

Displacement and Redemption
in the Lais of Marie de France

By

Sharon Lynn Dunkel

B.A., The University of Washington, 1986
A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
(Department of French)

We accept this thesis as conforming
to the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

April 1988

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Department of French

The University of British Columbia
1956 Main Mall
Vancouver, Canada
V6T 1Y3

Date April 26, 1988

Abstract

In the endless cycle of life and death, the issues of love and marriage are a constant and recurrent theme of literature. The man, as a foreigner, comes to court the woman with the intent of taking her away from her parents and bringing her into his own home. He must first convince the woman to leave the paternal location. The hearth, the center of the new home and the symbol of his wife, constitutes the one constant and stable aspect of the man's otherwise nomadic existence. The tensions and conflict inherent in this masculine struggle serve to mold and prepare the man for his future role as the protector and provider of his home and society.

The woman, for her part, must also undergo a spatial displacement. Not only must she travel to the new domicile, but she must also be prepared to change and adapt herself to the idea of leaving her birthplace. The vertical movement from the tower to the grove by way of the bedroom constitutes the process of maturation for the lady. Once she has proven herself capable of adulthood, the woman will assist her mate in gaining access to the society he had originally rejected in his search for self. Thus the woman serves as the instrument of God in redeeming the man while maintaining her own individuality, seen in the parallel process of displacement which she experiences.

The reader response to the text of the Lais is based upon the realization that the reader also experiences a type of spatial displacement similar to that of the protagonists. Marie, through the use of a variety of literary mechanisms, forces the recipients of the text to go back in time and space to the mythic locale of *Bretaigne*. The purpose of this narrative technique is that, through identification with the various characters, each reader learns the proper methods of social interaction. In other words, the twelve stories form a manual of courtly etiquette.

The Lais of Marie de France are not only for entertainment but for edification as well.

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List of AbbreviationsLais

Prologue	P.
Guigemar	G
Equitan	Eq
Le Fresne	Fr
Bisclavret	B
Lanval	Ll
Deus Amanz	DA
Yonec	Y
Laüstic	L
Milun	M
Chaitivel	C
Chievrefoil	Cf
Eliduc	E
Yvain	Yv

Marie de France, as the first known major woman writer in French, expresses views that are undeniably feminine versions of the human experience, meant to entertain as well as to instruct. Her sensibility and keen narrative technique present us with thumbnail character sketches that offer the reader a glimpse of the past. Her stories are both universal (in topic) and particular (in detail). Adventures and love, in aristocratic settings, constitute the unifying themes of these various tales. While the protagonists of the Lais do not seek adventures, they rather stumble into them and in the process, the individual undergoes a type of social integration ritual which either succeeds or fails. Love, as the major motivating force of the integration process, is not presented by Marie as a legalistic social code, but as a potent, complex and multifaceted emotional experience.

Marie gives us two plainly enunciated reasons for the composition of her stories. She wants to guard herself from vice by the proper occupation of her mind, thus she undertakes this work. Secondly, in fulfillment of her social duty, she wishes to leave a record of the adventures so that the generations to come will profit from her efforts.

*Custume fu as ancīens,
 Ceo testimoine Precīens,
 Es livres ke jadis feseient,
 Assez oscurement diseient
 Pur ceus ki a venir esteient
 E ki aprendre les deveient,
 K'i peüssent gloser la lettre
 E de lur sen le surplus mettre. (P 9-16)*

Clearly, in the prologue, Marie states her intentions to preserve old tales that she had heard for future generations. She thus stands in time as a mediator of culture and folklore between eras.

In her social role as poet and teacher, Marie seeks to recreate tradition as a means of preserving it. "The aim of poetry, of course, is not 'devices' but a knowledge of the world and the relationship among people, self-knowledge, and the development of the human personality in the process of learning and social communication. In the final summing up, the goal of the poet coincides with the goal of culture as a whole."¹ Thus the picture that emerges is not one of conflict between the preserver of tradition and the creative artist; it is rather one of the preservation of tradition by the constant recreation of it. The originality of topic and theme do not enter into the issue. What truly matters is the skill with which these stories are told- how well they are related.

There is no greater proof of success for a work than the quality and endurance of its function and internal systems, one of the most important of these aspects being its style of narration. The process of narration culminates in the interpreter/narrator's immediate frame of reference to events outside of that immediate situation. Narration, then, rests upon the presence of a narrator or narrative

¹ Albert Lord, The Singer of Tales, Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature 24, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960) 132-3.

medium and the absence of the events narrated. In other words, there must be some sort of time element, a gap between the event and it's being recounted, which denotes the relationship of the author to the circumstances of the action. The question of narrative enunciation is frequently reduced to the simpler one of point of view. We, as receptor of a text, are forced to see the events through the eyes of the narrator.

Marie's style of narration is based on an economy of words. This might be accounted for by her having probably performed the work before a live audience. One of the essential stages of oral composition is the performance before a critical audience. There are seemingly two recipients envisioned here; a live audience composed of Marie's contemporaries and a fictitious audience composed of future generations of readers. Thus the text functions on two levels. It is a dramatic performance as well as a written text serving as an intermediary between the author and these respective groups.

The temporal factor, inherent in the structure of the language, plays a key role in the reception of the text. It gives us a window into the past allowing us to observe another time, another world, a different reality no longer existent. It sets the tone of the story. It is an unavoidable necessity of composition.

"...Je peux fort bien raconter une
histoire sans préciser le lieu où elle
se passe, et si ce lieu est plus ou
moins éloigné du lieu d'où je la raconte,

tandis qu'il m'est presque impossible de ne pas la situer dans le temps par rapport à mon acte narratif, puisque je dois nécessairement la raconter à un temps du présent, du passé ou du futur. De là vient peut-être que les déterminations temporelles de l'instance narrative sont manifestement plus importantes que ses déterminations spatiales."²

Narrative time gains its importance by virtue of the fact that it transports us out of our own reality into that of the story. We are disassociated from all of our standard reference points and take up those of the author. We leave behind the receptive time of the actual reading (the present) and enter into the created time of the history (the indefinite past).

As readers entering into the context as well as the time of the actual tale, we find ourselves to be situated in a very specific and well defined space, that of the Celtic territory of *Bretagne*. E Hoepffner states, "*Le fait est que Marie a toujours eu soin de fixer ses lais dans le temps et dans l'espace.*"³ She takes particular care to establish the locale of the individual *lai* well as its temporal component. Not only are we in the past, but we are also transported into the mythical past more often than into the historical past.

There are very specific signs incorporated into the text which allow us to place each *lai* in one of two

2 Gerard Genette, *Figures III*, (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1972) 228.

3 E. Hoepffner, "La Géographie et l'histoire dans les *Lais* de Marie de France," *Romania* LVI (1930) 1.

categories. If there are definite place names and realistic details then we are dealing with a story which can be situated within a historical context. This type of *récit* deals in general with a local legend associated with the establishment of the indicated city. Of the twelve *lais*, there are three that fit into this category; *Deus Amanz*, *Laüstic* and *Chaitivel*. The events narrated occur in or near the respective cities of Pitres in Normandy, St. Malo and Nantes in Brittany. Each story is lacking in miraculous or magical nuances, and are totally plausible in every aspect.

The signs which permit us to categorize mythical or fantastic *lais* are clear and easily recognizable. The use of the temporal terms *jadis* and *anciens* for all their quantitative ambiguity nonetheless serve as clear indicators of an indefinite past. When we come across them in a particular passage, we know that the distance between the actual events and the textual reception thereof is great. Another notable manifestation of the mythical past comes from the usage of fantastic details such as talking beasts, metamorphosis and characters from other worlds. As the locale of Celtic mythology, Bretagne comes to symbolize for the reader an ambiguous country where the unusual occurs as a habitual experience.

Within the context of the stories, whether we consider the historical or the mythical past, a distinct pattern develops in relation to the internal settings of the various character types in the *Lais*. There is the natural

distinction of the city and the forest which reflects the civilized and wild sides of man's nature. However, if we were to go into a more in-depth analysis of the locales chosen for male and female persona, a clear distribution of spatial displacement emerges. As one might expect, given the contemporary social structure, the woman's domain centers around the home while the man's activities align themselves with the broader concept of the city.

The feminine characters experience a vertical transition, moving alternately between the tower, the bed-chamber and the grove. As far as extensive movement is concerned within the context of their roles in the Lais, the women can only make one major journey, namely as a sign of their ultimate loyalty to the man. The male characters undergo a horizontal transition. They travel between cities through the untamed regions of the forest in their search for a suitable companion.

In diverse regions, notably among the Celts, the forest constitutes a sanctuary within the context of nature. The forest evokes a sensation of safety, an enveloping blanket of security permitting one to hide from the rest of mankind thus isolating the refugee from society. This is particularly significant because Europe was covered with forest in the Middle Ages.

The abundance of trees which constitute a forest form an intrinsic link between the physical life (the earth) and the spiritual life (the sky) of mankind. The tree can be

considered as a symbol of the human life, being an intermediary between the earth, where its roots are embedded, and the heavens touched by its towering limbs.

However, when seen from a modern perspective, the forest acts as a stripping agent, removing all the superimposed layers of civility to reveal the subconscious core of the human psyche.

"Pour l'analyste moderne, par son obscurité et son enracinement profond, la forêt symbolise l'inconscient. Les terreurs de la forêt, comme les terreurs paniques, seraient inspirées, selon Jung, par la crainte des révélations de l'inconscient."⁴

The forest is no longer the welcoming refuge from society but a threatening place, where one is forced to confront the reality of his basic nature. The forest acts as a mirror which contains a true reflection of the inner man. The character must then learn to deal with and control that inner, wild nature before being allowed back into society as represented by the city. Thus the journey through the forest doubles for the psychological journey to maturity.

Medieval concepts see man as a pilgrim journeying between two cities: life is a passage from the city below (the world) to the city above (the heavenly kingdom). Thus the physical journey between two cities in search of a suitable mate parallels a man's personal search for divine aid. Having gained the second city and received the desired boon, the man is now equipped to return to his original

⁴ Marian Berleur, ed., Dictionnaire des symboles, (Paris: Seghers 1973) 341.

community, capable of contributing to that organism rather than just living parasitically from it. Once again, the issue becomes one of the passage from adolescence to adulthood.

According to contemporary analysis, the city is one of the principal symbols of the mother, with the double attributes of limits and protection. In the same manner that a mother contains within her children, so too the city possesses its inhabitants. The city on high creates by virtue of the spirit, the city below by the means of the flesh; the one and the other are equally mother and wife.

In the Greek tradition, the goddess Hestia is the spiritual guardian of the hearth. She represents the immobile and stationary center of the home. When a woman leaves her paternal home, she becomes the protector of this sacred space within the new home.

"En contrast avec Hermès, le dieu de l'espace ouvert, du passage et des échanges, Hestia délimite l'espace du dedans, celui du monde féminin, que la nouvelle épouse, une fois installée dans la demeure de son mari, va perpétuer, maintenir dans sa continuité, en devenant en quelque sorte comme la fille de la nouvelle maison et du feu domestique, confiés à ses soins."⁵

Thus the very one who has betrayed the foyer of one man, her father, controls the atmosphere and the sanctity of her husband's refuge. For certainly, a man will always return home as that is his point of stability and security amidst

⁵ Yves Bonnefoy, ed., *Dictionnaire des mythologies*, (Paris: Flammarion, 1981) 518-19.

his wanderings in the service of society. He comes under the protection of Hermes, the god of movement and activity who forms the counter part to Hestia. As a civil servant, the man is basically protecting the city and hence the woman.

A lady is often the instrument of God or of the love that incites a man to excel. Love may even be the impulse in man that responds to God through the medium of the woman's beauty and goodness. However, the woman is not a mere projection of the man's impulses; if anything, she clearly is a reflection of God's goodness towards man in giving him a helpmate. The union of a man and a woman functions as a symbol of the harmony and integration of the man's being.

Woman is presented as a part of man, different yet essential to his perfection. Eve was created from Adam. She was meant to be a part of him. She represents that piece of himself which he must learn to control and use properly, not to reject, if he is to achieve the reintegration of the human being. This harmonization of the two diverse natures must be accomplished before total union with God can be realized- his ultimate goal. From this point of view, woman has an essential and positive role in the moral development of a man, a role given her by God. She has the power to lead him astray or into wholeness.

Woman does not differ from man as to what she is- a created being, but as to what she represents- temptation and original sin. Often the object of man's desire becomes the cause of it; in other words, he projects his own weakness

onto its object. Thus the women function as symbols, aspects of philosophical and psychological problems that trouble the male dominated world. The traditional literary role for women as symbols is ignored by Marie de France; she treats female persona in an innovative way

In giving us closer insights into the feelings of her ladies, Marie is more realistic than her contemporaries in her treatment both of women and of the love relationship. She takes the female persona out of their normal literary functions, making of them plausible and realistic characters by allowing them a degree of mobility in the plot structure. Only Marie, who sees marriage from the woman's point of view as repressive and often sinful, allows the adulterous wife, such as the ladies in *Guigemar*, *Yonec* and *Milun*, a noble love. She does not however idealize the women about whom she writes, as seen in the punishment given to the wives in *Equitan*, *Bisclavret* and *Laüstic*. The mother of *Fresne* furnishes us with a clear example of a woman who experiences rehabilitation and reintegration in society as a direct result of the plot resolution. Marie's female characters transcend the standard roles for women and achieve their own individuality, separate from and yet complementary to their male counterpart.

Until he falls in love, until a woman intrudes herself on his life and awakens him to an aspect of his being that the male accomplice has not been aware of, a man's life has no apparent direction. The woman becomes his goal and

purpose to act within society. She calls forth the deeper and often hidden aspects of his personality. Love plays a significant role in the attainment of self-awareness since the end of love is to make a new person out of two previously separated individuals. The man needs the woman to supply that which he is lacking to complement and complete himself.

The Journey for a man represents two distinct directions of movement: outward and inward. As a man travels from his home in search of the woman, he goes out into the world. Yet at the same time he withdraws into himself to come in contact with the void which he seeks to fill. He must familiarize himself with that void so that he can recognize the right woman to fill it. She becomes the object and answer to his inner desires.

Having found a complementary mate, his next task is to bring her back to his home, to integrate her into his social role as well as his private life. The initial outward motion is now reversed, allowing the man to return home. Parallel to his return to the initial location, the inward motion is also reversed. He must regain his equilibrium, re-establish his rank in relation to his fellow men once he comes home. Having found the fulfillment of his inner needs in the woman, he becomes once again extrovert, able to go forth and accomplish that which he is given to do as a responsible member of society.

This motion of stretching and returning to equilibrium contains the two basic metaphors that society has for change: physical displacement and the stages of maturation in the life-cycle. This pattern of motion and maturation occurs in all twelve of the *lais*. *Guigemar*, the story a young man's first love, and *Eliduc*, a tale of an older, more mature love, form two extremes of a spectrum of human encounters with *affaires du coeur*. Marie presents her readers with a wide variety of combinations between these two end-posts of experience. Thus we can see that the Lais form a tightly knit system describing one of life's most complicated adventures: the male/female relationship.

Socially, the twelfth century saw the beginning signs of decay in Feudalism and the rise of a more law-abiding middle class.¹ The romanticization of the past, a longing for "the good old days", is prevalent among many societies, especially those undergoing a great deal of change. This type of idealization is what we see in the Lais. Marie stands in her era, looking back to what was while transmitting to us an appraisal of the heights from which chivalry has fallen and the path of descent that it took. Hence the generally tragic tone in the Lais.

We see this attitude of decline latent in the injustice of Arthur's court wherein Lanval abides neglected and abused. In verse six, Arthur is described as brave and courtly: *Artur, li pruz e li curteis*. Yet, thirteen verses later, this description is negated by the king's treatment of Lanval.² By forming a clear contrast between appearance and action, Marie cracks the courtly facade to reveal the hollowness within. Envy has gnawed away the substance of an ideal, Arthur being the literary exemplar of kingship.

1 "Many historians describe the twelfth century as a period of confident activity, of economic and intellectual expansion,..." Joan M. Ferrante, Women as Image in Medieval Literature: From the Twelfth Century to Dante, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975) 11.

2 *Ceo fu Lanval; ne l'en sovint
Ne nuls des soens bien ne li tint.
Pur sa valur, pur sa largesce,
Pur sa beauté, pur sa pruësce,
L'envioent tuit li plusur;
Tels li mustra semblant d'amur,
S'al chevalier mesavenist,
Ja une feiz ne l'en pleinsist!* (L1 19-26).

The term *Breton*, as it applies to the genre of literature which is similar to our modern "short story"- the lai, is given because of the presence of Celtic local color (both in place-names and personal names) and certain folkloric and supernatural elements. Most of the time, the poets claim to have utilized Breton sources.

In Marie's hands, the traditional lai undergoes a definite change in form, with seven of the twelve lais being attributed to the Celts. The musical lais upon which her stories are based were to be performed on the harp or rote. By emphasizing the adventure, Marie creates a narrative poem which was to be recited or read. We have available to us no extant texts to which to refer to check the validity of this. Marie de France is no exception to this tradition, being one of the earliest writers to compose her texts around Celtic folklore.

"Les éléments celtiques des lais sont toutefois assez abondants: la plupart des noms des personnages sont des noms bretons, des références à l'histoire de l'Amorique se rencontrent à plusieurs reprises, les noms de lieux renvoient à la géographie de la Bretagne ou à l'Angleterre de la tradition arthurienne. Les thèmes merveilleux, enfin, sont des thèmes de contes bretons."³

In dealing with the question of temporal settings, there are two categories into which the twelve lais fall;

³ Jeanne Lods, Les Laïs de Marie de France, Les Classiques français du Moyen Age 87, (Paris: Librairie Honore Champion, 1959) x-xi.

that of the Celtic mythical past being contrasted with a historically based scenario. Only three of the twelve *lais* fall into this latter category; namely *Deus Amanz*, *Laustic* and *Chaitive*⁷. Each of these three tales is characterized by its realistic details and the precision of its place names. Also, the three are seemingly based on local legends linked to the place names chosen by Marie, a point which she takes great care to establish.

In contrast to this trio, we see the majority of the *lais* occurring in the distant past, mystified and romanticized by the cloud of time. These tales are markedly different from the historic narratives in that we see an element of the Other World coming into play. Indefinite and hazy are the temporal details which the author provides to her audience.⁴ The talking stag and magic boat of *Guigemar*, metamorphosis in *Bisclavret* and *Yonec*, Lanval's fairy lover, the "miraculous" revelation of identity for Fresne and Milun's son, all of these elements transmit to the reader that feeling of a time long ago when the fantastic was possible, when a primitive belief in magic reigned supreme in the hearts and minds of the audience.

A longing for "the golden days of yore" is communicated through the use of such terms as *jadis*⁵ and *anciens*⁶ which create a nostalgic ambiance. Marie makes a conscious effort

4 "L'emploi d'un temps du passé suffit à la désigner comme telle, sans pour autant indiquer la distance temporelle qui sépare le moment de la narration de celui de l'histoire." Genette, 232.

5 Fr 3,4; B 5; Y 11,12; DA 1,2; Eq3.

6 G 26; M 532; E 1,5,6.

to situate her stories in the distant past. The time always remains imprecise and vague. Absent are all the precisions of physical setting so obvious in the historically based tales. We are given very general terms which enable us to situate the tales in a distant temporal setting.

Guigemar, the first tale of the collection, is clearly placed in the mythical past.

*Ki en Bretaigne la Menur
Avint al tens ancienur
En cel tens tint Hoilas la tere* (G 25-27).

We are also given the name of the current monarch- Hoel, who held the land. This is an ancient story which occurred in Brittany.

A second distinguishing aspect of *Guigemar* is the supernatural, which acts as a narrative impetus. While hunting in the forest, Guigemar wounds a white hind. A conversation ensues, wherein the beast prophesies her adversary's future. This scene comprises the commencement of actions. Up to this section, all is description and background information, but with the hunt, the *recit* begins. Immediately following this forest scene, there is the journey via a magnificent magic vessel. The boat is empty and unguarded, yet it is obviously costly as signified by the type of wood used in its construction as well as the furnishings therein. The reference to Solomon (v 72) evokes the fabled luxury of this, the most wealthy of ancient kings. The ship steers itself and moves under divine impetus as denoted by the good and gentle wind. The ebony vessel

conveniently makes two more appearances in the story, at the expulsion of Guigemar and at the flight of the lady. Thus magic, as symbolized by the ship, becomes the motivational force of physical displacement as well as of narrative progression.

Guigemar meets both of our requirements of ancient times and magical influences. It is a clear case of mythical past and cannot be confused with history despite the use of contemporary geography in the preliminary description. With *Equitan*, however, the case is not so straight-forward. While the antiquated is obvious, the magical is relatively nonexistent.

The only indication of the supernatural is found in describing Equitan as *sire des Nauns*. (v 12). This ambiguous locale has been interpreted to be modern-day Nantes, hence a total lack of magic, and, to the converse extreme, as *nains*, the king of dwarfs. If we take the latter interpretation into consideration, the conclusions become self-evident. Being the king of the dwarfs, Equitan links us with the folkloric society of the little people, so prevalent in Irish tradition. Equitan could, in this sense, be a story about the fairy kingdom, as it is hard to imagine a realistic realm where everyone is deformed as a national trait.

The other possibility which presents itself is that of a king cursed in his physical stature. Physical deformities were often interpreted as a curse of God upon an

individual; the weight of his forefathers' sins being manifested in his flesh. A fleshly marking of this sort would give the central figure a dark and negative connotation, a just representation of Equitan's inner state of moral baseness contrasted to his peerless lineage.

The debate remains to date unresolved and a point of contention to scholars. *Nauns* could be a simple invention of Marie's imagination, as Ernest Hoepffner suggests in his detailed examination of historical geography of the *Lais*⁷, or a geographical reference of which no authoritative source has survived. Given no concrete evidence to support either theory, this issue remains a mystery that in all likelihood, will remain shrouded in the fog of ambiguity.⁸

There is, however, another indication of time about which we can be certain. *Equitan* is an old tale.

*Cil de Bretagne, li Bretun!
Jadis suleient par pruvèsce,
Par curteisie e par noblesce
Des aventures qu'il oeient, (E 2-5).*

The use of *Jadis* and *Bretun* place *Equitan* in the category of the mythical past. We are given no clear, defined period of time nor are we made aware of a specific locale to which we could affix the name *Nauns*. This story could take place in either of the Britains. The majority of action occurs at or around the seneschal's castle. This could be any castle, anywhere, at any time in the past. The lack of precision

⁷ Hoepffner 5.

⁸ For an overview of the various theories concerning the various meanings of *Nauns*, see Jean Rychner, *Lais*, Les Classiques français du Moyen Age 93, (Paris: Librairie Honore Champion, 1978) 247-248.

thus makes *Equitan* open to interpretation. An *Equitan* could be lying dormant within any monarch.

Fresne, like *Equitan*, takes place in the distant past. Marie uses the same vocabulary to place her next story in a context:

*En Bretagne jadis maneient
Dui chevalier; veisin esteient.* (Fr 3,4)

First, we note the use of the temporal adverb *jadis* as the major indicator of our relative position to the supposed occurrence of the story. Secondly, having established a precedent in *Guigemar* and *Equitan* for the use of Bretagne with the fantastic, Marie, in *Fresne*, takes more liberty with the details of her setting.

The first part of the tale concerning *Fresne's* parentage remains rather vague. All we are told is that two neighbors have had a falling out due to gossip. The main episode which treats the adult life of *Fresne* is emphatically specific in its location, being named as the archbishopric of Dole. Secure in her establishment of Bretagne as the old world, Marie now begins to fill in more details for her readers. This extra embellishment of the narration lends to *Fresne* a touch of local color and a reference point to which people can relate with facility.

The miracle aspect of this adventure is *Fresne* herself. The general populace is amazed at *Fresne's* reaction to the reversal of her estate.

*A grant merveile le teneient
Cil e celes ki la veeient.* (Fr 381-82)

Her calm and selfless love towards Gurun is in direct opposition to the mother who still schemes to remove her daughter yet again from the scene. Fresne accepts her fate and makes the best of what is a terrible situation with the potential to worsen.

The second miracle that occurs is the repentance of the mother, who heretofore acts negatively within the plot. The example of Fresne is contrasted to the conniving attitude of the mother. Upon recognizing the coverlet upon the bed, the mother inquires of Fresne as to where it came from. The lady could have simply ignored the story given in explanation to her queries, but instead she choses to acknowledge her foolhardy ways. Miraculously, the lady falls to her knees before the husband, confessing all:

*Quant il est en la chambre entrez,
la dame li chei as piez,
Estreitement li ad baisiez,
Pardun li quiert de sun mesfait. (Fr 456-59)*

What we are witness to here is the greatest and perhaps the most difficult of miracles- the changing of a human heart.

In *Bisclavret*, Marie gives us a tale that contains elements of both the fantastic and the folkloric. Again we note the use of *Jadis* which send us spiraling into the indefinite past- *Jadis le poeit hum oïr* (5). Immediately thereafter follows a brief discourse on the legendary characteristics of the werewolf.

This metamorphosis from man to wolf and back again, as the central theme of the story, encapsules the element of fantasy in *Bisclavret*. We expect to read a horrific tale of

a man-eating beast, but instead Marie twists tradition, lending to it pity and pathos, thus enabling her audience to identify with the man trapped inside the beast. She forces us to change loyalties from the wife to the husband by narrating from his point of view. In doing this, we, as active readers, enter into the fantasy, experiencing with Bislavret the pains, disappointments and betrayal which comprise his enforced imprisonment.

We know that the baron in question is from Bretagne, as this fact is given at the beginning of the story.⁹ Marie later defines this geographical name as the country of marvels as previously discussed. It is through the voice of the king's advisor that Bretagne is thus described. He, as a wise man is the only one to interpret correctly the signs of Bislavret's captivity. By the physical change of state, as well as the two other indicators (the use of *jadis* and *Bretagne*), we can safely surmise that *Bislavret* definitely fits into the category of ahistorical settings.

Lanval, our next tale, is set in the court of King Arthur. Having seen in our above discussions of the mythical *lais* that *Bretagne* is an incontestable sign of the indefinite past, let us instead concentrate on Marie's choice of association with Arthur. That the Arthurian elements of *Lanval* are mainly surface decorations and could easily be replaced without any difficulty is the expressed opinion of Ernest Hoepffner in his article *La Géographie et*

⁹ *En Bretagne maneit uns bers;*

Merveille l'ai oï loër: (B 15,16).

*l'histoire dans les Lais de Marie de France.*¹⁰ But why would Marie make such an overt connection to a literary tradition which stretches back to Gaufrei de Monmouth and Wace if not to lend an air of credibility to her tales, a point of contact with which her audience could readily identify.

Marie also makes references to *Yvain* by Chrestien de Troyes in two distinct details which she includes in *Lanval*. First of all, there is the injustice and decline of courtly life most emphatically demonstrated by the ostracism of Lanval:

*Femmes e teres departi
Fors a un sul ki l'ot servi:
Geu fu Lanval; ne l'en sovint
Ne nuls de soens bien ne li tint. (L1 17-20)*

Likewise, Chrestien starts *Yvain* in the same manner, namely by emphasising the decline of courtly ethics. He mourns the loss of true chivalry and laments those who now make a mockery of it by rendering a hollow and base service to Love.¹¹ Described by both Marie and Chrestien as brave

¹⁰ "Les éléments arthuriennes dans *Lanval* sont d'ailleurs tout à fait extérieurs et ne touchent en rien au cœur du sujet; on peut les éliminer sans la moindre difficulté." Hoepffner 20.

¹¹ *Li un recontoient noveles,
Li autre parloient d'Amors,
Des angoisses et des dolors
Et des granz biens qu'orent sovant
Li disciple de son covant,
Qui lors estoit molt dolz et buens;
Mes or i a molt po des suens
Qu'a bien pres l'ont ja tuit lessiee;
S'an est Amors molt abessiee,
Car cil qui soloient amer
Se feisoient cortois clamer
Et preu et large et enorable;
Or est Amors tornee a fable
Por ce que cil qui rien n'en santent
Dient qu'il aiment, mes il mantent,*

and courteous (Ll 6; Yv 3), Arthur forgets his manners and falls asleep in the queen's chambers. The knights are astounded and deeply disturbed by this overt lack of courtesy.

*Mes cel jor molt se merveillierent
Del roi qui eincois se leva,
Si ot de tex cui molt greva
Et qui molt grant parole an firent
Por ce qui onques mes nel virent
A si grant feste an chanbre antrer
por dormir ne por reposer;
Mes cel jor ensi le avint
Que la reine le detint,
Si demora tant delez li
Qu'il s'oblia et endormi. (Yv 42-52)*

The knights Didonel, Sagremors, Kex, Gauvains, Yvain and Calogrenant sit outside the door sharing a tale, not of honor and valor but of shame and disgrace. The overall picture of this opening scene is filled with negative elements and details about court life that are far from flattering. Notice also that Yvain commences at the feast of Pentecost (6) as does Lanval (11).

The second textual link between Lanval and Yvain is the introduction of Gauvain and Yvain into Marie's text :

*Ensemble od eus esteit Walwains
E sis cusins li beaus Ywains. (Ll 225-26)*

These two form an integral part of the narrative as it is Gauvain and his men who stand as pledge for Lanval (Ll 397-

*Et cil fable et manconge an font
Qui s'an vantent et droit n'i ont.
Mes or parlons de cez qui furent,
Si leissons cez qui ancor durent,
Car molt valt mialz, ce m'est a vis
Uns cortois morz c'uns vilains vis (Yv 12-32.)*

T.B.W.Reid, ed., Yvain, Le Chevalier au Lyon (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1961) 1.

401). Marie, in using elements of *Yvain* and arthurian aspects in the creation of *Lanvaël*, aligns her story with some of the greatest creators of literary mythology. These details are intentional and integral to the narration of *Lanvaël*, being more than mere textual embellishments as E. Hoepffner had stated. They, more than any other aspect, enforce the placement of *Lanvaël* within the classification of the indefinite past.

The supernatural aspect of the fairy lady as Lanval's lover gives this story a folkloric flavoring. Her mysterious pavilion set out in the grove, adorned and ornamented with an unparalleled wealth, could not be bought by any king on earth. It would take a mortgage on one's castle just to afford the palfrey she rides upon:

*Un blanc palefrei chevauchot,

 Riche atur ot el palefrei:
 Suz ciel nen ad cunte ne rei
 Ki tut le peüst eslegier
 Sanz tere vendre u engagier. (L1 551, 555-58)*

She is the sovereign who protects and defends Lanval as well as being the source of his limitless wealth. The lady is from another land as she herself confesses:

*Pur vus vinc jao fors de ma tere:
 De luinz vus sui venue quere! (L1 111-12)*

This other land from whence she came is revealed in the last verses of the lai as Avalon, thus confirming her faerie nature. Thus its supernatural content also serves to exempt *Lanvaël* from a historic classification.

Yonec is yet another example of a fairy tale lai set in the "days of yore." This time, however, the fairy is male instead of female. The bird-knight is the counterpart to Lanval's lady. He too has come from another land during a time of crisis for the protagonist of the adventure, being an answer to prayer.

*Mes ne poeie a vus venir
Ne fors de mun paleis eissir,
Si vus ne m'eüssez requis. (Y 131-33)*

Here we find our second occurrence of metamorphosis, which, as in *Bisclavret*, occurs in Bretagne and the time is indicated by *jadis*; two solidly established signals with Marie. Other facets of this tale to take note of are the lady's miraculous leap, her journey through the hill and the silver city. Thus *Yonec* fits into the generally established pattern which we have examined for the temporal settings of other ahistorical lais.

Just as *Yonec* is the counter-part to *Lanval*, so is *Milun* to *Fresne*, where a son instead of a daughter recovers his family.¹² However, here we are given no indication that *Milun* is based on a Breton tale. Marie does tell us that Milun was born in South Wales, so the lai still situates itself within a Celtic context. Her source is an ancient one, as she reveals at the end of the lai.

*De lur amur e de lur bien
Firent un lai li aucien, (M 531-32)*

¹² For more on the correlation of the various lais to one another, see S. Foster Damon, "Marie Psychologist of Courtly Love," Publications of the Modern Language Association of America, XLIV (1929) 968-996.

While this story does contain a great number of specific geographic place names, it does not deal with local history, as is the criteria for the modern *lais*. It is the personal history of Milun, his lover and their son. The twenty years of correspondence via the swan is in and of itself a wonder to ponder. The manner in which the son's identity is discovered is also presented by Marie as something remarkable, in that the Oedipian combat, instead of ending in disaster, results in the resolution of the intrigue.

*E Deu! fait il, cum sui gariz!
Par fei, amis, tu es mis fiz! (M 471-72)*

For Milun, the reunion is a divine healing for both his body and his bruised ego, leading to the desired union with his lady. The amazing series of details and the location both conform to our qualifications of distant past, making *Milun* a legendary tale more than a historic one.

Chievrefoil links itself to the legendary love affair of Tristan and Yseut. Marie gives us no background information. Instead we immediately receive the story with a minimal introduction.

*Plusur le m'unt cunté e dit
E jeo l'ai trové en escrit
De Tristram e de la reïne, (Cf 5-7)*

While there is nothing miraculous nor magical within this, the shortest of the *lais*, Marie nonetheless has created yet another mythological Celtic vignette, as established within the literary tradition and context most notably expounded by Beroul and Thomas.

Eliduc, the twelfth and final lai of the collection, is described by Marie as a very old Breton lai.

*D'un mut ancien lai bretun
Le cunte e tute la reison
Mus dirai, si cum jeo entent
La verité, mun escient. (E 1-4)*

This lai, like the majority, is situated in Bretagne (E 5,30). As with *Lanval*, we witness the injustice of the court brought to bear upon a faithful vassal because of jealousy. *Eliduc* is forced to flee the continent and takes refuge across the Channel. Marie uses the Breton name for England, Logres (E 69,1071). All of the proper names used are also of American derivation.

The "resurrection" of *Guilliadun* is the miraculous episode in the story, as she was given up for dead by *Eliduc*, her lover. The wife, *Guilheluec*, instead of being jealous, as people tend to be, is the tool of destiny in this recovery. She, like *Fresne*, is a paragon of virtue and an agent of narration. Her manner of relating to *Guilliadun* resembles closely that of sisters rather than rivals. *Guilheluec*'s preference for the veil clears the way for the two lovers to be united.

Thus, having started with the distant, mythological past in *Guigemar*, we end upon the same note with this story. *Eliduc* occurs, like all of the other ahistorical lais, in the Bretagne of Marie's making. Being situated within the literary tradition of a country replete with strange and marvelous occurrences, the twelfth and final lai brings us

full circle in our investigation of the imaginary space which is *Bretaigne* in all its forms.

In direct contrast with the legendary tales, where magic, fairies and other worldly elements are prevalent, three of the *lais* are placed within the historic past. Generally speaking, they are local stories linked to a city and are characterized by realistic details and definite place names. *Deus Amanz*, *Laustic* and *Chaitivel* respectively relate to Pitres in Normandy and St. Malo and Nantes, both in Bretagne. There is a distinct lack of the fantastic and the episodes are more concerned with plausible scenarios of conjugal life in its various stages. They are less adventuresome and more mundane in their subject matter. The realistic *lais* thus deal with the issues and concerns of everyday life as it was known to Marie's contemporaries.

We classify *Deus Amanz* with the "historic" tales for two reasons. First of all, Marie takes great care to associate this recit with a specific mountain and city (7-20) as well as with local history. Thus it is not a question here of mythical time and place. The exact site of this lai has long ago been identified according to the specific place names which Marie provides for us.¹³ O.M. Johnston concludes that this lai exploits two well known themes in the

13 "... Il s'agit de la "coté des Deux Amants", qui, au confluent de la Seine et de l'Andelle, domine de ses 138 mètres la prairie qui la sépare des rivières; cet escarpement, impressionnant dans un pays de plaines, se trouve à proximité de Pitres." Jeanne Wathelet-Willem, "Un Lai de Marie de France: *Les Deux Amants*," *Mélanges offerts à Rita Lejeune*, (Gembloux: Editions J. Duculot, 1969) 1144.

universal tradition of folklore; namely the abnormal love of a father for his daughter who imposes upon the suitor of the daughter an insurmountable task as proof of his love. He denies any originality in the composition of this story, placing it in the context of a local legend which Marie exploits.¹⁴ It becomes evident, even at a cursory examination of the lai, that *Deus Amanz* is not a product of Celtic folklore even though Marie claims it is.¹⁵

Secondly, there is a total lack of the mystical. The philtre and potion are not for love, as the two principle characters are already enamored with each other. By refusing to drink the potion, the young man denies magic and its potential influences upon the real world. He rejects the fantastic, otherworldly aid and prefers the risks of reality. Rather Marie takes a literary motif, the bottle of potion, and makes it a purely medicinal drink to improve and augment physical strength. This is a matter of roots, herbs and training as directed by the rich relative of Salerne, who practices *l'art de phisike* and *Que mut est saive de mescines* (DA 106-7).

While the Bretons have made a lai of this story, it is not located in Bretagne, but explains the naming of a mountain in Normandy. The lai, as much as the mountain, is a

14 O.M. Johnston, "Sources of the lay of the Two Lovers," *Modern Language Notes*, XXI (1906) 34-39.

15 *Pur l'aventure des enfaunz*
Ad nun li munz "des Deus Amanz".
Issi avint cum dit vus ai;
Li Bretun en firent un lai. (DA 251-54).

monument to "love's labor lost." Thus *Deus Amanz* fails the two basic criteria for the mythical classification, while fulfilling those of the historic.¹⁶

Laustic is our second historic tale and is strictly urban in flavor, being set in St. Malo. Two rich neighbors living next door to each other as friends end up as enemies. These two rivals parallel each other in all respects except in marital concerns. The bachelor betrays his friend by courting the latter's wife. This love triangle which constitutes the central theme of *Laustic* is very modern in all respects. Marie presents to the reader a cynical account of two grown individuals playing at love for the sake of the game. The ironic tinge shows through most clearly in the two reasons given for the affair's existence. The lady succumbs to her lover's persistent pressure without much of a battle, reasoning that, since he maintained a good reputation and was readily accessible, it would be worth her effort.

*Tant pur le bien qu'ele en oi,
Tant pur ceo qu'il eirt pres de li. (L 27-28)*

Convenience merits, in this case, an equal status with reputation. The plot is not complex nor is their love profound enough to withstand a trial. As a matter of course, when the convenience goes, so does the lover, whom the lady rapidly disposes of. The cut and dried forthright

¹⁶ This is in direct contrast to the opinions of E Hoepffner, who, in his article, places this tale within the inaccessible past of legends. Hoepffner 5-6.

delineation of events contains no magical characters nor enchanted episodes as found in the nine folkloric lais.

The final urban tale, which closely parallels *Laustic* in form and content is *Chaitivel*. Here again we are confronted with a proud woman over whom men compete. The lady in question has twice as many suitors to deal with as did the lady in *Laustic*. For her, the major issue is not choosing between a lover and a husband, but merely selecting one of the four as a mate. Hesitation and indecision bring about the downfall of the heroine. By delaying her choice, she loses all four, as three are killed and the fourth condemned to life as an invalid. The charmed life she leads in her tower above the tournament field is shattered reality at its best and, at its worst moments, it becomes a prison of mental stagnation as seen in the lady's inability to make a decision.

The total lack of temporal adverbs signifies a great deal. Marie, in all of the so-called "mythic" tales painstakingly establishes her various *récits* in the distant past. In this lai, there is no clear temporal classification. The narrative present tense, as used by the poetess, also adds to the feeling of an imagined present. This makes *Chaitivel* a timeless tale that, but for its medieval details of tournaments and knights, would be appropriate to any generation of readers.

In this lai, Marie rejects the proposed ideal of courtly love which is a dream of former ages. In both tone and content it seems to support personal, as well as social responsibility. By refusing to chose, the lady states tacitly that she sincerely loves none of the four. She seeks love as a way to feed her amour-propre, as seen in the title that she proposes. The harsh reality of this lai, combined with the city of Nantes as the locale, exclude it from the classification of the mythical past and hence we place it in the category of historic past.

Clearly, if we take Marie at her word, the lais were intended as a collection of folkloric literature based on the Celtic oral tradition:

*Des lais pensai, k'oïz aveie
Ne dutai pas, bien le saveis,
Ke pur remembrance les firent
Des aventures k'il oïrent
Cil ki primes les comencierent
E ki avant les enveierent.
Plusurs en ai oï conter,
Nes voil laissier ne oblier. (P, 33-40)*

The majority of the stories do fit the description of traditional tales and are attributed by Marie to the Bretons. But she also includes contemporary anecdotes and thus provides relief from the suspension of reality, giving a variety of selections which appeal to a more diverse audience. The absence of a clear, distinct time reference in the greater number of the twelve tales gives this collection its enduring appeal. The other-worldly aspects of fairies, talking animals and magic objects create a mythical

imaginary space which is the fabled *Bretaigne* of Marie de France's creating; her personal stage for the presentation of her genius.

In-depth analysis of the various *lais* uncovers complex and dense internal structures which form a tight unity amidst the variety of scenarios presented. A cursory reading of the collection, on the other hand, also reveals important aspects which, while obvious, need not be taken for granted. An example of one such facet of the *Lais* is the tension between city and country life, as seen through the various settings chosen by Marie. *Laustic* and *Chaitivel* are exclusively urban in flavor in contrast to *Equitan*, *Biclavret* and *Chevrefoil* with their rural castles and forest scenes. The remaining seven *lais* contain a mixture of the two where, more often than not, the protagonist enroute from one point of civilization to another undergoes a life-changing adventure within the context of natural surroundings.

Each type of persona has his own unique domain in which they excel and thus that specific setting becomes a touchstone, showing forth their true constitution. When displaced, the characters change in their manner of acting and reacting. The proud, self-confident Guinevere suffers humiliation before the court of her husband, for example. Yonec's mother finds the strength to face her abusive husband after having visited the land of her lover. Each character exhibits another, often hidden, aspect of themselves which will be focused on through the course of the adventure reflected in the various locales.

While men are quite mobile, women generally remain stationary until called upon to meet and follow their man. The voyage can be a unique event for the woman, the fruition of her free-will decision to leave one man and to go after another, exemplified in the tragedy of *Deus Amanz*. A lack of decisive motion, however, casts a negative aura upon the women in *Chaitivel*, *Laustic* and *Milun*.

A wife, guardian of hearth and home, ought to be stable and secure. She provides and establishes a safe atmosphere as the central figure of the home that a man returns to. Marie places her women in three traditional locations-- towers, bedchambers and groves-- each being fairly civilized and reflecting the ladies' varied roles as idol, lover and companion. Often, the action of the plot is a vertical progression from one location to the next, either ascendant or descendant. The woman gains freedom from the imprisonment of her socially established role and is enabled to attain a true position within the society. More often than not, the lady moves from the tower to the bedroom and then out into the real world, as represented by the natural surroundings of the grove. She will, of course be free to move between the grove and the bedchamber, but rarely does the lady return to the tower.

This liberation activates the woman to be a truly inspirational force in the life of her lover, rather than a mere possession. And while she does not re-enter the physical tower, in the heart of her lover, she is exalted

for her true qualities, rather than for the enforced virtues of her previous mate's making. True love liberates and does not constitute a mere changing of physical location, but a readjustment of thoughts and attitudes as well.

There are many women in the *Lais* who make neither a physical nor a psychological movement when given the opportunity. It is these women who receive negative coverage by the poetess. They are criticized for their lack of motivation, initiative and purpose. These ladies play the game of love instead of living out the experience in its varied forms.

When in a tower, the woman is exalted and mystified by the man, a prize to be won as well as an omnipresent force of motivation and inspiration. Love inspires the hero not so much to greater deeds but to a higher purpose and responsibility. It is the facade of *Frauendienst* that Marie shatters by her ability to portray idealistic scenarios filled with realistic and all too human characters. The lady of Nantes in *Chaitive* exemplifies this type of femininity. During the combat, the lady is in a tower, watching her four knights.

*La dame fu sur une tur,
Bien choisi les suens e les lur. (C 107,108)*

The four suitors, in the folly of competition, put aside common sense and continue fighting past dusk. The society loses three of its four defenders as they fall, sacrificed to a love without reward. The fourth, wounded but

alive, should be the victor to receive the lady's hand, or at least the favors that the four had sought.

*Icil quatre la dame amoent
E de bien fere se penoent}
Par li e par s'amur aveir
I meteit chescuns sun poeir. (C 41-44)*

The lady has the wounded knight carried to her chambers in order to attempt to cure him. She brings him to her, instead of going to him.² She can not be the companion he needs during his darkest hour. We do not see her running out to the battle field to bring him aid. Instead she offers the services of a doctor, being willing to pay for his care rather than commit herself to his cause by becoming physically involved with his healing.

She continues to play the role of the *grande dame* by an overt display of her grief. Even the funerals which she buys for the three dead knights form more of a monument to her grief than a tribute to their memory. She can not break free of the mask that she wears as a public display of her pride.

The next scene recounted is a conversation in the chamber between the knight and the lady. While the setting has changed, the lady has not. She can not make the

1 "... the first five words suggest simple love inspiration, 'for her and her love,' but the last word *aveir* makes it clear that it is for tangible reward, possession of the lady. Robert Hanning and Joan Ferrante, *The Lais of Marie de France*, (Durham: The Labyrinth Press, 1982) 182, fnnt 3.

2 Actually, all of the knights, both dead and living, are carried to her on their shields:

*Sur sun escu fu mis chescuns;
En la cité les unt portez
A la dame kis ot amez. (C, 140-142).*

transition from adored ideal to a lover. Her aloof and distant manners are revealed by the bitter speech of the fourth knight.³ His latent criticism of her receives support from Marie in her decision to name the lai *Chaitivel* instead of *Quatre Dols*. The lady is condemned to permanent indecision, as she mourns for the three dead lovers and scorns the fourth. Her illusion shattered, she still refuses reality.

Another such woman, who controls the fate of her lover, is the *mal mariée* of *Yonec*. The lady is of noble lineage, beautiful and intelligent, but wasting away in a tower where her husband has imprisoned her because of jealousy. He forces her into the role of secluded chastity by his wish for a son. Even though he himself is old and dried up like the river Duélas, indicated in the use of *trespas* and *trespassez* (16,17), he still treats his wife as if it were her fault that there is no heir. She is cloistered, an object to use, not a living woman but a possession.

Muldumarec, her lover, shows to us that his attitude toward the lady is one of reverent adoration.

*Jeo vus ai lungement amee
E en mun quor mut desiree;*

3 *Mes Jéo, ki sui eschapez vifs,
Tuz esgarez e tuz cheitifs,
Ceo qu'el siecle puis plus amer
Vei sovent venir e aler,
Parles od mei matin e seir,
Si n'en puis nule joie aveir
Ne de baisier ne d'acoler
Ne d'autre bien fors de parler.
Teus cent maus ne fetes suffrir
Mieuz me vaudreit la mort tenir!* (C, 215-224)

*Unkes femme fors vus n'amai
Ne james autre n'ameraï. (Y 127-30)*

She controls his destiny: he waits for her call and acts only when she has released him. Her subsequent calls for him are met with immediate response, and she also initiates his demise by her unintentional betrayal of him. Both the sister-in-law and the husband notice the physical changes that love brings about in her and thus the lovers are discovered. In all of the interaction that occurs in the tower, the lady instigates the action and the bird-knight responds.

Unlike the lady of *Chaitivel*, Yonec's mother has no problems shifting roles. She readily agrees to take the bird-knight as her lover, if he believes in God. This he is more than willing to prove, showing himself faithful, unlike the husband who stands accused of having been baptized in the fires of hell. They have a brief period of mutual enjoyment; but the lady plays out her role to excess. The sister notes that she is more willing to be alone in her room than before. She calls continually upon the knight to come to her.

*Sun ami voelt suvent veeir
E de lui sun delit avoir;
Des que sis sires s'en depart,
E nuit e jur e tost e tart
Ele l'ad tut a sun pleisir. (Y 219-223)*

The tower, once a prison, now is paradise for her. Marie stops referring specifically to the tower and now the center of action is the bedchamber, where their affair takes place.

The excessive desire to be alone and her over-indulgence in love are the key elements which tip off the antagonists.

The lady in *Yonac*, spurred on by her emotional attachment to Muldumarec, finds escape from the tower to be as simple as jumping out of the window. The window is her point of contact with reality, allowing her to observe the world that she had been denied. It also represents access to the world of Muldumarec, the portal between their exclusive domains. Thus she takes the same route of escape as did her lover. She is the faithful companion who follows the knight to help him in his time of need just as he brought aid to her in her darkest hour.

The journey which she undertakes, described as dangerous and difficult, underlines her ultimate allegiance to her lover and her total rejection of the husband and the society which he personifies. She is with him in his final hour, despite the danger to her own person. She also willingly obeys his last orders, instructions that will eventually facilitate her reunion in death with him. Her love and obedience enable her to experience the freedom, so long withheld, that by all rights she should share with the man who made it possible. However, she returns to her own home for the sake of her unborn child- *Yonac*. She never again enters the tower, having fulfilled her original purpose in bearing an heir for the husband.

The last episode is another journey and has as its goal the city of Caerleon, but is actually the completion of

her first trip. She goes with her family to the feast of St. Aaron. Stopping to lodge at an abbey on the way, they find the tomb of the bird-knight. The lady, having completed her task in bearing and rearing the child, now accomplishes the postponed vengeance by means of her son. She is free to depart and join her lover. They are united in death under the protection of the church reflected in the final resting place of their bodies: the abbey enshrines the two in honor. This lady thus makes all of the major spatial transitions as well as their emotional counterparts. She, while being the tragic victim of forced circumstances, ultimately triumphs and joins her lover in the afterlife.

Lanval presents us with the inverse situation of *Yonec*. *Yonec* is the story of one woman torn between two men, one of whom she leaves to follow the other into another world, another life. *Lanval* is also caught between two women who vie for his love and loyalty, one of whom he will choose to follow by rejecting the other. The ladies in *Lanval* present us with a study in contrasting manners. Guinevere's petulant and arrogant stance highlights the fairy lady's cordiality and kindness by showing just how fundamentally different the two are. First let us examine the queen's spatial stance as a preparatory inquiry to what a sovereign's duties should and should not be. The first glimpse obtained of the queen is from the garden where the various knights are entertaining ladies. The queen looks out from her "sculpted window" upon the scene below. She and her ladies descend

into the orchard to keep the men company. The proposition of Lanval symbolizes the corruption of the queen. She tries to get him to be more than just an acquaintance by attempting to move the scene of interaction from a public setting to a more private one. Then, upon receiving his rejection, the queen retires to her chambers in the tower in an outraged mock morality. Her retreat from the public place to the more remote locale reflects her supposed purity and discretion. She does not want to appear publicly until her honor has been cleared. What we have here is a picture of a spoiled child thwarted in her attempts to have her cake and eat it too. The sham display of propriety only serves to increase her public humiliation at the conclusion of the story.

In contrast to this is the fairy lady whom Lanval meets in the grove. Having left the city, Lanval encounters two girls who lead him to the beautiful pavilion wherein waits his future lover. Not only does this exotic creature offer him her love and devotion, but she also promises him all the tokens of friendship and acceptance that he has been denied at the court of Arthur. She has come from her country because she really loves him, not because she wants to use him as had been the queen's intention.

Like the lady in *Yonec*, Lanval's lover will come to him at request and cannot be known of without permanently damaging the relationship. She comes to him in his room, on his own level. We do not ever see her putting herself above him as an objective ideal to be worshipped. Her entrance

into court, however, does cause the other men to admire and desire her. Lanval's subsequent rejection of the court, as he joins his lady to go to Avalon, is also an implicit rejection of the queen and all that she represents. For, even as Arthur is the epitome of nobility, so is Guinevere of the "courtly" woman. Thus Marie indirectly criticizes the women who selfishly play at the game of love.

Laustic presents the situation of a proud, vain woman who also gets involved with her neighbor for selfish reasons. His reputation will increase her worth, and the proximity of their abodes makes adultery exceedingly accessible. The majority of the action takes place at the adjacent windows, from where the two can communicate. The houses both have towers; this fact allows the lovers to circumvent the problems posed by the wall which imprisons the lady.

*Preceines furent lur maisuns
E lur sales e lur dunguns;
N'i aveit bare ne devise
Fors un haut mur de pierre bise.
Des chambres u la dame jut,
Quant s la fenestre s'estut,
Poeit parler a sun ami
De l'autre part, e il a li, (L 35-42)*

The self-indulgent nature of this lai is apparent in the veneer of commitment which, when tested by a trial, cracks under the threats of a jealous husband. The lady never gets beyond her tower. She and the "lover" never consummate their affection by entering into a bedchamber. She never escapes the household because her loyalty is not with the lover but with herself and her own convenience. We

have here a one-dimensional character who refuses to develop or mature. She will remain in her tower by day, able to reach neither her lover's arms nor his bed. She will, on the other hand now remain in her husband's bed at night, trapped into playing the role of a faithful wife and lover. Above all, she remains encased in her window, a hollow show-piece to be admired for her physical beauty alone.

Another wife locked away as a means of keeping her beauty away from the world is the lady in *Guigemar*. Here we have the situation that was already expounded upon above in our discussion of *Yonec*. The lady is kept in her chambers, a symbolic setting which reflects the nature of her role as a child-bearer for an old man.

As she lingers in the grove at the foot of the tower, the lady spies a ship coming into the harbor. Her companion serves as a medium of introduction between Guigemar and the trapped woman. The lady offers her aid to him, thus exhibiting proffered friendship. She first helps him to heal and regain bodily strength before any mention of love is made. It is only after she has brought him into her chambers that the amorous side of their relationship develops. Even then, it takes just a short speech by Guigemar to persuade and instruct the lady in her new part.

The walls of the chamber itself depict the nature of their relationship. The husband has had murals of Venus and her varied traits depicted upon the walls.⁴ This is a clear

⁴ Herman Braet discusses the various possible sources from which Marie could have gained her knowledge of Ovid,

explanation of the intended use for the chamber, yet the plans and purposes of the old husband are reversed. Instead of learning to love her husband faithfully, she gains knowledge in respects to a lover. Thus the husband accomplishes and assures his own cuckoldry.

After the discovery of Guigemar by the husband, we see that the lady is removed from the "love nest" and put instead in the tower:

*Par le conseil d'un suen barun
Ses sires l'ad mise en prisun
En une tur de marbre bis. (G 657-59)*

Her husband forces her to play the part of a faithful wife and ensures that this time there will be no allowance for infidelity. However, the door remains unlocked on one day, immediately after she expresses her wish to be with Guigemar or die. So she sets out on her one time journey to find the companion she lost, the ship being her means of escape. We are not given details of her sea voyage, but, just as in the window scene in *Yonec*, the heroine follows the exact route of escape as did her lover. Thus the boat represents a tangential point between their diverse domains.

concentrating mainly on the intended function of the murals. He believes that the husband had intended the wife to learn faithfulness to her lord, but that it all depends upon the perspective of the viewer. "Tout depend, en fin de compte, de celui qui considère la peinture. Même si c'est le mari qui en a choisi le sujet, cette représentation peut démontrer, de façon assez ironique, le contraire de ce qu'il a voulu. L'ambiguïté demeure, et c'était peut-être, précisément, l'intention de la poetess." Herman Braet, "Note sur Marie de France et Ovide (Lai de Guigemar, vv.233-244)" Mélanges de philologie et de littératures romanes offerts à Jeanne Wathélet-Willem (Liège: March Romane, 1978) 25.

At the end of her Journey, she falls into the hands of the greedy Meriaduc. There is yet one more trial for the lovers to overcome. Meriaduc locks the lady away in his castle. Guigemar proves his love and loyalty to the lady by liberating her from this adoring captor, who would once again imprison her in the role of a worshipped creature instead of allowing her to be a real person. Whereas she, in her own world, had acted to protect him, she now is the helpless, passive one who needs Guigemar. By liberating her, Guigemar repays her previous kindness and demonstrates his own commitment.

We see then that the Guigemar's lady moves from one stage to the next with a smooth, if not always rapid, transfer of place and position. Her initial placement in the grove surrounding the tower intimates the future role she shall play in Guigemar's fate, being first a helpful friend as well as the woman of his dreams. She readily brings him into her chambers, where the two become lovers. Refusing her social status as wife of her husband, she leaves the tower, the physical representation of social propriety which holds her back from true love. She is then able to take up her new role having finally rejected the old one. Nothing will keep her from achieving that new position because, through the exercise of her free will, she distinguishes her new-found self as an individual.

With *Equitan*, we confront another woman who, this time, lacks the ability to relocate herself. The seneschal's wife

is a rather one-dimensional character reflected in her one arena of action- the bedroom. We know that Equitan has established a correspondence with her, which serves to prepare the lady for his confession of love. The first time that the lady becomes active is when the king has stopped his hunting in the forest to take up a different sort of chase. He calls the lady to his rooms, where the initial villainy will take place.

*Es chambres vet, si s'est cuchiaz.
Dolenz en est li senescaus;
Il ne seit pas queils est li maus
De quei li reis sent les fricuns:
Sa femme en est dreite acheisuns.
Pur sei deduire e cunforter
La fist venir a lui parler. (Eq 106-12)*

This is unusual in that all of the other *lais* present the affair from within the woman's domain. Here, the lady must come to the king, whereas normally the man would seek out the lady in her lair. Even when the seneschal and his wife are at court, the liaisons take place in the king's rooms. This reversal is yet another facet of Equitan's unbalanced policies, the seneschal having so far taken over the king's major public functions.

Whenever the lady speaks, it is while she and the king are in bed together. Once having convinced her that she belongs there, Equitan keeps her as his mistress. She is his lover, but she wants more. This woman wants the public recognition of the private place she holds in the king's heart. This movement out of bed and into the court, which is a reflection of her ambition, displays the lady's attempt to

begin to develop as a character. But she never does leave her place of private prominence for one of public justification. Indeed one wonders if such a transition would be possible, as the public opinion is so negative toward her.

It is she who, in fear of losing the king, instigates the plot to kill the seneschal. There are a few things that Marie makes definite statements about and the devious destruction of another human being is one of them, as stated here and in *Bisclavret* as well. The two lovers are condemned to death by their own attitudes and actions. They also overstep the boundaries of propriety by committing adultery in the seneschal's own bed.

The wife and the king find their final resting place to be one of shame and ignominy. Justice causes the plot to turn back against those who instigated the action, giving us a sinister variation on *à tricheur, tricheur et demi*. They both end up caught in the trap which was set for the seneschal; a scalding tub where one is boiled to death and the other is drowned.

Marie gives us a proverb to ponder at the end of this lai:

*Ki bien vodreit reisun entendre
Ici purreit ensample prendre:
Tels purcace le mal d'autrui
Dunt tuz li mals revert sur lui. (Eq 307-10)*

Clearly she is condemning the actions of the couple. The king is guilty of having broken his feudal duty to a vassal as he himself admits. The wife, in the folly of her pride,

attempts murder. Our poetess seems to suggest that the two deserved their fate, as she protects the seneschal by choosing to let him live.

There is one other lai, wherein Marie prefers the husband to the wife. *Bisclavret* contains a lady who out of fear and superstition betrays her husband in order to secure her own position, as did the seneschal's wife. In a desperate attempt to assure her safety at home, she takes a lover whom she admits to never having loved in the first place. She does not realize that she has shut out the very one who first gave her her social position.

We don't see much of the lady, as the story is narrated from the werewolf's perspective, but when we do she is acting selfishly and foolishly. There are two occasions where she appears: in the initial scene and approaching the king in the forest. When she is at home, the wife is well able to hide her intentions. She is in her element and thus can hide her true intentions from Bisclavret. However, she shows forth her true character as one of insecurity and manipulative deceit. She uses her new love for her own ends. He is a convenient tool, not a human being for whom she feels. She lacks compassion and the ability to see things from another's point of view.

Her basic act of treason, pointed out by Marie⁵, ruins not only the life of her husband but indites herself as well. The wife is supposed to be the central element of the

5 *Issi fu Bisclavret trahiz*
E par sa femme maubailiz. (B 125,6)

home. It is she who creates the atmosphere of acceptance and refuge for the man when he seeks shelter from the world. Her domain, the reflection of herself, manifests itself in the home. The wife of Bislavret fails as a woman, by being incapable of taking her man for better or for worse, and by having betrayed her sacred trust..

The king decides to go back to the forest where he had found Bislavret. The wife, hearing of this goes out to meet him:

*La femme Bislavret le sot.
Avenantment s'appareilot;
El demain vait al rei parler,
Riche present li fait porter. (B 227-30)*

When in the forest, the wife steps out of her proper domain. She no longer has the disguise of civility about her. Her protection left at home, she leaves herself open to the vengeance of Bislavret, who tears off her nose. The whole scene is one of suffering for the wife. She is tortured by the king's men in order to get the truth out of her. In the forest, her mean and petty character comes forth. She does not reveal the secret of Bislavret out of sympathy or concern for her husband, but from pain and fear induced by the torture. The truth surfaces, for the forest reveals life as it really is. Her punishment is equitable. She had banished Bislavret from the society of humans, entrapping him in an animal's form. She, in just recompense for her betrayal, receives that which she gave.

With *Bislavret*, we have a case where the woman, as the antagonist, hides behind the facade of her social position.

She pretends to be what the circumstances demand. Yet she manipulates the male characters just, as surely and skillfully as did the lady of *Chaitive*⁷. Her selfish and base actions reveals a cold, calculating heart. The one mistake she makes is in trying to move out of her domain. For when she is stripped of the trappings of civilization, the real woman comes forth. The motion from the castle to the forest unveils an unworthy creature who is rejected by the very society she tried to court.

Yseut, as Tristan's lover also appears in her true form when in the forest: In *Chievrefoil*, she relates to Tristan as the queen. Marie never specifically uses her name.⁶ We only read of the queen. This overt reminder of Yseut's social status reinforces the reality of her position. She is his lover, but first and foremost in this lai, she is the queen. They talk and take great joy in seeing each other, she gives him news of King Marc, but nothing tangible occurs between the two. It is forbidden by their respective obligations. The queen continues her journey. She is committed to the king, not to Tristan. They cannot deny the impossibility of their love. There is no pretending that things could change.

The queen is in control of her lover's life. Tristan risks his life just to be able to see her. He cares not for himself. This attitude of worship is counter-balanced by

6 "... she simply calls her 'the queen,' the title which, because it reminds us of her position and responsibility, also tells us how impossible their love must be in the world." Hanning and Ferrante 195.

their friendship. While they are lovers, they also have great care and concern for the other's well-being. She is hopeful that he will be reconciled to the king and thus allowed back into society. The sad, tragic tone of the tale of *Chievrefoil* is communicated to the reader is augmented by their surroundings. They can't meet publicly, and so their one chance to communicate occurs outside civilized settings.

The forest *rendez-vous* thus circumvents the rules that would otherwise keep them publicly apart. Having been banished by King Marc, Tristan has lost all possibility of seeing the queen. Yet when he was in court, they, under the guise of propriety, were able to carry on their affair. They were able to do in court what they can not do in the forest. The surrounding of society gave them the protection they needed to be lovers. Now, in nature, they realize the futility of their mutual affections. Thus, what they were unable to acknowledge in the city, they confront in the forest.

Deus Amanz presents us with a daughter whose father keeps her from developing as a person by his refusal to release her. The princess leads a sheltered life in the castle. In order to keep her by him, her father sets an impossible challenge for the suitors to meet. The girl makes a lover of the young man because the king thought highly of him. She, however, has a deeper commitment to her father than to her lover. She will not elope for fear of losing contact with her father. In refusing to leave, she places

the king above the lover. Thus by refusing to move from her place of security, she chooses to remain an adolescent rather than to grow up.

Her one positive act, in an attempt to mature is the plan which she devises to meet her father's demands. The trip up the mountain embodies her one futile gesture to be free from the king. She fasts so as to make the burden lighter for the boy. She also sends him to her relative in Salerno to prepare for his trial. She does want to be united with her lover. She continues to encourage him to drink his medicine. But her time for action is past. She should have left home when given the opportunity. Whatever she says now, the issue is out of her hands and in those of the lover.

She is unrealistic in her demands that he go through the motions just to please her father. For her refusal to take decisive action, she loses her lover and she dies as well. They are united in death, as she could not cope with the demands of reality.

Milun also contains the tale of two young people who agree to be lovers. While not as young as the unfortunate couple in *Deus Amanz*, they are definitely playing at the game of love. The lady asks Milun to be her lover because of his good reputation.⁷ She meets her lover in the grove which serves as the scene of their affair. Their excessive

⁷ This is the same reason for an affair as given in *Equitan* (38), *Le Fresne* (247-48), *Deus Amanz* (59-62), *Laustic* (26-28), *Chaitivel* (53-54), and *Eliduc* (273-74). Marie seems to criticise this motive as in five of the cases, the lovers are punished while in the two other stories, the lovers must demonstrate their sincerity through a trial.

delights lead to the inevitable results. When she becomes pregnant her reputation hangs in the balance. She expresses more concern for her public image than for the child and proves her motives to be of a selfish nature.

*Dist li cument est avenu:
S'onur e sun bien ad perdu,
Quant de tel fet s'est entremise;
De li ert faite granz justise:
A gleive serat turmentee
U vendue en autre cuntree. (Fr 57-62)*

She never tries to escape from the confines of the household. In giving away her son, the woman denies her affair as well as the responsibility and consequences of love. She can easily play the part of lover and companion to Milun, but she can not shift into the role of mother for the baby. The total lack of maturity in word and deed excludes her from the more sublime emotions that are present in the other women whom we have discussed. Thus she can never ascend in the esteem that Milun might have had for her.

She marries and follows the social conventions, playing out her part. She never tries to escape and join Milun. In *Guigemar* and *Yonec*, the mere expression of the desire to leave and follow their man was sufficient for the heroine to realize this wish. Here, there is a lack of clear commitment on the part of the lady. Her indecisiveness costs the two lovers twenty years of separation. She remains in her husband's household, just as she remained in her father's. The lady does manage to get out occasionally to *rendez-vous* with her lover, because, as Marie adds, no one

can be so closely guarded that they can't find some way out.⁸

She continues to play the game by sending messages with the swan. However, the lady never acts to free herself and thus never develops beyond a conventional stock character. She must be rescued by her son, yet fate intervenes before he can act. The death of her husband finally clears the way for her to realize the love that heretofore has remained a game.

In the last two *lais* to be examined, there is a shifting of focus for the settings. Instead of the tower as a central point of idolization for the woman, we see the ladies being rescued out of or sent into abbeys or chapels instead of towers. Here, in *Le Fresne* and *Eliduc*, the emphasis is on moral as well as social redemption. The characters do not only succeed in interpersonal relationships but also excel in their own internal betterment. Often, the lady must be taken out of one repressive or encumbering environment in order to realize her full potential. While the progression still is toward the bedroom, and the grove still represents the reality symbolized nature, the tower is turned into a religious sanctuary.

8 *Ensemble viendrent plusurs feiz.
Nuls ne poet estre si destreiz
Ne si tenuz estreitement
Que il ne truisse liu sovent.* (M 285-88)

The mother in *Le Fresne* tries to ensure that her social position remains secure. After having accused a neighbor of infidelity, she falls into the same trap herself. Marie points out that she is deceptive and vicious:

*Kar ele ert feint e orguilluse
E mesdisanz e enviuse. (Fr 27-28)*

Her domain is the household. She protects her place there by threatening to commit murder when she, too, gives birth to twins. The mother exhibits more concern for her reputation than for the welfare of her child.⁹

The mother does not appear again until the end of the tale. Once again, she protects her own interests. She doesn't care about Fresne and tries a second time to get rid of the girl. However, this character redeems herself in that she is able to confess her guilt. The sight of the cloth on the bed causes her to inquire more deeply into the situation. She is no longer in her own domain where she has to play a role. The true nature of this wicked mother is revealed to all the characters of the story, a fact that we as readers are already aware of. Being removed from the security of her own home, she is free to show her true colors. This honesty is rewarded by the recovery of her long-lost daughter. Thus she undergoes a social redemption that would not have been possible if she had remained at home. She develops in relation to the others and

9 *Pur mei defendre de hunir,
Un des enfanz m'estuet murdrir;
Mieuz le voil vers Deu amender
Que mei hunir e vergunder. (F 91-94)*

distinguishes herself as a major figure in the *récit*. The journey from her home into that of Fresne saves this lady from remaining in the realm of a stock, one-dimensional character.

Fresne herself undergoes a series of spatial transitions which reflect her various roles throughout the story. Being brought up in the abbey influences her reactions to all the situations that she will face. Her "aunt", the abbess, has instilled her with a patience that will be tested to its limits in the subsequent stages of the plot. The world has not put its mark on her as she was raised in total seclusion. The atmosphere of the abbey moulds and forms her character into an extraordinary role-model of Christian virtue.

The knight convinces her to leave the abbey and come to live with him. This transition causes no problems for Fresne. She is already his lover and yet both are concerned with the propriety of carrying on an affair under false pretenses. She must make this move to correspond to the change in roles that she has undergone. It would be wrong of her to remain in the abbey. Marie does not condemn the two in their living arrangement. Indeed, she rather applauds their choice to be open and public about their love. Fresne fits into Gurun's life perfectly; she belongs there. The problem occurs when it is determined that Gurun must provide a legitimate heir for his people. Fresne is overlooked because of her lack of "nobility", and yet she will prove

herself to be the most noble of them all. She does not try, like the seneschal's wife in *Equitan*, to secure her position in the house. God has been her protector since birth and He will justify her now. The mother arrives at the castle and the two meet in the bedroom, being forced back into the original context wherein they were last together. Fresne is there preparing the way for her rival to come in. Her concern centers around others and is not introspective. She is in her element and the mother tries to usurp Fresne's rights to be there. However in this case virtue triumphs as the girl recovers not only the threatened place beside Gurun, but the lost birthrights of her parents' home as well. Thus she has gained access to the two locations which were denied her and which confirm her identity and rights in relationship to society.

The two principle women in *Eliduc* go through a series of changes and developments which need to be examined. Firstly, there is Eliduc's original wife, Guildeluec. She stays at home to guard the property while her husband is in exile. She exemplifies the perfect wife. Not only is her concern firstly for her husband's welfare but she is also the agent which makes his happiness possible by her role in the recovery of her rival. Like Fresne, the first wife exhibits no jealousy, but aids the other woman in her new-found role. Having been left alone for so long, it is not surprising that Guildeluec choses to live her own life in the abbey. She is no longer capable of fulfilling the needs

of her husband and so retires into the sequestered life. Eliduc greatly esteems his wife for her choice, not only because she has cleared the way for his future joy, but also because he recognizes in her that higher calling and respects her decision to follow a godly life.

The second woman in *Eliduc* goes through a process of maturing, from adolescent to woman. When we first make her acquaintance, Guilliadun lives with an overprotective father similar to that of *Deus Amanz*:

*Vieuz hum e aunciens esteit;
Karnel heir madle nen aveit.
Une fille ot a marier.
Pur ceo k'il ne la volt doner
A un suen per, sil guerriot,
Tute se tere li gastot. (E 93-98)*

The daughter invites Eliduc to come into her chamber and talk with her. They sit on the bed and it is at that moment when she falls in love.

*La pucele ki l'ot veü
Vodra de lui fere sun dru:
Unques mes tant nul ne preisa! (E 327-29)*

It is she who instigates the first actions in the love affair. By inviting him into her rooms, she opens herself up to the possibility of love. He continues to come to her rooms and visit with her. There is no mention of the consummation of their love, yet what is interesting is that the king himself instructs his daughter to become acquainted with the foreign knight. Thus the king unwittingly sanctions their relationship and his daughter's subsequent elopement.

This princess, unlike the one in *Deus Amanz*, shows enough initiative to free herself from her father. She

willingly goes with her lover. Her commitment is to Eliduc, not to the king. As his future companion, she must be able to come to his country, as that is the duty of the bride. She leaves her parents' household to follow her husband. Here, however, Marie twists the plot by having the girl go through one last trial before their union is possible.

Having fainted on learning of Eliduc's wife, Guilliadun is left for dead in a forest chapel. She is given back to God. When she wakes up as a result of Guildeluec's observance, what occurs is that the two women end up switching places. The original wife retreats to the forest chapel which has now become her requested abbey. The second one takes over the former's duties as wife and companion to Eliduc. They not only exchange places but social roles as well; all three end up in the religious life. Marie seems to be saying that both ways of life are valid and desirable. But it is only by a free-will choice that one can change. The trio all attain to the moral superiority that exemplifies itself in the abbey. They have not only aided each other, but in doing so they have advanced their own cause bringing them all that much nearer to heaven's door.

In this examination of the settings and their significance in the character development, it becomes evident that, in choosing her locations, Marie was not merely filling in details. The women that we have looked at all seem to react to their environment in distinct ways. When in civilization, the women easily play the game of love. They

can deceive and manipulate their husbands and others as well. They control the true action for they are acting from within their own personal domain- the home. Women are sedentary and stationary in traditional portrayals of them.

In this set of feminine stereotypes, each individual has had the opportunity to chose between moving on in life or remaining content in her situation. They either met the challenge or failed the test. Whatever the results, the question was always one of a need for relocation, actions being a reflection of the will's convictions. Whenever a particular woman is unable to move forward, the latent criticism is that her hardness of heart and selfish motivations have petrified and imprisoned her into a social subcategory. There often is, for these women, no way out because they refuse to act responsibly. Where, on the other hand, there is a will a way presents itself. Thus this issue of spatial occupation and personal development is dependant on the individual's own free will. Society can imprison or it can liberate.

Just as women are the stationary members of society, as embodied in the home, so men tend to the opposite extreme being the nomadic element, mobile and animated by that society which they serve. And, like a moth drawn to a flame, men are drawn by circumstances, fate and destiny to women around whom they circle and to whom they return. Man, in general, is the foreigner who comes to court the lady, persuading her away from her original microcosm of the paternal manor. Taking her away from her world, a protected and secure place, he draws her through the trial of separation from her parents to his own world where they start a family and thus renew the social cycle.

In the Lais, this spatial displacement of the male protagonist often constitutes the plot of the story. One man's journey in search of a woman in eight specific instances is that same man's search for himself, an attempt to realize and develop his higher qualities. The male protagonist perceives through the idealization of his female counterpart that he can be so much more than he currently is. This process of maturation for the man parallels that of the woman in that the signs of emotional and psychological change are reflected in the character's ability to react to and interact with his environment. However, whereas the woman experiences a vertical progression, the man undergoes a horizontal one.

If we should attempt to formulate a general plan for the plot structure of the Lais, it would reduce to the simple movement of a man from his society through the wilds of the forest to the social setting of the woman and back to his own world again. The woman joins him after his return to the original scene. Their final destination, which denotes the resolution of the plot, can be one of three plausible options: they remain and settle down in the man's city, they die and are placed in a tomb, or they return to the woman's city. As well, we see that, in a great many cases, one or more of the characters end up in a religious setting of some sort, whether that be the location of their tomb or a place to spend their final terrestrial moments.

As stated in chapter two, each type of character inhabits their own unique space in relation to their function in the story and thus that specific setting magnifies and shows forth their true constitution. When displaced, the characters change in their manner of acting and reacting. The proud, self-confident Guigemar becomes insecure before his lady love, for example. Milun takes on a vengeful attitude when going to challenge the knight, Sanz Per. Each character exhibits another, often hidden, aspect of themselves. It is this hidden flaw which will be focused on through the course of the adventure; the process of rectification reflected in the movement through various locales.

Civilization, created by man, opposes nature in that the latter is a pure and factual representation of reality while the former is forced and false, an imposed structure which represents man's attempt to rule and subdue nature, from whence he came. The cities visited stand as extreme poles between which the male characters migrate. When in an urban locale, the man fulfills a societal function which defines and delineates his existence. He serves that society but must also learn to balance civic duty and private concerns which vie for his loyalty and devotion.

The distinction between the use of *bois* and *forest* in the *Lais* is the subject of an in-depth analysis by André Eskénazi.¹ He attempts to distinguish the type of discourse which is associated with the use of these two seemingly similar terms. While the *forest* is *un séjour impénétrable*², *bois* is *un séjour familier*.³ *Bois* seems to be a quantity that is defined and limited in a culturally accessible sense. The use of *forest* tends to denote a wilder untouched expanse that is unlimited and savage in nature. Thus *bois* focuses itself down to a state of civility while *forest* expands out away from the society:

*Cette distribution issue de l'analyse
du contenu est confirmée par deux in-
dices formels: le degré zéro de l'ar-*

1 André Eskénazi, *Bois et Forest dans les Lais du Ms. H, Mélanges de Langue et de Littérature médiévales offerts à Alice Planche*, Publications Annales de la Faculté des Lettres et Sciences Humaines de Nice, 48 (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1984) 199-211.

2 Eskénazi, 201.

3 Eskénazi, 202.

*ticle dans aler en bois, et le nombre,
toujours singulier dans le cas de bois...*⁴

M. Eskénazi concludes that *bois* indicates a more civilized type of arrangement whereas *forest* refers to nature in its purest state.

A man's wanderings between locales traverse the forest, that part of his environment which has yet to be civilized and tamed.⁵ While in the forest, the man comes in contact with his basic nature and, having shed the socially imposed identity, he can rediscover his true *raison d'être*. In gaining this knowledge, the male protagonist learns to balance the various elements of his life. He is freed from a false sense of duty to his fellow citizens and, having discovered his natural talents, he now can make a legitimate contribution to society, both in personal and public affairs.

Chievrefoil occurs exclusively in the forest. Marie sets the stage for her readers with twenty-four lines of background information. We thus know that Tristan has come from South Wales, his place of birth. Tristan, having been forced out of courtly society, finds himself waiting for the queen to pass by in hopes of speaking to her. He has been stripped of all his status and rank by being exiled and is forced to beg from the peasants at night. What we see here

⁴ Eskénazi, 211.

⁵ "... avec forest, le but spatial du déplacement est toujours associé au motif du déplacement...", Eskénazi, 206.

is a man compelled by his one overriding desire to attempt to possess what society cannot and will not offer him, to risk death in pursuit of that one goal to its end.

Tristan knows that the love he nurses for the queen will never be realized in this life. Theirs is a tragic tale in that both are victims not only of society but of fate as well. From the moment of having drunk the love potion, Tristan has been locked into his dire destiny. The joy that he experiences at seeing his lover is a feeling shared by the queen as well. Their temporary happiness only serves to make the tragedy more evident and poignant, a point which Marie makes the reader aware of:

Puis en mururent en un jur. (Cf 10)

King Marc has summoned all the barons by ban to join him at Tintagel where he will hold court at Pentecost. It is for this reason that the queen is travelling through the forests of Cornwall. The general mood of such a gathering is one of *joie e deduit* (42). Tristan exhibits the exact opposite emotions, being *dolenz e trespensez* (25), as he has been barred from participating in the festivities. In the forest, Tristan is not the nephew of the king, nor is he one of the privileged barons, but merely a man who has had the misfortune to fall in love with his uncle's wife.

Tristan seeks an audience with the queen, yet we sense that much more than a mere chat is desired. He does speak with the queen. However, he goes away empty handed and

returns to South Wales. He never regains entrance into the lady's society nor does he convince her to leave that society and return with him. Yseut continues on her way as she too must be true to her real function- the wife of a king. The only bright spot in this scenario is the hopeful whisper that the young lover might be recalled to court by King Marc.

*Puis li munstra cumfaitement
Del rei avrat acordement,
E que mut li avait pesé
De ceo qu'il l'ot si cungeé:
Pur encusement l'aveit fait. (CF 97-101)*

With this nebulous promise, Tristan returns home to wait until his uncle should send for him. He set out from home and yet he failed to gain entrance into the lady's social sphere. The intended displacement is aborted and diverted. Thus he has failed in his attempts at social re-integration within the context and scope of this lai, given that Marie must work her tale around a pre-established literary tradition.

Bisclavret presents us with another character who, having been banished from the society of which he is a part, seeks refuge in the forest. This man has everything arranged to his favor. He has a secure place in society, a wife who, to all intents and purposes, loves him and a lord with whom he is very close. Even his neighbors love and admire him. However, there is one problem: he is a werewolf and disappears at regular intervals into the forest to live out this other role.

This dual nature of the protagonist embodies the essence of the tale and contains the central issue which is the intrigue. It is this hidden side of Bisclavret which will be the focus of the narration and which will undergo the process of social re-integration. He has covered up a major flaw within his makeup. While he does not go in search of a woman, he does, as a direct reaction to the woman he already has, find the power to overcome this problem. When he does finally re-enter the court as a restored human being, we no longer hear of him relapsing into his former illness. Instead, the physical curse seems to transfer itself to the wife in the form of a missing nose for generations to come. Bisclavret has acknowledged and dealt with his problem publicly, therefore it ceases to plague him.

Bisclavret is banished from his home by the treachery of his wife. She has condemned him to a life of aimless wanderings in the forest. He ceases to exist as a man and thus he figuratively and socially, if not physically, has died.

*-Dame, fet il, pur Deu merci!
 Mal m'en vendra si jol vus di,
 Kar de m'amur vus partirai
 Et mei meïsmes en perdrai.➤ (B 53-56)*

Contrary to the description of a werewolf given by Marie in the introduction, Bisclavret maintains a very human demeanor. It is this inner quality of civility which alerts the king to the true situation and thus saves Bisclavret

from being torn to pieces by the hunting hounds. His clothes, the symbol of his civility, remain hidden under a stone by a chapel, thus indicating that his ultimate security and hope of deliverance rests in divine providence.

*«Dame, fet il, delez cel bois,
Lez le chemin par unt jeo vois,
Une vielz chapele i esteit,
Ki meintefeiz grant bien me feit:
La est la pierre cruose e lee,
Suz un bussun, dedenz cavee;
Mes dras i met, suz le buissun,
Tant que jeo revienç a meisun.»* (B 89-96)

The outward aspect of civility and the bestial facet of Bisclavret have been transposed. Whereas his animal nature had been denied and disguised by the protagonist, it is now made evident for all to observe. Yet the human qualities are a matter of displayed actions and demeanor. The king recognizes this reasonableness in the creature.⁶ He takes Bisclavret from the forest to his court. Therefore what in the wife is a mask of civility hiding a wicked nature becomes for the man a mask of brutality hiding a true nobility.

During his sojourn at the court, Bisclavret acts as a perfect "gentleman". He shows himself to be most loyal to the king. This serves to reinforce the idea that there is a real man hidden under the coat of fur. The only exception to this takes place when the knight who aided the wife in betraying Bisclavret comes to court. The werewolf attacks

⁶ *Cum ceste beste s'humilie!
Ele ad sen d'hume, merci crie.*

.....
Ceste beste ad entente e sen. (B 153-54,57)

the man. This sudden change of character in Bisclavret prompts the king to return to the forest. It is there that the true identity of the wolf will be revealed. Thus, after having established firmly in the minds of her readers that the knight is a fit member of society, despite the strange circumstances, Marie takes us back to the scene of the crime to reinstate the protagonist to his rightful position in the community.

Once again, a hidden aspect of his nature will be revealed as Bisclavret returns to the forest. Whereas before it was his base, animalistic nature that was in question, it is now a matter of unveiling the true identity of the knight. In the forest, there can be no way of disguising one's self, therefore each character acts according to his innermost traits. Bisclavret attacks his wife and bites off her nose. This punishment is perfectly reasonable as it was the right of a husband to punish an adulterous wife. He could have killed her but chose instead to make her live out her life in ignominy and shame; a just recompense for her vainglorious pride. Moreover, the king puts her to torture in order to discover the facts of this mystery. Thus they uncover the wife's plot against Bisclavret.

Now there remains only the restoration of the clothing to the baron. The king places the garments in front of the werewolf, indicating that his sovereign, the consummate symbol of the realm, accepts him once again back into the community. His peers accept him unconditionally, even after

having found out his worst and deepest secret. Amazingly, the beast refuses to don the proffered clothes. He is embarrassed. This touching detail serves to remind us just how much the baron has changed. He now follows precisely the conventions of propriety, waiting until he is alone in the king's chambers to regain his human form. This also reveals that he does now have some control over the moment of metamorphosis. He can now fully participate in the community, both in giving and receiving aid. So, by the end of the tale, his social reintegration is complete.

Equitan has two male figures which interact equally within the context of the story. There are two locales which are dealt with in the plot; the seneschal's castle in the country and *Equitan*'s court. The seneschal is a good, decent and straightforward character, yet his devotion to duty renders him unobservant of tensions and interests around him. He has, to our knowledge only one fault, that of blindness in matters concerning the conduct of his best friend and his spouse. This inability to correctly perceive reality will be remedied in the final scene in one swift incident. The king, *Equitan*, by his *démésure*, reveals to the seneschal what is becoming apparent to others around him.

The king's love for the seneschal's wife causes him to forsake his favorite hobbies and thus he also forsakes the forest, scene of his habitual exploits. He not only abandons the personal pleasures of his position, but he also neglects the social duties related to that position. He deceives his

friend and his subjects are totally forgotten in the pursuit of folly. The wife and king enjoy success in love yet they are a failure in society. The king denies his social duties and refuses the pressures put on him to wed:

*Li reis l'ama mut lungement
Que d'autre femme n'ot talent.
Il ne voleit nule espuser;
Ja n'en rovast oïr parler.
La gent le tindrent mut a mal, (Eq 197-201)*

He pursues this course at the cost of breaking a multitude of other promises. He does not see that one must be able to integrate personal and social lifestyles in order to have true fulfillment. The failure to resolve this inherent tension between the two loyalties results in his death as is the ultimate outcome of this tale.

Equitan effectively prophesies his own demise:

*Cil ki d'amur sunt novelier
E ki s'aturnent de trichier,
Il sunt gabé e deceü;
De plusurs l'avum nus veü.
N'est pas merveille se cil pert
Ki par s'ovreine le desert. (Eq 163-68)*

He has behaved ignobly to the seneschal and to his people. While he did keep his promise to love the lady well, he also forfeited all his other relationships as a direct result of the influence that she exerted upon him. He is thus unworthy to continue as king, yet the only way to remove him is by death, an option which Marie exercises.

Equitan previously ignored the social life of court in the excess of his passion for hunting. He was too personally involved with the pursuit of pleasure. Then, after meeting the lady, he inverts this unnatural preoccupation. He

ignores the private domain of the forest and exchanges it for the social scene of the court or the seneschal's domain. However, once again, he selfishly pursues the private pleasures of love and continues to neglect his public duties. He is unbalanced wherever he happens to be. He cannot function equitably in either location and thus refuses to deal with the real world. Having rejected reality, it rejects him in turn.

The king fails miserably in his attempt to fulfill his every desire. Equitan could not bring about a synthesis of private and public domains. He has forsaken a part of himself, made himself less than he was at the outset of the tale. He gave up the forest activities of hunting and hawking. In their place he substituted adultery. Love is a debasing force in his life because of his selfish and greedy intentions. He has placed himself below the lady's level while she tried to ascend to his. In his demise, Equitan pulls the woman down with him. Once having started along the downward path, Equitan lacks the moral fortitude or the ability to stop his slide. Instead of improving, Equitan and the lady sink lower and lower, being fully united only in a common death.

Muldumarec, the main male figure in *Yonec*, embodies the greater part of the motion in that he is the one who comes and goes according to the lady's bidding. He underwent a metamorphosis, such as Bisclavret had experienced, which enabled him to achieve his journey's end. Given the story

from the lady's point of view, we do not directly see the route that he takes. Muldumarec tells his *bien aimée* that he left his own country as a response to her prayer for release. Thus, once again, we see from a new perspective the general pattern repeating itself; namely that the man, a foreigner, voyages from home to seek out the woman of his desire.

We learn of the route that he takes via the lady's own journey. She follows the trail left by his fatal wound. Unable to fly, she jumps from the window and pursues the knight. By reversing the stages of her excursion, we can re-establish the sequence of events for the man before his wounding. After leaving his city, Muldumarec enters a meadow, similar to that of Lanval's, and finds the hill with its hole. Going through the dark hole, he would end up at the road which leads to the tower. Being a bird-knight, he would have no problem gaining access to the tower, wherein the wicked husband has imprisoned the wife. He enters through the window, an effective portal between the reality of his existence and of hers. Thus there are three stages to his journey.

The first section of Muldumarec's pilgrimage constitutes the search for maturity. He goes into the meadow to seek a companion⁷ and instead finds an obstacle to his path- the hill. The dark, tomb-like interior of the hill,

⁷ See chapter two, wherein the significance of the meadow and grove are discussed. These two places represent the role of woman as companion and helpmate to the man.

while intimidating, represents his only manner of gaining access to the lady's world. He cannot reach her except by going through the deathlike translation of this somber and subterranean stage of the process. The time underground comprises the second stage of his maturation, the ability to "die" for the sake of his beloved. This transitional experience prefigures their eventual triumph of unity in death at the conclusion to the lai. And thirdly, there is the trip from the hill to the castle. Having forsaken his own people and figuratively having died to reach the castle, the remainder of the motion is easily accomplished. He gains entrance to her chambers without challenge.

Muldumarec does die, but leaves behind a replacement who will not only avenge, but also replace him. Yonec, as the son of the main male figure in this lai, does not enter the story until the final lines. We find out that the lady's persecution ceases as soon as she produces a son for the old man. We now have a wicked step-father figure instead of the traditional step-mother to deal with.

This old, incompetent character does not venture out from his home except for an occasional foray into the forest to hunt. He, twisted and corrupt in nature, takes this penchant of pursuit and turns it against the bird-knight, whom he perceives as the enemy. For this base and vile deed against "true love" he will be punished by death. It is the duty of his wife to bear and rear the son that destiny created for his demise. There is a certain poetic justice in

this twist of tradition. The one desire of the old king's heart embodies his greatest fear as well.

*Pur ceo k'il ot bon heritage,
Femme prist pur enfanz aveir,
Ki après lui fuissent si heir. (Y 18-20)*

He did not want to die without an heir to whom he could bequeath his vast wealth. That ignominious death ironically occurs at the hands of his heir.

The son in question, Yonec, embodies the triumph of forbidden love; his parents are prohibited by their societies from realizing their common attraction in any other state but the afterlife. Yonec becomes his mother's sole reason to exist. She must, through him, carry out the last wish of Muldumarec. Therefore, he is also an instrument of revenge. Thirdly Yonec signifies the step-father's supreme arrogance and ruthlessness in establishing the security of his own perpetuity on earth. The three members of the preceding generation each have placed all their hopes and dreams within him.

His own journey to maturity occurs in the last hundred verses recounted by Marie. Upon reaching the abbey, on the way to Caerleon, the boy learns of his father's history from the abbot. The mother confirms that this is indeed Yonec's father. He performs his first act of adulthood by striking down the step-father. Yonec is then installed by the city as the proper replacement for his real father. The mother he has laid to rest with Muldumarec. All of this occurs under the auspices of the church, indicating divine approval of

the love affair. Yonec has travelled from his mother's homeland to that of his father and at the same time he has also left behind youth to take up the duties of a man.

We observe in these three male figures two patterns which are indicative of the pre-established life-cycle of men. Yonec and Muldumarec both are indicative of the stage of transition which occurs when a *damoiseau* becomes a *chevalier*. They are both noble and full of life, willing to confront any adventure, all risks and consequences inclusive. The old king of Caerwent typifies the opposite sort of man. He lacks many qualities which would distinguish one of noble bearing; kindness, compassion and common decency in the treatment of his bride. The king's sedentary lifestyle reveals to the reader a false corrupt member of society. The father and son pair clearly manifest a contrasting lifestyle to that of their joint rival. Muldumarec and Yonec are able to develop as people and characters which is seen by their journey through nature's wilderness in order to achieve their respective destinies.

Lanval also tells the tale of a youth in search of a true companion. Unlike the egress of Muldumarec, the lady meets Lanval at the halfway point of his journey, the grove rather than passively waiting. Here we are presented with an inverse structure of the same character scenario as was found in *Yonec*. The male and female characters experience a role reversal in respect to their traditional social rank. The fairy lady comes to rescue Lanval in a time of need.

She seeks him out rather than waiting for his call because she is a fairy and thus not subject to the rules of society.

Lanval is a foreigner both in King Arthur's court and to his lover. He has been rejected and ignored by the members and head of the court to which he is attached. Lanval leaves the town for the forest to seek the companionship refused him by this group of peers. He finds in the fairy more than he ever could have hoped for. She is his ideal and he commits himself to her wholeheartedly.

Lanval returns to the city, now that he has the sponsorship and support of a sovereign, for she rules over his heart; his fealty is hers. This aspect of their relationship is to be tested by his sojourn in the city. Lanval is sworn to secrecy concerning her existence and the related source of his new-found wealth. The location of conflict and refinement, instead of occurring in the forest, will in this case happen in the city.

By insulting the queen, Lanval stands accused by her and the court, who had started to accept him. This reversal of attitudes shows us, the readers, the fickle attitude of courtly society and allows us to see just how far their decline has progressed. Lanval, as a imperfect man, fails to keep his promise of confidentiality by revealing the existence of his lady love. He torments himself despairing of ever seeing her again. His commitment remains strong and true. Despite his broken promise, the fairy lover proves her loyalty towards Lanval. He is acquitted by the society which

had so greatly wronged him. The couple decides to return to Avalun. Having seen the reality of Arthur's court, Lanval has no desire to remain there. His loyalty and commitment to the lady reign supreme.

*Quand la pucele ist fors a l'us,
Sur le palefrei, detriers li,
De plain eslais Lanval sailli!
Od li s'en vaît en Avalun, (L1 638-41)*

He rejects reality and the false promises of a fickle fortune and choses instead to follow love wherever it leads. Reconciled to that society and having satisfied its demands upon him, Lanval finds with his forest maiden all that he previously sought from his social peers.

Chaitivel, a strictly urban tale, does not present us with a clear distinction between the city and the country. It does however give us, as careful readers, an insight into the corruption of civilized life. The four men who seek the hand of the lady comprise a specific cross section of society. Each is a carbon copy of the other three and the four can be seen as one whole unit. These men are continually associated with one another, both in life and death.⁸ They are the corruption of nobility, denoted by their *démasure*. More committed to an unworthy ideal than they are to the city whose protection is their duty, they fall in battle. These men forfeit neither the glory of

⁸ Tant furent tuit de grant valor,
Ne pot eslire le meillur.

.....
Sur sun escu fu mis chescuns;
En la cité les unt portez
A la dame kis ot amez. (C 53-54, 140-142)

battle nor the honor of victory for a truer, more noble cause. Three die outright and the last lies crippled, condemned to life. The last knight's bitter speech reveals to us that all too late, he recognizes the folly of their collective way. The false promises of the city show themselves to be naught but a shadow of reality.

Another urban tale as was *Chaitive*⁷, yet of a different ilk, is *Laüstic*. This story takes place in St. Malo between two neighbors upon whom rests the reputation of the city. The conflict of interest which surfaces concerns one baron's love for the other's wife. The bachelor was well known among his peers as being generous and of a brave nature. This baron leads a very active life: *Mut turneot e despendeit* (L 21). However, he suspends his love of adventure when he falls in love with the lady next door. This shift to a very sedentary, nocturnal lifestyle denotes the commencement of his decline. He no longer interests himself in external matters, denoted by the suspension of motion and motivation in this character. He restricts his life to the tower and window from which he observes the lady at night.⁹ His arena of action becomes more and more restricted as the plot progresses. Finally, when confronted with the casket containing the corpse of the *Laüstic*, the baron gives up the charade. He lacks the true force of love that is needed to carry on the affair. Immediately released from the

⁹ *A la fenestre ester veneit
Pur sun ami qu'ele saveit
Qu'autreteu vie demenot
E le plus de la nuit veillot.* (L 73-76).

relationship, the knight once again takes up his life where he left it off, continuing to pursue his knightly duties for which the nightly ones had previously substituted.

The major difference between the two men surfaces in their ability to move and act within the context of their respective positions. The married man frequently goes out into nature, hence his reason for guarding his wife so strictly. These forays into the countryside reveal that he can and does remain loyal to his first purpose, namely protecting the town. While so obviously a failure within his marriage, he can successfully manage at least one aspect of his life. He leaves no doubt in the minds of his wife, friend and the readers that his law is word in his household. The husband fares no better than the lover under the cynical judgement of Marie's narration. The second baron treats his wife with a ruthless cruelty, perceiving her to be the sole source of fault in this tale. His merciless murder of the nightingale more than adequately communicates the man's opinion of his wife's conduct. The bloody violence of his act shows to the reader that he is no more worthy of admiration than is his friend. While his will does triumph in the final outcome, the husband, as a human being, is severely criticized.

In this *récit*, as well as in the other inner-city tale, no one character comes forth as truly exemplary of noble bearing and attitude. All of the major personae show

themselves to have major flaws. Given that this is true, the one person with the strongest will is destined to gain the upper hand. In this case, that one person is the husband. The nightingale symbolizes each of the three people. It is the lover, too weak to successfully fight the husband. By virtue of its death, the bird also lends credence to the husband's negative reputation. Finally, the laüstic reveals the insipid quality of the lady's love. Desiring to give herself to the bachelor, she instead sends him the symbol of her inadequate commitment. Given the specific spatial reference of St. Malo by the narrator, we are also given a glimpse of the lives of its supposedly most famous citizens. If this is the best that a city can produce, then this commentary is very derogatory indeed.

Le Fresne, while strictly neither urban nor rural in nature, unveils another facet of noble life in the twelfth century. While the main story centers around Fresne herself and, consequently, her mother, there are two men to be examined. They respectively are linked to the mother/daughter pair, the partners of each woman. Firstly, the husband and father of Fresne appears in the plot. While portrayed in a sympathetic manner by Marie, he obviously has trouble controlling his wife. She speaks wickedly and yet he does nothing to restrain her. He does issue a mild rebuke:

*«Dame, fet il, lessiez ester!
Ne devez mie issi parler!
Veritez est que ceste dame
Ad mut esté de bone fame.»* (Fr 45-48)

The final scene of the drama proves the father to be no more forceful or distinctive than he was at the outset. He does not act to punish his wife. He instead proves himself to be a moderate and equitable judge, accepting the repentant wife as well as the long-lost daughter. This character distinguishes himself in no clear way except that of his reasonable demeanor in the face of amazing circumstances. By being neither hot nor cold, the father/husband relegates himself to the realm of supporting cast.

The same will hold true to a certain degree for Fresne's lover. Because the story essentially revolves around Fresne, Gurun simply acts as a foil; a contrasting example against which her love and patient devotion are displayed. He is loyal to her, but that aspect of his relationship with her will be tested. He disdains marriage to any other until pressure mounts from his retainers. This male persona leads a somewhat more active role in the tale as he is the counterpart to the girl. He initially falls in love with Fresne while out at a tournament. This pursuit of honor and renown shows Gurun to be actively involved in the community life, as does his donation to the convent (even though the latter is done under false pretenses.) Gurun is thus established as a success in matters of social consequence.

The second level of intrigue occurs when the knight's vassals urge him to wed and get rid of his mistress. There must be a legitimate heir who could succeed to his land and

inheritance. Here, Gurun fails in that he puts social duty, already a proven virtue in him, above personal concerns. Yet it is this very weakening of resolve in the young lover that makes it possible for Fresne to be restored to her rightful social position. He therefore is the agent of resolution that triggers the *dénouement* of the original intrigue. He unwittingly brings the first man's family back together again. Through no virtue of his own does Gurun end up with the right girl. He merely is an agent of destiny. The story does end in the triumph of true love, yet it is because of the steadfast witness of the daughter not directly because of anything done by the man.

Deus Amanz contains a father and a lover who also react in relation to the daughter/lover, which establishes a rather unique twist to the traditional love triangle. Here we are dealing with a selfish old man who never moves from his castle except to go to the foot of a mountain where he demands much more of the various suitors than he was ever capable of in his prime. By the very nature of this father/daughter relationship, the elderly king stands accused of incest. His refusal to let go of the girl, and hence the past, reveals the king's inability to cope with reality.

The young son of a local count attempts to gain the princess' hand. He has journeyed from his own land to accomplish this. Setting himself up in the court, he proceeds to work his way into the maiden's heart. She

however remains torn between family loyalty and the maturity demanded of her by the relationship. The delicate state of affairs forces these two demands causes them to come in conflict rather than complementing one another.

The young contender must make an extra journey to Salerno in order to achieve his prime directive- to obtain the girl's hand in marriage at any cost. He cannot convince the girl to elope therefore he must prepare to attempt the trial of carrying her up the mountain. This detour shows the boy's determination to break out of adolescence and into the responsibility of adulthood. He will fulfill the letter of the king's law while circumventing the spirit of it.

The training and preparation he undergoes serves mainly to increase his own self-confidence and, essentially immature, he pridefully assumes that he is up to the challenge. Refusing to drink the strength potion which he had journeyed to receive, the young suitor negates his initial obedience to the princess in having made the trip to Salerno.

This male persona has not yet learned the need to occasionally bend the rules, especially when those regulations are unjust. The resultant death of both parties stems from the boy's inability to accept the advice of his charge. The impression from the tone of the narration is that, even if the attempt had been successful, the two lovers would still be too immature to handle their success.

While in the castle or at the city of Salerno, the boy can fool himself into believing that success is possible. Yet once the two are out on the mountain, the task proves to be too great, not by virtue of physical but of mental possibility. The lad does attain the crest of the mountain but has no strength left to live. His true stamina and abilities are stretched to the maximum limit. He just barely completes his task before going on to another realm. The girl, in sympathetic despair, joins him in death. They are united on earth only in their joint tombs which serve as a lesson to all who care to hear their silent testimony. Those who are strong enough to survive the temptations of the city are not always so successful when faced with the challenge presented by man's original domain- nature.

Milun, the main character after whom the lai is named, is a young knight who, as we shall see, has difficulty in maturing. He gains a marvelous reputation by his prowess. But this reputation leads him to commit the ultimate folly which becomes his trademark, changing the entire future. Having heard of Milun's great renown, a young maiden offers him her love and he readily assents to this proposal. While there is nothing unusual or extraordinary about this turn of events, the duration of their affair, being a time of testing and maturation, lasts well beyond the dictates of reason. Twenty years of separation are needed before Milun is capable of obtaining his *bien aimée* in matrimony.

When we first make his acquaintance, Milun is a young, but accomplished knight who impregnates his girl friend. Meeting her frequently in the grove, he gladly shares her company and obviously enjoys her favors. He however cannot rise to the actual status of a true lover, seen by Milun's inability to move from the grove and become accepted in her bedroom, the rightful place for all genuine lovers.¹⁰ Instead of helping her to escape with him or offering advise, he reticently agrees to whatever plan the damsel can devise:

*Milun respunt que il fera
Ceo qu'ele cunseillera. (M 65-66)*

He is unable to commit himself to her and unwilling to take his rightful share of responsibility. His inherently immature nature translates itself into an inability of action concerning the girl.

Milun subsequently decides to leave and goes abroad to seek honor through martial exploits. There is no mention of an effort to be united with his lover. As soon as the child is removed, there is no further purpose for him to stay. In his absence, the girl is given away by her father. When Milun comes back, the affair continues as normal. Milun exhibits a certain amount of grief over the situation, but circumvents the problem rather ingeniously. The communication is established by the use of a swan as

¹⁰ This is the only lai, where the lover cannot seem to find some way into the lady's bower. The two content themselves with the al fresco setting, not even bothering to attempt an entrance into the lady's household.

courier. The two also take up their old habit of *rendez-vous*:

*Ensemble viendrent plusurs feiz.
Nuls ne poet estre si destreiz
Ne si tenuz estreitement
Que il ne truisse liu sovent. (M 285-88)*

In re-establishing the previous pattern of casual love, the couple in question show no signs of having grown wiser with time. They are content to remain within their circumstances instead of rising above them. The crucial point for Milun in this matter of development arrives when he is confronted with the product of his irresponsibility- his son.

The abandoned infant, now a grown youth, gains his status as knight and, in the manner of his father, searches for fame and honor. He is judged the best no matter where he jousts, quickly earning the title *Sans Per*. He arrives at the same stage of social development and responsibility as Milun had achieved in the opening lines of the tale. Pure and wholesome in nature, the youth triumphs abroad and the news of his success reaches the jealous ears of Milun.

Desiring to teach a lesson to this unknown knight, Milun, in the folly of pride, traverses yet again the Channel to do battle. When they meet on the field, the son, younger and therefore more powerful, unseats Milun. It is at this juncture in the narration that the divergent constitutions of father and son become evident. While Milun continues to act immaturely and impulsively, as he is wont to do, the son responds to the challenge and, when he realizes that his contender is an old man, prudently ceases

the action. Helping the elder man to his feet, the knight *Sans Per* distinguishes himself as generous and humble. Thus a potentially deadly tension is dispersed. The field of combat reveals through the attitudes of the two men a common heritage yet a vastly different result.

By recognizing and acknowledging his son, Milun takes the long avoided step to maturity, a step twenty years in the making. Having wronged the boy through rejection at birth, he now has the fortitude and courage to accept publicly what heretofore was only a mistake of youthful exuberance in his eyes. This public acceptance of the son redeems him in the narrator's opinion, for now all the obstacles which blocked his feeble attempts at obtaining the lady are removed, and the husband dies. Yet even so, it is the youth, not Milun, who suggests bringing the two lovers together. He forces his family to unite if for no other reason than for his own legitimacy.

*Unc ne demanderent parent:
Sanz conseil de tute autre gent
Lur fiz amdeus les assembla,
La mere a sun pere dona. (M 525-28)*

It is through no overwhelming motivation that Milun receives his woman. Marie seems to allow this story to end happily for the sake of the forsaken son. And so the two go together to join the lady in her domicile, where she patiently awaits their return.

By leaving the resolving action to the son, Marie implicitly augments his maturity level above that of the older man. The son accomplishes what twenty years of

muddling around could not. His decisive spirit exhibits itself not only on the field but in matters of politics as well. He is all that Milun could have been and more.

The activity and movement of Guigemar are much more complex and offer to us a prime example of the man in search of himself through his search for a suitable companion. Here we are presented with a knight who has won fame and honor for himself at a tender age, like Milun and his son. This knight however has the distinction of being indifferent to love, a situation which will subsequently be remedied. The youth, after a brilliant debut, returns home, indicating that he has not just yet severed the apron strings.

The first scene of activity we are given is in the forest surrounding the paternal domain. Guigemar finds himself confronted by the reality of his existence. Whether born of vanity or indifference, that reality is nonetheless shown for the fault that it is. Being separated from the source of his social identity, the house, Guigemar cannot deny the truth of the hind's prophetic enunciation. He accepts the challenge to grow in character out of the necessity of a physical wound. The wounded thigh externalizes an internal fault that must be resolved before Guigemar can successfully return to civilization. The background scene of the forest relieves him of the social duty and of the mask that heretofore he has borne. The naked truth forces him to act.

The resultant voyage by boat comprises the second stage of Guigemar's journey to manhood. For while he has all the outward sign to confirm his adult standing in society, he lacks the personal confidence thereof. Throwing himself quite literally upon the winds of fate, Guigemar prays for divine guidance and protection as well.

A Deu prie k'en prenge cure,
K'a sun poeir l'ameint a port
Et sil defende de la mort. (G. 201-3)

This desire for protection stems from his fear of the unknown and, as we will later see, undergoes a transformation in the course of events. He learns to protect the lady rather than his own interests.

Gaining the shore in safety, Guigemar meets the lady in whom resides his hope for survival. He is removed from the boat and taken to her chambers. The initial flaw of Guigemar, the inability to love, disappears in proportion to the degree that he falls in love with the lady. Thus the external wound is also healed. However there is now a new wound that Guigemar receives, namely that, after having enjoyed the fruits of his newly established emotional development, he is forcefully separated from the woman he loves. Now he will understand what comprises real suffering.

When in the boat, which once again serves as a metaphor for psychological displacement from the happy medium of his existence, Guigemar testifies to the progress achieved by falling in love:

*La dame regretout sovent
 E prie Deu omnipotent
 Qu'il li dunast hastive mort
 E que jamés ne vienge a port
 S'il ne repeot aveir s'amie,
 K'il desire plus que sa vie. (G 623-28)*

He no longer cares for his own life, now worthless without the lady to share it. She now embodies his *raison d'être* having replaced the former idol of his own ego.

He goes on with his life, returning to his native land. Guigemar persists in ignoring the amorous intentions of the local ladies. This time, however, his stance is acceptable, rooted in the true love of a worthy lady rather than sunk in the mire of vainglory. The love knot which the lady had tied in his shirt not only stands as a test to those who would wish to gain his heart but also as a legitimate explanation of his actions. No one can condemn him now of being a bore in matters of the heart. Instead, it changes Guigemar from a mockery of manhood into the most mysterious and sought-after bachelor, thus increasing his honor and social worth.

The lady finally decides to leave her husband. Guigemar finds her residing at the castle of a nearby friend, at whose port she arrived. He has proven his right to her by virtue of the knot and girtle, but the lord selfishly refuses to give up the fairylike lady. Guigemar's duty now lies in liberating her from this earthly prison. By defying Meriaduc, Guigemar commits himself wholeheartedly to the lady's cause. In freeing her by means of a siege, the young knight proves to all involved that he has gained maturity and wisdom. He is now able to commit himself to another

human being. This augments his worth to the society at large, proving to them as well that he has overcome the character faults which were previously his trademark.

Having removed himself from Meriaduc's castle, Guigemar places himself outside of the social laws and customs that have denied him his rightful prize. By breaking down that same castle, he splits open the false code of ethics, exposing them for the faulty chains that they are. Thus Guigemar makes himself not only fit for society, but of use to it as well. He achieves that tenuous balance between social and personal duty that others find so hard to establish. He thus is rewarded by Marie in the "happily ever after ending" of her choosing.

Eliduc, the final lai of the collection and of our examination, also deals with the social reintegration of a male persona. Whereas *Guigemar* dealt with the problems of budding masculinity, this lai addresses the concerns of the older, well established man. Eliduc, long a favorite with the king, becomes the victim of slanderous gossip and is exiled by his beloved sovereign. Here we have a happily married man who is quite content in all respects. Into the midst of this complacent scene, the foibles of fate exert their influence, thus proving that nothing is so stable as to be a constant.

The first episode of the story finds Eliduc on the shores of England, near Exeter. Hearing rumors of war, Eliduc proceeds to work as a mercenary, as errant knights

are inclined to do. Herein lies the intrigue of the *récit*, for after having saved the day for a local monarch, Eliduc meets the man's daughter and falls in love with her. There is the slight problem in that Eliduc is already married and as a foreigner he must behave properly. While in the country, he does act very courteously, except that he hides from the princess the presence of another woman in his life. It is this aspect of their relationship that will be the center of the plot and the issue to be resolved.

Eliduc easily gains entrance to the princess' chambers, having been invited there by the occupant herself and, moreover, upon the orders of her father. They even sit upon the bed and converse for quite some time, a direct allusion to their future relationship as husband and wife.

*Cele l'aveit par la mein pris,
Desur un lit erent asis.
De plusurs choses unt parlé. (E 297-99)*

Having lived the love-life of an arranged marriage, Eliduc now realizes the extent of what he has here-to-fore lacked. Once again, Eliduc has set himself up in a very advantageous and desirable situation.

Yet, as before, his fortunes change as his original king, having fallen on bad times, requests the aid of his former vassal. Eliduc, as the faithful servant, goes to the aid of the king who had treated him so poorly. Even though he has failed to keep his private promises to his wife, he has proved himself to be an honorable member of society in

respect to his public duty. He truly is the consummate nobleman in this respect.

In his comings and goings across the channel, Eliduc readily fulfills his social requirements. Yet in the same respect, he negates that good by his deceptive ways with the two women. He cannot extract himself from the dilemma created by the circumstances of fate. He desperately attempts to obtain Guilliadun by persuading her to run off with him. He thus wrongs the king who had been so hospitable to Eliduc, the foreign knight.

In the first three crossings, Marie does not make much of the details of the voyage, restraining herself to one verse;

A la mer vient, si est passez, (E 87).

When it comes to the fourth time across the water, however, we get a more complete description of the voyage.

*Mes quand il durent ariver,
Une turmente eurent en mer
E un vent devant eus leva,
Ki luin del hafne les geta;
Lur verge brusa e fendi
E tut lur sigle desrumpi. (E 815-20)*

The violence of the elements prevents the boat from reaching land, as if nature rebels against aiding Eliduc in his sin. For, in the words of the unfortunate sailor, he brings the maiden back in defiance of God and the law. When in the girl's city, Eliduc was able to deceive her, but now, faced with the reality of their situation, he can no longer hide behind the mask of virtue and excellence that are his

surface traits. Nature presents Eliduc with an accurate metaphor of his inner turmoil- the storm.

As just punishment for his lies, Eliduc loses the maiden to a deathlike sleep. It is as if there were no other allowable way to get her to shore. Alive, she torments him with her presence. Dead, she haunts his every moment. Eliduc leaves Guillliadun in the forest chapel, reflecting their natural right to be together by virtue of love. The chapel setting is chosen to symbolize that Eliduc has now given up his love to God.

*Devant l'auter la cucherum
E a Deu la cumanderum. (E 929-30)*

Only God can redeem them from this tragic situation. Guillliadun's time in the chapel also speaks of the need for sanctification in their relationship. Eliduc makes daily pilgrimages to the site as if to try to purge his soul with sorrow. This choice of the forest chapel as a continuance of their previous rendez-vous serves as a temporary storage place for the girl and gives Marie time to prepare the way for an integration of the two parallel existences that Eliduc has led.

The joining of his two lives occurs as a direct result of Guildeluec's concern for her husband. The virtuous wife becomes the tool of God. Divine Providence uses her to revive her successor, unite the two lovers and then to establish an abbey. Through no virtue of Eliduc's does he receive Guillliadun. But because of his wife, the split halves of his shattered life are fused back together. He is

now free to bring Guilliadun into his society. For now, having publicly and privately acknowledged his wrongs, Eliduc is re-established to his former status and, like Job, with the increased blessing of a new and prosperous life.

Despite this happy ending, Marie still continues her tale. She choses to end this final lai by placing all of her principle characters in the abbey. There they can prepare to make their final journey across time and into eternity. Marie describes this time as one of peaceful joy. The three are there as a result of having lives abounding in good works. This added detail to an already completed plot line augments the underlying concept that God approves of their previous resolution to the intrigue. It also serves to give a moral lesson to the readers, showing that life can be lived with a perfect love both between man and woman and between individuals and God.

In our examination of the various lais, we see that they readily divide themselves into three categories based on the resolution of a common plot. That plot is one man's inner search for himself through the external actions of seeking out a mate. The most common resolution chosen by Marie is that of death for one or more of the principal characters. In *Equitan*, *Deus Amanz* and *Yonec*, both the man and his lady die. In *Chaitivel*, three of the four suitors are killed outright while the one survivor remains virtually useless to society. With *Laüstic*, there is the figurative death of the two lovers substantiated by the dead bird.

Another possible outcome to the tales that is less frequent but still viable sees the two lovers going back to the woman's city. This is most evident in *Lanval*, where the young prince follows his lady back to Avalun. Milun returns to his lover's home as well, but more with the intent to liberate her than to permanently reside there. With *Chievrefoil*, Tristan tries to gain entrance into Yseut's society, but fails in this goal. Finally, there are four *lais* which end with some degree of successful closure. These are the tales where the couple settle down in the man's city, as is the socially established norm. They are *Guigemar*, *Bisclavret*, *Fresne* and *Eliduc*. With *Bisclavret*, the man is justified before his peers even though he loses his wife and remains in his original scene of action. The other three present us with two lovers who settle down to live happily ever after in the man's city. For the majority of the *lais*, there is a somewhat tragic ending, indicating that while Marie believes in the eventual triumph of love, it is not always possible to realize this goal in the present life.

As previously noted, each type of character acts from within his own unique setting and fulfills his function in the plot according to his reactions within the given context. The spatial displacement of a particular individual will result in a change of behavioral patterns. When in the social milieu of the court or city, men are able to cover up their true intentions and motivations. However, as soon as

these men are removed from the security of their social position, from which they derive their identity and sense of self-worth, the true motives of their hearts are exposed. This exposure is necessary, for they cannot rectify a character flaw until they are willing to admit that a problem exists. Thus the function of the forest is to unveil the source of the problem while the city, with its pressures and turmoil, serves as a crucible to purge the evil from within the man's psychological makeup.

The man undergoes a horizontal displacement in contrast to the vertical one of women. He wanders between the two endposts of his own city and that of the woman in an attempt to achieve a realistic balance between the demands of private and public duties. The repeated trips of Guigemar, Muldumarec, Milun and Eliduc exemplify this type of motion. As men are the most mobile members of society, this motion often constitutes the plot structure of the *récit*.

In tracing the path of development for each of the characters in the individual lais, we have examined the role of displacement in the presentation of male and female persona. We have also discussed the reader reaction to being disassociated from his reality and relocated into the world of the Lais. Each of these various aspects is directly derived from the general pattern of the stories--displacement and redemption. The cohesive structure of the Lais forms a tight network of events that unite around a central theme. For the Lais, this theme is the physical displacement of characters as a motif of psychological maturation and social redemption.

Marie's basic concern is with the personal needs of the characters, while the social aspect of the plot is seen as a secondary result of the primary need. As the individual's recognition of a need for self-fulfillment grows, his or her struggle for the freedom to satisfy this need creates a tension between personal quest for freedom and social obligation. The internal conflict created by the divergent demands causes the man to come to the realization that he is lacking the resources necessary to resolve the dilemma. He needs a Paraclete, a helper who can supply that which is lacking in his psychological make-up. This aide, the woman, will render it possible for the man to resolve his internal conflict and thus free himself to be of use to the community at large.

As the mobile and active member of society, the man and his movements constitute the central action of the plot in the Lais. Characters exist as functions of the plot. Narration is how the plot is worked out and brought to life; a general plan expressed via the explicitness of detail. Thus in narrating the story of a man searching for a mate, Marie gives us twelve distinct narrations formulated from one basic plot, twelve variations on one theme.

In each story, the male figure's gradual discovery of real values through love develops through his experience with personal crisis. The protagonist goes through a type of ordeal that exposes his true character as being weak and imperfect. He then has the choice of rectifying the flaws or ignoring them. The way in which he deals with the various problems denotes whether or not he is a success or a failure. The sign of a successful resolution lies within the man's ability to confront the problem. Generally, this sign of victory is the return of the man to his original city with the woman by his side. He cannot be successful if he does not include his female counter-part in the action.

Thus we see that the goal of the male protagonist is to reverse his horizontal displacement - his exile from one city has forced him to traverse the forest and seek refuge in the city of the woman. He needs to return to the maternal locale from which he fled. The movement from city to city constitutes a search for someone who will take over the nurturing aspect of the relationship from the man's mother,

a vital need for the man that must be filled. The woman becomes the personification of his goal in that she will take the place formerly held by his mother. She now guards the hearth which is the heart and center of the new domicile.

A second, complementary and crucial goal of the man is to displace the female. The man must convince his lady to follow him back to his native land. She must join him in the redemption process which will gain him entrance back into the community. When the lady leaves her home, she becomes one with the man, sharing his goals, dreams and aspirations. She participates in the reintegration process of the man with society but she does not merely fulfill a secondary function in the plot. The woman must also undergo her own individual maturation by means of displacement.

The woman's spatial movement comprises a vertical shift in direct contrast to the horizontal one of her mate. Before the lady can be free to follow the man, she must prepare herself mentally and emotionally to leave her home. This preparation embodies the psychological shift in attitudes about life and her role in society as a member of that society. The three traditional locations from which the woman influences the man are the tower, the bedroom and the grove or garden. These places indicate the various role of the woman as idol, lover and companion. If the lady can make the required spatial and mental transitions implied by each space, she will have proven herself capable of aiding the

man in their now mutual goal of gaining entrance into his city.

The entrance into the community and the community's acceptance of the new family unit created by the two individuals denotes the resolution of the plot. In other words, if the couple are admitted back into the kin-group, they are portrayed by Marie as victorious. The variety of resolutions contained in the collection of *lais* reveals to the conscientious reader that, while love is often a positive force, it is not always possible to realize the fruits of love in this world. Often the society will refuse to re-admit the lovers because they cannot resolve the conflict of loyalties between social and private duties. Thus death becomes one of the most common modes of *dénouement* stated in *Equitan*:

*Bien les tiendrent, mut s'entramrent,
Puis en mururent e finerent.* (Eq, 183-84).

Another probable outcome is that the two must return to the lady's home because of the incompatibility between the man and his peers, which is shown in the case of *Lanval*:

Pur vus guerpirai tutes genz. (L1, 128)

Thus, while the couple may be ready to re-enter and work within the community, that group may not be worthy of their efforts on its behalf. Thus Marie presents us with a variety of alternate resolutions to the dramatic conflict as seen by the acceptance or rejection of the couple by society.

The courtly society, of which Marie was a member, provides an exemplary setting for the twelve plots of the

Lais. She examines the origins of her own social milieu and, at the same time, transcends it by the universality of her tales. We see the chivalric world in its most vulnerable moments. While the tales which she wrote were set in a more distant past than that of twelfth century France and England, the issues discussed are none-the-less relevant to her audiences both contemporary and future.

When writing the Lais, Marie obviously must have had a specific audience in mind. Discussed above, the reasons for this composition are three fold: to preserve Celtic tales, to occupy her mind and for the benefit of her readers.¹ The first, and most obvious, recipient is the king of whom she speaks in the prologue.

*En l'honor de vus, nobles reis,
Ki tant estes pruz e curteis,
A ki tute joie s'encline
Et en ki qu'er tuz biens racine,
M'entremis des lais assembler,
Par rime faire e reconter. (P, 43-48)*

Having seen that the redemption of men comprises a major portion of the thematic and narrative structure of the twelve stories, we can see where social instruction to men in general is implied.

There are numerous one-line instructions in the lais on proper comportment of a man when in the presence of a lady; one of the most notable instructions is found in *Eliduc*:

*Quant en la chambre dut entrer,
Le chamberlenc enveie avant,
E il s'alat aukes targant
De ci que cil revint ariere. (E, 286-89).*

¹ See introduction, page 1.

"One ought not enter unannounced into a lady's chamber" is the implied rule expounded by these few verses. Or, as in the case of the two lovers, a man should be able to receive counsel from his lady:

*"Amis, bevez vostre meschine!"
Ja ne la volt oïr ne creire;
A grant anguisse od tut le eire. (DA, 210-12)*

Thus we can see that the men in the audience were certainly the recipients of a generous portion of Marie's attention in the composition of the stories.

A larger and more homogeneous group of potential recipients for the Lais can be found in the fact that Marie wrote out her stories. Thus the immediate and future readers of her manuscript would have been taken into consideration when she was composing the collection. Evidently, the focus upon their particular needs of introduction to and comprehension of the context and setting of the Lais is answered by the care and detail put into the spatial and temporal configuration found at the outset of each narrative unit. Marie always takes meticulous care to establish the settings of her works.

As observed in Chapter One, the general setting chosen for the collection is that of *Bretagne*. Marie either states directly that this is the locale or she uses place names which are traditionally linked to that Celtic land. As for the temporal element of the texts, the use of *jadis* and *ancien* serve as signs to tell us that we are dealing with a time distant from our own. Each introductory section of the

twelve tales serves to take the readers back in time, to disassociate them from their current social context.

The purpose behind the dislocation of the reader is analogous to that of the characters; namely, through the experience with the text, a person can learn from and gain knowledge through reading about the characters' experiences. Being taken out of their standard, comfortable surroundings and temporarily placed in the context of the *lais* strips the readers of their own socially-imposed identities and allows them to explore and discover the same lessons of life that are developed through the variety of characters and situations presented in the *Lais*.

No matter what cross-section the audience is composed of, the intent and motivation of Marie de France are the same- to instruct and entertain her readers in a way both pleasing and productive. By her style of her narration and the wit of her composition, Marie proves herself to be a world-class writer, attested to by the enduring popularity and appeal of the *Lais*. A reading of the collection enriches the recipient. The effort, energy and time put into the text is never wasted but richly rewarded by the enlightenment of the mind and entertainment of the soul- the goal of literature and culture throughout the ages.

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