
*The Lais of
Marie de France*

TRANSLATED
WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
Glyn S. Burgess and Keith Busby

*Second Edition with two further lais
in the original Old French*

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non-specialist are dealt with at some length in the Introduction. In cases of ambiguity in the Old French, we have simply opted for a particular meaning as being the most convincing in our view without commenting.

The *Lais* have been edited many times, but the standard editions are those of Karl Warnke (3rd edn, 1925), Alfred Ewert (1944 and reprints) and Jean Rychner (1966). As Ewert's edition of manuscript H is excellent and readily available in English-speaking countries, we have based our translation on it, although we have sometimes departed from his punctuation. To help the reader follow the poems in the Old French, line references to this edition have been provided at regular intervals.

Our translation of Marie's *Lais* appears in the wake of a revival of interest in the Middle Ages, as evidenced by the vast quantity of fantasy literature using medieval subject-matter or settings, and the phenomenal success of such novels as Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose*, as well as by general manifestations of medieval culture in library and museum exhibitions. We welcome this interest and hope that the present volume will help to dispense with the myth, still current in some circles, that medieval literature, pure and unadulterated, is inaccessible and irrelevant to the modern reader. As regards the *Lais* of Marie de France, nothing could be further from the truth.

We would like to thank Gill Gaughan and José Lanfers for having read some of the *Lais* in various stages of completion. The late Mrs Betty Radice, former editor of the Penguin Classics series, made helpful comments and gave us much encouragement. For any remaining imperfections we are alone responsible.

Glyn S. Burgess, Liverpool
Keith Busby, Utrecht

The Lais of Marie de France

PROLOGUE

Anyone who has received from God the gift of knowledge and true eloquence has a duty not to remain silent: rather should one be happy to reveal such talents. When a truly beneficial thing is heard by many people, it then enjoys its first blossom, but if it is widely praised its flowers are in full bloom. It was customary for the ancients, in the books which they wrote (Priscian testifies to this), to express themselves very obscurely so that those in later generations, who had to learn them, could provide a gloss for the text and put the finishing touches to their meaning. Men of learning were aware of this and their experience had taught them that the more time they spent studying texts the more subtle would be their understanding of them and they would be better able to avoid future mistakes. Anyone wishing to guard against vice should study intently and undertake a demanding task, whereby one can ward off and rid oneself of great suffering. For this reason I began to think of working on some good story and translating a Latin text into French, but this would scarcely have been worthwhile, for others have undertaken a similar task. So I thought of lays which I had heard and did not doubt, for I knew it full well, that they were composed, by those who first began them and put them into circulation, to perpetuate the memory of adventures they had heard. I myself have heard a number of them and do not wish to overlook or neglect them. I have put them into verse, made poems from them and worked on them late into the night.

In your honour, noble king, you who are so worthy and courtly, you to whom all joy pays homage and in whose heart all true virtue has taken root, did I set myself to assemble lays, to compose and to relate them in rhyme. In my heart, lord, I thought and decided that I should present them to you, so if it pleased you to accept them, you would bring me great happiness and I should rejoice evermore. Do not consider me presumptuous if I make so bold as to offer you this gift. Now hear the beginning.

He had himself bled together with his seneschal, as a precaution against illness. On the third day he declared that he would take a bath. The seneschal assented to this and the king said: 'You will bathe with me.' The seneschal replied: 'I agree.' The lady had the baths heated and the two tubs brought in. As planned, each of the tubs was placed in front of the bed. She had the boiling water brought in for the seneschal, who had gone out in search of relaxation. The lady came to speak to the king and he made her sit down beside him. They lay down on the lord's bed and took their pleasure. They lay there together. Because of the tub which stood before them they had the door guarded by a maiden who was to stand there. [263-82] Suddenly the seneschal returned and banged on the door which the girl kept closed. He gave it such a violent blow that it was forced open, whereupon he discovered the king and his wife in each other's arms. The king looked up and saw him approaching. To conceal his wickedness he jumped feet first into the tub, completely naked. He paid no heed to the danger involved and was scalded to death. His evil plan had rebounded on him, whereas the seneschal was safe and sound. He saw just what had happened to the king. Seizing his wife immediately, he tossed her head first into the bath. Thus they died together, the king first, then the woman with him. Anyone willing to listen to reason could profit from this cautionary tale. Evil can easily rebound on him who seeks another's misfortune. [283-310]

All this happened as I have described. The Bretons composed a lay on this subject, about how Equitan died and about the lady who loved him so dearly. [311-14]

III

LE FRESNE

I shall tell you the lay of *Le Fresne* according to the story which I know. [1-2]

There once lived in Brittany two knights who were neighbours, rich and wealthy men, worthy and valiant knights from the same region. They had both taken a wife and one of the ladies conceived, giving birth to two children when her time came. Her husband was happy and joyful, and because of his joy sent word to his neighbour that his family was increased, as his wife had had two sons. He also said that he would present one of them to him so that he could stand godfather to the boy who would be named after him. The rich man was seated at table when the messenger arrived and knelt before the high table. He delivered his message fully, whereupon the lord gave thanks to God and offered him a fine horse. This knight's wife, who was sitting next to him at table, smiled, for she was deceitful and arrogant, prone to slander and envy. [3-28] She spoke foolishly and said in front of the whole household: 'So help me God, I am astonished that this worthy man decided to inform my husband of his shame and dishonour, that his wife has had two sons. They have both incurred shame because of it, for we know what is at issue here: it has never occurred that a woman gave birth to two sons at once, nor ever will, unless two men are the cause of it.' Her husband stared at her and reproached her severely. 'Lady,' he said, 'no more! You should not speak thus! The truth is that this lady has been of good repute.' Those in the house took note of these words which were repeated and became widely known throughout all Brittany: the lady was much hated and later suffered because of them, for all women who heard these words, both poor and rich, hated her as a result. The bearer of the message told his lord everything and when he heard the account he was saddened and did not know what to do. For this reason he hated the worthy woman and was highly mistrustful

of her, keeping her in close custody without her having deserved it. [29-64]

The same year the slanderer herself conceived twins and now her neighbour was avenged. She carried them until her time came and then had two daughters, which grieved and distressed her greatly. She lamented to herself: 'Alas!' she said, 'what shall I do? Now I shall never have esteem or honour! I am shamed, in truth, for neither my husband nor all his family will ever believe me, to be sure, when they hear of this adventure. I have been my own judge: I spoke ill of all women. Did I not say that it has never been the case and we had never seen it happen that a woman has had two children unless she has known two men? Now I have twins and it seems that I am paying the price. Whoever slanders and lies about others does not know what retribution awaits him. One can speak ill of someone who is more praiseworthy than oneself. To ward off shame, I shall have to murder one of the children: I would rather make amends with God than shame and dishonour myself.' Those who were in the chamber comforted her and said that they would not allow it, for killing was not a trifle. [65-98]

The lady had a maid of very noble birth who had long taken care of her and brought her up, loved her and cherished her greatly. The girl heard her lady crying, lamenting grievously and moaning, and this caused her great anguish. She came and comforted her: 'Lady,' she said, 'it is no use. You will do well to abandon this sadness! Let me have one of the children and I shall rid you of her so that you will never be shamed or see her ever again. I shall abandon her in a church to which I shall carry her safe and sound. Some worthy man will find her and, if it please God, raise her.' The lady heard what she said and was overjoyed, promising her that she would receive a good reward if she performed this service. They wrapped the noble child in a cloth of fine linen and then placed over her the finest piece of striped brocade which her husband had brought from Constantinople, where he had been. With a piece of her ribbon, the lady attached to the child's arm a large ring made from an ounce of pure gold, with a ruby set in it and lettering on the band. Wherever she was found, people would then truly know that she was of noble birth. The damsel took the child and left the chamber forthwith. [99-136] That night, when all was dark, she left the town and took to a

wide path which led her into the forest, and making her way through the wood by keeping to the main path, she emerged on the other side with the child. Far away to the right she had heard dogs barking and cocks crowing, and there she knew she could find a town. The damsel went quickly in the direction of the barking and entered a rich and fair town where there was an exceptionally wealthy and well-endowed abbey. I think it housed nuns with an abbess to watch over them. The girl saw the church, the towers, the walls and the bell-tower, and approached hurriedly, stopping before the door. She put down the child she was carrying, knelt humbly and began her prayer: 'God,' she said, 'by your holy name, if it please you, Lord, keep this infant from perishing.' When she had finished her prayer, she looked behind her and saw a wide ash-tree, luxuriant and with many boughs. It branched out into four forks and had been planted there as a source of shade. She took the child in her arms, ran up to the ash-tree, placed the child in it and then left her, commending her to the one true God. The damsel returned and told her lady what she had done. [137-76]

There was a porter at the abbey who opened the outer door of the church by which people entered to hear the service. That night he arose early, lit candles and lamps, rang the bells and opened the door. When he saw the garments on the ash-tree his only thought was that someone had stolen them and put them there. He made his way over to the tree as soon as he could, felt with his hand and thus found the child. He then gave thanks to God, took the child and returned home, not wanting to leave it there. He had a widowed daughter who had in the cradle a baby she was suckling. The worthy man called out: 'Daughter, arise, arise! Light a fire and candles! I have brought here a child which I found outside in the ash-tree. Suckle it with your milk for me, keep it warm, and bathe it!' [177-202] She obeyed him and lit the fire, taking the child and making it warm. She bathed it well and then suckled it with her milk. On its arm she found the ring, and when they saw the rich and beautiful cloth of silk, they were sure that she was born of high degree. That day after the service, when the abbess left the church, the porter went to talk to her, for he wanted to tell her the story of how he had found the child. The abbess commanded it to be brought before her just as it had been found

and so the porter went to his house and willingly brought the child to show her. She looked at the girl intently and said she would have her brought up as her niece, forbidding the porter to say anything about it. She herself raised the child and because she had been found in the ash-tree, they named her Le Fresne, which was what people then called her. [203-30]

The lady kept her secretly for a while as her niece and the girl was raised within the bounds of the abbey. When she reached the age when Nature forms beauty, there was no fairer, no more courtly girl in Brittany, for she was noble and cultivated, both in appearance and in speech. No one who had seen her would have failed to love and admire her greatly.

In Dol there lived the best lord there has ever been. I shall now tell you his name: in his country they called him Gurun, and he had heard tell of the maiden and began to love her. He went to a tournament and returned by way of the abbey, asking to see the girl. The abbess showed her to him, and when he saw that she was very beautiful and well educated, wise, courtly and well brought-up, he said to himself that he would henceforth consider himself unfortunate if he did not have her love. He was distraught and did not know what to do, for if he were to return too often the abbess would notice and he would never see the girl again. He thought of a solution: he would increase the wealth of the abbey and give it a great deal of his land, thereby enriching it for all time, for he wanted to have a lord's rights to a dwelling-place and residence. In order to join their community he gave them a generous portion of his wealth, but his motive was other than remission for his sins. He went there often to talk to the girl, and begged her and promised her so much that she granted what he sought. [231-74] When he was sure of her love, he spoke to her one day: 'Fair one, you have now made me your love. Come away with me for good! I assure you that should your aunt notice she would be most aggrieved and extremely angry if you became pregnant in her house. If you accept my advice, you will come away with me. Be sure I shall never fail you and shall provide for you well.' As she loved him deeply, she granted him his request and went away with him: he took her to his castle. She took her brocade and ring, for that might yet turn out to her advantage. The abbess had given them to her and told her what had happened when first she had been

sent to her and placed in the ash-tree. Whoever had sent her in the first place had given her the brocade and the ring, but no other riches accompanied her; she had then raised her as her niece. The girl kept the brocade and ring and put them in a casket which she carried with her, for she did not want to leave or forget it. The knight who took her away cherished and loved her greatly, as did all his men and his servants. There was not one, humble or great, who did not love and honour her for her nobility. [275-312]

After she had been with Gurun for some time, the landed knights reproached him for it severely, and they often spoke to him saying that he should take a noble wife and free himself from Le Fresne. They would be happier if he had an heir to inherit his land and it would be a grievous loss if he did not have a child by a wife on account of his concubine. They would never more consider him their lord, nor serve him willingly, if he did not do their bidding. The knight agreed to take a wife on their advice and so they looked to see where one might be found. 'Lord,' they said, 'close to us here is a worthy man quite your equal who has a daughter as his heir: much land will come with her. The damsel is called La Codre and in all the land there is none so fair. In exchange for Le Fresne, whom you will give up, you will have La Codre. On the hazel there are nuts to be enjoyed, but the ash never bears fruit. We shall seek to obtain the damsel, and if it please God, we shall give her to you.' Thus they sought this marriage and assent was given by all parties. Alas! what a misfortune that the worthy men did not know the story of these damsels who were twin sisters! Le Fresne was kept hidden from the other girl, who was then married to Le Fresne's beloved. When she learned of the marriage, Le Fresne showed no displeasure but served her lord properly and honoured all his people. The knights of his household, the squires and the serving-boys, grieved much because they were going to lose her. [313-58]

On the day set for their marriage Gurun summoned his friends, and his vassal the Archbishop of Dol was there. They brought Gurun's wife to him, but her mother, who accompanied her, was afraid of the girl whom he loved so much, lest she try to cause ill-will between her daughter and her husband. She planned to cast her out of her own house and advise her son-in-law to marry her to a worthy man, for in this way she could be rid of her.

The wedding was richly celebrated and there was much merrymaking. The damsel was in the bedchamber but gave no sign that anything she had seen had upset her, not even sufficiently to anger her. She served the lady willingly and properly so that those who saw her, both men and women, marvelled at it. Her mother looked at her intently, and esteemed and loved her in her heart. She thought and said to herself that if she had known the kind of person Le Fresne was, she would not have suffered harm because of her daughter La Codre, nor would her lord have been taken from her. [359-88]

That night, when the bed in which the wife was to lie was being prepared, the damsel went there and took off her cloak. She summoned the chamberlains and showed them how her lord wanted the bed made, for she had often seen it done. When they had made the bed ready, they covered it with a sheet made from old dress-material. The damsel saw it and was dissatisfied, for it did not seem right to her. She opened a chest, took out her brocade and, to honour him, put it on her lord's bed. The Archbishop was there to bless them and make the sign of the cross over them, for this was part of his duty. When the chamber was empty, the lady brought her daughter, whom she wanted to get ready for bed, and told her to undress. She saw the brocade on the bed, the like of which she had never seen, save for the one she had given away with the daughter she had concealed. Then she remembered her and trembled in her heart. She called the chamberlain to her. [389-419] 'Tell me,' she said, 'on your faith, where was this fine brocade found?' 'Lady,' he said, 'I shall tell you: the damsel brought it and cast it over this coverlet which she did not like. I think that the brocade is hers.' The lady called her and she came. When she had taken off her cloak, her mother spoke to her: 'Fair friend, do not conceal it from me. Where was this good brocade found? How did you acquire it? Who gave it to you? Tell me from whom you received it!' The girl answered her: 'Lady, my aunt, the abbess, who raised me, gave it to me and ordered me to keep it. Those who sent me to be brought up gave me that and a ring.' 'Fair one, may I see the ring?' 'Yes, my lady, with pleasure.' She brought her the ring and the lady looked at it carefully, easily recognizing it and the brocade. She had no doubt, for she now knew for sure that this was indeed her daughter, and, for all to hear, she said

openly: 'You are my daughter, fair friend!' [420-50] Because of the emotion she felt she fell back and fainted. When she arose from her swoon, she sent for her husband straightaway and he came, quite frightened. When he had entered the chamber, the lady fell at his feet and embraced him closely, begging his pardon for her crime. He had no part in this affair. 'Lady,' he said, 'what are you saying? There is nothing but good between us. Whatever you wish, let it be pardoned! Tell me your will!' 'Lord, since you have forgiven me, listen to what I have to tell you! Once, in my great wickedness, I slandered my neighbour. I spoke ill of her two children, but in fact I did myself harm. The truth is that I became with child and had two daughters, one of whom I hid. I had her abandoned at a church and sent with her our brocade and the ring you gave me when you first spoke with me. It can be hidden from you no longer: I have found the cloth and the ring, and have recognized here our daughter whom I had lost by my folly. This is the damsel, so worthy, wise and fair, whom the knight loved and whose sister he has married!' [451-84] The lord said: 'I was never as happy as I am now that we have found our daughter. God has given us great joy rather than allowing the sin to be doubled. Daughter, come here!' The girl rejoiced when she heard the story. Her father wanted to wait no longer and went to fetch his son-in-law himself to tell him the story, taking the archbishop with him. The knight was never so joyful as when he learnt about it. The archbishop recommended that things be left as they were that night; the next day he would unjoin those he had married. Thus they agreed and the following day the two were separated. Gurun then married his beloved and her father gave her to him as a mark of affection. He gave her half his inheritance and he and her mother were present at the wedding with their other daughter, as was fitting. When they returned to their own country, they took their daughter La Codre with them. She later made a rich marriage. [485-514]

When the truth of this adventure was known, they composed the lay of *Le Fresne*. It was given this title on account of its heroine. [515-18]

BISCLAVRET

In my effort to compose lays I do not wish to omit *Bisclavret* – for such is its name in Breton, while the Normans call it *Garwaf*. In days gone by one could hear tell, and indeed it often used to happen, that many men turned into werewolves and went to live in the woods. A werewolf is a ferocious beast which, when possessed by this madness, devours men, causes great damage and dwells in vast forests. I leave such matters for the moment, for I wish to tell you about Bisclavret. [1–14]

In Brittany there lived a baron whom I have heard greatly praised. He was a good and handsome knight who conducted himself nobly. He was one of his lord's closest advisers and was well loved by all his neighbours. As his wedded wife he had a woman who was worthy and attractive in appearance. He loved her and she returned his love. But one thing caused her great worry: each week he was absent for three full days without her knowing what became of him or where he went, and no one in the household knew what happened to him. One day, when he had returned home in high spirits, she questioned him: 'Lord,' she said, 'my dear, sweet love, I would gladly ask you something, if only I dared; but there is nothing I fear more than your anger.' [15–35] When he heard this, he embraced her, drew her towards him and kissed her. 'Lady,' he said, 'come, ask your question! There is nothing you can ask which I shall not tell you, if I know the answer.' 'In faith,' she said, 'I am relieved to hear this. Lord, I am so fraught with anxiety the days you are apart from me, my heart is so heavy and I have such a fear of losing you that I shall surely die shortly from this unless I soon get help. Please tell me where you go, what becomes of you and where you stay. I think you must have a lover and, if this is so, you are doing wrong.' 'Lady,' he said, 'in God's name, have mercy on me! If I tell you this, great harm will come to me,

for as a result I shall lose your love and destroy myself.' [36–56]

When the lady heard what he said, she thought it was no laughing matter. She questioned him repeatedly and coaxed him so persuasively that he told her his story, keeping nothing secret. 'Lady, I become a werewolf: I enter the vast forest and live in the deepest part of the wood where I feed off the prey I can capture.' When he had related everything to her, she asked him whether he undressed or remained clothed. 'Lady,' he said, 'I go about completely naked.' 'Tell me, in the name of God, where do you leave your clothes?' 'That I will not tell you, for if I lost them and were discovered in that state, I should remain a werewolf forever. No one would be able to help me until they were returned to me. That is why I do not wish this to be known.' [57–79] 'Lord,' the lady replied to him, 'I love you more than the whole world. You must not hide anything from me or doubt me in any way. That would not seem like true love. What have I done wrong? What sin have I committed that you should doubt me in any way? Do tell me – you will be acting wisely'. She tormented and harried him so much that he could not do otherwise but tell her. 'Lady,' he said, 'beside the wood, near the path I follow, stands an old chapel which often serves me well. There beneath a bush is a broad stone, hollowed out in the centre, in which I put my clothes until I return home.' The lady heard this remarkable revelation and her face became flushed with fear. She was greatly alarmed by the story, and began to consider various means of parting from him, as she no longer wished to lie with him. [80–102] She sent a messenger to summon a knight who lived in the region and who had loved her for a long time, wooed her ardently and served her generously. She had never loved him or promised him her affection but now she told him what was on her mind. 'Friend,' she said, 'rejoice: without further delay I grant you that which has tormented you; never again will you encounter any refusal. I offer you my love and my body; make me your mistress.' He thanked her warmly and accepted her pledge, whereupon she received his oath and told him of her husband and what became of him. She described the path he took to the forest and sent him for her husband's clothes. Thus was Bisclavret betrayed and wronged by his wife. Because he was often missing, everyone thought that this time he had gone away for good. They searched and inquired for him a

long while but, as no trace of him was found, they had to let the matter drop. Then the knight married the lady he had loved for so long. [103-34]

A whole year passed by until one day the king went hunting and headed straight for the forest in which Bisclavret was living. When the hounds were unleashed they came upon Bisclavret and the dogs and hunters spent the whole day in pursuit until they were just about to capture him, tear him to pieces and destroy him. As soon as he saw the king he ran up to him and begged for mercy. He took hold of his stirrup and kissed his foot and his leg. The king saw him and was filled with dread. He summoned all his companions. 'Lords,' he said, 'come forward! See the marvellous way this beast humbles itself before me! It has the intelligence of a human and is pleading for mercy. Drive back all the dogs and see that no one strikes it! The beast possesses understanding and intelligence. Hurry! Let us depart. I shall place the creature under my protection, for I shall hunt no more today.' [135-60]

The king then left with Bisclavret following him. He kept very close to the king, as he did not want to be separated from him and had no wish to abandon him. The king, who took him straight to his castle, was delighted and overjoyed at what had happened, for never before had he seen such a thing. He considered the wolf to be a great wonder and loved it dearly, commanding all his people to guard it well for love of him and not to do it any harm. None of them was to strike it and plenty of food and water must be provided for it. His men were happy to look after the creature and each day it would sleep amongst the knights, just by the king. It was loved by everyone and so noble and gentle a beast was it that it never attempted to cause any harm. Wherever the king might go, it never wanted to be left behind. It accompanied him constantly and showed clearly that it loved him. [161-84]

Now hear what happened next. The king held court and all his barons and those who held fiefs from him were summoned so that they could help him celebrate the festival and serve him all the better. Amongst them, richly and elegantly attired, was the knight who had married Bisclavret's wife. He did not realize and would never have suspected that Bisclavret was so close by. As soon as he arrived at the palace, Bisclavret caught sight of the knight and sped towards him, sinking his teeth into him and dragging him

down towards him. He would soon have done the knight serious harm if the king had not called him and threatened him with a stick. On two occasions that day he attempted to bite him. Many people were greatly astonished at this for never before had he shown signs of such behaviour towards anyone he had seen. Throughout the household it was remarked that he would not have done it without good reason. The knight had wronged him somehow or other, for he was bent on revenge. On this occasion that was the end of the matter, until the festival came to a close and the barons took their leave and returned home. The knight whom Bisclavret attacked was one of the very first to go, I believe. No wonder Bisclavret hated him. [185-218]

Not long afterwards, as I understand it, the king, who was wise and courtly, went into the forest where Bisclavret had been discovered. Bisclavret accompanied him and on the way home that night the king took lodging in that region. Bisclavret's wife learnt of this and, dressing herself elegantly, went next day to speak to the king, taking an expensive present for him. When Bisclavret saw her approach, no one could restrain him. He dashed towards her like a madman. Just hear how successfully he took his revenge. He tore the nose right off her face. What worse punishment could he have inflicted on her? From all sides he was threatened and was on the point of being torn to pieces, when a wise man said to the king: 'Lord, listen to me. This beast has lived with you and every single one of us has seen him over a long period and has been with him at close quarters. Never before has he touched a soul or committed a hostile act, except against this lady here. By the faith I owe you, he has some grudge against her and also against her husband. She is the wife of the knight you used to love so dearly and who has been missing for a long time without our knowing what became of him. Question the lady to see if she will tell you why the beast hates her. Make her tell you, if she knows! We have witnessed many marvels happening in Brittany.' [219-60] The king accepted his advice. Holding the knight, he took the lady away and subjected her to torture. Pain and fear combined made her reveal everything about her husband: how she had betrayed him and taken his clothes, about his account of what happened, what became of him and where he went. Since his clothes had been taken he had not been seen in the region. She was quite convinced that the beast was

Bisclavret. The king asked her for the clothes and, whether she liked it or not, made her bring them and return them to Bisclavret. When they were placed before him, Bisclavret took no notice of them. The man who gave the advice earlier called to the king: 'Lord, you are not acting properly: nothing would induce him to put on his clothing in front of you or change his animal form. You do not realize the importance of this; it is most humiliating for him. Take him into your bedchamber and bring him the clothes. Let us leave him there for a while and we shall soon see if he turns into a man.' [261-92] The king himself led the way and closed all the doors on the wolf. After a while he returned, taking two barons with him. All three entered the room. They found the knight sleeping on the king's own bed. The king ran forward to embrace him, and kissed him many times. It was not long before he restored his land to him; he gave him more than I can tell and banished the woman from the country, exiling her from the region. The man for whom she betrayed her husband went with her. She had a good many children who were thereafter recognizable by their appearance. Many of the women in the family, I tell you truly, were born without noses and lived noseless. [293-314]

The adventure you have heard actually took place, do not doubt it. The lay was composed about Bisclavret to be remembered for ever more. [315-18]

V

LANVAL

Just as it happened, I shall relate to you the story of another lay, which tells of a very noble young man whose name in Breton is Lanval. [1-4]

Arthur, the worthy and courtly king, was at Carlisle on account of the Scots and the Picts who were ravaging the country, penetrating into the land of Logres and frequently laying it waste.

The king was there during the summer, at Pentecost, and he gave many rich gifts to counts and barons and to those of the Round Table: there was no such company in the whole world. He apportioned wives and lands to all, save to one who had served him: this was Lanval, whom he did not remember, and for whom no one put in a good word. Because of his valour, generosity, beauty and prowess, many were envious of him. There were those who pretended to hold him in esteem, but who would not have uttered a single regret if misfortune had befallen him. He was the son of a king of noble birth, but far from his inheritance, and although he belonged to Arthur's household he had spent all his wealth, for the king gave him nothing and Lanval asked for nothing. Now he was in a plight, very sad and forlorn. Lords, do not be surprised: a stranger bereft of advice can be very downcast in another land when he does not know where to seek help. [5-38]

This knight whose tale I am telling you had served the king well. One day he mounted his horse and went to take his ease. He left the town and came alone to a meadow, dismounting by a stream; but there his horse trembled violently, so he loosened its saddlegirth and left it, allowing it to enter the meadow to roll over on its back. He folded his cloak, which he placed beneath his head, very disconsolate because of his troubles, and nothing could please him. Lying thus, he looked downriver and saw two damsels coming, more beautiful than any he had ever seen: they were richly dressed in closely fitting tunics of dark purple and their faces

Now that I have begun to compose lays, I shall not cease my effort but shall relate fully in rhyme the adventures that I know. It is my intention and desire henceforth to tell you about Yonec, under what circumstances he was born and how his father, whose name was Muldumarec, first met his mother. [1-10]

In Britain there once lived a rich old man who held the fief of Caerwent and was acknowledged lord of the land.¹ The city lay on the River Duellas and formerly ships could reach it. This man was very old and, because his inheritance would be large, he took a wife in order to have children, who would be his heirs. The maiden who was given to the rich man was from a noble family, wise, courtly and extremely beautiful. He loved her greatly on account of her beauty, but because she was so fair and noble, he took good care to watch over her and locked her in his tower in a large paved chamber. He had a sister, old and widowed, without a husband, and he placed her with the lady to keep her from going astray. There were other women, I believe, in a separate room, but the lady would never have spoken to them without the old woman's permission. [11-36]

Thus he held her for seven years – they never had any children – and she did not leave the tower either for family or friend. When the lord went to bed, there was neither chamberlain nor door-keeper who would have dared enter the chamber to light a candle before him. The lady was in great distress, and she wept and sighed so much that she lost her beauty, as happens to any woman who fails to take care of herself. She would herself have preferred death to take her quickly.

It was the beginning of the month of April, when the birds sing their songs, that the lord arose in the early morning and prepared to set out for the woods. He had made the old woman get up and lock the doors after him. When she had done his bidding, he left

with his men. The old woman carried her psalter from which she intended to recite psalms. [37-59] The lady lay awake weeping and looking at the sunlight. She noticed that the old woman had left the room and grieved, sighed and lamented tearfully: 'Alas,' she said, 'that ever I was born! My destiny is hard indeed. I am a prisoner in this tower and death alone will free me. What is this jealous old man afraid of, to keep me so securely imprisoned? He is extremely stupid and foolish, always fearing that he will be betrayed. I can neither go to church nor hear God's service. I could put on a friendly mien for him, even without any desire to do so, if I could talk to people and join them in amusement. Cursed be my parents and all those who gave me to this jealous man and married me to his person! I pull and tug on a strong rope! He will never die. When he should have been baptized, he was plunged into the river of Hell, for his sinews are hard, and so are his veins which are full of living blood. I have often heard tell that in this country one used to encounter adventures which relieved those afflicted by care: knights discovered maidens to their liking, noble and fair, and ladies found handsome and courtly lovers, worthy and valiant men. There was no fear of reproach and they alone could see them. If this can be and ever was, if it ever did happen to anyone, may almighty God grant my wish!' [60-104]

Having lamented thus, she noticed the shadow of a large bird through a narrow window, but did not know what it could be. The bird flew into the room: it had straps on its feet and looked like a hawk of five or six moultings. It landed before the lady, and after it had been there for a while for her to see, it turned into a fair and noble knight. The lady was astounded by this. Her face became flushed, and she trembled and covered her head, being very afraid. The knight was extremely courtly and spoke to her first: 'Lady, do not be afraid! The hawk is a noble bird. Even if its secrets remain a mystery to you, be assured that you are safe, and make me your beloved! This is the reason I came here. I have loved you for a long time and desired you greatly in my heart. I never loved any woman but you, nor shall I ever love another. Yet I could not come to you, nor leave my country, unless you had wished for me; but now I can be your beloved!' The lady, now assured, uncovered her head and spoke. She answered the knight,

saying that she would make him her lover, provided he believed in God, which would make their love possible. He was very handsome and never in her life had she seen such a handsome knight, nor would she ever again. [105-44] 'Lady,' he said, 'you are right. I would not on any account want guilt, distrust or suspicion to attach to me. I do believe in the Creator who set us free from the sorrow in which our ancestor Adam put us by biting the bitter apple. He is, will be and always has been life and light to sinners. If you do not believe this of me, send for your chaplain. Tell him that an illness has come upon you and that you want to hear the service that God has established in this world for the redemption of sinners. I shall assume your appearance, receive the body of Christ, and recite all of my credo for you. Never doubt me on this count.' She replied that he had spoken well. He lay down next to her on the bed, but did not intend to touch, embrace or kiss her. Then the old woman returned, and when she found the lady awake she told her it was time to get up and that she would bring her clothes. The lady said that she was ill and she must ensure that the chaplain came quickly to her, for she was very much afraid of dying. The old woman said: 'Be patient now! My lord has gone to the woods. No one but me may enter here.' The lady was very afraid and pretended to faint, and when the old woman saw her she was greatly alarmed. She opened the door of the chamber and sent for the priest, who came as quickly as possible, bringing the *corpus domini*. The knight received it and drank the wine from the chalice, whereupon the chaplain left and the old woman closed the doors. [145-90]

The lady lay next to her beloved: I never saw so fair a couple. When they had laughed and sported and exchanged confidences, the knight took his leave, for he wanted to return to his own country. She begged him gently to come back and see her often. 'Lady,' he said, 'whenever it pleases you, I shall be with you within the hour, but observe moderation so that we are not discomfited. This old woman will betray us and keep watch over us night and day. When she notices our love, she will tell her lord about it. If this should happen as I say and we are betrayed in this way, I shall have no way of preventing my death.' [191-210]

Thereupon the knight departed and left his beloved in great joy. The next day she arose quite recovered and was very happy

that week. She looked after herself well and her beauty was quite restored. Now she was more content just to remain where she was than to amuse herself in any other way, for she wanted to see her beloved often and to take her pleasure with him as soon as her lord left. Night and day, early or late, he was hers whenever she wanted. Now may she, with God's grace, long enjoy her love! The great joy she often experienced on seeing her lover caused her appearance to alter. Her husband was very cunning and noticed that she was different from her usual self. He was suspicious of his sister, but spoke to her one day and said that he was astonished that the lady attired herself thus, asking what this might mean. The old woman replied that she did not know, for no one could speak to her nor did she have a friend or beloved, except that she had noticed that she remained alone more willingly than before. The lord then replied: 'In faith, that I believe! Now you must do something: in the morning when I have got up and you have locked the doors, pretend to go outside and leave her to lie alone. Stay in a secret place and watch to see what it can be that keeps her so joyful.' With this plan they parted. Alas! how ill-served were they on whom he wanted to spy in order to betray and trap them. [211-56]

Three days later, I heard tell, the lord pretended to leave, telling his wife that the king had summoned him by letter, but that he would soon be back. He then left the chamber and closed the door. The old woman arose and hid behind a curtain from where it was easy for her to hear and satisfy her curiosity. The lady lay there without sleeping, for she greatly desired her beloved who came without delay, in no time at all. They were full of joy to be with each other, to talk and exchange glances, until it was time to get up, for then the knight had to go. The old woman saw and took note of how he came and went, but was very much afraid because she saw him one moment a man and another a hawk. When the lord, who had not been far away, returned, she explained the truth about the knight. He was most distressed by this and quickly made traps to kill the knight. He had large iron spikes forged and the tips more sharply pointed than any razor. When he had prepared and cut barbs in them, he set them on the window, close together and well-positioned, in the place through which the knight passed whenever he came to see the lady. Oh God! if only

he had known the treachery that the villain was preparing. [257-96]

The next morning the lord arose before daybreak and said that he intended to go hunting. The old woman went to see him off and then returned to bed, for dawn was not yet visible. The lady was awake, waiting for the man she loved faithfully, and said that he could now come and be with her quite at leisure. When she summoned him, he left without delay and flew through the window, but the spikes were in front of it. One of them pierced his body and the red blood flowed out. When he realized that he was mortally wounded, he freed himself from the prongs and entered. He sat down on the bed beside the lady, covering all the sheets in blood, and when she saw the blood and the wound she was grievously alarmed. He said to her: 'My sweet beloved, for love of you I am losing my life. I told you what would come of it: your appearance would slay us.' When she heard this, she fell into a swoon, and for a while seemed dead. He comforted her tenderly, saying that grief was of no avail, and telling her she was with child by him and would have a worthy and valiant son to comfort her. She was to call him Yonec, and he would avenge both of them and kill his enemy. [297-332]

He could remain no longer, for his wound was bleeding continuously, and he left in great pain, with her following him with loud cries. She escaped through a window, but it was a wonder she did not kill herself, for she had to jump a good twenty feet. Naked but for her shift, she followed the trail of blood which flowed from the knight on to the path she was taking and to which she kept until she came to a hill. In this hill there was an opening, all covered in his blood, but she could see nothing beyond and therefore assumed that her beloved had entered there. She hurriedly went in, but finding no light, followed the straight path until she emerged on the other side of the hill, in a beautiful meadow. She found the grass wet with blood, which alarmed her greatly, and followed the trail through the meadow. [333-59] There was a city nearby, completely enclosed by a wall, where there was not a house, hall or tower which did not seem to be made of solid silver. The state rooms were especially rich. Over towards the town were the marshes, the forests and the enclosures, and in the other direction, towards the keep, a stream flowed all around, where the ships used

to arrive, and there were more than three hundred sails. Downstream the gate was unlocked, and so the lady entered the town, still following the fresh blood through the centre of the town up to the castle. No one at all spoke to her, for she encountered neither man nor woman. She came to the paved entrance of the palace and found it covered in blood, and when she went into a beautiful chamber she found a knight sleeping, but did not recognize him and continued into another, larger, room. There, finding nothing but a bed with a knight sleeping on it, she passed through. She entered the third room and found her beloved's bed. The bedposts were of pure gold, and I cannot estimate the worth of the bedclothes. The candles and the candelabra, lit by both night and day, were worth all the gold in an entire city. [360-92] As soon as she saw the knight she recognized him, and approached in alarm, falling over him in a swoon. He who loved her deeply took her in his arms and lamented his misfortune repeatedly. When she had recovered, he comforted her gently: 'Fair beloved, in God's name, have mercy! Go away! Flee from here! I shall die soon, before daybreak. There would be such grief here if you were found, and you would be tormented, for my people would know that they had lost me because of my love for you. I am sad and troubled for your sake.' The lady said to him: 'Beloved, I should rather die together with you than suffer with my husband. If I go back to him, he will kill me.' The knight reassured her, gave her a ring, and told her that as long as she kept it her husband would remember nothing that had happened and would not keep her in custody. He gave and commended to her his sword, then enjoined her to prevent any man from ever taking possession of it, but to keep it for the use of her son. [393-424] When he had grown up and become a worthy and valiant knight, she should take him and her husband to a feast. They would come to an abbey and at a tomb they would visit, they would again hear about his death and how he was unjustly killed. There she would give the sword to his son who was to be told the story of his birth and who his father was. Then they would see what he would do. When he had explained everything to her, he gave her a costly tunic, and ordered her to put it on. Then he made her leave him, and she went away wearing the ring and carrying the sword that comforted her. She had not gone half a league from the city when she heard the bells ringing

and the lamentation in the castle. She swooned four times with grief and, when she recovered, made her way towards the hill, which she passed through and arrived back in her own region. She remained afterwards a long time together with her husband, who made no accusations against her, and neither slandered nor mocked her. [425-56]

Their son was born and well brought up, well protected and well loved. They called him Yonec and in the whole kingdom there was not a fairer, worthier, more valiant or more generous man to be found. When he had come of age, they had him dubbed a knight, but now listen to what happened that same year!

As was the custom of the country the lord had been summoned with his friends to the feast of St Aaron, which was celebrated in Caerleon and in several other cities. He took his wife and son and dressed himself richly; so it was that they set out, not knowing exactly where they were going. With them was a young lad who led them along the straight road until they came to a castle, fairer than any other in the whole world. Inside there was an abbey with very holy people, where the squire who was taking them to the feast found them lodgings. They were well served and honoured in the abbot's chamber, and next morning went to hear mass. Then they intended to leave, but the abbot came to talk to them and begged them to stay, for he wanted to show them his dormitory, his chapter-house and his refectory, and since they were well-lodged, the lord consented to stay. [457-92]

That day after dinner they visited the various rooms. First they came to the chapter-house where they found a great tomb covered with a cloth of striped brocade with a band of rich gold material running through it. At the head, feet and sides, there were twenty lighted candles. The candelabra were of fine gold, and the censers which were used by day to honour the tomb with fragrance, of amethyst. They inquired of the inhabitants whose tomb it was and who lay there. At this, the inhabitants began to weep and said amidst their tears that it was the best knight, the strongest and the fiercest, the fairest and the most beloved, who had ever been born. He had been king of that land and none had ever been as courtly. He had been destroyed at Caerwent and killed for the love of a lady [493-520]: 'We have never since had a lord, but, just as he said and commanded, we have waited long for a son he gave the

lady.' When the lady heard this news, she called aloud to her son: 'Fair son, you have heard how God has brought us here! It is your father who lies here, whom this old man unjustly killed. Now I commend and hand over to you his sword, for I have kept it long enough.' For all to hear, she revealed to him that this was his father and he his son, how he used to come to her and how her husband had betrayed him. She told him the truth, fell into a faint on the tomb, and, while unconscious, died. She never spoke again, but when her son saw she was dead, he struck off his stepfather's head, and thus with his father's sword avenged his mother's grief. When what had happened became known throughout the city, they took the lady in great honour and laid her in the tomb. Before leaving this place they made Yonec their lord. [521-50]

Those who heard this story long afterwards composed a lay from it, about the sorrow and grief that they suffered for love. [551-4]

That was all he wrote, because he had sent her word that he had been there a long time, waiting patiently and watching out for an opportunity to see her, for he could not possibly live without her.¹ The two of them resembled the honeysuckle which clings to the hazel branch: when it has wound itself round and attached itself to the hazel, the two can survive together: but if anyone should then attempt to separate them, the hazel quickly dies, as does the honeysuckle. 'Sweet love, so it is with us: without me you cannot survive, nor I without you. [44-78]

The queen rode along. She looked at the path as it sloped upwards ahead of her, saw the piece of wood and realized what it was. She recognized all the letters and commanded all those who were escorting her and travelling along with her to stop. She wished to alight and take a rest. They did as she bade and she moved a good distance away from her companions, calling her faithful servant Brenguein to her. She went a little way off the path and in the wood she found the man who loved her more than any living thing. They shared great joy together. He spoke freely to her and she told him of her desires. Then she explained how he could be reconciled with the king and how disturbed the king had been at having to banish him. He had done it because of the accusation against him. Then she departed, leaving her beloved behind. But, when the moment came for them to separate, they began to weep. Tristram returned to Wales until his uncle summoned him. [79-106]

On account of the joy he had experienced from the sight of his beloved and because of what he had written, Tristram, a skilful harpist, in order to record his words (as the queen had said he should), used them to create a new lay. I shall very briefly name it: the English call it *Gotelef* and the French *Chevrefoil*. I have told you the truth of the lay I have related here. [107-18]



ELIDUC

I shall tell you the story and the whole substance of a very old Breton lay, in so far as I understand the truth of it. [1-4]

In Brittany there was a knight, worthy and courtly, brave and fierce: Eliduc was his name, I believe, and there was no man so valiant in the land. His wife was noble and wise, of good family and high-born. They lived together for a long time and loved each other with great loyalty, but then it happened that he went in search of paid military service. There he loved a maiden, the daughter of a king and queen, whose name was Guilliadun, and none in the kingdom was more beautiful. His wife, whose name was Guildelüec, remained in her country. From these two the lay of *Guildelüec* and *Guilliadun* takes its name. It was first called *Eliduc*, but now the name has been changed, because the adventure upon which the lay is based concerns the ladies. I shall relate to you the truth of it as it happened. [5-28]

Eliduc's lord, the King of Brittany, loved him dearly and cherished him. He served the king loyally and, whenever the king was away, the land was Eliduc's to guard. The king retained Eliduc for his prowess and as a result many advantages accrued to him. He could hunt in the forest and no forester was bold enough to oppose him or even grumble at him in any way. The envy of his good fortune, which often possesses others, caused him to be embroiled with his lord, to be slandered and accused, so that he was banished from the court without a formal accusation. Eliduc did not know why and often beseeched the king to hear his defence and not to believe slander, for he had served him long and willingly. But the king did not answer him and, since his lord refused to listen, he was obliged to depart. He returned to his house, summoned all his friends and told them of the anger which his lord, the king, felt towards him. He had served him to the best of his ability and ought not to have deserved his ill-will. [29-60] The

rustics say in a proverb that when he admonishes his ploughman a lord's love is no fief. He who is loyal to his lord and loves his good neighbours is wise and sensible. Eliduc did not want to stay in the country and said that he would cross the sea to the kingdom of Logres to take his ease for a while. He would leave his wife at home and order his men to look after her faithfully, and all his friends likewise. He kept this counsel and equipped himself richly. His friends were very sad that he was leaving them. He took only ten knights with him, and his wife, who bewailed her husband's departure, escorted him at his leaving, but he assured her that he would keep good faith with her. Thereupon he parted from her and pursued his path onwards. Coming to the sea, he crossed it and arrived at Totnes. [61-88]

There were a number of kings in that land and there was great strife and war between them. In this country, near Exeter, lived a very old and powerful man, who had no male heir of his own, just a daughter of marriageable age. Because he refused to give her to one of his peers, this latter was making war upon him and laying waste all his lands. The enemy had surrounded him in a castle where no man was bold enough to resist and engage in single combat or in *mêlée*, but when Eliduc heard of this he would proceed no further now that he had found a war. He wanted to remain in that country to help as best he could the king who was most afflicted and discomfited, and remain in his service. He sent messengers and informed the king in a letter that he had left his own country and come to his aid, asking him to make known his wishes and, if he did not want to retain him, to grant him safe conduct through the land. He would then go further in search of service. [89-118] When the king saw the messengers, he received them eagerly and honourably. He called his constable and quickly ordered him to prepare an escort to bring the baron there, to prepare hostels where they could lodge and to give them as much as they would need for a month's expenditure. The escort was prepared and sent to fetch Eliduc, who was received with great honour and made very welcome by the king. His lodging was with a very wise and courtly burgess, who turned over to him his fine chamber hung with curtains. Eliduc ensured that he was well-served and had all the poor knights who were lodged in the town come to his table.

He forbade all his men to be so bold as to accept any gift or money during the first forty days. [119-44]

On the third day of their stay the cry went up in the city that their enemies had come and were spread throughout the land, intending to assault the town and come right up to the gates. Eliduc heard the tumult of the frightened people and armed himself without delay, as did his companions. There were forty mounted knights staying in the town – a number were wounded and there were many prisoners – and when they saw Eliduc mount they went to their lodgings to arm themselves. They left with him by the gate, not waiting to be summoned. 'Lord,' they said, 'we shall go with you and do as you do!' He replied: 'I thank you. Does anyone know of a narrow pass or defile where we can ambush the enemy? If we await them here, we could join battle with them, but this would not be to our advantage if anyone knows a better plan.' They said to him: 'Lord, truly, near this wood, in a thicket, is a narrow cart-track along which they must return. When they have captured their spoils, they will return thence. They often come back unarmed on their palfreys, thus openly courting death. It would be easy to inflict losses on them, humiliate them and make them suffer.' [145-84] Eliduc said to them: 'Friends, I pledge my faith to you in this matter: he who does not sometimes go where he surely thinks he will lose will gain little and never rise in esteem. You are all vassals of the king and should thus remain loyal to him, so come with me wherever I go and do as I do. I promise you faithfully that you will meet no obstacle as long as I can help it, and, if we can win anything, the discomfiting of our enemies will increase our reputation.' They accepted his pledge and took him to the wood, hiding in the bushes near the path until the enemy returned. Eliduc showed them exactly how to engage the enemy and how to shout at them. When the enemy had entered the pass, Eliduc shouted after them and called to all his companions, exhorting them to do well. They struck vigorously and did not spare the enemy, who were quite astounded, quickly routed and their ranks split, being vanquished in a short time. [185-217] Their constable and many other knights were held and entrusted to the keeping of the squires. Twenty-five men on Eliduc's side captured thirty of the enemy. They quickly seized the equipment, took much booty and then returned joyfully, having achieved

much. The king was in a tower, much afraid for his men, and lamented Eliduc loudly for he thought and feared that he had abandoned his knights. But they arrived back in a body, loaded with booty, their number greater upon their return than it had been when they left; because of this, the king failed to recognize them and harboured doubts and suspicions. He ordered the gates shut and told his people to climb on to the walls to shoot at them and bombard them. They would have no need of this, however, for the party had sent in advance a squire on a swift steed, who related the adventure to them, told them of the soldier, how he had defeated the enemy and how he had conducted himself. There was never such a knight, they said. [218-49] He had taken the constable, captured twenty-nine of the others, and killed and wounded many more. When the king heard the news, he was exceedingly joyful and came down from the tower to meet Eliduc. He thanked him for his kindness and Eliduc surrendered the prisoners to him, distributing the arms to the others and keeping for his own use only three horses, which were highly praised. He shared and gave away everything, including his own portion, to both the prisoners and the others.

After this deed I have related to you, the king loved and cherished Eliduc greatly, retaining him for a whole year along with his companions. He received his allegiance and made him custodian of his land. [250-70]

Eliduc was courtly and wise, a fine knight, worthy and generous, and the king's daughter heard tell of him and his virtues. She sent her personal chamberlain to him to request and summon him to come and relax for a while with her, so that they might talk and become acquainted. She was most surprised that he had not come to her, but Eliduc replied that he would go and make her acquaintance willingly. He mounted his steed, taking a knight with him, and then went to talk to the maiden. Before he entered the chamber he sent the chamberlain on ahead and delayed a little until the latter returned. With gentle mien, honest expression and very noble demeanour, he spoke with much breeding and thanked the damsel, Guilliadun, who was very beautiful, for having sent for him to come and talk to her. She took him by the hand and they sat down on a bed and spoke of many things. [271-99] She looked at him closely, at his face, his body and his appearance, saying to herself

that there was nothing unbecoming about him and forming a great admiration for him. Love dispatched its messenger who summoned her to love him. It made her go pale and sigh, but she did not want to discuss the matter with him lest he blame her for it. He stayed there a long while, then took his leave and left. She granted him leave very unwillingly, but he nevertheless departed and returned to his lodging. He was very sad and pensive, and anxious because this beautiful girl, the daughter of his lord the king, had addressed him so gently and sighed. He considered himself most unfortunate to have been in the country for so long and to have seen her so little. Having said this, he repented of it, for he remembered his wife, and how he had assured her that he would be faithful and behave loyally. [300-326]

When she had seen him, the maiden wanted him for her lover. She had never esteemed anyone as much and wanted to keep him with her if she could. Thus she stayed awake the whole night and neither rested nor slept. She arose the next morning, went to a window, calling her chamberlain in whom she confided fully. 'By my faith,' she said, 'how unfortunate I am! I have fallen into a sorry plight, for I love the new soldier, Eliduc, the good knight. I had no rest last night and could not close my eyes to sleep. If he wishes to love me truly and will pledge himself to me, I shall do whatever he wants; he could benefit greatly from it and be king of this land. He is so exceedingly wise and courtly that, if he does not love me truly, I shall have to die a mournful death.' When she had spoken thus, the chamberlain whom she had summoned gave her some loyal advice with which he should not be reproached. 'Lady,' he said, 'if you love him, send someone to ask him to come and send him a girdle, a ribbon or ring, for this will please him. If he receives it gladly and is happy about the summons, then you will be sure of his love. There is no emperor on earth who ought not to be glad if you wanted to love him.' [327-64] When she had heard his advice, the maiden replied: 'How shall I know from my present whether he is inclined to love me? I have never seen a knight who received such a request, whether he felt love or hate, who did not willingly keep any present sent to him. I should hate him to mock me. But we may nevertheless learn something of the man from his mien. Get yourself ready and go.' 'I am ready now,' he replied. 'You will take him a gold ring and give him my girdle. Greet him

a thousand times on my behalf.' The chamberlain departed and she remained thus. Although she almost called him back, she nevertheless let him go and began to lament: 'Alas, how my heart has been taken unawares by a man from another country! I do not even know if he is of a noble family. He will soon leave and I shall be left behind to mourn, for I was foolish to set my mind on this. I only spoke of it yesterday and now already I am begging him for his love. I think he may blame me, but if he is courtly, he will be grateful. Now the die is cast and, if he does not care for my love, I shall consider myself unfortunate and shall have no joy for the rest of my life.' [365-400]

While she was lamenting, the chamberlain hurried to Eliduc and greeted him secretly, telling him the maiden had asked to see him. He presented Eliduc with the ring and the girdle and the knight thanked him, put the golden ring on his finger and the girdle around him. The young man said no more, nor did Eliduc inquire further, but only offered him a present of his own. He left, refusing to take anything. He returned to his lady and found her in her chamber, and when he had greeted her on Eliduc's behalf and thanked her for the gift, she said: 'Come now, hide nothing from me! Does he want to love me truly?' He replied: 'This is my opinion: the knight is not fickle. I consider him courtly and wise, and he knows well how to conceal his feelings. I greeted him on your behalf and gave him your gifts. He put on your girdle, attaching it securely around his waist and put the ring on his finger. I said nothing more to him, nor he to me.' [401-30] 'Did he not receive it as a love-token? If not, then I am betrayed.' He replied: 'By my faith, I do not know, but listen to what I am about to tell you: if he did not wish you well, then he would want nothing of yours.' 'You jest,' she said. 'I know he does not hate me, for I never did him any harm, except by loving him so deeply. If he still wants to hate me, he deserves to die. I shall never ask anything else of him through you or anyone else until I speak to him. I want to show him myself how my love for him afflicts me, but I do not know if he will stay.' The chamberlain replied: 'Lady, the king has retained him on oath for a year to serve him faithfully. Thus you will have enough opportunity to show him your desire.' When she heard he would be remaining, she rejoiced greatly, very

glad he was staying. She knew nothing of the sadness he had felt since seeing her, but he had no joy or pleasure, except when thinking of her. [431-61] He considered himself unfortunate, for he had promised his wife, before leaving his own country, that he would love only her. Now his heart was firmly trapped, for he wanted to remain faithful, but could not refrain from loving the maiden Guilliadun, who was so beautiful, from looking at her and talking to her, kissing and embracing her. However, he would never ask her for her love, which would redound to his dishonour, both in order to keep faith with his wife, and because he was in the king's service. In great distress, Eliduc mounted up and delayed no longer, calling his companions to him. He went to the castle to talk to the king and wanted to see the maiden if he could, as she was the reason why he had set out. The king rose from the table, went into his daughter's rooms and began to play chess with a knight from over the sea, who sat at the other side of the chessboard and whose duty it was to teach his daughter. Eliduc approached, and the king welcomed him warmly, making him sit down beside him. [462-91] He then called his daughter and said to her: 'Damsel, you should become well acquainted with this knight and show him great honour. There is none better in five hundred.' When the girl had listened to what her lord had commanded, she was very glad, and she arose and spoke to Eliduc. They sat well apart from the others, both caught in love's grip, but she dared not address him and he was fearful about talking to her, apart from thanking her for the present she had sent him: he had never cherished any possession more. She answered the knight that she was glad of this and that she had sent him the ring, and the girdle as well, because she had granted him possession of herself. She loved him so much and wanted to make him her husband and, if she could not have him, he truly ought to know that she would have no man alive. Now, she said, he ought to tell her his wishes. [492-518] 'Lady,' he replied, 'I am very grateful to you for your love and it gives me much joy. Since you esteem me so much, I ought to be very glad of this and will not forget it. I have agreed to remain one year with the king who took my oath that I would not leave until his war was over. Then I shall return to my country, as I wish to remain no longer, providing you will give me leave.' The maiden answered him: 'Beloved, I thank you profusely! You are so

wise and courtly that before then you will have decided what to do about me. I love and trust you above anything else.' They pledged each other their troth and spoke no more on that occasion. Eliduc went to his lodgings and was very happy, for he had achieved much. He could often speak with his beloved and great was the love between them. His efforts in the war were so successful that he captured and retained the king's adversary, and freed the whole land. He was greatly valued for his prowess, his wisdom and his generosity. Good fortune had befallen him. [519-49]

While all this was taking place, his own lord had sent out three messengers to look for him, to say that he was being set upon and injured. He was losing all his castles and all his land was being laid waste. He had often regretted that Eliduc had left him and had been ill-advised to view him with disfavour. He had cast out of the country and exiled for ever those traitors who had accused Eliduc, who had blamed him and caused him to be embroiled with his lord. In his dire need he summoned and required Eliduc by the promise he had made when he had accepted his homage to come and help him, for he stood in great need. [550-70]

Eliduc heard the news and was much disturbed for the maiden's sake, for he loved her dearly and she him as much as possible. There was no foolishness between them, nor fickleness, nor wickedness, as their love consisted entirely of courting and talking, and exchanging fair gifts when they were together. It was her intention and her hope to make him hers completely and keep him if she could, but she did not know that he had a wife. 'Alas,' he said, 'I have behaved badly! I have been too long in this country. Alas that ever I saw it! Here I have deeply loved a girl, Guilliadun, the king's daughter, and she has loved me. If I must leave her thus, one of us will have to die, or perhaps even both. But nevertheless I must go, for my lord has summoned me in a letter and required me by my oath, and my wife as well. Now I must take care. I can remain no longer and must leave. If I were to marry my beloved, the Christian religion would not accept it. Things are going badly in all respects. God, parting is so hard! But whoever may blame me for it, I shall always do right by my beloved. I shall do as she wishes and act according to her advice. The king, her lord, is now at peace and henceforth I think no one will make war upon him. In my own lord's interests I shall seek to depart before

the day set to mark the end of my stay here with the king. I shall go and talk with the maiden and inform her fully about my situation. She will tell me her wishes and I shall carry them out as best I can.' [571-618]

The knight delayed no more and went to take leave of the king. He told him what had happened and read him the letter sent by his lord, who was summoning him in great distress. When the king heard the summons, he realized Eliduc would not remain and was very sad and disturbed. He offered him a large share of his possessions and surrendered to him his treasure and a third of his heritage. He would do so much to make him stay that Eliduc would thereafter always be grateful to him. 'God,' he said, 'since my lord is in distress and has summoned me from such a distance, this time I shall go to his aid; nothing would keep me here. If you need my service, I shall willingly return to you with a great force of knights.' The king thanked him for this and gladly gave him leave, putting all the wealth of his house at his disposal, gold and silver, dogs and horses, and silken clothes, fine and fair. Eliduc took a moderate quantity and then, as was fitting, said he would go and speak with his daughter, if he agreed. The king replied: 'That would please me.' [619-51] The king sent ahead a squire to open the chamber door. Eliduc went to talk with her and when she saw him she spoke to him and greeted him six thousand times. He consulted her about the matter and briefly explained to her his journey, but before he had told her everything, or begged or taken his leave, she fainted with grief and lost all her colour. When Eliduc saw her faint he began to moan and kissed her mouth often and wept most tenderly. He took her and held her in his arms until she recovered from her swoon. 'Ah God,' he said, 'sweet love, let me tell you something: you are my life and my death, in you is all my comfort! I consulted you because of the pledge between us, but of necessity I must go to my country. I have taken leave of your father, but I shall do what you wish, whatever may befall me.' 'Take me away with you,' she said, 'since you will remain no longer! If not, I shall kill myself and never have joy or happiness again.' Eliduc replied gently that he loved her deeply and truly: 'Fair one, in truth I belong by an oath to your father up to the appointed time - if I were to take you away with me, I should betray my faith. Loyally I swear and pledge to you that, if you

give me leave, grant me a postponement and set a day by which you wish me to return, nothing on earth will keep me from doing so, providing I am alive and well. My life is completely in your hands.' She had great love for him and so set a period and fixed the day on which he was to return and take her away. They grieved much on parting, exchanged their golden rings and kissed each other affectionately. [652-702]

He came to the sea, where the wind was good, and soon crossed. When Eliduc had arrived, his lord was joyful and glad, as were his friends, relations and everyone else, above all his good wife, who was very beautiful, wise and worthy. But he was still distracted by the love that had taken him unawares, and he displayed no joyful or friendly mien, whatever he saw, nor would he indeed be joyful until he saw his beloved. He behaved most secretively and his wife was sad in her heart because of this, not knowing what it meant. She lamented to herself and often asked him whether someone had told him that she had misbehaved or done wrong while he had been out of the country, for she would willingly defend herself in front of his people, if he wished. [703-26] 'Lady,' he said, 'I do not accuse you of any crime or misdemeanour, but in the country where I have been I pledged and swore to the king that I should return to him; now he has great need of me. If my lord the king were at peace, I should not stay another week. Great torment will come my way before I can return, and nothing will make me happy until I have done so, for I do not want to break my word.' At this the lady let the matter rest. Eliduc was with his lord, whom he aided greatly. The king acted on his advice and took steps to safeguard the whole land, but when the time approached which the maiden had appointed, Eliduc strove to make peace. He reconciled the king with all his enemies, and then prepared himself for departure together with those he wished to take with him. He took only two of his nephews whom he loved, a chamberlain of his (who had been privy to their plans and had borne the message) and his squires, for he wanted no others. He made these pledge and swear to keep his affair secret. [727-58]

Waiting no longer, he put to sea and they were soon on the other side. He arrived in the region where he was greatly desired, but Eliduc was very sensible and took lodging far from the harbour, for he did not want to be seen, discovered or recognized. He

prepared his chamberlain and sent him to his beloved to inform her of his arrival and that he had kept his covenant. That night, when all was dark, she was to leave the city; the chamberlain would go with her and Eliduc himself would come to meet her. The chamberlain had changed all his garments and went swiftly on foot to the city where the king's daughter was. He sought and inquired until he found his way into her chamber, where he greeted the damsel and said that her beloved had come. Whereas she had been mournful and dismayed before, when she heard the news she wept tenderly for joy and kissed the chamberlain several times. He told her that she would have to leave with him at nightfall and thus they remained the whole day, planning their route well. At night, when all was dark, she and the young man left the town, the two of them alone, but she was still frightened lest anyone see her. She was dressed in a silken garment finely embroidered with gold, with a short cloak attached. [759-98]

A bow's shot from the gate was a wood surrounded by a beautiful pasture. Her beloved, who had come on her account, waited for them at the foot of the palissade, towards which the chamberlain led her. Eliduc dismounted and kissed her and they were most joyful at their reunion. He made her mount a horse and then mounted himself, taking the reins. He quickly departed with her and came to the harbour at Totnes, where they boarded the ship straightaway. There was no one on board, save his own men and his beloved Guilliadun. They had a good wind and settled weather, but as they were about to arrive, they encountered a storm at sea and a wind arose before them that drove them far from the harbour. Their mast broke and split and the sail was completely torn. They solemnly called upon God, St Nicholas and St Clement, and upon the Virgin Mary to beseech her son to help them and save them from destruction and so enable them to reach the harbour. They sailed back and forth along the coast and came extremely close to being shipwrecked. [799-829] Then one of the sailors cried aloud: 'What are we doing? Lord, you have with you the woman who will cause us to perish. We shall never make land! You have a loyal wife and now with this other woman you offend God and his law, righteousness and the faith. Let us cast her into the sea and we shall soon arrive safely.' Eliduc heard what he said and almost went demented with anger. 'Son of a whore,' he said,

'wicked and evil traitor, say no more! If I had abandoned my love, you would have paid dearly for it.' But he held her in his arms and comforted her as best he could against her sea-sickness and because she had heard that he had a wife in his own country. She fell face down, quite pale and wan, in a swoon in which she remained, for she did not come round or breathe. He who was taking her away with him truly believed that she was dead. [830-58] He lamented greatly and then arose, went quickly up to the sailor and struck him with the oar so that he knocked him out flat. Then with his foot he pushed him overboard and the waves bore the body away. When he had cast him into the sea, he went to take charge of the helm, steering the boat and holding it on course so that he reached the harbour and land. When they had arrived, he put down the gangway and dropped anchor. Guilliadun still lay in a swoon, seemingly dead, and Eliduc lamented loudly, for he would gladly have died with her. He asked each of his companions for advice on where he could bear the maiden, for he would not leave her. She would be interred and buried with great honour and with a fine service in a consecrated cemetery, for she was a king's daughter and had a right to this. They were quite forlorn, unable to give him any advice, and so Eliduc began to think where he could take her. His dwelling was close to the sea and he could be there by dinner time. All around it was a forest, thirty leagues in circumference, where a holy hermit, who had been there for forty years, lived and had a chapel. Eliduc had spoken with him many times. He decided to take her to him and have her buried in his chapel. He would provide a large portion of his land to found an abbey there and establish a convent of monks, nuns or canons who would always pray for her. May God be merciful to her! He had his horses brought and ordered his companions to mount, making them swear that they would not betray him. He carried his beloved before him on his palfrey. [859-908]

They rode straight onwards until they entered the wood and came to the chapel, where they called and knocked, but found no one to answer them or to open the door, so Eliduc sent one of his men inside to unlock and open it. Eight days earlier, the holy, saintly hermit had passed away, and when Eliduc found the newly dug tomb, he was most aggrieved and upset. The others wanted to dig the grave where he was to place his beloved, but he made

them draw back and said to them: 'This is not correct, for I shall first take counsel with the wise men of the country about how I can glorify the place either as an abbey or as a church. We shall lay her before the altar and commend her to God.' He had sheets brought and they made a bed for her at once, laying the girl on it and leaving her for dead. But when it came to parting, he thought he would die of grief, and he kissed her eyes and her face, saying: 'Fair one, may it never please God for me to bear arms again or live and endure in this world! Fair love, how sad that you ever laid eyes on me! Sweet darling, how sad that you followed me! Fair one, you would soon have been a queen, but for the loyal and pure love with which you loved me so faithfully. My heart grieves because of you and the day I bury you I shall take holy orders. On your tomb every day I shall make my grief resound.' Then he left the maiden and closed the chapel door. [909-952]

He had sent a messenger home to tell his wife that he was coming, but that he was weary and upset. When she heard this, she was very glad and prepared to meet him. She received her lord properly, but little joy awaited her, for he showed no friendly mien nor spoke fair words, and no one dared address him. He was in the house for two days and then heard mass in the morning and set off. He went to the chapel in the woods where the damsel lay and found her still in a swoon, for she neither recovered nor even breathed. It seemed astonishing to him to see the colour in her cheeks still, for she had lost little of it and was only a trifle paler. He wept in anguish and prayed for her soul. When he had finished his prayer, he returned to his house. [953-78]

One day his wife had one of her servants spy on Eliduc as he left the church. She promised him a large reward if he followed at a distance and took note of which direction her lord took. If he did this, she would give him horse and arms. He obeyed her command, taking to the woods and following Eliduc without being noticed. He saw how he entered the chapel and heard the lamentation he made, but before Eliduc came out he had returned to his lady, telling all he had heard, the lamentation, the noise, and the cries that her husband had made in the hermitage. She was disturbed by this and said: 'We shall go straightaway and search the hermitage thoroughly. My husband has to go out, I think, for he is going to court to talk to the king. The hermit died some time ago,

and even though I know that my husband loved him well, he would not do this on his account, nor show much grief.' Such was her conclusion on this occasion. [979-1005]

On the afternoon of the same day, when Eliduc went to talk to the king, the lady took the servant with her and he led her to the hermitage. When she entered the chapel and saw the bed of the maiden who was like a new rose, she raised the coverlet and saw the body so slender, the long arms, the white hands, the fingers, slim, long, and full. Then she knew why her husband had grieved. She called the servant and showed him the marvel: 'Do you see this woman,' she said, 'who in beauty resembles a gem? This is my husband's beloved for whom he laments so, and, in faith, it is no wonder when such a beautiful woman has perished. Either pity or love will prevent me from ever knowing joy again.' She began to weep and lament the damsel and, as she sat weeping in front of the bed, a weasel, which had come out from beneath the altar, ran past, and the servant struck it because it passed over the body. He killed it with a stick and threw it on the floor. [1006-37] It did not take long for another to run up which, seeing the first one lying there, walked around its head, touching it often with its foot. Unable to rouse its partner, it seemed distressed and left the chapel, going into the woods in search of herbs. With its teeth the weasel picked a flower, bright red in colour, and then quickly returned, placing it in the mouth of its companion, whom the servant had killed, with the result that it quickly recovered. The lady noticed this and shouted to the servant: 'Catch it! Throw your stick, good man, do not let it escape!' And he threw it and hit the weasel so that the flower fell from its mouth. The lady arose, picked it up and quickly came back, placing the beautiful flower inside the maiden's mouth.¹ After a short while she revived and breathed. Then she spoke and opened her eyes: 'God,' she said, 'I have slept so long!' [1038-66] When the lady heard her speak, she began to thank God and asked her who she was. The girl said: 'Lady, I was born in Logres, the daughter of a king of that country. I deeply loved a knight, Eliduc, the good soldier, who took me away with him. He sinned when he tricked me, for he has a wife and never told me or even gave any indication of this, and so, when I heard about his wife, my grief caused me to faint. He has wickedly left me forlorn in another land and has betrayed me. I do not know

what to think. She who trusts a man is extremely foolish.' 'Fair one,' the lady replied, 'nothing on earth could make him joyful, you may be assured of that, for he thinks you are dead and is terribly distressed. He has come to look at you every day, but I assume he found you in a swoon. Truly, I am his wife and my heart grieves for him. Because of the grief he displayed, I wanted to know where he went, and came after him and found you. I am overjoyed that you are alive and shall take you with me and return you to your beloved. I shall set him free completely and take the veil.' The lady comforted the girl until she was able to take her away with her. [1067-104]

She made her servant ready and sent him for her husband. He searched until he found him and then greeted him courteously, telling him the story. Eliduc mounted on a horse, but did not wait for his companions and returned that night to his house. When he found his beloved alive, he thanked his wife gently. Eliduc was extremely happy, and had never been so joyful. He often kissed the maiden and she him tenderly, for together they were very happy. When the lady saw how they looked, she spoke to her husband and asked him for permission to leave and to separate from him, for she wanted to be a nun and serve God. He could give her some of his land, on which she could found an abbey, and then marry the girl he loved so much, for it was neither right nor proper to keep two wives, nor should the law allow it. Eliduc granted his wife this and willingly gave her leave, for he would do everything she wanted and give her some land. Near the castle in the woods, where the hermitage chapel stood, she had her church and houses built. It was endowed with much land and great possessions and would have everything it needed. When everything had been properly prepared, she took the veil, as did thirty nuns with her. Then she established her way of life and the rules of her order. [1105-44]

Eliduc married his beloved. On the wedding day the celebrations were conducted with great honour and a fine service. They lived together for many a day and the love between them was perfect. They distributed great alms and great wealth until such time as they themselves turned to God. Near the castle, on the other side, Eliduc wisely and carefully built a church, which he endowed with most of his land and all his gold and silver. There

he placed his own men and other pious persons to uphold the order and maintain the house. When everything was ready, he hardly delayed, but joined himself to them in order to serve almighty God. He placed his dear wife together with his first one and the latter received her as her sister and showed her great honour, urging her to serve God and teaching her the order. They prayed that God might show their beloved His sweet mercy and Eliduc in turn prayed for them, sending his messenger to see how they fared and how their spirits were. Each one strove to love God in good faith and they came to a good end thanks to God, the true divine. [1145-80]

From the story of these three the ancient courtly Bretons composed a lay to be remembered, so that it should not be forgotten. [1181-4]

NOTES

GUIGEMAR

1. The rote was a harp of five strings, rather like a zither.

YONEC

1. The lady's husband is designated in Marie's text as an *avouez* (v. 13). It is possible that this term is a general one describing the lord of the city, the holder of the fief. But it is more likely that Marie is referring to the official functions of the advocate (*advocatus*), the officer appointed by the Church to handle its secular affairs. The advocates seem often to have usurped the land they were supposed to protect and to have set themselves up as independent feudal lords. The distaste felt by many for the advocate would emphasize the plight of the lady, married off to him in order to produce an heir to lands which should rightfully revert on his death to the Church.

CHEVREFOIL

1. Lines 60-61 read, with Ewert's punctuation, '*Ceo fu la somme de l'escrit / Qu'il li aveit mandé e dit*'. These lines are usually rendered as 'This was the gist of the message which he had sent her'. The present interpretation is based on a change in punctuation: '*Ceo fu la somme de l'escrit. / Qu'il li aveit mandé e dit / Que lunge ot ilec esté . . .*'. See G. S. Burgess, *The Lais of Marie de France: Text and Context*, Chapter 4.

ELIDUC

1. The gender of the weasels is difficult to determine. The Old French *musteile* is feminine, as is the Modern French *belette*. It is tempting to see the pair as a male and a female, but in this case the translation of R. Hanning and J. Ferrante, in which the first weasel appears as a female and the second as a male, can be compared with that of E. Mason, for whom a female resuscitates a male. However, it could well be that we should take both weasels to be female. In his study 'The Weasel in Religion, Myth and Superstition' (*Washington University Studies*, 12, 1924, 33-66) T. S. Duncan points out that the weasel 'may have been generally thought of as a female animal' (p. 44) and that in cases of metamorphosis 'the weasel is always transformed into a woman and never into a man' (*ibid.*). In this case the weasels could be envisaged as a reflection of Eliduc's two ladies. In folklore the weasel is credited with knowledge of the herb of life. The red flower, which could be the verbena, is probably symbolic of the flow of blood and the restoration of life to the dead girl.

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