

Bulletin of the International Marie de France Society

Abstracts, Notes and Queries







From left to right: Chantal Maréchal, Heather Arden, Kathryn Lorenz, Jeanne Nightingale and Hans Runte (We have this photograph due to the thoughfulness of Carolyn Behnke, a doctoral candidate at the University of Cincinnati).

An Invitation to Join.

The mission of this Society is to establish friendly and productive exchanges between those persons--faculty, independent scholars, or students--who are interested in Marie de France and the anonymous lays.

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The Bulletin is published once a year. Special issues will be prepared whenever the editor will have received substantial data from the members.

Members of *The Marie de France Society* are invited to join the Marie de France's Society's E-mail discussion group: Le-cygne. Send e-mail addresses to cmarecha@cabell.vcu.edu.

Annual dues are as follows: Regular Members, \$10.00 (with an additional postage fee of \$1.00) for members residing outside North America); Students, \$7.00. Members residing outside the USA should send their dues payments in US dollars. Please return your membership form with your check, to *The International Marie de France Society*, c/o Chantal Maréchal, P.O. Box 7438, Richmond, VA 23221.

Unless otherwise specified, the information provided on this form (address, telephone number, FAX or E-MAIL numbers) will be published in each issue.

General announcement:

Notices of forthcoming presentations on Marie de France, titles of papers presented at conferences (please include the name of the panelist with his/her affiliation or address), new publications, titles of dissertations in progress (or completed outside the USA), or any announcements of interest for the membership, should be sent to:

The International Marie de France Society, c/o Chantal Maréchal, P.O. Box 7438, Richmond VA 23221, or to: cmarecha@cabell.vcu.edu.

Kalamazoo 1996:

Persons interested in presenting a paper on Marie de France, or on the anonymous lair, should contact Chantal Maréchal, especially if their name is not on the Medieval Institute's mailing list.

Book News:

Maddox Donald and Sara Sturm Maddox, eds. International Courtly Literature Society: Literary Aspects of Courtly Culture. Selected papers from the Seventh Triennial Congress of the ICLS. University of Massachusetts-Amlierst. 27 July - I August 1992. Cambridge: D.S Brewer, 1994.

Contains the following articles:

McCash, June Hall. "The Curse of the White Hind and the Cure of the Weasel: Animal Magic in the *Lais* of Marie de France" (199-209).

Pickens, Rupert. "The Poetics of Androgyny in the Lais of Marie de France: "Yonee," "Milun" and the General Prologue" (211-219).

Jambeck, Karen. "Truth and Deception in the Fables of Marie de France" (221-29).

CONFERENCE NEWS

Papers: titles and abstracts.

CONVENTION OF THE MODERN LANGUAGE ASSOCIATION (Toronto, December 27-30, 1993)

Who Read the Lais of Marie de France. J. Andrew Taylor (Trent University).

THE ILLINOIS MEDIEVAL ASSOCIATION'S ELEVENTH ANNUAL MEETING (Chicago, February 18-19, 1994).

Forbidden Body/Forbidden Text: The Lais of Marie de France. Tilde Sankovitch (Northwestern University).

INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS ON MEDIEVAL STUDIES (Kalamazoo, May 5-8, 1994).

A Friend in Need: Patron-Client Relations in Twelfth-Century Romances of Friendship. Alison M. Hunt (University of California-Los Angeles).

The Malmariée as Subtext of Marie's "Guigemar." Joan Brumlik (University of Alberta).

The conclusion to "Guigemar" offers no possibility of marriage. Marie's refusal to provide a stable ending allows one to establish a parallel between Guigemar and the poet/hero of the lyric "malmariée," a genre in which married women give their love freely, expecting nothing in return. Marie simultaneously places the lady within contexts for illicit but faithful love without allowing the themes their customary resolution. In so doing she invites her women readers to recognize that fictional modes, courtly or uncourtly, classical or contemporary, provide unsatisfactory models for women.

The Double Adventure Plot of Marie de France's "Guigemar." David M. Merchant (University of Tennessee-Knoxville).

Is There an Author in this Text? Reading and Interpretation in Marie de France's Fables. Sahar Amer (Yale University).

This paper explores the role of the poet-narrator in the first vernacular collection of fables in Western Europe. In a genre traditionally associated with didacticism, authority and univocality, Marie de France offers a different theory of reading and proposes a new relationship to authority. Under the guise of giving the reader a clear moral, she undermines her own role as narrator and teacher as she questions the very possibility of the fable to be a didactic instrument. Meanwhile she places all learning responsability upon the reader and forces her/him to take an active role in deciphering and interpreting the necessarily ambiguous language of the fables.

Through a close reading of two fables combined with a first-hand study of the manuscript tradition of the *Esope*, I will show that meaning in Marie's collection does not lie in the moral drawn from the story of the fable, as has been claimed, but rather that it lies at the intersection of the story and the moral, in the illuminations, marginalia and general page set-up of the manuscript.

This paper shows that the vernacular fable differs markedly from the latin tradition which was the model from which it developed. Marie de France has in fact recreated the genre of the fable by foregrounding the issues of language and of authority. Eight centuries before Barthes' and Foucault's claims of the death of the author, the author had already died and the reader's birth been celebrated.

The Landscape of Female Love in "Eliduc." Lisa Udel (University of Cincinnati).

THE VIRGINIA MEDIEVAL SYMPOSIUM (Richmond, October 14-15, 1994).

The Noble fay in "Lanval," "Sir Landervale" and "Sir Launfal". Robert Grover (Western Connecticut State University).

Scholars widely agree that Marie de France's Lanval inspired two Middle English works: the anonymous early 14th-century Sir Landevale and Thomas Chestre's late 14th-century Sir Launfal. The author of each versions adapts the tale to his or her particular audience. As has often been noted, Marie de France's Lanval is intended for a courtly audience. The two later renderings of this tale, however, reveal features appropriate for less aristocratic milieux. Sir Landevale, for instance, is well suited to the minstrel performances popular among tradesmen, while Thomas Chestre wrote for a bourgeois audience that was growing in size and wealth.

The description of the Fay offers particularly telling examples of characteristic differences among the three texts. A comparative analysis of the images in the three works reveals the strategies each author employs. These parallel passages, particularly in their treatment of animals and items associated with the hunt, offer useful insights into the style and conventions of each of the authors in relationship to his or her intended audience. These variations gain particular significance in light of differences between the continental literary hunt traditions and the same traditions as depicted in Middle English literature. Whereas the continental tradition places greater emphasis on utilitarian detail, English texts focus much more on the peripheral trappings, ostentation, and social details which give every huntsmen the appearance of nobility. As contemporary hunting manuals and other sources indicate, the hunt was an activity with set rules and an extravagance in which only the nobility could indulge. As such, it became a sign of courtliness and nobility in secular texts. Thus Marie could indicate the Fay's nobility to her aristocratic audience simply by supplying her with a sparrowhawk appropriate for a lady and a hare hound sometimes employed in hunting with hawks. Conversely, Thomas Chestre, employing the conventions of the hunt, amplified the courtliness of the Fay by carefully selecting the rarest and most valuable of falcons and a white brace of the swiftest of dogs to represent her. Chestre, wishing to emphasize the Fay's royalty, turns Marie's "esperuier' and "leuerer," her sparrowhawk and single hare hound, which the author of *Sir Landevale* turns into three white greyhounds, into a gyrfalcon and two white greyhounds. Indeed, in accord with the projected social desires of his bourgeois audience, and perhaps serving a political agenda, *Sir Launfal* provides careful detail concerning the extravagance of royalty.

"Eliduc": A Study in Intertextuality. Karen Jambeck (Western Connecticut State University).

Modern understanding and appreciation of medieval literature begins with Tyrwhitt and Warton in England and Le Grand Aussy and the Abbé de la Rue in France. One of the great discoveries of that period was Marie de France. Although brief mentions of Marie appear as early as the Renaissance, the recovery of the Lais, Fables, and Purgatory of Saint Patrick, as well as their attribution to a single author, properly belongs to the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. One long-ignored work that holds particular interest in this regard is Ann Radcliffe's posthumously published novel, Gaston de Blondeville.

Radcliffe's multi-dimensional incorporation into her novel of information concerning Marie de France and her Lais results in a richly intertextual work. Embedded within the novel's narrative frame is a fictionalized medieval manuscript entitled A Trew Chronique, which is interlaced with references and allusions to Marie de France and her lai "Eliduc." The Chronique's narrative centers on Henri III of England; two members of the royal entourage, Gaston de Blondeville and Lady Barbara; and a mysterious stranger. Especially noteworthy are Radcliffe's narrative strategies as they relate to Marie. Existing evidence reveals that Radcliffe scrupulously researched the historical background of Gaston de Blondeville. Not only is this historical novel presented as a retelling of a fictional medieval manuscript, but the work is interlaced with references and allusions to Marie de France (as known to scholars of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries) and to Marie's lai "Eliduc." Within this historical context, Radcliffe makes Marie a character in the novel, introducing her as a noted writer at the court. In addition, the novelist interpolates a summary of Marie's "Eliduc," which is performed by a

French minstrel during the celebration marking the wedding of Gaston de Blondeville and Lady Barbara. Radcliffe's most intriguing accomplishment, however, is the plot of Gaston de Blondeville, which is a creative adaptation and amplification of Marie's "Eliduc." Radcliffe's intertextual strategies in this novel revived Marie's lai and helped restore Marie de France and her work to the nineteenth century.

CONFERENCE OF THE NORTH-EAST MODERN LANGUAGE ASSOCIATION (March 31-April 1, 1995)

Marie de France rewrites Genesis: The Image of the Woman in Marie de France's Fables. Sahar Amer (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill).

Medieval didactic literature, such as that of the fables, traditionally depicts the woman in a univocal and fixed way: she was Eve, the symbol of evil and of temptation, the cause of the Fall and the source for all human misfortunes. At a time when such was the prevailing view, Marie dares to speak otherwise. As a woman, speaking on behalf of women, the first French female poet explores the bases of this medieval (male) bias. To liberate the woman from the negative associations weighing on her meant ultimately to re-write or to re-interpret Original Sin. I would like to propose in this paper that this is in fact what Marie does in her Fables.

I will examine how Marie destabilizes the traditional negative symbolism of the woman by re-writing the episode of the Temptation (fable 53) and by highlighting, through the absence of the woman from her fable, the arbitrariness of her condemnation by the (male) moralists. Marie further demonstrates that the univocal symbolism associated with the woman in the Middle Ages is in fact the result of a power struggle, in which men silence women for fear of their voice, and of the polyvocality that would ensue if women were allowed to express themselves. By blaming the woman for the Fall, male preachers thus perform a linguistic castration, which upholds their own (male) voice as unique, authoritative and unchallenged. By examining the woman's role in the Temptation episode, Marie subverts both male authority and unquestioned medieval theological beliefs. While pointing to male responsability, she shows that the woman is equal to man, and that she deserves the same respect and consideration.

INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS ON MEDIEVAL STUDIES (Kalamazoo, May 5-8, 1994).

A Fox is not always a Fox! Animal Symbolism in Marie de France's Fables. Sahar Amer (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill).

This paper examines the representation of animals in Marie de France's Fables. Il will focus more specifically on the image of the fox in her collection because it is with this character that one sees most clearly how Marie departs from the univocal and fixed animal typology of her period. Instead of consigning her characters to the specific and unique role imposed on them by tradition, Marie endows them rather with what I call a "poetic" meaning, one that is renewed in each fable, and which depends on the situation the animals are in rather than on some inherent unchanging nature.

In this paper, I will study the depiction of the fox throughout its various portrayals in the recueil, and will focus primarily on his first and last appearances (fables 10 and 98). I will show that although at times Marie may use the descriptions of the fox as proposed in the Bestiaries and the Roman de Renart, she refuses to limit her character to theses and thus widens the semantic field associated with the fox. As she provides her character with an individuality, a personal life and a moral and affective complexity, she demonstrates that if the fox can act evil, he is not inherently evil. The distance, introduced for the first time by Marie, between the animal and his actions allows the character to act multiple and contradictory roles; his depiction and meaning become idiosyncratic, are no longer determined by tradition, but by the free decision of the artist.

As Marie frees her characters from the traditional symbolism associated with them, she also frees her own work from the moralistic or didactic stance provided by her models. In other words, as the animals of the fables cease to be instruments of social or moral edification, Marie's collection ceases to be a didactic work, departs from the Latin fable tradition and inaugurates the new era of the vernacular, literary and poetic fable.

L'homme et sou moi bestial. Karine Boulle (Central Virginia Community College-Lynchburg).

This study defines the nature of reality in the Lais

of Marie de France and analyses the mind's reality as expressed through the use of symbols. In these analyses, the symbols reveal that the inner reality is related to the experiences of the outer world. It is through these experiences that the heroes find their own liberation.

The examination of these symbols entails to a psychoanalytical study. The theme of liberation shows an evolution as the inner being changes. This evolution will be achieved through the theme of animals. Indeed, as they appear closely connected to the heroes, the animals tend to become part of the principal characters, showing a different aspect of their personality. Thus, an evil mind can be discovered under a pure and angelic appearance.

This study will demonstrate not only how the heroes reach a deliverance but also the importance of the animal ego in this "metamorphosis."

An Alternative Reading of "Bisclavret." David Fein (University of North Carolina-Greensboro).

The traditional reading of Marie de France's Bisclavret is based on the assumption that the readers are intended to place their sympathy with the husband rather than with the wife. A close reading of the story, however, reveals a certain neutrality, if not ambivalence, on the part of the narrator. In this paper I suggest that Bisclavret may also be read as the story of multiple victims--the husband, the wife, their marriage itself--all overwhelmed by forces they cannot control. The deepest and richest reading of the story is one in which Marie raises disturbing questions about the concept of marriage.

Translator, Text, and Audience in Marie de France's Espurgatoire Saint Patriz. Laura E. Mestayer (Rutgers University).

My discussion analyzes Marie de France's Espurgatoire Saint Patriz as an example of translatio studii, the tradition in which one copies, reworks, and/or translates a text for the purpose of providing it with a larger or newer audience. Marie's text remains very faithful to its source, the Tractatus de Purgatorio Sancti Patricii of Henry of Saltrey; yet Marie even furthers the

didactic goals of the narrative by adding a new layer to the textual and religious traditions already embedded within the work as she renovates it for the *laie gent*.

The paper focuses on three aspects of Marie's contribution to medieval writings on purgatory. First, I emphasize passages from Marie's text which are self-referential, or which forefront the authority of the text. Second, I examine the romance elements of the religious narrative which include the aventures of a hero for the lay people, the knight Owein. Third, I note how Marie's lines which are original and do not stem from the Latin source function specifically to stimulate the attention of the audience, to render the text more rhetorically effective. In short, Marie works hard at furthering the evangelist purposes of the narrative by developing a close relationship between herself, her text, and her audience.

From this study of Marie's Espurgatoire, we can contribute to our understanding of Marie as an artist. The Espurgatoire Saint Patriz should not be read narrowly, that is, only as a close translation of the Tractatus. From her prologue to her vocabulary, we see that she remains simultaneously faithful to her source material while maintaining the newness of her own layer. Thus, the work provides additional evidence of Marie's concern for the quality and survival of her writings and her interest in the artistic process; in this work, however, these artistic issues are intimately linked with Christian purposes.

A Match Made in Heaven: Medieval Women and Purgatory. Margaret R. Robinson (University of Massachusetts).

In his study entitled *The Birth of Purgatory*, Jacques Le Goff cites Marie de France's *L'Espurgatoire de Saint Patriz* as the first work to use the noun "purgatory" in the vernacular. Curiously this particular work by Marie has been relatively overlooked by scholars who opt more often for the colorful worlds of the *Lais* and the *Fables*. Given the apparent importance of Marie's vernacular adaptation of the Latin *Tractatus de Purgatorio Sancti Patricii* in the evolution of the concept of purgatory during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, there is ample reason to examine her somewhat obscure text.

In the past it has been suggested that the Espurgatoire is an inferior literary endeavor when compared to the originality and vitality of the Fables and the Lais. However, one cannot ignore Marie's obvious reverence for the work of the poet that is so clearly stated in her prologue to the Lais. This study will examine some of the more recent commentaries by scholars who have turned

to the Espurgatoire for further clues to the shadowy literary figure of Marie de France. In addition a case will be made for further study of the concept of purgatory and its particular pertinence to women of the Middle Ages, especially the visionaries of the Beguine movement of the thirteenth century who seem to have lived out a kind of purgatory on earth.

The End at the Beginning: Marie de France's "Les Deux Amanz" and "Chevrefoil." Judith Rice Rothschild (Appalachian State University).

Among recent critical preoccupations concerning the Lais of Marie de France, there has been a strong interest in narrative beginnings and closings, the "framing" of the twelve individual poems. For example, Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner in Shaping Romance:Interpetation, Truth, and Closure in Twelfth-Century French Fictions (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press,1993) and Douglas Kelly, The Art of Medieval French Romance (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992) have mentioned these narrative elements.

The present study will focus, however, upon the only *lais* in whose prologues the author/narrator offers a summary of the story even before the narrative actually begins: *Les Deus Amanz* and *Chevrefoil* (nos. 6 and 11, respectively, in Harley 978). Why should Marie utilize such a procedure in the opening frame of just these two poems whose conclusions are similar (the death of the lovers) but whose narrative content and tone are so clearly dissimilar? What is there in common between these two *lais* to justify such a coincidence? We shall propose that many underlying parallels of narrative elements exist: an opposition of grief, constraint and suffering, and joy; a potion, specified or understood; an emphasis upon narrative truth; a chronological sequence of narrative events; a density of narrative texture. There are, furthermore, intertextual evidences and resonances of the Tristan story present in *Les Deus Amanz*. These parallels and intertextualities serve, in our judgment, to explain Marie's choice of content in the prologue of these particular *lais*.

Sticks and Stones: The Manipulation of Linguistic Systems and its Bearing on Gender/Power Relations in the *Lais* of Marie de France. Anna K. Sandström (University of Massuchusetts).

Much scholarship has addressed the use of symbols in the *Lais* of Marie de France. This paper proposes to re-examine this phenomenon with the alm of investigating how this manipulation of symbolic configurations comes to bear on gender and power relations.

On another level, this paper will direct inquiry toward the question of whether certain aspects of the manipulation of symbols in the *Lais* can also be observed in the author's other works. This paper will provide a forum for discussion not only of gender and power, but the role of the author as well.

Language and Vulnerability in the Lais of Marie de France. John R. Secor (Morehead State University).

The speech act, in life and in art, serves to define character, to reveal personality, to express thoughts and to display passions. In literature the act of speaking does these things, and furthermore, it aids in plot comprehension, emphasizing elements important to a story, and showing the nature of interpersonal relationship.

Much has been written about the dominance of male roles and male speech, and thus the scarcity of female speech in 12th-century Old French narrative. Silence is significant; even communicative acts by hands and other parts of the female anatomy have been scrutinized (for example in Jane Burns' Bodytalk).

Yet it cannot be said that all male roles are dominant and all female roles submissive. Neither can the assessment of gender equity be made simply by counting lines. There are textual indicators, such as the use of verbal aspect (perfectivity, imperfectivity, durativity, etc.), and such as the use of tone of voice (suggestion, imploring, sarcasm, etc.) that bear further examination. Does male speech differ from female speech in the *Lais*? And if it does, then how does it differ? Discussion of linguistic and stylistic issues will furnish answers to these questions.

The particular focus of this paper will be vulnerability. In two examples from the Lais, Bisclavret and Lanval, the story is named for a male who exhibits vulnerability of one sort or another. Bisclavret is sensitive about his double life, and only speaks of his bestial nature after some prodding by his

wife. The key to his weekly transformation is the hidding place of his clothes; when he tells her this secret he is left in a position of extreme vulnerability, from which he may not be able to reassume his human form. Lanval, a social misfit, having been sworn to secrecy by his fée-lover, falls prey to the queen's suggestive remarks, and defends himself with choice words that leave him vulnerable to the queen's jalousy and to his lover's scorn. Ultimately, neither protagonist can be rescued except by an external force (Bisclavret by the king, Lanval by the fée).



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