

also appears in romances as an invincible force capable of defying social limits and suggesting that those limits exist only to test and affirm two persons' attachment. While the latter view of love is often the more prominent in romance, the social and cultural implications of love exist in them as well, although often more covertly, as in the case of *Floire et Blancheflor*. In other words, even when love stories naturalize what should be transgressive, some element of transgression usually remains. Reading love stories not as simplistic tales but rather as complicated cultural negotiations thus provides a richer perspective on what medieval authors were able to achieve via the genre of romance, and also expands our own appreciation of the strategies through which such intercultural issues were articulated and explored.

Chapter 4

"Femmes et tere": Marie de France and the Discourses of "Lanval"

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Speaking or writing in a variety articulates its own view of the world, and that articulation is a social practice, a conscious or unconscious intervention in the organization of society. Literature's cultural force has its origins in this property of language.¹

"L'aventure d'un autre lai, / Cum ele avient, vus cunterai"²—with these words Marie begins the narrative known as "Lanval." Her account focuses on the "noble vassal," Lanval, who, having left his native Brittany, serves as a knight at King Arthur's court.³ After a battle with the Picts and the Scots, Arthur rewards his vassals with wives and lands, but in so doing overlooks Lanval. Alone, without family or resources, the knight rides out to a remote meadow, where he encounters a nameless aristocratic woman from "another land," who offers love and abundance if he is worthy. Willingly, Lanval accepts the lady's love and in return promises absolute loyalty, which includes a vow of secrecy. Upon returning to Arthur's court, Lanval rejects the advances of

¹ Roger Fowler, *Literature as Social Discourse* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1961), 8.

² "Lanval" (ll. 1–2) [Just as it happened, I shall relate to you the story of another lay]. Unless otherwise noted, all French quotations are drawn from Marie de France, *Lais*, ed. Alfred Ewert (Oxford: Blackwell, 1944; repr. London: Bristol Classical Press and Gerald Duckworth, 1995); and all English translations of Marie's text come from *The Lais of Marie de France*, trans. Glyn S. Burgess and Keith Busby, 2nd ed. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1999). In general see Roberta L. Krueger, "Marie de France," in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women's Writing*, ed. Carolyn Dinshaw and David Wallace (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 172–83, esp. 176.

³ For the background, see J. E. Caerwyn Williams, "Brittany and the Arthurian Legends," in *The Arthur of the Welsh*, ed. Rachel Bromwich et al. (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1991), 249–72.

Arthur's lustful queen. Although he refuses her, she insists, finally charging him with homosexuality; nonplussed, he responds by praising the beauty of his beloved, thereby breaking his pledge. The vengeful queen accuses Lanval of misconduct, and the knight is brought to trial. Just as the verdict is about to be announced, Lanval's lady arrives; her appearance and words lead to his being adjudged innocent of the charge, and as she leaves Arthur's court, Lanval joins her.

The coexistence of apparently fabulous and demonstrably realistic elements in "Lanval"⁴ has frequently led commentators to regard the *lai* either as an escapist fantasy⁵ or as an historically accurate depiction of twelfth-century legal practice.⁶ Such interpretations, while often insightful, tend to focus on static narrative blocks, placing some sections in the foreground while treating others as though they were irrelevant or merely fortuitous.⁷ However, focusing instead on the dominant discursive modes that inform and shape "Lanval" reveals a dual-voiced narrative in which Marie deploys both legal and mythic discourse—described below—to examine and comment upon love, law, and marriage in the society of her time.⁸

⁴ A tradition dating back to the eighteenth century attempts to account for the admixture of the fabulous and the historical by explaining that Marie de France medievalized her Breton story to suit the tastes of her audience. See the Abbé Gervais de La Rue, "Dissertation on the Life and Writings of Mary, an Anglo-Norman Poetess of the 13th Century," *Archaeologia or Miscellaneous Tracts Relating to Antiquity* 13 (1800): 35–67.

⁵ See, for example, S. Damon Foster, "Marie de France: Psychologist of Courtly Love," *PMLA* 44 (1929): 968–96.

⁶ See, for example, Jacqueline Eccles, "Marie de France and the Law," in *Les Lieux interdits: Transgression in French Literature*, ed. Larry Duffy and Adrian Tudor (Hull: Hull University Press, 1998), 15–30.

⁷ Ernst Hoepffner, for instance, found the trial scene irrelevant: *Les Lais de Marie de France* (Paris: Librairie Nizet, n.d.), 64.

⁸ It is generally accepted that Marie composed her *lais* in England in the latter part of the twelfth century, probably during the reign of Henry II. See, for example, Glynn S. Burgess, "Introduction," in *Marie de France, Lais*, ed. Ewert, vii–viii; and idem, *The Lais of Marie de France: Text and Context* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1987), 1–34.

Legal Discourse.⁹

Monologic. Legal discourse is characterized by a "specialized lexicon, with fixed meanings; it attempts to map one-to-one equivalencies between signifier and signified." It is "monologic," "uniaccentual," and centripetal.

Intertextual. Legal discourse is "intertextual with other legal texts, usually written texts."

It "has its primary basis in custom and its vocabulary is correspondingly governed by doctrines of memory, recognition and usage, defined in textual terms by reference to extensive and obscure etymologies, inert and calcified meanings and procedures," and by its own "epistemology."

Institutionally Authorized. Legal discourse is "socially and institutionally authorised by a wide variety of highly visible organisational and sociolinguistic insignia of a privileged class." It functions in "a specialized context," a "highly restricted institutional setting" with a clear "legal and social hierarchy." The operations of legal discourse involve personnel of "elite character" and the "ritual trappings of trial."

Axiomatic and Rational. The function of legal discourse is to "prescribe, preserve, maintain social order by formulating and following normative codes." It is "institutional," "rational," and "axiomatic."

Authoritarian and Distanced. Legal discourse is a vehicle for the law, whose "source is always pre-existent," deriving, for instance, from a sovereign, legislature, or custom. It is "authoritarian," "distanced," "alien," "reified." It "restricts human actions" and it is characterized by "linguistic objectification," for "law fixes legal meaning to individual acts" in the context of "responsibility," ignoring human emotions and relationships. In law, the subject "is constituted" as a point of abstract equivalence and the ethical image of the speaking persona as a unitary and unique subjectivity comes to pervade legal discourse, as in testimony.

⁹ The following definition is drawn from Peter Goodrich, "Law and Language: An Historical Critical Introduction," *Journal of Law and Society* 11 (1984): 173–206.

Mythic Discourse¹⁰

Polysemous and Metaphoric. Mythic discourse “describes and pictures,” employing both language and symbolic images that are polysemous and tending to the centrifugal.¹¹ Myth and mythic discourse are metaphoric.¹²

Intertextual. Mythic discourse is intertextual: myths tend to resonate with other myths (whether as a consequence of mere resemblance or through attracting and absorbing features of other mythic narratives).¹³

¹⁰ Multiple meanings of *mythos* existed even in ancient Greece. From its original meaning, “anything delivered by word of mouth,” it came to signify “design” or “plan” as in a narrative or dramatic plot, and, once associated with “tale” or “story,” it began to connote a poetic or legendary tale as opposed to a historical account, and from there the semantic field broadened to include the sense of “something that is not true.” See, for example, *A Lexicon Abridged from Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 454. Here *myth* can be considered as “a story or a complex of story elements taken as expressing and therefore as implicitly symbolizing certain deep-lying aspects of human and transhuman existence”: *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), 538. Following a different approach to some of Marie's *lais*, though not “Lanval,” SunHee Kim Gerz considers Ovid's and Marie's “participat[ion] in the mythological process,” which she defines in accordance with Cassirer as “the truth recreating and in so realizing itself”: *Echoes and Reflections. Memory and Memorials in Ovid and Marie de France* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2003), 31.

¹¹ See, for example, *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, 539–40.

¹² In myth there is “virtually no distinction between the literal and the figurative,” between “psychic and linguistic amalgams”; mythic metaphor is based on a “prior semantic activity which operates, perhaps preconsciously, by fusing certain raw elements of experience—qualities, relationships, capabilities, emotional colorings . . . —into a unity of reference which some symbol is taken to represent”: *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, 539. On *sign* and *myth*, see also Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), 114–15, 131.

¹³ On the intertextuality of myth and the tendency of such discourse to attract elements from other mythic sources and to incorporate and absorb characters and features of other mythic and legendary strains, see Ken Dowden, *The Uses of Greek Mythology* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 8–16; Mircea Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, trans. Willard Trask (New York

Legitimizing and Universal. Mythic discourse informs “legitimizing narratives” that exemplify, justify, and validate cultural practices and human behavior. It has both personal and communal implications, providing models for “all significant human activities—diet or marriage, work or education, art or wisdom.”¹⁴ Mythic discourse can exist in a general, and even a universal, context; this mode of discursivity can be adopted, and even adapted, by all.¹⁵ *Axiological.* Mythic discourse is axiological, illustrating moral and ethical values for living. Non-rational and affective, it “bypasses,” exceeds, or transcends human logic.¹⁶

Transcendent and Interpellant. Mythic discourse participates in myth's “absolute authority,” which is “implied rather than stated,” its immediate and eternal “truth” emanating from “elsewhere, from an authority that is higher than human” (e.g., gods, ancestors, or some other transcendent source).¹⁷ In communicating myths that account for the individual's participation with the universe, mythic discourse demonstrates how individuals fit into the natural scheme of things and why human beings are “constituted” in a particular way;¹⁸ it is interpellant, requiring that humans “recognize themselves in this image.”¹⁹

and Evanston: Harper & Row, 1963), 200; and Marie-Louise Sjoestedt, *Gods and Heroes of the Celts* (Dublin, Ireland, and Portland, OR: Four Courts Press, 1994), 25–36.

¹⁴ Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, 8.

¹⁵ Here *myth* is distinguished from “sacred story,” which may be restricted to certain personnel (e.g., priests) and certain locations (e.g., temples or churches). Eliade outlines the process by which a sacred tale “desacralizes,” losing sacred meaning, yet “the mythical elements continue to play their functions”: *Myth and Reality*, 111–13, 200. Dowden observes that even for the Greeks, “the old myths were there to be recycled,” “reconceived,” and “reformulated”: *The Uses of Greek Mythology*, 22, 53.

¹⁶ Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, 140–42.

¹⁷ Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, 139, 75–91.

¹⁸ Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, 11, 92.

¹⁹ Barthes, *Mythologies*, 125, 155. In the following discussion, *interpellant* is used not in the strict Althusserian sense, but in the broader sense of “causing one to recognize the self in,” or “identify with.”

As these discursive modes function throughout Marie's narrative, the polysemic and metaphoric mythic discourse is reserved for the Lady and her relationship with Lanval. Once the knight leaves town and castle and enters a meadow near a stream, he encounters individuals and objects that exceed the significances normally assigned in everyday life. It is here, inside a magnificent pavilion, that he first meets the stunning, unnamed woman, who calls him by name and tells him she has come "Pur vus vienc jeo fors de ma tere" (l. 111). Here the straightforward connection between the term and place—the "tere de Loengre" (l. 9) or the "tere" (land or honors) presented by Arthur to his knights (l. 17)—dissolves into multivalence. Does she come from another "land" or "country," or an "other world"? After Lanval pledges his love to her, she makes an unexplained demand for his vow of secrecy (ll. 144–145). She brings Lanval limitless love, joy, and wealth (ll. 114–116). She tells Lanval that no other man will see or hear her ("Nul hum fors vus ne me verra / Ne ma parole nen orra" [ll. 169–170]). Moreover, this Lady, who has many servants, comes to and departs from Arthur's court at will, and even the King cannot retain her (ll. 630–632). In this discourse, not only lexical items²⁰ but also objects are charged with meaning: the "ewe curaunt" (ll. 45–46); golden basins and a "tuaile" borne by two richly-clad maidens who invite Lanval to a magnificent pavilion (ll. 61–64); and the Lady's palfrey, dog, and sparrowhawk (ll. 551–574). These and other images hint that they are more than they first appear.

²⁰ On the semantic range of terms like *herberger*, *departir*, and *esgarder* in "Lanval," see, for instance, Emmanuel J. Mickel, "Marie de France's Use of Irony as a Stylistic and Narrative Device," *Studies in Philology* 71 (1974): 265–90; here 288–89; and Elizabeth Wilson Poe, "Love in the Afternoon: Courtly Play in the *Lai de Lanval*," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 84 (1983): 301–10. For fuller discussions of polysemy in Marie's *Lais*, see, for example, R. Howard Bloch, "The Dead Nightingale in the Tomb of Old French Literature," *Culture and History* 3 (1988): 63–78; idem, "New Philology and Old French," *Speculum* 65 (1990): 38–58; idem, "The Lay and the Law: Sexual /Textual Transgression in *La Chastelaine de Vergi*, the *Lai d'Ignaure*, and the *Lais* of Marie de France," *Stanford French Review* 14 (1990): 181–210; and most recently, although in a somewhat different direction, idem, *The Anonymous Marie* (Chicago and New York: University of Chicago Press, 2003), esp. 20–22, 32–50.

Jean Rychner observes that Marie's lack of precision envelops the characters and action in a "halo de mystère, évocant l'autre."²¹ In fact, the discourse portraying the Lady is infused with double meaning. All that surrounds her is of superior worth, items associated with sovereigns: she is draped with imperial purple, silk, and ermine (ll. 101–102); a golden eagle surmounts her tent (l. 87); the coverlets of her bed are worth "as much as a castle" (l. 98). However, a correspondence between the lady's possessions and some aspect of the material world once being established, each comparison subsequently negates the point of similarity. Her grand possessions, for example, exceed the grasp of the richest sovereign. Her pavilion is so resplendent that "no king under the sun could afford it" ("Suz ciel n'ad rei ki[s] esligast" [l. 91]). Her palfrey is "finer than any on earth," and the horse's tack and fittings are worth more "than a king's realm" (ll. 551–558). Even the lowliest of her maids-in-waiting is more beautiful than a queen (ll. 299–300).

The unnamed woman is always designated by human terms—"pucele," "dameisele," "meschine" ("girl" or "young woman") and "dame"—all appropriate for a young woman of noble birth; she is also referred to as Lanval's "amie."²² And as Ernst Hoepffner has noted, the mysterious Lady is very much a woman.²³ On two separate occasions, the narrator describes the Lady's physical attributes. She is the object of Lanval's, and the audience's, gaze as she reclines upon a richly appointed couch inside her splendid pavilion:

Ele jut sur un lit mut bel

 En sa chemise senglement.
 Mut ot le cors bien fait e gent;
 Un cher mantel . . .
 Ot pur le chaut sur li geté;
 Tut ot desouvert le costé,

²¹ Jean Rychner, ed., *Les Lais de Marie de France* (Paris: Classiques Français du Moyen Age, 1966, 2nd ed. 1981), 235, note 61.

²² See, for example, Burgess, *Text and Context*, 105. While the term *pucelle* is most frequently used in "Lanval," the English honorific "Lady" ("dame," employed by her maidens and by Marie [ll. 536, 601]) is used in this analysis to indicate her elevated status.

²³ See, for example, Hoepffner, *Les Lais*, 69.

Le vis, le col e la peitrine;
Plus ert blanche que flur d'espine. (ll. 97–106)

[She lay on a very beautiful bed . . . clad only in her shift. Her body was well formed and handsome, and in order to protect herself from the heat of the sun, she had cast about her a costly mantle. . . . Her side, though, was uncovered, as well as her face, neck and breast; she was whiter than the hawthorn blossom.]

The second time the Lady appears, she rides slowly into view of Lanval, the members of the court, and the townspeople. As she approaches, her natural beauty shines forth. She wears "a white tunic and a shift, laced left and right so as to reveal her sides" ("De chainsil blanc e de chemise, / Que tuz les costez li pareient, / Que de deus parz laciez esteient" [ll. 560–562]). Her figure is lithe and handsome ("le cors ot gent" [l. 563]); "her hips low" ("basse la hanche" [l. 563]); her eyes gray (l. 565); her face and neck "whiter than the snow on the branch" ("plus blanc que neif sur branche" [l. 564–565]); her brow and sculpted features fair (566–567); her hair golden (ll. 569–570).

However, even though she is depicted in terms of the physical world, she surpasses all to which she is compared, exceeding the capacity of worldly language and sense imagery to describe her. The similitudes used to portray her are marked by the comparative rather than the superlative, which is often associated with the hyperbolic; the result is a subtly understated quality that allows for the Lady's presence in Loengtes, yet elevates her above her surroundings. She is more beautiful than the lily ("flur de lis") and the new rose ("rose novele") in the summer (ll. 94–96). Her skin is "whiter than the hawthorn" (l. 106); her "blond curls glisten more than a gold thread in the sun" ("E le chef cresp e aukes blunt; / Fil d'or ne gette tel luur" [ll. 568–569]). No mere ornaments, Marie's similitudes are central to the mythic theme, for the multivalent descriptions hover between the material world and an 'other' spiritual world, without decisively or explicitly committing to either. The result is an ambiguous suspension between the world of the senses and the world of affect and of spirit. These associations do indeed "bypass or transcend human logic," and they embody a "numinous quality [that] is compatible with the pervasive Celtic belief that the supernatural resided within the natural world."²⁴

²⁴ On Celtic beliefs concerning the presence of the supernatural in the natural world; the perception of a spirit or divine force in trees, streams,

The discourse associated with the Lady also teems with mythic intertextuality, which scholars have investigated for more than a century. For example, the stream (l. 45), notable because Lanval's horse trembles as he approaches it and because the Lady is lodged nearby, has been identified with the *topos* of the sacred stream or spring that recurs throughout Celtic myth and legend.²⁵ According to Celtic tradition, streams, rivers, lakes, springs, and wells bear a close relationship to sacred powers and are often thought to offer access to the Other World, liminal spaces through which "humans might pass into the mysterious lands and realms of [supernatural] power." Especially sacred to the Celts, many aqueous sites were associated with "the life force" and attendant "female spirits."²⁶ Moreover, the golden basins and towel have been linked with ritual trappings and supernatural receptacles: cups, cauldrons, baskets, and cornucopiae of plenty.²⁷ So, too, critics have long noted the motif of the goddess or fairy who confidently and forthrightly announces her love for a human, presenting him with gifts.²⁸ Eithne O'Sharkey, for instance, has

mountains, and other natural objects; and the existence of the sacred on earth rather than in a separate realm, see Miranda Green, "Gods and the Supernatural," in *The Celtic World*, ed. eadem (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 465–88, here 465; eadem, *Dictionary of Celtic Myth and Legend* (London: Thames and Hudson, Ltd., 1992), 22; and Sjoestedt, *Gods and Heroes of the Celts*, 92. For more on the Celtic connection, see the essay by Sharon Kinoshita in this volume, below, 147–62.

²⁵ See, for example, Philippe Ménard, *Les Lais de Marie de France. Contes d'amour et d'aventure au moyen âge* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1979), 173.

²⁶ See, for example, R. Stewart, *Celtic Gods, Celtic Goddesses* (London: Cassell, 1990), 40; and Miranda Green, *Celtic Goddesses* (London: British Museum Press, 1995), 90, 97–99.

²⁷ See, for example, Jeanne Walthelet-Willem, "Le Mystère chez Marie de France," *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire* 39 (1961): 661–86; Tom Peete Cross, "The Celtic Elements in the Lays of Lanval and Graellent," *Modern Philology* 12 (1914–1915): 585–644, here 609; Ménard, *Lais de Marie de France*, 156; Jean Markale, *The Celts*, trans. C. Hauch (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 1993), 267, 273–74; and T. G. E. Powell, *The Celts*, new ed. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1980), 153.

²⁸ Cross, "The Celtic Elements," 609; Jacques Ribard, "Le Lai de Lanval: Essai d'interprétation polysémique," in *Mélanges de philologie et de littératures romanes*

argued for the goddess Morgan²⁹ as the Lady's precursor. Constance Bullock-Davies links the tale's main characters to the god Llanvalus and the goddess Morgen.³⁰ Tom Peete Cross proposes the Welsh goddess Rhiannon, traditionally associated with the horse, as a model or analogue.³¹ And yet another possible antecedent is the Romano-Celtic goddess Epona,³² who is generally depicted riding on a horse, and accompanied by a dog and bird. Associated with fertility, abundance, and healing springs, Epona was the patroness of cavalymen, the precursors of medieval knights like Lanval.³³ Similarly, the Lady's requirement and Lanval's pledge of secrecy have been explained in terms of the Celtic *geis*, "a taboo or prohibition placed upon heroes in Irish narratives."³⁴ And, finally, some scholars have argued that Lanval's journey with the Lady to Avalon corresponds to mythic accounts in which a goddess or *fée* transports a mortal to an Other World.³⁵ Yet despite many valiant attempts to discover the origins of the Lanval tale, none has fully succeeded, and while the images, motifs, and themes are clearly reminiscent of various mythic components, no known extant tale has been identified as a

offerts à Jeanne Wathelet-Willem, ed. Jacques de Caluwecques, *Mediaevalia* 76 (Liege: Cahiers de l'A. R. U. Lg., 1978), 1:529–44, here 536.

²⁹ Eithne M. O'Sharkey, "The Identity of the Fairy Mistress in Marie de France's *Lai de Lanval*," *Trivium* 6 (1971): 17–25.

³⁰ Constance Bullock-Davies, "Lanval and Avalon," *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies* 23 (1969): 128–42.

³¹ Cross, "The Celtic Elements," 585–644.

³² On Epona, see Green, *Dictionary of Celtic Myth*, 90–92; and eadem, *Celtic Goddesses*, 186.

³³ Celtic animal symbolism is abundant; see, for example, Stewart, *Celtic Gods*, 25; Green, *Dictionary of Celtic Myth*, 90–91; and on the Celtic connections of the sparrowhawk in Chrétien's *Erec and Enide*, Roger Sherman Loomis, *Arthurian Tradition and Chrétien de Troyes* (New York and London: Cornell University Press, 1949), 99–100.

³⁴ Sjoestedt, *Gods and Heroes of the Celts*, 70–71. See also Cross, "The Celtic Elements," 609.

³⁵ See Cross, "The Celtic Elements," 609; O'Sharkey, "The Identity of the Fairy Mistress," 60; Markale, *The Celts*, 285; James MacKillop, *Dictionary of Celtic Mythology* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 359. In the *Middle English Sir Launfal*, the destination is the island of Oleron off the coast of Brittany.

source. Justifiably, then, Ménard rejects such attempts at uncovering sources as flawed because they are based on fragments from "une foule de textes hétérogènes."³⁶

Still, viewed in the light of myth's tendency to attract and absorb a variety of traditional materials, such remnants and echoes are characteristic of mythic discourse. Additionally, these allusions and fragments may come from more than a single tradition, for instance, not only from Celtic but also from Greco-Roman antecedents. Thus as Marie describes the opulent pavilion, she observes that the right tent flap is worth more than either Semiramis at the peak of her power and wealth or Octavian would have been able to afford (ll. 82–86). In that both the Assyrian queen Semiramis (Sammu-ramat)³⁷ and the Roman emperor Octavian (Augustus),³⁸ well-known rulers of the ancient world, had attained legendary, and even mythic, status as great sovereigns, conquering warriors, and persons of inestimable wealth, these allusions underscore the superiority of the lady, her metonymic tent far surpassing all worldly power and riches.

This allusion to Semiramis, moreover, further develops and calls attention to Marie's theme as it touches on love, for situated as it is immediately before Lanval's afternoon tryst with the Lady, Marie's reference to the Assyrian queen evokes a previously unnoticed correspondence with the fifth elegy of Ovid's *Amores* (Book I), in which the narrator describes his midday seduction, or

³⁶ Ménard, *Lais de Marie de France*, 47.

³⁷ Semiramis was known to the West largely through Greek sources in translation. On the Assyrian queen Semiramis (or Sammu-ramat), see William Hallo, *Origins: The Ancient Near Eastern Background of Some Modern Western Institutions* (Leiden and New York: E. J. Brill, 1996), 253–55. She was also famed for her building of cities and fortifications, which were said to include the walls and perhaps the hanging gardens of Babylon. See also Ekart Frahm, "Semiramis," in *Der Neue Pauly. Enzyklopädie der Antike* (Stuttgart and Weimar: Verlag J. B. Metzler, 2000), 11:378; and Wilhelm Eilers, *Semiramis. Entstehung und Nachhall einer altorientalischen Sage* (Vienna: Hermann Böhlau, 1971).

³⁸ In addition to "his legal powers as magistrate, he was endowed with the divine right"; "he was a living god." He was also renowned for his monumental contributions to Imperial Rome: Gilbert Charles-Picard, *Augustus and Nero*, trans. Len Ortzen (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1965), 16–17. Octavian had also attracted some of the qualities of Midas: Ewert, *Lais*, 174, note 82–86.

perhaps rape, of a fair woman, Corinna, whose beauty is compared to that of Semiramis.³⁹ On a warm summer day, from the vantage point of his couch, the narrator sees Corinna, wearing only an ungirdled loosely-woven tunic ["ecce, Corinna venit, tunica velata recincta" (l. 9)].⁴⁰ Tearing the light tunic from her body, Ovid's narrator stops momentarily to observe the beauty of his prey:

Quos umeros, quales vidi tetigique lacertos!
forma papillarum quam fuit apta premil
qua castigato planus sub pectore venter!
quantum et quale latus! (19–22)

[What shoulders, what arms did I see—and touch!
How suitable for caress the form of her breasts!
How smooth her body beneath the faultless bosom!
What a long and beautiful side!]

Ultimately, despite her struggles against the narrator, the woman is "conquered."

Notably, Marie rewrites Ovid's scene. In an echo of the summer afternoon encounter, Lanval discovers the Lady, reclining on her couch and clad only in a "chemise"—a tunic or shift—and a lightly draped mantle that reveal her fair neck, breast, and side:

Mut ot le cors bien fait e gent;
....
Tut ot descovert le costé,
Le vis, le col e la peitrine; (ll. 97–105)

³⁹ "qualiter in thalamos famosa Semiramis isse / dicitur" (ll. 11–12). The Latin quotations and English translations come from Ovid, *Heroides and Amores*, trans. Grant Showerman, 2nd ed. rev. G. P. Goold, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann, Ltd., 1986), 332–35.

⁴⁰ Showerman translates "draped in tunic girded round" (l. 9). However, *recingo* signifies "to ungird, loosen" as with *tunicas* in Ovid: *Cassell's Latin Dictionary* (London: Cassell & Company; New York: Macmillan, 1977), 503.

[Her body was well formed and handsome, . . . Her side, though, was uncovered, as well as her face, neck and breast; . . .]

In contrast to Ovid's predatory narrator, who overpowers Corinna in chilling silence, Marie's Lady warmly announces her love for Lanval, and after he responds with his declaration of love and fidelity, she willingly grants him "S'amur e sun cors" (l. 133). This intertextual connection also resonates with the *lai* of "Guigemar," where a mural depicts Venus throwing "le livre Ovide," perhaps Ovid's *Amores*, into the flames. As Marie explains, Venus is associated with "les traiz" and "la nature" of love: "Cument hom deit amur tenir / E léalment e bien servir" [how one should observe love loyally and serve well]. Ovid's work, however, teaches "Coment chascun s'amur estreine" [how one dominates in love].⁴¹ By contrasting such domination with the nature and true obligations of love, this allusion serves to accent Marie's delineation of love in "Lanval."

Thus mythic discourse here offers a model for human action and interaction with general and even universal applicability. Both the Lady and Lanval declare their love for each other (ll. 110–130), a love that is portrayed as reciprocal, entailing mutual fidelity and loyalty and mutual obligation.⁴² Lanval and the Lady converse affectionately. The discourse conveying their words, actions, and existence permits communication between cultures and perhaps between worlds. Additionally, the Lady's maidens address Lanval and the King, directing the latter to prepare for their mistress (ll. 491–494; 535–537), issuing instructions as imperatives, not as requests marked by the interrogative or supplicative. Finally, the Lady and the King address each other and are heard by all at court. Like others of her time (e.g., Geoffrey of Monmouth, Wace, Gaimar), Marie appropriates mythic themes, and exploits them to communicate ideas about the origins and nature, both spiritual and physical, of shared love.

Inherently axiological, the mythic discourse of "Lanval" imparts transcendent values described in terms of truth: here the spiritual dimension of human love, which encompasses mutual respect, mutual obligation and loyalty, generosity, and freedom of choice. The Lady, her love, and her generosity inspire virtue in Lanval: if he is "pruz e curteis," she says, no

⁴¹ "Guigemar" (ll. 234–240); my translation.

⁴² On the pledge as obligation, see Ménard, *Lais de Marie de France*, 172.

emperor, count, or king could experience the joy that he will, for she loves him above all ("sur tute rien" [ll. 107–116]). And Lanval, in turn, acts with generosity when he returns to the town and court (ll. 205–215). These values are communicated in affective terms and center on sentiments and beliefs. Lanval's emotional, spiritual, and material well-being emanates from his relationship with his "amie." All at court sense the truth of Lanval's words when they see and hear the Lady. Moreover, the importance of loyalty and obligation is also highlighted by Lanval's profound contrition after he breaks his pledge to his "amie" (ll. 334–351).

More powerful than earthly sovereigns, the Lady embodies a transcendent force and supernal power that are signaled by her superiority over people and things of this world. Marie first highlights the significance of mythic truth when she introduces the maidens who invite Lanval to meet their mistress: "I will not fail to tell you the truth" ("Le veir vus en dirai sanz faile" [l. 63]). In this tale, the word *true* (*veir*) and its derivatives occur only in connection with the mythic discourse depicting the Lady and the love that she and Lanval share. The King and his vassals recognize the Lady's extraordinary beauty, and her words are acknowledged as truth by all at court (ll. 611–629). The truth encoded in the old story, the myth, still holds for Marie.

In "Lanval," moreover, the mythic discursivity is inviting and interpellant, exemplifying the individual's place in the natural scheme of things, and reflecting timeless truths that explain human existence and human nature.⁴³ Just as Lanval is attracted to the Lady, ultimately joining her, so too the reader is drawn into the account of their mutual love, which is immediate, harmonious, and integral to life and well-being. From her tent in the meadow, in the heart of the natural world, the Lady, who is depicted in terms of nature, summons the "gentil" Lanval, who willingly pledges his love and loyalty (ll. 107–116). Their love is both in accord with nature and inherent in human nature. Affect is central, and psychological states, especially Lanval's, are placed in the foreground: his love for the Lady is spontaneous, and his joy overflows in the form of generous acts directed at all ranks of society. Similarly, after having heedlessly broken his pledge, his sense of loss and emotional pain (ll. 334–351; 375–378) so profound that the trial and impending punishment are of no consequence to him. These motivations and emotions are integral to Lanval's existence.

The tale also beckons to its readers and listeners; each is invited to see himself or herself in terms of this alluring and compelling love and to participate in the affective life of the lovers. Speaking to the individual, this mythic example of mutual love has captivated readers for centuries. According to her contemporary Denis Piramus, who describes the audiences of the time (e.g., "Li rei, li prince, e li courtur, / Cunte, barun, e vavasur"), Marie's *lais* held great attraction for the "Cunte, barun e chivaler" and especially the ladies, who recognized their own wishes and desires ("lur volenté") therein.⁴⁴ And the tale continues to invite readers to recognize human nature and even ourselves in it. So it is that some view the *lai* as an engrossing fantasy,⁴⁵ or as an account of discovering true identity.⁴⁶ Others extol Marie's engaging representation of "shared love," simultaneously as "an absolute right" and as "a true value,"⁴⁷ and her love ethic characterized by loyalty,⁴⁸ "une belle franchise et une noble élévation," and "une morale de la sincerité et de l'authenticité."⁴⁹ Still others point to Marie's language of "compassionate sensuality,"⁵⁰ and her celebration of physical love, an "explosion of sexual energy" which produces cooperation between men and women.⁵¹

⁴⁴ Denis Piramus, *La Vie Seint Edmund le rei. Poème anglo-normand du XIIe siècle*, ed. Hilding Kjellman (Göteborg: Wettergren & Kerber, 1935; repr. Geneva: Slatkine, 1974), ll. 42–50.

⁴⁵ Foster, "Marie de France," 968–96; and William Calin, *The French Tradition and the Literature of Medieval England* (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 28.

⁴⁶ Michèle Koubichkine, "A propos du *Lai de Lanval*," *Le Moyen Age* 78 (1972): 467–88, here 476–82.

⁴⁷ Jean Flori, "Amour et société aristocratique au XIIe siècle: l'exemple des *Lais* de Marie de France," *Le Moyen Age* 98 (1992): 17–34, here 33.

⁴⁸ Burgess, *Text and Context*, 134–78.

⁴⁹ Ménard, *Lais de Marie de France*, 143.

⁵⁰ Stephen G. Nichols, "Rewriting Marriage in the Middle Ages," *Romanic Review* 79 (1979): 42–60, here 59. Nichols also notes the similarities between Heloise's view of love as a binding force and that of Marie.

⁵¹ Rupert Pickens, "Poétique et sexualité chez Marie de France: l'exemple de Fresne," in "Et c'est la fin pour quoy sommes ensemble": *Hommage à Jean Dufournet: littérature, histoire et langue du Moyen Age*, ed. Jean-Claude Aubailly, Nouvelle Bibliothèque du Moyen Age 25, 3 vols. (Paris: Champion, 1993), 3:1119–131.

⁴³ Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, 92.

Marie's mythic discourse would have been appreciated and understood by a wide audience, especially the aristocracy, and the vestigial potency of Celtic myths and mythic elements would have been apprehended in many parts of Britain,⁵² and indeed of the Angevin empire. During the twelfth century, oral Celtic tales persisted as a living tradition in Wales, Ireland, and Brittany. Constance Bullock-Davies maintains that such tales were transmitted by bilingual and trilingual *latimers*, or interpreters.⁵³ Marriages between the Anglo-Normans and the Welsh and Irish also provided spaces in which oral stories could circulate: some of the better-known alliances are those of Nesta, daughter of Rhys ap Tewdr, and Gerald of Windsor;⁵⁴ and Aiofe, daughter of Dermot, king of Leinster, and Richard de Clare (Strongbow).⁵⁵ In addition, marriages also linked the Angevin court to Brittany: the most prominent involved Henry's son Geoffrey, who became Duke of Brittany and who married Constance, heiress of Count Conan IV of Brittany.⁵⁶ Marie's appropriation of Celtic myth parallels a strategy popular with the Anglo-Norman and Angevin royalty, who utilized Celtic Arthurian materials (Welsh and Breton) for legitimating and political purposes.⁵⁷ While these myths may have become desacralized, thus losing some of their original coherence and spiritual significance, they still bore the traces of transcendent axiological

⁵² On Henry II and Wales, see W. L. Warren, *Henry II* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1977), 168–69. On the interchanges between the Irish and the Welsh in southwest Wales, from as early as the late third century, see Sioned Davies, "Mythology and the Oral Tradition: Wales," in *The Celtic World*, 785–91, here 787. And on Brittany, see Powell, *The Celts*, 203–4; and Williams, "Brittany and the Arthurian Legend."

⁵³ Constance Bullock-Davies, *Professional Interpreters and the Matter of Britain* (Cardiff: Wales University Press, 1966), 24.

⁵⁴ Nesta, or Nest, was also the mistress of Henry I: Robert Bartlett, *Gerald of Wales, 1146–1223* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 113.

⁵⁵ David Crouch, *William Marshal: Court, Career, and Chivalry in the Angevin Empire, 1147–1219* (London: Longman, 1990), 99–100.

⁵⁶ Warren, *Henry II*, 563.

⁵⁷ Henry was educated in the household of his maternal uncle Robert of Gloucester, the illegitimate son of Henry I and half-brother of Matilda and a dedicatee of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia*. On the political dimension of Henry's interest in Arthur, see N. J. Higham, *King Arthur: Myth-Making and History* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 230.

truths. Additionally, some aspects of the belief system and cultural practices undergirding these myths were still in place in Wales and Ireland. For instance, in early Welsh and Irish custom and law, a woman "enjoyed a certain independence": she could not be married against her will; and there existed possibilities of choice in partner.⁵⁸ Such use of Celtic materials with deep cultural resonances and ties to individual psyche and spirit is also apparent in the hagiographical text *Espurgatoire Seint Patrick*, also attributed to Marie.

In "Lanval," particularly in connection with the royal court, Marie also deploys a monologic legal discourse that represents the united voice of the king and the barons, the most powerful men in the realm, who endorse it, participate in it, and insist upon it. As has been amply demonstrated in previous commentaries, the trial scenes in *Lanval* are laced with legal terms of art (e.g. *acheisuner*, *felunie*, *garant*, *gager*, *jugement*, *respuns*).⁵⁹ William Rothwell convincingly argues that these terms are part of a specialized Anglo-Norman legal vocabulary that was formalized in speech and in written form soon after the Norman Conquest.⁶⁰ In that "legal meaning arrives after the event to

⁵⁸ See for example, Thomas Peter Ellis, *Welsh Tribal Law and Custom in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1926), 395. Green also points to the equality between males and females in Celtic myth: *Celtic Goddesses*, 117.

⁵⁹ Hoepffner argued that the trial scene in "Lanval" was inspired by one in the *Roman de Thèbes* by Daire le Roux: see "Pour la chronologie des *Lais* de Marie de France," *Romania* 59 (1933): 351–70; and idem, *Les Lais de Marie de France*, 64–65. The first close analysis of the *lai*'s legal lexicon in the context of twelfth-century law appears in Elizabeth A. Francis, "The Trial in *Lanval*," in *Studies in French Language and Mediaeval Literature Presented to Professor Mildred K. Pope* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1939), 114–24. Full accounts of the trial also appear in Jean Rychner, ed., *Marie de France. Le Lai de Lanval* (Geneva: Droz; Paris: Minard, 1958), 78–84; and esp. Yoriko Otaka, "Le Vocabulaire de justice chez Marie de France," *Studies in Language and Culture* 6 (1980): 103–30. Eccles examines selected legal terms in relation to the Assize of Clarendon in "Marie de France and the Law," 15–30. William Rothwell provides a penetrating lexicographical analysis in "The Trial Scene in *Lanval* and the Development of the Legal Register in Anglo-Norman," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 101 (2000): 17–36.

⁶⁰ Rothwell, "The Trial Scene in *Lanval*," 27–30; see also Otaka, "Le Vocabulaire de justice," 109–10.

reconstruct the discourse of others," the king and barons demand a legal trial, with a judgment based on *dreit* ("law," "legal rights," "justice"); Lanval's actions are to be defined and judged in accordance with the legal definition of "felunie." All, including the King and Lanval, agree to abide by the judgment of the barons (ll. 379, 625–626).

Notably, the legal vocabulary of "Lanval" resonates intertextually with legal texts of the time (the *Coronation Charter* of Henry I, Glanvill's *Treatise*, the *Leis Willelme*) and other texts that refer to law and legal practices (e.g., the Anglo-Norman *Alexander*, the *Tristan* of Thomas, Jordan Fantosme's *Chronicle*, Gaimar's *Histoire des Engleis*).⁶¹ In addition, intratextual references occur throughout the legal discourse; the trial scenes focus on establishing whether or not Lanval is guilty of charges set forth first by the queen, then the king, and finally the Count of Cornwall, all in echoing terms. The spurned queen complains to the king of Lanval's purported offense: he brought shame upon her by attempting to seduce her ("l'ad hunie" [l. 316]), and subsequently he offended and dishonored her ("laidi" and "avila" [l. 319]). But it is the king who makes the official accusation: "Vassal, vus me avez mut mesfait! / . . . / De me hunir et aviler" (ll. 363–365) [Vassal, you have seriously wronged me . . . by shaming and dishonoring me]. Lanval denies bringing dishonor and shame to his lord ("defent la deshonor / e la hunte de sun seignur" [ll. 371–372]),⁶² but he also acknowledges the truth of his boast about his beloved (l. 377). At the trial the Count of Cornwall explicates the charge as follows: "The king accused his vassal, whom I heard you call Lanval, of felony,"⁶³ and

⁶¹ See, for example, Rothwell, "The Trial Scene in *Lanval*," 17–36.

⁶² My translations.

⁶³ These repeated accusations of *felunie* resonate with several twelfth-century texts. Examples: The *Policraticus* of John of Salisbury, 6.25: "If we are bound by fealty (*fidelitas*) to anyone, we must not harm his soundness of body, or take from him the military resources upon which his safety depends, or presume to commit any act whereby his honor or advantage is diminished; neither is it lawful that that which is easy for him should be made difficult, or that which is possible impossible. . . .": *The Statesman's Book of John of Salisbury*, trans. John Dickinson (New York: Knopf, 1927, repr. New York: Russell & Russell, 1963), 261. See also the trans. by Cary J. Nederman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 139. The *Leges Henrici Primi*: violations in respect to the sovereign include "injuring anywhere members of his household"; "unfaithfulness or treason"; "despis[ing] or speak[ing] badly of

charged him with a crime ('un mesfait'), about a love he boasted of which angered my lady" (ll. 439–442). Cornwall also asserts that a vassal owes appropriate honor to his lord: "a sun seignur / Deit hum par tut fairë honur" (ll. 447–448). And it is on this point that the judgment hinges.

In Marie's *lai* the institutionally authorized legal discourse is embraced by those of rank in the "legal and social hierarchy," and attendant "discursive techniques and sanctions" "delimit who may speak, on what topic, with what content," and in what "specific institutional settings." Thus it has the capacity to "exclud[e] and obscur[e] alternative or oppositional readings and meanings," thereby implying "ethical and political desirability while at the same time allowing highly refined manipulation."⁶⁴ Thus the king makes the formal accusation against Lanval, who is restricted to answering the charges in order ("de mot en mot, si cum il dist" [l. 373]). The king first commands his household vassals (those of his "maisne[e]" [ll. 359–394]) and then a larger assemblage of barons of the realm (l. 393) to deliver a judgment. Among these "jugeurs," the Count of Cornwall, perhaps an allusion to the esteemed and influential advisor of Henry II, Reginald de Dunstanville (d. 1175),⁶⁵ has special authority. Notably, these men who share a linguistic code comprise an

him [the king]," quoted in John Hudson, *The Formation of the English Common Law: Law and Society in England from the Norman Conquest to Magna Carta* (London and New York: Longman, 1996), 29. Glanvill: "The following [criminal pleas] belong to the crown of the lord king: The crime which the civil lawyers call *lese-majesté*, namely the killing or betrayal of the lord king or the betrayal of the realm or the army; fraudulent concealment of treasure trove; the plea of breach of the lord king's peace; . . . all these are punishable by death or cutting off of the limbs": *The Treatise on the Laws and Customs of the Realm of England Commonly Called Glanvill*, ed. and trans. G. D. G. Hall (London: Thomas Nelson, 1965) (cited by book and paragraph), 1:1–2. See Glynnis M. Cropp, "Felony and Courtly Love," in *The Court Reconvenes: Courtly Literature Across the Disciplines*, ed. Barbara K. Altmann and Carleton W. Carroll (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 2003), 73–80.

⁶⁴ Goodrich, "Law and Language," 187, 190.

⁶⁵ Ewert's edition reads, "li quous de Cornwaille," following British Library MS. Harley 978; the four other manuscripts have "dus" or "dux." See, for instance, Rychner, *Le Lai de Lanval*, 58–59. After the earl's death in 1175 the earldom of Cornwall reverted to the King until 1189: Burgess, *Text and Context*, 19, 195, note 52.

elite speech community.⁶⁶

So too each of these trials follows established procedures of Marie's time.⁶⁷ In the first or preliminary trial, the king makes the accusation ("d'un mesfait l'acheisun" [l. 440]); Lanval then gives his legal answer ("respuns" [l. 500]), responding to each of the king's charges. In the first hearing, it is determined that Lanval must appear before an expanded *curia* ("la curz esforcie[e]" [l. 393]). Some of Lanval's fellow knights serve as guarantors ("li plegge" [l. 418]), offering their lands as security that Lanval will stand trial on the appointed day (ll. 415–419). During the deliberations, the Count of Cornwall restates the king's charge of "felunie" and specifies that only the sovereign can make such an accusation against a vassal (ll. 439–443). After directing the knight to take a binding oath ("Un serement l'engagera" [l. 449]) in accordance with the law, Cornwall explains that the final judgment will turn on whether or not Lanval can produce his "guarant" (l. 451)—that is, "proof, justifying evidence" or "authority"⁶⁸—in the form of his "amie," so that the court can determine the truth of his boast. If Lanval complies, he will be pardoned; if he fails, he will "lose the king's service and the king will banish him" ("Tut sun servise pert del rei, / E sil deit cungeer de sei" [ll. 459–460]). The trial concludes when the Lady appears; her presence and her formal statement confirm the truth of Lanval's legal declaration, and he is exonerated.

In this axiomatic and rational legal discourse, then, meaning is assigned "after the event to reconstruct the discourse of others and to rewrite the diversity of social language in terms of the purportedly neutral or artistic significances."⁶⁹ The barons are instructed to, and claim to, judge according to custom and law (ll. 434–460), and they must account for their decisions (l. 396). Lanval's words and actions are construed as a "felunie," which is punishable by law. At first the king threatens to burn or hang Lanval ("Il le ferat arder u pendre" [l. 328]). Later it is decided by the court that if Lanval is found guilty he will lose the king's service and be banished ("Tut sun servise pert del rei, / E sil deit cungeer de sei" [ll. 459–460]).

⁶⁶ On the composition the court of Henry II, see Warren, *Henry II*, 306–60.

⁶⁷ See Francis, "The Trial in *Lanval*," 114–24; and Otaka, "Le Vocabulaire de justice," 103–30.

⁶⁸ *Lais*, ed. Ewert, 176.

⁶⁹ Goodrich, "Law and Language," 189.

At Arthur's court, the legal discourse is both authoritarian and distanced, containing repeated references to *dreit* (i.e., "law" and "justice").⁷⁰ This emphasis on judgment according to law disregards situation and motivation. Thus, as the barons deliberate in regard to the king's charge and Lanval's "legal answer," or "declaration," the Count of Cornwall announces that they must abide by the law and do justice ("Le dreit estuet aler avant" [l. 436]). Similarly, at the conclusion of the trial the king grants that "it should be as the judges recommended, in accordance with law" ("Ceo qu'il en jugerunt par dreit / Li reis otrie ke issi seit" [ll. 625–626]). In contrast to mythic discourse, legal discourse "fixes legal meaning to individual acts." This reification of words and actions "obscures the real relations which form the context of such actions and the explanation of their motives," and transforms "human beings—the diffuse, complex and changing biographical entities of motivated interaction—into the ethical and political subjects of legal rationality and formal justice."⁷¹ It is this discursive mode that restates and construes Lanval's actions and words. Focusing on such interpretations of actions and events, the legal discourse in "*Lanval*" ignores human affect and personal bonds. So, too, the context and motives behind his actions (e.g., the queen's offer of "druerie" and her angry taunting)⁷² remain outside the legal deliberations. Once accused, Lanval is no longer free: he is summoned to court and he is allowed to leave only with bail ("plegges" [l. 390]); his words count only as responses to the charges; and his status as a loyal vassal hangs in the balance. When he is brought to trial, the barons order him to summon his "amie," but he declines, for he knows that because of his broken promise he has lost her. Publicly he asserts that he has been faithful to his lord and that he has spoken truthfully

⁷⁰ See lines 309, 383, 436, 625. In contrast with this emphasis on *dreit*, which prevails in the legal discourse, the mythic discourse emphasizes truth, "la verité."

⁷¹ Goodrich, "Law and Language," 190.

⁷² She asserts that he "has no desire for women" ("des femmez n'avez talent") and calls him "base coward" and "wicked recreant" ("Vileins cuarz, mauvais failliz" [ll. 180–183]). On eleventh- and twelfth-century ecclesiastical views of homosexuality as "a sin against nature," see James A. Brundage, *Sex, Law, and Marriage in the Middle Ages* (Aldershot and Brookfield, VT: Variorum, 1993), 212–14, 250, 313; and R. D. Fulk, "Male Homoeroticism in the Old English *Canons of Theodore*," in *Sex and Sexuality in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. Carol Braun Pasternack (Tempe, AZ: MRTS, forthcoming).

about his beloved, yet he suffers remorse (ll. 375–378). His personal obligations and private reasons for his actions, however, are irrelevant in the court of law, where his words and acts are judged exclusively within a legal framework. Lanval's very identity—as a loyal vassal of Arthur or as a *felun* who will be banned from the court—is to be determined solely by legal definitions, procedures, and judgments.

Intersection and Transgression

Throughout "Lanval" mythic and legal discursivity coexist in parallel, except for a moment when the two discourses intersect, indeed, when the mythic discourse transgresses the boundaries of legal discourse. Three times the Lady's attendants and finally the "Dame" herself interrupt and confound the legal deliberations at court. On each occasion, Arthur presses the barons to state their verdict, but they fall silent each time a pair of maidens and finally the Lady herself come into view. At each of these three moments, the voices of the king and the barons are replaced by the voices of the maidens and their mistress.⁷³ When the Lady does appear, all who see her are transfixed by her radiant beauty. Confidently, she makes a formal statement, addressing each of the charges brought against Lanval: his boast, the queen's accusation, and implicitly the question of the vassal's loyalty to his lord and king. By thus proving the veracity of Lanval's boast and his subsequent legal statement, she exonerates and vindicates him.

In intersecting and transgressing the legal discourse, Marie's mythic discourse not only broadens the semantic range of previously restricted legal terms,⁷⁴ it also reformulates legal constructs of interpersonal and socio-political relationships, reconstituting concepts of mutuality, fidelity, and obligation. As the locus of public power, the king grants "femmes," "tere,"

⁷³ Bernadine McCreesh points out "the progression from the long speech of Cornwall to the short speech of the barons, to the speechlessness of the courtiers": "The Use of Conversation in Medieval Literature: The Case of Marie de France and Her First Redactor," *Revue de l'Université d'Ottawa* 53 (1983): 189–97, here 192.

⁷⁴ When the Lady's maidens appear at court, for instance, the verb *esgarder* expands from the sense of "judging" to include "seeing," and even "staring in amazement." See, for example, Poe, *Love in the Afternoon*, 301–10. Similarly, the term *fei* extends beyond that which is demanded by the feudal oath between lord and vassal.

and "riches duns" as recompense for service. Similarly, he requires that Gawain and the knights who serve as guarantors for Lanval "gage" their lands, which they hold from him, and he demands severe punishments for those who fail to uphold the vow of fealty: the escheating of lands, banishment, and even death. Thus on perceiving an affront on the part of his vassal, Arthur first threatens to hang or burn Lanval, and later announces that he will banish the knight if he is adjudged guilty. Conversely, the Lady generously bestows gifts out of love and generosity of spirit, a practice that Lanval subsequently adopts. Moreover, the Lady's loyalty to Lanval proves superior to that of the king to his vassal. Lanval's astonishment is clear when he discovers that his "amie" is in fact at Arthur's court: "Par fei, fet il, 'ceo est m'amie!'" (l. 597). This comment is, of course, doubly apt because it is precisely through faith and faithfulness that the Lady comes to redeem Lanval. It is clear that Lanval has found an enduring love, a private alliance that surpasses any public alliance. And in each case, the mythic construct surpasses the legal construct; the bonds forged by law fall short of the bonds born of love.

In Marie's *lai*, mythic discourse, underwritten by the authority of its ultimate source, portrays and constitutes love as deeply interiorized yet interpersonal, characterized by mutual respect, mutual loyalty, and mutual obligation. The love shared by Lanval and his "amie" then is an intensely private matter. From the time of their first interlude in the pavilion, the Lady explains that they will enjoy each other only in seclusion: "U nuls puist aver s'amie / Sanz reproece, sanz vileinie" (ll. 165–166), and she exacts a pledge of secrecy, adding that she will not be seen or heard by others. This love, moreover, is intimately connected to virtue and spirit, for the Lady emphasizes the necessity of Lanval's being "pru" and "curteis," and there is an overflowing of the effects of love (e.g., well-being, joy, and generosity)⁷⁵ into the public sphere. Yet the exact nature of the love relationship is beyond the ken of any but the lovers. As the mythic discourse, with its emphasis upon human nature and its concern for values associated with human love, intersects the constraining legal discourse, private momentarily becomes public. Once the king and the people of the court perceive, however briefly and superficially,

⁷⁵ For discussions of Marie's emphasis on love in connection with earthly happiness, see Albrecht Classen, "Happiness in the Middle Ages? Hartmann von Aue and Marie de France," *Neohelicon* 25 (1998): 247–74, here 256–64, and Flori, "Amour et société aristocratique," 33. Classen also makes an important link between such love and virtue and reason.

the manifestations of mutual devotion, they first recognize and then acknowledge the truth and rightness of the Lady's—and, in retrospect, Lanval's—words, which are manifestations of their love. While this love is known only to the two who share it, the onlookers discern it, albeit imperfectly, and experience an ineffable joy (“Il n’ot un sul ki l’esgardast / De dreite joie n’eschaufast / Cil ki le chevaler amoënt” [ll. 583–585]). Here, the concept of love thus fashioned through mythic discursivity is depicted as more powerful than the boundaries and limits established by legal discourse and law.

Apropos of the bond of love between Lanval and his *amie*, it is worth noting that despite the absence of parental involvement, ceremony, lordly sanction, or ecclesiastical blessing, a union that was based on consent and consummation, or simply free consent, even if in secret—like the vows and acts of love that transpired in the privacy of the Lady's pavilion—would have constituted a valid marriage.⁷⁶ Thus, as the following discussion demonstrates, it is possible to see Marie's commentary as having noteworthy social significance and practical implications for her audience.

Law, Land, and Marriage in Twelfth- and Thirteenth-Century England

In Europe, the late eleventh century through the twelfth century witnessed the burgeoning of legal systems, marked by increasing formalization and regularization of laws. So, too, twelfth-century England, especially during the reign of Henry II (1154–1189), experienced a striking growth in legal activity. By the time of *The Treatise on the laws and customs of the realm of England commonly called Glanvill* (1187–1189), the foundations of the common law had been established, “with a body of laws administered by a defined group of justices following a distinct procedure.”⁷⁷ Notably, this legal activity emphasized

⁷⁶ While a public ceremony, parental consent, or priestly blessing were considered desirable, they were not essential to a valid marriage: see, for example, Brundage, *Sex, Law, and Marriage*, 325; Michael M. Sheehan, “Choice of Marriage Partners in the Middle Ages: Development and Mode of Application of a Theory of Marriage,” *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History* n.s. 1 (1978): 3–33, esp. 9–15; J. Gillingham, “Love, Marriage and Politics in the Twelfth Century,” *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 25 (1989): 292–303, here 294–95.

⁷⁷ R. C. Van Caenegem, *The Birth of the English Common Law*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 3. On *lex* as encompassing “all Law or laws, written or unwritten, or custom,” in late eleventh- and

landholding. Once a landholding relationship had been established, certain practices and customs had legal import, with perspectives regarding law and landholding dependent upon an individual's position in the landholding relationship. For the lord, land law was a means of “controlling key resources, his wealth, and his followers.” For the tenant, land and custom or law was a way “to provide for himself, his family, and his followers, in his lifetime and beyond.” Moreover, the tenant's family, his sub-tenants, and his peers also had a point of view on the landholding relationship and the laws associated with it. As John Hudson observes, people in Norman and Angevin England knew about the law and were “sensitive to its vocabulary.”⁷⁸ In twelfth-century lawsuits, litigants would, for instance, enlist the aid of friends and family. Additionally, legal matters were discussed not only in the context of the trials but also in the retinue of Henry II and in all noble households. And legal proceedings also appear in many literary texts of the time.⁷⁹

Women too, especially aristocratic women, had knowledge of the law. Tracing the changes in inheritance practices, Judith Green points out, “Women come into greater prominence in twelfth-century affairs” as a result of their importance in the transmission of land, as recipients of family land (the *maritagium* or marriage portion) when they married, and particularly as heirs. Significantly, in England at this time the number of heiresses and potential heiresses increased because of *parceny* (co-heirship).⁸⁰ John

twelfth-century England, see Hudson, *The Formation of the English Common Law*, 3. See also Harold J. Berman, *Law and Revolution: The Formation of the Western Legal Tradition* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1983), 253–81.

⁷⁸ Hudson, *The Formation of the English Common Law*, 88, 6.

⁷⁹ In addition, judicial and political processes often overlapped. See, for example, Robert Bartlett, *England under the Norman and Angevin Kings, 1075–1225* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 187–90; Warren, *Henry II*, 306, 359–60; and R. Howard Bloch, *Medieval French Literature and the Law* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1977).

⁸⁰ Judith A. Green, “Aristocratic Women in Early Twelfth-Century England,” in *Anglo-Norman Political Culture and the Twelfth-Century Renaissance. Proceedings of the Borchard Conference on Anglo-Norman History, 1995*, ed. C. Warren Hollister (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1997), 59–82, here 60–61. See also J. C. Holt, “Feudal Society and the Family in Early Medieval England: IV. The Heiress and the Alien,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 5th ser. 35

Gillingham has christened the twelfth century "the century of heiresses."⁸¹ And J. C. Holt explains the importance of the heiress as "one of the fluid elements in the social structure": the heiress allowed sovereigns "to reward vassals, landless knights, and ambitious officials"; permitted "men to enter into the hierarchy of the noble elite"; enabled "families to form alliances with each other"; and helped "established lineages" to restore "their military reputation" or to enhance "their access to government circles."⁸² During the twelfth century, then, a notable legal issue during the twelfth century is inheritance of land, especially as it pertains to women.

In his capacity as feudal lord, the king had the "right" of control over the marriages of his tenants' heiress daughters; this right could be exercised while the tenant was alive, and after his death the lord became the guardian of the daughter or daughters, even if they had reached majority. One of the early expressions of these rights occurs in the coronation charter of Henry I (1100). Throughout the early twelfth century, Henry I had considerable latitude in exploiting such royal rights.⁸³ Control of marriages not only prevented alliances between the king's enemies, but it allowed for the granting of rich heiresses as rewards to the king's men. Thus it was through marriage to aristocratic women, especially heiresses, that men could, and did, rise in status and wealth. Given the finitude of the royal demesne, granting heiresses as

(1985): 1–28, here 6–8; and Craig A. Berry, "What Silence Desires: Female Inheritance and the Romance of Property in the *Roman de Silence*," in *Translating Desire in Medieval and Early Modern Literature*, ed. idem and Heather Hayton (Tempe, AZ: MRTS, forthcoming). See also Linda Paterson, "Women, Property and the Rise of Courtly Love," in *The Court Reconvenes*, ed. Altmann and Carroll, 41–55.

⁸¹ Gillingham, "Love, Marriage and Politics," 295. "Few maidens at their betrothal were heirs apparent. Some were heirs presumptive. All were heirs potential": Holt, "Feudal Society," 6.

⁸² Holt, "Feudal Society," 1–28.

⁸³ Under William the Conqueror, who had vast lands with which to reward his men, the matter had not had great relevance; however, by the time of his son Henry I, concerns about depleting the royal demesne were apparent. Subsequently, Henry II was more cautious in exploiting these rights, but by the time of King John, the king's "rights" again became a matter of political contest. See Marjorie Chibnall, *Anglo-Norman England* (Oxford and New York: Blackwell, 1986), 72–76.

wives was also an important feature of royal patronage, and it was by such means that Henry I was said to have raised several of his men "from the dust."⁸⁴ Under Henry II prevailing practice is similarly defined by Glanvill's *Treatise*: "by the law and custom of the realm no woman who is heir to land may be married without the direction and consent of the lord."⁸⁵ To complicate matters further, lords and kings could "sell marriages" (that is, "the right to control the marriage of an heiress") to those who might want to marry the ward, to give the ward to a family member, or to "resell" the marriage at a profit. This practice is documented for the reigns of Henry II and his sons, during which period there are records of sixty payments for permission to marry heiresses. Additionally, there are thirty-one instances of punishment for those who had done so without permission.⁸⁶

According to law, then, daughters could marry only after gaining the lord's approval and satisfying his requirements. It is true that marriages that satisfied the rulings of the church but not the lord were "licit"; in the words of Glanvill, when there is a question of "lawful marriage," the "plea shall not proceed in the court of the lord king; and the archbishop or bishop of the place shall be ordered by the following writ to enquire about the marriage, and to inform the lord king or his justices of his judgment in the matter."⁸⁷ Nevertheless, violating the "lord's right to consent" might result in a strong reaction and heavy fines; under Henry II, for example, the average fine was £75, the equivalent of a knight's income for five years, and in some instances the offender's property might be seized.⁸⁸

⁸⁴ Judith A. Green, *The Aristocracy of Norman England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 266.

⁸⁵ Glanvill, *Treatise on the Laws*, 7.12.

⁸⁶ From 1130 the Pipe rolls begin to record information on the royal exploitation of the rights of wardship and marriage. On the "grubby characteristics" of this "marriage market," see Holt, "Feudal Society," 21–24.

⁸⁷ Glanvill, *Treatise on the Laws*, 7.13. The church's role in legal decisions concerning marriage grew during the twelfth century and afterwards, as it extended its jurisdiction over marriage and sexual affairs. See also Bartlett, *England under the Norman and Angevin Kings*, 547; and Scott Waugh, *Lordship of England: Royal Wardships and Marriage in English Society and Politics, 1217–1327* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 87–88.

⁸⁸ Waugh, *Lordship*, 87–88.

Aristocratic women participated in legal matters, both as wives and as widows, most notably in connection with their inheritance. While it is true that according to law a man had "extensive control" over his wife and over "her movable goods," and that by law a woman did "not control her own lands," Hudson argues that in practice women had "more control of the lands they brought to their marriage" than Glanvill indicates. For example, in instances "concerning lands she had brought to the marriage, a wife had to be sued jointly with her husband"; in addition, "women made grants in their own name with their husband's consent," and "a husband might vouch for his wife as warrantor." Moreover, widows are frequent litigants, "with numerous actions concerning dower" in litigation involving land.⁸⁹

Virginie Greene has observed that Georges Duby's "pessimism about the condition of medieval women was reversed in one of his last books, *Dames du XIIIe siècle* (1995), where he recognized that women can be visible as agents at least in the imaginary realm of romance."⁹⁰ The idea of women as "agents," moreover, extends beyond the boundaries of romance, for a growing body of historical evidence, much of which has gone unnoticed in regard to Marie's *lai*, indicates that women were not necessarily passive in connection with law, land, and marriage. One of the most famous examples of a marriage between an heiress and a landless knight is the case of Isabel, Countess of Striguil and Pembroke, and William Marshal. Having served Henry II long and faithfully, William was granted the hand, and the lands, of Isabel, the daughter of Richard of Clare (Strongbow), and Aiofe, or Eve, the daughter of King Dermot of Leinster (Ireland). At the time, William was forty-two, and Isabel between seventeen and twenty. Although the marriage seems to have been arranged,⁹¹ some surviving details concerning the couple have relevance here.

David Crouch notes that the *Histoire* of William Marshal offers some brief insights into Isabel's role in this union. According to this account, councils of

⁸⁹ Hudson, *Formation of the English Common Law*, 235. Additionally, there are frequent examples of widows involved in litigation, several with considerable success.

⁹⁰ See Virginie Green's contribution to this volume, "The Knight, the Woman, and the Historian: Georges Duby and Courtly Love," above, 43–63. On the limitations of Duby's "theoretical models of marriage in the eleventh century," see Brundage, *Sex, Law, and Marriage*, 194.

⁹¹ The marriage had been promised by Henry II; Richard I granted Isabel to William in 1189, just after his father's death.

William Marshal's men deliberated about the countess's concerns on two occasions; once over her "doubts" about King John's "intentions" with regard to a trip that the Marshal was to make to England, and once over her wish that her son Richard should not be "delivered to the King." These insights, Crouch points out, indicate that Isabel "was in reality no mere cipher in her husband's affairs"; indeed, she was "a great lady in a long line of powerful Norman aristocratic women; her advice and consent was both needed and sought."⁹² Yet another telling passage from the *Histoire* describes a scene in 1207, when William Marshal was about to depart from Ireland for England, leaving the countess to defend her husband's, and her own, interests in Ireland.⁹³ As Crouch recounts the scene, having summoned his barons and knights of Leinster to his chief fortress of Kilkenny, the Marshal "made a dramatic entry, Isabel on his arm" and addressed his men as follows:

Lords! See the countess, whom I here present to you; your lady by birth, the daughter of the earl who freely enfeoffed you all when he conquered this land. She remains amongst you, pregnant. Until God permits me to return, I pray you to keep her well and faithfully, for she is your lady, and I have nothing but through her.⁹⁴

This account suggests that even in this arranged marriage mutual respect and cooperation could exist. Crouch's observation that Isabel was "a great lady in a long line of powerful Norman aristocratic women" is doubly significant. First, William Marshal respectfully acknowledges her importance in the transmission and retention of the land. Second, Crouch intimates that Isabel had inherited more than land from the women in her family. In fact, there is a pattern of medieval women passing down values and practices from mother to daughter (and grandmother to granddaughter), and such may well have been the case with Isabel, Eve, and those before her.⁹⁵

⁹² Crouch, *William Marshal*, 99–100.

⁹³ "Any great lady had to be ready to assume responsibility in her husband's time of need, and to defend her dower rights. Her interests and his were one": Marjorie Chibnall, "Women in Orderic Vitalis," *Haskins Journal* 2 (1990): 105–21, here 114.

⁹⁴ Crouch, *William Marshal*, 99–100.

⁹⁵ On intergenerational connections between women, see, for example, Eleanor Searle, "Women and the Legitimation of Succession at the Norman

So, too, many women took an active role in connection with their lands, and at least some also took an active role in regard to their marital status. Evidence, as is usually the case, is more abundant for widows than for single women and wives, whose legal identities were subsumed by those of their fathers or husbands. Extant documents indicate that not infrequently widows, particularly those wishing to remain single, tried to avoid arranged marriages. Their attempts encountered varied responses. For instance, Hawisa, the widow of the Earl of Essex and Countess of Aumale in her own right, refused (ca. 1194) to marry William de Forz, the husband chosen for her by King Richard; ultimately, however, she was forced to succumb when the king ordered her property to be confiscated.⁹⁶ And upon the death of Baldwin, the son and heir of the Earl of Devon, his young widow, Margaret de Redevers, a double heiress, was given in marriage to one of King John's Norman knights, Fawkes de Bréauté; she subsequently attempted to dissolve the union, maintaining that the marriage had occurred against her will.⁹⁷ In 1205 the widow Alice Belet refused to marry in accordance with King John's wishes. The king then seized her dower lands, but with the help of her father, who made the appropriate payments, she was able to recover her dower and live as a widow.⁹⁸

When a widow did succeed in securing an exemption from "royal marriage," she gained "freedom" and "power over her inheritance, her dower, and her marriage-portion." Such was the case for Countess Lucy, who in 1130 after the death of her third husband, Ranulf le Meschin, Earl of Chester, paid 500 marks to avoid marrying for a period of five years; there is no evidence

Conquest," in *Proceedings of the Battle Conference on Anglo-Norman Studies*, 3, ed. R. Allen Brown (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1980): 159–70. For a later period, see Karen Jambeck, "Patterns of Women's Literary Patronage: England 1200–ca. 1475," in *The Cultural Patronage of Medieval Women*, ed. June Hall McCash (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 228–65. On Isabel's possible patronage of *Dermot and the Earl*, see, for example, Paul Meyer, "Review of Orpen's edition of the *Song of Dermot*," *Romania* 21 (1892): 444–51; and Evelyn Mullaly, ed., *The Deeds of the Normans in Ireland: La Geste des Engleis en Yrlande [The Song of Dermot and the Earl]* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2002), 34–37.

⁹⁶ Holt, "Feudal Society," 24.

⁹⁷ The matter came to an end with the death of de Bréauté: Holt, "Feudal Society," 27.

⁹⁸ Holt, "Feudal Society," 23–24.

that she ever remarried. She was also successful in paying additional sums to enable her to "do justice in her court amongst her men" and to "recover her patrimony."⁹⁹ So too Margaret of Beaumont was widowed in 1119 and was still living as a widow in 1156.¹⁰⁰ In the following century, Margaret, heir to the earldom of Lincoln, which descended to her through her mother Hawise, the sister of Ranulf, Earl of Chester, married twice, and after the death of her second husband she lived as a widow for more than two decades, controlling not only her Lincoln inheritance but also her share of the Lacy lands and her dower settlement, which included entire counties.¹⁰¹

Historical records also provide examples of women who participated in and even shaped their own destiny. Scattered among the leaves and rolls of surviving documents are examples of couples who defied the laws and social conventions of the time. In the twelfth century, the widow of Hugh de Mount Pincon, Matilda de Grandmesnil, left her home, family, and friends in Normandy "to accompany her new love, a young knight called Matthew, on a journey to Jerusalem."¹⁰² So, too, the well-born wife of Count Robert I of Meulun (d. 1118) was said to have left him for another earl.¹⁰³ Yet another example is Joan of Acre, daughter of Edward I and Eleanor of Castile. Joan had been married to Gilbert, Earl of Clare, who died in 1295. A wealthy widow at twenty-three, Joan avoided a second arranged marriage by secretly wedding

⁹⁹ Holt, "Feudal Society," 24. See also Green, *Aristocracy of Norman England*, 368–71.

¹⁰⁰ Peter Coss, *The Lady in Medieval England* (Stroud, UK, and Mechanicsburg, PA: Sutton, 1998), 29.

¹⁰¹ Linda E. Mitchell, "The Lady as Lord in Thirteenth-Century Britain," *Historical Reflections / Reflexions historiques* 18 (1992): 71–97, here 87. Rowena Archer has argued that medieval widows who successfully managed their estates had had these abilities as wives; and even before they married, women learned by observing what occurred in their families: "How ladies ... who live on their manors ought to manage their households and estates": Women as Landholders and Administrators in the later Middle Ages," in *Woman Is a Worthy Wight: Women in English Society c. 1200–1500*, ed. P. J. P. Goldberg (Gloucester: Sutton, 1992), 149–81, here 152.

¹⁰² Holt, "Feudal Society," 24–25.

¹⁰³ David Crouch, *The Beaumont Twins. The Roots and Branches of Power in the Twelfth Century* (London and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 3–6.

Ralph de Monthermer, who had served her former husband as a squire. Joan was also foresighted enough to have Ralph knighted before she married him.¹⁰⁴

Toward the end of the twelfth century and into the thirteenth century payment of such fines becomes more common. It is at this point that examples of some women exercising control over their marriages appear. Such seems to be the case for the heiress Philippa Basset, who was the widow of Henry de Newburgh, Earl of Warwick. In 1229 she paid 100 marks to the king in order to remain unmarried or to marry a man of her choice. Within a month she had remarried.¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, some women, and men, seem to have found a way around the system by marrying first and paying a fine later. A fascinating example here is Elizabeth de Clare (1295–1360), who after the death of her husband John de Burgh, Earl of Ulster, was a widow at twenty-one. In this case King Edward I's plan to marry her to a favored vassal was thwarted when Theobald de Verdon abducted Elizabeth in 1316, wedding her without the king's license. Elizabeth's biographer, Francis Underhill, argues that since the payment of a fine, sometimes a high one, could usually secure the king's pardon for a marriage without previous royal approval, this appears to have been the situation with Elizabeth and Theobald. In fact, feigned abduction and clandestine marriages, a means by which women and men could exercise choice in marriage partners, became more common in the later Middle Ages.¹⁰⁶

It is in the opening lines of "Lanval" that Marie begins to strike her theme: "femmes et tere departi." Law and legal practices assign wives to

¹⁰⁴ Francis A. Underhill, *For Her Good Estate: The Life of Elizabeth de Burgh* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 6–7. As early as the twelfth century, there is evidence of wards' buying the freedom to arrange their own marriages, but the practice becomes more common in the thirteenth century and later. See, for instance, Sue S. Walker, "Free Consent and Marriage of Feudal Wards in Medieval England," *Journal of Medieval History* 8 (1982): 123–34; and Gillingham, "Love, Marriage and Politics," 295.

¹⁰⁵ In 1242, she obtained an annulment, and thereafter she remained unmarried: Coss, *The Lady in Medieval England*, 121.

¹⁰⁶ Noting that Theobald "testified that Elizabeth came to him freely," Underhill speculates that she may have had her mother's [Joan of Acre's] second marriage in mind: *For Her Good Estate*, 15–16. On clandestine marriages, see Brundage, *Sex, Law, and Marriage*, 250, 338.

avored knights, and love is notably absent. This theme comes into high relief when Marie's text is compared to Wace's *Roman de Brut*, a work that has been sometimes been regarded as a source, sometimes as an analogue, for this section of "Lanval."¹⁰⁷ Both Marie and Wace describe the rewards for Arthur's loyal knights after the war with the Picts and the Scots. However, on the two occasions that Wace writes of such rewards, they are described as consisting of "enurs e terres," [honors and lands] or "enurs delivres," [escheated honors], whereas Marie announces that the rewards consist of "femmes et teres."¹⁰⁸ Significantly, the King grants these rewards on Pentecost (Whitsunday), a traditional time for the "king's crown-wearing" and a time associated with regnal authority and law.¹⁰⁹

Early on, then, the *lai* establishes that the law sanctions the king's distribution of wives and lands. Moreover, Marie's narrative expresses concern about enacting and enforcing laws that can endanger or impede human relationships. In this context, courts and laws are antipathetic to individual volition;¹¹⁰ additionally, laws that combine land and marriage have the potential of resulting in tenuous personal connections and uneasy alliances. Marie's dialogic conjoining of discourses allows for the contrast between public and private, and she demonstrates a keen awareness of interpersonal relationships within social and political matrices where law performs a central function. In this *lai* private and public exist in delicate balance: Lanval and the Lady honor social and legal obligations; they are generous to fellow human beings, and they acquit themselves responsibly in connection with the law and government. Yet Marie's *lai* also demonstrates that love functions most fully in private. According to "Lanval," the ethically-based love alliance emanates from two individuals; it is mutual and it is volitional; moreover, it is a requisite, in fact, a prerequisite, for a lasting union.

¹⁰⁷ Hoepffner, *Les Lais*, 58.

¹⁰⁸ *Le Roman de Brut de Wace*, ed. Ivor Arnold, 2 vols. (Paris: Société des anciens textes français, 1940), 2:534, 555 (ll. 40169–10170; 10591–10592), and a variant in B.N. MS. fonds français 1416: "Enors et terres lor dona" (l. 10592).

¹⁰⁹ Bartlett, *England under the Norman and Angevin Kings*, 128–29.

¹¹⁰ On Marie's *lai* as opposing general twelfth-century legal practices, see Don A. Monson, "L'idéologie du lai de Lanval," *Le Moyen Age* 93 (1987): 349–72. Jacqueline Eccles argues that Marie objected to laws that interfered with privacy during the reign of Henry II: "Marie de France and the Law," 21–22.

Relying on a dual narrative strategy, Marie appropriates the mythic discourse of Celtic inspiration—a source that had been so valuable to Norman and Angevin kings—and turns it to her own purposes. Simultaneously, she also appropriates legal discourse to vindicate the lovers and her approach to love. Having rendered the court speechless, the Lady, who is a myth-sanctioned representative of transcendent truth, expresses the verities of nature, and of human nature. Marie's freighted mythic discourse transgresses the twelfth-century legal discourse, which increasingly limited personal choices relating to love, marriage, and sexuality. The Lady's words and ways are contrasted with the restrictive laws and legal proceedings, some of which attempt to control the fates of women,¹¹¹ who were distributed along with land, and of men, especially landless knights and lesser vassals, who were rewarded, or not, according to the whim of a king or lord. Opposing the legal discourse of the feudal court with an oppositional mythic discourse, Marie demonstrates that attempts to constrain love are misguided.¹¹²

Although the conclusion of "Lanval" Marie's *lai* is notoriously open,¹¹³ this *lai* undeniably centers on love. In fact, it presents a model of shared love and mutual commitment, an ideal for all women and men, and one with particular relevance to the heiress.¹¹⁴ Here it is important to remember that

¹¹¹ On the *lai*'s negative position in regard to feudal approaches to marriage, see Flori, "Amour et société aristocratique," 33; and Sharon Kinoshita, "Cherchez la femme: Feminist Criticism and Marie de France's *Lai de Lanval*," *Romance Notes* 34 (1993–1994): 263–73, here 272.

¹¹² This concept of mutual love and loyalty is further highlighted through another contrast: Arthur's queen lacks not only the Lady's beauty but also her virtues. The Queen is portrayed as lustful and indifferent to the love and fidelity she owes to her husband and king, perhaps as a result of a marriage forged in a feudal environment. According to Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia*, Arthur marries Guinevere for her beauty: *The History of the Kings of Britain*, trans. Lewis Thorpe (Harmondsworth and New York: Penguin Books, 1966), 221.

¹¹³ See, for example, Ribard, "Le Lai de Lanval," 529–44; and M.-J. Walkley, "The Critics and *Lanval*," *New Zealand Journal of French Studies* 4 (1983): 5–23.

¹¹⁴ Howard Bloch has noted the similarity between the Lady and the heiress: "The fairy lady is the literary incarnation of a fantasized solution to the material problems of the class of unmarried, unendowed, and wandering

many of Marie's contemporaries were vitally concerned about love and marriage, and not merely in connection with a first union. While it is true that the church promoted lifelong marriage, many medieval women and men married more than once because of the death of a spouse. As surviving legal documents from the period indicate, at first gradually and then with increasing frequency, women and men sought to marry partners of their own choosing.¹¹⁵ Composing at a time when legal practices were encroaching upon one of the most intimate of human relationships, Marie offers practical observations on human nature, the limits of law, and a means of enriching the lives of men and women emotionally and materially. And, while it is perhaps too much to insist that "Lanval" also teaches socio-economic and political lessons, this thinly veiled but not overly subtle narrative illustrates a way to find love and even choice in marriage. Although normally marriage involved parental, lordly, and ever-increasing ecclesiastical involvement, a new option offered hope for some. Even though this option would have required determination, courage, planning, and cooperation, it was enabled, if not endorsed, by the church, which from the twelfth century on accepted as valid marriages based solely on free consent.¹¹⁶ Marie's dedication of her *Lais* to a "noble reis," within whose purview lay the enactment and enforcement of laws with significant implications for "femmes" and "tere," would have been especially apt. If Marie's dedication was in fact addressed to Henry II, the subject of the *Lais*, and

'jeunes'—an heiress whose riches are a reminder, as the French proverb still holds, that 'tout mariage est un heritage': "The Lay and the Law," 201. Margaret Aziza Pappno links the Lady to Eleanor of Aquitaine, "the richest heiress in Europe": "Marie de France, Aliénor d'Aquitaine, and the Alien Queen," in *Eleanor of Aquitaine. Lord and Lady*, ed. Bonnie Wheeler and John Carmi Parsons (New York and Houndsmill, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 337–67, here 354.

¹¹⁵ On the growing importance of love and free choice as a prerequisite for marriage that was to be a lasting union, see, for example, Sheehan, "Choice of Marriage Partners," 3–33; John T. Noonan. "Marital Affection in the Canonists," *Studia Gratiana* 12 (1967): 479–509; and Gillingham, "Love, Marriage and Politics," 292–303.

¹¹⁶ Gillingham, "Love, Marriage and Politics." Additionally, a mechanism in secular law was also becoming increasingly viable, that is, the possibility of paying a fine in order to marry according to one's choice. See, for instance, Walker, "Free Consent and Marriage of Feudal Wards," 123–34.

especially "Lanval," would no doubt have attracted his attention, for the Plantagenet king was most knowledgeable about wives, lands, and heiresses.¹¹⁷

Lai, Lei, and Conter

By deploying these two discourses in "Lanval," Marie conjoins mythic lay and law. As Howard Bloch has observed in connection with his investigations of the "polysemic plasticity of Old French," there is in some dialects a homophonic relationship between *lai*—the "written residue," or "the trace of a pre-existing song,"—and *lei / loi*, in the sense of "justice" or "law."¹¹⁸ In this context, it is significant that Marie begins and ends with the verb *cunter*: "L'aventure d'un autre lai, / Cum ele avient, vus cunterai" (ll. 1–2); and "Ne jeo n'en sai avant cunter" (l. 646) [I cannot relate any more]. Given the narrative's emphasis on legal register, the term *cunter* invites another reading. In her final statement, Marie switches to and integrates legal diction, with *cunter* functioning as an instance of *antanaclasis*: In the introduction to the *lai*, *cunter* has as its grammatical object "aventure" (ll. 1–2), and is equivalent to "telling a story or tale." In the concluding line, however, Marie incorporates the legal sense of the term, that is, "to make a [legal] declaration."¹¹⁹ Thus, having set forth her account of Lanval and the Lady, and having illustrated the rightness of their cause through mythic discourse, Marie concludes, "I cannot declare any further," or "I cannot make a further legal declaration or pleading."¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ In addition to being the husband and son of heiresses, Henry was much occupied with the marriages of his children. See, for instance, Christopher N. L. Brooke, "Marriage and Society in the Central Middle Ages," in *Marriage and Society: Studies in the Social History of Marriage*, ed. R. B. Outhwaite (London: Europa Publications Ltd, 1981), 17–34.

¹¹⁸ Bloch, "The Lay and the Law," 208. Additionally, these homophones can also be homographs (i.e., *lai* for both *lai* and *lei / loi*, though of differing grammatical gender) in Anglo-Norman, the dialect in which the *Lais* are recorded in British Library MS. Harley 978; see, for example, *The Anglo-Norman Dictionary*, fasc. 3:383.

¹¹⁹ J. H. Baker, *Manual of Law French*, 2nd ed. (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1990), 79.

¹²⁰ My translation. On the importance of the advocate (e.g., the *forespeca* and *conteur*) in connection with oral pleading in medieval English courts of law, see M. T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066–1307*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 274–75.

Like the Lady, who at Lanval's trial directs her formal legal statement, or declaration, to the King and court, Marie too addresses her declaration, or pleading, to her audience, the "dames" and "barons" and "chevaliers," and also "li rei, li prince, e li courtur," that is, the kings, princes, and *curiales* who shaped and enforced the laws that affected women, marriage, and land. Marie's narrative, then, not only provides a social commentary, but also constitutes, in Fowler's terms, "an intervention in the organization of [her] society." She intercedes by offering her *conte*—her tale and her declaration—on behalf of Lanval and his "amie," and others like them who wish to choose a partner on the basis of mutual love and mutual enrichment.

Discourses on Love, Marriage, and
Transgression in Medieval and Early
Modern Literature

edited by
Albrecht Classen

Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies
Tempe, Arizona
2004

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Discourses on love, marriage, and transgression in medieval and early modern
literature / edited by Albrecht Classen

p. cm. — (Medieval and Renaissance texts and studies; v. 278)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-86698-321-X (alk. paper)

1. Literature, Medieval--History and criticism. 2. Literature, Modern--
15th and 16th centuries--History and criticism. 3. Love in literature. 4.
Marriage in literature. 5. Sex in literature. I. Classen, Albrecht. II. Series:
Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies (Series) ; v. 278.

PN682.L68D57 2004
809'.933543--dc22

2004022619



This book is made to last.
It is set in Garamond, smyth-sewn,
printed on acid-free paper
to library specifications.

Printed in the United States of America

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