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Magical Mistress Tour: Patronage, Intellectual Property, and the Dissemination of Wealth in the *Lais* of Marie de France

The twelfth-century French poet we know as Marie de France may have been the greatest writer of short fiction before Boccaccio and Chaucer; arguably her best works—her *lais,* short, deceptively simple romances in octosyllabic couplets—rival even theirs. In these tales, Marie explores the situations of the most marginalized members of the Norman aristocracy, specifically women and bachelor knights, those younger sons dispossessed by the system of primogeniture through which the ruling class perpetuated itself. In so doing, Marie exposes the imbrication of artistic, political, economic, and legal activity in the production and reproduction of gendered (and classed) identities.

In the epilogue to her *Fables,* Marie gives her name "for memory" (pur remembrance) (1987, 256 [line 3]), so that her authorship will be remembered and appropriately rewarded: "My name is Marie; I am from France" (Marie ai num, si sui de France [line 4]). She names her patron as well, presumably also "for memory." The *Fables* are dedicated to, written for the love of ("Pur amur" [line 9]), a Count William, "the most valiant in any realm" (le plus vaillant de nul realme [line 10]). The epilogue seems almost another fable with its generic names—how many Maries and Williams were there in the French-speaking world of the twelfth century?—and it tantalizes us with the promise that these are historical personages associated with the Norman court of Henry II. A close analysis of the patron-client relationship implied in the epilogue illuminates the ways patronage regulated the formation and maintenance of gendered and classed subjectivities among the aristocracy of Norman England during the reign of Henry II. Patronage relationships dominated all aspects of social interaction during this period. Most literary critics who study the role of patronage in the arts tend to isolate cultural patronage from the larger system of patron-client relations that organized social, political, and economic

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relations at every level of medieval society.[1] We believe, however, that during this period virtually all goods and services—whether manuscripts, military service, or political offices—circulated more or less interchangeably within an amorphous and informal system of patronage. In this article, therefore, we make no distinction between literary or artistic patronage and other forms of patronage—economic, political, military. One cannot fully understand how Marie's *lais* embody and reproduce the ideologies of class and gender held by the Norman ruling class without examining the wider cultural, economic, and political work that patronage performed.

Patronage relationships of all kinds were often structured as private erotic relationships with love as the medium for the distribution, exchange, and circulation of wealth (Finke 1992, 33–48). The first part of this article examines how the patronage system regulated aristocratic masculinity and asks why it was necessary to draw on the ideology and forms of heterosexual love to structure a social process—patronage—that was, with only a few exceptions, homosocial, a means of organizing relations between men through the exchange of women and wealth. But because women cannot so easily be reduced to ciphers—symbols of wealth—the second part of the article explores how, once they are no longer represented simply as prizes to be won by successful clients but become active participants in patronage networks, women might successfully negotiate these social networks to their own advantage. In a system whose very informality and lack of explicit institutionalization made it a suitable vehicle for the advancement of the marginalized, it is not surprising that Norman noblewomen would participate in the accumulation and distribution of capital as energetically as their husbands, fathers, and brothers.

We can begin to grasp the centrality of patronage to the social organization of the Norman aristocracy by speculating about the identity of the Count William named in Marie's epilogue. Scholars have proposed several possibilities, but the best arguments for each are no more conclusive than arguments that link the author of the *lais* with one of the various Maries associated with the Anglo-Norman court of Henry II.[2] Although we have no new evidence for this position, and it would require moving the date

[1] The anthology edited by June Hall McCash (1996a) provides good examples of this approach.

[2] The various candidates for Marie have included the Abbesses of Reading and Shaftsbury (Henry II's half sister) (Rychner 1983, viii), the daughter of Waleran II, Count of Meulan (Holmes 1932; Grillo 1988), and the daughter of King Stephen (Knapton 1978). Candidates for Count William have included Guillaume of Gloucester (Rychner 1983, ix), William Longsword, and Guillaume de Mandeville, Earl of Essex, as well as William Marshal (Painter 1933).

of the fables to after 1190 (Painter 1933), we would like to think that Marie's patron was William Marshal, Earl of Pembroke, marshal of England under Henry and guardian of his son and presumptive heir. William Marshal appeals to us because his career so strongly resembles that of the character Milun—and his son—in Marie's *lai* of the same name. The careers of both the historical William and of Marie's fictional characters—their success in manipulating the system of patronage to enhance their humble beginnings—demonstrate the workings of a system that organized male/male relationships, and hence masculine identity, through structured exchanges of women and wealth.

Georges Duby (1985) recounts the life of William Marshal based on the vita of an anonymous chronicler named Jean (Meyer 1891–1901).[3] William was one of the so-called new men, those men of the lower aristocracy who provided administrative and military services to the newly centralizing monarchies of Europe and who negotiated their relations to the aristocracy through patronage, often achieving significant power and prominence (Duby 1985, 58; Green 1986, 139–59). He was the fourth son of a minor Norman nobleman and, in a world in which inheritance was governed by the principles of primogeniture and nonpartition, a man with no prospects. Yet he eventually rose to become the marshal of England, regent for Henry's eldest son and heir, Henry Court Mantel, and one of the richest and most powerful men in the realm. He accomplished this by securing the "love" of increasingly more powerful patrons, including that of Henry II and his son, until he could acquire land, a wife, a title, and the position of a powerful patron.

While primogeniture and its attendant narrative, genealogy, would seem to produce a stagnant system of rigid class divisions that limited social mobility, patronage opened up spaces through which men disinherited and disadvantaged by birth might advance. While primogeniture created fictions of permanence and continuity, patronage created elaborate networks of male-male relations that emphasized discontinuity, change, and mobility. Individuals both within and outside Henry's government constituted their relationship to it through the exchange networks of patronage.

[3] Crouch accuses Duby of being uncritical of Jean's *Histoire* and of ignoring pertinent historical facts (1990, 5). But Duby is quite specific that his purpose in writing about Marshal is not to establish a "history of events"—what really happened in William Marshal's life—but to examine the "culture of chivalry" through the eyes of the men who created it. He is less interested in establishing facts than in "the way they were created," that is, in understanding how the twelfth-century Anglo-Norman aristocracy fashioned themselves through the histories they commissioned to advance their view of events (Duby 1985, 38). Jean's biases, then, are precisely Duby's point.

Indeed, Henry's government was a product of these patronage relations and could not have functioned without them. Marshal differed from his contemporaries only in preferring military service to administration as a means of advancement, although his charters attest to his abilities as a businessman and estate manager.[4]

Patronage relations predominate when power in a society is to some extent centralized but relatively weak and when the power of the elite to control resources at the periphery is limited. Although the policy of the Norman kings since William the Conqueror had been to concentrate their power by holding their feudal prerogatives closely, avoiding the fragmentation and decentralization that plagued the monarchy in France, at the periphery of the kingdom they were forced to cede more power (Crane 1986, 7). As Earl of Pembroke, Marshal joined the ranks of the March lords who, because they controlled lands bordering hostile populations (in Marshal's case, the Welsh), were granted more power, wealth, and autonomy than Norman kings usually ceded to those barons more centrally located.

Marshal's career seems to have been not unlike that of Marie's characters in the *lai* "Milun." The title character is described as a knight of indeterminate origin who is "generous and strong, courteous and proud" (Francs e hardiz, curteis e fiers [line 14]).[5] He is beloved and honored by many princes, but he is clearly a bachelor knight who occupies the position of client to more powerful patrons. He falls in love with the daughter of a baron, and she becomes pregnant with his illegitimate child. Despite his martial abilities, however, Milun is not seen as an eligible match for the woman he loves, most likely because, like Marshal, he does not hold any land of his own. His lover is "given" by her father to "a rich lord of the region, / a powerful man of great repute" (Un mut riche humme del païs, / Mut esforcible e de grant pris [lines 125–26]), and the illegitimate child is secretly sent to Northumbria to be raised by Milun's sister.[6]

The division between married and unmarried men in the twelfth century, according to Duby, constituted a class division, a nearly insurmountable divide between men who could be patrons and those who were clients, between men who had land and wives to produce heirs and unmarried men

[4] See Crouch 1990, 5. Both Duby 1985, 36, and Crouch 1990, 3, also point out that Marshal, unlike most of his contemporaries, was completely illiterate.

[5] All references to Marie's *lais* are to the edition by Jean Rychner (Marie de France 1983); all translations are by Robert Hanning and Joan Ferrante (Marie de France 1978). Subsequent references to these texts will be by line numbers only.

[6] Interestingly, Northumbria is march land, bordering Scotland. The hero and heroine come from South Wales. "Milun" is the most precisely localized of Marie's *lais,* situated in the very border lands that were England's buffers against its hostile Celtic neighbors.

who attached themselves as clients to more powerful men who bore the cost of their upkeep as part of their household or *mesnie.* Neither William Marshal, as a younger son, nor Milun, whose class status is unarticulated, is powerful enough to marry or to hold land—at least initially. Both seek their fortune by attaching themselves as bachelor knights to the households of increasingly more powerful patrons. Their success is measured primarily by success in tournaments, which is heavily rewarded by their patrons, often so much that they are themselves able to support clients of their own, bachelor knights less fortunate than themselves. In the case of Milun's son, who, like his father, begins his adventures as a bachelor knight, success in tournaments is so great that he is eventually able, without consulting anyone,[7] to give ("dona") his now-widowed mother to his father; he is able to act the part of the powerful patron, just as eventually Marshal was rewarded by the "gift" of a wife and, with her, the lands that would make him Earl of Pembroke. It is almost too much to hope that "Milun" is a thinly disguised biography of William Marshal—a medieval roman à clef.

Of course, this identification must remain highly speculative. For our purposes, however, it does not finally matter whether the Count William of the *Fables* was William Marshal or another of the king's powerful clients, say, William of Mandeville, the Earl of Essex (on Mandeville's career, see Keefe 1983, 112–15). Marshal's well-chronicled life helps us to understand the ways men of his status negotiated the patronage networks of Henry's court even if he was not one of Marie's patrons (and he certainly moved in the same court circles as Marie). The complexity of these networks is implied when Marie describes Milun's son's successes in Brittany:

> There he spent lavishly and tourneyed
> and became acquainted with rich men.
> In every joust he entered,
> he was judged the best combatant.
> He loved poor knights;
> what he gained from rich ones
> he gave to them and thus retained them in his service;
> he was generous in all his spending.
>
> (La despendi e turneia,
> As riches hummes s'acuinta.
> Unques ne vint en nul estur
> Que l'en nel tenist al meillur.
> Les povres chevaliers amot;

[7] "Unc ne demanderent parent: / Sanz cunseil de tute autre gent" (lines 525–26).

Ceo que des riches gaainot
Lur donout e sis reteneit,
E mut largement despendeit.)
(Lines 321–28)

This passage illustrates several features of patronage relationships that are crucial to our arguments about Marie.[8] Patronage relations differ from other forms of exchange in that they are not one-time exchanges, but involve long-term obligation and credit. They are particularistic and diffuse rather than legal or contractual. Unlike other, impersonal forms of exchange that alienate individuals from one another, gift giving draws individuals together, establishing personal bonds between them, which is why terms such as *love,* applied above to Milun's son's relations with "poor knights," are often used to describe the relationship. Despite this affective dimension, however, patron-client relations are marked by extreme inequality, which in this passage is marked by the distance between the wealth of Milun's son and the poverty of the knights he supports. Nonetheless, patronage relations are entered into voluntarily and, as a result, are highly unstable; they can be terminated voluntarily by either party. For this reason, it would not be unusual for a client to seek out more than one patron or even to incur obligations on both sides of a conflict between two patrons. Because of the pervasiveness of patronage in twelfth-century England, all but the most powerful men would be patrons and clients simultaneously. (Even the king, who was the vassal of the king of France, was not excepted.) In the passage above, Milun's son gives to the poor knights who are his clients what he receives from rich ones who are his patrons. This economy of expenditure requires that gifts continually circulate; they cannot be hoarded. The circuit of the gift traces the complex web of relationships that crisscross the French and English aristocracies during the late twelfth century, as Marshal's well-documented career suggests.

Patronage relations always involve the exchange of different kinds of resources. These resources might be material and economic (such as the wealth Milun's son dispenses) or political and military (the support he receives from the knights who benefit from his generosity); often they were intangible, but no less vital, resources such as prestige, influence, and status. What facilitated the exchange of these different kinds of resources was symbolic capital—Pierre Bourdieu's term for those distinctions (honor, reputation, prestige) that in a precapitalist economy could be converted into material wealth (1977, 178). In a capitalist economy, money functions as a general symbolic equivalent, that is, it serves as an excluded bearer of

[8] Our analysis draws on the work of S. N. Eisenstadt and Luis Roniger, who discuss social systems that combine elements of patronage with those of ascribed status (1984, 178–84).

value that establishes equivalences among commodities (Goux 1996). In precapitalist societies in which even money must bear the king's image so that its value is guaranteed by his prestige, symbolic capital would serve the function of general symbolic equivalent. For this reason, it is important to see the interrelationship between political forms of patronage, such as that enjoyed by William Marshal, and the literary patronage that Marie seeks in her prologue to the *Fables*. They circulated interchangeably. Literary patronage is but one specific instance of a social institution that organized social, political, economic, and cultural relations at every level of society.

Gender and class identities among the male English aristocracy at the end of the twelfth century, then, were produced through a homosocial arrangement in which relationships between men were marked by potent affective ties. The "hordes of younger sons" dispossessed by primogeniture who became bachelor knights may even, Carolyn Dinshaw suggests, have provoked anxieties about homosexual activity (1994, 222). There is some historical evidence to support Dinshaw's speculations that same-sex eroticism was widely feared where groups of bachelor knights congregated; several medieval writers associate the male aristocracy with homosexuality.[9] Although panic about sodomitical practices among knights did not reach its peak until 1307, with the trials and executions of the Templars, it is nonetheless already present in the twelfth century.[10] Saint Bernard, writing at roughly the same time as Marie, expresses disgust with the contamination of knighthood by feminine decoration: "You cover your horses with silks, and I do not know what hanging rags cover your breastplates; you paint your banners, shields and saddles; you decorate your bridles and spurs all over with gold and silver and precious stones, and with such pomp you hasten to death with shameful fury and impudent foolishness. Are these knightly insignia or are they rather ornaments for women?" (quoted in Barber 1978, 7). While this kind of effeminate profligacy was not invariably associated with same-sex eroticism, the two are linked often

[9] This discussion follows Leonard Barkan's characterization of homosexuality as "erotic relations of any kind between those of the same gender, whatever mentality concerning psyche, society, or identity may accompany them" (1991, 22). This approach avoids the extreme positions of John Boswell (1980), who argues for the possibility not only of homosexuality during the Middle Ages but of a gay identity more or less continuous with modern gay identity, and David Halperin (1990), who argues that because sexual identity was an invention of the nineteenth century, seeking homosexuality in history is anachronistic. See also Dinshaw (1994, 207), who argues that we can and should speak of sexuality in the Middle Ages as long as we historicize it with regard to "psyche, society, and identity," and Greenberg 1988, esp. 255–60.

[10] One of the most consistent charges against Knights Templar during the fourteenth-century trials was sodomy.

enough, especially by clerical writers. Orderic Vitalis, for instance, condemned the court of William Rufus, charging that "the effeminate predominated everywhere and revelled without restraint, while filthy catamites, fit only to perish in the flames, abandoned themselves to the foulest practices of Sodom" (quoted in Greenberg 1988, 292). The twelfth-century framers of the rule governing the Knights Templar expressed horror "when a brother was tainted with the filthy, stinking sin of sodomy, which is so filthy and so stinking and so repugnant that it should not be named" (quoted in Barber 1994, 227).

This panic specifically targeted bachelor knights, primarily because these "hordes" of young knights were bound together by the affective ties of gift giving—and receiving—which created personal relationships encoded in discourses about "love." Chivalric texts like Marie's *lais* must vigilantly guard against the slippage from the homosocial to the homoerotic that lurks in the semiotic structures of such relationships. Epithets describing social status, like those cataloged by Glyn Burgess (1985, 73)—*"proz," "hardi," "fier," "bel," "fort," "vaillant," "franc,"* and *"curteis"*—function interchangeably in the chivalric world to describe both martial and amatory prowess. The potential semantic confusion between the two domains requires the reassertion and policing of heteronormativity. Within this homosocial structure, women were required to mediate male-male intercourse; they did so by acting as "surrogate" patrons. One way these knights veiled their appeals for patronage to their lord was through erotic appeals to his wife. William Marshal, according to one story, was exiled from young Henry's court and nearly ruined because of rumors of an adulterous relationship with Henry's wife, Margaret.[11] Yet the competition for the favors of the lady of the castle, favors that were seen as conduits for the patron's favor, must have been just as keen among the knights as the martial competition of tournaments. By recasting the essentially homosocial relationships of patronage within the erotic fictions of heterosexuality, the twelfth-century aristocracy fashioned new political and economic roles for women, roles that Marie explores in the *lai* "Lanval."

The romances that propagated the ideologies of courtly love were primarily a means of articulating the hierarchical relations among men.[12] The bachelor knights celebrated in most of Marie's *lais,* however, stood at the center of several hierarchical and gendered structures of relationships—

[11] Significantly for our argument about the primacy of male homosociality among the Norman aristocracy, the prince ultimately banished his wife and brought William back to court as a favorite; see Duby 1985, 47–54, 119–20.

[12] For a summary of arguments about male homosociality in medieval courtly literature, see Finke 1996, 355–58.

both male-male and male-female—whose coherence was sustained by the loyalty required of the patron-client relationship. Marie's *lais* tend to romanticize the gender relations of patronage, while, as Duby argues, Jean's chronicle of William Marshal casts a "harsh light" on the relations between men and women at the end of the twelfth century and reveals the subordination of heterosocial relations to the homosocial relations between men (Duby 1985, 47). Reading Marie's literary text in relation to Duby's historical text enables us to explore the roles that gender plays in the distribution of wealth governed by the unspoken rules or "customs" of patronage. Burgess argues that Marie's heroes are predominantly from the class of "young, active well-connected knights in search of personal happiness," lords or potential lords (1985, 73). Yet many of Marie's *lais* focus on the hero's (Milun, Lanval, Tristan) initial distance from the centers of economic, political, and sexual power. The economic situation of Marie's heroes is more complex than Burgess suggests; we are interested in the possibilities for advancement that the patronage system of feudalism offered for less well endowed bachelor knights, particularly in their appeals for patronage through elaborate fictions of erotic love for the wives of their overlords. The remainder of this article, then, examines anxieties about women's necessary but dangerous participation in the networks of patron-client relationships that governed the distribution of wealth in twelfth-century England.

"Lanval," Marie's only Arthurian *lai,* offers a textbook view of these operations of patronage. It opens by calling attention to the lavish patronage dispensed in Arthur's court. Arthur, we are told:

> Gave out many rich gifts:
> to counts and barons,
> members of the Round Table—
> such a company had no equal in all the world—
> he distributed wives and lands,
> to all but one who had served him.
> That was Lanval.
>
> (Asez i duna riches duns
> E as cuntes e as baruns.
> A ceus de la Table Roünde—
> N'ot tant de teus en tut le munde—
> Femmes e teres departi,
> Fors a un sul ki l'ot servi:
> Ceo fu Lanval.)
>
> (Lines 13–19)

Note the prominence in the opening verses of words about giving—"duns," "duna," "despendu," "departi"—which calls attention to the ways gift-giving organizes relationships among men. As it was in the historical account of William Marshal and in the *lai* "Milun," the distribution of wives and lands is intricately linked, the one of necessity implying the other. Men deprived of wealth and status by the rigid hierarchies of genealogy and primogeniture can still attain both through gifts of women and land from more powerful men.

In this passage, only Lanval is untouched by Arthur's generosity, which raises questions about his place in the interlocking structures of genealogy and patronage that determine whether an individual knight inherited wealth or acquired it. We are told that "the king gave him nothing / Nor did Lanval ask" (li reis rien ne li dona, / Ne Lanval ne li demanda [lines 31–32]), but the *lai* never makes clear why Lanval needs patronage nor why he is passed by, even though his rank would seem to make him an attractive client, since "He was the son of a king of high degree" (Fiz a rei fu, de haut parage [line 27]). David Chamberlain sees Lanval as a royal heir with enormous prospects who foolishly abandons his legacy for the self-gratification of illicit fornication, but he overlooks Marie's emphasis on the knight's extreme poverty *before* his affair and the consequences of that poverty (1994, 19). Chamberlain's argument equates genealogy and wealth in twelfth-century Anglo-Norman culture, assuming that high birth necessarily implied wealth or at least the promise of wealth. But, as Susan Crane has argued, the Norman nobility saw a gradual deterioration in its economic and social position between 1066 and 1400. Moving out of baronial status was as easy as moving into it, so that individuals could not rely on ancestry or title alone to establish themselves (Crane 1986, 8). Marie is frustratingly ambiguous both about Lanval's expectations and the causes of his poverty; as in most of the *lais,* she offers little information concerning her protagonist's land holdings. She tells us only that Lanval has expended all of his wealth and hints that his distance from his father's lands may make him a stranger and thus someone suspicious, a "hum estrange" (strange man [line 36]), "luin ert de sun heritage" (far from his heritage [line 28]). Lanval has gambled on securing the patronage of a remote king apparently more powerful than his father, but because the pursuit of patronage requires expenditure, Arthur's subsequent neglect has serious consequences for Lanval, who can no longer support his own retinue of clients. As a failed client, he is unable to fulfill his responsibilities as a patron; he is in no position to give gifts.

In Marie's *lai,* then, a bachelor knight's survival in Arthur's court depends on the successful acquisition of patronage from other males. How-

ever, Marie also complicates the gender relations implied by this model of patronage, considering the aristocratic woman's ability to accumulate and dispense capital within such a homosocial world. She provides two paradigms of the woman as patron, one rooted in the erotic fictions of patronage and the other in the structure of exogamy and intellectual property regimes. The first paradigm is represented by Arthur's queen, the second by the fairy woman Lanval meets when he leaves Arthur's court.

As a result of Lanval's social, political, and economic disenfranchisement as a failed client and patron, he is pushed to the geographic margins of Arthur's kingdom. Unable to take part in the exchange of capital and "depressed and very worried . . . a strange man, without friends" (Mut est dolenz, mut est pensis . . . Hum estrange descunseillez [lines 34–35]), Lanval leaves Arthur's court, traveling until he reaches the kingdom's outer boundary, a stream his horse refuses to cross. Having arrived some distance—metaphoric, if not literal—from Arthur's court, where he was apportioned neither women nor money, Lanval encounters an exceedingly beautiful damsel who proclaims her love for him. The love that Lanval would owe Arthur—if the king were a reliable patron—is transferred to a mysterious fairy mistress, and issues of economics become issues of courtly love, although the text never loses sight of the economic motives that fuel even extramarital love.

Lanval is first approached by two extraordinarily beautiful and "richly dressed" (Vestues furent richement [line 57]) women, one of whom is carrying finely made dishes of gold. He is led to a tent whose opulence is incalculable (lines 80–106). Over and over again, the poet asserts that there are no commodities on earth equivalent to the wealth of the smallest part of the tent. Marie examines the tent piecemeal; rather than being a single commodity, it represents a whole series of undifferentiated commodities. Neither Queen Semiramis nor the emperor Octavian "could have paid for one of the flaps" (N'esligasent le destre pan). The eagle on top is also priceless ("De cel ne sai dire le pris"); the bedclothes alone are worth a castle ("Li drap valeient un chastel"); and there is no king on earth who could buy even the cords and poles that hold the tent up ("Suz ciel n'ad rei kis esligast / Pur nul aveir k'il i donast). In describing the tent, Marie alludes to a rudimentary form of economic exchange in which money has not yet become the general symbolic expression of the value of all commodities (Goux 1996). Each commodity in this description both is and is not a part of the system of economic exchange that Marx in *Das Kapital* called the extended form of value, in which "for any one commodity there are numerous elementary expressions of value, according as it is brought into a value relation with this or that other commodity. . . . The value of any one

commodity, such as linen [here we might think of the bedclothes], is expressed in terms of numberless other elements of the world of commodities [e.g., castles]. Any commodity you please to select may serve as mirror of the linen's value" (Goux 1996, 15).[13] This passage, with its elaborate denial of equivalency, serves to mystify the processes of economic transformation at work in twelfth-century England.

The form of primitive accumulation described in Marx's text bears more than a passing resemblance to the system of patronage networks that dominated Norman political life. On the one hand, "the exchange value of [a] single commodity is . . . fully expressed in the endless number of equations in which the use value of all other commodities forms its equivalents" (Goux 1996, 15), just as the client receives the value conferred by the patron (or even by multiple patrons who all give value to many different clients). On the other hand, "each type of equivalent commodity is itself involved in other relationships, where it in turn acts as relative form to an infinite number of equivalents" (Goux 1996, 15), just as in political relations clients become patrons and, in turn, confer value on their clients. Both describe articulated and disseminated networks of political and economic relations that were not yet centralized in twelfth-century England and France.

The tent's female occupant represents the promise of limitless wealth in the midst of Lanval's extreme need. Not only are her surroundings described as fabulously rich, her very body exudes wealth. Marie's descriptions both eroticize wealth (the lady somehow manages to be simultaneously dressed in sumptuous ermine and purple and almost completely naked) and commodify the body, highlighting the circulation between the discourses of desire and those of economics. In a gift-giving economy, such as the Norman court for which Marie produced her *lais,* exchange is erotic in the sense that it involves attraction, union, an affection that binds individuals (men as well as men and women) together, as opposed to the rationality and impersonality of market exchange (Hyde 1983, 60). The lady's studied nudity reveals a body that has been completely objectified. It is yet another marvelous and priceless artifact—another piece in the construction of the tableau of wealth that represents a projection of every bachelor knight's desire for prosperity and abundance. It alludes to a heteronormative sexuality specific to the romance, in which the circulation and exchange of women among men facilitates the circulation and exchange of wealth (see Krueger 1993, 39–50). Yet the tableau also carries a

[13] The translations from the German that Goux gives convey more clearly the proliferation of equivalences in Marx's text than does Fowkes's English translation of *Das Kapital* (see Marx 1976, 155–56).

hint of danger because the lady's wealth appears to be entirely at her own disposal and not under the control of patriarchal property regimes (see Chamberlain 1994). Because she is, quite literally, a spectacle—something to be looked at—she is also powerful. She is a patron in her own right and not simply a vehicle for the patronage of wealthy men. Conventional feminist analyses of women's objectification are insufficient to understand this sort of spectacle. Passivity does not always or necessarily connote weakness and vulnerability to exploitation, as much feminist writing on the male gaze suggests.[14] Within patronage systems, passivity or inactivity—as well as spectacle—often signals the power of the patron; others act on the patron's behalf. The fairy mistress's passivity, like Arthur's, is an expression of her power as a patron. She enables the activity of others.

Just as the mysterious maiden's wealth cannot be calculated because, while it can remind us of the extended form of value, it does not circulate within that system of economic exchanges, Lanval's worth as Arthur's client is unknown because he is excluded from the network of relationships that make up Arthur's court. Only after Lanval receives the patronage of the fairy woman—such extraordinary patronage that it enables him to act as a fairly conspicuous patron himself—does he become visible at Arthur's court. The text makes clear that the fairy mistress's "gift" of her love is also a gift of patronage. The exchange of wealth is chronologically and causally linked to the exchange of sexual love: "Afterwards she gave him a gift" (Un dun li ad duné aprés [line 135]). The gift she gives confers on Lanval inexhaustible wealth:

> Now Lanval is well cared for.
> The more lavishly he spends,
> the more gold and silver he will have.
>
> (Mut est Lanval bien assenez:
> Cum plus despendra richement,
> E plus avra or e argent!)
>
> (Lines 140–42)

This largess makes Lanval in turn a powerful patron, able to dispense gifts and establish new relationships when he returns to Arthur's court:

> There was no knight in the city
> who really needed a place to stay
> whom he didn't invite to join him
> to be well and richly served.
> Lanval gave rich gifts,

[14] For a critique of feminist theories of the gaze, see Stanbury 1997.

Lanval released prisoners,
Lanval dressed jongleurs,
Lanval offered great honors.
There was no stranger or friend
to whom Lanval didn't give.

(N'ot en la vile chevalier
Ki de surjur ait grant mestier
Que il ne face a lui venir
E richement et bien servir.
Lanval donout les riches duns,
Lanval aquitout les prisuns,
Lanval vesteit les jugleürs,
Lanval feseit les granz honurs!
N'i ot estrange ne privé
A ki Lanval n'eüst doné.)
(Lines 205–14)

His return to court is accompanied by a burst of activity, emphasized by all of the active verbs in the series of anaphoric parallels: he gives, releases, dresses, offers. It is as if only the circulation of gifts enables activity at court; failure to do so results in paralysis—the sleep that nearly overtakes Lanval when he lies down beside the stream. Lanval's earlier inactivity in the public sphere of homosocial relations at Arthur's court (he would not even ask for patronage), had the effect of feminizing him—at least in relation to other bachelor knights. However, once set into motion by his powerful female patron, he assumes the aggressive masculine position of the successful client who can dispense gifts of his own.

Only by assuming his place within the heteronormative order—by attaching himself to a woman—can Lanval acquire the capital to take on the role of patron. However, his acquisition of a lover also creates competition among patrons for Lanval's services as a client. The fairy mistress is more deserving than Arthur of Lanval's love both because she is physically attractive and because she possesses more wealth than the king. These two patrons' competition for Lanval as client is played out in the more overt contest between the fairy mistress and Arthur's queen for Lanval's love—which effectively displaces fears about homoeroticism by disguising the affective bonds of homosocial patronage as heterosexual love. The mediation of women is required in this process. Arthur's queen insists on her role as Lanval's lover and is infuriated when he refuses her, for her symbolic capital is derived not only through her relationship with her husband but through her participation in his patronage networks as well.

Only when Lanval has demonstrated his wealth and become a desirable client does the queen assert her right to his clientage by declaring her "love" for him:

> Lanval, I have shown you much honor,
> I have cherished you and loved you.
> You may have all my love;
> just tell me what you desire.
>
> (Lanval, mut vus ai honuré
> E mut cheri e mut amé;
> Tute m'amur poëz aveir.
> Kar me dites vostre voleir!)
>
> (Lines 263–66)

Lanval's response, that he is unwilling to be the queen's lover because of his love for Arthur, demonstrates how very confused the situation can become when female patronage networks function via adultery. Moreover, the queen insists that Lanval refuses her largess not because of his appropriate love for his king but for altogether different, and dishonorable, reasons (a confusion not as surprising, we have been arguing, as it might at first glance appear):

> People have often told me
> that you have no interest in women.
> You have fine looking boys
> with whom you enjoy yourself.
>
> (Asez le m'ad hum dit sovent
> Que des femmes n'avez talent!
> Vallez avez bien afeitiez,
> Ensemble od eus vus deduiez.)
>
> (Lines 279–82)

In effect, she accuses Lanval of the sodomy so repugnant to the framers of the Templar Rule that "it should not be named." If the courtly love tradition served as an elaborate code for disguising the economic operations of patronage, as we suggest, then it is possible that the queen is acting as a kind of surrogate for her husband and that the characteristic triangle of courtly love—Arthur, Lancelot, Guinevere; Mark, Tristan, Isolde—transforms what might otherwise appear a homosexual—or at least homoerotic—relationship into a heterosexual alliance. In rejecting the queen's love, Lanval, while not formally renouncing his vassalage (indeed the reason he gives is his loyalty to Arthur), calls into question the efficacy of

Arthur's patronage and with it the whole facade of heteronormative sexuality that thinly disguises the homosocial—and even homoerotic—bonding on which the military culture depends.

The confusions in this scene reveal the contradictions at the heart of gender relations within the twelfth-century aristocracy, which required that a wife be simultaneously chaste (to ensure the legitimacy of her children) and sexually available to others (as a conduit for her husband's patronage). The queen's declaration of her patronage (as her love for Lanval)—and her competition with another woman for that patronage—places Arthur in the somewhat bizarre position of being betrayed and ultimately angered because Lanval refuses to be seduced by the queen. The actual charge for which Lanval is tried is not attempted rape or seduction of the queen; rather, he is accused of insulting the queen by boasting of another love:

> The king spoke against his vassal . . .
> he accused him of felony,
> charged him with a misdeed—
> a love that he had boasted of,
> which made the queen angry.
> No one but the king accused him.
>
> (Li reis parla vers sun vassal . . .
> De felunie le retta
> E d'un mesfait l'acheisuna,
> D'une amur dunt il se vanta,
> E ma dame s'en curuça.
> Nuls ne l'apele fors le rei.)
>
> (Lines 437–43)

It does not reflect well on the king that his wife is not the most successful patron in the land, that Lanval is not willing to give her his love, is not glad to have her, despite all that she can offer. For the queen—and, indeed, for Arthur—there can be no possibility that some other person is better suited to be Lanval's patron.

The model of woman as surrogate patron, represented by the queen as well as by the great female patrons of the Anglo-Norman period (Eleanor of Aquitaine, Marie of Champagne, Adele of Champagne, Eleanor of Provence, and Eleanor of Castile)[15]—stands in opposition to another

[15] See McCash 1996a. While these women were certainly powerful literary patrons who controlled large fortunes in their own rights, none stood outside the system of exchanges of land and women by which aristocratic men perpetuated their class privilege. On the position

model, represented by the fairy mistress. Marie's use of the fairy mistress as a female patron able to control and dispense both her own sexuality and her own fortune, unconstrained by father, lover, or husband, represents a significant departure from routine marital arrangements of the twelfth-century aristocracy. To be sure, her existence holds out the prospect of exogamy, marriage outside of the group, as an opportunity for enrichment for those who have been disenfranchised by the institutions of primogeniture and patronage—the ultimate wish fulfillment for bachelor knights, who were among the most disenfranchised members of the Norman ruling class (Crouch 1990, 26–28). At the same time, however, her considerable largess suggests a model of empowerment (even if it is only a fantasy)[16] for women in medieval society, especially for learned women and artists like Marie. The fairy mistress is empowered by the magic she possesses, by her association with a supernatural world of fairy. This magic serves to mystify the means by which the maiden produces wealth and escapes the disciplines designed to control female sexuality. Michelle Freeman argues that, in a similar manner, Marie stresses in her prologue her own active role in formulating her *lais* themselves as gifts to be exchanged between a woman and a man, in this case her patron, Henry II (1984, 861). Like any client locked into an unequal relationship in which receiving a gift entails obligation and debt, Marie works to recast the relationship as one of equals or even to cast herself in the role of patron bestowing gifts. It does not seem surprising, then, that she creates a fairy mistress who has an inexhaustible power to give gifts.

In exchange for her patronage, Lanval is sworn never to divulge his lady's identity, never to speak of the magical source of his income or his love. The fairy mistress's magic and the secrecy required of Lanval as an initiate into her supernatural world may provide some insight into the anxieties of Marie and her audience about the competition for patronage and the circulation of intellectual property within the Anglo-Norman court. The systems of justice, finance, and administration created by Henry II required a cadre of bureaucrats who could gain access to information and to new technologies required for governing. Some of these bureaucrats came from the ranks of the so-called new men who came from outside the aristocracy and who were used by Henry to offset the power of the barons, although this distinction was never as rigid as some historians suggest and

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of the great patron queens of this period, see the essays in McCash 1996 by McCash, Lois L. Huneycutt, John Carmi Parsons, and Miriam Shadis.

[16] As Louise Fradenburg has argued, fantasy can be a potent carrier of social meaning (1996, 208–12).

although all men in Henry's government—whether barons, bachelor knights, or bureaucrats—negotiated their relationship to the monarch through patronage, whatever their rewards (Keefe 1983, 93–96). However, while the mechanisms for rewarding warriors were well established, methods for compensating *ingenium* (intelligence or craft) were less highly developed.

Social structures had to be developed within informal patronage networks to govern the creation and dissemination of ideas. *Intellectual property* is the term used by legal scholars to refer to structures designed to regulate the value attributed to such intangibles as technological innovation, invention, and authorship and to distinguish it from the tangible products or devices produced by that knowledge (Long 1991, 846). However, because intellectual property has several characteristics that make it notoriously difficult to protect, it has been called the "law's stepchild" (Wincor 1962, 11). The most salient of these characteristics is that ideas, while often costly to develop, become valueless to their creator once they are revealed. This characteristic makes it difficult for innovators to capitalize on their ideas since investors cannot know the value of information until they have sampled it, but once they have done so, the incentive to buy is gone (Suchman 1989, 1267–69).

Most commentators identify intellectual property with "the document-intensive, governmentally administered" regimes typical of modern Western law (Suchman 1989, 1264) and, when faced with the absence of established patent, trade secret, and copyright law in early European legal history, have assumed that individuals at that time in history were not interested in protecting their rights in innovative ideas (Long 1991, 869). But it is specious to assume that because a culture does not have the same methods for protecting intellectual property as we do that it has no interest in such protection. Different regimes in different cultural contexts may accomplish much the same purpose. In cultures without established juridical procedures concerning intellectual property (and we have as yet found no evidence to suggest that Norman England had any established body of law in this area [see Pollock and Maitland 1968]), the creators of intellectual property—either individually or collectively—generally resort to other means to assure the profitability of their creations, whether literary or technological. For instance, they might "lock [the] idea into physical commodities" (Suchman 1989, 1269), as in the Middle Ages, when authors' ideas were inseparable from the manuscripts that conveyed them. But this mechanism was of only limited utility, for once those manuscripts began to circulate, authors had no control over how their ideas were used and appropriated, as Marie complains on several occasions.

Mark Suchman has argued that in preliterate cultures the invocation of magic may be more effective than law as a means of protecting intellectual property: "Because the value of magic derives purely from social construction, adding magical components to a new technology costs relatively little. At the same time, magic may be much easier to monopolize than the physical process that accompanies it" (1989, 1273). Because intellectual property was difficult to control and protect, precapitalist inventors who discovered some new technique could use it to earn material and social rewards only if they could monopolize it. Such monopolies are difficult to establish, especially if the benefits promised by the technology are great and the technique simple to replicate. Magical elements attached to the process are easier to monopolize. An intellectual property regime that relies on magic requires a dual dynamic of display and secrecy in which the display—the prestidigitation—serves as a distraction that hides processes that might be easily replicated if made public. This is not to suggest that such strategic calculations always would be made consciously; even the magician may not entirely distinguish between the effective and superfluous elements of the performance.

An understanding of enchantment as an instrument of economic protection may illuminate the presence of supernatural elements in Marie's *lai*. Before we proceed, however, a few caveats are in order. We are not arguing that the Arthurian world of "Lanval" is a simple reflection of the court of Henry II, and we are not positing the one-to-one correspondence characteristic of allegory in which the fairy mistress's magic mirrors something literal in Marie's world. Rather, the *lai* both represents and actively shapes the interests, tastes, and anxieties of the audiences it was written to entertain. Marie's culture was not preliterate, but it was a culture in which literacy itself was an innovation. Literacy was a new technology that afforded considerable power to its possessors and so was jealously guarded by an elite to which Marie belonged. A precedent for such a monopoly, Richard Wincor suggests, might be found in the Welsh bardic system, with its "system of secret information, magic spells, sacred verse, dramatic ritual, satiric parody and enciphered writing," although its early destruction, he argues, marked the end of literary property protection in England until the advent of copyright laws (1962, 31). The Anglo-Norman culture of twelfth-century England, however, did not need to look to preliterate Celtic cultures for models of occult and mystical practices designed to monopolize intellectual property (Wincor 1962, 22–31); there were examples nearer to hand. The Church, in its jealous guarding of its scripts and rituals in an arcane and dead language, its mystical transformations of bread and wine performed behind altar screens, and its celibate priesthood, was going

about the business of protecting its intellectual properties every bit as energetically as any Celtic Druid, providing a ready-made model of an intellectual property regime.

With these caveats in mind, it may not be too far-fetched to suggest that the magic of Lanval's fairy mistress provides what Suchman calls a "host," a physical model, embodying Marie's own frequently expressed anxieties about her intellectual property—her writing. Marie's identification of the magician/patron/lover with a woman suggests her own social ambitions, hinted at both by the mention of Count William in the epilogue to the *Fables* and the fear, expressed in that epilogue, of having her work—which she clearly labels as her property—claimed by "clercs":

> I am from France, my name's Marie.
> And it may hap that many a clerk
> Will claim as his what is my work.
>
> (Marie ai num, si sui de France
> Put cel estre que clerc plusur
> Prendreient sur eus mun labur.)
>
> (*Fables,* p. 256; lines 4–6)

In this passage Marie proclaims her desire to protect her intellectual labor from those clerks who would appropriate it. In the prologue to the *lai* "Guigemar," she seems equally concerned with controlling the use of her tales once she has sent them forth; in particular she appears anxious that they be seen as her property:

> Whoever deals with good material
> feels pain if it's treated improperly.
> Listen, my lords, to the words of Marie
> who does not forget her responsibilities when her turn comes.
>
> (Ki de bone mateire traite,
> Mult li peise si bien n'est faite.
> Oëz, seignurs, ke dit Marie,
> Ki en sun tens pas ne s'oblie.)
>
> (*Lais,* "Guigemar," lines 1–4)

The prologue to Marie's collection of *lais* vacillates between the need to display her abilities and a desire for secrecy. At times she proclaims her desire for fame and recognition:

> Whoever has received knowledge
> And eloquence in speech from God

should not be silent or secretive
but demonstrate it willingly.

(Ki Deus ad duné escïence
E de parler bone eloquence
Ne s'en deit taisir ne celer,
Ainz se deit voluntiers mustrer.)
(*Lais,* "Prologue," lines 1–4)

At other times she stresses the necessary obscurity of knowledge:

The custom among the ancients—
as Priscian testifies—
was to speak quite obscurely
in the books they wrote,
so that those who were to come after and study them
might gloss the letter
and supply its significance from their own wisdom.

(Custume fu as ancïens
Ceo testimoine Precïens,
Es livres ke jadis feseient,
Assez oscurement diseient
Pur ceus ki a venir esteient
E ki aprendre les deveient,
K'i peüssent gloser la lettre
E de lur sen le surplus mettre.)
(*Lais,* "Prologue," lines 9–16)

In this passage, obscurity functions, alongside and in contradiction to display, to protect the monopoly of the learned few. Only initiates who have passed through a rigorous apprenticeship are allowed to "gloss the letter" and to understand the mysteries of old books. Old books do not yield their secrets to just anyone; they require the services of a mediator (in this case the poet) who possesses the necessary knowledge. In this sense, the creations of storytellers are not significantly different from the mysteries of Christianity: "Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the Kingdom of God; but unto them that are without all these things are done in parable: that seeing they may see, and not perceive, and hearing they may hear, and not understand" (Mark 4:11–12). Both require the services of a specialized knowledge monopolized by a few through obfuscation and mystery.

Henry's reliance on "new men," one of whom was William Marshal, to

control the increasingly complicated technologies of government enhanced the value of intellectual property, including authorship. At the same time, it created new grounds for competition, which would ultimately be reflected in the management of patronage networks. The fairy mistress of "Lanval" and the survival of Marie's *lais* indicate the existence of something like a "new woman" in Henry's court, a woman who—like the new men—could break out of the confines of ascribed status (the ascribed status of gender as well as that of class) and transform intellectual property into capital, a woman who could, with her own abilities, accumulate sufficient capital to receive love as a patron in her own right and not only as a conduit for her husband's patronage.

The conclusion of "Lanval," in which the fairy mistress arrives in a dazzling display just in time to save Lanval, who rides off with her to Avalon, may be understood in a number of different but potentially overlapping ways. One reading suggests that Lanval must leave Arthur's court (perhaps a residue of a more ancient form of exogamy in which the male becomes part of the female's kinship group rather than the reverse, which would have been more usual in Marie's experience). Lanval must leave, we would argue, not (or at least not only) because the purity of his love would be ruined by the sterility of the Arthurian world but because the kind of power that the fairy mistress possesses, a female sexuality unrestrained by a masculine sexual economy that requires the continual circulation of women and wealth, cannot be maintained for long within the Arthurian world without becoming subordinate to the sexual economy of feudalism. A second reading suggests that the kind of patronage represented in the queen has been supplemented by a new variety of women's patronage (and there is no reason to think that the historical Marie did not have considerable patronage of her own to dispense) that ultimately derives from the accumulation, exercise, and protection of women's intellectual property. With this reading, the fairy mistress, like Merlin in other Arthurian tales (see Bloch 1983, 1–2; Shichtman and Finke 1993, 28–35), becomes a paradigm for the artist, negotiating the circulation of capital between client and patron—and seeking to acquire for herself the status of patron. David Chamberlain has argued that Marie's magical mistress is a "succubus" determined to steal Lanval's soul (1994, 22). We believe, though, that she would simply like to be his boss.

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