception of romantic love. In Fresne all of the characters are quite mundane individuals, passive at the moment when we would expect a hero to react. In Yonec, however, the descriptions, superficially insignificant details, and the concept of reality in general are carefully calculated not to compromise an apparently idealistic atmosphere but to help create the dialectic of characters that is set up and finally resolved genuinely in this idealistic tale. The ideal and the real are not seen as diametrically opposed, primarily because of the presence of the motif of la prison heureuse.¹ What is originally seen as a cruel, destructive incarceration becomes--with no change to the physical setting--a haven for physical and emotional bliss. That is, each side of the dialectic sets up its own reality and in the final confrontation, as in any conventional romance, that of the lovers is triumphant.

The negative side of the prison imagery is of course centered around the old man, with his widowed sister as a supporting character. His initial description is not particularly incriminating but roots him well in the concerns of the real world:
En Bretaingne maneit jadis
Uns riches hum, vielz e antis;
De Carwent fu avouez
E del pais sire clamez.
La citez siet sur Duelas;
Jadis i ot de nes trespas.
Mut fu trespassez en eage.
Pur ceo k'il ot bon heritage,
Femme prist pur enfanz aveir,
Ki aprés lui fuissent si heir. \(11-20\)

We have here the precise geographical location of his home and his political status. We are told he is very old and that he married specifically to have children to receive his heritage. In the passages describing his treatment of his wife and in her comments about him, however, he is portrayed as a thoroughly despicable character. In a long lament she describes him as being paranoid and totally obsessed with keeping her locked in his tower, which for her at this point is a dreadful prison:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{En ceste tur sui en prisun,} \\
\text{Ja n'en istrai si par mort nun.} \\
\text{Cist vielz gelus, de quei se crient,} \\
\text{Que en si grant prisun me tient?} \\
\text{Mut par est fous e esbaiz!} \\
\text{Il crient tuz jurs estre trahiz!} \\
\text{Jeo ne puis al mustier venir} \\
\text{Ne le servise Deu oir.} \\
\end{align*} \quad (69-76)
\]

She also emphasizes his corporeal nature, referring to him as the "body" to which her cursed parents married her, and after associating him with infernal imagery, she mentions contemptuously his nerves, veins, and blood as though he were some obnoxious physical mass which disgusts her:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Maleeit seienn mi parent} \\
\text{E li autre communalement} \\
\text{Ki a cest gelus me donerent} \\
\text{E de sun cors me marierent!} \\
\text{A forte corde trai e tir,} \\
\text{Il ne purrat jamés murir!}
\end{align*}
\]
Quant il dût estre baptiziez,  
Si fu el flum d'enfern plungeiez:  
Dur sunt li nerf, dures les veines,  
Ki de vif sanc sunt tutes pleines!  

(81-90)

In contrast, because of his young wife's beauty and charm, the old man locks her not only in a tower but in a padded room:

Dedanz sa tur l'ad enserreie  
En une grant chambre pavez.  

(27-28)

As is suggested here and as is evinced in subsequent passages, incarceration is a veritable mania with him. His sister, one of his passive tools, is "placed" in the room with the wife to further his control over her. The young woman's solitude and total lack of freedom are emphasized by the fact that there are other women in the castle; however, she is not allowed to communicate freely with them:

Il ot une sue serur,  
Veille ert e vedve, sanz seignur;  
Ensemble od la dame l'ad mise  
Pur li tenir mieuz en justise.  
Autres femmes i ot, ceo crei,  
En une autre chambre par sei,  
Mes ja la dame n'i parlast,  
Si la vieille nel comandast.  

(29-36)

Another sentence dealing with her lack of freedom suggests the effects of the incarceration:

Unques entre eus n'eurent enfanz  
Ne fors de cele tur n'eissi,  
Ne pur parent ne pur ami.  

(38-40)

It seems to be the direct cause of her barrenness. We also see that it becomes so oppressive to her that she loses all interest in her material existence; she simply wants to die since death at this point represents for her the only possibility of freedom:
Considering the fact that the old man married her for her beauty and for heirs, the situation becomes increasingly ironic as her unhappiness leads to loss of beauty, sterility, and death wishes.

In the oppressive prison world of the *viel gelus*, time becomes another controlling factor. Nothing is done spontaneously; everything is accomplished on schedule and according to a set pattern. In at least four references made to the scene of the husband's rising in the morning and riding into the woods, the pattern is always the same:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Ceo fu el meis d'avril entrant,} & \\
\text{Quant cil oisel meinent lur chant.} & \\
\text{Li sires fu matin levez;} & \\
\text{D'aler en bois s'est aturnez.} & \\
\text{La vielle ad fete lever sus} & \\
\text{E aprés lui fermer les hus.} & \\
\text{Cele ad fet sun comandement.} & \\
\text{Li sires s'en vet od sa gent.}
\end{align*}
\]  

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Al matin, quant jeo erc levez} & \\
\text{E vus avrez les hus fermez,} & \\
\text{Fetes semblant de fors eissir,} & \\
\text{Si la lessiez sule gisir;}
\end{align*}
\]  

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Tiers jur aprés, ç'oï cunter,} & \\
\text{Fet li sires semblant d'ererr.} & \\
\text{A sa femme ad dit e cuntê} & \\
\text{Que li reis l'ad par brief mandê,} & \\
\text{Mes hastivement revendra.} & \\
\text{De la chambre ist e l'us ferma.} & \\
\text{Dunc s'esteit la vielle levee, . . .}
\end{align*}
\]  

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{El demain a la matinee,} & \\
\text{Li sires lieve ainz l'ajurnee} & \\
\text{E dit qu'il voet aler chacier.} & \\
\text{La vielle le vait cuveier,} & \\
\text{Pus se recuche pur dormir,} & \\
\text{Kar ne poeit le jur choisir.}
\end{align*}
\]
The scene of his going to bed is equally ritualistic:

Quant li sires s'alot cuchier,
N'i ot chamberlenc ne huissier
Ki en la chambre osast entrer
Ne devant lui cirge alumer. (41-44)

We see, then, that both rising and going to bed are associated with locked doors and a sinister darkness which contribute to the negative side of the prison motif.

His reactions to beauty and happiness are equally sinister. Naturally enough he marries his wife for her beauty, but then he locks her up for it as though this were an acceptable reaction to beauty:

De cee ke ele iert bele e gente,
En li garder mist mut s'entente. (25-26)

The conversation between the old man and his sister on the increased happiness and beauty of the wife is rather amusing. They are alarmed when they finally realize the woman is becoming more beautiful and that she is suddenly happy to be alone all of the time. That is, happiness and increasing beauty are danger signs in their world:

En sun curage s'aparceit
Qu'autrement est k'il ne suleit.
Mescreance ad vers sa serur.
Il la met a reisun un jur
E dit que mut ad grant merveille
Que la dame si s'appareille;
Demande li que cee devezit.
La vielle dist qu'el ne saveit,
Kar nuls ne pot parler od li
Ne ele n'ot dru ne ami,
Fors tant que sule remaneit
Plus volentiers qu'el ne suleit. (229-240)

Their plan is for the sister to hide in a secret spot to spy on the wife to see what could be making her so happy.
The temporary triumph of the husband's prison world comes in the scene where he successfully sets a trap for and mortally wounds the bird-lover. The description of the weapons he uses emphasizes the cruel power of his oppressive material world which tortures a man in killing him:

Des engins faire fu hastifs  
A oirect le chevalier.  
Broches de fer fist granz furgier  
E acerer le chief devant:  
Suz ciel n'ad rasur plus trenchant! (283-288)

The detailed description of the wounds with its insistence on blood indicates that the ideal world is not only terminated, but torn apart violently because it is vulnerable to the more physically powerful demonic world:

Mes les broches furent devant:  
L'unique le fiert par mi le cors,  
Li sans vermeilz en sailli fors!  
Quant il se sot a mort nafrez,  
Desferre sei, enz est entrez.  
Devant la dame el lit descent,  
Que tuit li drap furent sanglez.  
Ele veit le sanc e la plaie,  
Mut anguisusement s'esmaie. (310-318)

The ideal world of la prison heureuse enters the lady's dark dungeon at a significant moment. She is alone on a spring day when all the birds are singing. She looks out of the window at the sunlight and makes a long lament. Her first complaints and demands are quite reasonable and are perhaps the same ones she had been making for the more than seven years of her incarceration. She would like to have a little more freedom, be able to go to church, and be able to talk with people. If she could only do these things she would be amenable to her husband inspite of the animosity
she feels for him (67-80). Then she becomes more indignant and curses her family and those who "gave" her to *cest gelus.* Suddenly and apparently for the first time, she lets her imagination wander and enter an ideal, legendary world that could meet her desires. It is the world of young, handsome, and courteous knights who love beautiful ladies. The abruptness of the change of tone in line 87 indicates that something very different is in store for the lady:

```
Maleeit seient mi parent
E li autre communalment
Ki a cest gelus me donerent
E de sun cors me marierent!
A forte corde trai e tir,
Il ne purrat jamés murir!
Quant il dut estre baptiziez,
Si fu el flum d'enfern plunjiez:
Dur sunt li nerf, dures les veines,
Ki de vif sanc sunt tutes pleines!
Mut ai sovent oi cunter
Que l'em suleit jadis trover
Aventures en cest pais
Ki rehaitouent les pensis.
Chevalier trovoent puceles
A lur talent, gentes e beles,
E dames trovoent amanz
Beaus e curteis, pruz e vaillanz,
Si que blasmees n'en esteient
Ne nul fors eles nes veeient. (81-100)
```

She ends her monologue with a prayer requesting such a lover.

Her prayer is answered immediately by the arrival of the bird-lover who creates with her the world which saves her from the destructive prison of the *gelus.* In several ways it is the exact opposite and fits well Brombert's description of *la prison heureuse.* For Brombert, *la prison heureuse* is a "cage merveilleuse" where one feels liberated from the servitudes of the world. Isolated from mundane reality one is able to look into oneself. It leads to "une
descente dans le moi," "un abandon à la joie de l'auto-
réflexion," "une quête de l'authenticité." Brombert notes
that it is often associated with bird imagery, by nature
ambiguous, since the bird, even in flight, recalls the cage,
perhaps a happy one, from which he escaped. The cherished
solitude of Yoncq is a solitude of l'ego which leads to intimacy.

Whereas the world of physical reality is that of age,
constraint, suspicions, and schedules, the lovers' world,
very real for them, is one of youth, beauty, spontaneity,
and kindness. While the husband lives according to strict
patterns, the lovers meet whenever the lady is alone and
desires her lover; she simply has to wish for him to come.
Time is one of the contingencies of the real world which the
lovers transcend. This idea is presented particularly well
in a passage which describes precisely the protection offered
by the locked doors of la prison heureuse. The tower which
was once terribly constraining is now the most ideal spot
imaginable:

Or il plest plus a surjurner
Qu'en nul autre deduit aler!
Sun ami voelt suvent veeir
E de lui sun delit aveir;
Des que sis sires s'en depart,
E nuit e jur e tost e tart
Ele l'ad tut sun pleisir. (217-223)

Line 222 in listing four monosyllabic nonconjunctive words
reduces time to an undifferentiated medium. Rather than
being divided into night, day, early, and late, it is divided
into time the lovers are together and time they are not.
The prophecies of the lover also contribute to the fluid
conception of time in the ideal world. Not only is present
time undifferentiated, but present and future are mingled
as he speaks of what is to come.

The most pervasive characteristic of the ideal world
is the happiness the lovers find. Whereas the first seven
years of incarceration lead the young woman to a total loss
of interest in her physical existence, a short time with her
lover makes her cherish her body and recover her lost beauty:

A grant joie s'amie leit.
El demain lieve tute seine;
Mut fu haitiee la semeine.
Sun cors teneit en grant chierté:
Tute recouvre sa beaute. (212-216)

Their relationship is idealized by the fact that the narrator
tells us very little about their time together: she says
they "play," "laugh," and "talk." Rather than describing
their trysts, she tells us abstractly of the happiness and
joie they gain from them. Happiness, and desire in particu-
lar, become counterparts to the old man's obsession with
locks. Every day as he locks the door the lady is lying in
bed wishing for her lover to come.

In addition to the ecstatic happiness the lovers enjoy,
there is also present a calmer tenderness which is created
by the simple kindness they show each other. This is evident
in the rather amusing aspects of the scene of the original
arrival of the bird-lover. When he first flies through the
window and turns into a handsome knight, the lady is terri-
fied and covers her head. Her head remains covered during
a lengthy speech where he tries to coax her gently to come
out from beneath her cover. During the speech he assures her that a goshawk is really a very nice bird:

Dame, fet, il, n'eiez pour:  
Gentil oisel ad en ostur!  

When she is finally reassured, she uncovers her head and says that she will love him if he believes in God. Rather than simply testifying that he does, he commences a long, dogmatic speech about the Fall and Redemption, and finally tells her to call the priest to bring communion. He will assume her form and receive the host to show he is Christian. He then crawls in bed with her, an action which could be considered suspect, except that the narrator assures the reader that his intentions are entirely honorable:

Delez li s'est cuchiez el lit,  
Mes il ne vout a li tuchier  
Ne d'acoler ne de baisier.  
A tant la veille est repeiririe;  
La dame trovat esveilliee,  
Dist li que tens est de lever:  
Ses dras li voleit aporter.  

The scene is quite a striking conglomeration. The knight is trying to reassure the lady that he is Christian and in the meantime delivers a sermon which probably interests no one. The narrator, in defending the knight's motives, lists all the things he would like to do while he is in bed with the lady waiting for the old woman to come in. The young woman in an effort to find out if the knight is Christian lies and according to legalistic criteria defiles the sacrament. The poor old lady who comes in simply to pick up the dirty laundry is plunged into a traumatic situation because she finds herself compelled to go against her exigent
brother's commands and allow a man, the priest, to enter the young woman's room while he is away.

The old woman represents a constant threat to the lovers' ideal world. The first of three confrontations of the two worlds comes in the scene where she is hiding in a secret place spying on the young woman. The presentation of the scene gives preeminence to the lovers because, although the reader knows the lady is observing the scene, her reaction is not described until the entire scene has taken place. The narrator ignores chronology and presents the joy of the lovers before the shock of the old lady:

La dame jut, pas ne dormi,
Kar mut desire sun ami.
Venuz i est, pas ne demure,
Ne trespasse terme ne hure.
Ensemble funt joie mut grant
E par parole e par semblant,
De si ke tens fu de lever,
Kar dunc li estuveit aler.
Cele le vit, si l'esgarda,
Coment il vint e il ala.
De ceo ot ele grant pour
Qu'hume le vit e pus ostur.  (267-278)

By the time of the second confrontation we see that the two worlds are entirely separated, at least poetically. The jealous husband places elaborate traps in the window through which the bird-lover will enter, but neither knight nor lady sees them before the damage is done. When the lady follows him, she, while pregnant, is able to jump out of a window twenty feet above the ground without harm. Thus, once again, the lovers are not constrained by the contingencies of the real world.
The final confrontation comes in the last scene where Yonec, a product of the ideal world, cuts off the head of the representative of the demonic world of the tower prison. Yonec is not actually a part of the ideal world since it has been destroyed, but an idealized character in a real world. His description resembles that of many other heroes of the collection:

Sis fiz fu nez e bien nuriz  
E bien gardez e bien cheriz.  
Yonec le firent numer.  
El regné ne pot hom trover  
Si bel, si pruz ne si vaillant,  
Si large ne si despendant.  
Quant il fu venuz en eé,  
A chevalier l'unt adubé.  

With the help of the sword he received from his supernatural father, he destroys the enemy. He then becomes king of his father's kingdom which is a mysterious world somewhere between the totally idealized world of la prison heureuse and the demonic tower prison.

Although the intimate earthly paradise of the lovers is destroyed with the death of the knight, a certain idealism must live on to carry his son to his triumph at the end of the tale. This is accomplished by a certain dream-like or magical atmosphere which is first created in the atemporal atmosphere of la prison heureuse and is at least latently present until the end. It is evident in the scene where the lady, old man, and Yonec travel to Karlion to celebrate St. Aaron's Day, but it is most obvious in the earlier scene where the lady pursues her wounded lover to his mysterious kingdom. She jumps out of her tower window dressed only in
her chemise and begins to follow a trail of blood. She comes to a mountain with an entrance sprinkled with blood. She cannot see beyond the entrance because of darkness but enters anyway. She follows the pathway until it leads her to an open space and there finds a beautiful walled city whose buildings are made of silver:

La trace ensiut par mi le pré.
Asez pres ot une cité.
De mur fu close tut entur;
N'i ot mesun, sale ne tur
Ki ne parust tute d'argent;
Mut sunt riche li mandement.
Devers le burc sunt li mareis
E les forez e li difeis.
De l'autre part, vers le dunjun,
Curt une ewe tut envirun;
Ileoc arivoent les nefs,
Plus i avie de treis cenz tres.  (359-370)

It is interesting to note that Marie included the specific information of the 300 ships in the harbor which at this point distracts slightly from the emotional crisis at hand, but because of its simplicity and brevity it does not significantly disturb the tone of the passage. The atmosphere of the city is quite eerie. The young woman neither hears nor sees anyone until she comes to her lover's castle. There she enters a beautiful bedroom where she finds a sleeping knight. Since she does not know him she goes on. In a larger room she finds only a bed with a knight sleeping on it. In the third room she finds her lover's bed and her lover:

En la tierce chambre est entree:
Le lit sun ami ad trové.
Li pecol sunt d'or esmeré;
Ne sai mie les dras preisier;
Li cirge e li chandelier,
Ki nuit e jur sunt alumé,
Valent tut l'or d'une cité.
Si tost cum ele l'ad veu,
Le chevalier ad cuneu. (386-394)

The emphasis here is obviously on the mysterious and magnificent physical setting. The text describes the beauty of the lover's bed before saying anything about the lover. When the two talk, the knight tells the lady she must leave because he fears for her life; however, he gives her a magic ring and a sword to help her. When she is one-half league away, she hears bells ringing and people mourning in the city which only moments ago had been deserted. She faints four times on the return trip and passes through the same mountain before returning to her husband's home in the real world.

The idealized conception of love reaches its culmination at the end of the tale. We have seen in la prison heureuse that the love relationship is reciprocal, intimate, and determined to overcome obstacles. The lover cannot leave his home unless the lady wishes for him. When he declares his love to her, he tells her he has never loved anyone else and never will. When he is wounded, she pursues him through an obstacle course to have the opportunity to see him one last time. The ultimate sublimation of love comes in the scene where the lady dies and we learn she will be buried with her lover. She has given birth to their son, reared him, and passed on to him the sword he will use to kill the old man. Now she is ready to be reunited with her beloved whom she joins in a magnificent tomb, another archetypal prison heureuse.
NOTES ON CHAPTER 13

1. Subsequent references will explain what is meant by this motif in this chapter. The term itself and basic idea come from Victor Brombert, "Esquisse de la prison heureuse," Revue d'histoire littéraire de France (Mars-Avril, 1971), No. 2, 247-261.
CHAPTER 14

CONCLUSION

After a consideration of the relative influence of reality and convention in each of the twelve tales, it becomes evident that the collection as a whole cannot be termed "idealistic" in its conception of love or, more generally, in its world view. The influence of conventions is obvious throughout, although it is certainly more pervasive in the tales on the right side of the scale. Graphic descriptions of objects and situations in the manner of Balzac, often associated with realism, are not limited to the realistic tales. Such descriptions can reduce objects or situations to their material existence and thus insist on their mundane nature, or elevate them by insisting on their exotic, magical, or idealistic nature. What characterizes the realistic tales is the tendency to reduce to banal characters, situations, and emotions which are idealized in conventional romance and courtly literature.

The unity of the collection cannot be found, then, in a consistently idealistic conception of love and world vision. Other elements do permeate the Lais, however, and contribute to their unity and message concerning love: the tendency of the narrator to compromise the superficially idealistic tone of a tale with ironic, mundane, or amusing statements; the
incongruity of idealistic descriptions of characters and their ignoble and unheroic deeds and attitudes; the disintegration of personalities and relationships; the unsatisfying, unwholesome, and ephemeral nature of love; physical and psychological violence, especially as it is inflicted in ostensibly close personal relationships.

These elements, incompatible with most criticism of the Lais which insists on Marie's idealistic conception of love, coalesce in a theme which unifies the collection and contributes significantly to its universal import. This theme is the effort of Man to overcome his separateness and loneliness by entering into satisfying intimate relationships and his reaction when he finds himself unable to do so. Thus love—especially an idealized conception of it—is not the main theme of the Lais. The unity of the collection is found rather in the efforts of men and women—unsuccessful in almost every case—to overcome their sense of isolation by establishing love relationships. Throughout the tales, individuals reach out to others, trying to form bonds which would create a feeling of union to replace the reality of their aloneness. For the most part, however, they are left groping. Elaborate means are employed to aid communication (the message sent with the corpse of the nightingale in Laustic, the swan in Milun, the stick in Chievrefoil), but satisfying, intimate, and enduring communication is never achieved. There is very little dialogue in the entire collection. The narrator's technique of introducing the characters one by
one serves to further isolate them. In some tales, characters move from one relationship to another searching for satisfaction they never find. Eliduc finally abandons love of women entirely, either to attempt to form a relationship with God or to give up on love definitively. Equitan's primary occupation is the pursuit of erotic pleasure at the expense of all other relationships and responsibilities. In several lays, relationships are formed in direct retaliation to the termination of previous ones—through death of a wife in Les Deus amanz and rejection by a mother in Le Fresne. Bisclavret forms an intimate bond with the king, but this relationship is as much a negative reaction to his wife's perfidy as a positive attraction to the king's magnanimity. Disappointment and dissatisfaction in love lead to violence and destruction in Equitan, Bisclavret, Laustic, and Yonec. Physical and psychological violence are used to form and maintain love relationships in Eliduc and Chaitivel. The motif of disintegration and the incongruity between descriptions of characters and the reality of their lives thwart any tendency toward fusion, for a personality must have an integrity of its own before it can merge with another; otherwise it is simply dominated or repressed. The narrator's ironical comments which undermine idealistic elements contribute to what in the end is a rather cynical view of interpersonal relationships: intimacy is the ideal that Man desires most; yet because of obstacles within him, his society, or the object of his love, he is not able to attain
it. He is condemned to forming superficial relationships with people who are physically attractive and ostensibly courageous or charming, yet with whom he cannot communicate and who cannot satisfy his needs.
I. Works Dealing with Conventions


II. Works Dealing with Marie de France and the Lais


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