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ENCOUNTERING THE MARVELOUS IN MARIE DE FRANCE

presented in partial fulfillment of requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts  
in the Department of Modern Languages  
The University of Mississippi

by

Robert Edward McCain III

May 2012

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## Abstract

This study is an examination of the marvelous encounter in the *Lais* of Marie de France, a collection of twelve short narratives attributed to the twelfth century. Four of the *lais* – *Guigemar*, *Bisclavret*, *Lanval*, and *Yonec* – were selected for close analysis of the marvelous motifs and themes that are central to each story. Beginning with a summary of some of the proposed sources of the *lais*, many of which are Celtic in origin, the analysis subsequently examines the language of the text that describes the encounters between the feudal and “Other” world. In particular, the words *poür*, *pensis*, and *esgarder* and their use within the selected *lais* are investigated. An evaluation of the narrative function of the marvelous encounter is the final part of this study, an assessment of how the marvelous is used to both advance the plot of each *lai* and play with audience expectations. The source, language, and function of the marvelous contribute to an understanding of the role of the marvelous and medieval opinions of its nature in the text.

## Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to Dr. Daniel O’Sullivan, my advisor and friend whose love of medieval literature first initiated me to Marie in an Old French reading of *Bisclavret* in 2009. I have had the pleasure of being his student since 2008, and his teaching and mentorship has had a profound effect on the way in which I read, write, and live. His insight and aid have been crucial throughout this process, and his patience is without peer.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the Department of Modern Languages and the University of Mississippi for their financial support through a Summer Research Assistantship while in the beginning stages of this study.

Among the people who have helped me in reading the *Lais* and forming and preparing my analysis, I would like to thank in particular Drs. Logan Whalen and Mathieu Boyd for their personal contributions to my search for meaning and scholarship.

In addition, I would like to thank my committee members, Drs. Anne Quinney, Olivier Tonnerre, and Daniel O'Sullivan. Their comments and evaluations were important in finishing this project.

To all of the graduate students in the Modern Languages department, I thank you for your support and encouragement. My classmates, Jaime and Rachel, have been excellent companions in this short journey.

Finally, I thank my wife, Amelia, for her constant love and support, especially when I did not have the time to do the dishes.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

If the renowned authors of French medieval literature were to be gathered together, Marie de France would be prominent among them, despite very little conclusive evidence of her historical identity. At most, she is speculated to have originated in France while living in Anglo-Norman England, an explanation of her self-imposed specific, *de France*.<sup>1</sup> Though so little is known about her, she was a well-educated woman of high nobility, as she is ascribed several works, including Anglo-Norman translations of the *Espurgatoire de seint patriz* from Latin, a collection of Aesop's *Fables* from Middle English, and the recent addition of *La Vie seint Audree*.<sup>2</sup> However, her greatest works, those that have stood the test of time and taste, are the *lais*, a group of twelve short narratives in octosyllable couplets. These are the works for which she is famous. The *lais* of Marie de France appear in three separate codices, occurring in their entirety in only one, MS Harley 978, located in the British Library. It is this manuscript from which most editions of the *lais* are assembled, starting with *Guigemar* and ending with *Eliduc*.

Each *lai* is firmly grounded in the feudal society of the period, and each of Marie's stories can be largely characterized as revolving around two of the greatest themes of the time: love and familial devotion. *Courtois* literature was obsessed with the nature of love and fidelity, as seen also in Chrétien de Troyes's works set in Arthur's court. These two themes appear

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<sup>1</sup> This title was first accorded to her by Claude Fauchet in his compilation of medieval French authors in the late sixteenth century, based on her self-identification in the *Fables* (see Whalen's Introduction to *A companion*, p. vii).

<sup>2</sup> June Hall McCash gives a compelling argument for Marie's authorship of *La vie seinte Audree*. See "La vie seinte Audree: A Fourth Text by Marie de France?" *Speculum* 77 (2002): 744-777.



constantly in the *lais* and are often intertwined in the same narrative, as is the case for *Milun* and *Fresne*, two stories that portray the relationship between family and child in addition to the relationship between lovers. There is also a certain didactic quality to the *lais*, which often seem to function as moral *exempla* to readers, both implicitly and explicitly. The narrator is often fond of short prologues and epilogues in which brief synopses of the story and its Celtic sources (*Bretun*) are reiterated, and there is often an impression of praise or warning. For example, in *Equitan*, the *lai* that most strongly exhibits the counterexample of noble love and devotion:

Li Bretun en firent un lai,  
D'Equitan cument il fina,  
E la dame ki tant l'ama. (vv. 312-314)  
[The Bretons made a lai about it,  
about Equitan, his fate,  
and the woman who loved him so much.]<sup>3</sup>

Here, Marie reiterates that this story is centered on Equitan's fall; the woman is not even named in terms of her husband's position, a purposeful lack of identification that serves to emphasize the condemnation that Marie is placing on this failed liaison. This was not at all an unfamiliar position for Marie, the translator of fables, a genre known for its outright goal of suggestive morals and codes of conduct. Her opinions in regards to moral codes and societal expectations are scattered throughout the *lais*.

The distinguishing factor of Marie's *lais*, as separate from the lyric tradition, the *fabliau*, and the *romans d'antiquité* among vernacular texts, is what she defines as the source of her stories: the Celtic West. This is a distinction also made by Chrétien de Troyes, and the impact of this identification, whether real or perceived, would influence writers at the time and in the

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<sup>3</sup> Translations taken from Hanning and Ferrante's edition of the *lais* (1978), with few modifications unless noted.

following centuries in a variety of contexts. One has but to look to Middle English literature in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries to see the mark made by Marie herself. *Sir Launfal*, though different in many respects, is largely based on Marie's *Lanval*, a *lai* to be examined in this study. Many have studied the links between twelfth century vernacular literature and their Celtic influences, first introduced by Gregory of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*, or the *History of the Kings of Britain*, which appeared in the first half of the century. Though there is much debate surrounding the provenance of Marie's *lais*, which she claims to have heard from Breton minstrels, there are at the very least a number of Celtic names and places within the *lais* that are located near or outside the boundaries of the Romance speaking fiefdoms. Another aspect of the stories that has been peripherally tied to its Celtic otherness is the strong presence of the Marvelous. This theme is particularly evident in the fairy mistresses, talking animals, and magical objects, many of which appear throughout many Western traditions.

The label of the Marvelous as a theme in medieval literature is used primarily to indicate the presence of a supernatural device that does not have a distinct, divine origin. Despite this dissimilarity, there is often overlap between these two categories, the Miraculous and the Marvelous. In fact, the Latin terms from which these distinctions are descended are defined in very similar terms, as “wonderful, marvelous, extraordinary, unusual” (*mirabilis*) and “a wonderful thing, prodigy, miracle; wonder, surprise” (*miraculum*).<sup>4</sup> Both are descended from *miror*, “to wonder, be astonished.”<sup>5</sup> The origin of this literary label most likely originates from the frequent use of the word *merveille* [marvel] in these texts. Both Marie and Chrétien make ample use of it, though the way in which it is used lends a certain ambiguity in defining it as a designation used by the authors to identify the Marvelous. In Chrétien's *Yvain*, Calogrenant

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<sup>4</sup> Also indicated by Murray, p. 31, n. 13.

<sup>5</sup> All three as defined by *Cassell's Latin Dictionary*.

describes *le rustre* [the rustic] as a *mervoille*, due to his inhumanly ugly appearance (vv. 794-9). Marie in turn describes many of the encounters as a *merveille*, both in terms of the extraordinary events that take place and in locutions that appear to be idiomatic expressions expressing incredulity (“n’est merveille?” *Guigemar* v. 271).<sup>6</sup>

The way in which the marvelous elements function within the *lai* has also been a broad subject for discussion. This genre as a medium by which social frustrations were expressed has been a fruitful avenue of analysis. The knights and ladies in the narratives (these are the primary characters in almost every *lai*) are often depicted as vying against the power of a member of high nobility, such as a regional lord or king. For example, the lay *Equitan* presents a king with excessive desires and tastes who eventually dishonors his vassal by having an affair with his wife. The struggle between the landed nobility and the relatively powerless knights seem to correspond to many of the sentiments expressed in the literature of this period (Sweeney 27). This trend toward a genre that draws on the magical justice of a fairy world free from aristocratic domination and ecclesiastical collusion typical to the feudal system would be greatly attractive the lower rungs of the nobility while providing literary entertainment to the landed gentry, all without a great threat to the current social structure.

Certain analyses assert that the role of the marvelous in the lays serves only transitionally as a narrative force by which the story progresses. This type of approach depicts the lay as marvelous by its format: “l’abstraction du style, la façon exacte dont les différentes situations s’adaptent les unes aux autres est aussi merveilleuse que le seraient n’importe quels actes magiques extérieurs...” [the abstraction of style, the exact fashion in which the different situations adapt themselves one to the other is as marvelous as any exterior magical acts would be...] (Sienaart 30). The marvelous tale is recognized by its characterization of an ideal world

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<sup>6</sup> See the chapter on the language of the marvelous encounter in this study.

and the way in which the plot unfolds: a conflict arises, the character(s) respond(s), the resolution is ultimately felicitous. The beasts, the fairies, and supernatural devices function as bricks in the wall that hold together the narrative. Sienaart goes on to describe the characters in the lays as flat and interchangeable, existing without true emotional development or background (39). This perspective points out a common pattern throughout the lays by illustrating the structure that connects them and it is useful for examining the base of the marvelous *lai* in general. However, it reduces the effect of the marvelous within the tale to little more than a plot advancement, and it ignores the effect that the marvelous exercises both on the characters in the lays and the audience of the lays.

Though the basic reading of *lais* clearly center them around the nature of love and devotion in medieval society, an understanding of the medium through which these stories are transmitted reveals the structure, and in my opinion, the “hook,”<sup>7</sup> with which Marie engages her audience. Marie’s characters, though represented in brief tales with expected limitations, are not void of individual characterizations. This is due in large part to the language and imagery with which Marie packs so much into each verse or her *lais*. It is through the sources or influences on these texts, most readily identified through the marvelous interactions in the stories, in which a narrative function emerges that acts as a guiding force to the denouement of the *lai*. For Frappier, this moment of *aventure* is “le noyau, le diamant brut et le centre de gravité autour duquel s’organise le récit” [the core, the diamond in the rough, the center of gravity around which the narrative organizes itself] (32).

The following study, divided into three parts, will analyze the source, the

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<sup>7</sup> The marvelous themes in twelfth century medieval literature are very striking, even for today’s audience. Based on the way in which later writers of “Breton” *lais* construct narratives filled with these same marvelous motifs and themes, it seems plausible that the marvelous would have been “in vogue” stylistically following Marie (and perhaps Chretien’s) success.

characterization, and the narrative function of the marvelous encounter in the *lais* of *Guigemar*, *Bisclavret*, *Lanval*, and *Yonec*. The selection of these *lais* in particular is in large part due to the importance of the marvelous theme to the narrative. This is but one approach in which the ensemble of Marie's *lais* can be divided, and its purpose here is to facilitate the analysis of the role of the marvelous encounter, as it is more clearly defined. Many of the other *lais* include individual elements that are extraordinary in comparison to the everyday events in the story, such as the cure-bearing weasel in *Eliduc* or the potent philter in *Les Dous Amanz*. However, these images are isolated, and seem to serve in large part as a common theme that loosely ties the anthology together. In *Bisclavret*, *Lanval*, and *Yonec*, there is a marvelous character that plays an integral role in both the development and the essential plot of the *lai*. In *Bisclavret* and *Yonec*, it is the werewolf-knight and the bird-knight; in *Lanval*, it is the fairy queen. *Guigemar*, though lacking a central marvelous figure, contains several motifs – the antlered hind, the magical ship, the ambiguous Other World – that indicate the strong presence and importance of the supernatural.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE SOURCES OF THE *LAIS*

The seemingly sudden introduction of Celtic material into French courtly literature in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, notably in the works of Chrétien de Troyes and Marie de France, marks a shift that would remain popular throughout many centuries and whose style would spread throughout the Western world. One definite unity is the origin of the texts as put forth by their writers: *Bretagne*. The *matière* from which twelfth century writers developed their narratives was indicated to be such, the ensemble of lands at the edge of the known world. This would have included both modern day Brittany and the principal island of Great Britain. The mythical Arthurian court has a very strong presence in the Brythonic literary tradition and figures frequently in these works. Tales of hidden countries, knight-errants, and formidable *fées* are presented at the extreme edge of civilization, where the imagination of the Western societies dreamed of a world where chivalric values formed the base of the moral system and where neglected wives and their noble admirers enjoyed the knowledge that “true love” was given divine preference.

The connections between the Fairy World and the feudal reality play a large role in these medieval narratives, and the origins of this theme continue to be the source of debate. Despite the clear design of the writers to claim *Bretagne* as the point of origin for these narratives, the myriad texts from which compilers could have developed their works serves to obscure the “source” of these stories. Supernatural intervention was by no means new; most noticeably, the

presence of this element can be observed in classical literature and folklore contexts in Western Europe and beyond.<sup>8</sup> One particular theory posits that the absence of the marvelous in courtly literature in the preceding centuries reflects the preference for ecclesiastical explanations of the supernatural as divine intervention (often referred to as the “the miraculous”). Marvelous motifs have often been characterized as an incorporation of pagan themes into the Christian tradition, an indication of the comfortable dominance of the Church in all aspects cultural (Le Goff 29). The texts of this period often have a religious context; for example, Marie recounts the lay *Eliduc* in which choosing monastic devotion is touted as the proper response at the end of one’s life. Likewise, the principal character of *La Fresne* is raised in a convent, under the care of a benevolent abbess. Despite the strong presence of the Church throughout the anthology, there are a number of lays without overtly religious themes.

Many medieval authors make use of supernatural images, scenes, and characters in a variety of literary contexts. They receive particular prominence in “lays,” the *courts métrages* of narrative works, which emerge in the twelfth century. The lays of Marie de France form an anthology of twelve short narratives situated in the feudal world. The narrator indicates that the Breton tradition of oral storytelling inspired her to “assemble” her own collection: “m’entremis de lays assembler” (*General Prologue* 47). Filled with references to classical literature and Celtic traditions, the Other World manifests throughout the texts, but the lays *Guigemar*, *Lanval*, and *Yonec* in particular depict a central character that is found deficient or unhappy in one way or another. As the story unfolds, they find themselves in the midst of powerful forces that guide them towards a felicitous resolve to their plight.

Before an in-depth study of the effect of the marvelous in the *lais* of Marie de France can take place, it is important to understand the varied nature of the sources in which these stories

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<sup>8</sup> See the posited literary sources of the individual *lais* studied later in this chapter under “Tales and Motifs.”

may have found their roots. The focus of the vast majority of scholarship in this study leans toward a study of the twelfth century texts that assumes a Celtic origin.<sup>9</sup> This is supported with settings and names that are overwhelmingly Brythonic in appearance. In addition, there is a wide variety of attested tales from both Brythonic and Goidelic sources that have structures very similar to those found in the Old French narratives. However, the learned tradition of the time was heavily steeped in classical texts, and its presence is significant throughout the texts. The main theme, the nature of love, owes much to Latin texts. Additionally, motifs once purported to be Celtic in origin have also been shown to appear in texts from the classical tradition, with copies in vernacular folklore throughout Western Europe and the Indo-European network. As Emmanuel Mickel underlines in his study of classical sources: “If Marie’s narratives are drawn from a folkloric, oral tradition, some of her most telling moments of these tales, aspects which give them their drama and set them apart, can be found in Ovid or in the broader classical European tradition” (“The Learned Tradition” 41). The purpose of this chapter is to reveal the possible foundations on which Marie’s *lais* are constructed and two highlight the element of *conjointure* her work. This term was first introduced by Chrétien de Troyes in his work *Erec e Enide*. Here, Chrétien joins two tales together, the Hunt for the White Stag and the Sparrowhawk Duel, to create *une bele conjointure* (Kelly 55). This element in Marie’s writings supports how the narratives are perceived to function both individually and cohesively.

#### Names and Places

*La matière de Bretagne*, cited by Marie herself as the material with which she weaves her stories,<sup>10</sup> makes reference to tales with some degree of Celtic influence. The titles of the *lais*, named often after their characters, possess even to this day the impression of having Celtic

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<sup>9</sup> See “Tales and Motifs” below.

<sup>10</sup> *Guigemar* v. 20, *Equitan* v. 2, *Les Dous Amanz* v. 5, *Lanval* 660, *Aüstic* v. 2, *Eliduc* v. 1



origins. Breton road signs offer examples of the language's syllabic structure that is reminiscent to the names in the *lais*. In addition, and more to the point, there is etymological evidence that these words are of Brythonic origin.<sup>11</sup> In addition to the names of the characters, the geographical settings add a further Celtic dimension. Marie is specific in citing the cities or regions in which her narratives unfold. For example, *Milun* is said to have been born in *Suhtwales*, a claim made very early in the *lai* (v. 10). The origins and contexts of the names in the three supernatural *lais* and *Bisclavret* are examined below.<sup>12</sup>

Since Marie's works are written for an Anglo-Norman audience, it can be safe to assume some variation in the transmission of names from their Celtic language of origin. For this reason, Joseph Loth attests that *Guigemar* is the Gallicized equivalent of the Old-Breton name *Wiū-homarch*, pronounced *Gwiyovarch* in the twelfth century (478).<sup>13</sup> In addition, Mickel references a similar form, *Wihomarch*, which he cites as a name "shared by several 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>-century viscounts of *Liün* (Saint-Pol-de-Léon) in Brittany" ("The Learned Tradition" 23). The setting provided at the beginning of the *lai* is *Bretagne la Menur* (v. 25), or Minor Brittany, a distinction made of the smaller territory on the Continent, as opposed to the larger region of the main British Isle. Other names appear, including the king of the region, *Hoëls*, who is an attested ruler and relative to Arthur, as put forth in the *Historia regum Britanniae* by Geoffrey of Monmouth and Wace's *Brut* (Illingworth, "The Lai of Guigemar" 176). It is worth noting that Urban T. Holmes maintained that Marie has a specific landscape in her mind while recounting this story, that of "the region stretching from Radnorshire to the Severn," not far from the supposed provenance of

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<sup>11</sup> See below. There seems to have been some degree of overlap between Breton and Welsh at the time, though some scholars point out that there are enough differences to distinguish one from the other. See Jean-Luc Moreau, "La cité siet sur Duélas": à propos des *lais* d'*Yonec* et de *Milun*," *Romania* 106 (1985), 492-504 (also cited in Michel "The Learned Tradition" 33).

<sup>12</sup> Much of what is discussed here is covered more thoroughly in the first chapter of Glynn Burgess's *The Lais of Marie de France: Text and Context* ("The Problem of Internal Chronology") and Emanuel Mickel's "Marie de France and the Learned Tradition."

<sup>13</sup> Also cited in Illingworth, "The Lai of Guigemar" 176.

*Yonec* (“A Welsh Motif” 14).<sup>14</sup> In addition, three other names are given: *Ordials*, the purported baron of *Liün*, Guigemar’s father (v. 30-31); *Noguent*, sister to the protagonist, mentioned once and then ignored (v. 35); and *Meriadu*, Guigemar’s rival who is ultimately defeated (v. 692). The only other location in which the *lai*’s action takes place is in the land across the sea in which he finds his lover. No details are supplied concerning the land or its inhabitants’ names, a contributing detail to the ambiguity surrounding its status as the other world, as some scholars have noted.<sup>15</sup> In any case, Marie’s purposeful omission of these details, which she willingly supplies in the beginning of this story and in others where travel across the sea is involved, is an indication that she wanted, at the very least, an implied fairy feel.

Unlike many of the other stories, the *lai* of *Lanval* provides many details, including names, setting, and even time. The setting, *Kardoeil* (v. 5 ‘Carlisle’), is not much more helpful, being almost as remote to Wales as to Brittany. However, the ancient Roman town of Aballava (or Avalana) is situated very near to Carlisle, and it is thought to be the source of *Avalon*, as seen at the end of the *lai* (Mickel, “The Learned Tradition” 33).<sup>16</sup> This aspect of the story has been raised as evidence of its Celtic background (Burgess, *Text and Context* 19). It seems unlikely that Marie would have chosen Carlisle out of the blue, given that her familiarity seems to be with the southwest England and Wales. In addition to the setting, Marie opens the narrative with a brief introduction of four verses, of which the final addresses the name of the protagonist: “en Bretanz apellent Lanval” (v. 4) [in Breton they called him Lanval]. The meaning of *Bretanz*, as either Breton or a more general Brythonic, is as ambiguous as the method by which the tale was transmitted. The name of *Lanval* is attested to have Celtic roots, as a variant form of the Celtic

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<sup>14</sup> Holmes is also cited in Burgess, *Text and Context* 196.

<sup>15</sup> Illingworth in particular emphasizes this ambiguity (“The Lai of Guigemar 177”).

<sup>16</sup> See also Harf-Lancner, Laurence. *Les Fées au Moyen Age: Morgane et Mélusine, la naissance des fées*. Paris: Champion, 1984, as cited in by Mickel, “A Learned Tradition” 33.

god Lanoualus, who was near Carlisle (Mickel, “The Learned Tradition 18).<sup>17</sup> The rest of the ensemble of characters are pulled directly from the accounts of Arthur’s knights and retinue seen in *Brut* and used Chretien de Troyes’s works, such as the ever present *Walwains* and *Ywains* (v. 227-228 ‘Gawain and Yvain’) and of course, *Artur* (v. 6). However, no one else is named, save *li dus de Cornuaille* (v. 435) [the Duke of Cornwall], of whom no more is said. As is often the case for women in the *lais*, neither the queen nor the fairy is named, despite each of them playing an important role in the narrative.

The *lai* of *Yonec* also has many references that ground the tale in a Welsh context, albeit with Breton names. The lord to whom Yonec’s mother is espoused is said to be from *Caruënt*, in *Bretaigne* (v. 11-13; v. 525). The first is a form of the city Caerwent, in South Wales. The river on which the city is situated is further evidence of its location: “La citez siet sur Duëlas” (v. 15) [The city sits on the Duëlas]. *Duëlas* is purported to be an evolved form of the Welsh *du* “dark, black” and *glais* “stream” (Burgess, *Text and Context* 196).<sup>18</sup> At the end of the tale, the mother and son along with their lord journey to *Carlion*, to celebrate the “feste seinte Aaron” (v. 423-4) [the feast of St. Aaron]. This is a neighboring city in south Wales, known as Caerleon (*Les Lais* 205). Given the turn of events in *Yonec*, it is interesting to see that the realm of the bird-knight is accessible and known to the feudal society, as the lady’s journey through the hill and to his city implies an otherworldly quality. Burgess goes on to mention that it is likely Marie had personal knowledge of the area of Gwent, in which both of these cities are found (Burgess *Text and Context* 22). There are a variety of proposed etymologies for the two principal names, *Yonec* and *Muldumarec*. One theory supports *Ediunet* as a cognate of the Welsh *eiddeuned*, or “desire”

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<sup>17</sup> Constance Bullock-Davies, “‘Lanval’ and ‘Avalon,’” *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies* 23 (1969): 128-42, cited in Mickel “A Learned Tradition” 33; and in Burgess, *Text and Context* 18.

<sup>18</sup> See entry “Dulas” in Eilert Ekwall, *English River-Names*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968, and also E. Ernest Hoepffner, “La Géographie et l’histoire de Marie de France.” *Romania* 56 (1930): 1-32. See pp. 27-30, both as cited in Burgess.

(Burgess, *Text and Context* 196).<sup>19</sup> Holmes, on the other hand, posits an unattested Breton form \**dihudennêc* as the origin of *Yonec*, with the meaning “a comforting individual,” in keeping with Yonec’s role with his mother after the passing of his father (“Old French Yonec” 227).<sup>20</sup>

The *lai* of the *Bisclavret* is quite unlike those examined above. There is no specific context in which the story takes place. The only mention of location given is near the beginning of the narrative: “En Bretagne maneit uns ber” (v. 15) [In Britain there lived a baron]. This provides no definitive conclusion as to whether the tale takes place on the Continent or on the island. Furthermore, there are no proper nouns, not even for the protagonist, who is referred to only by his mutated form. Since *Bisclavret* is not a proper noun, there has been much debate as to the etymology of the word. Most agree that the first part of the word is derived from the Breton *bleiz*, meaning ‘wolf.’ However, the second part of the word has been the topic of debate, with no definitive agreement, though Sayers explanation of *claffet* meaning “sick” is recognized as a good suggestion (Burgess, *Text and Context* 192).<sup>21</sup>

#### Tales and Motifs

The oral nature of the supposed Breton tradition leaves us hardly any Celtic narrative with which to draw comparisons with Marie’s *lais*. However, records of Celtic tales from the centuries following Marie’s work and historical accounts of events and motifs alluded to in her anthology indicate a common source. Many of these younger texts are found among the insular Celtic cultures in the British Isles. In addition, Marie’s status as a writer supposes her knowledge of Classical texts and motifs, as she cites in the general prologue to the *lais* where she alludes to her

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<sup>19</sup> Brugger, Ernst. “Eigennamen in den *Lais* der Marie de France.” *Zeitschrift für Französische Sprache und Literatur* 49 (1927). See pp. 201-52, 381-484, as cited in Burgess and in Mickel “The Learned Tradition” 33-34.

<sup>20</sup> Holmes is also cited in Burgess *Text and Context* and in Mickel “The Learned Tradition”.

<sup>21</sup> Sayers, W. “*Bisclavret* in Marie de France: a Reply.” *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* 4 (1982): 77-82, as cited in Burgess. Additionally cited in Mickel “The Learned Tradition” 34; and in personal correspondence with Boyd, “The Origins of *Bisclavret*” 26 June 2011.

decision to work with the Breton *lais*. This claim is supported by several images and scenes in the lays that can be found or are very similar to ones found in Roman literature, some of which are directly inscribed, and others which require a more subtle inspection. Thirdly, folkloric traditions present throughout Western Europe are additional sources of themes that appear in the lays, or, at the very least, represent a base of tales and stories from which the varied forms have descended from over time.

### *Guigemar*

Much has been written on the *lai* of *Guigemar*, due in part to the striking motifs and images that are used throughout the narrative. The most popular of these, the hunt of the white stag or hind, occurs at the beginning of the story. Mickel points out several works in which a hunt takes place, including *Eric et Enide* by Chretien de Troyes and *Tyolet* and *Graelent*, two anonymous “Breton: *lais* (“The Learned Tradition” 35). *La Vie de Saint Eustace* has a comparable encounter when the Roman commander is hunting a stag only to be converted to Christianity after seeing the emblem of the crucifix and hearing a prophecy from his quarry’s mouth (Maddox 4). What distinguishes this specific instance of the stag motif is the physical description of the hind:

vit une bisse od sun föün.

Tute fu blanche cele beste

perches de cerf out en la teste (vv. 90-93)

[he saw a hind with a fawn.

A completely white beast,

with deer’s antlers on her head]

The hind has antlers, the usual mark of the masculine counterpart, and she is accompanied by a fawn, so as to insist on her sex. Some scholars have taken this creature as a hermaphroditic

reflection of Guigemar's predicament with love, a representation of the "sexual wholeness" he will come to know later in the *lai* (Pickens 335).<sup>22</sup> Given Marie's ability to weave together disparate themes to create a cohesive treatise of the nature of love, this analysis cannot be wholly disregarded, though the uniqueness of this specific motif makes its role in *lai* slightly ambiguous. There is one attested instance of a similar encounter with a horned doe. Holmes makes reference to a passage in Giraldus Cambrensis, or Gerald of Wales, where there is an encounter with such a creature ("A Welsh Motif").<sup>23</sup> The passage recounts a hunt in which an attendant to Einion, ruler of Gwrthrynion, shot an antlered doe and immediately fell ill, losing sight in one eye and suffering a stroke.<sup>24</sup> Whether this account is a factual event or a Welsh tale that developed from folklore or rumor, this specific instance very closely resembles the account made in *Guigemar*.

In addition to the presence of the deer, this specific interaction with Guigemar portrays the hind as a sapient creature that either delivers a message or invokes a curse. Illingworth compares the hind's role in *Guigemar* with a similar structure in the twelfth century Irish tale *Agallamh na Senórach* from the twelfth century, in which the pursuit of a fawn leads Finn and his men underground to a *sidh*, a fairy dwelling, where a group of warriors and ladies were gathered ("The Lay of Guigemar" 179).<sup>25</sup> It is here that they are told that that the fawn was actually one of the ladies, sent to lead them to the meeting place. This tale is described as a comparable version of the first half of *Guigemar*, as the episode portraying his wounding and journey across the sea, a point that Burgess alludes to as well in citing verses 23-24 as evidence of an actual text as sources for the second half of the *lai*: "Sulunc la lettre e l'écriture / Vos

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<sup>22</sup> Also cited in Brooks 96.

<sup>23</sup> As cited in Illingworth 184; Pickens 335; Burgess, *Text and Context* 23; and Brooks 96.

<sup>24</sup> Gerald of Wales. *The Journey through Wales and the Description of Wales*. Trans. by Lewis Thorpe London: Harmondsworth, 1978. See p. 78, as cited in Brooks 96.

<sup>25</sup> From the edition translated by S.H. O'Grady *Silva Gadelic : a collection of tales in Irish; with extracts illustrating persons and places*. London: Williams and Norgate, 1892. (Illingworth cites: I 196 ff. II 222 ff); and dated to the second half of the twelfth century by R. Thurneysen, *Die Irische Helden- und Königsage bis zum 17. Jahrhundert* Halle (Saale): Niemeyer, 1921- see p. 48; and E. Gwynn, *Erin X* (1926) 74-5, all as cited in Illingworth 179.

mosteraï un' aventure" [just the way it was written down / I'll relate an adventure] (Burgess, *Text and Context* 24). An account of the romance, *Partenopeus de Blois*, contemporary with Marie's *lais* reinforces the theory that the first half of the *lai* was modeled on a encounter with a fairy who actively lures her hunting lover across the sea by means of a magical ship and also serves as an indication of the preferences for the period (Illingworth, "The Lay of Guigemar" 177). Illingworth goes on to compare Guigemar's search for a cure with a similar journey in another Irish narrative, *Fled Bricrenn ocus Longes mac n-Duil Dermait*, from the tenth century ("The Lay of Guigemar" 182).<sup>26</sup> In this tale, CúChulainn, wounded but victorious in battle, is cursed by his opponent Eochu Ronn until he can obtain information about the cause of sons of Doel Dermait's exile (Windisch, II, 105-5). Up until this point, there does not seem to be much of a similarity. However, CúChulainn then journeys with the aid of a boat, lent by the son of the King of Ireland and which sails by a magical charm, to an island described as "surrounded by a silver wall," where he goes on to eventually find fair ladies and his cure. Here, the combined use of the themes of curses and magical ships that sail across the sea to wondrous lands that contain the ladies and the cure to the afflictions seems much too coincidental for there not to have been some knowledge on Marie's part of similar tales. Lastly, Illingworth cites a Welsh story, *The Dream of Macsen Wledig*, from the second half of the twelfth century in which the protagonist dreams of a lady whilst out hunting and is sick with longing until he crosses the sea on a richly ornate ship to an equally magnificent hall where awaits his lover ("The Lay of Guigemar" 183).<sup>27</sup> Though the link between the dream and the curse (or the hind) is tenuous, the description of the ship, which Illingworth characterizes as quite different from the bronze or crystal boats from Celtic

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<sup>26</sup> Ed. and trans. into German by E. Windisch, *Irische Texte* Vol I and II. Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1884. See pp. 164-217; and dated by Thurneysen, pp. 467-73 (see n. 24 above); both cited in Illingworth "The Lay of Guigemar" 182.

<sup>27</sup> Ifor Williams, ed. *Breuddwyd Maxen*. Bangor: Jarvis a Foster, 1928, Trans. by Gwyn and Thomas Jones, *The Mabinogion*, London, J.M. Dent; New York, E.P. Dutton, 1949 (see pp. 79-88); dated by J. Loth. *Les Mabinogion*. Paris: E. Thorin, 1889 (see I 30); both cited in Illingworth, "The Lay of Guigemar" 183.

traditions, provides another link to Guigemar's journey (184).

The preceding tales that offer dim recollections of Guigemar's *aventure* have for the most part avoided a characterization of the lady as a true *fee*. It is very clear in the passage that she is surprised at the arrival of the ship, to the point of terror. However, a few verses contain hints at her ambiguous nature. The most explicit is a reference to her beauty as like unto a fairy: "Dedenz unt la dame trouvee / ki de belté resemble fee" (vv. 703-4) [inside they found the woman / who had a fairylike beauty]. This appraisal is made by Meriadu, the only point of reference for the lady's nature save through Guigemar. However, other indications of her fairy-like existence are found, specifically with her and her companion's first interaction with Guigemar. When her young friend first steps onto the ship, she removes her mantel, a removal of clothing reminiscent of the bathing ladies in *Graelent* and *Guigamor*, two anonymous Breton *lais*, and Guigemar is bathed with water from a "basins d'or" [golden vessel], a detail reminiscent of the mysterious damsels in *Lanval* (Koopmans and Verhuyk 11).<sup>28</sup> These details, while small, may serve to further identify the lady as a fairy, as suggested by the Irish narratives.

In addition to the plethora of Celtic material that has been posited as the source for Marie's works, many scholars have emphasized the role of Latin texts and themes in the *lais*.<sup>29</sup> Marie is frank about her knowledge of the classical tradition. Her general prologue contains several references to the learned tradition, including her own thought process of the work she would do:

Pur ceo començai a penser  
d'alkune bone estoire faire  
e de Latin en Romanza traire

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<sup>28</sup> *Guigamor* vv. 437-449, *Graelent* vv. 235-6: the protagonist tries to hide the clothes of the lady, who he posits will not leave without them.

<sup>29</sup> See below.



mais ne me fust guaires pris:  
itant s'en sunt altre entremis (vv. 28-32).  
[That's why I began to think  
about composing some good stories  
and translating from Latin to Romance;  
but that was not to bring me fame:  
too many others have done it.]

Marie here indicates her implicit knowledge of Latin works, and her disinterest in translating them as others had already done. This is Marie's explanation for choosing to work with the *lais*. However, she neither divorces herself or her works from the classical tradition. In *Guigemar*, the painting of Venus, the goddess of love, on the interior wall of the lady's dwelling is a clear image of a disparaging attitude to the works of Ovid, the *Remedia Amoris*, as based on the description:

Le livre Ovide, u il enseigne  
coment chascuns s'amur estreigne,  
en un fu ardant le getout (vv. 239-232)  
[Ovid's book, the one in which he instructs  
lovers how to control their love,  
was being thrown by Venus into a fire,]

According to Marie, or at least implicitly through her work, love is inescapable, and any philosophy that supposes or supports otherwise is intolerable. This image of futility of the resistance to love fits nicely with Mickel's reconsideration of the nature of love, since the broadest characterization throughout the *lais* is how it "subverts the reason and causes man to

react in a way that ultimately causes him suffering and grief” (“A Reconsideration” 42). Though much focus centers on how love is condemned or sustained in marriage and society, both of which figure largely in the *lais*, the reappraisal of love as a diametric force to reason is a theme that is linked to *Les Echees amoureux*, a work from the fourteenth century which underscores that love outside of marriage leads to sorrow, whether it be of “high quality” or “condemned when it is only concupiscence or selfish love” (Michel, “A Reconsideration” 43). This representation of love would account for the many instances within the *lais* when selfishness, even within the confines of marriage, is punished (e.g., in *Yonec* and *Milun*), while at the same time this selfless, inescapable love transcends the society’s boundaries.

In addition to a thematic connection with works like *Les Echees*, links between narratives and motifs, there are also a number of myths and motifs in classical texts to which allusions can be made in respect to Marie’s anthology. Koopmans and Veruyk make the argument that structural rapprochements that have been made between Celtic texts and the *lais*, while interesting, does not account for the thematic content throughout the texts. In this way, they argue for emphasis on the superposition of themes, rather than a juxtaposition of narrative structures (9).<sup>30</sup> Returning to the horned hind, they pose a link between Diane/Artemis and this “androgynous” creature, in addition to the sun cult associated with Diane (Koopmans and Verhuyk 11).<sup>31</sup> In addition, the link between two disparate themes, one of the hunt and the other of the young man incapable of love, are linked together in a variety of contexts. Mickel likens Guigemar’s wound to a similar event, a Roman conquest of Cupid, the Emperor Honorius, as recounted by Claudian in the “Epithalamium” written in A.D. 398 (“The Learned Tradition” 45). He cites a passage in which the young ruler, at the time only fourteen years of age, was interested

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<sup>30</sup> They posit four archetypal structures that undercut the entire *lai*: the woman-fairy, the woman-sun, the woman-lover, and the woman-dynasty.

<sup>31</sup> Also cited in Mickel, “The Learned Tradition” 36.

only in sport and hunting, a clear reference to the Hippolytus motif. Michel sees Marie's use of this motif as well, as Guigemar wounds and is wounded, all in conjunction with the Celtic fairy who changes into the messenger-hind, as purported by Illingworth's Irish tales. Michel also points the work of Carlo Donà on the story of Hilluyankas, a Hittite tale with many parallels with *Guigemar*, including "the voyage of a hero to the land of the dead where he has a love relationship with the queen of the otherworld" (qtd in "The Learned Tradition" 36).<sup>32</sup> These last two examples of Indo-European folklore as evidence of common themes running throughout Western medieval literature merit further study, however tenuous the link may appear.

### *Yonec*

Several parallels have been drawn between several Old Irish narratives and *Yonec*; among these, one in particular has sparked a discussion that is an excellent illustration of the debate between Celtic and classical texts. Tom Cross made the first "thoroughgoing" examination of the Celtic sources of *Yonec* in his article "The Celtic Origin of the Lay of *Yonec*," to which two important articles were written in response, and with subsequent scholarship that cites all three. Cross cites many instances of bird-man motifs in Celtic literature, both in Goidelic and Brythonic sources ("The Lay of *Yonec*" 29-36). A point of agreement for Illingworth, who later took up Cross's work with Celtic sources, is the readily apparent link between the bird-lover in *Yonec* and a similar motif in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* [*Destruction of Da Derga's Hostel*], an Irish tale dated to the eleventh century with theory of a "floating tradition" that dates back to the ninth ("The Lay of *Yonec*" 505).<sup>33</sup> This story recounts the life of the daughter of the King of Ulster (Cormac), and her salvation from her malicious fairy stepmother. There are several elements that are

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<sup>32</sup> Carlo Donà, "La Cerva divina: Guigemar e il viaggio iniziatico," *Medioevo Romanzo* 20 (1996): 321-77, 21 (1997), 3-68; as cited in Michel 2011, from whom I draw the quotation.

<sup>33</sup> Also in Cross, "The Lay of *Yonec*" 37; Illingworth cites the dating work performed by R. Thurneysen 1921 (see note 24 above).

reminiscent of structures found in *Yonec*. She is hidden in a “fenced house of wickerwork” with “only a window and a skylight,” and she is visited by a bird that transforms into a man and forewarns her of the impending arrival of her father’s men (Illingworth, “The Lai of Yonec” 506). He then foretells that she will bear his son, who is to be raised to avoid killing birds. The most significant aspects of this story that echo the plot of *Yonec* is the *inclusa* motif (the imprisoned, unhappy wife) and the supernatural being who takes the form of a bird. Cross cites an additional Irish narrative, the *Snám Da Én* [*Swimming-Place of Two Birds*], a narrative found in the *Dinnshenchus* poems found in the *Book of Leinster*, a manuscript dated to the twelfth century with the bird-lover motif as a central theme (“The Lay of Yonec” 40). Cross, however, maintains that the “versified portions probably go back to the ninth or tenth century” (“The Lay of Yonec” 30). In this account, two supernatural bird-men, Buide and Luan, visit Estin, the wife of Conall, with whom Buide is intimate. Both are slain by the jealous husband with a single thrust of a spear at their meeting with the wife. Illingworth additionally underlines the similarity of the subterranean dwelling of Muldumarec and Buide’s *síd* (a fairy, underground dwelling) in the “hilly ground of Dubthir,” though this proves to be a shaky link when compared with the family’s journey to the same country at the end of the *lai*, a point that Illingworth does not hesitate to mention (“The Lai of Yonec” 504).<sup>34</sup>

Illingworth’s departure with Cross’s analysis occurs with the second half of the *lai*, where he indicates that Cross has underestimated the influence of the *mal-mariée* in the lyric tradition. M.B. Ogle first criticized Cross for his assertion that Celtic sources lay at the root of Marie’s *lai*. By underlining the long tradition of the supernatural lover who morphs into a different form (in particular, the Roman pantheon of gods who were wont to take other forms and then rape their

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<sup>34</sup> Also p. 509. Illingworth also argues that the absence of a well-defined account of the journey is point of departure from previous vernacular traditions (*romans antiques*) and therefore is indicative of the preservation of a Celtic narrative.

conquests), Ogle asserts that there are enough examples for there to be no clear provenance, and that the remaining distinguishing themes – the *inclusa* motif, the secret visits from a supernatural or mortal lover – are readily found in classical texts available to Marie (Ogle 125-6; 136-42). He goes on to provide an example of a story similar to story similar to *Yonec* but from a Russian tradition, with comparable stories in other Western cultures, as evidence of the inability to firmly establish a Celtic heritage for *Yonec*. Before recounting the tale, which reflects many of the themes in *Yonec* (a supernatural bird-lover of a sequestered lady who is ultimately killed by the jealous husband, with the aid of a watchful servant) he concedes that Marie’s *lai* could very well have been the root of the story, but that it is unlikely given its oriental roots (Ogle 143-5).

Illingworth, however, moves on from this description of the first half of the *lai* in order to examine what he characterizes as a story of revenge. In so doing, he cites several Old Irish texts, including *Cath Maige Mucrama* [*The Battle of Mag Mucrama*], in which a son is born to a woman after the death of her lover and who eventually avenges his father’s death after coming of age (“The Lai of Yonec” 515). There are a variety of themes that seem to echo those of *Yonec*. However, the most salient and symbolic of these describes three objects – a sword, a golden thumbing, and an assembly array (*a chlaideb*, *a ornasc óir*, and *a thimthag oenaig*) – that are left by the lover, Art, doomed to die in battle by his own words. Boyd seizes on the significance of these three items in recounting *The Story of Éogan and Cormac* (*Scela Çogain 7 Cormaic*), though he is careful to insist that there is no verifiable way to posit Marie’s knowledge of the Irish story, however popular Cormac’s legend may have been (“The Ring” 211). However, through a careful study of the significance of each object in terms of its royal metonymy, he posits this transfer as Art’s divestment of the kingship to his future son (Boyd, “The Ring” 213). Himself launching into an analysis of the arguments put forth by Cross and Illingworth (which

he finds “compelling”), Boyd is predominantly preoccupied with the function of the *lai* of *Yonec* (“The Ring” 219). The emphasis, he finds, is on the narrative as a “birth-tale,” an attested heroic-biography common among Irish tales (as with Cormac’s story) that explains Marie’s emphasis on *Yonec* despite the small role he plays in the narrative as a whole.

Marie weaves her traditional concepts of love and devotion around these three symbolic objects that would customarily function as a key part of the birth-tale. In a convincing analysis of the relationship between the two French narratives, Murray links this scene in *Yonec* with the parallel event in *La Vie de saint Alexis*, in which the saint leaves a ring and sword behind with his bride (25).<sup>35</sup> Both exchanges are thought to indicate marriage between the two parties, though the objects have different functions (at least superficially, since both are tied to remembrance). In this way, Murray posits the significance of the reading of *Yonec* in light of *La Vie*’s imagery. She goes on to emphasize other similarities, including a rapprochement between the works of St. Bernard, whose *On Loving God* seems to provide Alexis’s response to God in light of his wife’s beauty, while emphasizing the similarity between the *mal-mariée* in *Yonec*’s travel to her lover’s city and a similar event in the *Song of Songs* (also included in St. Bernard’s critical works), in which the beloved wanders the city streets searching for her lover (31-32). Murray concludes that the *lai*’s function is as a treatise on “the true nature of marriage,” not on adultery, and as such takes on a didactic quality reminiscent of *La Vie* (36). The “compelling” argument that Marie draws on multiple traditions – Celtic, classical, and Romance – underlines the richness and the complexity of her work.

### *Lanval*

The *lai* of *Lanval* provides an essentially similar structure to the other three *lais* in this story, with the exception that the main human protagonist is male while his female counterpart is

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<sup>35</sup> Murray’s article was actually the inspiration for Boyd’s work *Yonec* as a heroic-biography (“The Ring”).

definitively marvelous and of fairy provenance. Though the *fée* is never named, the last few lines of the narrative indicate that she spirits away with Lanval to Avalon, her home. These two points, the name of her home and the nature of her relationship with Lanval, are for some an indication of her identity, Morgain. Loomis, in examining the motif of the sparrow-hawk adventure,<sup>36</sup> asserts that Morgain was the daughter “Regis Avallonis,” a detail supported by Paton in her examination of a passage from the *Vita Merlini* (Loomis 86; Paton 46). In describing the nature of the Arthurian fay, Paton references a variety of Celtic tales<sup>37</sup> that form a “distinct conception of the fairy queen” as a

supernatural woman, always more beautiful than the imagination can possibly fancy her, untouched by time, unhampered by lack of resources for the accomplishment of her pleasure superior to human blemish, contingency, or necessity, in short, altogether unlimited in her power. (4)

She goes on to describe “insistent love as fundamental to her nature” for the fairy, a further detail in keeping with the behavior of the reclining lady in *Lanval* (Paton 4). Of the fays that frequent the Arthurian genre, Paton defines Morgain as one found in works outside the tradition, such as the *Roman de Troie* and *Huon de Bordeaux*, though she maintains these appearance are due to the authors’ familiarity with “Breton” (sic) tales.

Cross, in a more specific characterization of the fairy, indicates the widespread nature of the “Offended Fée” motif in Indo-European literature, among others (“Celtic Elements” 4). He goes on to present Lanval’s oath breaking (his “disregard of her injunctions”) and his subsequent “Journey to the Other World” (that is, Avalon, home of the fairies) as both separate and

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<sup>36</sup> *Lanval*’s fairy enters court with a falcon on her arm.

<sup>37</sup> Specifically: *Imram Brain maic Febail* (*The Voyage of Bran, Son of Febal*) of which an oral tradition dating to the seventh century is supposed; *Echtra Condla* (*The Adventures of Connla*) whose manuscript tradition dates at least to the eleventh century; and the *Mabinogi* of *Pwyll, Prince of Dyfed*, said to antedate the twelfth century (Paton 1-4); Cross (“Celtic Element” 599) also makes a comparison to *Pwyll*.

conjoined motifs well-attested in Celtic literature predating Marie's *lais* (Cross, "Celtic Elements" 593). Cross cites the *Aidead Muirchertaig maic Erca* [Death of Muirchertach mac Erca], a story whose existence he dates older than Marie's *lais* as the protagonist's death is recorded much earlier elsewhere ("Celtic Elements" 595). The gist of the story recounts a mortal king who encounters a mysterious lady of perilous beauty who has sought him out, and who tells him that her name, *Sín*, is never to be spoken. One night as she exhibits several supernatural predilections, the king utters her name, is immediately punished, dies, and is later recalled as the killer of the lady's family, for whom she has exacted her revenge. The clearest analogues with *Lanval* are the secret nature surrounding identity and the consequences for him at its revelation, but the comparison is fragile. References to stories in the *Acallamh na Senórach* [Colloquy of the Old Men], the *Léighes Coise Chéin*, and the *Aislinge Oengusso* [Vision of Oengus] contribute to this motif in their portrayal of mortal kings who are propositioned by wondrously beautiful fairy women, some of which abandon them at the slightest provocation ("Celtic Elements" 596-598; 613-614). A good deal of emphasis is placed on the similarity between the dialogues of the "Celtic and Romance accounts" (614); however, such resemblances are lost on this reader. One of the most important details of *Lanval*'s encounter with the fairy queen is the way in which there is little dialogue. The fairy queen makes her speech and offers riches and passion for love and obedience. *Lanval* subsequently acquiesces, to which the fairy adds that their love must not be revealed. Each side of the conversation has clear demarcations, and as such makes comparisons with smoother flowing dialogue problematic. This stylistic choice, especially as seen between *Bisclavret* and his wife, is not isolated and often seems awkward, though one could argue that it represents Marie's attempts at creating points of focalization for each perspective.

Cross later cites the forwardness of Muirchertach's lady as another link with *Lanval*, who



he characterizes as the “forth-putting women with which the pages of early Irish literature are filled” (“Celtic Elements 611). Mickel points out the universality of the Potiphar’s wife theme exhibited between Lanval and Arthur’s queen, a point that Cross acknowledges himself while insisting that this biblical account would have enhanced this perception of Celtic women and would (“The Learned Tradition” 37; “Celtic Elements” 635). There are many other comparisons that Cross makes, but one of the most striking is the setting in which Lanval first encounters his queen and her retinue. Like the traditional Mélusine tale, in which the magical mother is seated by a fountain, Lanval quits the city where “sur une ewe currant descent” [he dismounted by a running stream]. The maidens, who carry both vessels and a towel, greet him: there is plenty of water for washing. Cross seizes on this scenario, which he attributes to Celtic heritage, citing first the practices of the ancient Celts in Gaul and the “cult of the water-goddesses” (“Celtic Elements” 600). He goes on to speak of subaqueous fairy dwellings, with entrances located near fountains, as reoccurring image in Irish literature. His best example of this is taken from the *Togail Bruidne Dá Derga*<sup>38</sup> [Destruction of Da Derga’s Hostel], where the meeting between an Irish king and a woman described as very beautiful found “washing in a silver basin” on the edge of a fountain (601). He also extends this motif to include stories where this meeting place is at a river, such as one episode from the epic *Táin Bó Cúalgne*, in which Cuchulainn meets a woman at a ford who declares her love, offers him her riches, is rebuffed and seeks supernatural vengeance before finally forgiving him for his mistake.

An important detail in *Lanval*, particularly for this study, is Marie’s knowledge of legal proceedings in Anglo-Norman England. Francis writes, in a criticism of Hoepffner’s comparison of the trial scene in *Lanval* with the one depicted in the *Roman de Thèbes*, cites that Marie’s knowledge must have come from her surroundings, as they closely resemble twelfth century

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<sup>38</sup> As previously cited in examining the sources of *Yonec*.

customs and practices. Since she is not cognizant of documents that detail twelfth century proceedings, she copes by comparing *Lanval* with Maitland's description of medieval legal practices, she highlights several locutions that she claims must have had a legal bearing (Francis 116-119).<sup>39</sup> She describes the appeal on Lanval (on the part of the king) as a very specific legal arraignment, and that there is little "similarity of terminology" with the *Roman de Thèbes*. The full weight of this observation, though not analyzed in detail by Francis, will have implications later on this studying chapter three.

### *Bisclavret*

Of all of Marie's *lais*, *Bisclavret* may be considered one of the hardest to define and whose story is the most difficult to place within a specific context, given the widespread nature of the werewolf story throughout many folkloric traditions. The defining feature of this *lai* is the humanity of the beast, the heroic quality given the creature that normally would be vilified in the story. This theme is not common in the werewolf genre predating the twelfth century, making it very difficult to tease out a history for the narrative. The familiar story in which the werewolf is depicted as a ravenous beast is ancient and as such marks the point of departure for this portion of the study.

The first reference to the man-wolf changeling in Antiquity is seen in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, a text purportedly predating the birth of Christ by more than a millennia and a half. The mention of the werewolf is one of many other mythic tales that illustrate the reason for which King Gilgamesh rebuffs the advances of Ishtar, the goddess of love, who was not known for her longsuffering kindness towards her lovers. Here, the werewolf is described as a former shepherd, who though loved and loved in turn by the deity, was struck and turned into a wolf, who was in turn chased by his offspring and by dogs (Sconduto 7). This passage is oddly

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<sup>39</sup> She quotes liberally from Pollock and Maitland's *History of the English Law*.

reminiscent of a passage in a troubadour song, specifically *De chantar m'era laissatz* [I had ceased to sing] by Peire Vidal, in which he describes being called “wolf” (*lop* v. 41) chased by Na Loba’s (Lady Wolfess) men (Bartsch *Lieder* 24).<sup>40</sup> Peire considers identification with his lover both in name and in behavior as worthy of his suffering. In general, this song revolves around pain and love and the extent to which the troubadour will go to show his love for his lady, as experienced by Vidal in his dealings with Na Loba, who ultimately accepts him and his love (v. 53); the passage, as it speaks of shepherds chasing and beating the man as wolf from their liege lady, is uncannily similar to the one found in *Gilgamesh*.<sup>41</sup> Sconduto makes other parallels between the epic and Greek mythology, in which Diana punishes the mortal, Actaeon, for seeing her naked (7-8). The common theme running between these accounts is the position of the lady, as the instigator of the change and possessing control over the man’s destiny as he is now transformed into beast. This is definitively one of the central tenants in *Bisclavret*, a tale where the wife’s treason is paramount to the intrigue.

Among other details central to many werewolf stories, the account in the *Metamorphoses* of King Lycaon, the etymological root of “lycanthropy,” is depicted trying to deceive Zeus in feeding him human flesh (Sconduto 9). As a deity, Zeus is not fooled and in turn curses the king by changing him into the likeness of a wolf. Pliny the Elder seems to be the first chronicler to address the abundance of werewolf stories. Sconduto excerpts a passage from his *Historia Naturalis* in which he declares them untrue while reinforcing the fact that they stem from the belief that they are a curse. This is also good evidence to support the popular folk tale of the werewolf, since few written records of folklore exist from as early as the first century.

Though the previous examples stem from classical and vernacular, definitively Celtic

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<sup>40</sup> Translation from Fraser (73).

<sup>41</sup> The Marquis de Sade later makes use of this passage from Vidal, though his purposes are a bit different.

sources exist have a stronger thematic link to *Bisclavret*. Sconduto cites Geraldus Camrbiensis' *Topographia Hibernica* in which he recounts the "historical anecdote" of Ossory in which a priest is asked by a werewolf to come and administer last rites to his dying werewolf wife (26-27). The theological implications of this story are many, but this characterization of the werewolf as a repentant creature, one worthy of salvation, is a turning point for the genre. Though the traditional tale of madness and curse is sure to have remained, here the humanity of the beast is what is emphasized, another common trait with Marie's account. Sconduto underlines that this emphasis on the difference between outward appearance of form and one's true nature is what allows the priest to fulfill his sacred duty (32). In this way, the themes central to story of *Bisclavret* are attested, or at least they are given points of reference to conventions popular before Marie's works.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE LANGUAGE OF THE MARVELOUS

As seen in the previous chapter, there is much debate regarding the sources for the lays of Marie de France. These discussions are important because our understanding of these sources gives weight to what we perceive as the role the marvelous plays in the lays. For example, one explanation of the white hind relies heavily upon Celtic narratives that depict the fairy lover as able to take the form of a deer to act as a messenger to lure the knight to her domain (Illingworth, “The Lai of Guigemar” 179). In conjunction with the pilotless ship, this structure supposes a coordinated effort to bring the knight across the sea. Rather than a random insertion of a marvelous motif, the white hind’s appearance becomes part of a coordinated group of situations and characters that move toward a common goal. This analysis supports the argument that Marie’s marvelous lays are indeed cohesive units and not just traditional, feudal narratives on love and duty colored with the exotic, Celtic names and locations.

Many times the reaction to the appearance of a marvelous being seems to be fear or awe, which quickly fades toward a sentiment of a love or desire, in an Annunciation-like interaction. The initial shock of such an appearance is often followed by uneasiness in regards to the ambiguity of the marvelous character’s origin or nature, which is most often resolved as soon as the creature noble comportment is established. However, there are instances in which this physical and emotional reaction is vague. In order to pin down the nature of the marvelous encounter and its function within the narratives, it is essential to take a closer look at the

language that Marie uses to describe the interactions with beings from the Other World. Moreover, words and phrases that are consistently used throughout her anthology reveal a common thread and further serve to link the works together. The following is a consideration of some of the repeated characterizations of reactions to the marvelous based on the lexis that Marie chooses. Specifically, the words and their respective semantic fields examined are *poür* [fear], *pensis* [pensive, reflective, worried], and *esguarder* [to look, to observe].

In order to accurately describe the context of the marvelous encounter, it is first necessary to identify the encounter itself. The initial appearance of a supernatural being to the main protagonist and to secondary characters offers the most fertile analysis of the *lais*. Most descriptions of interactions beyond this point often take for granted the marvelous nature of the being or creature. Though there are many magical objects (such as rings, knots, and phials) scattered throughout the lays, most of them appear at the behest of an otherworldly figure, and seem to function as a referent for the giver of the gift. As such, there does not seem to be any distinguishable differences in the manner everyday objects are used from the marvelous ones. A ring is worn, a sword is wielded, and clothes are worn (or not worn, in the case of the *Bisclavret*). There is no doubt symbolic power behind these objects, but they do not seem to evoke any reaction that is distinct from the marvelous figure. With that in mind, marvelous settings in which the human characters find themselves plunged are included. For example, the seemingly magical realm in which the *dame* in *Yonec* enters after following Muldumarec's bloody path,<sup>42</sup> or the scenes at the coast where characters in *Guigemar* encounter the magical *nef*.<sup>43</sup>

#### *Poür*

The locution repeated most often in correlation with a marvelous encounter occurs in three out of

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<sup>42</sup> *Yonec* vv. 345-382

<sup>43</sup> *Guigemar* vv. 151, 267, (619), 698

four of the lays studied here. *Poür* is a two-syllable<sup>44</sup> dialectal variant (perhaps Anglo-Norman) of *peur*, as cited by Van Daele’s dictionary. Other variations listed are *poor*, *peor*, and *peür*, and the Latin root, *pavore* (or *pavoris*),<sup>45</sup> is defined as “a trembling, quaking, produced by fear or excitement; to cause fear” (*Cassell’s Latin Dictionary*). Pope’s *Latin to Modern French* lists *pavorem*<sup>46</sup> as the Latin substantive from which evolves the Old French *paour* [paour > pœür]. *Poür* is the preferred spelling of the *Lettres Gothiques* and Jean Rychner’s edition of the *lais*. *Dictionnaire Godefroy* has an entry for *paourance* and *paoureux*, the first being a substantive (sing., fem.) glossed as “peur” and the second an adjective with several variations (-ous, -eux, -us; *paor.*, *paur.*, *pour.*, *peur.*, *paer.*, *peureus*) as “terrible, effrayant, dangereux” [terrible, frightening, dangerous]. However, an entry for monosyllabic substantive *peur* or the variants listed in Van Daile are not to be found. There is an entry for *peior* (with the variants *peur* and *peeur*, among others), a superlative adjective meaning “le pire, plus mauvais, méchant, moindre” [the worst, poorer, malicious, lesser]. This missing entry is bizarre. *Tobler*, on the other hand, lists *pëor* with the variants *pöor* and *päor*, and defined as “furcht” [fear] and often linked with *avoir*. The distribution of *poür* in the four *lais* in this study is displayed in the Figure 1 below:

Figure 1: Distribution of *poür* in *Guigemar*, *Bisclavret*, *Yonec*, and *Lanval*

Guigemar	3 times: v. 271, 479, 556
Bisclavret	3 times: v. 98, 149, 265
Yonec	4 times: v. 122, 125, 180, 281
Lanval	0 times

*Poür* occurs throughout the narratives in a fairly even distribution, with the notable exception of *Lanval*, from which it is altogether absent.

<sup>44</sup> Marie’s octosyllable couplets help identify that it is not monosyllabic.

<sup>45</sup> *Pavore* becomes the oblique case in Old French, while *pavoris* becomes the nominative.

<sup>46</sup> The Classical Latin equivalent of *pavore*, the Vulgar Latin form. The loss of *-m* is posited to have occurred around the 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE.

Though not the longest *lai*, *Bisclavret* contains multiple examples where *poür* is the primary emotion expressed by the characters, and most instances are tied to interactions with the only marvelous element to this story – the werewolf. When news of the knight’s situation reaches the ears of his wife, we are not given an immediate feedback on her part. Instead, she goes on to ask the details of his metamorphosis, which reveals the common thread that runs through many lycanthropic tales: “enquis li a e demandé / s’il se despueille u vet vestuz” (vv. 68-69) [she asked further and inquired / whether he undressed or kept his clothes on]. However, after explaining the details of his transformation and his habits as a werewolf, the narrator wastes no time in shifting her attention to the lady’s perspective:

La dame oï cele merveille  
de poür fu tute vermeille  
De l’aventure s’efrea.  
En maint endroit se purpensa  
cum ele s’en puïst partir:  
ne voliet mes lez lui gisir (vv. 98-102)  
[The Lady heard this wonder  
and turned scarlet from fear;  
she was terrified of the whole adventure.  
Over and over she considered  
how she might get rid of him;  
she never wanted to sleep with him again.]

As Marie characterizes the husband’s status as *merveille*, the lady’s opinion of her husband’s dual nature is clearly cast, as indicated by both *poür* and *s’efrea*, and is further supported by her



change in color, *vermeille*. *S'efreir* [to be frightened], being the reflexive form of the Old French verb *efreir*, does not appear to have shifted at all in meaning, according to *Godefroy*; *vermeille* likewise [rose-red or ruddy] seems to have had a simple evolution, listed in *Godefroy* as “le nom d’une fleur de couleur rouge” [the name of a flower of red color]. This emotional reaction, fright, is thus linked to a physical reaction, the change in her countenance. It is followed by a description of her plans to leave him because of her fear of sleeping with him. Whether this is a physical fear of bodily harm, as the three previous verses suggest, or the fear of giving birth to more monsters like her husband, it is unclear, and perhaps purposefully so. The next encounter between the knight – this time in his lichen form – and a human can be seen during the royal hunt in the forest, when the Bisclavret runs and prostrates himself before the king:

Des que il a le rei choisi  
vers lui curut querre merci.  
Il l’aveit pris par sun estrié  
la jambe li baise e le pié  
Li reis le vit, grant poür a; (vv. 145-149)  
[When he saw the king  
he ran to him, pleading for mercy.  
He took hold of the king’s stirrup,  
kissed his leg and foot.  
The king saw this and was terrified;]

Bisclavret makes the first move as soon as he sees the king. Marie then shift the focus to the king, in a way similar to the way in which the wife’s delayed reaction is presented. The king, who finds himself the subject of the beast’s attention, is understandably terrified of being bitten.

However, unlike the wife, whose fear led to her betrayal without even the merest glimpse of her husband in wolfish form, the king's reaction is to see the humanity within the monster. As he calls to his companions, his words describe the *merveille* of seeing the beast prostrate himself:

e ceste merveille esgardez,

cum ceste beste s'umilie !

Ele a sen d'ume, merci crie. (vv. 152-154)

[Look at this marvel-

this beast is humbling itself to me!

It has the mind of a man, and it's begging me for mercy.]

The third and final occurrence of *poür* is held by the adulterous wife on the rack, and seems to be a reaction to the pain of her confession, and not necessarily to the reappearance of her *loup-garou* of a husband. In the end, we see the reversal of fortunes. The knight is recognized for his noble behavior and is physically redeemed when his wife's ignoble behavior is finally revealed. It is she who is the monster, a fact reinforced by her and her progeny's repugnant physical appearance and her exile.

The *lai* of *Guigemar* provides a few points of comparison with *Bisclavret*. Though Guigemar himself seems to take his *aventure* in stride, being above all preoccupied with his wound, the lady across the sea has a much more colorful reaction to the arrival of a richly ornate and unmanned ship on the shore bordering her heavily guarded domain:

La dame vult turner en fui

se ele a poür, n'est merveille

tute en fu sa face vermeille (vv. 270-272)

[The lady started to flee-

it's not surprising if she was afraid;  
her whole face grew red.]

These verses, which bear several resemblances with those in *Le Bisclavret*, notably the repetition of the words *poür*, *merveille*, and *vermeille*, capture a reaction that is quite similar. The additional detail of her face as the part of her body that reddens seems almost superfluous<sup>47</sup>. However, the appearance of *tute* in conjunction with *vermeille* further ties the two verses and images together. One point of contrast is the use of *merveille*, which does not seem to be literal in this passage. Marie employs this frequently appearing word in a conditional clause set in the present tense in which she rationalizes the reaction of the lady. She does not actually call the ship, as seen by the lady, a *merveille*. However, the usage seems too coincidental to ignore, and one can almost imagine the audience's wink and snicker upon hearing the turn of phrase. The added detail of her desire to flee (v. 270) is also not seen in *Bisclavret*, whose lady perhaps feels constrained by the bonds of marriage. In any case, Guigemar's soon-to-be lover eventually overcomes her fear with the help of her younger companion, though Marie clearly indicates that her fright is not an unnatural response and is completely justified.

The next appearance of *poür* in *Guigemar* occurs midway through the narrative, when the chevalier and the lady find themselves together, both after having privately expressed their burning love for the other:

Il la salue e ele lui.  
En grant esfrei erent amdui.  
Il ne l'osot niënt requerre ;  
pur ceo qu'il ert d'estrance terre  
aveit poür, s'il li mustrast,

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<sup>47</sup> What other part of a medieval woman's body would be exposed? Lanval could fill us in.

qu'el l'enhaïst e esloignast. (vv. 475-480)

[He greeted her and she him

they were both very scared now.

He didn't dare ask anything from her,

for he was a foreigner

and was afraid, if he told her what he felt,

she'd hate him for it, send him away.]

The words of interest are once again *poür* and *esfrei*, the past participle form of *esfreir* (see p. 4 of this chapter). Here, instead of the lady, we have Guigemar's reaction to another *merveille*, that of love, to which he has until now been ignorant. The passage that follows this "encounter" is a treatise on the painful nature of love, and reflects Guigemar's newfound pain as mirrored with that of his physical wound. As the two sentiments tie them together, Guigemar's fear is also a reflection of that displayed by his lover at their first encounter.

The last appearance of *poür* is found within the words of Guigemar as he tries to comfort his lover's fear of their imminent separation, an air of forewarning that she holds. Overall, this scene is similar to a passage in *Yonec* in which the bird-knight warns his lover to be wary of her changing countenance, as it is an indication of his presence (vv. 205-214). The two passages are tied together by their references to death as the outcome of their separation, as Muldumarec warns will be his fate (*Yonec* v. 214) and as the lady in *Guigemar* alludes to (v. 549).

*Yonec* has many other points of comparison between *Guigemar* and *Bisclavret* studied above. In an all too familiar scenario, the neglected wife is surprised and frightened by the appearance of a supernatural visitor:

La dame a merveille le tint

li sans li remut e fremi  
grant poür ot, sun chief covri. (vv. 122-124)  
[The lady was astonished  
her blood went cold, she trembled,  
she was frightened she covered her head.]

*Le* in verse 122 refers to the bird-knight and his metamorphosis from osprey to man. Once again, *merveille* links the passages in the preceding *lais* and serves as a further indication of the wondrous nature of the visitor. The lady is clearly frightened, cowering in fear with her head covered with her arms, and Muldumarec's first words serve to allay this fear: "'Dame', fet il, 'n'aiez poür,'" (v.125). Her fear is obvious due to her movements, and perhaps another change in her countenance.

The description of her body and her movements seem to indicate a fear leading toward panic at his sudden appearance, her blood running cold and her arms raised over her head, as the translated passage suggests. *Fremi* does not seem to have changed much in its modern sense [to quiver, to stir], though *Godefroy* only lists the slightly different entry *fremillier* with a similar definition. However, *remut* is listed in *Godefroy* as the simple past form of the verb *remuer*, and is defined primarily as "Act., changer, échanger" [Active, to change, to exchange]. In addition, the entry directly cites this passage in *Yonec* (as *remue*) and defines it as "Neutr., être excité, troublé" [Neutral, to be excited, troubled]. While the definition describes the general impression of the passage, it seems too tailor-made for this instance and fails to link the verb to what may be the most important word in the line, the subject of the sentence *sans* [blood]. *Sans* seems to be the subject of this clause, with *remut* and *fremi* as intransitive verbs with an indirect object, *li*, the pronoun for its antecedent, *la dame*, in the preceding verse. This one instance is reinforced by a

very similar construction in *Aymeri de Narbonne*: “Quant Savaris voit la desconvenue / De mautalent toz li sans li remue” [When Savaris saw this tragedy / in anger all his blood rose up within him] (“remuer” *Godefroy*).<sup>48</sup> Further study of the locution within this *chanson de geste* reveals a description of some passages where characters “muer le sanc” or “changer de couleur, être profondément bouleversé” [to change color, to be profoundly distressed] (*Aymeri*, Honoré 729). What is more, the glossary in the Honoré Champion edition of the text cites one specific occurrence of these two words that confirms the association between *poür* and *vermeille*: “Tel paor ot, tout ot le sanc mué” [Such a fear he had, he grew completely flushed].<sup>49</sup> *Godefroy* lists of definition of *muer*, the verb employed here as a past participle, as “changer de couleur” [to change color], though the citation supporting the entry (from *Le Roman de Tristan*) is a little more ambiguous: “qui si muoit et palissoit” [who flushed and paled].<sup>50</sup> It is possible that the difference between *muer* and *remuer* is the direction in which the blood is moving, i.e., to the face (where it is visible) or away from the face (where its absence is noted). Regardless, it is evident that this passage in *Yonec* implies a physical change in appearance due to the lady’s blood moving in a flush. While the current notion of blood and usually implies its running cold (while shaking, shivering, and paling), this specific mention of *sans* fits together with *vermeille*, as seen in *Guigemar* and *Bisclavret*, linking all three initial encounters together and supplying a very specific physical reaction of reddening that is associated with the fear of the unknown.

Between the other two instances of *poür*, only one is associated with the supernatural. The first is expressed by the lady when she acts sick to the point of death to have the priest come, in order to ensure Muldumarec’s devotion to the God: “s’il fast tost a li venir / kar grant poür a de mourir” (vv. 179-180) [and bring him to her quickly- / she very much feared she was dying].

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<sup>48</sup> *Aymeri de Narbonne*, Anciens texts edition, v. 1810. Translation mine.

<sup>49</sup> B1 1976, R 2005. Translation mine.

<sup>50</sup> *Tristan*, Richel. 2171, f° 3<sup>a</sup>. Translation mine. *Muoit* should be translated literally as “changed.”

Whether this a genuine fear of Muldumarec, whose diabolic nature has yet to be disproved, or a fear completely feigned to obtain the sacrament, the ambiguity seems once again purposeful. For the final occurrence, though there is no mention of color, the lady's elder guardian has a similar reaction to her younger counterpart when she espies the knight's nature and method of entrance into the lady's chamber: "De ceo ot ele grant poür / qu'ume le vit e puis ostur" (v. 281-282) [She was quite frightened when she saw a man and then a bird].<sup>51</sup> Here, the origin of her fear is directly indicated to be centered on Muldumarec's metamorphosis.

### *Pensis*

Along with its inflectional derivations, *pensis* appear throughout the lays in numerous contexts, but with specific concentrations found most frequently in the three of the lays selected for this study: *Guigemar*, *Lanval*, and *Yonec*. *Goderfroy* provides the quite subtle definition of "qui pense" for *pensif*. Modern French and English versions vary widely in their translations of the word. The *Lettres Gothiques* edition glosses *pensis* as *étonné*, *soucieux*, and *affligé*, not to mention the conservative *pensif*, while the English edition used for this study employs a variety of words, among which are *troubled*, *worried*, and *upset*.<sup>52</sup> The corresponding derivational forms of *penser*, *purpenser*, and *trespensez* are also scattered throughout the text, though in a diminished frequency. McClelland, in her lexical study of Marie's works, remarks on *penser* and its variants, in passing, "la richesse morphologique de la série" [the morphological richness of the series] (53). This marks the extent of her comments, and the absence of *pensis* from her semantic category of "les sentiments désagréables et leurs manifestations" [disagreeable feelings and their manifestations] is unfortunate, especially given that all of the words paired with *pensis* are supplied (McClelland 48). The verb *pensare* meaning "peser, juger" [to weigh, to judge] is the

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<sup>51</sup> There are a few numbering discrepancies between the *Lettres Gothiques* edition and Hanning and Ferrante's edition.

<sup>52</sup> *Guigemar* 161; *Lanval* 51, 34; *Milun* 152.

Latin etymon *penser*, a form little changed in Old French, and from which Modern French receives the verbs *peser* [to weigh] and *penser* (*Dictionnaire Etymologique*). *Godefroy* defines the Old French verb *penser*, with its variation *pancer*, primarily as the following: 1) “Neut., *penser de*, prendre soin de, soigner” [Neutral, to take care of, to look after]; 2) “Act., soigner, donner ses soins à” [Active, to care for, to give care to]; “Fig., traiter avec égards” [Figurative, to treat with respect]. *Purpenser*, on the other hand, is listed as a variation of the entry *porpenser*, defined as: 1) “Act., méditer, projeter, penser à” [to meditate, to project, to think about]; 2) “Neut., penser, réfléchir” [to think, to reflect]; 3) “Refl., former telle résolution, réfléchir, méditer, comploter, prendre garde” [to form such a resolution, to reflect, to meditate, to plot, to watch out]. Finally, the adjective *trespensif* is listed as a synonym of *trespensé*, defined as “plongé dans ses pensées, très pensif, soucieux, inquiet” [deep in thought, very pensive, worried, anxious]. This final definition, while very specific in form, offers the best résumé of the meaning of *pensis* and all its variants as seen in the *lais*. As evident, there appears to be some hesitation in selecting a consistent translation, which underscores the need to understand the context in which it appears.

The meaning of *penser* and its emphatic form *purpenser* seem to vary from that of *quider* and *creire*, which are also common throughout the *lais* and even co-occur (for example, *Lanval* 200 and *Bisclavret* 273).<sup>53</sup> However, neither of these verbs appears with any regularity in the same context as *penser*, which leads one to posit a shift in meaning, if but slight, to a definition more akin to that of *réfléchir*. *McClelland* suggests as much in her gloss of the Latin root *pensare* as “peser dans l’esprit” [to weigh in the spirit].<sup>54</sup> This idea of a “weight” or a burden carried by the character fits well with the images of pain and anguish, a theme that runs

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<sup>53</sup> *cuidier*: “penser, croire, s’imaginer” [to think, to believe, to picture oneself]; *creire*: “Act., confier, faire credit de” [to entrust, to give credit to]

<sup>54</sup> *McClelland*, p. 53.



throughout the *lais* but especially so in three studied here. To further emphasize this characterization, the following chart depicts the distribution of *pensis* and its inflectional variants:

Figure 2: *Pensis* and its variants in the *Lais* of Marie de France

	Guigemar	Equitan	Le Fraisne	Bisclavret	Lanval	Les Dous Amanz	Yonec	Laüstic	Milun	Chaïstivel	Chevrefeille	Eliiduc
<i>pensif</i>					1							
<i>pensifs</i>					1							
<i>pensis</i>	3	1			3		3		1		1	1
<i>pensive</i>	3											
<i>trespensez</i>									1		1	2

As the Figure 2 suggests, *pensis* is the most commonly occurring variant, with a total of thirteen appearances. The first lay, *Guigemar*, has the largest number of these forms, nearly double that of every other *lai*. The first occurrence of *pensis* portrays Guigemar's reaction as he finds the richly decorated ship on the usually barren coast:

Le chevaliers fu mult *pensis*  
 en la cuntree n'el païs  
 n'out unkes mes oï parler  
 que nes i peüst ariver. (vv. 161-164)

[The knight was troubled;  
 he had never heard it said  
 anywhere in that region  
 that ships could land there.]

In this context, it would be justifiably simple to translate *pensis* as semantically tied to the

process of reflection, as he seems to be searching his memory for an instance in which he has seen a boat in this part of the land.<sup>55</sup> In looking back to the previous scene, *purpenser* seems to be used in a similar manner, to indicate reflection:

Comença sei a purpenser  
en quell terre purra aler  
pur sa plaie faire guarir ; (vv. 125-128)  
[He began to consider carefully  
what land he might set out for  
to have his wound healed.]

Though these occurrences offer nothing substantial beyond their primary definitions, as outlined above, the passages examined below expands the significance of this semantic field to the point in which this general idea of the word's function cannot help but be colored by the context in which Marie uses it.

*Guigemar* is the only *lai* that contains the feminine form, *pensive*. This is fitting to the mirror-like quality of the plot, both in terms of the structure of the narrative and the differing perspectives of Guigemar and the lady. Just as the chevalier is beset by his wounds, so is the lady portrayed with the same sentiment of painful preoccupation. Overall, *pensis* and *pensive* occur three times each. It is interesting to note that while there seems to be no significant change in form, *pensive* is almost accompanied by an adjective that directly describes the lady's appearance, as seen previously with *poür*:

La dame pluranz e pensive (v. 306)  
La dame fut pensive e pale (v. 764)  
[The lady, upset and weeping]

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<sup>55</sup> The *Lettres Gothiques* edition, for whatever reason, translates it as *étonné* [surprised].

[The lady was pale and upset.]

In these two separate passages, *pensive* is paired with *pluranz* [tearful] and *pale* [pale]. Both instances depict her interaction with Guigemar, as she sees him for the first time in the ship (v. 306), and as she sees him for the first time after his return and her arrival in *Bretagne*, when Meriadu holds her captive. Though Guigemar is not a marvelous, supernatural being, the attention paid to her physical appearance (specifically, her face) continues to reinforce the importance of a change in countenance as Marie's point of focalization.<sup>56</sup>

The third appearance of *pensive* is not coupled with an adjective that betokens a definitive description of her face; however, it is preceded with a description of her rich clothing. The contrast created by these opposing images suggests that the verse describes her countenance: *richement la vest e aturne / mes tuz jurs est pensive e murne* (v. 716-7) [the damsel dressed her richly / But she remained constantly sad and preoccupied]. Despite relying on characters who are often downtrodden and morose and describing their physical conditions to reinforce their emotional state, Marie is also fond of underlining the disparity between outward appearance and inner reality, as seen in *Bisclavret*. Here, though the lady is bedecked in splendid raiment, this does not change her poor emotional state in her separation from Guigemar. On the other hand, when *pensis* is used to describe Guigemar, it seems to point to a change in his state of mind, a reflection of his thoughts: "*Mult fut preisiez en sun pais / mes tuz jurs ert maz e pensis*" (v. 643-4) [He was highly honored in his land / but through it all he was sad and distracted]. That is not to say that there is no corresponding physical reaction, only that one is not supplied. He too, with plenty of reason for celebration and joy, cannot appreciate his return because he misses his lover. These two passages appear in a context so similar, both thematically and structurally, that they

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<sup>56</sup> Though the audience knows Guigemar is a man, the lady's perspective is quite different. This is explored more in the following chapter.

cannot resemble each other by chance. Rather, these passages function as an indication that their thoughts have not left their lover, as indicated by *pensis*.

*Pensis* also appears coupled with some adjectives in syntactic doubling as a repeated formula. One specific use appears in two separate lays: “*pensis esteit e anguissosus*” (*Guigemar* 394, *Lanval* 340) [he was preoccupied and in distress]. This pairing with “anguish,” in conjunction with *maz*, *morne*, *pale*, and *pluranz* [dull, mournful, pale, and tearful] with which it is paired in the lines describing the couple, serve to solidify that *pensis* must be distinguished as a word indicative of sorrow. Though briefly mentioned later in the following paragraphs, *pensis* is also paired with *dolenz* throughout several of the *lais* not examined here.<sup>57</sup>

*Lanval*, a story defined by the redemption of a browbeaten knight, exhibits a usage of *pensis* similar to that of *Guigemar*, as it occurs coupled with another adjective. Two of these descriptions occur before he finds his fairy friend:

Mult est dolenz , mult est pensis (v. 34)

Mult est pensis par sa mesaise (v. 51)

[very depressed and very worried]

[He worried about his difficulty]

*Mesaise*, a reference to his poor condition, denotes the reason for his painful preoccupation. Instead of being used to describe the marvelous encounter, however, these descriptions are used to set the stage for the fairy’s intervention. His spirits are lifted once he is accepted by the fairy queen and forgets his abandonment by the king. Though there is a paucity of description describing his immediate reaction to finding a half-naked fairy pledging him her love, the general sentiment of the passage, in addition to his vows of love and obedience, imply a satisfied chevalier, pulled from the brink of ruin and given a second chance. However, the verses

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<sup>57</sup> *dolenz e pensis (trespensez)*: Milun v. 152; Chievrefueil v. 22, 25; Eliduc 627.

describing his return to Arthur's court depict Lanval in a manner that clashes with his newfound joy:

Mult est Lanval en grant esfrei ;  
de s'aventure vait pensant  
e en sun curage dotant.  
Esbauiz est, ne set que creire ;  
il ne la quide mie a veire. (vv. 195-201)

[Lanval was very disturbed;  
he wondered about his adventure  
and was doubtful in his heart.

He was amazed, not knowing what to believe;  
he didn't expect ever to see her again.]

Lanval seems to be in a state of bewilderment. After leaving the fairy's presence, he is described as "terribly frightened" (*grant esfrei*); the use of *pensant*, as the present participle of *penser*, seems to be a throwback to his demeanor before the encounter. He is also depicted as doubting in *sun curage*; the ambiguity of this phrase makes the intention of its meaning difficult. Does he doubt the veracity of his experience with the fairy, as some translations seem to suggest? Along with his transfixion at the sight of the lady, this is the most solid piece of evidence of a bewitchment of sorts on Lanval, a spell that leaves him muddled and confused after his encounter. On the other hand, perhaps this is a passage in which he doubts his own resolve to carry through his new oaths. Marie is fond of such foreshadowing.

At the rupture of their agreement, he immediately falls back into his gloomy depression (as seen in the verse duplicated in *Guigemar*), a sentiment also extended to those pleading on his

behalf at the trial held at Arthur's court, as seen in the following verses:

mult sunt pensis e eguaré (v. 430)

Dunc assemblerent tuit pensif (v. 511)

[they were very worried and distressed]

[Then they assembled, everyone was worried]

Here, *esguaré* further defines the attitudes of the judges and *pensif* serves to mirror the painful reluctance with which they go about their task of condemning Lanval. *Esguaré*, as defined by *Godefroy*, means “isolé, abandonné, entristé” [isolated, abandoned, saddened]. Left to their morose proceedings, they are consumed by the dolorous thoughts on the matter.

In *Yonec*, *pensis* is used in one of the final scenes of the lay to describe the bird-knight as the *dame* kneels beside his deathbed. Coupled with a common pairing, the knight expresses his fear of harm befalling his lover when his vassals find her at their dead lord's bed: “pur vus sui dolenz e pensis” (v. 413) [I am disturbed and troubled for you]. Based on the *lais* examined above, this occurrence of *pensis* is now the standard, and reflects the knight's worry for his lover now that he is dying and cannot protect her from her husband's wrath. In a reflection of Guigemar and his lady's demeanor in losing each other, the lord of this fairy land is worried over losing his own when he has perished.

This contrasts with the verse depicting the jealous lord's sudden knowledge of his wife's infidelity: “e il en est forment pensis” (v. 287) [and the lord was truly troubled by it]. This seems to be a strange reaction, especially given his next action, which consists of setting a trap for his cuckolding, otherworldly rival. This would be the first instance in which *pensis* is tied to anger instead of sadness. It could be conceived as an indication of his silence, an externalization of his tormented thoughts. In addition, perhaps it reflects the formation of his plan for revenge, a

carefully crafted design for the knight's demise. Though it is a tenuous suggestion, it may be possible that Marie is using an emotion generally reserved for the character with whom the audience sympathizes in order to commiserate, if only briefly, with the jealous husband. Though his actions are worthy of condemnation, one can hardly blame him for his pain in hearing that his meticulous plans have been swept aside.

In addition to this odd use of *pensis*, another interesting occurrence appears in the middle of a long discourse by the cloistered *dame*:

Mult ai oï sovent cunter  
que l'em suleit jadis trover  
aventures en cest païs,  
ki rehaitouent les pensis. (v. 95-98)  
[I've often heard  
that one could once find  
adventures in this land  
that brought relief to the unhappy.]

After expressing the complaints typical of the plight of a *mal-mariée*, the lady finishes with a voiced desire to join the ranks of ladies saved from the misery of an unfulfilled marriage. *Pensis* is here used as a nominalized adjective; the lady, given her complaint, is self-identifying as one of the *pensis*. It is interesting to note that the form given appears to be masculine. This could be no more than an effort to rhyme with *païs*; or, perhaps, it is a reflection of Marie's theme of the reciprocal necessity of love and the plight of all of her characters, not just the *mal-mariées*.

#### *Esguarder*

A striking difference between the lay of *Lanval* and the remaining lays examined in this study is

the absence of fear in association with the interactions with the marvelous. In fact, the direct opposite reaction seems to be the preferred response. At first glance, *esgarder* seems to be nothing more than precursor to the everyday *regarder* [to look] in Modern French. The etymon for this verb and others with the same root of *-ward-* is *\*wardôn*, a Frankish word of Germanic origin meaning “veiller, être sur ses gardes” [to watch over, to be on guard] (*Dictionnaire étymologique*). The semantic shift necessary for the meaning to widen to its modern sense of “to look” is not at all unusual. However, this verb is often seen in positions where *poür* was present in the other *lais* of this study. Le Dictionnaire Godefroy has several entries for *esgarder*, of which the first, second, and seventh are most pertinent to this study. The first gives the simplest definition of the verb, as pertaining to sight: “Act., regarder, considérer” [Active, to look, to consider]. This definition is preferred, based on usage throughout the lays. The second entry offers a more narrowed definition: “Au sens mor., examiner, considérer, envisager” [In a moral sense, to examine, to consider, to envisage]. The seventh entry offers a significant shift from the original meaning: “Act., décider, résoudre, ordonner, régler, fixer, juger” [Active, to decide, to resolve, to prescribe, to regulate, to fix, to judge]. McClelland catalogues *esgarder* in her table of verbs tied to sensory perception, under *vue* (31). According to her count, the word is the second most common word in this category, with a total of 30 occurrences throughout the lays, as compared to *veier* [to see], the principal verb of sight with 135 uses. She characterizes *esgarder* as:

(l')expression la plus fréquente après *veier*, implique une attention soutenue. Fréquemment associée à *veier* dont il complète le sens, il se trouve renforcé par les adverbes suivants : *mut, bien, souvent*. *Esgarder* quelqu'un signifie « détailler » la personne en question. (McClelland 33)



[the most fréquent expression after *veeir*, it implies a sustained attention. Frequently associated with *veeir* to which it complements the meaning, it is often modified by the following adverbs: *mut, bien, souvent* [very, well, often]. *Esguarder* someone signifies “to scrutinize” the person in question.]

The first occurrence of *esgarder* supports this summary. When he is ushered by two mysterious *demoiselles* into the presence of the fairy queen, it is she who first proclaims her love for him with the promise that he shall never again have an earthly need unfulfilled. The first depiction of Lanval’s reaction to this turn of events is a description of his actions following her brief discourse (vv. 110-116):

Il l’esguarda, si la vit bele  
amurs le point de l’estencele  
ki sun quer alume e esprent (vv. 117-119)  
[He looked at her and saw she was beautiful  
Love stung him with a spark  
that burned and set fire to his heart.]

He is struck by her beauty, not by her words, and then swears an oath of love and obedience to his new mistress. No more is written that gives any indication of his mind or emotions, such that his reaction seems automatic and stilted. However, despite a lack of attention paid to his immediate response, there is no outright indication that he has fallen under an enchantment, as designed for the sole purpose of ensnaring him.<sup>58</sup> The next occurrence of the verb is very similar to the first, save that Lanval has now become the object: “Lanval conut e esguarda” (v. 243) [She saw and recognized Lanval]. This passage depicts the queen in her tower looking down on knights in the field, among whom she perceives Lanval. This is directly followed by her

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<sup>58</sup> See the preceding study of *pensis* for an argument for enchantment.

proclamation of love and her desire for Lanval, due likely to his recent change in fortune (vv. 265-270). This meeting with the queen is in many ways a reflection to the fairy encounter and offers a point of contrast between the malevolent queen and Lanval's fairy lover, and the repetition of *esguarder* further links these two scenes.

The next appearance of *esguarder*, however, differs from the previous examples: “De ceo lur dit que il fera / quan que la curz esguardera” (vv. 381-382) [About that he said he would do / whatever the court decided]. This appears to be an abstraction of the verb in keeping with the last definition cited above, with *curz* as the subject. The significance of this verb, as the manner by which Lanval receives judgment from the court, is repeated throughout the rest of the lay.<sup>59</sup> The next occurrence is seen paired directly with *jugier* [to judge]: “si unt jugié e esguardé” (v. 390) [they judged and decided]. This instance refers to the knights in their role as judges (*la curz*) in their decision that Lanval should give his word to remain until his fate has been pronounced. Once the trials has commenced, the damsels' arrival interrupts the knights from their 'judgment': “Pur les dames que nus veïmes / nen i avum nul esguart fait” (v. 509) [Because of the ladies we have just seen / we have made no judgment]. Whether the noun derives from the verb or the verb from the noun is unclear. Their meanings derive from the same source and they are in this way comparable.

This abstracted use of *esguarder* has not gone unmentioned. In his article regarding the evolution of Anglo-Norman legal terminology, Rothwell includes an “Appendix of ‘legal’ terms” (31). Both *esgarder* and *esgart* are listed and defined as “to judge” and “judgment,” with several attestations from a variety of texts (Rothwell 34). Rothwell's argument is against the supposition that an Anglo-Norman “legal” vocabulary was developed in the thirteenth century, as purported

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<sup>59</sup> Note that this is Arthur's court, so it is not limited to its definition as a place of justice, but rather can also refer to the ensemble of his retinue.

by Baker, who cites several authors over the past few decades in the *Manual of French Law* (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., 1990). Rothwell describes the nature of language change as an evolving process, not as one that suddenly produces a host of terms with their full “semantic content” *ab ovo* (23). When Anglo-Norman reached the stage in which it had accrued the necessary breadth and prestige to be used in written legal documents, it is then that it begins to replace Anglo-Latin terminology (Rothwell 27). The vernacular would still have been used to discuss the development of legal documents or between unlearned laborers, as Rothwell aptly demonstrates with the example of the construction of a church (26).

The Anglo-Norman “legal” terminology absent from official documents can be cited in vernacular imaginative literature, some of which Rothwell cites in his definitions. He goes on to counter the development of legal terminology in Anglo-Norman as separate from the rest of the language: “In the twelfth century a ‘legal register’ set apart from the language of everyday life is an anachronism: Anglo-Norman was all of a piece, its meaning determined by context” (Rothwell 24). The distinction between a word’s original meaning and its legal connotation relies on the text.

Marie’s trial scene in *Lanval* is proof of that. What is more, she purposefully exploits the interplay between these disparate meanings of *esgarder*, as seen in the arrival of the fairy queen and her retinue to Arthur’s court.

Mult par esteient avenanz;

de cendal purpre sunt vestues

tut senglement a lur chars nues.

Cil les esgardent volentiers. (vv. 476-479)

[They were very attractive,

dressed in purple taffeta,  
over their bare skin.

[The men looked at them with pleasure.]

Here, the vassals drink in the sight of the fairy queen's companions, a respite from their travail. As the final verse suggests, they would quite gladly "judge" the maidens, as opposed to the unpleasant task of judging Lanval set to them by the king (vv. 421, 424, 430). By describing their physical appearance, Marie purposefully plays with the everyday meaning of the verb and the legal task with which the court is occupied. This sentiment is increased tenfold at the arrival of the fairy herself:

Li jugeür, ki la veeient,  
a grant merveille le teneient ;  
n'i ot un seul ki l'esguardast,  
de dreite joie n'eschalfast. (vv. 593-596)

[The judges who saw her  
marveled at the sight;  
no one who looked at her  
was not warmed with joy.]

Three verbs of perception – *veeir*, *tenir*, and *esgarder* – are used here to describe the manner of the chevaliers' observations. Marie's intentional branding of the knights as *li jugeür* plays up the dual meaning of *esgarder*, as both a sensory perception and an appraising judgment of her beauty, the implication being that she is much more beautiful than the queen. The physical description of their reaction in the last line may even be a joke of contrasts, by juxtaposing the knights' sexual desire with a legal concept. The final instance of *esgarder* in this passage seals

the deal: “Quant il l’orent bien esgardee / e sa bealté assez loëe” (vv. 627-628) [When they had looked at her well, / and had greatly praised her beauty]. As she enters the throne room, the fairy removes some of her outer garments in order that she can be better seen, appreciated, and “judged” (vv. 621-622). The king can see for himself that his queen is no match.

The implications for this use of *esgarder* in the *lai* are not definitive. In the absence of details of Lanval’s first reaction to the fairy’s beauty, it is tempting to allow the legal connotation of the word to color this use, perhaps as a foreshadowing of sorts by Marie. The link is tenuous, if only because this contextual use of *esgarder* occurs a couple hundred lines later. The queen’s evaluation of Lanval has a stronger tie to this use, if only because of her involvement in the trial and the implicit comparison of herself and the queen.

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The linguistic study of the components that form the descriptions of the marvelous encounters in the *lai*, and by extension to the collection of the twelve narratives, is crucial to reach an understanding of what Marie is trying to convey about the supernatural to her audience. By examining her use of *poür*, it is evident that the overwhelming response to the appearance of the strange and mysterious is fear and terror. This reaction is often temporary; in some instances, it is contrast with an opposing case, as seen with the king in *Bisclavret*. The werewolf’s wife has a visible reaction to the supernatural revelation in that she turns red or flushes out of fear, a response mirrored by the ladies in *Guigemar* and *Yonec*. Likewise, the continual reappearance of *pensis* and the long list of variations thereon not only indicates the depressed emotional state of many of Marie’s characters, but it also reflects a usage in association with the marvelous that depicts a worrisome trait, with allusions to that unsettled feeling in the pit of your stomach when the intervention of the supernatural abounds, as clearly experienced by *Guigemar* and *Lanval*.

Finally, the use of *esgarder* in *Lanval* re-emphasizes Marie's knowledge of legal proceedings in Anglo-Norman England. Her word play with the traditional and legal connotations of the verb underscores the finesse with which Marie wove her *lais*, incorporating contemporary content to a story constructed from older narratives and themes. Her masterful and consistent command of language adds to the perception of her works a fluid and cohesive quality, a shared trait by which the worth of her oeuvre is esteemed.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE NARRATIVE FUNCTION OF THE ENCOUNTER

The level of detail with which Marie describes the marvelous encounter, as explored in the previous chapter, emphasizes that this meeting is not a plot device that serves the basic structure of the narrative. There is an expressive emotional reaction to the presence of supernatural beings, and this is reflected in the base themes and narratives that bear influence on the *lais*. However, as previously argued by Sienaart, there is an element of the marvelous encounter that contributes to the functional structure of Marie's stories. In some aspects, it is essential to the base structure; without the Marvelous, the *lais* would fall apart. With no fairy mistress, Lanval can never rise out of his depression. Guigemar would have remained an incomplete knight, never knowing the joys (and pains) of love. Yonec's mother would still be languishing in her tower chamber, never knowing the delights and realities of true love. Without the Bisclavret, as a noble and humane werewolf, there would be nothing striking about Marie's story. The marvelous is vital for these *lais*. However, the ensemble of motifs and themes also work together to indicate where the narrative is moving. Additionally, there often seems to be a manipulation of the anticipations of the audience who rely upon these markers.

The marvelous encounter between the human and the supernatural represents a point of demarcation for the narrative and supplies a natural indication of the progression of the story. *Le chevalier au lion* depicts Calogrenant encountering the grotesque wild herder (*le rustre*, vv. 797-799) who is mistaken for a demon, and he is subsequently pointed in the direction of the

supernatural fountain. Later on, Yvain sees and meets the same figure, a sign that he is on the right path and headed for *aventure*. The marvelous, in this one specific instance, functions as a literal guide to the following scene in the story. Keeping in mind that Marie's lays build on preceding medieval traditions, whether oral or textual, the presence of marvelous plot devices would not have been unfamiliar to the listener or reader. The study of the sources that inspired Marie present clear evidence that dangerous fairies and speaking animals were not foreign to the medieval audience. In fact, it very well may have functioned as a distinguishing feature of the genre, one anticipated by the spectators. These supernatural appearances would therefore provide a glimpse into the story's future. What is more, Marie furthers this sense of foreshadowing with direct hints to future details of the story. This prolepsis often accompanies the marvelous in the lays, given that the supernatural often functions as a signpost in the advancement of the plot. The analyses below will emphasize the manner in which Marie manipulates the *matière de Bretagne* in order to play with the expectations of the audience and clue them in to the following events.

### *Guigemar*

The first lay of the anthology depicts the life a young knight, a master in every chivalric pursuit except in his disinterest in women. From the beginning, Marie constructs a lacking character ready for a series of events - some of unexplainable origins - that will form a story that relates a restoration. Before the protagonist finds the remedy to his affliction, he must be made aware of the deficit of his character. The marvelous fulfills this necessity in the form of a warning in order that he realize the serious nature of his lack of love. In respect to the reader, Marie initiates them to expect the marvelous as a signal of restitution by tying it directly to the first scene of the lay. Throughout the first half of the story, Guigemar is led to his cure by supernatural motifs, each one presenting an image in which Marie takes careful note of every detail.



An examination of the sequence of events that lead to Guigemar's journey across the sea can give us an accurate depiction of the role of the marvelous in the lay. The narrative presents Guigemar as fearsome hero without equal in terms of devotion to his lord and his prowess in battle. Marie indicates the direction the story will take by turning to and putting emphasis on his shortcoming: "De tant i out mespris nature / que unc de nule amur n'out cure" (vv. 57-58) [But in forming him nature had so badly erred / that he never gave any thought to love]. Her mention of nature is neither poetic formula nor a suitable word to fit the rhyme. The word occurs four times in *Guigemar*, while occurring only twice more in the rest of the ensemble of Marie's lays. The next instance describe the jealousy of the elder *seigneur* as the logical result of his age, as entailed by Nature:

Gelus esteit a desmesure;  
 car ce purporte la nature  
 que tuit li vieil seient gelus; (v. 213-215)  
 [he was extremely jealous,  
 which accorded with his nature.  
 All old folk are jealous;]

The key word in this passage is *purporte*; it appears that *nature* is the subject of this clause, while *ce* is the anaphora that precedes its clausal antecedent in verse 215, introduced by the relative pronoun *que*. This would make *nature* the determining force that creates the condition of jealousy among the elderly men. *Godefroy* offers the gloss of *comporter* [to comprise, to entail] as part of the translation for the verb, and that indeed seems to be the case here. The result is an involvement on the part of Nature that seems less than design but is certainly more than a passive role.

The labeling of Nature as a willful force is hardly new to scholarly research. Pickens identifies Nature as intertwined with Love and God, which “work in a hierarchical relationship to motivate all events and characters which advance his (Guigemar’s) progress” (330). He goes on to identify Love as subordinate to Nature, as sexual desire, as seen with the third occurrence of *nature* in the lay:

Amurs est plaie dedenz cors  
e si ne piert niënt defors ;  
ceo est uns mal ki lunges tient  
pur ceo que de nature vient. (v. 483-486)

[Love is a wound in the body,  
and yet nothing appears on the outside.  
It’s a sickness that lasts a long time,  
because it comes from nature.]

The reoccurring theme of love as a wound is once again used here, with a further qualification of its origin in verse 486. Just as the meeting between the hind and the hunter and the nature of their mutual wounds presents a foreshadowing for the following adventure across the sea, where the hunter once again finds himself beset, this time the pain of love is shared with his fairy caregiver. The reasonable outcome of love, whether virtuous or selfish, is pain and anguish. Pickens describes Guigemar’s *aventure* as predestined by God, who ordains that Guigemar should be imperfect in love, as created by Nature, in order that he may be redeemed through a far greater love, as described in verses 120-121 (339). Brooks rejects this idea of a preformed *destinee* for Guigemar, citing the hind’s words as “a wish resulting from his action,” and therefore initiated

by the hind, not God (99).<sup>60</sup> While there is merit in a study of the language of the encounter, the author errs in relying on Guigemar's description of the event: "Mut me maudist e si ura" (v. 322) [It cursed me much and swore]. Here, Brooks claims that Guigemar himself recognizes he was cursed. However, it would be impossible for him, at this stage, to realize the benefit of his situation. That is the omniscient perspective of the audience, and Marie is constant in her use of marvelous motifs to signal shifts in the narrative to the spectator.

From the moment he sets eye on the white hind, Guigemar considers it to be nothing more than suitable game from his hunt. For the reader, the appearance of the beast, given the tone set in the introduction, can only be as an aspect of the intervention of his unnatural behavior. The androgynous nature of the hind and the fact that he is in the middle of the forest, often the meeting place of the fay and dangerous residents of the Other World, further emphasizes this point. After this first encounter, all signs point to a meeting between Guigemar and his lover. This is reinforced by the urgency in which he departs from the forest, in spite of his wounded state. The green path by which he exits the forest seems to be a coordinated fulfillment of his *destinee*, as he is lead (*mené*) out of the undergrowth mentioned in verse 89. His arrival at the ship, described as very ornate and richly furnished, is typical of many marvelous encounters (vv. 154-160).

There are many parallels that can be drawn between this and similar encounters occurring within Marie's lays and others. *Lanval* in particular contains a description of a pavilion that mirrors the one made of the ship in *Guigemar* (*Lanval* vv. 80-92). Given the oral tradition from which Marie claims to have assembled her works, it is not a stretch of the imagination to suppose that the reader might have expected another important figure in the story, such as a fairy or a

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<sup>60</sup> See also *le rustre* and the lady in *Yvain*.

body within the ship.<sup>61</sup> Unfortunately, no one is to be found within the vessel; *Guigemar* must search elsewhere for his cure. The absence of a fairy figure does not destroy the marvelous aspect of the ship, but instead raises the suspense, especially when Guigemar enters and rests in the bier. At the moment that he finds himself at sea, tormented by his wound and by his misfortune, Marie directly indicates his fate: “Sufrir li estuet l’aventure” (v. 199) [Suffering was his adventure]. She thus puts emphasis on his pain (and by extension, his treatment) in signaling the events to come.

Across the sea, the “fairy” lady does not clearly resemble a supernatural creature.<sup>62</sup> However, she is found at the top of the local social hierarchy as the unhappy wife of the regional lord. The readers will have immediately recognized the plight of a *mal-mariée*; indeed, the mere fact that she is the first lady whose life is described in even minimal detail indicates that she and Guigemar will at some point interact as lovers. The initial fear that she exhibits upon seeing the ship is not only humanizing, but is also indicative of her recognition of the passage of some marvelous event. Just as Guigemar is astonished at a richly ornate vessel with no crew, so is the lady even more so when she sees it docked in her cloistered domain. Her younger companion has a cooler head about the matter, and in this way may present the perspective that the audience has, at this point, developed. She encourages the lady to enter the boat while the reader is already knowledgeable of the contents.

The perspectives of Guigemar and the lady reflect an encounter with a foreign being from a distant land. It would seem that this interaction creates the effect of an encounter with the marvelous, according experienced by the two characters, though the audience knows the truth of

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<sup>61</sup> *La Vengeance Raguidel*, an Arthurian tale from the thirteenth century opens with the arrival of a magical ship that contains the body of a dead knight and instructions for the vengeance of his murder (v. 105, 126).

<sup>62</sup> Illingworth would mark this moment as the meeting point of the two disparate sources of the Celtic fay and the more familiar *mal-mariée* (178).

the matter. This may explain why Marie never specifies the nature of the lady as a fairy creature, as it is alluded to when Meriadu enters the recently arrived ship: *Dedenz unt la dame trovee / ki de belté resemble fee* (v. 703-704) [inside they found the woman / who had a fairy like beauty].

### *Lanval*

Among the *lais* of this anthology, it is possible to assert that *Lanval* may be the most charming, as it depicts the story of a young, disenfranchised knight who finds himself ultimately redeemed by his fairy lover. Such a story would have been instantly attractive to an audience made up of members of the lower nobility who found the story of a poor stranger particularly relevant. The lay begins with his fall from prestige as he incurs the jealousy of his peers and the neglect of his lord. Fleeing the environs of his misery, he finds himself outside the confines of society and civilization<sup>63</sup> (v. 43, 44). This seclusion and his declining emotional, physical, and social state may signal an impending bout of *folie*, as seen in *Yvain*. However, the signs also make him ripe for a meeting with the marvelous.

From one point of view, he is pulled into the wilderness by the presence of the fairy he will later meet. The hints of her presence serve to augment the anticipation of this encounter, at least for the audience; Lanval himself remains oblivious to anything but his fall from grace. His frightened horse, his nearness to water, and the arrival of two comely maidens carrying golden basins point to an imminent force with whom his path will cross (*Lettres Gothiques* 137). This expectation continues to mount with suspense, as the allusions grow stronger and clearer throughout the passage. Verses 80-108 describe in great detail the pavilion and, finally, the *pucele* herself. The manner in which Lanval reacts to her words (his first recorded reaction to what he sees and hears) resembles that of a devotee before his god or a vassal before his lord.

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<sup>63</sup> Other anonymous lays with similar plots and characters show the young protagonist entering a forest, something that is not explicit here in Marie's edition. (see the *lai* of *Graelent* in Burgess and Brook's *Eleven Old French Narrative Lais*).

The mutual admonitions of love and service from the two beings represent an emotional climax of sorts for the first part of the lay. However, the constraining commands issued by the fairy, though having no obvious effect on Lanval, usher the reader back into reality and foreshadow the conflict later in the lay. This audience is thus prepared for the rupture of this oath, almost immediately after hearing it. As presented in the previous chapter with the verb *esgarder*, the audience is forewarned of the strife to come.

The shame and the despair that he experiences after having let loose the secret of his lover serves as a delayed accentuation of his sentiments. His meeting with the queen, and even the moment where the queen spies him from within the castle (v. 242), indicate to the audience the manner in which his promise will be broken. The ensuing trial serves to augment the tension until the moment when the first damsels begin to arrive. Despite Lanval's morose outlook, the spectator cannot help but recognize the intervention of the fairy, in a position to the townspeople and knights who react joyously to the beauty of the damsels, automatically linking them to Lanval and his plight. These two perspectives are set in opposition: one sure of the finality of his pride, the other taking note of the signs of the fairy queen and looking toward the final happy ending. Lanval remains oblivious in a way that can only make the reader cringe with pity: "Ne sai ki sunt / ne dunt vienent n'u eles vunt" (v. 485b, 486) [I don't who they are / neither from where they come nor where they go].

The felicitous resolve is finally achieved with Lanval's defense and the redemption made by his lover. This differs somewhat from traditional categories of fairies and their human lovers. Laurence Harf-Lancner describes these fairy intrusions into the human world in terms of two categories: Mélusinian fays and Morganian fays (*Les fées au moyen âge*). Lanval's fairy takes attributes of both of the two archetypes: she asks for Lanval to guard the secret of her identity,

which he then breaks and for which she abandons him (Mélusine); however, she then spirits him away after he has broken his oath (Morgane), though their relationship has been rejuvenated. The chief difference lies in the final tone: Lanval's decides on his own to journey to Avalon, and this is a beneficial outcome for all parties involved. The hybrid of these two fairy roles does not seem to be created at random. Rather, it is evidence of how Marie played with the expectations of her audience by breaking preconceived notions of fairy behavior.

### *Yonec*

The lay of *Yonec* presents a slightly different plot from the narratives examined above. The action takes place around a *mal-mariée* cloistered in a tower by her elderly husband. The opening lines of the main story portray the lamentations of her plight as the neglected wife of an old man. After imploring salvation by some higher power, the bird-knight arrives (v. 113). Marie has already laid out the main structure of the narrative in this prologue: the details of Yonec's conception and the identity of his father (v. 1-10). His patriarchal identity is briefly mentioned in the form of a general foreshadowing of the coming events, though it is interesting that there is no mention of his nature as a fairy. From the moment the knight arrives in the lady's chamber, it is clear to the audience that this couple was the one spoken of in the prologue as the parents of the coming Yonec.

As Muldumarec spends more time with the lady, he warns her of the danger she will put him in by calling him too often. He counsels her to be prudent or she will reveal his presence and their tryst (v. 203). This prolepsis, though largely ignored by the lady, serves as a clear indication of future events. Muldumarec's fear is realized when the lady's physical appearance is rejuvenated to such a degree that her captors take notice and then learn of the bird-knight's presence. His words having been proved true, he remembers his words and finalizes his doom:

“Bien le vus dis qu’en avendrait / vostre semblanz nus ocireit” (v. 325-326) [I told you that it would happen / that your appearance would kill us]. While he spends his remaining moments in her room, he tells her of their son and the promise of vengeance that is achieved at the end of the lay.

When the lady leaps from the window of her tower to follow the flight of her lover, the narrator indicates that it was a wonder she was not hurt: “c’est merveille qu’el ne s’ocist” (v. 342) [it’s a wonder that she wasn’t killed]. This action sets the tone for the following scenes, where she enters a hill and re-emerges to find a fantastical, fortified city, ornate and richly built, but completely empty. For the reader, it is clear that she has entered Muldumarec’s domain, and that like him his kingdom exhibits the signs of fairy wonder described above. The sleeping knights she finds while searching for her dying lover may indicate nothing more than a city asleep before the full coming of day. However, there yet remains a distinct coloring of an interaction with the magical. Throughout the lay, the words of the marvelous protagonist have functioned almost entirely in a prophetic fashion, and this fact may carry as much weight as his own marvelous appearance as a bird. As his warnings to the lady go unheeded, the audience is privy to unraveling nature of their secret love, and in turn, anticipate the arrival of their son to set things right. In summary, prolepsis is rampant in *Yonec*, to the point that it becomes a theme itself woven directly with the marvelous itself.

#### *Bisclavret*

Staying true to form, as previously characterized in other parts of this study, the *lai* of *Bisclavret* presents a formidable challenge when an attempt to evaluate the narrative function of the marvelous is made. The key problem is the nature of the tale in respect to the marvelous: Bisclavret, the noble werewolf, is the central character. He is omnipresent in every scene of the



*lai*, if not always present physically. Unlike the preceding *lais*, which have been argued to be structured in a way that the marvelous pushes the central intrigue, Bisclavret is at once both the marvelous motif and the central plot, in addition to being the perspective through which the audience is recounted the narrative. However, observations about true nature in spite of form once again offer a way in which the *lai* can be explained. Just as the monster within is contrasted with the monster without, so too is the narrative function of the marvelous shifted from Bisclavret to his traitorous wife and her lover.

As previously analyzed, the physical and behavioral nature of the werewolf protagonist of this story is exhibited through his contact with others. The first focalization is through the knight's eyes as he is persuaded to recount the reason for his frequent outings and the details of his metamorphosis. The horror with which such beings are usually associated contrasted with the earlier description of Bisclavret's noble countenance and demeanor present a fairly neutral image at this first encounter. When the focalization shifts to the wife's perspective, however, we find that she seems to have made up her mind against remaining faithful to her husband despite his *maladie*. At this point, we are told that she is racking her brain to find a way by which she can escape (v. 100). After she implores her lover to help her rid herself of her beast of a husband, Marie indicates her opinion on the matter: "Issi fu Bisclavret trahiz / E par femme maubailiz" (vv. 125-126) [So Bisclavret was betrayed / ruined by his wife]. This represents a definitive turning point in the *lai*, after which Bisclavret is solidly perceived as the hero of the story. This would consequently identify his wife and lover as the opposition, and a glance at the rest of the story confirms this characterization.

The principal movements of the narrative occur when the king meets Bisclavret, when the wife's lover meets Bisclavret and when the wife meets Bisclavret, one might say, for the first

time. Bisclavret's encounter with the king provides a reinforcement of Marie's position, that the werewolf is humane and noble despite his form. It is in this way that the wife and her lover are labeled as the monsters in this story, and as such take the place of the marvelous motif that would originally have been occupied by Bisclavret. This role reversal places the couple in the position normally occupied by Marvelous motifs.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

The objective of this study was to analyze the selected supernatural *lais* in terms of the interactions between their marvelous and human characters and the function of this common theme by which the narratives are linked. By examining the themes and strategies that may form the base of these stories, a clearer image of the function of many of these images can be established.

The *lai* of *Lanval* is also recognized as containing several motifs that were popular in Celtic literature that predates it. *Lanval* offers a typically morose, down-and-out knight who is twice redeemed by a figure with allusions to Morgain, offering a point of comparison for medieval audiences familiar with such fairy queen/chevalier stories. However, it is Marie's use of legal terminology that sets the *lai* apart from other tales. From one perspective, the argument could be made that she is spicing up a common fairy story by setting it in Arthur's court and including many "cultural" references to legal proceedings that were common to the period. In any case, the juxtaposition of traditional praise of the beauty of the supernatural fairy and the legal connotation of *esguarder* creates the opportunity for Marie to distinguish her works from the others.

The *lai* of *Bisclavret* in turn should be appraised in light of the way in which Marie plays with the conventions of the werewolf genre. Her description of fear as the overwhelming reaction to the marvelous firmly situates the motif among the typical themes of savage and

outcast beasts. However, by focusing on the humanity of the creature, Marie aligns herself with other examples (here, Celtic) of the difference between superficial appearance and true form. In this way, she plays with the traditional expectations of the audience, by turning the tables on those who appear courtly but who exhibit an inner savageness.

Conversely, the opening scenes of *Yonec*, depicting the *mal-mariée* distraught over her plight as a neglected wife, do quite the opposite. By identifying the lady as one of the *pensis*, Marie openly suggests that the *lai*, already declared to be a story about her son, will depict her salvation from the jealous husband. Likewise, Muldumarec warns that her fears should not entirely dissipate, in that her appearance will betray his presence, a foretold fact reinforced by the similarity of the language used to describe the lady's return to grief at her lover's death. The reoccurring triad of objects further emphasizes the connections to other literary works, such as the *La Vie de seint Alexis*, that in turn creating a resounding echo of the themes of love and duty as expressed in the *lai*.

In *Guigemar*, the implication of the Celtic provenance of the *lai*, that of identifying the first half of the *lai* as closely resembling a Celtic narrative in which a *fée* lures her lover toward her by supernatural means, merits a reading of *Guigemar* that accounts for these marvelous themes accordingly. The hind and ship suddenly have a significant indexical relationship with the lady waiting across the sea; the harmonization of the supernatural events signifies a coordinated effort, a method behind the madness. This theme rings true until the audience realizes that the lady too is but human, as exhibited through her own fearful reaction to the mysterious ship and the stranger within; the break with the traditional *dénouement* of the plot is where Marie's narrative skill is shown. In this way, knowledge of the concepts and structures popular at the time of the texts are necessary, in as much as the focalizations and perspectives of

the stories are crucial. These two aspects of Marie's *lais* inform the reader, both medieval and modern, of the author's intent and add a level of interpretation that enhances the narrative quality of the story.

The results of this study should have a bearing on the multitude of medieval texts that contain defined encounters with supernatural beings. For starters, though Chrétien de Troyes's works have been briefly reference from time to time in this analysis, a more in depth comparison of how he and Marie treat the marvelous could be profitable. Throughout his *romans*, the Marvelous is often quite minimal to the overall plot. Sometimes supernatural beings appear, such as the giants in *Yvain* or the the Marvelous is often quite minimal to the overall plot. Sometimes supernatural beings appear, such as the giants in *Yvain*; more often, however, is the use of magical objects such as rings and the truly important *graal*. Overall, though their different mediums (the *lai* and the *romans*) have influence on their form, there treatment of the Marvelous bears further examination. Even more so, a close analysis of the anonymous *lais* that figure largely in the centuries following Marie's works (the thirteenth and fourteenth) could be very revealing. Many of these works have the semblance of containing themes common to many different sources, including Marie. Moreover, the Marvelous seems to figure largely in these works, especially when it comes to the fairy mistress persona seen in *Lanval*. However, the characterization of these encounters and the way in which they function within the narrative seems to be different. For instance, the *lai* of *Desiré*, the story of a young knight who finds love in a fairy found in a forest, contains only one instance of *pensis*. Perhaps this has more bearing for a stylistic analysis; then again, it could be an indication of the difference between Marie and other writers' use of the Marvelous in their narratives.

To insist upon the structure of the examination, the method of analysis of this study

should have bearing for similar cases in the future. Whether or not Marie's *lais* are definitively Celtic in origin is not in question, but rather that her characterization of the stories leads one to posit links between her works and Celtic traditions. Likewise, an account for the expectations for the genre that were held by her audience at the time must be made. By inserting themes and motifs from a variety of sources, she plays with traditional roles, leaving the spectator or reader to expect Marvelous themes, but often breaking with tradition and drastically changing the perspective. Finally, it is only through a close reading of the texts that observations can be made concerning the depiction of the characters and motifs that Marie wishes to portray. As pointed out by Rothwell, "only a handful of lexicologists and lexicographers make it their business to examine the actual words that make up the text" (21). It is more focus on the texts, the *lais* and otherwise, and the images, phrases, and words with which they are composed that will offer greater and more substantial critical analysis.

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## VITA

Robert E. McCain III

### Degrees:

Bachelor of Arts, French, University of Mississippi, 2010

Bachelor of Arts, Linguistics, University of Mississippi, 2010

### Employment:

Graduate Assistant in French, 2011-2012

Research Assistant in French, 2010-2011

Thesis Title: Encountering the Marvelous in Marie de France

### Thesis Examination Committee:

Chair, Daniel O'Sullivan, Ph.D

Committee Member, Anne Quinney, Ph.D

Committee Member, Olivier Tonnerre, Ph.D