in which case return to home and family is also return to an enlarged home and family.

This story pattern is characteristic of many fairy stories, medieval romances, Shakespearean comedies, novels, and popular movies. It not only represents desire but activates desire in its readers: the pleasure we take in such stories derives from our desire for the reintegration of lives in a coherent and constructive narrative. The desired pattern can also, of course, be adapted in many variations. In particular, it can be activated in order to be frustrated: some protagonists, particularly adulterous ones like Tristan and Ysolt, never reach home, forever needing to defer that unreachable happy ending of recognition.

Romances, then, are symbolic stories, replaying and allaying the fears of the young as they face the apparently insuperable challenges of the adult world. Their deepest wisdom is this: civilization is not a unitary concept. To enter and remain in the world of civilized order, we must, say romances, have commerce with all that threatens it. To regain Rome at the center, we must first be tested in the marginal wilds of romance. To be recognized and found, we must first be lost.

The romances offered here exemplify different possibilities derived from this story structure. *Sir Orfeo* is the only classic example, true in almost every respect to the model sketched above. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and Chaucer's *Wife of Bath's Tale*, following this cluster, play fascinating games with classic romance structure. *Milun* and *Lanval* suggest different possibilities for romance within the tight and suffocating context of the medieval court. *Chevrefoil* expresses the way the aspiration to achieve a happy ending is all the more painfully intense because impossible. The earlier sample from Thomas's *Tristran* (pp. 140–43) underlines the inevitable end of such an impossible passion.

MARIE DE FRANCE

Much of twelfth-century French literature was composed in England in the Anglo-Norman dialect (see p. 11). Prominent among the earliest poets writing in the French vernacular, who shaped the genres, themes, and styles of later medieval European poetry, is the author who, in an epilogue to her *Fables*, calls herself Marie de France. That signature tells us only that her given name was Marie and that she was born in France, but circumstantial evidence from her writings shows that she spent much of her life in England. A reference to her in a French poem written in England around 1180 speaks of "dame Marie" who wrote "lais" much loved and praised, read, and heard by counts, barons, and knights and indicates that her poems also appealed to ladies who listened to them gladly and joyfully.

Three works can be safely attributed to Marie, probably written in the following order: the *Lais* [English "lay" refers to a short narrative poem in verse], the *Fables*, and *St. Patrick's Purgatory*. Marie's twelve lays are short romances (they range from 118 to 1,184 lines), each of which deals with a single event or crisis in the affairs of noble lovers. In her prologue, Marie tells us that she had heard these *performed*, and in several of the lays she refers to the Breton language and Breton storytellers—that is, professional minstrels from the French province of Brittany or the Celtic parts of Great Britain. Marie's lays provide the basis of the genre that came to be known as the "Breton lay." In the prologue Marie dedicates the work to a "noble king," who is most likely to have been Henry II of England, who reigned from 1154 to 1189.

The portrait of the author that emerges from the combination of these works is of a highly educated noblewoman, proficient in Latin and English as well as her native French, with ideas of her own and a strong commitment to writing. Scholars have proposed several Maries of the period who fit this description to identify the author. A likely candidate is Marie, abbess of Shaftesbury, an illegitimate daughter of Geoffrey of Anjou and thus half-sister of Henry II. Correct or not, such an identification points to the milieu in which Marie moved and to the kind of audience she was addressing.

Many of Marie's lays contain elements of magic and mystery. Medieval readers would recognize that *Lanval* is about a mortal lover and a fairy bride, although the word "fairy" is not used in the tale. In the Middle Ages fairies were not thought of as the small creatures they became in Elizabethan and later literature. Fairies are supernatural, sometimes dangerous, beings who possess magical powers and inhabit another world. Their realm in some respects resembles the human (fairies have kings and queens), and fairies generally keep to themselves and disappear when humans notice them. But the tales are often about crossovers between the human and fairy worlds. *Sir Orfeo* and Chaucer's *Wife of Bath's Tale* are such stories.

Marie's narrative *Milun* has a tight family unit at its core, but that unit is divided in time and space by an oppressive marital system. Testing consists of long deferral; ability to recognize signs; and intergenerational violence, between father and son, that turns out to be constructive.

Chevrefoil, the shortest of Marie's lays, tells of a brief encounter between Tristran (here Tristram) and Ysolt (the Queen). The lay exemplifies the pain of their separation as well as the stratagems by which the lovers are forced to communicate and meet. The title refers to an image from the natural world that serves as a symbol of the inextricable and fatal character of the love that binds them to one another.

Marie wrote in eight-syllable couplets, which was the standard form of French narrative verse, employed also by Wace and Chrétien de Troyes. Here is what the beginning of Marie's prologue to the *Lais* says about her view of a writer's duty and, implicitly, of her own talent:

Ki Deu ad duné escïence	He to whom God has given knowledge
E de parler bon' eloquence	And the gift of speaking eloquently,
Ne s'en deit taisir ne celer,	Must not keep silent nor conceal the gift.
Ainz se deit volunters mustrer.	But he must willingly display it.

All translations of Marie's lays are by Dorothy Gilbert. All notes are by the translator.

Milun

Who wishes various tales to tell
must vary forms to do it well,
speak a propos, with reason, sense,
for this will please the audience.
Just now I shall begin "Milun,"
revealing, by a brief sermon
just how it happened, how and why
this tale was formed and named, this *lai*.

In South Wales he was born, Milun.
From the day he was dubbed, no one
he found, no single chevalier,
could knock him off his destrier.[1]

1. Steed (French).

He excelled among ch
noble and valiant, pro
well known he was in
in Norway, also in Go
in Logres and in Alba
many watched Milun
Loved for his prowess,
and many princes hon
In his same country
I do not know what na
He had a daughter, be
and a most courtly de
Much she heard ment
and she began to love
She sent a messenger;
if it should please him
This news filled Milur
he thanked the demoi
willingly said he'd be
be true, and never qui
Quite courtly his respo
Rich gifts he gave the
and great affection pro
"Now, friend, see to
"that I may speak with
that we meet with due
Carry to her my golde
on my behalf this mes
that when it pleases he
send thee here; I'll ret
The servant took his
this message to the de
gave her the ring, and
performed the task, an
The girl was overjoyed
that love had thus bee

So in a garden, set n
her chamber, in great j
of spirit, she kept rend
Oh, frequently they m
He came so much,[5] he
that she conceived, thi
When she perceived sh
she summoned Milun,
and told him what had
honor and good name
since she'd engaged in

2. Logres is England; Albany is an old
Scotland.
3. Young lady; damsel (French).
4. Friend, lover.
5. The double entendre of English "ca
came so much"—does not occur in Mar

He excelled among chevaliers,
noble and valiant, proud and fierce;
well known he was in Ireland,
in Norway, also in Gotland,
in Logres and in Albany[2]
many watched Milun enviously.
Loved for his prowess, though, Milun;
and many princes honored him.
In his same country lived a lord;
I do not know what name he had.
He had a daughter, beautiful,
and a most courtly demoiselle.[3]
Much she heard mention of Milun
and she began to love the man.
She sent a messenger; she'd be
if it should please him, his *amie*.[4]
This news filled Milun with delight;
he thanked the demoiselle for it,
willingly said he'd be her lover—
be true, and never quit her, never!
Quite courtly his response to her.
Rich gifts he gave the messenger,
and great affection promised him.
"Now, friend, see to it," said Milun,
"that I may speak with my *amie*,
that we meet with due secrecy.
Carry to her my golden ring;
on my behalf this message bring,
that when it pleases her, then she
send thee here; I'll return with thee."
The servant took his leave, to tell
this message to the demoiselle,
gave her the ring, and said he'd well
performed the task, and done her will.
The girl was overjoyed to hear
that love had thus been granted her.

So in a garden, set nearby
her chamber, in great jollity
of spirit, she kept rendez-vous;
Oh, frequently they met, these two!
He came so much,[5] he loved so well,
that she conceived, this demoiselle.
When she perceived she was *enceinte*,[6]
she summoned Milun, made her plaint,
and told him what had come to pass;
honor and good name lost, alas,
since she'd engaged in this affair.

2. Logres is England; Albany is an old name for Scotland.
3. Young lady; damsel (French).
4. Friend, lover.
5. The double entendre of English "came"—"he came so much"—does not occur in Marie's original or, as far as I know, in Marie's language; I have not found it in the many ribald tales of the period. I have retained it in this translation, thinking the pun consistent with Marie's wit and worldly spirit.
6. Pregnant (French).

Judgment on her would be severe:
torture by sword, or she might be
sold into foreign slavery.
The ancients had such customs then,
and in that time such things were done.
Milun responded that he would
do what her counsel said he should.
"Take this child," said she, "at its birth;
my married sister lives up north,
up in Northumberland's her home.
She's a rich, wise, and worthy dame.
If in writing you display it,
if in words you speak and say it,
this is your sister's child you bring,
a cause of her great suffering,
it will be nurtured well, she'll see,
boy, girl, whichever one it be.
And hang around its neck your ring,
also a letter you must bring,
written within, its father's name
and the hard story of its dame.
When the child's big, and fully grown,
and to sufficient age has come
so it can reason understand,
letter and ring into its hand
she should give, so it may discover
while it cares for these things, its father."

They kept her counsel thoroughly
through the term of her pregnancy
until the damsel's time to bear.
Then an old woman cared for her,
with whom she trusted all she did.
This dame concealed all, all she hid,
never gave hint of the affair
by word, by manner, or by air.
Beautiful was the damsel's son.
Around its neck the ring she hung,
also a pouch of silk; within
the letter, which no one had seen.
She laid all in a cradle; over
these treasures tucked a linen cover.
She placed beneath the infant's head
a useful pillow, fine and good;
a coverlet placed over him
hemmed all about with marten skin.
All, the old woman gave Milun
who, in the garden, took his son.
He bade his serving-folk that they
transport the infant loyally.
Through all the towns upon their way
they seven times stopped on each day
to rest, let the child suck,
bathe him, put him to be
They took the straightest
found the dame, gave the
And she received the chil
letter and seal and little
When she discovered wh
her loving care was marv
Those who had brought
to their own country wer

Out of his country wer
a warrior, hired, to win
Meanwhile his sweethea
Her sire bestowed her o
a baron of that region, ri
and powerful, his fame
And when she learned th
past reason she was desc
Much she regretted her
with Milun, for her deed
She'd borne a child, a se
straightway her lord wou
"Alas," she said, "what
Me, take a lord? Not pos
No longer virgin, no mo
I'll all my days be servin
I little knew how things
I thought to marry my *a*
We'd have concealed th
never heard talk by anyo
Why live? To die is best
But I am not the least b
all around me are guard
young ones and old, my
who loathe love, with g
always, and who love m
I am compelled to suffe
if only I could die! Alas
The time came; she
led to her lord upon the

Back to his country
a pensive and a grievin
Great pain he showed,
but he took comfort fr
that nearby lay the cou
was home to her he lov
Milun considered how

7. Friend, lover (masculine form of *ami*
8. The line in the original seems ambi
sis sires l'en ad amenee, *sires* could refer

to rest, let the child suck, and then
bathe him, put him to bed again.
They took the straightest route, and there
found the dame, gave the child to her.
And she received the child with joy—
letter and seal and little boy.
When she discovered who he was
her loving care was marvelous!
Those who had brought the baby boy
to their own country went their way.

Out of his country went Milun,
a warrior, hired, to win renown.
Meanwhile his sweetheart was at home.
Her sire bestowed her on a man,
a baron of that region, rich
and powerful, his fame worth much.
And when she learned this was her fate
past reason she was desolate.
Much she regretted her affair
with Milun, for her deeds felt fear.
She'd borne a child, a serious fault,
straightway her lord would know of it.
"Alas," she said, "what shall I do?
Me, take a lord? Not possible!
No longer virgin, no more maid,
I'll all my days be serving maid.
I little knew how things would be;
I thought to marry my *ami*.[7]
We'd have concealed the liaison,
never heard talk by anyone.
Why live? To die is best for me.
But I am not the least bit free,
all around me are guardians,
young ones and old, my chamberlains,
who loathe love, with great enmity,
always, and who love misery.
I am compelled to suffer thus—
if only I could die! Alas!"
The time came; she was given away;
led to her lord upon the day.[8]

Back to his country came Milun,
a pensive and a grieving man.
Great pain he showed, great sorrow felt,
but he took comfort from the thought
that nearby lay the country which
was home to her he loved so much.
Milun considered how he could

7. Friend, lover (masculine form of *amie*).
8. The line in the original seems ambiguous. In *sis sires l'en ad amenee*, *sires* could refer either to the father, so keen to marry his daughter off to the baron and lead her to him, or to the baron himself, now her lord.

alert his love, or send her word
that he was, once again, at home
without the message being known.
A letter he composed, Milun,
and sealed. He had a much-loved swan;
he placed the letter round its throat
and in its feathers hid the note.
He called one of his squires to come,
And with this speech instructed him:
"Change thy clothes; quickly go," said he,
"to the *chastel*[9] of my *amie*.
My swan thou shalt transport with thee;
take care that, for a surety,
that maid, manservant, either one
present my sweetheart with the swan!"
He did as he was bid, this man;
at that he left and took the swan.
The route he knew, the straightest road,
and came there, quickly as he could,
on his way passing through the town;
now to the main gate he has come.
The porter saw him, called to him:
"Hear me, friend," called out Milun's man.
"My occupation, you must know,
is catching birds; that's what I do.
In a field under Caerleon,
with my snare, I have caught a swan.
I wish protection, strong and sure;
thus I present the swan to her
so that I not be hindered here,
charged and accused, as now I fear."
To him replied the officer:
"Friend, for sure no one speaks with her.
Nevertheless I will find out
if I could locate near, some spot
where I could take you, lead you there.
Then I would let you speak with her."
The porter went into the hall.
He saw two knights there, that was all,
at a large table; seated thus,
they much amused themselves at chess.
The porter came back hastily,
and led the man in such a way
that no one saw him in the hall,
noticed or hindered them at all.
Now at the chamber, at his call
the door was opened; a *pucelle*[1]
went to her lady, took the swan;
thus was the presentation done.

9. Castle (Anglo-Norman French).
1. A "maid," in most of the English senses. Here, it means a maidservant. In line 135 it obviously means a virgin; in line 136, a maidservant. It can also mean a "maiden, young girl" in a more general sense.

The lady called her valet
And gave instructions to
"See that my swan he
cared for, and has suffic
"Dame," said the man
"this is a gift for you alo
splendid, and fit for roya
How beautiful, how fine
He put it in her hands,
received the present gra
Her fingers felt the h
under the feathers felt t
She trembled; her blood
the note, she knew, was
Some recompense she g
then he could go, his ta
She was alone now in
she called a servant gir
unlaced the letter from
broke the seal, saw the
right at the top. Oh, ce
she knew the name of
A hundred times she k
weeping before speech
There at the top, the te
all he confided, all he
the great distress and
that Milun suffered, n
"Now it was at her p
to kill him, or see him
If some device she cou
whereby they two coul
she should write back
and send the letter wi
First the bird must ha
then she must starve
three days; and then a
she must attach her a
and let him go; then h
flying once more to hi
When she had read
and understood all in
she kept the swan; he
Fine food and drink h
A month, in her chan

But now hear more
How she found, by h
parchment and ink,
wrote such a letter as
and with a ring seale
The swan she then a

The lady called her valet, then,
And gave instructions to the man;
"See that my swan here is well fed,
cared for, and has sufficient food."
"Dame," said the man who'd brought the swan,
"this is a gift for you alone,
splendid, and fit for royalty!
How beautiful, how fine, just see!"
He put it in her hands, and she
received the present graciously.
Her fingers felt the head, the throat;
under the feathers felt the note.
She trembled; her blood froze; the swan,
the note, she knew, was from Milun.
Some recompense she gave his man;
then he could go, his task was done.
She was alone now in the room;
she called a servant girl to come;
unlaced the letter from the swan;
broke the seal, saw the name "Milun"
right at the top. Oh, certainly
she knew the name of her *ami*!
A hundred times she kissed the note,
weeping before speech passed her throat.
There at the top, the text she read,
all he confided, all he said,
the great distress and agony
that Milun suffered, night and day:
"Now it was at her pleasure whether
to kill him, or see him recover
If some device she could discover
whereby they two could speak together
she should write back to him in turn
and send the letter with the swan.
First the bird must have care and rest,
then she must starve him, let him fast,
three days; and then around his throat
she must attach her answering note,
and let him go; then he would come
flying once more to his first home."
When she had read all that he wrote,
and understood all in the note,
she kept the swan; he sojourned there.
Fine food and drink he had from her!
A month, in her chamber, had good care.

But now hear more of this affair!
How she found, by her stratagem,
parchment and ink, made use of them,
wrote such a letter as he sought,
and with a ring sealed up her note.
The swan she then allowed to fast,

, a maidservant. It can
ıg girl" in a more gen-

and then into the air it cast
with the note, and the famished bird
craving and longing for its food
flew hastily, until it came
to its first shelter, its first home.
To the town, to the house, the swan
flew; to the feet, then, of Milun.
When he sees it, how joyful he!
He held its wings delightedly,
summoned a steward, so he could
give the pet swan its well-earned food.
From the swan's neck he took the note,
from end to end read all she wrote;
tokens and greetings in the feathers
gave him delights well known to lovers:
"Without him I can know no good,
no joy; his sentiments he should
return, as she'd done, by the swan."
Hastily he'll comply, Milun.

Twenty years these two lived this way,
The knight Milun and his *amie*,
always the swan their emissary,
no other intermediary.
Thus they would cause the bird to fast,
then let him fly off with his trust.
Then the one who received the bird
knew very well to give him food.
Sometimes they met, she and Milun.
No lover's so afflicted, none
so much constrained or so beset
they cannot find a way to meet.

The lady who had nursed their son
devoted such attention
he grew of age under her care;
and then she dubbed him chevalier.
He was a fine young handsome man!
Letter and ring she gave him then,
explained to him who was his mother,
and told the fortunes of his father:
the best, she said, of chevaliers,
how worthy, and how bold and fierce,
no better knight upon this earth
for reputation, valor, worth.
And when she had revealed this truth
and he had listened well enough,
his father's prowess and this word
made him rejoice at all he heard.
Then to himself he thought and spoke:
"He'll be considered small by folk,
if he was sired by such a man,

a chevalier of such reno
who does not seek a gre
leaving the land from w
Convinced of this nec
only one night more wo
and took his leave the f
The lady then had muc
of admonitions; those b
she gave him money for
At Southampton he p
since over sea he meant
To Barfluet[2] he went st
and so he came to Britt
He tourneyed there;
wealthy men's friendshi
and raised his lance in
invariably he came off
He loved the poor knig
riches and prizes, the y
took the poor in his ser
shared the won wealth
In one land he'd no wis
but in all countries ove
he bore with him his fa
so courtly that he knev
His prowess, largess, h
at length to his own co
that there was from th
who crossed the sea to
whose prowess, genero
largesse, were all so gr
this famous, nameless
was called by all the k
Praise of this fine k
this man who'd such c
much Milun suffered,
to himself of this knig
While he himself set f
bore arms, engaged hi
none, in the country c
must prized, or praise
A plan he then resolve
he'd cross the sea, ma
and with this chevalie
injure him, harm him
Rage spurred him to
if he could knock the
he'd finally be disgrac
Milun would then see
who from the country

2. Modern Barfleur.

a chevalier of such renown,
who does not seek a greater fame,
leaving the land from which he came."
  Convinced of this necessity,
only one night more would he stay,
and took his leave the following day.
The lady then had much to say
of admonitions; those bestowed,
she gave him money for the road.
  At Southampton he passed straight through,
since over sea he meant to go.
To Barfluet[2] he went straightway,
and so he came to Brittany.
  He tourneyed there; gave largesse; sought
wealthy men's friendship. When he fought,
and raised his lance in any joust,
invariably he came off best.
He loved the poor knights; when he won
riches and prizes, the young man
took the poor in his service; he
shared the won wealth most lavishly.
In one land he'd no wish to stay,
but in all countries over sea
he bore with him his fame, his valor,
so courtly that he knew much honor.
His prowess, largess, his great fame
at length to his own country came,
that there was from that land a youth
who crossed the sea to prove his worth,
whose prowess, generosity,
largesse, were all so great that he,
this famous, nameless chevalier,
was called by all the knights "Sans Peer."[3]
  Praise of this fine knight reached Milun,
this man who'd such distinction won,
much Milun suffered, much complained
to himself of this knight, so famed.
While he himself set forth on journeys,
bore arms, engaged himself in tourneys,
none, in the country of his birth,
must prized, or praised, be, for his worth!
A plan he then resolved upon:
he'd cross the sea, make haste, be gone,
and with this chevalier he'd joust,
injure him, harm him, do his worst.
Rage spurred him to pursue this course;
if he could knock the man off horse
he'd finally be disgraced; that done,
Milun would then seek out his son,
who from the country was long gone,

2. Modern Barfleur.

3. I.e., "Without Equal."

his whereabouts and fate unknown.
To his *amie* he made this known;
he wished her blessing on this plan.
All his heart's feelings to reveal,
he sent the letter with its seal,
to my best knowledge, by the swan.
Her desire she must tell in turn.
When she had heard thus from her lover,
she thanked him greatly for the favor,
since, if their son he could discover,
he must leave home, the seas cross over,
find out the fortunes of the boy;
never would she stand in his way.
This message of hers reached Milun;
appareled splendidly, he soon
sailed to, then passed through, Normandy;
and traveled on to Brittany.
He cultivated folk, and went
seeking out any tournament,
rich lodgings he took frequently,
rewarding service courteously.
All that one winter, I believe,
In that land Milun chose to live;
many good knights chose to retain.
Then, after Easter, once again
it was the time for tournaments,
also of wars and violence.[4]
They gathered at Mount Saint Michel,
Normans and Bretons and, as well,
Flemings and French assembled there,
but Englishmen were rather rare.
Milun, one of the earliest
came, bold and fierce, upon his quest.
Now the fine chevalier he sought;
for certain, people could point out
the region that the knight was from,
his arms, his shield, and so quite soon
they'd shown the warrior to Milun,
who now most closely studied him.
Tourniers gathered now; each knight
who wished to joust, soon found a fight;
who wished to search the ranks, could choose
soon enough, chance to win or lose,
encounter with an adversary.
But, let me tell you Milun's story.
He was most valiant in the fray,
and he received much praise that day,
but the youth I have told of, he
over all, got *le dernier cri*.[5]

4. Tournaments and warfare were banned by the Church at certain times of the year, including Lent, in keeping with the principle of "the truce of God." The ban was sometimes ignored.
5. That is, the youth got the loudest, greatest cry of acclaim from observers and participants.

No one could match him,
in tourneying or in a jous
How he behaved, Milun t
how well he spurred, how
for all his envy of the kni
his skill filled Milun with
He sought the ranks; he
there they engaged and j
Milun struck so ferociou
his foe's lance shattered,
but he was not unhorsed
so hardily he struck Milu
that from his charger he
At that, the young man
under the visor, the whit
white beard; his grief wa
Milun's horse by the rein
to him; bestowed it on h
"Sire, mount up, do! I
I'm greatly troubled in m
that to a fine man of you
I've dealt such insult, su
Milun leaped on his h
on the youth's finger rec
the ring, as he returned
and to the young man h
"Friend, listen! Say, b
by the Omnipotent's swe
what name is that borne
What is thy name? Who
I wish to know the truth
much, a great traveler;
much sought in countri
battle and war and tour
never, by strike of cheva
did I fall from my destr
Thou hast, though, jous
wonderfully could I lov
The other said, "I'll s
about my father—what
In Wales, I think, the
and given there the na
He loved a rich man's
in secrecy engendered
Sent to Northumbria,
I was well nourished,
An aunt of mine there
long kept me in her co
gave me arms and a de
and it was she who ser
I've long lived here. Bu
to leave; my longing,
is to make voyage over

No one could match him, of the rest
in tourneying or in a joust.
How he behaved, Milun took note,
how well he spurred, how well he smote,
for all his envy of the knight
his skill filled Milun with delight.
He sought the ranks; he met the youth;
there they engaged and jousted, both.
Milun struck so ferociously
his foe's lance shattered, truth to say,
but he was not unhorsed; in turn
so hardily he struck Milun
that from his charger he fell down.
At that, the young man could discern
under the visor, the white hair,
white beard; his grief was hard to bear!
Milun's horse by the reins he led
to him; bestowed it on him; said,
"Sire, mount up, do! I am distraught,
I'm greatly troubled in my thought
that to a fine man of your age
I've dealt such insult, such outrage!"
Milun leaped on his horse, much pleased;
on the youth's finger recognized
the ring, as he returned the horse,
and to the young man he spoke thus:
"Friend, listen! Say, by God above,
by the Omnipotent's sweet love,
what name is that borne by thy father?
What is thy name? Who is thy mother?
I wish to know the truth. I've been,
much, a great traveler; much I've seen,
much sought in countries where I went,
battle and war and tournament;
never, by strike of chevalier
did I fall from my destrier.
Thou hast, though, jousting, unhorsed me;
wonderfully could I love thee!"
The other said, "I'll speak to you
about my father—what I know.
In Wales, I think, the man was born,
and given there the name Milun.
He loved a rich man's daughter; he
in secrecy engendered me.
Sent to Northumbria, there placed,
I was well nourished, taught, and raised!
An aunt of mine there nurtured me,
long kept me in her company,
gave me arms and a destrier,
and it was she who sent me here.
I've long lived here. But now I want
to leave; my longing, my intent
is to make voyage over sea

to my own country, hastily,
know the condition of my father
and his behavior toward my mother.
I will show him my golden ring
and certain tokens I will bring;
that he'll disown me, I've no fear;
but he will love me, hold me dear."
When he spoke thus, Milun, for sure
could not sit still and listen more;
quickly he leaped up, seized the skirt
of the youth's hauberk, his mailed shirt;
"My God", he said, "healed is Milun!
by my faith, friend, you are my son!
I've searched for thee, I've sought for thee,
this year, my country left for thee."
The youth heard; from his horse leaped down
and tenderly he kissed Milun.
Such joyous mein had son and father,
such happy speech made to each other
that other folk who watched nearby
wept both for pity and for joy.

The tournament broke up. Milun
left, all impatience; with his son
he greatly longed to speak at leisure,
impart to him his plans and pleasure.
They at a hostel spent the night,
in joyousness and in delight,
a goodly crowd of knights was there.
Milun could tell his son, and share
how he had come to love his mother,
how she was given, by her father,
to a lord of that region; he,
Milun, still loved her, faithfully,
and she him, most devotedly.
And how the swan then came to be
bearer of letters, go-between;
they dared not trust a human being.
The son said, "By my faith, dear father,
I shall bring you and her together!
This lord of hers I will dispatch,
and see you married! Made a match!"
They spoke no more of this affair.
Next day their task was to prepare
to leave; bid their friends farewell; and then
to their own land at last return.
Hastily they passed over seas,
fair winds they had, auspicious breeze.
They met, as they went on their way,
riding toward them, a servant boy.
He was sent by Milun's *amie*,
and meant to go to Brittany;

she sent this lad, and a
but now his journey wa
A letter, sealed, he gav
in speech, he urged th
quickly to her, he must
Her lord was dead! Mi
When he had heard th
thought it seemed mar
and he explained all to
Delay or hindrance the
they traveled on until t
to the dame's castle, to
In her son she took mu
a worthy, valiant, nobl
No word they sought f
no counsel took, of no
but the son brought th
and gave his mother to
In happiness and swee
they lived from then o

Of their good fortun
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The story of another
just as it happened, I
It's of a young, most n
he was called Lanval i
At Carlisle there wa
Arthur, the valiant, co
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waste all that land, in
Down into Logres[1] the
and often they did cru
The King was there at
lodging there for that
Gifts to his barons an
he gave, in great muni
And to those of the Ta
—no greater band on
and wives to wed, he
save for one man, who
Lanval. The King forg
none put in a good wo

1. An ancient name for England.

she sent this lad, and a report—
but now his journey was cut short!
A letter, sealed, he gave Milun;
in speech, he urged the man to come
quickly to her, he must not tarry!
Her lord was dead! Milun must hurry!
When he had heard this news, Milun
thought it seemed marvelous to him,
and he explained all to his son.
Delay or hindrance there was none;
they traveled on until they'd come
to the dame's castle, to her home.
In her son she took much delight—
a worthy, valiant, noble knight!
No word they sought from relative;
no counsel took, of none asked leave,
but the son brought the two together
and gave his mother to his father.
In happiness and sweetest joy
they lived from then on, night and day.

Of their good fortune and their love
the ancients made the *lai* above,
and I, who wrote the story down,
delighted much to tell this one.

Lanval

The story of another *lai*,
just as it happened, I will say.
It's of a young, most noble man;
he was called Lanval in Breton.
At Carlisle there was sojourning
Arthur, the valiant, courtly King;
Scottish and Pictish peoples laid
waste all that land, in war and raid.
Down into Logres[1] they would come
and often they did cruel harm.
The King was there at Pentecost,
lodging there for that summer feast,
Gifts to his barons and his counts
he gave, in great munificence.
And to those of the Table Round
—no greater band on earth!—good land,
and wives to wed, he gave them all,
save for one man, who'd served him well,
Lanval. The King forgot this man;
none put in a good word for him.

1. An ancient name for England.

For his great valor, his largesse,
his manly beauty, his prowess,
he was much envied by most men;
they made a show of loving him.
But if he'd met with some mischance,
No day would that be for laments!
A king's son, of high lineage,
he was far from his heritage!
Though of King Arthur's house, he had
spent all his money and his good,
for Arthur gave him not a thing,
and he asked nothing of the King.
Lanval was much disturbed by now,
pensive, he was, and sorrowful.
Be not dismayed, lords, at the thought
that such a man would be distraught,
foreigner in a foreign place—
where to find help, protection, grace?
This chevalier of whom I tell,
who'd served King Arthur long and well,
mounted one day his destrier[2]
for pleasure, and relief from care.
He mounted, and rode out of town,
came to a meadow all alone,
by a swift stream got down, to see
his horse was trembling terribly.
Unsaddling it, he let it go
roll in the field, as horses do.
Folding his cloak beneath his head
he lay down, made the field his bed
still pensive, deep in his malaise.
Nothing, it seemed, could bring him ease.
He lay there thus, heartsick, heartsore,
and down along the river's shore
he saw two girls approaching; never
had he seen fairer women, ever!
Splendidly, richly, they were dressed,
in garments closely, tightly laced,
bliauts[3] of dark silk with the laces,
and oh, how beautiful their faces!
Two golden bowls the elder bore,
of splendid workmanship, and pure;
it's true; pure gold each lovely bowl;
the younger woman bore a towel.
They were advancing straightaway
just up to where the young knight lay.
Now courteous Lanval rose to greet

2. A charger, or warhorse. It was a powerful and very expensive mount, ordinarily used for combat rather than pleasure riding.
3. Long, close-fitting tunics, with long, full sleeves. Under the *bliaut*, in Marie's period, were ordinarily worn two other garments. The *chemise* was worn next to the skin; it had a long, full, pleated skirt. Over the chemise was worn a *chainse*, a garment made of linen or hemp with long tight sleeves and a skirt so long it might trail on the ground. The *chainse* might show just a bit above the *bliaut* at the neck and below the hem.

the women, got up to h
First they saluted the y
and then their message
"Sir Lanval, our own
so worthy, wise and be
has sent us here to find
she bids you come to h
We shall conduct you s
for the pavilion is quite
With the girls went t
but of his horse he took
he left it grazing while
The damsels led him
splendidly set, magnific
Not Semiramis,[6] opulen
and at the zenith of her
her wealth, her wisdom
nor that Octavian, grea
could that door—its rig
On top, a golden eagle
I do not know the worth
nor of the tent ropes or
that gave support to all
No king exists beneath
who could afford all, pe
In the tent lay the de
the lily, the new rose as
that in the summertime
Oh, she was so much lo
She lay upon a gorgeous
—worth a great castle w
and her chemise[8] was a
Her body so well formed
A costly cloak, of ermin
and Alexandrine silk, sh
from the heat it protect
Her side, though, was re
Face, neck and breast b
as hawthorn bloom, as
Into the tent then, La

4. A young lady, an unmarried woman o
birth (English "damsel").
5. Horseman, knight (French).
6. A mythical Assyrian queen, wife of
founder of Nineveh, whom she succee
ruler. Famed for her beauty, wisdom, and
tuousness, she was said to have built
and its hanging gardens, founded certai
ancient cities, conquered Egypt, and uns
fully attacked India.
7. Caesar Augustus (63 B.C.E.–C.E. 14), t
Roman emperor.
8. See note to line 59. An undergarment
long, full, pleated skirt, it was ordinaril
under a *chainse*, a long dress with ver
sleeves. Over that was worn the tunic or

the women, got up to his feet.
First they saluted the young man;
and then their message gave to him.
"Sir Lanval, our own demoiselle,[4]
so worthy, wise and beautiful,
has sent us here to find you thus;
she bids you come to her with us.
We shall conduct you safely there,
for the pavilion is quite near."
With the girls went the chevalier,[5]
but of his horse he took no care,
he left it grazing while he went.
The damsels led him to a tent,
splendidly set, magnificent.
Not Semiramis,[6] opulent
and at the zenith of her power,
her wealth, her wisdom in full flower,
nor that Octavian, great Rome's lord,[7]
could that door—its right flap!—afford.
On top, a golden eagle sat.
I do not know the worth of it,
nor of the tent ropes or the poles
that gave support to all the walls.
No king exists beneath the sky
who could afford all, possibly.
In the tent lay the demoiselle;
the lily, the new rose as well,
that in the summertime appear—
Oh, she was so much lovelier!
She lay upon a gorgeous bed;
—worth a great castle was the spread—
and her chemise[8] was all she wore.
Her body so well formed, so fair!
A costly cloak, of ermine fur,
and Alexandrine silk, she wore;
from the heat it protected her.
Her side, though, was revealed and bare.[9]
Face, neck and breast bare too, and white
as hawthorn bloom, as delicate.
Into the tent then, Lanval came;

4. A young lady, an unmarried woman of gentle birth (English "damsel").
5. Horseman, knight (French).
6. A mythical Assyrian queen, wife of Ninus, founder of Nineveh, whom she succeeded as ruler. Famed for her beauty, wisdom, and voluptuousness, she was said to have built Babylon and its hanging gardens, founded certain other ancient cities, conquered Egypt, and unsuccessfully attacked India.
7. Caesar Augustus (63 B.C.E.–C.E. 14), the first Roman emperor.
8. See note to line 59. An undergarment with a long, full, pleated skirt, it was ordinarily worn under a *chainse*, a long dress with very tight sleeves. Over that was worn the tunic or *bliaut*, with long, full sleeves.
9. Some readers have seen a contradiction or at least a confusion in this description in which the *pucelle* lies only in her chemise (line 99) but a few lines down is described having an ermine fur cloak pulled over her to shield her from the heat (lines 101–3). As Marie says, . . . *En sa chemise senglement. / Mut ot le cors bien fait e gent / Un chier mantel de blanc hermine, / Couvert de purpre alexandrine, / Ot pur le chaut sur li geté; / Tut ot descovert le costé, / Le vis, le col, e la peitrine* . . . The fur cloak protects her, presumably covers her, but perhaps not completely? Or one can see her bare side and her bare face, neck and breast, presumably from the side or perhaps through her supernatural abilities.

the lovely girl called out to him.
He sat down, just beside the bed.
"Lanval, fair friend," the damsel said,
"I've come for you. I've come from far,
I've left my land, to seek you here.
If you are courtly, wise and brave,
joy beyond measure you shall have,
greater than emperors or kings—
for I love you above all things."
He saw her beauty; felt within
the spark ignite, the glow begin
to set his heart alight, to spread,
and with due courtesy, he said:
"Fair one: if you should wish to give
to me such joy, to give your love,
I know of nothing you might ask
I would not honor as my task
if it lay in my power at all—
though good, or evil, might befall.
I will do all that you require;
forsake all those I might desire,
and never seek to part from you—
this, above all, I wish to do!"
When the girl heard him thus declare
so forcefully his love for her,
her love, her body, she gave, both.
Lanval was now on the right path!
After, she had a boon to give:
anything he might wish to have
was his to hold and to possess;
should he bestow great gifts, largesse,
she would find a sufficiency.
This was a pleasant place to be;
the more he lavished, more he gave,
more gold and silver would he have!
"Friend," she said, "I admonish you—
command! beseech! In all you do,
tell our sweet secret to no one.
Here is my warning, all and sum.
Betray us, and you lose your lover;
I shall be lost to you for ever.
Lost to your sight; lost, our amours;
my body never pleasure yours."
He would obey her, Lanval said,
her command he well understood.
He lay beside her on the bed;
here was a lodging sweet and good!
He lay by her all afternoon,
nearly till evening came on,
and would have lingered if he could
and if she had more stay allowed.
She said, "You must get up, sweet friend.

Even this time must ha
Go away, now! Here I
but listen: I have this t
when you may wish fo
there's no place you ma
where one may meet w
without reproach or ca
that I shall not seek ou
to be with you, to do yo
We shall be seen there
none hear the words w
Full of deep joy at wh
he kissed her, then got
Those who had led him
now gave him clothes n
Thus dressed anew, be
No man was handsome
Lanval was neither b
they brought him water
he washed and dried hi
they brought a supper t
His love and he took th
who could refuse so fin
Served it was with great
which he accepted happ
Many and fine the dish
all pleasing to the cheva
for often his *amie* he kis
and he embraced and h
When they had finished
the damsels led him to
saddled up expeditiously
there too, he found grea
He took his leave, got
off to the city then he w
Often he looked back; f
Lanval felt great dismay
Shaken by all these stra
disturbed, depressed in
amazed, he could not tr
Had it all truly been, or

Home again, at his ho
he saw his men—dresse
That night he was a lavi
where his wealth came f
If in that town a chevali
needed a lodging, he ca
Lanval would see to it; h
and splendidly be waited

1. Friend, lover (French).

Even this time must have an end.
Go away, now! Here I shall stay,
but listen: I have this to say:
when you may wish for us to speak,
there's no place you may know or seek
where one may meet with one's *amie*[1]
without reproach or calumny
that I shall not seek out as well,
to be with you, to do your will.
We shall be seen there by no other,
none hear the words we speak together."
Full of deep joy at what she said,
he kissed her, then got out of bed.
Those who had led him to the tent
now gave him clothes most elegant.
Thus dressed anew, beneath the sky
No man was handsomer than he!
Lanval was neither boor nor fool;
they brought him water and a towel;
he washed and dried his hands. That done,
they brought a supper to the man.
His love and he took this repast—
who could refuse so fine a feast!
Served it was with great courtesy,
which he accepted happily.
Many and fine the dishes were,
all pleasing to the chevalier,
for often his *amie* he kissed,
and he embraced and held her fast.
When they had finished every course,
the damsels led him to his horse,
saddled up expeditiously:
there too, he found great courtesy!
He took his leave, got on his mount;
off to the city then he went.
Often he looked back; for our knight
Lanval felt great dismay and fright.
Shaken by all these strange events,
disturbed, depressed in heart and sense,
amazed, he could not trust his thought.
Had it all truly been, or not?

Home again, at his hostelry,
he saw his men—dressed splendidly!
That night he was a lavish host:
where his wealth came from, no one guessed.
If in that town a chevalier
needed a lodging, he came there;
Lanval would see to it; he'd come,
and splendidly be waited on.

1. Friend, lover (French).

Lanval gave gifts to chevaliers;
and Lanval ransomed prisoners;
jongleurs[2] he dressed in fineries;
and many were his honorees!
Foreigner, intimate, they all
had gifts from generous Lanval.
Great was his joy and his delight;
at times by day, at times by night,
often she came, his sweet *amie*,
to do his will most happily.

That year, I understand, quite soon
after the feast of good Saint John,[3]
a group, perhaps, of thirty knights,
met for amusement and delights
within a garden, very near
a tower where stayed Queen Guinevere.
Among these chevaliers, Gawain;[4]
his cousin, handsome Sir Yvain.[5]
Gawain, that noble, valiant man,
who was so loved by everyone,
spoke out: "God, *seigneurs*![6] We do wrong
to Lanval, our companion,
so courtly and so generous;
his sire is rich, illustrious,
a king! We should have brought Lanval!"
At that the knights turned, and they all
went off to Lanval's lodging; there
begged and convinced the chevalier.
At a carved window chanced to lean,
looking about and down, the queen;
three ladies were attending her.
She noticed the King's household there;
She knew and recognized Lanval.
She made occasion then to call
one of her ladies to go find
the fairest damsels, most refined,
they'd join her in the garden there,
and frolic where the knights all were.
More than thirty she brought with her
descending with her down the stair.
The knights, delighted with the meeting,
gave all the women joyful greeting,
taking them by the hands; their speech
lacked no refinement, each to each.
Lanval, though, stood alone, apart,
impatient, tumult in his heart,

2. Jugglers, jesters (French).
3. The Feast of St. John is Midsummer Day, June 24.
4. Gawain, the son of King Lot, is Arthur's nephew. In many Arthurian tales he is the finest of Arthur's knights and a model of perfect chivalry and *courtoisie*.
5. There are three Arthurian knights known as Yvain (there is some evidence that they may actually be the same person), but this man is undoubtedly Yvain the Valiant (*li preuz*).
6. Lords (French).

he longed for his *amie* s
to kiss her, hold her, kn
how poor, how small, al
with his own pleasure r
But the queen saw th
and lost no time, but hu
sat down beside him, sp
unburdened all her hea
"Dear Lanval," said Q
you are much honored a
you may possess my love
Speak to me! Tell me yo
Freely I give you *druerie*
you must rejoice in takin
"Lady," said Lanval, "
I care not for your *druer*
I've served my king well,
I'll never compromise m
No to your love, dame, n
I will not wrong my sove
At that the queen was
and she spoke slander, sp
"Lanval," she said, "I k
you do not care for dallia
but it is often rumored, s
for women you have no d
But youths and squires, v
You seek out; you disport
Oh, coward! Boor! Unnat
your service to my lord, I
He has lost God—I fear i
he's known your vicious i
Lanval heard—and wit
but was not slow in his de
In fury, though, he spoke
he much repented afterw
"This calling that you c
Lady, I have no knowledg
but I love, and possess the
of one who should be priz
all other women whom I'v
I say this truth to you, my
and you had better unders
some servant girl she has
the poorest in her retinue
is, Lady Queen, worth mo

7. Guinevere is not named in Marie's orig
text; she is always referred to as *la reïne*
"the queen"). . . . Since this queen is undo
edly the figure known in Arthurian litera
(e.g., the romances of Chrétien de Troyes,
was probably Marie's near contemporary

he longed for his *amie* so much—
to kiss her, hold her, know her, know her touch—
how poor, how small, all other joy
with his own pleasure not nearby!
But the queen saw the lone young lover,
and lost no time, but hurried over
sat down beside him, spoke his name,
unburdened all her heart to him.
"Dear Lanval," said Queen Guinevere,[7]
you are much honored and held dear—
you may possess my love entire!
Speak to me! Tell me your desire!
Freely I give you *druerie*;[8]
you must rejoice in taking me!"
"Lady," said Lanval, "let me be!"
I care not for your *druerie*.
I've served my king well, kept my faith—
I'll never compromise my oath!
No to your love, dame, no's the word—
I will not wrong my sovereign lord!"
At that the queen was furious,
and she spoke slander, spoke it thus:
"Lanval," she said, "I know, I sense
you do not care for dalliance;
but it is often rumored, sire,
for women you have no desire!
But youths and squires, well-trained young men
You seek out; you disport with them.
Oh, coward! Boor! Unnatural,
your service to my lord, Lanval!
He has lost God—I fear it—since
he's known your vicious influence!"[9]
Lanval heard—and with grief intense—
but was not slow in his defense.
In fury, though, he spoke such words
he much repented afterwards.
"This calling that you claim I have,
Lady, I have no knowledge of;
but I love, and possess the love
of one who should be prized above
all other women whom I've seen;
I say this truth to you, my queen,
and you had better understand—
some servant girl she has at hand,
the poorest in her retinue,
is, Lady Queen, worth more than you

7. Guinevere is not named in Marie's original text; she is always referred to as *la reïne* (i.e., "the queen"). . . . Since this queen is undoubtedly the figure known in Arthurian literature (e.g., the romances of Chrétien de Troyes, who was probably Marie's near contemporary) as Guinevere, I have taken the liberty of supplying her name.
8. Love, or courtly love; or a love affair. In other medieval works, it can mean a love token.
9. In other words, Arthur has lost his salvation, is damned, through Lanval's supposed influence.

in beauty—body and in face—
in breeding, virtue, goodness, grace!"
At that the queen abandoned him,
and she went weeping to her room.
Great was her grief, rage, wounded pride,
she was so shamed and vilified.
Wretched at heart, she went to bed,
never would she get up, she said,
until the king had got redress
for that which caused her such distress.
The king came riding from the wood,
joyful; the sport that day was good!
He went straight to the queen's abode.
She saw him and complained aloud;
"Mercy!" she cried; at his feet fell;
she'd been dishonored by Lanval!
Love he'd demanded, *druerie*,
She had refused him, loyally;
he had humiliated her,
boasting of an *amie* so fair,
noble, refined and elegant,
even her poorest maidservant,
the lowliest one serving her,
was finer than Queen Guinevere.
Terrible was King Arthur's wrath;
in his great rage he swore an oath,
if in the court this was proved truth,
Lanval must hang, or burn to death.
The king stormed out. He left the room,
he called on barons, three of them,
to summon Lanval; sent them off.
Lanval was sorrowful enough;
back to his lodging he had gone.
He knew full well what he had done;
utterly lost was his *amie*—
he had revealed their *druerie*!
Alone now in his room, Lanval
was pensive, deeply miserable.
His love he summoned, over and over—
there was no answer from his lover.
He sighed, lamented, made complaint;
at times he fell down in a faint;
a hundred times he tried to call,
Mercy! Speak to your love Lanval!
He cursed his heart, he cursed his mouth,
a wonder, did not seek his death.
Neither his wailings, shouts and cries,
self-lacerations, agonies,
could make his love have mercy, hear,
and to the wretched man appear.
Alas, poor Lanval! What to do?
The men of Arthur's retinue

arrived now, with their gra
without delay, he must to
The summons of the king
he was accused by Guinev
He went with them, in mis
wishing they would just m
Before the king Lanval
he stands there pensive, m
his bearing shows his grea
The king speaks, his rage
"Vassal, you've done gre
Disgusting act! Your villai
traduces, shames me! Vile
you slander and abuse the
You boast, then, madly, re
that you've so noble an *am*
her serving maid is lovelie
and finer than Queen Gui
Lanval denied he'd said
shaming, dishonoring his
Word for word he denied t
he'd made not trial of the
But then that claim he'd s
he said, was true; he had
of whom he'd made, in fac
and so she'd gone; his love
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ate to a young man of noble rank, either a
rade or someone to whom one must exten
courtesies of rank. It could also refer to
noble, worthy young man or to a noble or k

arrived now, with their grave import:
without delay, he must to court.
The summons of the king they bore;
he was accused by Guinevere.
He went with them, in misery,
wishing they would just make him die.
Before the king Lanval has come:
he stands there pensive, mute, struck dumb,
his bearing shows his great distress.
The king speaks, his rage manifest.
"Vassal, you've done great wrong to me![1]
Disgusting act! Your villainy
traduces, shames me! Vile, obscene,
you slander and abuse the queen!
You boast, then, madly, recklessly,
that you've so noble an *amie*
her serving maid is lovelier
and finer than Queen Guinevere!"
Lanval denied he'd said one thing
shaming, dishonoring his king.
Word for word he denied the scene—
he'd made not trial of the queen.
But then that claim he'd spoken of,
he said, was true; he had a love
of whom he'd made, in fact, that boast,
and so she'd gone; his love was lost.
Desolate, he said he'd submit
to the decision of the court.
The king was in a tearing rage;
he called all knights in his ménage[2]
to counsel him on protocol;
he wished no adverse thoughts at all!
They came at his commandment, whether
they wanted to or not; together
they were assembled. There they weighed
judicially, decreed and said
that Lanval needs must have his day
in court, but must pledge faithfully
that he'd attend; give solemn word;
present himself before his lord.
The court would be its full size then;
now it was just the household men.
These barons went back to the king,
there to announce their reasoning;
the pledges he required, at that.
Lanval stood, lone and desolate.

1. The word *vassal* had several meanings. It could commonly be a form of address appropriate to a young man of noble rank, either a comrade or someone to whom one must extend the courtesies of rank. It could also refer to any noble, worthy young man or to a noble or knight who had sworn fealty to a lord. Here, Arthur uses it in the latter sense, especially to emphasize his belief that Lanval has betrayed and traduced the bond between the two of them.
2. Household (French).

With him there were no friends or kin—
but bail was offered by Gawain;
his confreres followed, one by one.
The king said, "I'll release this man,
but all each man here holds from me—
lands, fiefs—you'll pledge in surety."
They pledged. No more was to be done.
Lanval was to his lodging gone,
escorted, for the others came,
with much chastisement and much blame.
His grief they made reproaches of,
cursing his ludicrous, mad love.
Each day the barons came to call;
they wanted to be sure Lanval
ate and drank, did so properly.
They feared he might go mad, or die.

Then on the designated day
the knights all gathered faithfully.
The king and queen were there as well.
The pledge was honored by Lanval.
Many there felt concern and grief;
a hundred men, it's my belief,
would have done all within their might
to liberate from trial this knight.
He'd been accused most wrongfully!
Now for the verdict. What would be
the finding, and the king's demands?
Now all was in the barons' hands.
All of them were assembled there;
many perplexed and saddened for
this foreigner, this noble knight—
with them, he had so hard a plight!
Some wished him harm though, following
the wishes of their lord and king.
Cornwall's Count then addressed the court;
"We have a task; we'll not fall short,
whoever weeps, whoever sings,
right must prevail above all things.
The king has charged, before us all,
a vassal I have heard you call
Lanval; charged him with felony,
gross misdeed, gross activity,
boasting, it seems, of an *amie*,
infuriating my lady.
The king alone desires to sue.
Now by the faith I owe to you,
there should, to speak the truth, not be
for response, a necessity,
save that for one's *seigneur*, one's king,
honor is due in everything.
We, with an oath, can bind Lanval,

and the king will excus
If Lanval can make wa
and she comes forward,
and it is true—proof ca
this statement that enra
then pardon will be his
since he did not speak
And if he cannot prove
then we must go and sa
his service to the king i
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They sent a message t
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They saw two damsels ri
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the girls were wonderful
Rich purple taffeta they
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One said politely to the k
"Royal sire, make avail
a chamber, and adorn it
with silken curtains; for
wishes for lodging in you
Arthur obliged; he did th
summoned two chevalier
the ladies to an upper flo
For the time being, they
The king then asked th

and the king will excuse us all.
If Lanval can make warranty,
and she comes forward, this *amie*,
and it is true—proof can be seen—
this statement that enraged the queen,
then pardon will be his by right,
since he did not speak out from spite.
And if he cannot prove his claim,
then we must go and say to him
his service to the king is lost;
he must be banished for his boast."

They sent a message to the knight;
they said, announced, that now, by right
he must send for his love to come
defend, protect, and succor him.
He said this was not possible:
no chance that she would help Lanval!
They returned to the judges' place;
no help from Lanval in his case!
King Arthur pressed them to make haste
for the queen's sake. No time to waste!
The verdict was about to come.

They saw two damsels riding on
two lovely palfreys ambling near;
the girls were wonderfully fair!
Rich purple taffeta they wore
next to their skin, and nothing more.
The knights looked on delightedly!
Gawain, and with him riders three,
went to Lanval, gave him the news,
and pointed out the demoiselles.
Full of joy, Gawain begged Lanval—
is one of them your *amie*? Speak! Tell!
But these girls Lanval did not know,
where they came from or meant to go.
Still they approached, and still they rode
their palfreys; still in graceful mode
dismounted just before the dais
that was King Arthur's honored space.
Their beauty was astonishing.
One said politely to the king:
"Royal sire, make available
a chamber, and adorn it well
with silken curtains; for my dame
wishes for lodging in your home."
Arthur obliged; he did this deed,
summoned two chevaliers, to lead
the ladies to an upper floor.
For the time being, they said no more.
The king then asked the knights, meanwhile,

for judgment, finding, in the trial.
He was incensed, he said to them,
so dilatory they had been.
"Sire," they said, "we debate. We're keen.
Thanks to the ladies you have seen
we have not reached a verdict yet.
Now let us all get on with it."
Pensive and anxious, they all met,
noisy and brawling and upset.

While their fear hung on them this way
two girls in beautiful array—
Phrygian silk stuff was what they wore,[3]
and Spanish mules these damsels bore—
were observed riding by the way.
This gave the vassals all great joy!
Each to each said that these would save
Lanval, the worthy and the brave.
Up to him now there came Yvain
leading companions after him.
"Sire," he said, "now you must rejoice!
For God's love, speak! Give us your voice!
Two demoiselles are coming here,
splendidly dressed and passing fair,
one of them surely your *amie*!"
But Lanval replied hastily
neither he knew; all Yvain got:
"I know them not; I love them not."
They arrived now, these demoiselles;
before the king, got off their mules.
Many admired them in that place
for form, complexion, and for face
and said, more worthy than the queen
they were, more than she'd ever been.

The elder, with great courtesy,
spoke wisely, with propriety.
"King, sire, have a chamber ready
that can accommodate my lady.
She's on her way to speak to you."
He gave commands to lead the two
where the two others were led before.
But of the mules they took no care.
The damsels once provided for
the king gave his commands once more.
The judgment! Now, without delay!
Too much was squandered of the day,
and the queen's fury had increased;
she had not broken yet her fast.

3. Phrygia was an ancient state located in what is now central Turkey.

They were about to ar
they could see coming f
upon her horse, a girl. C
none had such beauty, n
A pure white palfrey wa
gentle it was and elegant
Form—neck and head—
on earth was no such an
Splendid adornments bo
under sweet heaven no k
could ever buy them, hav
unless his lands were ple
Dressed was this damsel
In a white *chainse* and a
in two parts laced togeth
all down her sides the fle
Her form was fine, her h
her neck white as a bran
brilliant her eyes, her fac
lovely her mouth, nose se
brown her eyebrows, her
her head of curly, quite b
gold thread could not giv
as did her hair in sunbea
A mantle of dark silk she
with the skirts gathered
sparrowhawk on her fist
following her, a levrier.[5]
In the town no one, smal
in childhood or in aged st
there was, who did not ru
where she rode, where th
Her beauty caused no gab
but slowly she approached
The judges who observed
thought her a wonder, ma
not one of them who look
but felt a kindling warmth

Barons who loved the k
went to him speedily to te
how there was come a der
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"Sire—dear companion
who's neither tawny, nor d
In all the world, she's love
of all the women who exis

That Lanval heard, and
He knew her well from wh

4. See n. 3, p. 172; n. 8, p. 173.
5. A greyhound.

They were about to answer, when
they could see coming from the town,
upon her horse, a girl. On earth
none had such beauty, none such worth!
A pure white palfrey was her mount;
gentle it was and elegant.
Form—neck and head—so beautiful
on earth was no such animal.
Splendid adornments bore this mount;
under sweet heaven no king nor count
could ever buy them, have and hold
unless his lands were pledged or sold.
Dressed was this damsel in this wise:
In a white *chainse* and a chemise[4]
in two parts laced together, so
all down her sides the flesh could show.
Her form was fine, her hips were low,
her neck white as a branch in snow,
brilliant her eyes, her face was white,
lovely her mouth, nose set just right,
brown her eyebrows, her forehead fair,
her head of curly, quite blonde hair;
gold thread could not give off such light
as did her hair in sunbeams bright.
A mantle of dark silk she wore
with the skirts gathered close to her,
sparrowhawk on her fist she bore,
following her, a levrier.[5]
In the town no one, small or great,
in childhood or in aged state
there was, who did not rush to be
where she rode, where they too could see.
Her beauty caused no gab, no jokes,
but slowly she approached these folks.
The judges who observed her thus,
thought her a wonder, marvelous;
not one of them who looked her way
but felt a kindling warmth of joy.

Barons who loved the knight Lanval
went to him speedily to tell
how there was come a demoiselle
who, if God pleased, could save him still.
"Sire—dear companion—here rides one
who's neither tawny, nor dull brown.[6]
In all the world, she's loveliest
of all the women who exist!"

That Lanval heard, and raised his head;
He knew her well from what they said,

4. See n. 3, p. 172; n. 8, p. 173.
5. A greyhound.
6. Dark complexions were considered unattractive in the Middle Ages.

he gasped, and blood rose to his face.
He answered them, and with some haste.
"Faith!" he said, "that is my *amie*!
I do not care who slaughters me
if she shows me no mercy, for
all my cure is in seeing her."

Into the palace rode the lady;
none there had ever seen such beauty.
Before the king she stepped down, then
she was well seen by everyone.
Dismounted, she let fall her cloak
for better view by all the folk.
The king, so courtly and well bred,
rose up to greet her where she stood;
the others honored her as well,
and wished to serve the demoiselle.
When they'd seen all there was to see
and praised her beauty fittingly,
she spoke to Arthur in this way,
for she was not inclined to stay.
"King, I have loved thy vassal. See,
there he stands; Lanval, it is he!
Here in thy court he stands accused;
Lanval must not be here abused
for what he spoke; thou, King, must know
the queen was wrong; it was not so,
he never sought her love at all!
As for the boast made by Lanval,
if his acquittal come through me,
let thy good barons set him free!"
King Arthur granted that it must
be as the Court found right and just;
of all the judges, one and all
determined to acquit Lanval,
and by their finding he was free.

The lady left, for such as she
not even Arthur could retain,
with his fine servants; she was gone.
Before the hall there had been set
a block of stone, dark marble. That
the heavier men could use to mount
when to King Arthur's court they went.
Lanval jumped up upon this stone;
when his love out the door had come,
riding her palfrey, up behind
leaped Lanval, in a single bound!
With her he went to Avalon[7]

7. A mystical island that figures in a number of Arthurian legends; King Arthur's sword, Excalibur, was said to have been forged there.

—or so they say, those
to an isle, a most lovely
she carried off this fine
More of Lanval no one
I cannot tell another wo

Much pleased am I to
the *lai* that folk call *Che*
I shall recount the truth
why it was made, and ho

Folk have told me it, s
and I've found written ta
of Tristram and the Que
what an exalted love was
from which much sorrov
how they both perished i
King Mark was raging
his nephew, Tristram, ga
Tristram was banished, f
the secret lover of the Q
To his own country he h
to Southern Wales, wher
For a full year was his so
in exile; he could not ret
But then he chose, most
to risk death and calamit
That choice should not a
for loyal lovers, steadfast
are troubled, full of dolef
when their great longings
So Tristram, pensive, dol
he must go, leave his hon
Straightway he sought C
for it was there he'd find
In the forest he hid, al
for he wished notice by n
Only in evening he stole
needing a lodging for the
He met some poor folk, p
glad of their hospitality
he asked, what news? Th
did he pursue, what busi
The King had summoned

1. In English, "honeysuckle." Literally it
"Goat-leaf." See note to line 115. In Anglo-No
of this period the vowel sound in "foil" wo

—or so they say, those called Breton—
to an isle, a most lovely one,
she carried off this fine young man!
More of Lanval no one has heard;
I cannot tell another word.

Chevrefoil[1]

Much pleased am I to tell the tale,
the *lai* that folk call *Chevrefoil.*
I shall recount the truth, the sum,
why it was made, and how: for whom.

Folk have told me it, several,
and I've found written tales as well,
of Tristram and the Queen's affairs,
what an exalted love was theirs,
from which much sorrow came their way:
how they both perished in one day.
King Mark was raging, furious,
his nephew, Tristram, gave him cause.
Tristram was banished, for he'd been
the secret lover of the Queen.
To his own country he had gone,
to Southern Wales, where he was born.
For a full year was his sojourn,
in exile; he could not return,
But then he chose, most recklessly,
to risk death and calamity.
That choice should not astonish you,
for loyal lovers, steadfast, true,
are troubled, full of doleful thought,
when their great longings are not met.
So Tristram, pensive, doleful, found
he must go, leave his home and land.
Straightway he sought Cornwall again,
for it was there he'd find the Queen.
In the forest he hid, alone,
for he wished notice by no one.
Only in evening he stole out,
needing a lodging for the night.
He met some poor folk, peasantry;
glad of their hospitality
he asked, what news? The King, what quest
did he pursue, what business?
The King had summoned, so they heard,

1. In English, "honeysuckle." Literally it means "Goat-leaf." See note to line 115. In Anglo-Norman of this period the vowel sound in "foil" would be *ay*, and the rhyme with English "tale" would be closer than in modern French.

all of the barons, every lord.
To Tintagel they must repair;
Mark desired court to be held there.
At Pentecost they'd gather, all,
to meet in joyous festival,
the Queen among the company.
Tristram heard, full of joy and glee,
for if she took that road, for sure
Tristram must catch a sight of her.
The day the King moved house, Tristram
was hidden in the woods again.
And on the route that he well knew,
the route the party must pass through,
a hazel branch he cut and split,
squared it, and made a staff from it.
When he had pared and smoothed the staff,
he carved his name there with his knife.
The Queen would likely see it there;
she would be watching, well aware,
for it had happened once before
such a stick was perceived by her—
her lover's stick she'd recognize
when it appeared before her eyes.
He wrote just this, and nothing more;
he had made known to her before
that in that place he lay in wait,
long tarrying, in a hopeful state,
to catch a glimpse of her and know
how meeting her was possible;
live he could not, if not with her.
The two of them were similar
to honeysuckle, which must find
a hazel, and around it bind;
when it enlaces it all round,
both in each other are all wound.
Together they will surely thrive,
but split asunder, they'll not live.
Quick is the hazel tree's demise;
quickly the honeysuckle dies.
"So with us never, *belle amie*,[2]
me without you, you without me."
The Queen came riding. As she rode
she watched the upward-sloping road.
She saw the staff; perceived it well,
could certainly those letters spell.
Attending chevaliers who led her
as they rode on their way together
she told to stop; she gave command;
she wished to rest and would descend.
Her men obeyed; did not say nay!

2. In English, "fair sweetheart," "fair friend," "beautiful lover."

and from her knights
calling to her her ma
so greatly trusted by
A distance, small, al
she went; found him
who loved her most
great joy they had, h
He spoke, at leisure;
she spoke, at pleasur
and then she told hi
win from his uncle a
Much grieved the Ki
Sir Tristram into bar
accused he had been
They parted then; sh
but as they separate
wept much, each of
Back home to Wales
until his uncle for hi

For all the joy that
when Tristram had h
and for the words he
at the fond urging of
to keep those words
Tristram, who well k
made, for remembra
briefly I name it; let
Gotelef[4] the English
and the French call
Now I've recounted
about this *lai* I've tol

3. In the various versions of the T
various people reveal the affair b
knight and the queen. In the mid-twe
Old French work by Beroul, three wi
observe Tristan and Yseut the Fair i
mising situation" and plot to discredi

Sir Orfeo is a reworking
Eurydice. When Eurydi
underworld. Having so pleas
granted Eurydice's release, or
him from Hades. Orpheus di

and from her knights she went some way,
calling to her her maid Brenguein,
so greatly trusted by the Queen.
A distance, small, along the road,
she went; found him within the wood,
who loved her most of any being;
great joy they had, he and the Queen.
He spoke, at leisure; time allowed;
she spoke, at pleasure, all she would;
and then she told him how he could
win from his uncle an accord.
Much grieved the King was when he sent
Sir Tristram into banishment;
accused he had been, by some other.[3]
They parted then; she left her lover,
but as they separated, both
wept much, each of them was so loath.
Back home to Wales Sir Tristram went
until his uncle for him sent.

For all the joy that he had known
when Tristram had his lover seen,
and for the words he then wrote down
at the fond urging of the Queen—
to keep those words in memory
Tristram, who well knew minstrelsy,
made, for remembrance, a new *lai*;
briefly I name it; let me say,
Gotelef[4] the English call this tale;
and the French call it *Chevrefoil*.
Now I've recounted all that's true
about this *lai* I've told to you.

3. In the various versions of the Tristan story, various people reveal the affair between the knight and the queen. In the mid-twelfth-century Old French work by Beroul, three wicked barons observe Tristan and Yseut the Fair in a "compromising situation" and plot to discredit the knight; in Thomas of Britain's *Tristran*, much of which is lost, Brangein turns against her mistress and tells the king that she is unfaithful not with Tristran but with another man.
4. I.e., "Goat-leaf." The word is not attested in Middle English.

SIR ORFEO
ca. 1300

Sir Orfeo is a reworking of the tragic classical myth of Orpheus and his wife, Eurydice. When Eurydice died of a snake bite, Orpheus followed her to the underworld. Having so pleased Pluto and Proserpina with his music, Orpheus was granted Eurydice's release, on condition he not look back to his wife as she followed him from Hades. Orpheus did look back, and so lost his wife. The medieval narrative