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A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE ROLES OF WOMEN
IN THE LAIS OF MARIE DE FRANCE

By

Jeri S. Guthrie

B.A., University of Montana, 1972

Presented in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

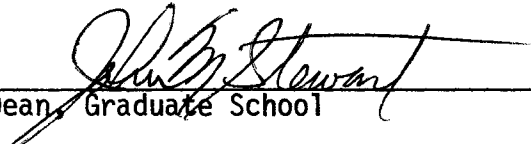
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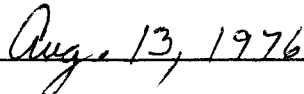
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French

A Critical Analysis of the Roles of Women in the Lais of Marie de FranceDirector: Maureen C. Curnow *mcc*

A critical examination of the women in the Lais proves that in her rendition of the twelve Celtic legends Marie de France refutes the intellectual categorization of love inherent in the twelfth-century codes of courtly love. Marie de France's judgment of the women characters reveals her literary and philosophical autonomy as well as her personal moral convictions. The poetess particularly condemns the adulterous nature of fin' amors, the code of love which was initiated by the troubadour poets in medieval Southern France. Although she accepts the concepts of discretion, moderation, and suffering as admirable qualities in love relationships, Marie de France condemns the lack of sincere personal engagement in the definitions of courtly love in the didactic works of Ovid and Andreas Capellanus. Her emphasis in the Lais is on the women characters, who though frequently less active in the action of the plot, define and resolve the essential conflict in each lay. In its entirety the collection of the Lais denies a rigid association of woman with the negative figure of Eve or the literary idolization of "la dompna hautaine". Her adept development of the diverse personalities of the women in the Lais is evidence that Marie de France historically is not only an important woman writer, but a humanist and one of the first feminist writers in French literature.

This analysis of the women characters is divided into four chapters. The first chapter is a brief introduction to the literary and social influences of the twelfth century Renaissance and to the life of Marie de France. Comparative literary studies offer parallels between the Lais and the Brut, the Roman d'Enée, and the earliest versions of the Arthurian Legend. The lay as a genre is traced from its Breton origin. The second chapter is a study of women in Chaitivel, Bisclavret, and Equitan who are condemned by the poetess for their betrayal of loyal admirers or husbands. The third chapter treats unhappily and unwillingly married women whose adultery is excused by Marie de France as the only escape from arranged marriages. The fourth chapter is an examination of the flawless women in Lanval, Fresne, and Eliduc. These ideal women represent a literary parallel of the medieval cult of the Virgin.

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CHAPTER I

THE LAIS OF MARIE DE FRANCE: BIOGRAPHICAL, SOCIAL, AND LITERARY INFLUENCES

The purpose of this study is an analysis of the roles of women in the Lais of Marie de France in order to show that Marie de France did not accept the codes of courtly love of the twelfth century. In my individual examination of the women in the Lais it will be seen that they are neither condemned nor idealized on the basis of a general stereotype; each is judged by standards of personal merit. As we shall see in this study it is chiefly through her portrayal of women in the Lais that Marie de France condemns the capricious nature of courtly literature's ideal woman. Selfishness, vanity, and disloyalty bring unfortunate results, but women who express charity, mercy, and sincerity in love relationships are duly rewarded by the poetess. An analysis of Marie de France's treatment of the women characters will reveal a humanist viewpoint and a flexible justice, one in which mitigating circumstances will alter judgment. I shall group the women in the twelve lays into three categories: condemned women, pardoned women, and ideal women. The three groups reflect the poetess' judgment of the women characters in love relationships, and simultaneously reveal Marie de France's particular condemnation of fin' amors. Through a study of the women in the Lais Marie de France's personal philosophy of love and her basically christian ideals will become evident.

As an introduction to the analysis of the women characters in each lay, three categories of introductory information are reviewed in Chapter I. The first category includes the generally accepted facts of the life of Marie de France and her literary background, an historical analysis of the lay as a genre, and the chronology of Marie de France's three works. In the second category a resumé of the social and literary climate of the twelfth-century Renaissance reflects the sources of Marie de France's popularity in her own time. Two medieval codes of love, amour courtois and fin' amors, are defined and contrasted, and Capellanus' De arte honeste amandi is briefly outlined. Finally, Marie de France's rejection of the codes of love is explained. Her condemnation of fin' amors is an essential element of the women characters in the Lais, as it is chiefly by means of her portrayal of women in love that Marie de France refutes fin' amors.

Marie de France, the first renowned woman poet in France, has been so named since the literary scholar Claude Fauchet referred to her as "Marie de France" in 1581. Although her popularity among medievalists has never waned, little is known of her life. In her three works, the Lais, the Fables, and the Espurgatoire saint Patrice, she names herself simply "Marie". The only precision she gives appears in verse four of the epilogue to the Fables, "Marie ai nom si sui de France".¹ Some of her biographers have associated Marie de France with two historical figures of the twelfth century, but no absolute verification or consensus of opinion supports either hypothesis. Three reputable medievalists,

¹Ernest Hoepffner, Les Lais de Marie de France (Mayenne. Joseph Floch, 1971), p. 49.

Ernest Hoepffner,² Jean Frappier,³ and Jean Rychner,⁴ agree that Marie de France was originally from France, but that she lived and wrote in England. They do not believe that she was a member of the ruling Plantagenêt family, as several other biographers have suggested. In seeking facts about her life, some biographers have inconclusively associated Marie de France with either Marie of Champagne, daughter of Eleanor of Aquitaine and Louis VII,⁵ or Mary, abbess of Shaftesbury and half-sister of Henry II of England.⁶

Her biographers generally agree that Marie de France lived and wrote in England. There is little doubt that she was closely associated with the royal court of Henry II Plantagenêt and Eleanor of Aquitaine, who were married in Poitiers on May 18, 1152, and who acceded to the throne of England in 1154. The *Lais* are dedicated to Henry II, "Ki tant estes pruz e curteis,/ A ki tute joie s'encline/ E en ki qu'er tuz biens racine," (v. 44-46).⁷ In 1154 and 1155 the troubadour Bertrand de Ventadour visited the Anglo-Norman court under the patronage of the Queen. One may easily deduce that Marie de France's knowledge of the

²Hoepffner, Lais de Marie de France, pp. 49-50.

³Jean Frappier, "Vues sur les conceptions courtoises dans les littératures d'oc et d'oïl au douzième siècle," Cahiers de Civilisation Médiévale, II (Avril-Juin, 1959), p. 154.

⁴Jean Rychner, Les Lais de Marie de France (Paris: Editions Champion, 1973), p. VII.

⁵Hoepffner, Lais de Marie de France, p. 49.

⁶Hoepffner, Lais de Marie de France, p. 50.

⁷Rychner, Les Lais de Marie de France (Paris: Editions Champion, 1973), "Prologue," verses 44-46. (All quotations of the Lais and titles of the Lais in this study will be from the Rychner edition. Quotations will be for verse number in the Rychner edition for each lay.)

emerging codes of amour courtois and fin' amors was enhanced by his presence.⁸

Several recurring motifs in the Lais have been interpreted by some biographers as clues to Marie de France's own life. Since no evidence exists to warrant an autobiographical reading of the Lais, these motifs more readily illustrate twelfth-century life. Monastic life is an important scenario in the lays of Yonec, Fresne, and especially Eliduc. A rather stereotyped image of the mal-mariée, the unhappily married woman, emerges in the lays of Guigemar, Laüstic, Milun, and Yonec. In her carefully sympathetic portrayal of Lanval, Marie de France gives personal expression to the fate of a stranger in a foreign land. In these three aspects of medieval life, certainly more than the life of one woman is described. Though no evidence indicates that Marie de France was mal-mariée, she did indeed live away from her homeland. Her literary knowledge indicates an aristocratic background and possibly a convent education. However, these motifs from the Lais are not definitively autobiographical information, and one must conclude with Hoepffner that "nous ne savons rien du rang social que Marie avait occupé dans son temps."⁹

Marie de France had a vast knowledge of the literature and science of her time. In the Prologue to the Lais she defends her serious attention to study:

⁸Frappier, "Vues sur les conceptions courtoises," p. 154.

⁹Hoepffner, Lais de Marie de France, p. 52.

Ki de vice se voelt defendre
 Estudier deit e entendre
 A grevose ovre comencier
 Par ceo s'en puet plus esloignier
 E de grant dolur delivrer. (v. 23-27).

In a less humble appraisal of her duty as a poetess Marie de France believes that "Ki Deus ad dune escience/ E de parler bone eloquence/ Ne s'en deit taisir ne celer,/ Ainz se deit voluntiers mustrer." (v. 1-4, Prologue of the Lais). Her work as a translator proves that Marie de France was multilingual: she translated the Fables, attributed to King Alfred, from English to French, and the Espurgatoire saint Patrice, a Latin treatise by Henri de Saltrey, from Latin to French. Several allusions in the Lais indicate that Marie de France was well acquainted with the Brut by Wace, the Roman de Thebes and the Roman d'Enée, and several of Ovid's works.¹⁰ In Guigemar there is an overt condemnation of Ovid, presumably of his popular Remedia amoris, which Marie de France, like Chrétien de Troyes in Cligès, refers to as the Enseignements.¹¹ Marie de France was probably familiar with a more primitive version of the Tristan legend than we may now refer to, as Chievrefoil would indicate. There is, however, no evidence that she was versed in the Arthurian novel of the style of Chrétien de Troyes. Though Lanval certainly revolves around the Arthurian court, Arthur and Guenièvre are not characterized as they are in later versions of the Arthurian legend. An essential element of the traditional Arthurian novel, heroic adventure, is not to be found in Lanval.

¹⁰Hoepffner, Lais de Marie de France, p. 53.

¹¹Hoepffner, Lais de Marie de France, p. 53.

In contrast to the diversity of subject in her three major works, one finds in each of the works a unifying interest in the supernatural. In his introduction to the edition of the Lais, Jean Rychner comments on this:

En faisant surgir l'irrationnel et le merveilleux dans le décor ordinaire de la vie, ce n'est pas le merveilleux que Marie tue, c'est la vie qu'elle poétise.¹²

The Lais represent a folk literature destined for the société courtoise and suited to its concern for the problems of love. The Fables present a practical, secular morality. The Christian morality is presented in Marie de France's didactic translation of the Espurgatoire saint Patrice. For Hoepffner the unifying factor of these works is le merveilleux:

... le merveilleux celtique dans les lais, le merveilleux chrétien dans le voyage du chevalier Owein dans le monde d'Outre-Tombe, et dans les Fables aussi le trait surnaturel, qui en constitue la donnée fondamentale, d'animaux doués de la parole et d'une intelligence humaine.¹³

The lay as a genre has been traced to a Breton origin, and it was in Brittany that the medieval lay flourished. The lay or Celtic laïd dates from at least the twelfth century when Armorican poets sang their folk legends to the accompaniment of a rote or a harp. These legends were early referred to as lais bretons because of their origin. The story may have been briefly narrated before it was played by a jongleur breton. Hoepffner offers a convincing hypothesis that the lay was originally comprised of two parts, a brief narration of a fantastic story followed by a purely instrumental composition, a melodic souvenir of the adventure.

¹²Rychner, Lais de Marie de France, p. xviii.

¹³Hoepffner, Lais de Marie de France, p. 54.

A côté de ce dernier on a donc à présent le "lai narratif." De sorte que, par un singulier retour, le lai musical ou lyrique nous ramène à son prétendu point de départ, le conte, avec lequel il partage le titre et auquel il donne à son tour son propre nom, ce conte, qui, en se dégageant du lai qu'il accompagnait jusqu'ici, va devenir à présent un nouveau genre littéraire.¹⁴

The best example of this distinction between the story and the music of a lay is in Chievrefoil. Marie de France introduces the story as an explanation for the musical lay:

Asez me plest e bien le voil,
Del lai qu'hum nume Chievrefoil,
Que la verite vus en cunt
Pur qui fu fez, coment e dunt. (v. 1-4).

The epilogue tells us that Tristan composed the musical lay, and Marie de France has told its story: "Tristram, ki bien saveit harper,/ En aveit fet un nuvel lai;" (v. 112-113).

As these folk songs became popular the poets may have presented the same song in several dialects: Anglo-Norman, the language of the Plantagenêt court, Celtic or Armorican, and Francian. Marie de France gives translations of the titles for three of her lays: Bisclavret, Chievrefoil, and Laüstic. For Bisclavret we have a Norman title alternative: "Bisclavret ad nun en bretan,/ Garwaf l'apelent li Norman." (v. 3-4). The epilogue of Chievrefoil, a Francian title, offers an English translation, "Gotelef l'apelent Engleis." (v. 115). To Laüstic, the Breton title, Marie de France adds. "Ceo est 'russignol' en franceis/ E 'nihtegale' en dreit engleis." (v. 5-6). She may well have included these translations in imitation of the jongleurs, who probably translated at least their titles to suit a certain audience.

¹⁴Hoeffner, Lais de Marie de France, pp. 43-47.

The title is the connecting link between the musical lay and the story it recalls. Often this connection between title and story is obscure, as in Laüstic, Chievrefoil, or Chaitivel, and the story is related as an explanation of the title. There is a parallel in the literature of Southern France of the same era. The razo, a brief prose narration, precedes certain songs of the troubadours as an explanation of the origin of the song.¹⁵

Marie de France's knowledge of literature as revealed in her works, as well as her position in the Plantagenêt court, combine to set chronological limits on her three major works. Since it is widely accepted that she wrote at the court of Henry II Plantagenêt, her most active period falls between 1154, the year of his accession to the Anglo-Norman throne, and 1189, the year of his death. The Arthurian background in Lanval lacks the heroic, epic adventures that characterize the later Arthurian tradition of Chrétien de Troyes. Marie de France was, however, very familiar with the Brut translated by Wace. Wace, a Norman monk, completed his translation of Geoffroy de Monmouth's Historia regum Britanniae from Latin to French in 1155.¹⁶ It is in Wace's translation that Marie de France first encountered the rudiments of the Arthurian Round Table legends. Marie de France's description of Lanval is very close to Wace's description of Arthur. There are several corresponding passages in the Brut and Lanval.

In Lanval and in the Brut the queen, Guenièvre, is negatively portrayed. This portrayal, the more ancient one, is revived in Chrétien

¹⁵Hoepffner, Lais de Marie de France, p. 46.

¹⁶Hoepffner, Lais de Marie de France, pp. 25-26.

de Troyes's Lancelot, but in the other legends by Chrétien de Troyes she is an admirable minor character. Thus, Marie de France must have been compiling the Lais before Chrétien de Troyes became widely popular. As Hoepffner notes in his study of the chronology of the Lais: "Après la vogue des romans de Chrétien, Marie n'aurait certainement plus pu faire jouer à Guenièvre le rôle déplaisant qu'elle lui assigne dans Lanval."¹⁷

Several noteworthy influences from the Roman de Thebes and the Roman d'Enée place the Lais after 1150. The Roman de Thebes was translated shortly after 1150 by an anonymous clerk at Poitiers. Marie de France's descriptions of the tent and of the beauty of Lanval's fairy show the influence of the Roman de Thebes. The description of the fairy in Lanval is very close to those of Antigone and Ismène in the Roman de Thebes and to that of Camille in the Roman d'Enée. Hoepffner calls Lanval "une des premières tentatives de narration courtoise dans le cadre nouveau du monde arthurien," and would date it soon after the appearance of the Brut.¹⁸

Hoepffner's in-depth chronological studies date the Lais after 1155. As a probable terminus ante quem he notes an imitation of the lay of Eliduc, Ille et Galeron by Gautier d'Arras, which dates from 1167. Eliduc, one of the more complex lays in terms of theme and character development, was certainly not one of the first that Marie de France wrote. In his conclusion Hoepffner states that Marie de France wrote all three of her works between 1160 and 1190: the Lais between 1155 and

¹⁷Ernest Hoepffner, "Pour la chronologie des lais de Marie de France," Romania, LIX (1933), p. 356.

¹⁸Hoepffner, "Pour la chronologie des Lais," p. 370.

1167, the Fables between 1167 and 1185, and the Espurgatoire saint Patrice between 1185 and 1190.¹⁹

Marie de France was among the artists whose literary works brought about the twelfth-century Renaissance. The resultant social climate increased the interest and the audience for folk literature such as the Lais because, like the sixteenth-century Renaissance, this period evoked a rebirth of humanism. Marie de France reflects a humanist philosophy not only in her choice of Breton legends for a literary work, but even more in her realistic portrayal of women in the Lais. Concurrently, the social and political changes in the twelfth century improved the status of at least the aristocratic women.

Medieval society was gradually altered by the social and intellectual developments that introduced the Renaissance of the twelfth century. The role of the church, especially in intellectual and literary affairs, was changed during this period. The beginnings of the schism that led to the Reformation may be found in the twelfth-century Renaissance.

In the eleventh century one of the most important effects of the feudal tradition became evident. The power of the regional seigneur, and even of his vassals, increased as the feudal system became entrenched in society. Traveling merchants and pilgrims opened new horizons for isolated regional courts. Inheritance of land, money, and power became possible in an established feudal system. The formation of this hereditary class of nobles and chevaliers in the early twelfth century was a social transformation caused by the enlarging of the economic

¹⁹Hoepffner, Lais de Marie de France, pp. 54-55.

domain and the development of court life along a uniform code of conduct. The twelfth century in France was a period of relative peace. The fervor of the crusades had not yet begun. The concentration of power, not only in regions in the feudal system, but also in the expansion of certain regional rulers' power, restrained the petty wars and rivalry of the earlier feudal state. In his History of Medieval Europe Maurice Keen explains the stability of the feudal state brought about in the twelfth century.

The efforts of a nascent bureaucracy to establish a degree of system and order in estate management and in the activities of courts of justice made the ruler's personal intervention necessary less often, and enabled him to control wider estates more effectively.²⁰

Since the right to rule over lands and men was accepted to be heritable, empires were more easily built in the marriage bed than by the sword.²¹

Because of these new developments in the twelfth-century feudal society, the ruling class had a renewed interest in the fine arts and in literature. They turned to the intellectuals of their period, the clerks who possessed the total knowledge of the time, yet who were not strongly attached to the church, and held only "bénéfices ecclésiastiques," or minor orders.²² From the alliance of these clergymen and the regional nobles the Renaissance of the twelfth century gained its impetus.

The development of a hereditary class of regional nobility and of its code of conduct occurred concurrently in the South and the North of

²⁰Maurice Keen, The Pelican History of Medieval Europe (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England. Penguin Books, Ltd., 1968), p. 104.

²¹Keen, Pelican History of Medieval Europe, p. 105.

²²Frapplier, "Vues sur les conceptions courtoises," p. 147.

France. There are, however, important distinctions between the fin' amors of the South and the amour courtois of the North. The most authoritative studies of these two societies have been done by Moshé Lazar in Amour courtois et fin' amors dans la littérature du douzième siècle and by Jean Frappier in Vues sur les conceptions courtoises dans les littératures d'oc et d'oïl au douzième siècle. Although both scholars clearly define amour courtois and fin' amors and both recognize the different effects of these social codes in the North and South respectively, Lazar contends that both fin' amors and amour courtois originated in the ideology of the Hispano-Arab troubadour poets of the early Middle Ages. Frappier believes that amour courtois developed independently in the North of France. Lazar admits the more liberal nature of fin' amors:

En passant du Midi dans le Nord, l'idéologie de l'amour courtois s'est transformée. Elle a abandonné en cours de route une partie de sa densité érotique, et surtout, son exaltation de l'adultère.²³

In the twelfth century a literary transition occurs: genres dealing with fin' amors and amour courtois become more important than the genre of the epic hero, the chanson de geste. The chanson de geste is replaced by the roman courtois in the North and the chanson lyrique in the South of France. In the new literature the exterior action of the epic hero is thus replaced by an emphasis on the individual in emotional and psychological dilemmas.

The controlling unity between the two ideologies of North and South is found in mezura, discretion and emotional balance in love

²³Moshé Lazar, Amour courtois et fin' amors dans la littérature du douzième siècle (Paris. Klincksieck, 1964), p. 14.

relationships, and joven, or spontaneous good nature. Mezura implies a savoir-vivre, self-control, modesty, patience, and, especially, moderation in desire. In a close examination of the Lais of Marie de France we will find that a lack of measure is the most serious fault of a chevalier or his lady. As the code of courtoisie is discipline in society, mezura is discipline of self. Frappier describes joven as "disponibilité spontanée, sans arrière-pensée ni calcul à se montrer généreux et à savoir bien courtoiser les dames."²⁴ In essence, moderation and humility in love must become simultaneously a natural reaction and an ideal. These two aspects of courtoisie, mezura and joven, were shared in the North and in the South, and make it possible to define both amour courtois and fin' amors as the spontaneous moral conduct of the courtly lover.

In the North of France the new ideology was a more conservative one than the fin' amors of the Midi. There was more conciliation with the traditional mores and with the church, since the adulterous nature of these love relationships was deemphasized. All the rights and privileges of idealized love were at least theoretically assured, with or without marriage, in the twelfth-century Renaissance society. In the North the moral question of adultery became a more heated debate than it was in the South. However, in both regions emphasis was placed on the natural need for love and the irrationality of denying an essential human need. The inherent contradiction with Christian morality remained a moot point. Marie de France's position vis à vis the moral debate of

²⁴Frappier, "Vues sur les conceptions courtoises," p. 139.

courtly love is a major theme throughout the Lais. In this study I shall examine her ideas as they appear in each particular lay.

Marie de France judges the validity of each love relationship on its own merits. Her criteria are mezura, discretion, and fidelity. Her judgment of the characters is determined by their individual circumstances and by her respect for the qualities of Christian generosity and humility. Throughout the Lais Marie de France discredits intellectual categorization of love. She does not accept either code of behavior completely. In Guigemar she explicitly attacks Ovid. Chaitivel illustrates the cruelty of a capriciously courtoise lady. In Bisclavret and in Equitan deception and adultery are severely punished. Although Eliduc emerges from the tradition of le mari aux deux femmes, Marie de France insists on the platonic nature of his extramarital affair and does not allow him to love two women at the same time.

Andreas Capellanus, in his three volume didactic essay, De arte honeste amandi, first defined the philosophical argument about love in terms of human need.²⁵ De arte honeste amandi, which was popularly received in the courts of Northern France, was written between 1184 and 1185 at the request of Eleanor of Aquitaine. The work was initially commissioned for Marie of Champagne who was soon to be married. The first two volumes describe the art of love. The third volume, presumably written in self-defense, refutes the first two, but failed to protect the author from a declaration of heresy.

²⁵Frederick W. Locke, editor, The Art of Courtly Love, (A translation of De arte honeste amandi by Andreas Capellanus), (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1957).

Capellanus outlines two distinct types of love, purus amor and mixtus amor. Pure love is a spiritual affection in which the man and woman patiently refuse carnal pleasure until the perfect moment. This pure love is possible only for the aristocratic class, high and low nobility, and a chosen few from the new class, the bourgeoisie. However, Capellanus adds that the highest nobility and the most discrete, prudent and experienced lovers are the clergy. Mixtus amor, or common love, is carnal love and a less desirable relationship, though probably by far the more prevalent. Capellanus insists that one must love in this world; not to love is both unnatural and unreasonable. He thus openly attacks the dogma and the practice of celibacy in the church. In a series of dialogues between a man who represents the new troubadours' concept of fin' amors and a woman who defends Christian morality and tradition, Capellanus defines the debate that was a part of court life in the 1180's and long after Capellanus was forgotten.

The third volume refutes categorically the first two and is traditionally anti-feminist in its theological argument. Capellanus describes woman as the most impure creature in the world. She embodies evil temptations, egoism, greed, and jealousy. To love or desire a woman is the greatest sin on earth. He focuses on the much debated question of the nature of woman, the debate on the antithetical images of Eve and Mary. Capellanus concludes De arte honeste amandi with the dilemma that what is true to human nature and reason, that is fin' amors and amour courtois, is false to divine grace and authority.

In spite of Capellanus' unresolved argument, the social relationships prescribed in the new code of conduct integrated readily with the

feudalism and chivalry of the North. In the Arthurian legends a fundamental theme is love as the inspiration of a knight's prowess. The rites of fidelity between lovers are parallels of those between vassal and serf. The exchange of lovers' gifts, or drueries, symbolizes the exchange of desired fidelity. Geoffroy de Monmouth's Historia regum Britanniae (1136) advises ladies of the court to insure their chastity by refusing the advances of any knight who has not proven his courage in combat at least three times. In this manner not only would a lady's honor be preserved, but her affection would ennoble a knight.²⁶ Wace reiterates this suggestion in his translation in 1155, which, as I have noted above, was probably read by Marie de France. Because of this alliance of chivalry and courtly love, the courtly tradition in the North was considered less heretical and was integrated more completely into the aristocratic society. Frappier expresses a strong faith in the independence of the Northern amour courtois:

Le thème fondamental des romans antiques et des romans bretons, l'alliance courtoise de l'amour et de la chevalerie, dépend d'une tradition bien établie dans le Nord avant toute influence de la poésie d'oc.²⁷

In elevating woman to a superior position in love relationships both social codes conflict sharply with traditional Catholic anti-feminism and produce a lay literature that was never wholly acceptable to religious authority. Even in the North, where by the end of the twelfth century the courtly tradition was well entrenched in society,

²⁶Frappier, "Vues sur les conceptions courtoises," p. 155.

²⁷Frappier, "Vues sur les conceptions courtoises," p. 156.

the debates between the goliards, or minor clergy, and the féodaux, or knights, on the nature and value of woman continued for centuries.²⁸

The ambiguous discussion on the nature of woman was not limited to the goliards and féodaux. The role of Mary in church teaching had been greatly changed during the eleventh and early twelfth centuries by the popularity of miracles, plays in which Mary most frequently interceded for sinners seeking redemption. As a woman intervening to protect the weak from the strong, Mary in the miracles represented the mother in feudal patriarchy. The people identified very strongly with this realistic portrayal of Mary, and gradually she became at least as revered as the more abstract concept of the Trinity. The number and variation of these miracles attest to their acceptance by the medieval Christian. Originally the miracles as well as the mystère dramas were presented publicly as a means of teaching and illustrating the message of the Bible for the largely illiterate populace. The emergence of a charismatic, positive image of Mary as a pro-feminist influence in secular literature was probably not foreseen by church authorities. In the Lais, Lanval's fairy and the wife of Eliduc intervene on behalf of the physical, if not the spiritual, salvation of their men. These two idealized women suggest the cult of the Virgin in their merciful charity.

In secular and in religious ideology, the "Mary mystique" challenged the tradition of associating womanhood only with the negative image of Eve. This question of religious doctrine and intellectual debate inevitably found expression in literature. As the culte

²⁸Frappier, "Vues sur les conceptions courtoises," p. 148.

d'adoration evolved around Mary in the church, in literature a cult developed around the noble, sought-after lady.

Marie de France could accept neither the exalted, dominating woman of courtly literature nor the damned woman of medieval religious tradition. In the Lais she realistically portrays women as intellectually and emotionally equal to men. The women are as capable of human error, or of superior grace, as men. She was vulnerable to criticism for this unusually humane viewpoint.

The Lais of Marie de France was one of the literary works criticized as literature written by a woman for women. The first of Marie de France's contemporaries to criticize the Lais was an Anglo-Norman poet, Denys Pyramus, who, like Marie de France, lived in England. He criticized the Lais as literature to be appreciated by noble ladies, and implied that the Lais had been written only for an audience of women.²⁹ During the twelfth-century Renaissance women were indeed involved in literature. Eleanor of Aquitaine was the more important patron in the Plantagenêt court in England. Her daughter, Marie of Champagne, was an avant-garde patron of her contemporaries. The new literature of amour courtois represented "un raffinement des mœurs ... et des soins empressés auprès des dames qui dans les cours donnent le ton des relations sociales."³⁰ Certainly the twelfth-century society and its social and moral codes were not the unique invention or arena of women. However, the changed definition of woman in religious and

²⁹Alice Kemp-Welch, Of Six Medieval Women (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1913), p. 29.

³⁰Frappier, "Vues sur les conceptions courtoises," p. 135.

literary circles during the twelfth century did change the status of aristocratic women in medieval society.

In the Lais, Marie de France does not condemn or reward the actions of her characters on the basis of a prescribed code of conduct, such as fin' amors or amour courtois. The fate of each character generally depends on individual motivations and consequences, not on a preordained moral system. Whether Marie de France as a translator was consciously preserving the unregimented justice of the Breton legends, or whether she was indirectly criticizing the regimentation of morality in codes such as those of courtly love cannot be proven. In either case the unique value of the Lais remains intact.

In translating and popularizing these relatively original legends, Marie de France expresses her personal response to the generally accepted and codified morality of the twelfth century. Her emphases reveal a natural, humane outlook on love and justice that illustrates the poetess' response to the philosophy of courtly love. The Lais offer an alternative to the stylized literature of fin' amors and amour courtois.

For Marie de France the schemes and plots of the popular codes were an offense to sincere emotion. Jeanne Walthelet-Willem explains Marie de France's conception of love:

Pour Marie, l'amour est un sentiment naturel, dont l'absence est inconcevable chez un être jeune; respectable quand il est sincère, il devient hautement condamnable s'il se borne à un jeu.³¹

³¹J. Walthelet-Willem, "La Conception de l'amour chez Marie de France," Bulletin Bibliographique de la Société Internationale Arthurienne, XXI (1968-1969), p. 145.

Marie de France concentrates on the women characters in the Lais. Indeed, the male characters in the Lais are briefly developed and of lesser importance than the women. In several cases the male is more active, but throughout the work the resolution of conflict is motivated and determined by a woman. The fate of each woman depends upon her actions, her situation in relation to others, and her personality. For Marie de France, the most important criterion in human relationships is sincerity. In the Lais, the characters who are rewarded with lasting love have no pretensions. In Chaitivel Marie de France condemns the principle of fin' amors in which the woman has the right to be cruelly vain, for the poetess supports equality in love. She presents a courtly setting in this lay, including a casuistical debate, then discredits the ideology in a logical, but tragic, dénouement. In Yonec the woman is doomed by her own lack of mezura. Her desire for her lover is excessive and causes his death. In Equitan and Bisclavret adulterous women are condemned, not so much for adultery as for their betrayal of loyal and sincere husbands. In other lays, such as Guigemar, Milun, and Laüstic, adultery by unhappily and unwillingly married women is not condemned since no sincere love relationship is challenged by their adultery.

In the Lais, love is a natural phenomenon and is considered apart from holy institutions or secular customs. In each love relationship in the legends there is a degree of suffering. The quality of the sentiment determines the strength of suffering as an obstacle in the love relationship.

In this study of the women characters in the Lais I propose to illustrate Marie de France's perception of the roles of women in love

relationships. Marie de France requires at least two principles of love that benefit human rapports: moderation in desire and emotion, and loyalty in love. Her rendition of the twelve Celtic legends was not dominated by the courtly literature and philosophy of her time, and in fact is a condemnation of that ideology. She condemns not only the adulterous nature of love in the Southern code, but also its capricious approach to love. The honesty and psychological insight in the development of the women characters in the Lais, is, in my opinion, Marie de France's most valuable literary contribution, and the significance of the Lais in French literary history.

The women in the Lais readily form three major groups. those condemned for either excessive desire in love or disloyalty to a loyal husband; adulterous women who form a particular group as mal-mariées, and who are not punished for adultery because of extenuating circumstances; and a third group of physically and spiritually flawless women. The first group includes women in Chaitivel, Bisclavret, Equitan, Fresne, and Lanval. Women in Yonec, Milun, Deus Amanz, Chievrefoil, Laüstic, and Guigemar make up the second group. In Lanval, Fresne, and Eliduc we find descriptions of perfectly virtuous women.

Throughout this analysis of the Lais I will examine the major as well as the important minor women in terms of both their literal situation in the story and the role imposed by the psychological interplay between characters, such as the example of the young woman in Deus Amanz, who though unmarried, is indeed mal-mariée in her relationship with her father. Against a background of the Celtic supernatural and

the mingling of occasional incredible coincidences in the Lais, the emotional drama in each lay reflects a great deal of insight.

CHAPTER II

THE CONDEMNED WOMEN IN THE LAIS

In the first group of Lais two important failures result in tragedy for the women involved. Marie de France accepts the ideal of mezura in love, and in the Lais characters who do not control their desire are condemned. Married women who seek lovers chiefly out of carnal desire, and who thus betray loyal husbands, are cruelly punished for their lack of self-control and for adultery which is unwarranted. In his study of fin' amors in Equitan and Chaitivel Robert Green argues that these two lays form a unified psychological basis for the condemnation of fin' amors, which is a major theme in the Lais. He asserts that in the condemnation is the unity of the Lais.¹

Chaitivel is the story of a noble woman in Nantes, Brittany, who is unable to choose among the four^r barons who seek her love. Unwilling to lose three suitors by choosing one, she allocates equal favors to all four. In the spring a tournament is held in the region. The four barons distinguish themselves in tournament contests, but ultimately fight carelessly in earnest attempts to impress their lady who watches from her tower. Three are killed in contests. The survivor is wounded and left impotent to suffer his lady's presence, though he can never

¹Robert B. Green, "Fin' amors dans deux lais de Marie de France: Equitan et Chaitivel," Moyen Age LXXXI, No. 2, 1975 (Fourth Series, Volume XXX), p. 266.

possess her.

Chaitivel, unlike many of the Lais, depicts the life of the twelfth-century société courtoise and has no indication of the Celtic tradition. Marie de France begins, "Talent me prist de remembrer/ Un lai dunt jo oĩ parler." (v. 1-2). She may well have heard the tale in a salon discussion of the problems of love. During the twelfth century such hypothetical debates were popular in court society. The inclusion of this story in the Lais was very purposeful. In Chaitivel Marie de France makes a critical statement about a woman's role in the fin' amors ideology, as Moshé Lazar explains. "Marie condamne ici le principe de la fin' amors dont la dame a le droit d'être orgueilleuse et cruellement vaniteuse."²

The five major characters in Chaitivel are described as courtly stereotypes. The woman especially represents the ideal of the love code as she is admired and sought by all who see her:

Une dame ki mut valeit
De beauté e d'enseignement
E de tut bon affeitement.
N'ot en la tere chevalier
Ki aukes feïst a preisier,
Pur ceo qu'une feiz la veïst,
Ki ne l'amast e requeïst. (v. 10-16).

This woman, by her appearance and by her ambiguous behavior, follows Ovid's didactic description of the noble woman which Marie de France had read and which is the basis of prescribed behavior in Andreas Capellanus' De arte honeste amandi.

²Moshé Lazar, Amour courtois et fin' amors dans la littérature du douzième siècle (Paris. Klincksieck, 1964), p. 197.

The four barons represent the chevalier par excellence, and are described in a list of adjectives which define the perfect suitor.

Il n'aveient gueres d'eé,
 Mes mut erent de grant beauté
 E chevalier pruz e vaillant,
 Large, curteis e despendant.
 Mut par esteient de grant pris
 E gentil humme del païs. (v. 35-40).

The barons are so well loved and respected by the townspeople that when three of them die, they are grief-stricken.

Pur la dolur des chevaliers
 I aveit iteus deus milliers
 Ki lur ventaille deslacierent,
 Chevoiz e barbes detrahierent;
 Entre eus esteit li doels communs. (v. 135-139).

The woman's fault, or démésure, of course, is her inability to forfeit three suitors and devote herself to one. Her vanity thrives on the attentions of all four knights, as her declaration of grief near the end of the lay (verses 195-200) proves.

Though Marie de France briefly explains the woman's dilemma, her sympathies do not lie with the woman who will not make the choice demanded of her.

La dame fu de mut grant sens:
 En respit mist e en purpens
 Pur saveir e pur demander
 Li queils sereit mieuz a amer.
 Tant furent tuit de grant valor,
 Ne pot eslire le meillur. (v. 49-54).

Far from excusing the woman's indecisiveness, in these lines Marie de France condemns the doctrine which would make of the choice of a lover an intellectual question. Once again, the woman appears too calculating, and her sentiment can only be perceived as dishonest.

The tournament provides the four knights a perfect opportunity for competition, a chance that one may finally prove himself the most worthy of this lady. These scenes recall Geoffroy de Monmouth's advice to a lady to accept only the knight who has proven himself at least three times in battle.³ Throughout the tournament the four suitors are motivated by "le souci de prouesse et la volonté de conquerir par des exploits un coeur qui attend pour fixer son choix qu'une épreuve fasse éclater le mérite du plus vaillant."⁴ The four fare so well in the beginning of the tournament that they carelessly become separated, weakening their defense, and are attacked by surprise. Marie de France indicates that this fatal attack was accidental, and reinforces the idea that the four have perished by their own audacious ambition:

Cil ki a mort les unt nafrez
Lur escuz unt es chans getez;
Mut esteient pur eus dolent:
Nel firent pas a escient. (v. 127-130).

The lay evolves around the debate of a title; Quatre DoIs from the woman's point of view, or Le ChaitiveI, a diminutive form of chaitif, as the surviving lover's choice. The woman believes she is the martyr of the lay, as she has lost the love and admiration of her four suitors. On the other side, the knight is certain he has suffered more than she, for he, by elimination, has "won" her, yet he is impotent. The title should reflect the greater suffering. Marie de France does not state a preference for either title.

³Jean Frappier, "Vues sur les conceptions courtoises dans les littératures d'oc et d'oïl au douzième siècle," Cahiers de Civilisation Médiévale, II (Avril-Juin, 1959), p. 155.

⁴Jean-Charles Payen, Le Motif du repentir dans la littérature française médiévale des origines à 1230, (Geneva: Droz, 1968), p. 324.

Icil kil porterent avant,
 Quatre Dols l'apelent alquant;
 Chescuns des nuns bien i afiert,
 Kar la matire le requiert;
 Le Chaitivel ad nun en us. (v. 233-237).

Though in these verses she recognizes the validity of either title, her feelings obviously lie with the baron. In Chaitivel as in other lays, Marie de France expresses her bias in the description and the action of her characters, not in the introduction or conclusion to the legend. Marie de France's sympathy for the wounded baron is implicitly revealed in the lady's explanation of her situation, which is more a declaration of vanity and martyrdom than of grief.

Jamés dame de mun parage,
 Ja tant n'iert bele, pruz ne sage,
 Teus quatre ensemble n'amera
 Ne en un jur si nes perdra,
 Fors vus tut sul ki nafrez fustes;
 Grant poür de mort en eüstes! (v. 195-200).

The lady has inadvertently caused her own misery as she and her knights have been punished by her exaggerated vanity. As Lazar determines, "Marie n'accepte donc jamais les conventions de la fin' amors en bloc; elle présente certaines réserves à leur égard et les corrige selon ses propres conceptions de l'amour."⁵ Marie de France succeeds in Chaitivel in illustrating the uselessness and destructiveness of the "courtly attitude" in love. The woman's refinement scarcely masks the cruelty of a "love" which is in reality only selfishness.⁶

In Bisclavret and Equitan Marie de France presents major female characters who are guilty of betraying loyal and loving husbands. Her

⁵Moshé Lazar, Amour courtois et fin' amors, p. 197.

⁶Emanuel J. Mickel, Jr., "A Reconsideration of the Lais of Marie de France," Speculum, XXXVI, 1971, p. 59.

objection is not to adultery per se, but rather to the betrayal of sworn loyalties. In Bisclavret the woman's allegiance to her husband is a mutual bond of love, "Il amot li e ele lui." (v. 23). In Equitan the treasonous love between the king and the wife of his seneschal is an attack on feudal as well as marital loyalty. The seneschal has served his king well. In return he is cuckolded by a dishonest wife and a disloyal leader. The wife of Bisclavret is motivated chiefly by fear, while the woman in Equitan falls prey to vanity and carnal desire. Both women ultimately are severely punished. Entrusted with their husbands' fates, they promptly plot criminally against them. In the composite of the Lais these negatively portrayed women balance and oppose the flawless women in Eliduc and Fresne.

Bisclavret is the Celtic legend of a Breton knight who regularly becomes a werewolf and is finally betrayed by his fearful wife. Three days a week he mysteriously disappears. His wife, insecure and jealous, demands the truth of his frequent absence. He confesses that he lives half his life as a werewolf in the forest. With an aggressive admirer the frightened wife plots to steal the werewolf's clothes, thus obstructing his return to a human state. The accomplices become lovers and marry, but after a year in the forest as a beast, the husband manages to reveal the crime. As the werewolf, he attacks his wife and bites off her nose. She and her second husband are exiled.

Bisclavret is one of several lays which are bilingually introduced, and it apparently attracted a wide and varied audience:

"Bisclavret ad nun en bretan,/ Garwaf l'apelent li Norman." (v. 3-4).

Marie de France hints at her disbelief in the literal story by reminding

her audience of the Breton origin of the tale. She says, "Meinte merveille avum veüe,/ Ki en Bretagne est avenue." (v. 259-260). Brittany was already associated with the fantastic in the minds of twelfth-century audiences. Though it is doubtful that the educated court audience of which Marie de France was a member would literally accept Bisclavret, the poetess concludes the lay in an assertion of its validity.

L'aventure k'avez oïe
 Veraie fu, n'en dutez mie.
 De Bisclavret fu fez li lais
 Pur remembrance a tuz dis mais. (v. 315-318).

Indeed there is truth in the legend, and a lesson to remember. The reality of the tale of Bisclavret is in the development of the love relationship and the merciless end disloyalty brings.

The wife of the werewolf is a particularly negative character in the Lais because she betrays her positively portrayed husband so completely. In one of the shorter lays, only three hundred verses, Marie de France writes sixty verses to relate the woman's persistent questioning of her husband. Her first suspicion is that he has a lover. He denies the accusation, but at first resists revealing his sorry condition. Once she learns that his transformation from werewolf to man depends on dressing as a man, the woman begs to know where he hides his clothing when he enters the forest. After she willingly professes her love and loyalty he tells her everything.

Jeo vus eim plus que tut le mund!
 Ne! me devez nïent celer,
 Ne mei de nule rien duter:
 Ne semblereit pas amistié! (v. 80-83).

La dame oï cele merveille,
 De poür fu tute vermeille. (v. 97-98).

Her reaction to his confession is terror. Her fear leads her to offer herself to her admirer, a neighbor, if he will steal the clothes:

"Amis, fet ele, seiez liez!
 Ceo dunt vus estes travaillez
 Vus otri jeo sanz nul respit;
 Ja n'i avrez nul cuntredit.
 M'amur e mun cors vus otrei:
 Vostre drue fetes de mei!" (v. 111-116).

She has the power to determine her husband's destiny and his physical nature after he has confessed to her. Fear becomes her controlling emotion as there is no further mention of her love for her husband. She prostitutes herself to fear and totally betrays her husband's trust.

In Le Motif du repentir dans la littérature française médiévale des origines à 1230 Jean-Charles Payen concludes of the woman in Bisclavret that

son péché majeur est moins de s'être effrayée en vain que d'avoir été doublement déloyale, tout d'abord en condamnant son époux (à être loup-garou), et ensuite en épousant son complice, (plus coupable car elle avait aimé son mari) et que sa faiblesse a été l'occasion de la ruine du couple heureux.⁷

In introducing the major characters of Bisclavret Marie de France reveals the husband as the protagonist. His good character is proven by the admiration of his neighbors and of his lord.

Beaus chevaliers e bons esteit
 E noblement se cunteneit.
 De sun seinur esteit privez
 E de tuz ses veisins amez. (v. 17-20).

By contrast his wife is more superficially presented than any major female character in the Lais: "Femme ot espuse mut vailant/ E ki mut feseit beu semblant." (v. 21-22).

⁷Payen, Le Motif du repentir, p. 329.

The beaus chevaliers is not only loyal as a husband, but also as a vassal. Significantly, it is the regional seigneur, a figure representative of divinity, who rights the crime in the end and who metes out the punishment. It is the wife who is exiled from the kingdom.

La femme ad del païs ostee
 E chaciee de la cuntree.
 Cil s'en alat ensemble od li
 Pur ki sun seignur ot trahi. (v. 305-308).

She is the one to bear the curse of guilt, for only the women of the lineage are born without noses.

In eagerly questioning her husband the woman at least once implies that if he loves her he should confess all to her. Ironically, it is ultimately her insistence on knowing every detail of his condition that leads to the betrayal. By desiring to control his destiny, and by fearing him, she breaks the balance in their relationship as man and wife and brings tragedy to the men who love her and to herself. In Chaitivel, Bisclavret and Equitan Marie de France condemns egotistical women who think only of themselves, and thus bring misery on those who love them.

In Equitan Marie de France condemns the love of a king for the wife of his loyal vassal. Their affection reflects the code of courtly love described by Andreas Capellanus in De arte honeste amandi. When the king's men request that he marry and produce heirs, his lady fears the end of their affair. Together they plot to kill her husband, his vassal, by preparing for him a boiling bath. Just before the two men are to bathe, the cuckolded vassal discovers the two lovers in his bed. Surprised, the king tumbles into the boiling bath and the vassal drowns his disloyal wife in the fatal cuve.

Equitan, like Bisclavret, culminates in the punishment of a disloyal wife, and leaves even less moral ambiguity in its conclusion than does Bisclavret. For Marie de France "la passion est bonne, quand elle ne détruit pas un amour antérieur. Elle est maudite quand elle compromet le bonheur d'un couple qui ne mérite point d'être désuni."⁸ In Equitan and in Bisclavret we find two examples of a "passion maudite" and the tragedy it entails.

In his study of the chronology of the Lais Ernest Hoepffner rates Equitan as the earliest of the twelve legends to be written by Marie de France because of the unsophisticated, vengeful conclusion.⁹ The twelve verse introduction to Equitan, which is longer than those of the other lays, resembles the Prologue to the Lais in its insistence on the Breton origin of the legend. As in the Prologue, this introduction states that the purpose of the Lais is to record the legends for future generations.

Jadis suleient par pruésce,
Par curteisie e par noblesce,
Des aventures qu'il oeient,
Ki a plusurs genz aveneient,
Fere les lais pur remembrance,
Qu'um nes meïst en ubliance. (v. 3-8).

However, in an unusual deviation from her style in the other lays, Marie de France concludes Equitan with a moral which emphasizes the legend as a didactic lesson:

Ki bien vodreit reisun entendre
Ici purreit ensample prendre:
Tels purcace le mal d'autrui
Dunt tuz li mals revert sur lui. (v. 307-310).

⁸Payen, Le Motif du repentir, p. 319.

⁹Ernest Hoepffner, "Pour la chronologie des Lais de Marie de France," Romania, LIX, 1933, p. 356.

Invariably in other lays, "il s'agit d'aventures mémorables, dont il convient de conserver le souvenir; nulle part, d'exemples dont il faille s'inspirer."¹⁰ The supernatural events found in other representative Breton legends such as Lanval and Guigemar are absent in Equitan. The plot of the affair between the wife of the seneschal and Equitan is the core of Marie de France's warning against an unreasonable, unrestrained love. Marie de France's proximity as poetess in this lay also implies its early appearance in the work. Perhaps more in Equitan than in any of the others the legend centers on Marie de France's personal ideology of love.

Equitan is introduced as a gentleman of leisure who delegates much of his authority to his second-in-command, his seneschal.

Equitan fu mut de grant pris
E mut amez en sun païs.
Dedit amout e druërie,
Pur ceo maintint chevalerie. (v. 13-16).

Ja, se pur ostïer ne fust,
Pur nul busuin ki li creüst,
Li reis ne laissast sun chacier,
Sun deduire, sun riveier. (v. 25-28).

Equitan is a figurehead; the duties and operation of his domain fall to his seneschal who serves Equitan loyally. In society Equitan is admired for his courtois preoccupations. Perhaps for the medieval audience Equitan would have been a stereotype of the chevalier courtois, but Marie de France's description of his interests connotes a shallow character.

¹⁰Jeanne Walthelet-Willem, "Equitan dans l'oeuvre de Marie de France," Moyen Age, LXIX, 1963, p. 343.

The seneschal's wife is described in particular detail. Hoepffner compares the description of the wife to descriptions of women found in the Roman de Thebes and the Roman d'Enée. He proposes that these works served as models for Marie de France in her description of various characters in the Lais.¹¹ Unlike the wife in Bisclavret, the seneschal's wife does not invite the king's attentions. The woman's extraordinary beauty wins her fame in the region.

Femme espuse ot li seneschals
 Dunt puis vint el país granz mals.
 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, neis bien asis:
 El rëaume n'aveit sa per! (v. 29-37).

Equitan hears praise of this woman, and in the manner of courtly love, "Sanz veüe la coveita." (v. 41). Hoepffner again suggests a literary precursor of this attraction: "L'amour du roi pour la dame, avant même de l'avoir vue, rien que pour avoir entendu parler d'elle est celui, raconté par Wace, du roi Uter Pendragon, le père du roi Artus, pour la belle Ygerne, la femme de son vassal, le duc de Cornouailles."¹² Though this type of attraction and the calculated meeting it leads to are bona fide in the love described by Capellanus and Ovid, they are far removed from the natural appeal and sincere involvement Marie de France approves in the Lais. "Ce qu'attire Equitan est le perspective d'un succès qui le flatte, d'une gloire amoureuse qui rehausse son prestige. L'amour

¹¹Ernest Hoepffner, Les Lais de Marie de France, (Mayenne: Joseph Floch, 1971), p. 154.

¹²Hoepffner, Lais de Marie de France, p. 154.

change dès lors de Nature."¹³

The seneschal is kindly portrayed as a loyal vassal, in this case one who administers the domain in the king's place. Marie de France gives no indication that he is cruel to his wife, she is not among the mal-mariées whose adultery is excused because of extenuating circumstances. In the end, her husband, the sole survivor of the love triangle, is the character who deserves sympathy.

Equitan more than any other lay, with the possible exception of Guigemar, reveals the influence of literary works popular in twelfth-century France. In the debate the king and the seneschal's wife argue over the validity of love between social unequals. This debate, or casuistique amoureuse, would have been popular in the "chambres des dames" of the century. In fact, the debate in Equitan may well have been in part borrowed from the chapter entitled "Loquitur nobilior nobili" of Andreas Capellanus' De arte honeste amandi.¹⁴ Marie de France had undoubtedly met Bertrand de Ventadour at the Plantagenêt court when he visited England at the request of Queen Eleanor. Equitan is Marie de France's condemnation of the code of the troubadours.

Numerous similarities in idea and form exist between Equitan and the Roman d'Enée. Ernest Hoepffner in his study of the Lais analyzes the literary relationships between the two works.¹⁵ A description of love in Equitan has a parallel in the Roman d'Enée.

¹³Payen, Le Motif du repentir, p. 318.

¹⁴Hoepffner, Lais de Marie de France, p. 155.

¹⁵Hoepffner, Lais de Marie de France, p. 155.

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

These lines are very close to verses 1881 and 1882 of the Roman d'Enée: "De sa vie n'a el mes cure/ Amors nen a sens ne mesure." The apparently simple axiom on love which begins Equitan has not been uniformly interpreted. Jeanne Walthelet-Willem in "Equitan dans l'oeuvre de Marie de France" understands that, "Ceux là gaspillent leur vie, qui au sujet de l'amour n'ont compréhension, ni mesure. telle est la mesure de l'amour que nul n'y doit conserver raison."¹⁶ Joseph Bédier interprets these verses to be a rebuttal of the theories of chivalry and courtly behavior in which love is the reward of careful strategies and rules.¹⁷ Emanuel J. Mickel, Jr.¹⁸ and D. W. Robertson¹⁹ find here a clue to the moral of the lay: unwarranted carnal love will end in tragedy. This definition of sensual love which knows no measure, but proceeds without discretion, was common knowledge in twelfth-century clerical circles and had been written by Ailred of Rievaulx in his De spirituali amicitia.²⁰ Such a love is not the result of serious deliberation, nor is it tested by reasoned judgment. It is like the mixtus amor in De arte honeste amandi.

¹⁶Jeanne Walthelet-Willem, "Equitan," p. 333.

¹⁷Joseph Bédier, "Les Lais de Marie de France," Revue des Deux Mondes, CVII (Octobre, 1891), p. 855.

¹⁸Emanuel J. Mickel, Jr., "A Reconsideration of the Lais," p. 43.

¹⁹D. W. Robertson, "Love Conventions in Marie's Equitan," Romanic Review, XLIV, (February, 1953), p. 243.

²⁰Robertson, "Love Conventions in Marie's Equitan," pp. 243-244.

In Equitan this axiom sets the scene for a love without bounds. In Marie de France's conception of love, which is consistent in the Lais as a whole, the adultery in this story is unwarranted because the loyalties between husband and wife, and those between lord and vassal, are ignored by the lovers. These verses apply specifically to Equitan and should be interpreted as part of Marie de France's exaggeration and subsequent condemnation of fin' amors.

The illogical aspect of their relationship is further underscored by the poetess in the debate between Equitan and the lady. Ironically, a major argument in this debate is that of loyalty between lovers. Yet both are involved in gross disloyalty toward her husband. The lady recognizes the offense to feudalism their affair would cause and refuses his advances initially, "Pur ceo que estes reis puissaunz/ E mis sire est de vus tenaunz." (v. 133-134). Her main objection is their inequality, "Amur n'est pruz se n'est egals." (v. 137). It is in this respect, their inequality, that she relies on an ironic argument for loyalty.

Mieuz vaut uns povres hum leals,
Si en sei ad sen e valor,
E greinur joie est de s'amur
Qu'il n'est de prince u de rei,
Quant il n'ad leaute en sei. (v. 138-142).

In verse 148 she accuses Equitan of seeking her love "par seignurie." In fact the king's request for her love and their subsequent affair would have been considered an act of treason in the twelfth century. The treason was secular and religious since feudal amity between lord and vassal had traditionally been associated with divine love.²¹

²¹Robertson, "Love Conventions in Marie's Equitan," pp. 243-244.

In the style of the troubadours' fin' amors Equitan denies his superior social position and places her in the role of "la dompna hautaine" to whom he humbly submits his will and destiny. "L'amour qui ennoblit est un des traits les plus caractéristiques de la conception provençale de l'amour courtois."²² This submission of the man to his woman is inconsistent with the poetess's belief in equality in love. Equitan humbly says to her:

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. (v. 172-176).

She ultimately accepts his offer of love. Her later denial of the arguments she offers in the debate may be a defensive action for her, as Robert Green suggests in his study of Equitan. He explains that, "La femme du sénéchal par contre obéit soigneusement aux règles du fin' amors et les arrange à sa guise car cette philosophie justifie son crime."²³ Love will be ennobling for them both. Her beauty should not be wasted in the confines of conjugal love, as Equitan protests:

Si bele dame tant mar fust,
 S'ele n'amast e dru n'eüst!
 Que devendreit sa curteisie,
 S'ele n'amast de druërie? (v. 79-82).

It is his belief that it would be a sin for such a lady not to love that seals Equitan's resolve to seek her affection.

²²Hoepffner, Lais de Marie de France, p. 157.

²³Robert B. Green, "Fin' amors dans deux lais de Marie de France: Equitan et Chaitivel," Moyen Age, LXXXI, No 2, 1975 (Fourth Series, Volume XXX), p. 268.

When the lady learns of the demands of his vassals for the king to marry, she fears losing him and claims she will die in that event. He reassures her and swears that if she were free he would marry her. Then she does not hesitate to ask his aid in murdering her husband. It is the woman who outlines the plan of the crime. Equitan responds willingly, as her servant in love: "Li reis li ad tut graanté/ Qu'il en ferat sa volenté." (v. 261-262).

Finally, it is an incredible lack of discretion which causes their plot to fail. When the husband briefly steps out of the room, Equitan and his lover waste no time, but climb into her husband's bed beside the boiling bath, the one in which they soon shall die.

It is Marie de France who interprets the tragic conclusion for her audience and affirms her own morality of love in contrast to fin' amors. In a particularly explicit statement she says.

Ki bien vodreit reisun entendre
Ici purreit ensample prendre:
Tels purcace le mal d'autrui
Dunt tuz li mals revert sur lui. (v. 307-310).

Although moral judgments are often evident in the Lais, nowhere else is the moral explicitly stated as a warning and a lesson.

In her ideas on love Marie de France accepts the precepts of discretion, mezura, and suffering, though she tempers these precepts with her personal belief in justice and morality in love. But in Equitan she refutes the more liberal fin' amors code of Provence. As Hoepffner notes, "L'amour idéal à la manière 'provençale', semble-t-elle vouloir dire, voilà où il mène. Ainsi Marie prononce une condamnation discrète

et voilée, mais pas moins sévère de cette conception spéciale de l'amour, qu'elle ne peut pas approuver."²⁴

In the lay of Fresne, as in Equitan, the evil aimed against another reverts to the evil plotter. In Fresne it is the mother who suffers the punishment she had willingly inflicted on another. She had charged another woman, a neighbor, with adultery because of the birth of twins. It was then often assumed that twins were separately fathered. However, the unhappiness she had meant for her neighbor returns to her. She bears twin daughters, and unable to face the villagers, who know of her slanderous accusation, she sends one child away with a servant. The rejected twin, Fresne, is left at a convent where she is raised to womanhood. In a love intrigue Fresne discovers her identity just before her twin sister is to marry the man she loves. Through Fresne's goodness the mother is redeemed, her sister is married to another, and Fresne is married to the man she loves.

Although the mother of Fresne is a minor character in the Lais, she is negatively portrayed and thus deserves some attention in this discussion. Marie de France does not hesitate in her unsympathetic description of the mother: "Kar ele ert feinte e orguilluse/ E mesdisanz e enviuse." (v. 27-28). The accusation of adultery is heard by others in the village, and her notoriety becomes well known, especially among women.

Mut en fu la dame haïe;
 Pois en dut estre maubailie.
 Tutes les femmes ki l'oïrent,
 Povres e riches, l'enhaïrent. (v. 53-56).

²⁴Hoepffner, Lais de Marie de France, p. 158.

Soon after, in the same year, when the mother of Fresne bears twin daughters, "Ore est sa veisine vengiee." (v. 68). In order to save face she even considers murdering one of the children, rather than face public dishonor. Though she regrets her hasty judgment of her neighbor, she remains too egotistical to accept the ridicule of her family and friends. Only through a servant's intervention is Fresne saved and taken to a convent.

The guilty woman in Fresne recognizes her guilt in two respects. She has unjustly condemned all women in general by insisting that twins indicate adultery, a tradition she personally learns to be false. She admits this error in judgment: "Kar jeo meïsmes me jugai,/ De tutes femmes mesparlai." (v. 79-80). Then in her self-accusation she makes a basically Christian decision as to the judgment of others.

Ki sur autrui mesdit e ment
Ne seit mie qu'a l'oïl li pent,
De tel hume peot l'um parler
Ki mieuz de lui fet a loër. (v. 87-90).

Before she anonymously abandons Fresne at the convent, the mother carefully binds the infant in a richly brocaded coverlet and attaches a ruby ring, a gift from her husband, to the infant's neck. Emanuel Mickel, Jr., suggests that the ring is symbolic of a self-sacrifice made in repentance. "The wedding ring, the symbol of the pledge which the woman has forfeited and granted as a legacy to her daughter, is a symbol of her mutual loyalty and faith in her husband and their marriage. By her own words the mother is forfeiting God's eternity, symbolized by the ring."²⁵ The ruby in the ring, a symbol of charity, is surrounded by a

²⁵Emanuel J. Mickel, Jr., "A Reconsideration of the Lais," p. 49.

gold band representative of the virtue the mother has lost. At the end of the lay Fresne gives her coverlet to the man she loves for his marriage bed. The mother sees the coverlet and confesses. It is the perfect generosity of Fresne, in contrast to her mother's lack of charity, which redeems the mother in the end. Fresne's generosity is returned to her, as Marie de France illustrates that a positive action will lead to a just reward.

Thus in Fresne as in Equitan Marie de France has tacitly approved the "golden rule" of Christianity. In her own judgment of characters in the Lais, she is benevolent, with the exception of Bisclavret and Equitan, the first of the Lais that she wrote and the two in which she is the most moralistic.

In Lanval Guenièvre is a second minor character who falls in the group of condemned women in the Lais. Unlike the Guenièvre of the later and better known versions of the Arthurian tradition, Marie de France's Guenièvre is a vain and ruthless woman. This unfavorable portrait has been cited as proof that Marie de France was familiar only with the earliest versions of the Arthurian legend.

Guenièvre is willing to deceive Arthur, and she approaches Lanval with the offer of her affection. Though several women in the Lais are the first to propose love affairs, in this case Guenièvre's aggressive offer is not acceptable. She puts Lanval in an unreasonable predicament from which he cannot disentangle himself innocently. He must either offend her, his Queen, or betray his King. Guenièvre enrages him by suggesting that he is homosexual. In other words, if he does not want her, he must not seek women as lovers. She shows her exaggerated

vanity, and Lanval strikes back by belittling her. He is too loyal and honorable a knight to prove disloyal to Arthur, and in anger he claims that the least of his lady's chambermaids is more desirable than the Queen.

Guenièvre is ultimately dishonored in the court, and her lie is revealed. When the judges assemble to decide the verdict of the accused Lanval, his lady, a fairy, comes to the court and saves him. Arthur acknowledges the superiority of the fairy to any mortal woman. She is just as Lanval had described her to Guenièvre.

In her treatment of the women in Chaitivel, Bisclavret, and Equitan, Marie de France reveals her philosophy of justice in love. In the earliest lays she is a harsh, merciless judge. The capricious woman in Chaitivel is left with an incomplete man for her greedy refusal to choose one of her four admirers. Bisclavret's wife is accused by the husband she has cruelly tricked. The wife of the seneschal and Equitan receive the punishment they had planned for her husband. Fresne's mother learns that judging another can become a self-condemnation. Guenièvre is dishonored before the entire court. Through vanity, greed, and betrayal these women are at fault. Adultery per se is not the sin. Marie de France was as unwilling to adhere to an immovable, unbending morality as she was to generally condemn all women in the Lais. Even the act of adultery can be excused by mitigating circumstances, as the mal-mariée adulterous women in Chapter III illustrate. In each of the lays in Chapter II, the character faults and the personalities of the women cause their downfall, and each is individually judged.

CHAPTER III

THE PARDONED WOMEN IN THE LAIS

The most clearly distinguishable of the three groups of lays in this study is that of women who are mal-mariée. Although in Equitan and Bisclavret Marie de France strongly condemns adultery, unhappily married women in other lays are exonerated for the same offense because of varying extenuating circumstances. This contrast is not accidental, nor is it a contradiction on the part of the poetess. The women in the Lais who fit this description represent a social reality that was prevalent in the twelfth century among the high bourgeoisie and the nobility. Marriages within these classes were frequently arranged by parents for political or monetary benefit. It is because they have not determined their own marital situations that the mal-mariées are not condemned for their behavior.

In each of the lays in this group Marie de France leaves no doubt that the women have not married by choice. Not only are their husbands old and jealous: "vielz" and "gelus," but they have imprisoned the young wives in a static relationship. In keeping with her honest understanding of human behavior, Marie de France recognized that even the holy sacrament of matrimony could not justify a union entered unwillingly by a woman.

The recurring motifs of "la dame à la fenêtre" and of the woman enclosed in a tower, often guarded by an older woman, indicate the

desperate and immobile state of the mal-mariée. After a period of imprisonment and waiting, the rebellion of the woman is her adultery. However, this rebellion is simultaneously a rebirth and an affirmation of her self. These same motifs appear in a wide heritage of fairy tales, a genre of the Middle Ages, for example Rapunzel, Sleeping Beauty, and certainly Beauty and the Beast. It is only after the woman breaks away from the tower that there is a possibility of the "happily ever after" ending.

In describing the mal-mariée women, Marie de France was commenting on the social reality of her time. The parallel use of motifs and the thematic unity between the Lais and an international tradition of fairy tales lead to a more profound interpretation of the mal-mariée as a type. Marie-Louise von Franz, who has researched extensively the symbolic roles of women in folk literature, suggests that the woman in exclusion is a problem of feminine psychology. Her evaluation of this type of woman illuminates the mal-mariées in the Lais.

From the outside it looks like complete stagnation, but in reality it is a time of initiation and incubation when a deep inner split is cured and inner problems solved. This motif forms a contrast to the more active quest of the male hero, who has to go into the beyond and try to slay the monster, or to find the treasure, or the bride.¹

Marie-Louise von Franz' study of women in fairy tales offers a more specific interpretation to the symbolic role of the mal-mariée and the joined forces of the woman freed by the hero-lover who enhances himself by rescuing her from the jealous, aged husband. "In alchemical symbolism the feminine figure is often first married to the wrong kind of man,

¹Marie-Louise von Franz, The Feminine in Fairy Tales (New York: Spring Publications, 1972), p. 94.

and it is the heroic deed to separate the couple. The hero has to win his partner and separate her from the wrong man."²

In each of Marie de France's Lais involving unhappily married women the savior of the woman is a heroic figure and the ultimate ideal mate, one the woman might well have chosen for herself. Even so, despite the romance and adventure in the affair of prisoner and hero-lover, the legends of mal-mariées frequently conclude in unhappiness. As in the lays of guilty women, if the principles of discretion and self-control are ignored, tragedy results.

Though it is possible to suggest symbolic or psychological interpretations of the characters in the Lais, certainly for the poetess the dilemma of the mal-mariée was not an abstraction. In the lays of mal-mariées the ethics of honesty, discretion, mezura, and a basic human morality form the distinction between sinful and sanctified love, between tragedy and deserved happiness.

In Yonec the woman's excessive desire results in the death of her lover, as he had forewarned her that it would. She is a perfect example of the mal-mariée type, imprisoned in a tower by her husband and guarded relentlessly by his aged sister. She is not allowed to see even servants without the presence of her chaperon, nor is she permitted to go to church. She curses her husband and prays for a knight like those of Breton legends to rescue her. Her prayer is answered when a fine knight in the form of a hawk enters her tower window. He shall appear at her call, which soon becomes excessive. When the husband notices her changed expression, he traps the hawk and wounds him fatally. On his

²Franz, The Feminine in Fairy Tales, p. 14.

deathbed the young knight swears a son she shall bear will avenge his murder. Twenty years later the son, Yonec, at his father's tomb receives his father's sword and beheads the "vielz gelus."

Though the tragedy is attributable to the excessive desire of the woman in Yonec, her adultery is not condemned by Marie de France because of her unhappy marital state. She brings about the fated end of the knight, but his death is avenged. Since the story does not end with the knight's death, as well it could have, the final scene of retribution reveals Marie de France's sympathies and her characteristic emphasis on justice in love.

Ostensibly the lay is the tale of Yonec, the son. Marie de France tells us in the prologue that she will reveal how he was born, his father's name, and how his parents came to know each other. As in other lays we are in the midst of either a story within a story or a cyclical return at the end to Yonec, for he plays a role in only the prologue and the climax. He exists solely to avenge his parents. However, the genre of genealogical narrative was popular in the Middle Ages. Chrétien de Troyes' Cligès and much of the Tristan legend also recount the lives of the hero's parents as a prelude to the hero's adventure.

The lay begins with a plaintive speech by the woman. In this pathetic description of the life of a mal-mariée, the poetess' personal feeling of empathy is undeniable. The mal-mariée weeps and laments: "Lasse, fait ele, mar fui nee!/ Mut est dure ma destinee!/ En ceste tur sui en prisun,/ Ja n'en istrai si par mort nun." (v. 67-70). These verses are among the most personal in the Lais. Hoepffner speculates that this may be more than simple empathy.

La douleur qui parle dans la plainte de la mal-mariée,
l'indignation sincère qui vibre dans sa révolte contre le
triste sort qui lui est imposé, n'ont ces accents si prenants
que parce que la poétesse traduit là des sentiments qu'elle
partage elle-même avec ses personnages.³

The woman's indignation once expressed turns to desperate rage as she
curses her parents for arranging the marriage.

Maleeit seient mi parent
E li autre communalment
Ki a cest gelus me donerent
E de sun cors me marierent! (v. 81-84).

Her rage is truly justified. Her parents have conspired with her husband to prevent her emotional and physical happiness. Her aged husband, who disgusts her, has imprisoned not only her, but others as well, all in hopes of an heir. In fact, as a wealthy man, he has married precisely for an heir: "Femme prist pur enfanz aveir,/ Ki après lui fuissent si heir." (v. 19-20). He has failed to father an heir with her, and apparently with others, for "Autres femmes i ot, ceo crei,/ En une autre chambre par sei,/ Mes ja la dame n'i parlast,/ Si la vielle nel comandast." (v. 33-36). Ironically, though the old man has married her precisely because she is "bele" and for an heir, her affair with Muldumarec is significant chiefly because of the heir produced, Yonec.

After seven years of subjugation in the life of a mal-mariée the woman's rebellion and lament is the first self-assertion she has made, and it is in the lay the modus operandi for the adventure which rapidly unfolds. Her husband is diabolical in her eyes, and she has no hope of widowhood. Her final condemnation of him is extraordinarily strong:

³Ernest Hoepffner, Les Lais de Marie de France (Mayenne: Joseph Floch, 1971), p. 78.

A forte corde trai e tir,
 Il ne purrat jamés murir!
 Quant il dut estre baptiziez,
 Si fu el flum d'enfern plungiez:
 Dur sunt li nerf, dures les veines,
 Ki de vif sanc sunt tutes pleines! (v. 85-90).

She would prefer death to an unchanged future. Certainly the feelings she now expresses have intensified during this long period of imprisonment. Her only hope is for an "aventure." Though the knight's appearance seems to have been predetermined, he is inert without the catalyst of her complaint. Muldumarec says as much later in verses 131-133.

The immediate result of her mournful complaint is the appearance of a game bird, a hawk, at her window. The bird flies in and rapidly transforms itself into a "chevaliers bels e genz." (v. 115). The knight, Muldumarec, assures her that he has loved her for a long time, but only her request could bring him out of his palace. The whole affair depends on her recognition of the injustice that she suffers, and on her consequent rebellion.

In Yonec we have a brief illustration of Capellanus' purus amor. The physical attraction of the "chevalier bels e genz" and the "sage, curteise e ... bele" young woman is not consummated before a spiritual union takes place. Marie de France emphasizes this physical restraint: "Delez li s'est cuchiez el lit,/ Mes il ne vout a li tuchier/ Ne d'acoler ne de baisier." (v. 166-168). To prove that his strange transformation is not a trick of demons, and no less to offer his sincerity and loyalty as a lover, the knight asks the girl to feign illness and request communion. He will miraculously take on her appearance and receive the Eucharist simultaneously. Before a corporeal union occurs the couple will have united spiritually and mystically. As a

psychological interpretation suggests, the woman is marrying again. For a major part of the mass of marriage is the mass itself.

Certainly in these verses there is a profession of faith by Marie de France, but it is not the anti-feminist Christianity that was the tradition of medieval Catholicism. In the knight's testimony there is an unorthodox accounting of the doctrine of original sin.

Jeo crei mut bien el Creatur,
 Ki nus geta de la tristur
 U Adam nus mist, nostre pere,
 Par le mors de la pumme amere;
 Il est e ert e fu tuz jurs
 Vie e lumiere as pecheûrs. (v. 149-154)

No mention is made of Eve's transgression. The burden of sin rests on Adam, the father of man. Yet the hope for all sinners is eternal. In religion as in literature Marie de France did not accept en bloc the popular beliefs of the twelfth century.

Despite the blessing of communion their love will be fatal. As Muldumarec foretells:

Si ceo avient cum jeo vus di
 E nus seium issi trahi,
 Ne m'en puis mie departir
 Que mei n'en estuce murir." (v. 207-210)

It is the woman who is guarded, yet Muldumarec gives no hint of her doom here. He only knows that he would die if they were caught. His warning that she must maintain mezura in the relationship to prevent his death is yet another unheeded prophecy.

Mes tele mesure esgardez
 Que nuz ne seium encumbrez;
 Ceste vielle nus traïra,
 (E) nuit e jur nus gaitera. (v. 201-204)

His lady becomes so enchanted with her new life that she calls for him "E nuit e jur e tost e tart." (v. 222). Herein lies her fault. No

longer is her beauty fading, nor does she protest her imprisonment in the tower. Her husband notices the resurgence of her beauty and becomes suspicious. Though old and jealous, he is still perceptive. She causes the tragic end of her affair by her excessive passion and her indiscreet expression. She breaks two requirements of Marie de France's concept of love, mezura and discretion.

At the request of her brother the guard-chaperon spies on the young woman and her bird-lover. The old woman is terrified by the man-to-hawk transformation. When the jealous husband learns of the strange man, he plots a merciless assault.

Des engins faire fu hastifs
 A ocire le chevalier.
 Broches de fer fist granz furgier
 E acerer le chief devant.
 Suz ciel n'ad rasur plus trenchant! (v. 284-288)

The husband allegedly leaves to hunt, but his real trap is already well set. The chevalier is mortally wounded at his lady's window. He lies beside her long enough to blame her and to announce the vengeance their son will achieve. He says,

Il li ad dit: "Ma duce amie,
 Pur vostre amur perc jeo la vie.
 Bien le vus dis qu'en avendreit.
 Vostre semblanz nus ocireit." (v. 319-322)

Un fiz avra, pruz e vaillant;
 Icil la recunforterat.
 Yö nec numer le ferat.
 Il vengerat e lui e li,
 Il oscirat sun enemi. (v. 328-332)

He takes leave of her "a grant dolur." (v. 335). The physical inactivity of the young woman in Yonec is now drastically reversed. She leaps from a tower window and escapes unharmed. The journey she takes to follow her lover is the most action we find by the woman, and

definitely contrasts with the passive obscurity of her life as a mal-mariée, both before the affair and later, as the mother of Yonec.

In Muldumarec's castle a tripartite progression occurs which is like the procession of Lanval's fairy and her maidens before Arthur's court. The woman enters two bedrooms before she finds her knight on his bed. In each of the two rooms a knight, unknown by the woman, is sleeping. Their sleep forewarns her again of the knight's pending death. The austerity of the description of the two rooms and their occupants emphasizes by contrast the luxury of detail in the description of Muldumarec's bed, the emblem of his tomb.

Le lit sun ami ad trové.
Li pecol sunt d'or esmeré;
Ne sai mie les dras preisier;
Li cirgë e li chandelier,
Ki nuit e jur sunt alumé,
Valent tut l'or d'une cité. (v. 387-392)

The golden chandeliers and the bed covers are very like the tomb ornaments the lady will see, then share, in twenty years.

Une tumber troverent grant,
Coverte d'un palie roé,
D'un chier orfreis par mi bendé.
Al chief, as piez e as costez
Aveit vint cirges alumez;
D'or fin erent li chandelier, (v. 500-505)

Her reaction upon seeing her knight as he is dying foretells her own death on his tomb. In both cases she faints, the second faint is an eternal one:

Sur la tumber chei pasmee;
En la paumeisun devïa,
Unc puis a humme ne parla. (v. 540-542)

When she recovers from the first faint she sees no reason to live anymore since her husband will kill her if she returns to him.

Muldumarec warns her she is in danger in his castle, since she has caused his death. He explains that she must return to raise their son who will avenge his death. He arms her with the sword Yonec will inherit and with a magic ring. As long as she wears the ring her husband will have no memory of the whole adventure. On the return trip she faints four times more. Symbolically, her assertion of herself is over, and she protests her fate no further.

Ensemblement od sun seignur
 Demurat meint di e meint jur
 Que de cel fet ne la retta
 Ne ne mesdist ne ne gaba. (v. 455-458)

Now the woman returns to a passive role as Yonec's mother. She must raise her son so that he may regain his heritage as Muldumarec's heir. Except for a brief time of happiness, her life centers on bearing a son.

The last one hundred verses relate Yonec's story. At the age of twenty, Yonec accompanies his mother and step-father to an abbey. In the abbey is Muldumarec's tomb. His deathbed prediction now comes true. The abbot describes Muldumarec to the visitors.

De ceste tere ot esté reis,
 Unques ne fu nuls si curteis.
 A Carient fu entrepris,
 Pur l'amur d'une dame ocis. (v. 519-522)

The abbot says that they are waiting for a promised heir. The lady quickly calls her son to her, and reveals her carefully guarded secret.

"Beaus fiz, fet ele, avez oï
 Cum Deus nus ad menez ici?
 C'est vostre pere ki ci gist,
 Que cist villarz a tort ocist.
 Or vus comant e rent s'espee,
 Jeo l'ai asez lung tens garde." (v. 529-534)

Her mission accomplished, she falls into a fatal faint on the tomb.

Without question or hesitation Yonec beheads the viellard, and "De l'espeie ki fu sun pere/ Ad dunc vengié lui e sa mere." (v. 545-546). Yonec is received as the expected king, and his mother is entombed with Muldumarec.

In the prologue to Yonec Marie de France promised two stories: how Yonec was born and how his parents came together. Both events are told in the lay. Certainly the parents' meeting is more important. In Yonec, a genealogical narrative, only Muldumarec and Yonec are named. However, the central figure who initiates all the action in the story is the woman.

Marie de France could conceivably have omitted the final section of Yonec. However, her interest in a just conclusion to the lay must have caused her to relate Yonec's action. The punishment of the jealous husband at the end definitely reveals Muldumarec and Yonec's mother as the protagonists who have unduly suffered for their love.

In Milun as in Yonec the story of the parents precedes the adventures of the son. However, as Milun is the name of the father, this lay is not as clearly a genealogical tale. The lay of Milun is essentially a reversal of the Oedipus legend. Milun's son apologizes when he defeats his father, whom he does not recognize, in battle. Later it is the son who gives his mother in marriage to his father. In contrast to Yonec, there is no miraculous event in Milun. This lay is realistic. Though the lovers suffer for a long time, their love culminates in one of the happiest endings to be found in the Lais.

Unlike the other lays of mal-mariées the woman in Milun is not married when she first seeks Milun's attentions. His reputation as a

kind and valiant knight is widely known and leads her to request his love. Milun agrees and a brief affair follows. In the course of this affair she becomes pregnant. She fears social disgrace and punishment. The child, a son, is secretly born and Milun follows her directions to take the child to a sister in the North of England to be raised. Soon after, the woman's father marries her to a wealthy neighbor. Now she is mal-mariée. Milun becomes a mercenary knight and learns of her marriage only after the fact. For twenty years their love continues despite the obstacle of her husband and the separation they must endure. A swan is the messenger and the symbol of their love as it carries their correspondence. With age Milun's reputation falters and he is to be replaced by a younger knight known as "Sanz Per." Milun seeks to reestablish his unparalleled renown by jousting with "Sanz Per." In a poignant scene "Sanz Per" is revealed as Milun's son. As a perfect coincidence the husband dies, and the son reunites his parents, who live out their lives together.

Judith Rice Rothschild in her analysis, Narrative Technique in the Lais of Marie de France, sees movement and communication as the dominant features in Milun.⁴ Milun definitely is in constant movement in the first half of the lay. His reputation must be upheld and requires vigorous and wide action. During the twenty year period of written communication with his mal-mariée woman he is relatively stable. Then word of "Sanz Per" spurs him on to renewed activity as he determines to defend his name as a knight sanz per.

⁴Judith Rice Rothschild, Narrative Technique in the Lais of Marie de France (Chapel Hill, North Carolina. University of North Carolina Studies in the Romance Languages and Literatures, 1974), p. 169.

The woman, though she is sympathetically portrayed, is the most passive female character in the Lais. She is minimally characterized, particularly in comparison with the detailed and favorable picture of Milun. She is introduced dependently, as her father's daughter:

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

The strongest action she takes is her request for Milun's love. As in Yonec the result of their affair, her pregnancy, is defined as Milun's action: "Tant i vint Milun, tant l'ama/ Que la dameisele enceinta." (v. 53-54). Milun is again in movement as he follows her directions to take the infant to her sister. The only physical action the woman makes in the lay is from her father's house to her husband's.

In spite of her physical inertia, the woman is the instigator in the plot. The major elements of the story's and of Milun's movement are suggested and supported by the woman who is confined in the walls of her tower.

In Milun, as in several of the Lais, an attraction by reputation begins a love affair. She commences the love relationship in Milun. It is by her written offer that Milun first meets her. Eliduc's young lover makes a very similar request for love on the attraction of that knight's reputation. Equitan seeks the seneschal's wife in love because her renowned beauty is for him the challenge of acquisition. For the woman in Milun this offer of herself is her most significant action.

Ele ot o'i Milun nomer,
 Mut le cumençat a amer.
 Par sun message li manda
 Que, si li plect, el l'amera. (v. 25-28).

Not only does the written message prefigure the wealth of correspondence to come, but her offer of herself contrasts with her future passivity as a mal-mariée in the ensuing twenty years.

In response Milun is grateful for the offer and he sends her his gold ring as a token. The ring will be very important later as it triggers the recognition scene between Milun and his son.

After frequent secret meetings in the orchard, the woman discovers she is pregnant. She does not dread the revelation of her secret affair as much as she does the illegitimate pregnancy. She fears banishment from the country as a slave. She writes to Milun that

S'onur e sun bien ad perdu,
 Quant de tel fet s'est entremise;
 De li ert faite granz justise:
 A gleive serat turmentee
 U vendue en autre cuntree.
 Ceo fu custume as anc'iens,
 Issi teneient en cel tens. (v. 58-64).

The woman has devoted less energy to her dread of punishment than she has to a detailed plan to conceal the child. Milun agrees to follow her advice. In her longest speech in the lay she outlines the precise precautions she has planned. The child must be taken to her sister in "Norhumbre," a region of Northern England, to be well-raised by her, whether son or daughter. The child's identity will be proven by Milun's ring tied around its neck and by a letter sent to the sister. Each proof has significance to the rest of the lay. The ring will lead Milun to recognize his son. The "brief" foretells the correspondence of separated lovers. Later this letter will be given to the son, but there is a slight difference in the information he will learn. As the woman plans, "Escriz i ert li nuns sun pere/ E l'aventure de sa mere."

(v. 79-80). But when her sister tells the young knight of his parents, her message concerns chiefly his father.

Le brief li rendi e l'anel,
 Puis li ad dit ki est sa mere
 E l'aventure de sun pere
 E cum il est bons chevaliers,
 Tant pruz, si hardiz e si fiers,
 N'ot en la tere nul meillur,
 De sun pris ne de sa valur. (v. 294-300).

This reversal is important in that it is the reputation of his father that ennobles the young knight and inspires him to seek out his parents.

In relating her plan to Milun the lady begins by assuming a child of either sex. But at the end of her speech she expects a son who will learn the truth and find his father. She foretells the story here in the same manner as Yonec's father does for his lady, but she does not have a magical gift of prévoyance.

With the aid of a discreet and loyal old woman servant the young woman bears her son in secret. The child is richly swaddled in "martre," and Milun is alerted. His men take great care in transporting the infant, who is delivered safely to his aunt.

Now a twenty year period of separation commences for Milun and his lover. Perhaps in distress Milun leaves the region. Her father weds the woman to a wealthy neighbor, who in virtue and charity does not compare with Milun. Compared to the lengthy speech of the mal-mariée in Yonec, Milun's lady's complaint is brief, but no less bitter. Not only was she married against her will, but she must fear her husband's **discovery that she is not a virgin.**

Ja ne sui jeo mie pucele;
 A tuz jurs mes serai ancele.
 Jeo ne soi pas que fust issi,
 Ainz quidoue aveir mun ami;
 Entre nus celisum l'afaire,
 Ja ne l'o'isse aillurs retraire.
 Mieuz me vendreit murir que vivre! (v. 135-141)

She, too, would prefer death to her present life, but she cannot escape.

She is well-guarded and cannot even attempt to take her own life.

Vieuz e jeofnes, mes chamberleins,
 Ki tuz jurs heent bone amur
 E se delitent en tristur.
 Or m'estuvrat issi suffrir,
 Lasse! quant jeo ne puis murir." (v. 144-148)

Milun returns and devises a means of communication with her.

Their communication takes the form of a "cisne ... k'il mut ama."

(v. 162). This swan symbolizes their love's strength against the hardship of separation. He gives the swan with a note hidden in its neck feathers to a servant to be taken to his lady.

The woman's immediate discovery of the note brings an outburst of pent-up emotion. Milun has described to her his loneliness. He cares not if he lives or dies, and his future depends on her response. He explains the method of their communication via the swan. Even though they will meet several times in the interval, for the next twenty years the swan will bridge their separate lives.

Their reunion depends on their son. As soon as he learns the truth, he determines his obligation to them and begins a search for his father. In his search for Milun, the young knight gains a fine reputation for bravery, generosity and all other knightly attributes. He becomes famous, and those who do not know his name (including the lay's audience) know him as "Sanz Per."

When Milun hears praise of this newly-famed knight, he is irritated and jealous. He decides to joust with "Sanz Per" and reestablish his superiority as a knight. Then he shall seek his son. He writes of his two intentions to his lady. In her reply she does not mention the joust, but urges him on to seek their son, and grants him her leave

Quant pur lur fiz trover e quere
 Voleit eissir fors de la tere
 E pur le bien de lui mustrer;
 Nel voleit mie desturber. (v. 367-370)

After a winter of wandering Milun arrives at "Munt Seint Michel" (v. 385) for a tournament. "Sanz Per" is pointed out to Milun. Whether he sees a physical resemblance, or merely sizes-up carefully his chosen opponent, " ... il l'aveit bien esgardé." (v. 396).

The youth easily defeats his opponent and apologizes for challenging the older man. As his son approaches, Milun recognizes the ring on his finger. He excitedly questions the youth. The young knight relates his life story. His ambition now is to learn more of his parents and to be loved by them.

Saveir voil l'estre de mun pere,
 Cum il se cuntient vers ma mere (v. 461-462)

Ja ne me vodra reneier,
 Ainz m'amerat e tendrat chier." (v. 466-467)

In the evening Milun relates the story of his separation from the youth's mother and of the messages sent by swan. "Sanz Per" determines his duty toward his parents: he will reunite them, even if he must first kill his mother's husband.

The reunion of father and son after a long separation is a frequent literary theme. However, the benevolence of Milun and his son in the recognition scene differs significantly from the hostility and confusion which marks the reunion of Odysseus and Telemachus. Milun, furthermore, is the inverse reunion of the classical Oedipus legend. Instead of tragically separating his parents, the son in Milun is simultaneously the fruit and the bond of their love.

As in Yonec, in the second half of Milun the woman has been absent. The focus has been on the father and son, the heritage of the family. Milun has never tried to rescue her from her husband. The justice of the lay depends on the son, the final male figure to determine the woman's future, albeit this time in her interest.

Marie de France intervenes now to save the son from a violent encounter. His intention to murder his mother's husband suffices as justice. The cruel "barun" conveniently dies. Milun and his son, en route to their lady, are stopped by a servant with the welcome news.

Tant eirent que il sunt venu
 Al chastel u la dame fu.
 Mut par fu liee de sun fiz
 Ki tant esteit pruz e gentiz. (v. 521-524).

At the castle the son gives his mother to his father.

Her minimal emotion at the return of her son underscores the silence of the woman in the second half of the lay. Her chief contribution has been the birth of Milun's heir. Even as a relatively rebellious mal-mariée, in Milun the woman is relegated to a secondary position. She is certainly less forceful than the mother of Yonec. Of the women in the Lais she is exceptionally inactive in the story, but she is pivotal to the action.

A third lay incorporates the theme of the significance of the fruition of love. In Deus Amanz, however, the youthful lovers remain chaste, and the symbol of their love is the vegetation that blossoms near the tomb they share. In Yonec and in Milun the sons redeem their parents. In Deus Amanz the plants and the mountain are eternal reminders of the tragic love of a young couple, and of the union and new life the potion would have guaranteed.

The story of the two lovers is an ever-popular legend. Parallel legends were popular in the twelfth century in Italy and Germany.⁵ A young woman lives with her father, a widower. The father has come to rely on the daughter and to love her extraordinarily. Although in Marie de France's lay the incestuous undertone of their relationship has been played down, in similar stories it is exaggerated. In order to keep his daughter with him, the father assumes the role of the vielz gelus, and psychologically the woman is as imprisoned by his love as if she were mal-mariée. As an obstacle to her marriage he challenges any suitor to carry her to the summit of a steep mountain. This feat is seemingly impossible and only saves the father from overt public criticism. The woman falls in love with a young apprentice-knight. He begs her to run away from her father, but out of an unusual concern for her father she refuses. Instead she sends him to an aunt at Salerno who prepares an invigorating potion to help him meet the challenge of the climb. On the appointed day the crowd gathers at the foot of the mountain, and the young man begins his feat. Obsessed with his own nobility, he refuses to drink the potion. The force of love enables him to carry her to the

⁵Hoepffner, Lais de Marie de France, p. 126.

top, but there he is fatally overcome with exertion and dies. She embraces him and dies of a broken heart. Before she succumbs, she pours out the potion, which returns to its natural state in the earth. The site of their death becomes a symbolic, legendary garden of the love that might have been.

Because of the unnaturally strong attachment of father and daughter in this lay, which is neither denied nor emphasized by Marie de France, I have grouped Deus Amanz with the lays of mal-mariée women. Marie de France mentions the mother's death in terms of the daughter, who has replaced her mother.

Li reis n'aveit autre retur,
Pres de li esteit nuit e jur.
Cunfortez fu par la meschine,
Puis que perdue ot la reïne. (v. 29-32)

The girl is aware of her father's emotional reliance on her. She loves the young suitor, but will not leave her father to elope with her lover as Guilliadun does in Eliduc.

As in Fresne the force of public opinion activates the love dilemma. Not only do we find the implication that the king and his daughter are unreasonably close, but his vassals may well be concerned about the security of the kingdom without a male heir. As the young woman approaches womanhood the king is criticized for his hold on her: "Plusur a mal li aturnerent,/ Li suen meïsmes le blamerent." (v. 33-34) Hoepffner insists that the popular story of the incestuous love of father and daughter is at the base of this lay, but that Marie de France has deftly obscured this more primitive theme.⁶

⁶Hoepffner, Lais de Marie de France, p. 127.

The criticism by his neighbors causes the king to develop a plan to protect himself from rumor and to hold his daughter in his home.

This is stated as his primary goal:

Cumença sei a purpenser
 Cument s'en purrat delivrer,
 Que nuls sa fille ne quesist. (v. 37-39)

Immediately he makes his challenge public to protect his questioned reputation. Anyone who desires his daughter in marriage must first carry her, without stopping for rest, to the mountain top. At first many suitors try the feat, but none can carry her more than half-way up the mountain. Soon, no more suitors attempt the challenge, and "Iloec l'esteut laissier ester!" (v. 54) Seemingly, the king is delighted with the success of his scheme.

Deus Amanz is one of only three lays in which the lovers are not married to others (Fresne, Lanval, Deus Amanz). The young couple are neither named nor carefully described. By their actions we are continually reminded of their naïveté, and their love remains chaste in the lay. The girl is simply described as "bele" and "mut curteise." (v. 21-22). The boy is a "vallez," a knight in training. He is "Fiz a un cunte, gent e bel." (v. 58). His ambition marks him as an inexperienced knight. His goal reflects a youthful competition: "De bien faire pur avoir pris/ Sur tuz autres s'est entremis." (v. 59-60). He loves the king's daughter and requests her love. She decides to accept him because of his good qualities and, significantly, because of the king's approval of him. They are loyal and discreet in their affection.

Ironically, early in the lay the young knight acknowledges his impatience as a fault:

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

Of course, later his actions betray these words and he will bring about the ending by his vane impatience. The young woman, by contrast, has no flaws.

Before the climb he asks her to elope with him. He recognizes that her father will never consent to their marriage unless the feat is accomplished. Although he does not explicitly say so, he does not believe he can complete the challenge. The first direct speech, and the longest one in the lay, is her response to his suggestion that they elope. She does not hesitate to openly agree that her lover cannot carry her on his own strength. This humorous admission from her of his lack of physical stamina opens the revelation of her adept plan.

Once again in the Lais it is the woman who offers the solution to a love dilemma. We have been told that he loves her in verse 63, but never that she loves him. She refuses to elope with him because she realizes her father's dependence on her. She, too, is overly involved with her father since she could not bear his rejection and anger. She answers the young man's suggestion:

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. (v. 96-100).

The indication of her feelings for the young knight is revealed in her plan, which she supposedly could have offered to earlier suitors. She

advises him to go to her aunt in Salerno.⁷ Armed with the magical potion, the youth challenges the climb. Her father, of course, anticipates another failure.

An invitation is sent out to all in the region to come and witness the climb. The woman again proves her desire for the vallet:

La dameisele s'aturna;
Mut se destreinst e mut juna
E amaigri pur alegier,
Qu'a sun ami voleit aidier. (v. 173-176)

Not only has she lost weight, but to decrease her lover's burden even more, she wears only her chemise. She carries the vial of potion, since he trusts her and "Bien seit qu'el nel vout pas deceivre." (v. 186). At this point Marie de France addresses the audience and foretells the cause of the failure: "Mes jo creim que poi ne li vaille,/ Kar n'ot en lui point de mesure." (v. 188-189). His impatience and concern for appearance have not been the result of particular events in the lay, but throughout are noted as the dominant aspects of the youth's personality. He does lack mezura and in the Lais this fault inevitably leads to failure.

He reaches the half-way point in the climb, but "Pur la joie qu'il ot de li,/ De sun bievre ne li membra." (v. 192-193). Judith Rice Rothschild interprets this line as the cause of his failure to drink the

⁷Alice Kemp-Welch, Of Six Medieval Women, Chapter II: "A Twelfth-Century Romance Writer, Marie de France" (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1913), pp. 43-44. Until the ninth century there was no definite documentation of the medical school at Salerno, near Naples. The school was secular, but received some help and influence from the Benedictines who arrived in the region during the seventh century. The teaching followed the doctrines of Hippocrates and Galen and was known for its advanced drug preparations. The title "magister," or master, was used equally for men and women in the Salerno faculty.

potion. She suggests that the young man is sensually aroused while carrying the barely-clad maiden, and thus forgets his ultimate goal.⁸ This interpretation, combined with his character faults, well explains his reluctance to drink the necessary potion

Twice during the climb the young woman urges him to drink the potion as she feels his strength wane. He refuses because by stopping he would lose "treis pas." However, his main objection to stopping to drink stems from his exaggerated pride. He fears that if he stops the crowd below will ridicule him. At the summit he dies of overexertion. The young woman at first thinks he has fainted. She kneels to give him the drink, then sees that he has died.

Ele le pleint a mut haut cri,
 Puis ad geté e espaundu
 Le veissel u li beivre fu. (v 222-224)

Marie de France interrupts the dénouement of the two lovers' story to describe the lasting fertility of the spilled potion. The potion is a symbol of the fertile union that could have been. Instead, this liquid enhances the mountain's vegetation. As the region becomes fertile so would the king's power have flourished from the union of the lovers and the birth of an heir.

Once she has closed the story of the two lovers and their potion Marie de France returns to the meschine. The woman has never known such grief as she experiences on the mountain. She lays beside her dead lover, embraces him, kisses his closed eyes and his lips, and in a final **embrace**, she dies in his arms.

⁸Rothschild, Narrative Technique, p. 158.

Li dols de lui al quor la tuche:
 Ilec murut la dameisele,
 Ki tant ert pruz e sage e bele. (v. 236-238)

On the advice of his neighbors the king buries them together in a marble tomb at the summit.

In Yonec and in Milun, the unhappy situation of the mal-mariée woman is obvious. Deus Amanz provides a variation of the mal-mariée stereotype in that the daughter is emotionally restrained by her father, and truly suits the mal-mariée type in a psychological sense.

Chievrefoil relates a brief encounter between Tristan and Iseult.

Iseult is grouped in this study as an unhappily married woman because Marie de France does not discredit her affair with Tristan.

Chievrefoil relates the brief meeting of the two famous lovers, Tristan and Iseult. Tristan comes secretly out of exile to see the queen. During their encounter she explains that he can return to the court, and the lay ends optimistically despite the forewarned death of the lovers. The most important literary contribution of this lay is the potent symbol of the hazelwood and honeysuckle as nature's image of love and as an image of the strength of the lovers' devotion to one another.

Marie de France says she has heard as well as read the lay of Chievrefoil that she includes in the Lais. The origin of this suggested written text remains a mystery. Hoepffner indicates the parallel between this lay and the episode of the "copeaux" that Tristan carved and tossed into a stream near Iseult's window to alert her of his presence. This episode appears in the German poem by Eilhart von Oberge of the Tristan legend.⁹ In the more famous versions of the Tristan and

⁹Hoepffner, Lais de Marie de France, pp. 134-135.

Iseult story, those by Thomas and Bérout, there is no mention of such a symbolic branch, nor of a possible reconciliation between Tristan and his uncle, King Mark. One can only conclude that there was then in the popular variants of the legend an anecdote which Marie de France carefully utilized to form the lay which illustrates the nature of the passion between Tristan and Iseult.

The succinct presentation of Chievrefoil, a lay of only 118 verses, was possible because of the wide popularity and recognition of the legend. No background information is offered or needed; the queen, in fact, is never named. The audience could fully appreciate the significance of the vignette and integrate it with a more complete appreciation of the well-known legend.

The crux of Chievrefoil is the symbolic illustration of the nature of this famed love. The most important element in the lay is the bastun de coudrier, the hazelwood branch which is the symbol of their love. Marie de France describes the indissoluble nature of the love by comparing it in the lay to the interdependence of hazelwood and honeysuckle. Hazelwood and honeysuckle, according to popular folklore, grow only intertwined together, and once separated, die. Yet even before she introduces the symbol in the lay, Marie de France reminds the audience that this is a tragic love, as she says the lay is "De Tristram e de la reïne,/ De lur amur ki tant fu fine,/ Dunt il eurent meinte dolur,/ Puis en mururent en un jur." (v. 7-10). That the lovers will die "en un jur" only reinforces the hazelwood and honeysuckle comparison.

Briefly in four verses (11-14) we are reminded that Tristan has been exiled by his uncle, King Mark, for loving Queen Iseult. Though Mark is not the stereotyped jealous husband of the mal-mariée, Iseult is a mal-mariée in this love triangle, and thus in this study merits recognition in conjunction with the women in Yonec, Milun, and Guigemar.

After a year in "Suhtwales" in exile Tristan succumbs to the grief of love's separation. Marie de France has not only invoked the geographical setting of the Arthurian legend, but she explicitly repeats one of the major premises of courtly love, the suffering love requires and the despair of separated lovers to which death is preferable. After the year of separation, Tristan feels desperate.

Mes puis se mist en abandun
De mort e de destructiun.
Ne vus esmerveilliez neënt,
Kar cil ki eime lealment
Mut est dolenz e trespensez
Quant il nen ad ses volentez. (v. 19-24).

Capellanus and Ovid both emphasize the suffering of love, and here it is a special proof of the sincerity of Tristan's love for Iseult.

Tristan risks his life by going to "Cornwaille" and defying his uncle. He must see Iseult, if he can, to escape his misery. He goes to the forest alone, for he cannot chance recognition. He learns from peasants that the court is going to Tintagel for Pentecost. Now he sees his occasion to see Iseult, and he plans a means of subtly alerting her of his presence.

As Tristan waits at a crossroads which the queen is sure to pass, he carves his name into a branch of hazelwood. He leaves the branch beside the road where she will surely see it, for they have used this signal before, as the audience is told:

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

The signal has not been randomly chosen. It is a symbol of their feeling for each other, and apparently a symbol they have chosen purposely. Their relationship is a natural bond of affection, their interdependence is natural. Yet, within the necessity of their union is the paradox of their forced separation, and the suffering that exists as an inescapable aspect of love

The only direct speech in the lay is "Bele amie, si est de nus:/ Ne vus sanz mei, ne jeo sanz vus." (v. 77-78). At once a further explanation of the symbol and of the nature of Tristan and Iseult's love, the two lines would have been spoken by Tristan. Possibly he says these lines to himself as he waits impatiently for the queen to pass and see the branch. Tristan may recall aloud what he has said to Iseult earlier.

As soon as she sees the signal the queen commands her cortège to stop for rest. She goes far from the others, but takes her most loyal servant, Brenguein, with her. Then the brief meeting of lovers takes place. Before they part she relates a plan to Tristan, the details of which are not offered, which will insure a reconciliation with the king and an end to Tristan's exile. Nowhere else in the Tristan tradition is there such a possibility. Iseult, like the ideal women in the Lais, will intervene in behalf of her lover. When Brenguein warns them they must leave, the lovers are greatly saddened, but the future looks brighter as "Tristram en Wales s'en rala/ Tant que sis uncles le manda." (v. 105-106).

Iseult in Chievrefoil is positively portrayed in her sensitive reaction to the symbolic branch. Like all the women in the Lais, she devises a plan for the resolution of the story's conflict, her separation from Tristan. Her marriage is not described in the lay, but her affection for Tristan indicates that she is mal-mariée.

In Laüstic, as in Yonec, Marie de France enhances the content of the legend with a symbolic bird. In Laüstic the nightingale gains significance as it evolves from an excuse for the woman's nightly vigil to a target for her husband's malicious frustration. Finally, the dead bird is a symbol of love's suffering.

Unlike Chievrefoil which relates only an episode of a wider legend, Laüstic carries its love story from beginning to end. The setting of "Seint Mallo," "une vile renumee," (v. 7-8) emphasizes the Breton origin of the lay, as does the Breton title. Two knights are credited with the town's good reputation. Their neighboring mansions dominate the picture of the city. The first knight is married. His wife and his rival are secretly in love. She is presented as a mal-mariée in the motif of the woman waiting at the window and because she is "estreit gardee." (v. 49). Her window faces her lover's, yet they are separated by a stone wall between the houses. Therefore in Laüstic the only love possible is platonic. The two communicate in a nightly ritual as they speak softly from their windows across the wall. When her suspicious husband asks about her insomnia, the woman blames the spring song of the nightingale. The husband, not easily misled, contrives to capture the nightingale in a cruel trap. He succeeds in his plotting and calls his wife as witness to the murder of the

nightingale. He throws the bird's corpse at her and bloodies her chest. She must now signal her lover that further physical contact is impossible. As certain as Tristan in Chievrefoil that her sign will be understood, she wraps the bird carefully and sends it by messenger to her lover. He accepts the message reluctantly, but his love for the woman is transformed, and its symbol, the bird, is enshrined in a relic case.

The first characters we are introduced to in Laüstic are the two men. They are subtly presented as competitors as the two renowned men of the town. Individually they are differently described so that the protagonist is quickly identifiable. The first barun is a limited character: "Li uns aveit femme espusee,/ Sage, curteise e acemee;" (v. 13-14). His only significance in the lay is his role as her husband, for he portrays the negative qualities of a man in contrast to his rival who embodies the courtois ideal in Laüstic.

Li autres fu uns bachelers
 Bien coneüz entre ses pers,
 De pruésce, de grant valur,
 E volentiers feseit honor.
 Mut turneot e despendeit
 E bien donot ceo qu'il aveit. (v. 17-22).

He seeks to love his neighbor's wife, but is not condemned in the lay for this transgression of Christianity. He has been described as an ideal character to the twelfth-century audience. The woman, who represents a medieval ideal of femininity, is not aptly matched with her jealous husband and requires the lover. As Moshé Lazar explains, *Marie de France* "... ne condamne pas l'amour en dehors du mariage, seul amour

profond qui puisse apaiser le coeur de la femme malheureuse."¹⁰

The description of the woman illustrates the etiquette for women in the twelfth century. She is "Sage, curteise e acemee." (v. 13). "Sage" describes her moral and intellectual quality, a way of being. Her social bearing and way of acting is "curteise," and her beauty is relayed by the adjective "acemee."¹¹ Marie de France has only introduced the husband first as a means of relating him to the woman, for it is she who will initiate the symbol in Laüstic.

The woman's love for the neighboring barun is not as profound as the commanding passion of the mal-mariée in Yonec or Milun. In Laüstic she accepts his love on the basis of two minor but realistic premises: his reputation is influential; and he lives conveniently nearby. She loves him "Tant pur le bien qu'ele en oï,/ Tant pur ceo qu'il iert pres de li." (v. 27-28). She is obviously not as desperate to escape her marital situation as the woman in Yonec, thus she is able to meet the requirements of mezura and discretion which love requires in the Lais.

Sagement e bien s'entreamerent,
Mut se covrirent e garderent
Qu'il ne feussent aparceü
Ne disturbé ne mescreü; (v. 29-32).

Their discretion is helped by the "haut mur de pierre bise" which separates the two domains. Only through their windows can the lovers communicate, then only by words of love or by tossed gifts.

¹⁰Moshé Lazar, Amour courtois et fin' amors dans la littérature du douzième siècle (Paris: Klincksieck, 1964), p. 185.

¹¹Robert D. Cottrell, "Le Lai du Laüstic: From Physicality to Spirituality," Philological Quarterly, XLVII (October, 1968), p. 501.

As the spatial dimension contracts in the lay, the lovers' frustration increases. Their close physical proximity is a joy and a frustration.¹² Marie de France has carefully constructed the wall as a physical barrier, not as a moral one, for it cannot obstruct their sincere affection. The real obstruction they will encounter is not the wall, but rather the jealous husband.

As carefully as she has telescoped the scenario for the lovers, Marie de France now sets the scene for the introduction of the nightingale. The use of the Breton word laüstic has already given the bird a unique quality. Her style in describing the spring night and the bird's song is more typical of the introduction to a chanson lyrique than to that of a lay. The knight and his lady appreciate the bird's song in the moonlight and lend it a special meaning. In a subtle contrast between the lover and the husband, the husband's lack of sensitivity is attacked. While the lovers enjoy the evening's music, the husband is sound asleep. In describing the bird's song the poetess has declared that "Ki amur ad a sun talent,/ N'est merveille s'il i entent!" (v. 63-64). When the husband is angered by his wife's insomnia, she answers his queries with a similar explanation:

"Sire, la dame li respunt,
 Il nen ad joië en cest mund
 Ki n'ot le laüstic chanter.
 Pur ceo me vois ici ester.
 Tant ducement l'i oi la nuit
 Que mut me semble grant deduit;
 Tant m'i delit e tant le voil
 Que jeo ne puis dormir de l'oil." (v. 83-90).

At best the husband is excluded from a love relationship. At worst he

¹²Cottrell, "Laüstic," p. 502.

is incapable of love, at least the kind of love his wife values. This apparent defect in the husband is evidence of the ideology of the troubadours that "l'homme qui ignore la joie d'amour ne connaît aucune joie véritable en ce monde."¹³

The husband is determined to trap the nightingale, for he suspects that the bird and its nocturnal song mean more. He takes the captured bird to his wife's room. When he breaks the bird's neck with his two hands, he effectively thwarts the promised renaissance of spring and the hope of closer communication between the lovers. Cruelly he throws the dead bird at his wife, "Si que sun chainse ensanglanta/ Un poi desur le piz devant." (v. 118-119).

The confrontation of the opposing personalities of the husband and wife illustrates yet further the fact that she is mal-mariée and foretells the possible fate of the lovers. Her love for the other man, which was physical in its début, is potentially vulnerable to the hostile physical force represented by her husband. Yet through the fate of the nightingale, and the symbolic content of the bird, the love is sustained and transformed from a physical to a spiritual plane.¹⁴

After her husband leaves the room she curses him bitterly, "Kar mut li unt toleit grant hait." (v. 125). Then she realizes that she must not let her lover believe her affection has died as easily as the bird. In her brief lament the laüstic is reborn as a message to him and as a symbol of their love.

¹³Lazar, Amour courtois et fin' amors, p. 185.

¹⁴Cottrell, "Laüstic," p. 504.

"Lasse, fet ele, mal m'estait!
 Ne purrai mes la nuit lever
 N'aler a la fenestre ester,
 U jeo soil mun ami veeir.
 Une chose sai jeo de veir:
 Il quidera ke jeo me feigne;
 De ceo m'estuet que cunseil preigne.
 Le laüstic li trametrai,
 L'aventure li manderai." (v. 126-134)

Now that the laüstic has gained embellishment as a symbol, the lovers treat the bird as one would treat a relic. She wraps the bird in embroidered cloth. He entombs it in a reliquaire studded with precious gems.

In Laüstic the dénouement emphasizes the psychological state of the woman. The motif of the woman at the window, which in itself represents an opening and a possibility for change, is eclipsed in this lay where

Cette fenêtre, ouverte sur la nuit et sur un impossible amour, forme, à l'évidence, antithèse avec le haut mur de pierre bise (v. 38) qui sépare la maison de la dame de celle du chevalier et elle en tire toute sa signification.¹⁵

In at least three separate verses we see the woman at her window: "Quant a la fenestre s'estut," (v. 40), "A la fenestre ester veneit" (v. 73), and "N'aler a la fenestre ester," (v. 128). Her position at the window and the imagery of moonlight and darkness create an atmosphere of mystery in which it seems she lives in a dream-like reality. Jacques Ribard gives textual evidence to support a wide range of oppositions in the story between the husband and his mundane world, and his wife, who hovers at the window in need of escape. However, Marie de France's mal-mariée lacks the willful ability of the woman in Yonec.

¹⁵Jacques Ribard, "Le Lai du Laostic: Structure et signification," Moyen Age, LXXVI (1970), pp. 266-267.

That she is "plus faible et plus timorée,"¹⁶ may explain the failure of her adventure. Her love has not been aroused in a sincere lament and plea for refuge. Instead, she loves the knight for his reputation and the convenience of his proximity. She does not accept her husband's world, yet she was not initially desperate, nor does she escape.

La dame, pour qui s'est ouverte un moment la fenêtre sur l'inconnu d'un autre monde, va reprendre ... sa pose hiératique de silencieuse attente, cette queste intérieure, toujours déçue, toujours recommencée, d'un impossible amour, de quelque inaccessible Graal.¹⁷

The mal-mariée woman in Guigemar contrasts with her counterpart in Laüstic. She is as aggressive as the woman in Yonec, and her need for escape will not be thwarted. Her desperation is total.

In Guigemar Marie de France illustrates her interpretation of meaningful love by combining an ancient miraculous legend with a realistic love story. The break between the two parts of the lay is an abrupt one that is found nowhere else in the tradition of the lay. Many of the descriptive and magical passages in the first half of the lay have been influenced by other works, yet the second half is purely the work of the poetess. Though it appears first in the manuscripts, Guigemar was certainly not written before Bisclavret and Equitan. Because Marie de France outlines her feelings on love in this lay, at least one modern critic, Moshé Lazar, recognizes it as the chef d'oeuvre of the Lais.¹⁸

Guigemar is an ideal knight except for one important failing: he is unable to love and represents the type of le bel indifférent. As he

¹⁶Ribard, "Laostic," p. 270.

¹⁷Ribard, "Laostic," pp. 273-274.

¹⁸Lazar, Amour courtois et fin' amors, p. 198.

matures, his friends and relatives become concerned that he does not seek a woman or accept offers of love. To escape the social pressure Guigemar goes off to hunt. During the hunt he wounds a mysterious horned white doe. His arrow rebounds, and he is wounded in the thigh. Before she succumbs, the doe tells him that his wound can only be cured by a woman who will suffer a great love for him, and by his reciprocal suffering. Thus his physical wound becomes an aspect of his psychological flaw. As he limps away from the forest Guigemar sees a beautiful ship docked at a shore where he has never before seen any vessel. He goes on board to investigate, and the ship miraculously sails on its own and carries him away. Inside, Guigemar finds a luxurious bed, but no other people. He falls asleep on a magic pillow which halts time. As he awakes the ship approaches an inlet and a tower in an unknown city. Here dwell a heavily-guarded mal-mariée and her servant. The women rescue Guigemar and in the tower nurse his wound. As his physical wound mends, Guigemar's emotional suffering increases. He falls in love with the mal-mariée. She, too, suffers a love for Guigemar. They become lovers, and Guigemar remains for a year and a half. Soon after they devise objects of fidelity (a knotted shirt for him and a chastity belt for her), they are discovered by her jealous husband who forces Guigemar to leave on his ship. After a miserable two-year separation the woman escapes. The ship has returned for her, and she is carried to Guigemar's land. She is found by Meriadu who wants her for his wife. **She refuses** him, but is not free to leave his castle. At a tournament Guigemar discovers her and offers his services as a knight to Meriadu in trade for the woman. Meriadu refuses and the two knights go to war.

Guigemar defeats and slays Meriadu, and the lovers are reunited at last.

In the most complete manuscript of the Lais, the Harley manuscript of the British Museum, Guigemar begins with a long prologue in which Marie de France responds to critics, whose objection to her work, she says, is only jealousy. This prologue includes a maxim: "Celui deivent la gent loër/ Ki en bien fait de sei parler." (v. 5-6). But, when there is a woman or man highly esteemed, "Cil ki de sun bien unt envie/ Sovent en d'fent vileinie:/ Sun pris li volent abeissier;" (v. 9-11). The poetess humorously insists that this type of criticism will not interfere with her work:

Nel voil mie pur ceo leissier,
Si gangleür u losengier
Le me volent a mal turner:
Ceo est lur dreit de mesparler! (v. 15-18).

This defense of her work is aptly placed before Guigemar, a lay in which she vigorously attacks the code of fin' amors.

The first 200 verses of the lay of Guigemar are closely related to several legends. The description of the luxurious boat recalls the story of Solomon. The biche blanche has its parallel in Graelent, and matches the white boar in Guingamor and the white buck in the beginning of Erec et Enide. Of course, the initial meeting of the lovers via the magic boat reminds one of the boat ride which first brings the wounded Tristan to Iseult. Despite numerous valid comparisons which may be offered for the first half of Guigemar, Marie de France's lay is significantly unique because of the realistic second half of the story, in which, unlike the more primitive versions of the legend, we are concerned not with a powerful fairy, but with a mortal woman, a mal-mariée.

The setting of Guigemar is "Bretaigne la Menur." (v. 25). We are introduced to Guigemar by means of his lineage. In the reign of "Hoilas" Guigemar's father, "Oridials" is the "sire de L'fun " Because the name Guihomar was traditionally used in the family of viscounts of Léon, Hoepffner suggests that in Guigemar we have an example of a family legend, one which illustrates a miraculous event in the life of an ancestor.¹⁹ Guigemar is "sages e pruz" and he is loved by all who know him. At the age of maturity he is dubbed a knight and journeys from his land to make his peerless fame.

In contrast to his portrait as an ideal knight Guigemar has a major defect. He is unable to love. Because of his refusal of offers of love, he is scorned. Probably because of this social rejection Guigemar retreats to his father's home. While hunting he encounters the clue to his destiny, the white doe. The animal is supernatural: "Vit une bise od un foün;/ Tute fu blanche cele beste/ Perches de cerf out en la teste." (v. 90-92). He fatally wounds the animal, but his arrow mysteriously rebounds and he is himself wounded in the thigh. Now the strange beast in anguish addresses Guigemar:

N'avras tu jamés garisun
 De la plaie k'as en la quisse,
 De si ke cele te guarisse
 Ki souffera pur tue amur
 Issi grant peine e tel dolur
 K'unkes femme taunt ne suffri,
 E tu referas taunt pur li;
 Dunt tuit cil s'esmerveillerunt
 Ki aiment e amé avrunt
 U ki pois amerunt après. (v. 112-121)

Guigemar's physical suffering can only be cured when it is replaced by

¹⁹Hoepffner, Lais de Marie de France, p. 83.

love's suffering, but once he finds the first cure, his psychological defect will be resolved as well.

Jean Frappier has analyzed the importance of the white beast in this and other ancient tales. He determines that "selon la donnée la plus traditionnelle, la bête blanche que le héros ou le chevalier chasse dans la forêt 'aventureuse' est un leurre envoyé par une fée pour attirer auprès d'elle, dans l'Autre Monde, celui dont elle désire l'amour."²⁰ Ironically, then, Guigemar has not been the hunter, but rather the prey. This development in the lay is an example of the medieval popularity of antitheses. Later, Guigemar will appear to rescue a woman, yet she ultimately saves him.

Guigemar quickly realizes he has no choice but to seek the woman who can cure him. Rather than turn to one of the women of his country who have already offered their love, significantly Guigemar assumes he must journey before he can be cured. A psychological interpretation of this decision would affirm that Guigemar's cure is essentially a spiritual need. For him this will be a mythic journey. He is incomplete because he cannot love a woman, and the means of his cure will necessarily secure a larger, more important end: his self-realization. A magical path leads Guigemar to a shore where he has never before seen a vessel. A ship is now docked there. The sumptuous description of this ship enhances the atmosphere of predestined adventure. Guigemar boards the ship, but he cannot find anyone on board. In the middle of the ship he finds an exquisite bed of gold and ivory. As Guigemar sits

²⁰ Jeanne Walthelet-Willem, "Le Mystère chez Marie de France," Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire, Volume XXXIX (1961), p. 667.

down on the bed, the ship automatically sets sail. He feels the pain of his wound and his physical anguish increases as he embarks toward his spiritual cure. He prays that God lead him to a port and save him from death.

At this point the poetess interrupts the adventure, and we find the caesura of the lay; the mid-point between the primitive, miraculous legend and the realistic dénouement of a knight and a mal-mariée which identifies Guigemar in contrast to Graelent and Guingamor, two anonymous lays. It is here that Marie de France's lay actually begins as her story is that of the love affair. She tells us, "Hui ad trespassé le plus fort" (v. 204) as Guigemar falls asleep. The stage is set for the love story.

The most radical change from the ancient tradition of this lay is the transformation of the fairy into a mortal woman. Although the fairy originally cures the man's wound by magic, the lady and her servant, a niece, in Guigemar will wash and bind it very simply.

De même qu'ici un procédé purement humain remplace la guérison magique, de même la fée perd son caractère primitif, qu'elle conserve encore dans Lanval, pour devenir simplement une femme, une noble dame, une mal-mariée, qui trouve, comme celle de Yonec, une compensation pour son triste sort dans l'amour partagé avec le bel et noble étranger, venu par miracle d'une terre lointaine.²¹

Guigemar's noble lady is "Franche, curteise, bele e sage." (v. 212). She is married to the old man who rules the city. He is jealous, but his true failing is his age:

²¹Hoepffner, Lais de Marie de France, p. 85.

Gelus esteit a desmesure,
 Kar ceo purporte la nature
 Ke tuit li vieil seient gelus--
 Mult het chascuns ke il seit cous--:
 Tels est d'eage le trespas! (v. 213-217).

This argument is not unlike those posited by Andreas Capellanus in his insistence that love is the privilege of youth.

The woman is locked in private rooms surrounded by thick, high walls of marble. There is only one entrance, which is guarded night and day. At the other end her prison is bound by the sea, this point offers the only access. Her chapel and bedroom are richly adorned; she has all the comforts but her freedom.

Marie de France details for her audience the image of a painting in the woman's chamber. This image is an attack on Ovid's Ars amatoria and a prelude to the definition of love which Marie de France will reject and discredit in this lay. Venus dominates the painting and shows "Cument hom deit amur tenir/ E lealment e bien servir." (v. 237-238). The poetess's first criticism of fin' amors is shown in Venus's action.

Le livre Ovide, ou il enseine
 Comment chascuns s'amur estreine,
 En un fu ardant le gettout,
 E tuz iceus escumengout
 Ki jamais cel livre lirreient
 Ne sun enseignement fereient. (v. 239-244).

In two earlier versions of the legend, Graelent and Guingamor, the knight discovers the fairy as she is bathing. In Guigemar the woman is on her way to the water to bathe when she sees the ship approaching her orchard. The woman is frightened since the ship is deserted, and she wants to flee, but her more courageous servant calms her. The servant is first to board and discover Guigemar, whom she believes is dead.

Then she brings her lady on board. Beside the bed the woman admires and mourns the beauty of this knight. She places her hand near his heart and feels his heartbeat. Guigemar awakens and rejoices that his ship has landed. He relates the adventure and asks where he is. The woman tells him nothing more than that her husband owns the land. Then she laments her situation as the wife of an old man.

Riches hum est, de haut parage,
 Mes mut par est de grant eage.
 Anguissusement est gelus;
 Par cele fei ke jeo dei vus,
 Dedenz cest clos m'ad enseree.
 N'i ad fors une sule entree. (v. 341-346).

She tells him of the old priest who guards the entrance, and that she dares not leave the enclosure. She then invites him to remain until he is strong again, as if in total ignorance of the jealous proximity of her husband. Guigemar accepts, and she cleans and binds his wound in her chamber and shares her food with him.

Now Guigemar "De sa plaie nul mal ne sent." (v. 383). He is in anguish over the love he begins to feel for the woman. He has forgotten his own land, but he knows that without her love he will die. The potentially fatal wound now is love, not the physical wound. His love sickness is described in stereotyped terms and is compared to a fire. He mournfully recalls each of the lady's features. Neither Guigemar nor the lady, who is in love with him, recognizes the malady as love. The servant girl leads Guigemar to announce his feelings to the lady, though he is at first hesitant.

A second critique of fin' amors causes Guigemar to admit his feelings. Certainly it is the poetess speaking through his thoughts and addressing those who would popularize the Provençale code.

Amur est plaie dedenz cors
 E si ne piert nient defors;
 Ceo est un mal ki lunges tient,
 Pur ceo que de Nature vient.
 Plusur le tienent a gabeis,
 Si cume cil vilain curteis
 Ki jolivent par tut le mund,
 Puis s'avantent de ceo que funt.
 N'est pas amur, einz est folie,
 E mauveistié e lecherie! (v. 483-492).

Although Marie de France has been called a conservative moralist because of her rejection of fin' amors, the arguments of Jean Frappier discussed in Chapter I would show her point of view as representative of Northern France.

The role of pride in love was probably the subject of casuistical arguments in the twelfth-century salons, and in Guigemar Marie de France explains her point of view. When Guigemar confesses his love the lady replies that she cannot answer his request immediately since she is not used to such requests. Guigemar's reply to her is a lesson for women in love:

Femme jolive de mestier
 Se deit lunc tens faire preier
 Pur sei cherir, que cil ne quit
 Que ele eit usé cel deduit;
 Mes la dame de bon purpens,
 Ki en sei eit valor ne sens,
 S'ele treve hume a sa maniere,
 Ne se ferat vers lui trop fiere,
 Ainz l'amerat, s'en avrat joie. (v. 515-523).

Only an experienced lover should hesitate, one for whom love is an intellectual game. As a virtuous woman she should follow her sentiments and forget her pride. Guigemar's argument succeeds, and for the next year and a half the lovers live together in her prison.

One day the woman intuitively feels the dangerous potential of discovery. She fears Guigemar will love another if he is forced to

leave her and devises a manner of insuring his loyalty. She knots his shirt in a special way. Then she insists that he should only love a woman who can untie the knot without cutting it, though only she is so able. Guigemar counters her gift of loyalty with one for her. He buckles a ceinture, a chastity belt, around her and gives permission for her to love whoever can unbuckle the belt "Sanz depecier e sanz partir." (v. 574). That very day they are discovered, and Guigemar flees to his ship to save his life.

Once he is home the knotted shirt protects Guigemar from the pressure to marry that greets him. His problems at home have apparently not changed during his long absence. He answers his men's demands:

Ja ne prendra femme a nul jur,
 Ne pur aveir ne pur amur,
 S'ele ne peüst despleier
 Sa chemise sanz depecier. (v. 647-650).

The woman is severely punished by her angry husband. For two years she is locked in a tower; no longer does she have the relative freedom of her chamber and orchard.

Le jur ad mal e la nuit pis;
 Nuls hum el mund ne purreit dire
 Sa grant peine, ne le martire
 Ne l'anguisse ne la dolur
 Que la dame suffre en la tur. (v 660-664)

She miraculously escapes and hastens to the water to drown herself, but the ship, now devoid of its former luxury, is there. She is carried to Meriadu's land, near Guigemar's home in Brittany. Meriadu wants to marry her, but when she refuses he locks her in his castle. She defends herself from him by insisting that to love her he must first unbuckle her chastity belt. Meriadu associates her strange demand with Guigemar's and unwittingly alerts her of Guigemar's proximity.

The lovers' reunion contains no element of miracle, but is brought about by very realistic circumstances. Guigemar discovers her at a tournament. It is Meriadu who jokingly suggests that the lady should try to untie Guigemar's knotted shirt. She succeeds, but Guigemar is only convinced after he feels the chastity belt on her.

After he has heard her adventure, Guigemar courteously offers his service to Meriadu as recompense for the return of the lady. The final reunion, however, will not be so simply won. Meriadu refuses to release the woman. Guigemar gains strong support for the battle and lays siege to Meriadu's lands and castle; in a fairy-tale ending he carries away his lady.

The major theme of Guigemar is the inevitable suffering of love. The obstacle of separation and the strength of suffering will not defeat a sincere and loyal devotion. The portrait of Guigemar and his initial inability to love illustrate a psychological malady that Capellanus recognized when he wrote that not to love is unnatural. The process of his healing, including the effect of the woman's love, the mythic journey to her land, and the final heroic conquest of Meriadu, illustrates the major actions of the hero's self-completion. The woman is a stereotype of the mal-mariée who indirectly causes each of Guigemar's actions, yet is herself relatively passive. The process of her self-realization remains an internal one which the audience can only infer from her actions.

La femme de même n'en aimera qu'un seul, celui qui lui est 'prédestiné.' Elle repousse l'amour du vieux mari jaloux aussi bien que celui de Meriaduc; elle acceptera les pires souffrances pour rester attachée à cet amour unique.²²

In Guigemar, Marie de France severely criticizes the fin' amors philosophy. She is in accord with the idea of the troubadours of Provence that love and suffering go hand-in-hand. But she categorically refutes Ovid's remedies for love's suffering as a sacrilege to sincere love. The suffering in Guigemar is a type of purification, a necessary pain. Her characters are motivated throughout the Lais by natural impulses which cannot be codified. The intellectualism of amour courtois, discredited in this lay in the description of the painting and the debate about pride in love, is antithetical to Marie de France's conception of love as a natural phenomenon.

²²Hoepffner, Lais de Marie de France, p. 93.

CHAPTER IV

THE IDEALIZED WOMEN IN THE LAIS

In Lanval, Fresne and Eliduc four women illustrate Marie de France's ideal woman. Their perfection combines physical beauty and spiritual wholeness. The qualities of mercy and humility indicate their superior personal development. The major women in this group, Lanval's fairy, Fresne, and Guildeluëc, redeem men in the lays who are trapped by conflicting love and loyalty. Unlike the selfish women in Chapter II who betray their men, these characters are betrayed in love, but spontaneously forgive the betrayal. The mal-mariées in Chapter III act out predetermined situations, but the ideal women are free of rigid social bonds. The excellence in their forgiving and generous personalities is tied to their independence, for their actions as saviors in love are freely chosen.

The fairy in Lanval is the most independent woman in the Lais because she is supernatural. Her attraction to Lanval is no less sincere a love than that of a mortal woman. She freely chooses to love him and to rescue him from Guenièvre's unjust accusation. Her redemptive action is motivated by a concern for justice as well as by her love for him. Although her incredible beauty is underscored throughout the lay, **her rescue** of Lanval is the only action which **proves** her spiritual perfection.

Lanval is the story of the salvation by his fairy lover of one of King Arthur's most noble and generous knights. The fairy seeks Lanval to give him her love and miraculous, infinite wealth. She warns him that she will never return if he divulges the secret of their love and her existence to anyone. When the Queen arrogantly offers her love to Lanval he refuses on the pretext of his loyalty to Arthur. The Queen is enraged and accuses Lanval of homosexuality. In impulsive anger Lanval boasts of his love, whose most common servant is more beautiful and intelligent than Guenièvre. The Queen falsely accuses Lanval of seduction, and Arthur brings Lanval to judgment by his peers. As Lanval is about to be judged guilty, his fairy intervenes to save him. The court excuses Lanval once they see the fairy and her servants, who are in fact superior in beauty to all women. Lanval rides away with her to Avalon, her land, never to return to King Arthur's court.

Marie de France has created the Arthurian setting in Lanval. Lanval is nowhere named among the knights of the Round Table, but as a foreign knight he is like Lancelot. In Lanval one of the essential elements of the Arthurian story, heroic exploit, is missing. Marie de France has inserted this legendary character into the renowned court of the Breton king to please her audience. She emphasizes the Arthurian setting by her mention of the battle against the Scots, the duke of Cornouailles, Gauvain, Yvain, and the isle of Avalon. Wace portrays Guenièvre negatively, but in the later Arthurian series only Lancelot **includes** a vicious queen. Because the literary **influences in Lanval** are chiefly from Wace and the Roman de Thebes Hoepffner concludes that

Marie de France wrote Lanval before the popularity of Chrétien de Troyes and dates Lanval before Guigemar or Eliduc.¹

In "Le mystère chez Marie de France" Jeanne Walthelet-Willem compares two legends which share the theme of the lays of Guigemar and Lanval. Her study treats the anonymous legends of Graelent and Guingamor.² Some biographers have attempted in the past to credit Marie de France with one or both of these lays, but a consensus of opinion now supports their anonymous authorship. Graelent, like Lanval, refuses the queen's seduction and hunts a white doe. He finds a young woman at a fountain, and they become lovers in secrecy. When the queen parades before the court for each knight to acknowledge her supreme beauty, Graelent refuses and must then reveal his secret lover. Guingamor rejects the queen's allurements. The indignant queen challenges him to hunt the white boar, and he accepts although no knight has ever returned from this hunt. In the forest a woman promises to shelter Guingamor for three days and to give him the boar. He stays for three hundred years, and finally receives the white boar. In the end the woman saves his life, and Guingamor remains at her enchanted castle. In Guigemar and Lanval Marie de France modifies the more primitive legend. Yet significant remnants in each lay tie Marie de France's work to the anonymous, less sophisticated legends.

The fairy in Lanval is the first example of an idealized woman. She is superior to all mortal women in physical beauty; in fact, it is

¹Ernest Hoepffner, "Pour la chronologie des Lais de Marie de France," Romania, LIX (1933), pp. 369-370.

²Jeanne Walthelet-Willem, "Le Mystère chez Marie de France," Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire, XXXIX (1961), pp. 666-670.

chiefly in her physical appearance that she is admirable. Her most important action is her intervention on Lanval's behalf at the court of King Arthur. One cannot ignore the parallel between her action as a redeemer of Lanval and the role of the Virgin as a redemptive and intervening spirit. In these two aspects, her beauty and her intervention for justice, the fairy is ideal.

The action in Lanval is readily divided into three sections: Lanval's meeting with the fairy, his argument with Queen Guenièvre, and his judgment and pardon by the court. Each of these events brings Lanval and the fairy closer to one another as the fairy's excellence is affirmed, especially in contrast to the Queen, and Lanval's isolation from the Round Table knights becomes more profound. Characteristically, Marie de France defines Lanval's and the fairy's qualities by their reactions to the events.

Lanval's alienation is emphasized when Arthur forgets to reward him for loyal service. His peers do not attempt to redress the error, and Lanval is lonely and vulnerable when he first meets the fairy. He wants to escape his mundane existence.

His encounter with the fairy is Lanval's introduction to the Autre Monde, the miraculous land of Avalon of Breton folklore, where Lanval will ultimately retire with her. In a meadow the knight "Sur une ewe curaunt descent" (v. 45) and "... sis chevals tremble forment" (v. 46) as he crosses the stream. He watches as two dream-like maidens approach the meadow.

L'eisnee portout uns bacins
 D'or esmeré, bien faiz e fins;
 Le veir vus en dirai sanz faile:
 L'autre portout une tûaile. (v. 61-64).

The golden wash basin and the towel may be remnants from the more ancient tale which is the origin of Graelent, Guingamor, and Lanval, the version in which the knight first finds the woman as she bathes and steals her clothing. But, as Hoepffner argues, this would not be an acceptable act for Lanval. It was this brutal behavior in Guingamor which caused the fairy to reproach the knight's behavior and threaten his reputation.³ To remove this coarseness from her hero Marie de France may have reduced the bath to a golden bowl and a towel. Etiquette in the twelfth century required that an honored guest be offered water to wash as soon as he arrived.⁴ This was an indication of courteous welcome and usually the prelude to a meal. Marie de France may include these details as proof of the courtoisie of the fairy or to illustrate her welcome to Lanval. The maidens later precede their fairy in her procession to Lanval at the court. Now they bring him to her.

In order to follow them into the world of fantasy Lanval must divest himself of his ordinary world and his identity as a chevalier. When they take his horse the image of his normal life is removed and he is transformed. Silently he is led to the fairy's tent.

Lanval has found refuge in the Autre Monde of the fairy. When she offers him her love, she offers regeneration and hope. Jean-Charles Payen has written an apt comparison of the fairy and the dame courtoise of medieval literature.

³Ernest Hoepffner, Les Lais de Marie de France (Mayenne: Joseph Floch, 1971), p. 60.

⁴Jeanne Walthelet-Willem, "Le Mystère chez Marie de France," p. 661.

La fée, libre de sa personne, n'y est pas la dame inaccessible dont la conquête exige un siège héroïque et douloureux. Elle n'est pas non plus l'ingénue passionnée, toute prête à se rendre, mais retenue encore par les interdits d'une douloureuse pudeur, telle que se complaît à la peindre le roman antique. Elle est beaucoup plus proche des héroïnes celtiques qui s'offrent spontanément à l'homme dont elles s'éprennent.⁵

The fairy's tent is luxuriously described. As much a fantasy-world setting as Guigemar's ship, it is pictured in detail:

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 aveir k'il i donast! (v. 87-92).

In contrast to the description of the tent there is only a hint at the beauty of the fairy, who is carefully presented only later. Here her beauty is superior to Nature's creation: "Flur de lis e rose nuvele,/ Quant ele pert al tens d'esté,/ Trespassot ele de beauté." (v. 94-96).

Contrary to the passive role of women decreed in the code of amour courtois, the fairy offers her love to the knight. Guenièvre as well will ignore etiquette and offer herself, but her offer will be the result of insincere vanity. The fairy requests Lanval's love:

"Lanval, fet ele, beus amis,
Pur vus vinc jeo fors de ma tere:
De luinz vus sui venue quere!
Se vus estes pruz e curteis,
Emperere ne quens ne reis
N'ot unkes tant joie ne bien,
Kar jo vus aim sur tute rien." (v. 110-116).

This encounter was predestined, as she has sought him and traveled far. If he accepts her, he will surpass kings and emperors in his joy. The

⁵Jean-Charles Payen, Le Motif du repentir dans la littérature française médiévale des origines à 1230 (Geneva: Droz, 1968), p. 308.

love she offers has an inner value for Lanval more rewarding than the lands and titles he can earn in knighthood.

Lanval submits himself to her after Love captures his heart, and he swears to her, "Ne savr'iez rien comander/ Que j'eo ne face a mun poeir,/ Turt a folie u a saveir." (v. 124-126). The fairy gives her love physically to Lanval. Then she bestows on him a miraculous wealth, the more he spends, the more his treasure of gold and silver increases.

Jean-Charles Payen in his discussion of Lanval defines a geis as the set of mysterious conditions and obligations which are necessary to a fantastic adventure.⁶ In Lanval the geis is two-fold. Lanval must submit his will to that of the fairy in his love for her. He must also guard the secret of their love and her existence. She warns Lanval that a failure of discretion will be punished:

De ceo vus dirai ja la somme:
A tuz jurs m'avr'iez perdue,
Si ceste amur esteit seüe,
James nem purr'iez veeir
Ne de mun cors seisine aveir." (v. 146-150).

Lanval promises to obey. She explains that she will return to him, but that no one else will see or hear her. But once Lanval reveals the secret she will not return. As Jean-Charles Payen explains, "Il ne peut la revoir après qu'il rompt leur secret, pas seulement parce qu'elle veut le punir, mais parce qu'il lui manque l'accès à l'autre monde."⁷ When the geis is broken, the passage between their two worlds is blocked.

⁶Jean-Charles Payen, Le Motif du repentir, pp. 308-309.

⁷Jean-Charles Payen, Le Motif du repentir, p. 310.

As Lanval prepares to leave, the two maidens bring him his horse. The horse, which had been unsaddled, is newly and richly adorned. After the dream-like adventure as he returns to the court the new saddle will be the only concrete proof for Lanval of the fairy's reality. The return of his horse suggests the return of his worldly identity as well as his return to consciousness.

The second main action of Lanval concerns the Queen's attempt to seduce Lanval and their subsequent argument. Not long after he has acquired his wealth and the fairy's love, Lanval is asked by "Walwains" and "Ywains" to go to a gathering of knights and ladies at the castle. In the society of knights and ladies, Lanval stands aside. He is not interested in their company and misses his fairy lady. His former ambition in the court has waned as his attraction to her has increased. At the court Lanval is angered by Guenièvre's insulting accusation that he is homosexual. He inadvertently reveals the fairy's existence.

Mes jo aim e si sui amis
 Cele ki deit aveir le pris
 Sur tutes celes que jeo sai.
 E une chose vus dirai,
 Bien le sachiez a descobert:
 Une de celes ki la sert,
 Tute la plus povre meschine,
 Vaut mieux de vus, dame reïne,
 De cors, de vis e de beauté,
 D'enseignement e de bunté!" (v. 293-302).

Guenièvre complains to King Arthur and demands justice. Lanval is accused of two wrongs against the King. his alleged desire for the Queen and his praise of a servant as more worthy than Guenièvre. Both accusations are capital offenses to his oath of loyalty to Arthur.

The third section of Lanval describes Lanval's trial and his deliverance by the merciful fairy. Immediately after his transgression

Lanval's calls for his fairy are ignored. Certain that he has lost her forever, Lanval's depression is nearly suicidal. He is brought before the King to defend himself. Lanval denies the first charge, but confesses to the second.

At the assembly of judges the duke of "Cornwaille" speaks against those who would defy justice in order to please their King and defines the condition by which Lanval will be judged. He urges them in favor of justice: "'Ja endreit nus n'i avra faille,/ Kar ki qu'en plurt ne ki qu'en chant,/ Le dreit estuet aler avant." (v. 434-436). Lanval's fate rests with the fairy. To be proven innocent he must defend his boasts of her excellence by bringing her before the court. If the judges agree with Lanval's comparison of the fairy and the Queen, Lanval will be declared innocent. But, if the fairy does not come as proof, "Ceo li devum faire saveir:/ Tut sun servise pert del rei/ E sil deit cungeer de sei.'" (v. 458-460). The duke has insisted that Lanval's offense is against the King, and that it is chiefly his feudal oath to Arthur that has been questioned. Since his crime is not directly against the other knights, the duke implies that a death penalty is not warranted as punishment. Instead, Lanval faces a loss of his place at the Round Table, personal dishonor, and exile. After Lanval announces that he cannot provide proof, King Arthur impatiently closes the process. As the barons are ready to leave, the fairy's procession approaches them.

Marie de France opens her complete description of the fairy with a procession in order to fully emphasize the superlative beauty of the fairy. This motif of the triple gradation is found in the Tristan story as well. "Dans le vieux roman de Tristan, l'auteur est placé,

comme Marie, devant la nécessité de faire saisir à l'un de ses personnages la beauté inouïe de la reine Iseut. Il se sert à cet effet du motif, très répandu dans la littérature populaire, de 'la triple gradation.'⁸ In Tristan and in Lanval it is the fair servants who precede their mistress. The pace of the procession before the court is that of Lanval's slow renaissance of hope.

The description of the two "puceles" who appear is very similar to that of Antigone in the Roman de Thebes. Hoepffner believes this work was a model for the description of all the women in Lanval.⁹ Antigone's description as "D'une porpre inde fu vestue/ Tot senglement a sa char nue" is indeed close to the maidens in Lanval who are "De cendal purpre sunt vestues/ Tut senglement a lur chars nues." (v. 475-476).

After the first pair of maidens two more approach the court. They are even more lovely than the first, and they prove Lanval's statement to the Queen. These maidens create the atmosphere for the incredible fairy's appearance. The jury is very impressed.

Mut les loèrent li plusur
De cors, de vis e de colur:
N'i ad cele mieuz ne vausist
Qu'unkes la reine ne fist. (v. 529-532).

The Queen nervously and impatiently desires a verdict. As the others admire the fairy's maidens, she insists that she must leave to eat. Just as the court prepares to close, the fairy arrives at a gallop.

The portrait of the fairy has a three-way focus: her physical appearance, especially her facial features; her clothing; and her horse.

⁸Ernest Hoepffner, Lais de Marie de France, p. 65.

⁹Hoepffner, Lais de Marie de France, pp. 65-67, and "Pour la chronologie des Lais de Marie de France," pp. 359-364.

These are the elements of the descriptions of Ismène and Antigone in the Roman de Thebes and of Camille in the Roman d'Enée. In each of these portraits the woman is an image of exquisite, supernatural beauty and an idealized character. Marie de France emphasizes the facial features of the fairy rather than describing each part of her body, as was customary in a complete description.

First, the fairy's horse is described. The "blanc palefrei" is the most pleasing beast ever beheld. He is so richly adorned and saddled that he is as valuable as land to a count or king.

The second step of the portrait is the description of her clothing. She is lightly clothed "De chainse blanc e de chemise." (v. 560). This simple description of her attire leads into a description of her body, since it is perceptible under the chainse. "Le cors ot gent, basse la hanche,/ Le col plus blanc que neif sur branche." (v. 563-564).

The emphasis in the portrait of the fairy is on her face, for here lies her superiority. Each feature is individually pictured:

Les oilz ot vairs e blanc le vis,
Bele buche, neis bien asis,
Les surcilz bruns e bel le frunt,
E le chief cresp e aukes blunt.
Fils d'or ne gette tel luur
Cum si chevel cuntre le jur! (v. 565-570).

It is particularly her golden hair which attracts a certain attention and indicates her nobility, according to popular belief. The crowds in the village, young and old alike, join in praising her beauty. Her effect on the judges is no less significant:

Li jugeür ki la veeient
A grant merveille le teneient.
Il n'ot un sul ki l'esgardast
De dreite joie n'eschaufast! (v. 581-584).

As the procession of her maidens and the fairy enters the city, there is a slow renaissance of hope in Lanval. Initially he was despondent and indifferent to his fate. As each pair of maidens arrives his friends ask if his fairy is among them. Lanval does not expect his lady's help, so he is not disappointed when she is not there. Yet as the fervor builds at the court as the result of the maidens' arrival, Lanval feels its effect. When he is told that the most beautiful woman of all, a blonde, approaches, his reaction is an ascent from despair. He puts his destiny in her hands; if she does not forgive him he cares not for his fate. When he sees her he cries out: "'Par fei, fet il, ceo est m'amie!/ Or ne m'est gueres ki m'ocie,/ Si ele n'ad merci de mei,/ Kar gariz sui quant jeo la vei!'" (v. 597-600).

The fairy enters the palace, and letting her cloak fall so as to be seen by all, she approaches the King. After he has praised her beauty, she defends Lanval and offers herself as a guarantee that he has not lied. She declares:

Ne vuil mie qu'a mal li turt
 De ceo qu'il dist, ceo saches tu,
 Que la reïne ad tort eü:
 Unkes nul jur ne la requist.
 De la vantance ke il fist,
 Si par mei peot estre aquitez,
 Par vos baruns seit delivrez!" (v. 618-624).

The fairy has inspired Lanval with new hope, and he emerges from his passive sadness. The challenge of crossing between the two worlds, Avalon and King Arthur's court, has been accomplished by both lovers. Now Lanval chooses between the two; he chooses the fairy and her world. As she rounds the corner of the palace, Lanval leaps from the mounting

block onto the back of her horse. They ride away together, to Avalon as the Bretons tell us, and are never heard from again.

The fairy as Lanval's redeemer reflects a literary and a religious influence. In the Roman de Thebes, by the intervention of the beautiful Salemandre at the court of King Eteocles her guilty lover is saved from a deserved punishment.¹⁰ Lanval's fairy particularly represents the Virgin of the miracle plays in that she intervenes in favor of justice, as the Queen has falsely witnessed against Lanval. In medieval times, the Virgin was represented as taking under her cloak the sinners who, under divine law, would go to hell or purgatory, but for whom she obtained better conditions. That men make the laws and deal with worldly matters and women have the role of pleading for leniency fits the old patriarchal family pattern, where father does the punishing, and mother begs for leniency and says that father is too severe.¹¹ In her superlative beauty and commanding demeanor the fairy implies a higher authority than the King. In the end, when Lanval chooses her world, he has chosen a higher ideal than the mundane world could offer him.

The second story in the Lais of an ideal woman character is Fresne. The setting of Fresne is "en Bretagne" (v. 3) specifically near the city of "Dol" (v. 243). This lay recounts how the girl Fresne came to be abandoned by her mother, and how she ultimately recovers her identity. Fresne's mother had maligned a neighbor woman who bore twins, for in the Middle Ages it was commonly believed that twins were

¹⁰Hoepffner, "Pour la chronologie des Lais de Marie de France," p. 364.

¹¹Marie-Louise von Franz, The Feminine in Fairy Tales (New York. Spring Publications, 1972), p. 33.

separately fathered. Soon after, Fresne's mother bore twin daughters. To avoid public humiliation she allowed a servant to carry Fresne away, and Fresne was abandoned near a convent. There she is raised until a wealthy seignur from Dol takes her to live with him. Though they are in love, her questionable identity prevents his marriage to her. His vassals demand that he marry and produce an heir. By miraculous coincidence, he nearly weds the twin sister of Fresne, Codre. Before their vows are final, Fresne's mother recognizes the coverlet in which she once wrapped her rejected child. The family is reunited, and Fresne marries the man she loves.

Fresne's willingness to forfeit her identity by giving the coverlet, her only souvenir of her origin, is the crux of her portrait as a perfect woman. Her humility is no less emphasized than her self-sacrifice, for she gives the coverlet to the man she loves for his marriage bed. In contrast to Lanval's fairy, who is ideal in her physical beauty, Fresne is not only attractive, but well-educated and spiritually superior. Her actions deemphasize the importance of her physical beauty.

The mother of Fresne is an influential secondary character in the lay. She has been included in Chapter II of this study, therefore I will refer to her briefly now and only in contrast to her daughter. She first sends Fresne away in order to save her own reputation, as she selfishly reasons: "Un des enfanz m'estuet murdrir,/ Mieuz le voil vers Deu amender/ Que mei hunir e vergunder." (v. 92-94). Later, as she prepares the wedding of her daughter Codre to Gurun of Dol, her intention is to rid the castle of his mistress, Fresne. Her self-serving and

vicious personality has not altered. Ironically, her redemption at the end of the lay is only made possible by the humiliating confession, a penance she has delayed for nearly twenty years. Even then she only admits her sin after her husband grants his pardon.

Reputation and hearsay are two conflicting minor themes in Fresne. First, Fresne's mother attacks the reputation of her neighbor's wife. This cruelty ultimately returns to her when she bears twins and must send one child away to protect her own reputation. She wraps the infant in a rich coverlet and ties a golden ring around the tiny wrist to display the child's nobility. The mother's obsessive concern with reputation is the mark of a shallow character. Gurun of Dol is first aware of Fresne by her reputation, which is the source of his love for her. Finally, despite her admirable qualities, Fresne cannot marry the knight from Dol because of her unknown lineage. Her family's reputation is unknown.

S. Foster Damon's study of the Lais in pairs is most readily adaptable for Fresne and Milun.¹² Neither lay involves the supernatural so apparent in Breton lays. In fact, Milun is defined as simply the work of "li aunc'ien." (v. 532). In each lay the infant must be secretly hidden to preserve a woman's reputation, and "la reconnaissance est amenée dans chaque cas par un acte de déférence de la part de l'enfant."¹³ In Milun as in Fresne a ring reunites parent and child, though in Fresne the ring is secondary to the coverlet as an object of

¹²S. Foster Damon, "Marie de France, Psychologist of Courtly Love," Publication of the Modern Language Association of America, XLIV, (1929), pp. 968-996.

¹³Hoepffner, Lais de Marie de France, p. 109.

recognition. However, whereas in Milun the emphasis is on the father's story, in Fresne the mother's tale only sets the stage for the portrayal of the flawless daughter.

Fresne is saved from her mother's murderous plot by a compassionate servant's offer to abandon her far from home. The servant leaves the child at an abbey and prays for God's salvation. She abandons the infant cradled in the split of four branches in an ash tree. Fresne is later named for this tree. The porter of the abbey discovers Fresne and takes her to the abbess.

Two women in Fresne, her adopted mother and her true mother, love the girl from first sight. The abbess is the guardian of her development and her spiritual teacher. As the abbess is generous to Fresne, so will Fresne be merciful and generous to her lover, her mother, and her sister. When the porter brings the child to the abbess, "Cele l'ad forment esgardé/ E dit que nurir le fera/ E pur sa niece la tendra." (v. 222-224) In contrast to the natural mother, who selfishly denies her relationship to the child, the abbess creates a relationship where none physically exists. In the lay's climax as the mother realizes Fresne as her child, her reaction is similar: "Sa mere l'ad mut esgardee,/ En sun qor preisee e amee." (v. 383-384).

The first description of Fresne tells why others came to love her at first sight, yet her personality is described as well.

Quant ele vint en tel eé
 Que Nature furme beuté,
 En Bretagne ne fu si bele
 Ne tant curteise dameisele;
 Franche esteit e de bone escole,
 E en semblant e en parole.
 Nuls ne la vit que ne l'amast
 E merveille ne la preisast. (v. 235-242).

Indeed the knights and servants at the house of her lover worship Fresne while she lives there. She is merciful and calm when he proposes to marry another, but the servants mourn the loss of Fresne.

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 garçun
 Merveillus dol pur li feseient
 De ceo ke perdre la deveient. (v. 351-358).

Gurun falls in love with Fresne as soon as he hears of her and at first sight of her knows he must have her for his lover. He is the vehicle of the second description of Fresne: "Mut la vit bele e enseignee,/ Sage, curteise e afeitiee." (v. 253-254). It is important that even here Fresne is not described solely in terms of her physical beauty. The knight visits Fresne often, and we are told that she loves him, "Cele ki durement l'amot/ Bien otriât ceo que li plot." (v. 289-290). He persuades her to leave so as to avoid a dangerous deception in the convent, and to save the abbess from dishonor should Fresne become pregnant. Fresne agrees to move to his castle, and she brings her only possessions, her coverlet and her ring, with her.

To placate his nearly mutinous vassals, Gurun agrees to marry. He chooses a wealthy neighbor's daughter, none other than Codre, Fresne's twin. To further ease the tense situation he makes a speech comparing the apparently barren Fresne and her sister, Codre, whom he will marry to procure an heir.

The marriage is arranged without any complaint from Fresne, who is revered for her stoicism. Her mother arrives at Dol with the intention of marrying Fresne to "un prodhume," but she loses her spiteful attitude

as she meets the young woman. The mother is astounded by Fresne's charity:

La dameisele es chambres fu;
Unques de quank'ele ad veü
Ne fist semblant que li pesast
Ne tant qu'ele se curuçast.
Entur la dame bonement
Serveit mut afeitieement. (v. 375-380).

The palie roé is the catalyst in the recognition scene which reunites the family, prevents the wrong marriage, and brings to Fresne her deserved reward. First the emblem of her rejection, through Fresne it becomes a symbol of her devotion and humility when she puts it on the marriage bed of her lover and her sister. Fresne's gift is a profound self-sacrifice. The reward is as complete as the gift, for as she forfeits her life, she regains it. Like the heroic sacrifice of Guigemar, Milun, and the wife of Eliduc, Fresne's sacrifice is rewarded. "Fresne prouve donc que l'épreuve peut frapper inégalement selon la qualité de l'amour. L'essentiel est qu'il y ait épreuve, et que le héros ou l'héroïne en vienne à bout, par la vertu de sa passion."¹⁴

It is noteworthy that Fresne's only direct speech in the lay is to her mother in response to her mother's anxious queries about the coverlet and the golden ring. She simply relates the adventure of her life and tells of the abbess who told her of her abandonment. Fresne's words lead to the revelation of her identity.

Fresne's gift of the coverlet initiates her mother's redemptive humiliation. Only through Fresne's charity is the mother brought to a confession. As their contrasting natures and actions have illustrated,

¹⁴Payen, Le Motif du repentir, p. 328.

the triumph is one of honest Christian virtue over selfish deception and cruelty.

The central theme of Fresne is the ideal image of a loving woman. Fresne is the only lay named for the woman in the love story. For her mother Fresne is a saving grace. Her devotion to Gurun's happiness is superhuman. He is not chastised for his disregard for Fresne's happiness because his actions are precipitated by social pressure he cannot control. Marie de France not only praises a feminine ideal in Fresne, but more importantly, she portrays an ideal of Christianity.

Eliduc presents a variation of the love triangle we have seen in the lays of mal-mariées, for this lay originates in the folklore tradition of le mari aux deux femmes. Like Gurun of Dol in Fresne, Eliduc's actions are the result of his feudal loyalties and responsibilities. Eliduc loses his king's favor because of envious, malicious gossip. He leaves his land and his wife to become a mercenary in England. There, he pledges loyalty to a king and in battle wins a new fame. The king's daughter, Guilliadun, falls in love with Eliduc, who in returning her love places himself in a conflict of loyalties. After the English king's lands are secure, Eliduc takes Guilliadun across the Channel to his land. When she accidentally learns that Eliduc is married, Guilliadun falls into a death-like sleep. Eliduc enshrines her in an abandoned chapel. His wife, Guildeluëc, discovers the maiden and miraculously revives her. Because she recognizes the sincerity of Eliduc's love for Guilliadun, Guildeluëc forgives him and retires to a convent. Later Eliduc and Guilliadun join in a monastic existence, and all three dedicate their lives to prayer.

Marie de France develops the three characters in Eliduc more completely than she does any others in the Lais. All are presented positively. Eliduc is not harshly blamed for his infidelity, and much emphasis is placed in the lay on his internal debate and the sincerity of his conflicting emotions. In his study of Eliduc Jacques de Caluwé considers the "lignes de force" of the lay to be the description of the characters: "la vaillance et le valeur moral d'Eliduc, la noblesse sociale et psychologique de Guildeluëc, et la noblesse sociale et la beauté de Guilliadun."¹⁵ The first half of the story relates the love between Eliduc and Guilliadun, but Guildeluëc is the real heroine of the lay and the second part of the lay is hers. Marie de France emphasizes the primary roles of the women in Eliduc, though she uses the traditional title of Eliduc's name.

D'eles deus ad li lais a nun
 Guildeluëc ha Guilliadun.
 Elidus fu primes nomez,
 Mes ore est li nuns remuez,
 Kar des dames est avenu
 L'aventure dunt li lais fu (v. 21-26).

Eliduc has a definite Breton origin. Eliduc's seigneur is king of "Brutaine la Meinur" (v. 30) or Armorican Brittany. Certainly the names Eliduc and Guildeluëc are of Breton origin. In this lay Marie de France describes an historical period before the Arthurian era, as the regional rule in England indicates.

A synopsis of the lay precedes the text of Eliduc. This technique is not characteristic of the Lais and appears to be used here as a means of introducing the three characters before the action of the lay begins.

¹⁵Jacques de Caluwé, "La Conception de l'amour dans le lai d'Eliduc de Marie de France," Moyen Age, LXXVII, p. 55.

In her usual manner Marie de France presents the characters briefly; later their actions will embellish these sketches as a complete personality emerges for each character. Eliduc is "Pruz è curteis, hardi et fier." (v. 6). His wife is introduced in terms of the sincerity of their marriage.

Femme ot espuse, noble e sage,
De haute gent, de grant parage.
Ensemble furent lungement,
Mut s'entreamerent l'ëaument. (v. 9-12).

In her concise style Marie de France names the two women and hints at the conflict they pose. Then she emphasizes them as the major forces in the lay.

Guilliadun ot nun la pucele,
El réaume nen ot plus bele!
La femme resteit apelee
Guildeluëc en sa cuntree. (v. 17-20)

Later Eliduc is described as sensible and intelligent as a warrior and generous with victory's spoils. Guilliadun is pictured mainly in terms of her physical beauty, while Guildeluëc is only once called "bele." (v. 710). Between the two women Guildeluëc is certainly more admired in the lay, and she represents a spiritual and moral ideal.

Eliduc's conflict of loyalties in the lay encompasses two choices. First he must choose between the pledge of fidelity he makes to his wife and his promise of love to Guilliadun. But love is not his sole dilemma. In exile from Brittany Eliduc pledges his service to the English king. Then his oath to the Breton ruler is recalled to force by that ruler's request for Eliduc. By leaving his land Eliduc divides his existence and is forced into duplicity in order to prevent a collision of his dual loyalties.

Guilliadun is the cause of the war at "Excestre." Since her father has refused to marry her to a neighbor, hostilities begin. The aged father keeps his daughter sheltered from suitors much as the mal-mariées are "protected."

En un chastel l'aveit enclos.
N'ot el chastel hume si os
Ki cuntre lui osast eissir,
Estur ne mellee tenir. (v. 99-102).

Certainly Eliduc learns of the cause of the battle, yet throughout the lay he appears ignorant of the inescapable conclusion. To the victor of the battle go the spoils, and in this case the reward will be Guilliadun. Jacques de Caluwé analyzes the role of Guilliadun as such a reward. Since she was the cause of the war, he suggests that she unconsciously considers herself as the prize. This theory is supported by Guilliadun. When Eliduc has not attempted to meet her, she sends for him, for "Mut durement s'esmerveillot/ Que il a li ne repeirot." (v. 279-280). Eliduc does not share this feeling. "Il semble qu'Eliduc se soit fort peu occupé du fait qu'il se battait pour elle: preuve en est qu'il n'a manifesté aucun désir d'être présenté à la demoiselle, ce dont elle s'étonne."¹⁶

Marie de France dedicates nearly a hundred verses to a description of Eliduc's actions in the war, verses 145 to 226. This passage is unique in the Lais and stylistically closer to the chansons de geste. Hoepffner cites the Roman d'Enée as the source for the military section of Eliduc, and he insists that Marie de France included the portrayal of the battle to illustrate Eliduc's quality as a knight since this quality

¹⁶Jacques de Caluwé, "La Conception de l'amour," p. 58.

first attracts Guilliadun to him.¹⁷

The contrast between the chanson de geste style of the military passage and the courtoisie of Eliduc's first meeting with Guilliadun is a parallel to the aggressive feudal society of the early twelfth century which exists concurrently and is partially transformed by the courtly society, a culture dominated by women. This contrast is aptly included in Eliduc as it suits the pre-Arthurian setting of the lay.

Guilliadun recognizes her nascent love for Eliduc. Her exuberance in this, her first love, is checked by youthful prudence and by her sense of vulnerability. At their first meeting her prudence reigns.

Amurs i lance sun message
 Ki la somunt de lui amer,
 Palir la fist e suspirer;
 Mes ne l'en volt mettre a reisun,
 Qu'il ne li turt a mesprisun. (v. 304-308).

She is well-mannered and aware (at least for the moment) that as a woman she must not be the first to express her feelings. Her sighs give her away though, and Eliduc is well aware of her charm. As her love for him begins he feels the initial guilt of his conflict. At once as he regrets not having met Guilliadun earlier, he recalls his promise to his wife.

Quant ceo ot dit, si se repent:
 De sa femme li remembra
 E cum il li asseūra
 Que bone fei li portereit
 E l'ëaument se cuntendreit. (v. 322-326).

Ovid's advice to lovers in Ars amatoria is suggested in the advice of the servant to Guilliadun. The "chamberlencs" tells Guilliadun to send a gift to Eliduc. If he accepts the gift, he accepts her love.

¹⁷Hoepffner, Lais de Marie de France, p. 97.

But Guilliadun responds that the gift cannot insure love, as Ovid implies in Ars amatoria. Instead she cautions the servant to notice Eliduc's expression, the only sincere clue to his feelings. She sends him a golden ring and a belt.

Guilliadun's inexperience in love is emphasized by her insecurity in sending the gifts. This passage does not illustrate the objective plotting of love that Marie de France condemns in other lays. Rather, she illustrates Guilliadun's hesitant fear of revealing her emotions. Her action is not a deliberate scheme to trap Eliduc, but a frightening experiment for her. The servant lends her courage to send the gifts; alone again, Guilliadun vacillates between desire and prudence. Her first reaction is to regret her aggressiveness.

Unques mes n'i parlai fors ier
 E or le faz d'amer preier!
 Jeo quid ke il me blamera,
 S'il est curteis, gré me savra. (v. 393-396).

Guilliadun's uncertainty is characteristic of youthful infatuation. To Marie de France this natural indecision is preferable to unrestrained courtly love.

Guilliadun's budding love for Eliduc involves a disdain for his restraint. Of course she is ignorant of his marriage, the vows which obstruct his affection for her. She tells her servant that she is worthy of Eliduc and would condemn his refusal of her advances. Her desire is increasingly aggressive, as her words indicate: "Fors tant que jeo l'aim durement;/ E si pur tant me veut haïr,/ Dunc est il digne de murir." (v. 440-442).

As Guilliadun's passion increases, Eliduc's conflict between loyalty and desire heightens. Guilliadun's joy when she learns that he

is pledged to remain in England for a year contrasts sharply with his misery and guilt. His loyalty to her father presents a problem, too. He honestly desires the maiden, but he cannot dishonor her father by a secret love affair.

The stalemate in their love is broken by Guilliadun's father urging her to honor Eliduc. Her reticence is alleviated now, ironically by her father's approval of the foreigner, and she confesses her love to Eliduc. Again her innocence is proven as she can conceive of their love only in terms of marriage. She wants Eliduc as "sun seignur." (v. 514).

Guilliadun's inexperience and initiative in the love affair prove that she is not a model of a courtly woman. Hoepffner¹⁸ and Moshé Lazar¹⁹ cite Ille et Galeron by Gautier d'Arras as an anti-Eliduc in which Guilliadun's aggressiveness in love is condemned. "Ganor, chez Gautier, n'aurait pour rien au monde révélé la première son amour, car il ne se convient pas qu'une femme dise, 'Je veux devenir votre amie,' avant qu'on ne l'en ait longtemps priée."²⁰

Yet another feudal loyalty prevents Eliduc's involvement with Guilliadun. His Breton ruler, repentent and apologetic for the injustice he has done to Eliduc, appeals to the exiled knight for service in battle. By recalling the feudal oath, he appeals to Eliduc's fervent concern for allegiance. This appeal cannot be refused by Eliduc, who is obsessed by his promises.

¹⁸Hoepffner, Lais de Marie de France, p. 99.

¹⁹Moshé Lazar, Amour courtois et fin' amors dans la littérature du douzième siècle (Paris Klincksieck, 1964), p. 186.

²⁰Hoepffner, Lais de Marie de France, p. 99.

Marie de France explicitly defines their love as platonic. Despite the sincerity of their affection, and the emphasis on Eliduc's inner conflict, the love of fin' amors remains unacceptable to the poetess even in Eliduc. She defines the limits of their love:

Kar anguissusement l'amot
 E ele lui, ke plus ne pot.
 Mes n'ot entre eus nule folie,
 Joliveté ne vileinie;
 De douneier e de parler
 E de lur beaus aveirs doner
 Esteit tute la druèrie
 Par amur en lur cumpainie. (v. 573-580).

Their love corresponds to Capellanus's definition of purus amor in its platonic nature, but it is not a courtly love affair. Their patience and physical restraint assure that the attraction is not only physical desire.

Marie de France's empathy for the lovers is apparent in the description of Guilliadun's grief when Eliduc returns to Brittany.

Se pauma ele de dolur
 E perdi tute sa culur.
 Quant Elidus la veit paumer,
 Si se cumence a desmenter.
 La buche li baise sovent
 E si plure mut tendrement.
 Entre ses braz la prist e tint
 Tant que de paumeisuns revint. (v. 661-668).

On this occasion Eliduc's love and embrace revive her. Later the charity and love of Guildeluëc will bring her back to life. This fainting, her severe reaction to his departure, prevents Eliduc's planned confession. Instead, his impossible honesty is replaced by more promises of love. He swears to return for her; thus the resolution of his dilemma is postponed.

Eliduc's personality is significantly changed back in Brittany. He deceptively tells Guildeluëc that he must return to England because of his fidelity to the English king. His valor in battle is compromised. He surrenders his army rather than postpone the date of his return to Guilliadun. In this period of separation Eliduc's conflict is resolved; his only concern is for the English maiden.

Although Eliduc is a version of le mari aux deux femmes, it is clear that he does not love both women simultaneously. Guildeluëc is replaced by Guilliadun, as her husband's indifference to her indicates. Guildeluëc especially notes the change in Eliduc.

Mut se cuntient sutivement.
 Sa femme en ot le queor dolent,
 Ne sot mie que ceo deveit;
 A sei meïsmes se pleigneit. (v. 717-720).

When at first she believes his coolness is caused by doubt of her behavior, she offers to speak before his men to attest her fidelity to Eliduc during his absence. Eliduc rightly refuses this opportunity to tell her of Guilliadun. Such a confession would not be a suitable response to her protest of loyalty.

A miraculous event of nature reveals Eliduc's duplicity to Guilliadun and causes her death-like sleep. As Eliduc approaches his home shore with the stolen maiden, the seas become stormy and the ship, rocked by an evil gale, retreats from the harbor. This event has an explanation in folklore. "C'est une croyance bien ancienne au coeur des matelots, et de belles légendes l'attestent, que, si l'on navigue avec un criminel, on ne saurait apaiser la mer qu'en lui livrant le

coupable."²¹ In Eliduc it is one of the sailors, adhering to the legendary belief, who reveals all to Guilliadun. But he believes her to be the curse. He cries out in fear:

Sire, ça einz avez od vus
 Cele pār ki nus perissums:
 Jamés a tere ne vendrums!
 Femme leal espuse avez
 E sur celi autre enmenez
 Cuntre Deu e cuntre la lei,
 Cuntre dreiture e cuntre fei;
 Lessiez la nus geter en mer! (v. 832-839).

Guilliadun faints and appears dead. In fitful rage Eliduc throws the sailor overboard. Then he himself navigates the ship to shore. "Le coupable devant Dieu et devant la 'lei,' ce ne pourrait être qu'Eliduc lui-même. Or c'est Eliduc qui, prenant la barre en mains, mènera la nef à bon port. -- Ou bien Marie veut nier la croyance celtique--ou bien, faisant sienne poétiquement cette croyance, elle considère qu'Eliduc n'a pas agi contre Dieu."²² This adventure, combined with her insistence on the platonic nature of their love, is Marie de France's vindication of Eliduc and Guilliadun. Certainly the dénouement of the lay illustrates her sympathy for the lovers completely.

In lonely grief Eliduc makes two decisions which prefigure the end of the lay. He takes Guilliadun to a chapel near his castle. Eliduc determines to build an abbey around the chapel and dedicate it to Guilliadun. He will later build a convent, but for Guildeluéc instead of Guilliadun. In a second premonition he promises to retire to a monastic existence.

²¹ Joseph Bédier, "Les Lais de Marie de France," Revue des Deux Mondes, CVII (1891), p. 838.

²² Jacques de Caluwé, "La Conception de l'amour," p. 68.

In the final actions of Eliduc Guildeluëc becomes the principal character. She is suspicious of her husband's frequent escape to the forest and worried by his depression. At an opportune time she visits the chapel and discovers the sleeping beauty. Now we see Guilliadun through Guildeluëc's eyes.

El vit le lit a la pucele
Ki resemblot rose nuvele, (v. 1011-1012).

E vit le cors tant eschevi,
Les braz lungs e blanches les meins,
E les deiz greilles, lungs e pleins. (v. 1014-1016).

Guildeluëc's reaction of self-sacrifice begins immediately. "On trouve une immense compréhension et une lucidité extrême. Guildeluëc comprend immédiatement les implications d'une réalité dont elle sait qu'elle va souffrir."²³ She is so deeply saddened by the sight of the beautiful girl in "death" that she weeps and swears that "Jamés n'avrai joie nul jur." (v. 1028).

Guildeluëc's revival of Guilliadun involves the only supernatural event of the lay. A weasel enters the chapel and runs across the lifeless body. Guildeluëc's servant kills the weasel for this offense. As Guildeluëc weeps for the girl, the weasel's mate brings a miracle cure. "As herbes est el bois venue,/ Od ses denz ad prise une flur/ Tute de vermeille colur." (v. 1046-1048). Guildeluëc sees the dead weasel revived by the herb, and she quickly follows the example and awakens Guilliadun.

Guilliadun is bitter when she awakens and relates her adventure to Guildeluëc. She ends her story with cynical regret. She says, "Trahie

²³Jacques de Caluwé, "La Conception de l'amour," p. 70.

m'ad, ne sai que deit,/ Mut est fole ki humme creit!" (v. 1083-1084). Hoepffner considers this line a reply to verse 1600 of the Roman d'Enée, which became a popular saying: "Fous est qui en fame se fie."²⁴ He suggests that Marie de France intentionally offers the counterpart here and asserts that neither sex is blameless in love.

The ultimate justification of Eliduc's love for Guilliadun lies in Guildeluëc's approval. Because she recognizes the totality of their love, and that Eliduc no longer loves her, Guildeluëc humbly retires and frees Eliduc of his vow to her. Eliduc builds a convent in which she begins her order with thirty nuns. Guildeluëc's action is described with neither anger nor sullenness, but is a positive endeavor for her toward a new life.

When the lovers later join her in a religious existence the three buildings of Eliduc's estate, the church, the abbey, and the castle, represent the three factions of medieval nobility, but there is no doubt that the purpose of the community is religious. "Indeed, the rich, human love which the lovers experience is transformed, almost mystically, into a love of a much greater proportion, a love entirely devoted to the service and adoration of God."²⁵ Guilliadun joins Guildeluëc's convent while Eliduc takes the orders of a monk.

Ensemble od sa femme premiere
Mist sa femme que tant ot chiere.
El la receut cum sa serur
E mut li porta grant honor. (v. 1165-1168).

²⁴Hoepffner, Lais de Marie de France, p. 103.

²⁵Emanuel J. Mickel, Jr., "A Reconsideration of the Lais of Marie de France," Speculum, XXXVI (1971), p. 61.

The Christian virtue and charity of Eliduc is especially praised by Marie de France in the final four verses of the lay.

Mut se pena chescuns pur sei
 De Deu amer par bone fei
 E mut par firent bele fin,
 La merci Deu, le veir devin! (v. 1177-1180).

Marie de France does not offer any precise judgment in Eliduc. She is equally sympathetic to the three characters whose actions are simply stated so as to retain a spontaneous, human quality. This is especially true in the brief explanation of Guildeluëc's self-sacrifice. Her action is extraordinary, and her quiet retirement to the convent conveys her superior generosity and mercy. Marie de France kindly portrays the youthful inexperience of Guilliadun and the inconsistent loyalty of Eliduc. Unlike the lays of mal-mariées, triangles in which the husband is inevitably at fault, in this love triangle the poetess's sympathy prevents the antagonistic portrayal of either woman.

Two studies of the Lais compare Fresne and Guildeluëc as ideal figures in the Lais. In his comparison of Fresne and Guildeluëc, Hoepffner places Guildeluëc above Fresne because her self-sacrifice is voluntary. He claims that Fresne's sacrifice in love is only the result of the social pressure on Gurun to marry. Judith Rice Rothschild in her study chooses Fresne as the ideal woman of the Lais. Hoepffner's conclusion fails to acknowledge that Fresne's self-sacrifice occurs at her gift of the coverlet, which is the means to her self-discovery and her only hope for the future. This act is as voluntary as Guildeluëc's retirement, but it is a symbolic sacrifice. Each woman represents an ideal of Christian forgiveness and charity which too often has been mistaken for ideal feminine passivity and submission. Their actions are

not externally motivated by others or for appearance. They by no means epitomize an ideal woman by the standards of courtly literature of the twelfth century. Instead, Fresne and Guildeluëc affirm the potential for personal development as Christians, and their obvious model is Mary. These women reveal the most personal religious philosophy of the poetess, and they transcend the limits of courtly literature.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The women in the Lais are particularly strong characters. The major action in each lay is instigated by a woman. Whether the resolution of a love conflict takes the form of murderous plotting, or of humble self-sacrifice, the conflict in each lay is determined by a woman character. Thus, despite the physical activity of the men in the Lais, the women are ultimately responsible, and they are evaluated by the poetess.

Marie de France judges the women in the Lais independently. She refuses the uniformity and rigidity of codified behavior in fin' amors as well as in Christian dogma. Adultery is not an inexcusable offense, as contrast between the resolution of Equitan and that of Yonec or Guigemar proves. By acknowledging extenuating circumstances Marie de France humanizes her determination of the women characters. Individualized justice is essentially a humanist concept in which natural revenge plays a role. As Marie de France explicitly warns in Equitan and in Fresne, a crime reverts to wound the criminal.

Her idea of justice reveals the most basic principle in Marie de France's rejection of courtly love, for her insistence in love as in justice is that the rule adapt to the individual. This ideology requires a faith in human nature. In the portrayal of women in the Lais, Marie de France successfully balances her humanist philosophy with realism.

In this study the progression is from the most negative image of woman, the Eve-like figures of the women in Bisclavret and Equitan who are traitors in love, to the spiritually flawless, redemptive figures of Fresne and Guildeluéc. However, to tie the moral structure of the Lais strictly to an Eve-versus-Mary debate fails to do the collection justice. The poetess' genius is best illustrated by the diversity of women in the twelve legends, a diversity which denies a general definition of women and affirms the uniqueness of each individual.

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