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Micah Anne Steffler

AUTEUR DE LA THÈSE / AUTHOR OF THESIS

M.A. (English)

GRADE / DEGREE

Department of English

FACULTÉ, ÉCOLE, DÉPARTEMENT / FACULTY, SCHOOL, DEPARTMENT

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TITRE DE LA THÈSE / TITLE OF THESIS

David Staines

DIRECTEUR (DIRECTRICE) DE LA THÈSE / THESIS SUPERVISOR

CO-DIRECTEUR (CO-DIRECTRICE) DE LA THÈSE / THESIS CO-SUPERVISOR

Geoff Rector

Andrew Taylor

Gary W. Slater

Le Doyen de la Faculté des études supérieures et postdoctorales / Dean of the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies

La Mesure: Relationships of Love and Communication in The *Lais* of Marie de France

Micah Steffler

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Department of English
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***La Mesure*:**
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in
The *Lais* of Marie de France

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Abstract

This project examines the *Lais* of Marie de France with specific focus on "Chevrefoil," "Laüstic," "Milun," and "Eliduc." The view of the relationship between orality and textuality as a linear chronological development is called into question in the light of Marie's devotion to *mesure*. The association between the oral and written traditions of storytelling is shown to be based on mutual co-dependency instead of a hierarchy by which the written tradition is deemed a superior mode of communication. *Mesure* is crucial to the maintenance of balance in this relationship, and appears in further aspects of the *Lais*, including the language; the connections between writing, reading, and performance; and relationships between characters. To achieve the status of *fine amur*, the partners in a romantic relationship must possess *mesure*. Lovers must value each other as equals, or a hierarchy introduces *demesure* into the relationship. This project reveals Marie's dedication to the importance of sustaining *mesure* in the face of temptation to indulge in *demesure*.

Introduction

Marie de France is the first recorded female French poet, yet there is little information known about her, as her identity remains a mystery.[1] All that twenty-first century scholars know about her is her first name and her country of origin, stated by the poet herself in her *Fables*,[2] hence the name by which scholars refer to her. Marie wrote three works, the *Lais*, the *Saint Patrick's Purgatory*, and the *Fables*. The *Lais* are a collection of twelve poems exploring different examples of romantic love. *Saint Patrick's Purgatory* is a moralizing poem, "based on a Latin *Tractatus*" (Clifford 10). The *Fables* are a collection of Aesopic cautionary tales, adapted by Marie, and imbued with the distinct style that characterizes her work. Instead of employing a conventional twelfth-century literary style, one that makes use of "rhetorical tropes as well as ... 'figures de pensée' (comparison, allegory, parenthesis etc.)" (Clifford 82), Marie adopts a "style which convey[s] the impression of a simple eloquence and ... a marked preference for economy of expression" (Clifford 83). She opens the "Prologue" of her *Lais* by declaring she does not wish to translate "from Latin to Romance"[3] because "too many others have done it" (30, 32), and though her distinct style serves the purpose of setting her work apart from other twelfth-century literary texts, it is also more suitable to oral performance than a more complex rhetoric, as the "repetition" (Clifford 82) of words allows for more effortless memorization by an oral performer.

Another point on which scholars tend to agree is the performative aspect of Marie's *Lais*. Many who study the *Lais* acknowledge that, in her own time, Marie's poems were performed orally at court, most likely accompanied by a medieval string "instrument such as a harp or rote"

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[1] Many scholars have hypothesized on Marie's identity, and multiple theories have arisen. All that seems to be generally accepted is that Marie had a strong connection to the court of Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine and that she was of noble birth, confirmed by contemporaneous English poet Denis Piramus, who refers to her as "dame Marie" (*Vie Seint Edmund le rei* 35).

[2] "Marie ai num, si sui de France" ("Epilog" 4).

[3] Here, "Romance" is understood to mean the French language, not the literary genre, which was not established as such at the time.

(Burgess and Busby 8). Jean Maillard, in consensus with Burgess[4] and Busby, draws attention to references to performances of one of the *lais* by noting the "nombreux textes [qui] évoquent l'exécution du Lai du Chèvrefeuille sur un instrument seul, notamment la vièle à archet et la harpe" (223). The most convincing evidence of the performance of musical renditions of the *Lais* is Marie's own comment at the end of "Guigemar," where she describes how "the *lai* of Guigemar ... is now recited to the harp and rote; / the music is a pleasure to hear" (884-86).[5]

Any written documents of the music to which the *Lais* were performed during the medieval period have been lost over the centuries—if any such documents existed—yet music was an integral part of the medieval performance of the *Lais*. Marie Naudin speaks of the "alliance poésie-musique qui est à l'origine de toute la littérature française" (71).[6] In support of this view, John Stevens states, "Between 'singing' on the one hand and 'speaking' on the other there is not so much a gulf as a sort of no man's land, in which move shadowy creatures of indeterminate allegiance" (199). This link between poetry and music is apparent in the oral performance of the *Lais*, yet it is also present in the poetics, and is as evident to an individual reader as to a listening audience. Marie's language is precise and unembellished, and her rhyming octosyllabic couplets are consistent throughout the *Lais*. Her care in her writing results in poetry that adheres to a sense of balance, which renders the work aurally pleasing. The rhythm is consistent; the rise and fall of each line is steady, with no jarring enjambments; and the rhyme scheme is flawless in its harmonious execution. Because these characteristics of the poetry are so consistent, the oral performance of the *Lais* becomes a melody, even if the words are spoken

[4] For a comprehensive collection of criticism pertaining to Marie de France, consult Glyn S. Burgess's *Marie de France: An Analytical Bibliography* (1977).

[5] All English quotations taken from Marie de France. *The Lais of Marie de France*. Trans. Robert Hanning and Joan Ferrante. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2008.

[6] In *Development parallèle de la poésie et de la musique en France: Rôle unificateur de la chanson*, Marie Naudin traces the development of music and poetry from antiquity to the twentieth century, arguing that there is a "lien nécessaire entre poésie et musique pour le maintien d'un équilibre des deux arts et pour leur insertion dans des normes humaines" (253).

instead of sung (though the *Lais* indeed may have been sung during medieval oral performance). Music, therefore, becomes a bridge between two arts: writing and performance, and the divide between literature and song is rendered fluid.

The *Lais* were written during the middle of the twelfth century for members of the English nobility as an audience. I use the word "audience" here to represent those who are listening to this oral method of storytelling, yet I also use the term in the following chapters to describe those who experience Marie's *Lais* by means of a solitary reading (i.e. an individual reader). I designate the term "audience" to refer to anyone acting as a receiver of the poems, whether by means of aural reception or the act of reading.

The *lai* form is defined as a "short narrative ... written in *octosyllabic couplets*" (Abrams 170). One of the admirers of the *lai* was Geoffrey Chaucer,[7] who describes it

> in the *Franklin's Tale*:
> Thise olde gentil Britouns in hir dayes
> Of diverse aventures maden layes,
> Rymeyed in hir firste Briton tonge;
> Whiche layes with hir instrumentz they songe ...
> Such are the *lais* that Marie de France wrote in the late twelfth century, almost entirely in rhymed octosyllabic couplets like the courtly romance. (Stevens 140-41)

Lais are often referred to as "'Breton lais' because most of their narratives are drawn from Arthurian and other Celtic legends. ('Breton' refers to Brittany, which was a Celtic part of France ...)" (Abrams 170). Before Marie set down these stories in verse, she

> thought of the *lais* I'd heard.
> I did not doubt, indeed I knew well,
> that those who first began them
> and sent them forth

[7] Chaucer was not a literary contemporary of Marie, as he was born two centuries after Marie composed her works, yet his respect for the *lai* form implies that he studied and was influenced by popular *lais*.

composed them in order to preserve

adventures they had heard.

I have heard many told ("Prologue" 33-39)

The *lais* Marie uses as sources for her poems[8] would have come to her in an oral form. They belong to the oral tradition of storytelling as opposed to the written tradition. Marie's *Lais*, however, have the unprecedented characteristic of being set down in writing, thereby becoming part of the material world, as well. The versatility which is lent to her work because of the two forms (performance and text) is manifested in the poems being able to be both performed aloud and read. Chaucer makes reference to this dual means of communicating a story by means of a *lai* in "The Franklin's Tale," where he amends his description of the *lai* by stating, "Or elles redden hem for hir plesaunce" (713).[9]

The oral storytelling tradition is much older than the written tradition, which did not begin to flourish in England and France until the twelfth century, which witnessed "a flowering of intellectual and artistic life" (Backman 291). Music and literature, manifestation of orality and textuality, are revealed by Stevens to be considered opposing arts by many modern scholars, even if such a view is anachronistic in the twelfth century:

> In ordinary thinking—or 'not-thinking'—about music and literature, the notions of song and of story seem naturally opposed. We think of the 'song' as a completed object in which formal sound-pattern has achieved roundness and gives satisfaction; we think of 'story'—narrative—as, if not infinitely extensible, at least flexible, elastic, and malleable.

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[8] Marie does not transcribe the stories she heard; she alters them, and makes them her own by including references "from Classical authors, notably Ovid ... and Biblical allusions ... combined with local legend, fairy stories, Arthurian tradition and thematic and linguistic borrowing from her immediate forerunners in French literature, the *romans d'antiquité* of the 1150s" (Clifford 13).

[9] All quotations are taken from Chaucer, Geoffrey. *The Canterbury Tales*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005. 185-211. Print.

> In the early Middle Ages such a view would not have seemed a natural one: the amount of narrative music in people's ears may well have exceeded the amount of song in the narrower sense. (199)

Orality is considered by some to be a means of communication which offers a transient experience, thereby weakening its accuracy as compared to written texts. Textuality, on the other hand, is often viewed as a more authoritative method of communication. This perspective of the relationship between orality and textuality creates a hierarchy between the two, underscores the differences of the two traditions, and places them in opposition. Many embrace this perspective and apply it to their literary analyses, as Derek Pearsall does with his reference to "the simple opposition of orality *vs* literacy" (3). This view was also adhered to by many poets during the twelfth century. Scholars study orality and textuality with the idea in mind that the former gives rise to the latter, yet remains a lesser mode of communication, lacking the permanence of the tangibility of a text. Another reason for the elevation of textuality over orality is that, during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, literacy in England and France was a rare and valued talent. Even women were encouraged by men to accomplish literacy, as evidenced by Geoffroy de La Tour-Landry in *The Book of the Knight of the Tower*: "For a woman that can rede may better knowe the peryls of the sowle and her sauement / than she that can nou□t of it / for it hath be preued" (122).

The language of the English courts during the twelfth century was French. Although Marie is often studied in translation, it is important to remember that she wrote in Old French. The following claims deal with both the content and the poetics of the *Lais*. Unless otherwise specified, in the following chapters, quotations from the *Lais* concerned with proving a point

about content are from the Hanning's and Ferrante's English translation. Claims based on the poetics of the *Lais*, however, are supplemented by quotations from the Old French text.[10]

The only extant manuscript that contains all twelve of Marie's *Lais* in the language of composition is London, British Library MS Harley 978, housed in the British Museum. The reason that there is an accepted version of the order in which the *Lais* appear in publications is that most adhere to the order in which the twelve are found in this manuscript. Marie's *Lais* appear in three other manuscripts; one "contains three *lais*; the two remaining manuscripts contain one *lai* each" (Vitz 43). Harley 978 also contains medieval sheet music and multiple medieval lyrics, including "Sumer Is Icumen In." The dating of this manuscript has been the subject of much study, and Andrew Taylor puts forth a convincing argument in *Textual Situations*, managing to narrow the dates of composition to between 1261 and 1265.[11] Since Marie dedicates her *Lais* to Henry II,[12] it is possible to indicate a range of dates during which the work was composed. Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine "married in 1152," and their court "was an itinerant one, fostering literary and artistic talent up to the time of the Queen's imprisonment in 1173" (Clifford 10). Marie most likely wrote the *Lais* between these two dates, though there is a possibility that they were composed as late as 1189, the year of Henry II's death. Even if the latter date is the correct year of composition and the formation of Harley 978 took place as early as 1261, there are still more than seventy years between Marie's creation and the writing of the manuscript. Even in this optimistic scenario, it is unlikely that Marie would have been alive

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[10] Marie de France. *Lais de Marie de France*. Trans. Laurence Harf-Lancner. Paris, France: *Lettres gothiques*, 2007. This edition includes the Old French printed on one page and a convenient modern French translation by Harf-Lancner on the facing page.

[11] By studying the "controversy over the election of the new bishop of Winchester" (85) and accepting A. J. Ellis' claim that Harley 978 was created before "the barons were routed by Prince Edward at Evesham on the August 4, 1265" (85), Taylor lays out a logical argument which places the composition of this manuscript within a period of five consecutive years.

[12] "In your honor, noble King ... I undertook to assemble these *lais* / to compose and recount them in rhyme" ("Prologue" 43-48).

when this collection was put together, yet whoever penned the *Lais* for this manuscript intentionally wrote them in this manner and sequence, whether it was his own decision or because he was transcribing them from an earlier manuscript. Though it is impossible to know if any characteristics of this text are the result of Marie's own decisions, they indicate the only known thirteenth-century textual form and order of the *Lais*, the closest temporal connection we have to Marie.

It is a testament to the popularity of Marie's twelfth-century works that they were considered appropriate for inclusion in a thirteenth-century manuscript. The *Lais* were widely circulated (orally and textually), and inspired a number of anonymous *lais* written by Marie's late-twelfth-century and early-thirteenth-century admirers. Many of these *lais* have been erroneously attributed to Marie in the past, yet "critical opinion has tended towards the view that their authors are generally less skilful than Marie as far as style and technique are concerned" (Clifford 14). What these imitations do reveal is that Marie's works, especially the *Lais*, were instant literary successes among the nobility of the English court, and endured into the next century as performative pieces, readable texts, and inspiration for the creation of new works.

The presence of romantic or erotic love can be found in all twelve *lais*. The exploration of *fine amur*[13] is Marie's primary avenue of investigation with the characters and their particular circumstances in the *Lais*, whether it is the fight for a beloved who belongs to another, such as in "Guigemar," "Le Fresne," and "Yonec," or the exploration of a relationship which does not measure up to an ideal example of *fine amur*, such as in "Equitan," "Bisclavret," or "Laüstic." Themes explored in individual *lais* include the search for identity, the corrupting nature of mortal sin, the connection between the civilized human world and the bestial animal kingdom, unbridled

[13] *Fine amur* is the French term commonly translated as the courtly love tradition. For a medieval source concerning *fine amur*, see Andreas Capellanus' *The Art of Courtly Love*.

jealousy in the face of marital infidelity, and the tragedy of death preventing the realization of a romantic relationship. One theme that can be traced through all twelve *lais* is the virtue of moderation, described by Marie as the ability to practise *mesure*. The characters of the *Lais* who are loyal and exercise patience in the face of temptation are rewarded for their moderation at the end of their stories, whereas the characters who indulge in unchecked passions and other unrestrained behaviour succumb to destitution or must redeem themselves.

Marie presents an ethical code in the *Lais*, one that holds love "as the supreme good for the individual" (Clifford 78). Despite condoning infidelity in marriage and sexual intercourse out of wedlock, she adheres to a strict sense of morality which precludes ignorance, impatience, jealousy, cruelty, and arrogance. The perpetrators of these sins suffer appropriate penalties. In "Bisclavret," the disloyal wife has "the nose [torn] off her face" (235), rendering her bestial in appearance, just as she so renders Bisclavret when, motivated by fear of her werewolf husband, she hides his human clothing, the key to his transformation back into a man. Because Bisclavret's wife's crime is so devious and unwarrantedly malicious—Bisclavret does not commit any of the sins which Marie holds in contempt towards his wife—her progeny must suffer her punishment as well, and they

> were widely known
> for their appearance:
> several women of the family
> were actually born without noses,
> and lived out their lives noseless. (310-14)

Another crime considered grievous by Marie is the murder plot hatched by Equitan and the wife of his seneschal. Instead of successfully murdering the seneschal so they can be together

in an erotic capacity, Equitan and his mistress end as victims of their own trap. Marie's pedagogical voice is heard at the end of the *lai*: "he who plans evil for another / may have that evil rebound back on him" (309-10).

It is fascinating that a poet with such a strong sense of morality sees fit to forgive the many sins committed by her characters concerning the dictations of twelfth-century marriage. The extra-marital affairs undertaken in "Guigemar," "Lanval," "Milun," and "Chevrefoil"[14] go unpunished, and the audience sympathizes with these characters, who achieve a state of happiness at the end of their respective *lais*. Marie's less than reverent perspective on the marriages in these stories is shocking to encounter because "such a view is naturally contrary to the teachings of the Church" (Clifford 78). Although we know next to nothing about Marie's identity, she was undoubtedly a religious woman.[15] It is not, therefore, Christian doctrine against which she is placing herself; it is the social practice of marriage to which she objects, not the Christian sacrament of matrimony. At best, in the *Lais*, "marriage appears as no more than the logical consequence of" (Clifford 78) a romantic relationship.

Marie's lasting status as one of the most accomplished poets of the medieval era, even without any knowledge of her specific origins or social identity, is evidence of the sophistication and enduring quality of her works. The multiple manners by which an audience can receive her stories, her refined literary style, her complex characters, and the consistency of her moral implications in the *Lais* all contribute to the esteemed reputation they hold in a twenty-first-century literary setting, almost a thousand years after Marie took it upon herself "To put them

[14] Tristan and Isolde are arguably punished for their extra-marital affair in the traditional tale, yet "Chevrefoil" contains no chastisement of Tristan or the Queen. Though the two must separate at the end, the tone of the narrative is hopeful, as the Queen "assured [Tristan] / that he would be reconciled with the king" (97-98).

[15] If Marie were a nun, as many scholars think her to have been, she would have been seen as a religious authority figure in an intimate and intensely Christian community. She certainly would have been a devout Christian in this scenario, a conclusion supported by her many references to the inherent goodness in acts of devotion to God.

into word and rhyme ("Prologue" 41) in order to disseminate her contribution to the realms of textuality and orality.

Chapter 1 – *La Mesure* and the Traditions of Storytelling

Above all other things, Marie perceives love as the supreme power in the world. One of the virtues necessary to experience *fine amur* is the ability to practise *mesure*. A term employed by Marie in multiple contexts, *mesure* is a word which encompasses many meanings. *Mesure* often indicates the virtue of moderation, and Marie uses the term to describe the personality and behaviour of her characters, whether they are fortunate enough to possess *mesure* or are wanton practitioners of the reverse of what *mesurable* behaviour dictates; this quality is hereafter referred to as *demesure*. As well as moderation, *mesure* can mean the measure of the quantity of a substance or of the quality of a person; a limit or boundary (Greimas 413); kind, as in the type of whatever is being discussed; manner, as in the way with which a situation is dealt or the attitude with which it is approached; and form, including musical form. The word first appears in the *Lais* in "Guigemar," when Guigemar's lover is tying the knot in his shirt: "le pleit i fet en tel mesure, / nule femme nel desfereit" (564-65).[16] Here, the word has the meaning of the manner in which the act is done as well as the form of the knot itself. This key term first appears at this defining moment in "Guigemar" in order to draw attention to the importance of *mesure*, so that the audience may take note of when it appears again later. The position of the word at the end of the line places further emphasis on the significance of its role. When poetry is read aloud, the speaker's voice emphasizes the last word of the line, not least because this is where the rhyme occurs. Similarly, when poetry is read solitarily, the eye trails to the end of the line, where it is anchored by the final word. Marie could have written, "En tel mesure, i fet le pleit," thereby more prominently featuring the knot, yet she instead chooses to shift the focus to the *mesure* of the lady's actions and of the knot, a symbol of the *fine amur* between the two lovers.

[16] The knot works as a pledge of fidelity between the lovers. Later, it serves to identify Guigemar's lover when "she took the shirttail / and easily untied the knot" (810-11), when no one else could.

A word rich in meaning and connotation, *mesure* is crucial to the study Marie's poetics, and is also at the heart of what she is investigating in the content of her work. Often, though not exclusively, with reference to the erotic relationship between lovers, Marie teases out the need for *mesure* in the behaviour of her characters and its required practice for their achievement of happiness. A dramatic appearance of the term occurs in "Les Deus Amanz." At the beginning of this *lai*, the king proclaims that whoever is able "to carry [the king's daughter] in his arms / to the summit of the mountain outside the city / without stopping to rest" (36-38) will win the young woman's hand in marriage. The young lover of the king's daughter manages to procure "such a potion that, / no matter how fatigued he might be, / no matter how constrained, or how burdened, / the potion would still revive his entire body" (134-37). The youth, however, attempts to climb the mountain without the help of his supernatural potion, despite the encouragement from the king's daughter to drink it. Marie laments his impatience and excessive enthusiasm: "kar n'ot en lui point de mesure" (189). The young man ends by dying of exhaustion at the summit of the mountain, and becomes an example of what befalls those who are unwilling to exercise the patience which is a manifestation of the virtue of *mesure*.

Mesure extends beyond the content of Marie's works, and is found in her creation of them, as well. In writing a *lai*, the poet must consider many aspects of language, including rhythm, rhyme, and translation to oral performance. It is the poet's role to communicate a message while maintaining a balance between all these elements. The need for artistic *mesure* in the writing of *lai* poetry reveals the self-reflexive aspect of Marie's work: the moral investigation undertaken in the content of the work is mirrored in the form of the poetics. *Mesure* is also required for the oral performance of the *Lais*, both as the manner in which the performance is approached and as musical form. The presence of *mesure* in the literary content, the poetic form,

and the performance of the *Lais* demonstrates an intimate connection between orality and textuality, which are defined in the following argument as instances of oral and written communication as well as referring to the oral and print storytelling cultures. Textuality is used to describe any example of writing, from Harley 978 itself to love letters written back and forth between two lovers in "Milun" to an engraving of a name on a stick in "Chevrefoil." Similarly, the term orality includes the twelfth-century court performance of a *lai*, greetings between two strangers sent by means of a messenger in "Eliduc," and even simple conversation between characters.[17] The connection between orality and textuality, brought about by the overarching theme of *mesure*, joins together the written manifestation and the oral component of her work. The covalent connection between the text and the oral performance of the *Lais* demonstrates that there exists no hierarchy in the relationship between orality and textuality. Marie is able to expound on her vision of the ethics of love by means of both written and oral communication.

An example of the presence of *mesure* in the poetics of the *Lais* is found in "Yonec." The word *mesure* appears at the beginning when the situation of the imprisoned wife is being described: "Mult ert la dame en grant tristur, / Od lermes, od suspir e plur / sa belté pert en tel mesure / cume cele ki n'en a cure" (49-52). The jealous husband's restriction of his wife's behaviour[18] is the cause of her sorrow and the reason why "she lost her beauty, / as one does who cares nothing for it" (47-48). The outward appearance of the wife is a reflection of the desolation she feels within. The poetics of these lines reflect the loss of the wife's beauty and vitality in the

[17] In defence of orality as a term referring to all instances of oral communication is Walter Ong, who argues, "There is no 'school' of orality and literacy" (16). Ong himself defines orality as "thought and its verbal expression in oral culture" (16), a definition which encompasses the examples of what I refer to as orality in Marie's *Lais*.

[18] This is a case of a *malmariée*. A sub-genre of lyric poetry is the *chanson de la malmariée*, which is characterized by "the married woman's desire for a lover and her disregard for her husband" (Brumlik 68). A situation involving a *malmariée* can be identified by a subjugating spouse (e.g. the husband locks his wife in an inaccessible tower, as in "Yonec"), a May-December romance, a medieval trope which arises from the classical tradition of the *senex amans* (the husband is many years older than his youthful wife, as in Chaucer's "The Merchant's Tale"), or some other element in the relationship which precludes the presence of *mesure*.

loss of any variability in rhyme. Instead of altering the rhyme after the first couplet, as Marie conventionally does, the rhyme, the sound "ur," remains the same for the following couplet. The monotony of this rhyme scheme reveals the monotony of the wife's daily existence locked in a tower by an overbearing husband. The word *mesure* in line 51 means the manner by which the wife is losing her beauty, yet there is an implication of both form and quality of character. The dramatic deterioration of her physical form stresses the importance of her outward appearance as an indication of the quality of her character, which is dwindling under the tyranny of her husband. The diversity of the definition of the word *mesure* is exemplified in these lines for an audience aware of the importance of the term in the *Lais*.

In August 2009, I traveled to England to examine the British Library's microfilm of Harley 978. My study revealed multiple marginal markings throughout the part of the manuscript devoted to Marie's *Lais*. Although the specific significance of the majority of these marginal clues will likely remain a mystery, any repetitious and deliberate marginal inscriptions might be considered to indicate something significant, such as a place during an oral reading when a breath should be taken, an emphasis should be made, a change of performer should take place, or some other important moment of the performance of the *lai*. The marginal notations in the "Prologue" of Marie's *Lais* appear at first glance to resemble musical notation, which is found in the many medieval lyrics also contained in Harley 978.[19] The section of the manuscript containing Marie's *Lais* "seems neither a quasi-musical score nor an abstract architectural phantom but something in between" (Taylor 131-32), a poem able to be either performed orally or read silently.

[19] Harley 978 is among the top two percentile of the most restricted manuscripts of the British Library because its contents include the only written rendition of "Sumer Is Icumen In" and the only surviving compilation of all twelve of Marie's *Lais*.

Andrew Taylor, a medievalist specializing in minstrel performance, studied the microfilm of Harley 978, and came to the conclusion that these notations indicate "the *punctus* ... [which] was used to indicate all kinds of pauses, to introduce quotations, and to separate ... [it] was also used for 'points of respect' to set of names or titles" (Parkes 42). Paul Merkley, a musicologist and medieval specialist, also concluded that the marginal markings denote punctuation after examining multiple sketches I made of these notations.[20] Any musical direction noted in the margins, as these markings are, would be anachronistic for the twelfth century, more fitting to a manuscript written during the tenth century (Merkley). Often in manuscripts created for aesthetic purposes as much as for reading, punctuation at line endings is not uncommon. Harley 978 is a well-made manuscript, not as elaborate as later medieval commercial manuscripts, which contain gilding and intricate illuminations, yet aesthetically pleasing and carefully wrought, with consistent ruling and rubrication of the vellum. Presence of punctuation, therefore, could be decorative, a logical addition to an aesthetically pleasing manuscript. The discontinuation of the punctuation markings, though, implies they do not serve an aesthetic purpose alone; they were probably utilitarian, as well. In this case, the natural rhythm which they mark represents a textual manifestation of oral performance. The practice of oral performance in the twelfth century did not include a minstrel standing before the court with a copy of the manuscript in hand with specific stage directions. The markings, however, do aid a solitary reading audience to understand how an oral performance would sound, whether or not the scribe included them deliberately for this purpose.[21] Furthermore, twelfth-century oral performers would be solitary readers first, as they would memorize Marie's text as well as they could before performing.

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[20] see Appendix A

[21] The visual aspect of Marie's *Lais* can be found in the oral performances, during which the audience would listen to and watch the singer or musically-accompanied speaker. In the solitary reading of the *Lais*, as well, a visual element is present, as the reader imagines the characters and setting as the plot unfolds. The visual quality of Marie's *Lais* is another unexamined avenue of study along with the musical component.

Evelyn Birge Vitz refers to these solitary readings as "performance practice" (164). The notations in this manuscript, therefore, coincide with moments during the oral performance of the text when a reader would have to breathe, emphasize a word or a part of a word, change tone, or perform some other variation of oral presentation. The fact that these markings are present at the beginning of the text, continue throughout the remainder of the "Prologue," yet then disappear further supports the theory that they provide a performative model similar to one an oral performer would follow, an established pattern being easy to follow throughout the rest of the *Lais*. On the subject of the lack of any recorded music for the *Lais* or other works of literature connected to music, Taylor writes:

> Musical notation was only partially developed, and few could read it, so medieval songs were not necessarily distinguished in manuscript from lyric poems. This means that a large body of medieval poetry, including the lais, romances, and chansons de geste, as well as short forms like the ballade, rondeau, or virelai, now exist in limbo as far as performance history is concerned, and in their own day may well have been presented in a variety of ways as manuscripts passed from one group of users to another. (20)

Even though scholars may never know precisely what the notations on Harley 978 were originally intended to indicate, their presence reveals that performance of the *Lais* was occurring at the time that this manuscript was compiled, sometime in the middle of the thirteenth century.

Concerning the realm of orality, Marie's contemporary, Chrétien de Troyes, says: "those who wish to make their living by storytelling ... usually mutilate and spoil" ("Erec and Enide" 1) the stories. The oral tradition of storytelling is typically treated differently than the study of written texts, especially in medieval literature, where extant texts are significantly fewer in number than in later literary periods, many manuscripts having been destroyed or lost over time.

Orality is often used as a point of comparison rather than a method of conveying a story equal to textuality. The relationship between the oral version of a story and its rendition to the written word is not as straightforward as is often supposed, though. Marie de France demonstrates in the *Lais* the complexity of this relationship, and explores the details of how orality and textuality are inextricably intertwined. Scholars in agreement with Chrétien de Troyes's opinion of oral and textual storytelling view the relationship between the oral and written traditions as the former acting as a predecessor for the supposedly more sophisticated manner of telling a tale: the written word. By this model, A becomes B; oral storytelling evolves into the practice of writing texts, which is thought to be both an endpoint in the genealogy of a story and a more permanent method of communication than the ephemeral experience of an oral performance.

The oral aspect of medieval works is valued by many scholars. Paul Zumthor reveals, "l'ensemble des textes à nous légués par les X^{e}, XI^{e}, XII^{e} siècles ... a transité par la voix" (37). J. A. Burrow establishes a connection between books and musical scores when he states, "People in the Middle Ages commonly treated books rather as musical scores are treated today" (49). Walter Ong, when comparing the era of manuscripts to print culture, says, "Manuscript culture felt works of verbal art to be more in touch with the oral plenum, and never very effectively distinguished between poetry and rhetoric" (133). An examination, therefore, of Marie's *Lais* incorporating the oral element of the poetry is imperative to an understanding of the work, despite "the challenges of addressing the sound of a manuscript" (Taylor 20). With the limited primary sources available to scholars, it is impossible to recreate a definitive style of oral performance of Marie's *Lais*. For that matter, scholars cannot reconstruct many other poems which were performed orally during the medieval era, which is why "the vocalization of

medieval texts has all too often been ignored, normalized, or consigned to unexamined stereotypes" (Taylor 20).

The following chapters do not attempt to offer a teleological conclusion in reference to a specific model of performance. Instead, an examination of the nature of the connection between orality and textuality is undertaken in order to discover the extent that the presence of *mesure* in the oral and written traditions is reflected in the *mesure* required for an erotic relationship in the *Lais* to reach the status of *fine amur*. The putative existence of *any* style of oral performance of the *Lais* is alone enough to support such an investigation.

Marie has been studied by critics as an historian, many pointing to her memorializing impulse, her desire to preserve these stories, as she does not "want to neglect or forget them" ("Prologue" 40). If Marie's identity is fixed as an historian, then the text—her *Lais*—becomes the culmination of all the oral versions of the stories which she uses as sources.[22] She sets these tales down as texts, and they seem fixed and immutable, enduring as authoritative versions of the stories. Her work, however, does not fit into this model of development from orality to textuality, not least because the *Lais* include many references to oral performance and song. The genealogy of stories is often viewed as a linear development from event, to memory, to song, to text, a perspective which is especially problematic for Marie's *Lais*, as the poems require the oral component of performance in order to be understood in terms of the idea of *mesure* in which Marie is so interested. The relationship between the oral version of the stories she is adapting and her own poetry is much more fluid and harmonious. The oral performances of the stories indeed give rise to her written text. The dependent nature of the relationship, however, does not end there. Marie's own references to the oral performances of her *lais*, which she knows will follow

[22] Marie's source material is hereafter referred to as *matière*, the word she uses herself to refer to the works—both written and oral—which inspired the *Lais*.

their written composition, are evidence that she views the connection between orality and textuality as much more intertwined than a simple linear development. By studying Marie's poetry with this model, the text is no longer an endpoint, and the harmony between the oral and written forms is much more evident. Furthermore, without the hierarchy between orality and textuality inherent in the linear developmental model, the *mesure* present in and between the oral and the written renditions of the *Lais* renders the perspective endorsing the symbiotic relationship between orality and textuality more suitable for the study of Marie's poetry.

Marie, the historian is not to be discounted in the light of the view set out in the *Lais* of the connection between orality and textuality. In fact, "the commemorative process tends to be allied with operations of the organs of speech. We cannot be surprised, then, that in a predominantly oral culture a privileged agent in the ritual of recall should be the speaking poet, in whose performance historical discourse is replenished and vivified with a new inspiration of truth" (Vance 376-77). Though Marie highlights the importance of orality and performance of the *Lais*, she is eager to direct the audience's attention towards the written text as well. The advantage of oral communication and performance is that they are so quick to travel, unrestrained by the material existence that retards the travel of a text. The details of oral communication, however, may change in retelling, and this is where the advantage of a text is apparent. Although a myriad of different interpretations of the *Lais* is possible in textual form, the details of the plot do not change upon re-reading. Oral performance and written texts are both enduring; the *Lais* as texts and as performances both outlasted Marie. A text, however, is still subject to the destructive force of time. Manuscripts can be destroyed or lost. The fact that there exists only one complete collection of the *Lais* in manuscript form is a testament to the fragility of the material nature of a text. The *Lais* are able to be performed aloud, written down, and read

solitarily, ensuring the stories will last for future generations to remember and enjoy. The mutability of the oral performance is strengthened by the presence of the unchanging text, and the destructibility of the text is supplemented by oral renditions of the *Lais*, which are unrestricted by material existence.

Vitz sees Marie as a writer who devalues the written element of her works, claiming that Marie "seems to have misgivings about the value and interest of the text *qua* text; of 'literature'" and that "purely written things somehow do not seem adequate or compelling in the *Lais*" (42).[23] While it is apparent that written communication is rarely used in the *Lais* without supplemental oral communication, it does not follow that Marie is suspicious of literature. She questions the popular opinion of the twelfth century—and, indeed, a common view still held by many students of literature in the twenty-first century—that written texts are of a higher order of communication than oral performance. Marie does not harbour doubts concerning the written tradition as a method of storytelling, yet she does take care to emphasize the importance of the oral tradition in order to break down the hierarchy of communication in which her audience believes.

During the thirteenth century "fully solitary reading of romance was exceedingly rare" (Vitz 164). There was, however, solitary reading which "should ... be thought of as a 'performance practice'" (Vitz 164). Along "with the emergence of what we might call 'solitary space' in castles, starting around 1200" (Vitz 217), a veritable explosion of written texts capable of circulation, and the performance of these texts at court came an expansion in the opportunity for solitary reading. Another characteristic of a book or manuscript seen by many as an advantage over oral performance is that the written word is often thought "to give 'authority' to

[23] In *Orality and Performance in Early French Romance*, Vitz briefly explores the performative aspect of Marie's *Lais*. Other French romances are studied in more detail, and the source is a well-researched perspective on the characteristics of early medieval performance.

the contents of the" (Vitz 218) text. Recent interest in and study of different kinds of reading, however, call into question the immutability of solitary reading. The conditions in which the reader is reading, the mood during the act, the attentiveness, even the physical position are just a few considerations which could have effects on how a text is read and, therefore, how it is interpreted and analyzed. The alleged immutable nature of solitary reading, therefore, is faulty. Though an oral performance is certainly a different experience for an audience than participating in a solitary reading of a story, the two are perhaps not as diametrically opposite as is often thought, and are perhaps more covalently connected.

The perspective which considers the written and oral components of Marie's *Lais* in conjugation implies a connection between two genres. The narrative quality of the romance genre, which is often seen as a more scholastic avenue of research than the study of lyric poetry, is not generally thought to be connected to the oral nature of the lyric genre. With the link established between the oral element of poetry and the written text, however, the relationship between romance and lyric poetry opens up, and more possibilities are able to be considered as to the relationship between the two genres. Marie's work has been described as both lyric and adhering to conventions of the romance genre. Not easily categorized, the *Lais* fit into both genres when different aspects of the poetry are examined. The model by which orality and textuality are linked instead of being practices often studied individually demonstrates that Marie's stories are suitable for consideration as both romances and lyric poems.

On the practice of attempting to predict what any early medieval performance might have sounded like—which is often approached with scepticism—Pierre Guiraud notes that no matter what method is used,

> Il n'est pas douteux cependant que la methode attirera bien des critiques dont la moindre n'est pas une répugnance, très profondément enracinée, à "compter les virgules". Il est bien evident que l'analyse des éléments dénombrables d'un text est aussi loin du poème qu'une planche d'anatomie d'un corps vivant. Tout ce qu'on peut demander au linguiste c'est de ne pas confondre deux points de vue differents: il fait un bouquet ou un herbier; opérations irréductibles l'une à l'autre, mais l'une et l'autre justifiables. (17)

Guiraud's cautionary advice seems legitimate when considered with the extent an only hypothesized style of performance of a text can inform and have a significant impact on the meaning of the work when the oral and written traditions are viewed with a chronological linear perspective. There is, however, another consideration to be addressed. Guiraud does not take into account the idea that the performance of the text and its thematic content might be complementary to one another, even so intimately related as to inform and enhance the importance of certain elements of the study of both the oral and the written renditions. The balance between the writing of the work and the performance of it is an example of *mesure* practised by both the poet and the performer in order to strengthen further the recurring theme of *mesure* in the content of the *Lais*. With this in mind, suddenly Le Mée's painstaking charts and pattern schemes become important to the examination of the content of Marie's *Lais*, not only to the investigation of the poetics. It does not matter that there is little information as to how the *Lais* would have been performed in an early medieval court or that there is no explicit explanation of what certain markings on Harley 978 specifically mean. Because multiple potential readings can be projected after much research of other lyric performances of the time and because there are markings on Harley 978 likely coinciding with some sort of change or

emphasis in an oral performance, a connection between the written text and the thematic content must exist.

In studying the performance of twelfth- and thirteenth-century romances, Vitz comments: "The recitation of romance was often strongly dramatic, as well as musical" (164). A poem performed dramatically to music requires prior practice to decide exactly where changes in tone, certain gestures, even introductions of new speakers—or singers—should take place. With the minimal number of extant sources, it is impossible for twenty-first-century scholars to know precisely how medieval performers would have organized particular performances. Educated study, however, yields reasonable assumptions as to how these performances sounded and appeared. Katharine Le Mée has produced phonetic transcriptions of "Laüstic," "Equitan," "Bisclavret," "Les Deus Amanz," and "Chevrefoil" along with stress and word-length patterns.[24] This meticulous break-down provides "the groundwork ... for further investigations ... namely the lengthy process of establishing rules for identifying and quantifying the constituent elements of an Old French text" (163). Le Mée includes a list of the methodologies she employs to come to reasonable hypotheses concerning the stresses of the words when performed, since all scholars interested in the oral performance of Marie's *Lais* can only speculate on how a work which has only a few defining performative features was meant to be read aloud during the twelfth century. Among Le Mée's practices to generate a probable version of how the work could have been performed during Marie's own time are:

(1)Meter seen as the pattern most expected by the listener, determined statistically.

(2)Isolation of Colon Patterns which account for the rhythm of the *lais* sampled.

[24] Le Mée's *A Metrical Study of Five* Lais *of Marie de France* is an indispensible work for scholars who wish to examine the poetics of the *Lais*.

(3) Metrical information established as the degree of surprise effect which may be generated by a stress pattern.

(4) Use of flow graphs to indicate the relationship of patterns to each other, a technique which could easily be used to indicate grammatical relationships where problems of sequence and transition are involved.

(5) Caesura determined by reference to a formal feature of the language rather than to meaning.

(6) Identification of narrative devices as an introduction to the study of meaning.

(7) Application of the principle of arithmetical symmetry in determining the narrative sections of a poem. (163-4)

Le Mée makes use of a meticulous combination of multiple methods of approaching the issue of the unknown stylistic practices used in a twelfth- or thirteenth-century performance of Marie's works.

Le Mée outlines three methods of determining the metre of a poem: "'graphic prosody', the traditional approach, having its roots in the study of classical Latin poetry, 'musical theory', dating from the late nineteenth century though refined in the twentieth, and 'acoustic metrics', a more recent attempt, using the methods of physics, to analyze the sound spectrum of a given performance" (49). The first method is still taught in high school and university classrooms, and the "terminology ... *iambs, spondees,* poetic *feet, iambic pentameter,* etc. — is widely recognized today" (49). Le Mée, however, furthers this statement with the observation, "Metricians recognize that most poets do not adhere rigidly and mechanically to a metrical design, but, rather, purposely introduce lines which are in direct conflict with it" (50). In other words, a sudden lack of poetic *mesure* indicates an important moment in the text where the poet wishes to

draw the audience's attention. In Marie's works, the lines are never "in direct conflict with" the standard rhythm or rhyme scheme of the *Lais*, yet there are instances of deviation which remain within the rhythmic and rhyming parameters of a *lai*, and mark defining and climactic moments in the story.

Marie's task of practising *mesure* in the writing of her poetry is made easier because "The range of spellings in Anglo-Norman and Old French texts, including Marie's lais, is often cited as part of the linguistic play of the vernacular, an endless variety that facilitates puns ... [and] also provides flexibility in word length" (Taylor 131). Marie, therefore, is able to adjust the spelling of certain words to accommodate the rhythm of the poetry when it is read aloud. The variant spelling in Anglo-Norman texts unfortunately means the spelling in Harley 978 may not be Marie's original (or Marie's scribe's original), yet the number of syllables in each line of Harley 978 cannot have changed much, as the octosyllabic pattern remains so consistent throughout the work. Bernadette Masters sees the connection between the literary aspect of the language of Marie's *Lais* and their musicality when read aloud: "syllables are treated in [the *Lais*] much as notes might be in a musical score" (137). This observation means that there is no one style in which the *Lais* were meant to be performed. This observation means that there is no one style in which the *Lais* were meant to be performed. Just as there are endless interpretations of musical pieces, so are there seemingly limitless opportunities in an oral rendition of the *Lais*.

Though the pronunciation of Marie's vocabulary is not concrete, arguments can be constructed on the poetics of the *Lais* because a certain degree of freedom with pronunciation of syllables does not mean every word can be pronounced in an infinite number of ways. For instance, the following description precedes the first appearance of the term *mesure* in the *Lais*:

'Amis, de ceo m'aseürez!

Vostre chemise me livrez!

El pan desuz ferai un pleit;

cungié vus doins. u que ceo seit,

d'amer cele kil desfera ("Guigemar" 557-61)

As the tying of the knot in Guigemar's shirt is being described, the number of syllables in the last word of each line becomes shorter and shorter, with line 557 containing three syllables ("m'aeürez"), line 558 containing two ("livrez"), and line 559 containing one ("pleit"). This is an example of a tricolon diminuendo, a classical rhetorical trope adopted by medieval poets. By gradually decreasing the number of syllables in the final word of each line, Marie is mirroring the image of the tightening of the knot in the poetics of her work in order to connect the literary content of the lines and the sound of the words when they are spoken aloud. The following two lines increase in the number of syllables in the final word of the lines, from one syllable in line 560 ("seit") to three in line 561 ("desfera"), and is another example of the content of the work mirrored in the sound of the words. As the knot comes undone in the description, so do the syllables become less constricted, lengthening out once again. Marie includes this mirroring of content in the poetics at this moment because it is a defining moment in "Guigemar," and the audience will be more likely to notice the *mesure* Marie is practising by exploring the self-reflexive nature of the poetics in her work without indulging in departing too much from the accepted form of a *lai*, which could be construed as evidence of *demesure*.

At the beginning of "Equitan," Marie offers her audience sound advice in reference to love: "Cil metent lur vie en nuncure, / ki d'amer n'unt sen ne mesure; / tels est la mesure d'amer / que nuls n'i deit raisun guarder" (17-20). There is a large amount of *mesure* taking place in the poetics of these lines. The first words of each line are all one syllable ("Cil," "ki," "tels," and

"que"), and the last words are each two ("nuncure," "mesure," "d'amer," and "guarder"). Because Marie is advising her audience to take care when in love, and to practise *mesure* as much as possible, she must, in turn, exercise an amount of *mesure* in her poetics in order to set an example for those gleaning lessons from her poetry. At this moment, the word *mesure* appears twice in as many lines, highlighting its role in the *Lais* as a principal pedagogical idea.

Monique Rollin, when speaking of the twelfth century, asks, "pourquoi la musique de cette époque est-elle encore si peu connue, même de ceux qui s'intéressent à la poésie mediévale et de la plupart des musiciens?" (n.p.).[25] Little research has been undertaken to study twelfth- and thirteenth-century music. Polyphonic material, musical texts of multiple melodies,[26] exists in a "small amount but great variety" (Losseff 9).[27] Sources for these musical pieces do exist, yet they are few in number in comparison to musical texts from the late medieval period, where much more musical research has been undertaken. From the thirteenth century, "Manuscript remains are painfully fragmented, both in terms of the entire source and the individual composition" (Losseff 13). There is little written evidence of musical performance in England and Northern France at this time, yet more educated speculation could be made if scholarship attempted to approach the subject of oral performance through the poetry of the time. Many works, including Marie's *Lais*, are artistic creations which encompass both literary and musical elements. The most sensible approach to studying such works is a research perspective taking both textuality and orality into account. The poetry of the era, though much more thoroughly investigated than the music, would attract more scholarly attention, resulting in innovative ideas

[25] Rollin's question is posed in her preface to Jean Beck's *La musique des troubadours*.
[26] The emergence of polyphony in France predates its practice in England according to Taylor, who states, "While musicians at Chartres were exploring polyphony as early as the eleventh century, the turning point in the music of the Mass [in England] came around the year 1200" (114).
[27] Nicky Losseff's *The Best Concords: Polyphonic Music in Thirteenth-Century Britain* examines in detail the music of the era which follows Marie's own, yet is informative in reference to the twelfth century, as well.

and findings. Furthermore, "Music, which was harmony but never knowledge, is now information ... [which] may invite us to reconsider the extent to which we have consigned the musical dimension of early texts to oblivion not as unknowable (although indeed it is difficult to know much) but as insignificant" (Taylor 24). By exploring music and poetry as connected artistic practices, scholars contribute to increased knowledge of both disciplines.

Music and literature, as interrelated disciplines, are intimately connected through both creation and presentation. Marie Naudin references medieval writer Eustache Deschamps, who promotes the connection between music and poetry, and "s'étend sur leur attraction réciproque et sur la nécessité de leur corrélation" (77).[28] By creating work that is just as easily orally performable as it is textually readable, Marie's poems are the perfect example of the poetic-musical alliance of which Deschamps speaks. Roger Chartier supports the view of the intimate connection between the poet and the musical composer when he describes the poet's role as "un « *cantor* » dont la voix et le souffle habitent les chants" (23). Consideration of the universal theme of *mesure* in Marie's works cements the connection between the genres of romance and lyric poetry in the *Lais*, and a study of the works from this point of view contributes to the ongoing understanding and appreciation of the interdisciplinary nature of literature and music.

In reference to research which considers both poetry and music, Hendrik van der Werf comments, "There are many excellent studies dealing with the form and content of the poem, but almost all of the studies dealing with the music are only for the highly specialized medievalists among the musicologists, and, in an often forbidding terminology, they deal primarily with

[28] Although Deschamps' *Art de dictier* is a late-fourteenth-century text, the ideas and conclusions can be applied to Marie's work, as Deschamps is investigating music and poetry from the past as well as contemporaneous works.

minute technical problems of rhythm and meter" (13).[29] Although "minute technical problems of rhythm and meter" are crucial to the study of the poetics of a literary work, broader terminology and a focus on the connection between the content and the musicality of a literary work render such criticism more accessible. When van der Werf published his work in 1978, he confessed that "It may still be too soon for the dual task of bridging the gap between musicological and philological studies and of writing a general study about the most important aspects of the relation between text and melody in medieval song" (13). The task of providing a general conclusion about the relationship between all musical compositions and all poetry produced in the twelfth century is a daunting and perhaps impossible one. A focus on one poet, however, and the manner in which she composed her work, aware of the connection between oral and written communication, most effectively demonstrated by her detailed examination of the multifaceted nature of the idea of *mesure*, is the beginning of approaching the overwhelming task of discovering the specifics of the nature of the connection between song and poetry.

One of the practical reasons music and poetry are so intimately connected in medieval French and English literature is the Christian influence on both arts. The principal content of French music and poetry from the ninth and tenth centuries is religious, linking the two disciplines in an historically documented manner. Texts including both music and poetry contain early musical notation around and above the written words of a poem. Naudin describes early musical notation and its development:

> Dès la seconde moitié du IX^{e} siècle apparaît le système de notation musicale dit « neumatique » ... dont est issue la notation moderne. Les neumes sont placés au-dessus de vers latins ... Nous avons par là la preuve que la renaissance carolingienne des lettres,

[29] Though dated, van der Werf's *The chansons of the troubadours and trouvères* is still relevant to present-day scholarship, and contains valuable information about twelfth-century music and its connection to poetry of the same era.

> source de nombreux poèmes du IX[e] siècle hagiographiques, biographiques, de circonstances fortement influencés, pour le fond, des bons écrivains latins ... ne dédaigne pas, le cas échéant, le concours du cadre musical, usage totalement étranger aux poètes latins. (57)

After this appearance of the early musical notation system, "les autres œuvres ... sont construites sur des rythmes syllabiques et rimés" (Naudin 57). The development of music and literature in this period is simultaneous. The two disciplines were connected at first by religious content, yet they were linked later by the characteristics which evolved from the original poems and music from ninth-century France, which influenced later French literature and English texts, as well.

Although Marie hails from France, there exists a scholarly consensus that "Marie a probablement vécu en Angleterre, peut-être à la cour de Londres, la cour d'Henri Plantagenêt (1154-1189)" (Harf-Lancner 8). The English origin of the earliest manuscripts of her work (Rector)—including Harley 978—Marie's detailed knowledge of the geography of Britain, and her connection to the court of Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine contribute to the conclusion that she wrote the *Lais* and her other works in England. An examination of the development of music in the country of composition is as important as the study of the same in the poet's country of origin. It is a common preconception that France's artistic influence on England crossed the channel with William the Conqueror, yet "Despite the impact of the Norman Conquest on language, literature and culture in England in 1066, Edward the Confessor had in fact already precipitated a Norman influx to the English bishoprics as early as 1042, when he was recalled from his Norman exile to acceed [sic] to the throne on Cnute's death" (Losseff 3). The parallel development of both countries reaches back even farther than France's conquest of England, and "There is little doubt that for nearly half a millennium, the politics of neither Britain nor France

can be understood in isolation, but rather in terms of interaction" (Losseff 3). The development of music in England, therefore, can be studied in combination with the development of music in France, and "the musical relationship between the two lands [is] a relationship long dominated by the existence of an extensive and well-preserved corpus of polyphonic music" (Losseff 4).[30] This examination of two countries so closely connected is much like the manner of study of the musical and literary disciplines encouraged by Marie in the *Lais*. She is a poet of two countries, residing in England, yet writing in the French language, and this perspective lends credit to her claim that the oral and written traditions should be considered in conjunction. Already accustomed to considering two perspectives, Marie's Anglo-Norman position makes her an ideal candidate to bridge the two worlds of orality and textuality.

Mesure is a broad term, and its manifestation is diverse, appearing in the oral performance, the poetics, and the content of Marie's *Lais*. Tracing the word and evidence of the characteristic throughout the work leads to the conclusion that there is a deep-seated connection between the written text and any oral performance. Music acts as a bridge between the literary and performative aspects of the *Lais*, as the components of musicality, rhythm, rhyme, phrasing, and dynamics are present in both the poetics of the work and the performance of it. The following chapters move through a detailed analysis of "Chevrefoil," "Laüstic," "Milun," and "Eliduc," four of the *lais* most concerned with the achievement of *fine amur* while also containing strong examples of orality as well as textuality. The following chapters investigate what Marie's high value of *mesure* means in respect to her views on romantic love of the twelfth century.

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[30] Losseff continues this line of inquiry by examining the Scottish manuscript Wolfenbüttel, Herzog-August-Bibliothek, Helmstadiensis 628, whose "main corpus transmits music which has been identified with that of a 'Notre Dame' school: *organa* and *conducti* which ostensibly fit descriptions, offered by a thirteenth-century theorist, of music in use at the cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris and possibly composed during the latter half of the twelfth century" (4).

Chapter 2 – *Lur amur fine*: "Chevrefoil"

At one hundred and eighteen lines, "Chevrefoil" is the shortest of Marie's *lais*, though this fact has not discouraged scholarly attention, as it is among the most studied of the twelve. Many scholars laud "Chevrefoil" as a fine literary accomplishment, for it contains multiple complex ideas in so few lines. In "Marie de France and the Tristram Legend," Grace Frank refers to "Chevrefoil" as "a little gem of synthesis, compression and clean-cut narration" (410). The plot, encompassing only a moment of the Tristan and Isolde story, focuses on the nature of the romantic relationship. Though the introduction refers to the tragic ending "that brought them much suffering / and caused them to die the same day" (9-10), there is no further mention of the dismal fate of the two lovers. In "Le message d'amour de Tristant à Yseut," Rita Lejeune implies that the attraction of "Chevrefoil" lies in its departure from the traditionally celebrated events of the Tristan and Isolde story by describing it as possessing "un charme mystérieux" (187). The first appearance of a complete Tristan and Isolde tale is Béroul's *Le Roman de Tristan*, which tells the story in an epic manner.[31] Instead of adhering to the grand tradition of the epic genre, Marie's rendition of this love story has an intimate and personal tone,[32] evoking an intimate atmosphere and drawing in the audience as confidantes in this secret affair.

In the beginning, Marie is determined to pen "the truth / about the *lai* men call *Chevrefoil*— / why it was composed and where it came from" (2-4). Since the origins of this

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[31] Béroul's *Le Roman de Tristan* was written in two parts, the first dated between 1150-1170 and the second dated between 1181-1190. Béroul's work is contemporaneous with Marie's, though different literary styles set the works apart.

[32] The romance was emerging at this time, though not as scholars now recognize the genre. The movement from epic to romance is punctuated by public scenes replaced by intimate scenes, a shift from the communal to the personal. While attempting to define the romance genre, Douglas Kelly says, "To the ideals of epic—prowess and virtue or strength—the romances added the values of love as sung by the troubadours" (207). The romance genre appealed more to women than the epic genre because of this addition to the content and because the female characters often fulfill more important roles than they do in the epic tradition. Romances still retained popularity among men of the nobility, as well.

story are rooted in a time centuries before Marie's own,[33] she and her primary audience would have been aware of multiple accounts of the story. Marie finds the confidence to attribute truth to her version of the tale because she has studied both written texts and oral performances. She researched the renditions which she "found ... in writing" (6), yet she also paid attention to the "Many [who] have told and recited it to me" (5). Textual and oral *matière* are considered by Marie to be equally fruitful avenues of research as she attempts to uncover "the truth" (2) about this story.

There is little detail in "Chevrefoil" as to the history of the characters. Audiences would be already familiar with the Tristan and Isolde story, which was one of the most popular and well-known examples of *fine amur* at that time.[34] The audience is told that the queen is married to Tristan's uncle, King Mark, who has exiled Tristan from Cornwall (these details are consistent with varying accounts of the tale). After this minimal information is conveyed, nothing else is said about the world in which these two people live. Other versions of the Tristan and Isolde story include a more action-centred plot and complex events leading up to the tragic ending. Marie chooses to simplify the plot of her *lai*, and the audience is instead caught up in the microcosm that is the relationship between Tristan and the queen. There are other versions of the Tristan and Isolde story to consult if a more comprehensive story is being sought. In reference to Marie's *lai*, Keith Busby argues, "It ... seems to me counterproductive to force the story to be fuller, more consistent, or more 'meaningful' than it actually is" ("Ceo fu la summe de l'escrit" 3). It is the world of the two lovers and the need for *mesure* in *fine amur* that interest Marie in her ongoing investigation, not the event-filled plot found in other renditions of the story.

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[33] A Celtic legend often cited as the predecessor of the Tristan and Isolde tale is "the Old Irish love story of Diarmuid and Grainne" (Krapple 347), an epic story which bears resemblance to the story of Tristan and Isolde.
[34] Lancelot and Guinevere are a romantic couple more widely recognized today than Tristan and Isolde. Lancelot, however, does not exist prior to twelfth-century Arthurian literature.

Marie considers *mesure* to be an important quality in every aspect of living, not excluding literary creation. Marie manages to break down the established hierarchy between orality and textuality in part by choosing to compose her work as *lais*, a form which can be both read as text and aurally experienced as performance. This alone, though, is not enough to convey the *mesure* which Marie believes pervades all successful relationships between any equal components (whether they be two people or two methods of communication). Though the form of her work marries the oral and textual elements, it is the omnipresence of *mesure* throughout the content of the *Lais* that is the most convincing evidence which leads to a perspective which considers *mesure* to be necessary to the success of an erotic relationship.

Although in the twelfth century "Chevrefoil" was performed aloud more often than it was read silently, it is now more often experienced by a solitary reading audience than an aurally-receptive audience.[35] The oral rendition of "Chevrefoil," however, is still active, adapted from the written account of the *lai* unsurprisingly by means of music. The *mesure* which leads to the marriage between orality and textuality is the musical form given to Marie's work. There are no extant examples of sheet music definitively connected to a twelfth-century performance of Marie's *Lais*. There are, however, musicians who are keen to perform Marie's work to music.[36] *Istanpitta* is a musical ensemble from the United States which performs medieval pieces "at formal concert venues, universities, and festivals" (Istanpitta Home). A musical recording of "Chevrefoil" is available on CD from this group, providing evidence that the musical aspect of the *lai* is still a crucial component in its dissemination and preservation. Further musical

[35] A noteworthy exception to this statement is when the *Lais* are studied in university classrooms. Often, in this case, there occurs at least an abridged performance of a *lai*, though when studied in English literature classes, the performance is most likely done in translation.

[36] Such musical pieces are legitimate forms to study because examination and adaptation of other twelfth-century musical performance pieces, of which some do exist, results in reasonable possibilities of how these *lais* might have been performed during Marie's time.

arrangements of "Chevrefoil" have been composed on separate occasions by Lesl Harker and Joel Cohen. Despite the lack of any known twelfth-century melody to which "Chevrefoil" was performed, musicians are still inspired by Marie's poetry to create an artistic arrangement with the intent of sharing the work with an audience. Technological advancement means that these musicians have a world-wide listening audience. Music is the means by which the written and oral traditions are connected, proving once again that the marriage of the written and oral traditions results in an effective alloy of a method of communication, and Marie's work has now gained a larger propagation than ever before.

"Chevrefoil" opens with the exile of Tristan from Cornwall because of his love for King Mark's wife. The unhappy Tristan makes his way to his birthplace, southern Wales, and lives there for a year while enduring no communication with his lover. As a result of his separation from the queen, Tristan becomes reckless and begins "to expose himself / to death and destruction" (19-20). The description of Tristan during this time portrays him as a victim of circumstances beyond his control:

> Li reis Mars esteit curuciez,
> vers Tristram, sun nevu, iriez;
> de sa terre le cungea
> pur la reïne qu'il ama.
> En sa cuntree en est alez.
> En Suhtwales u il fu nez
> un an demura tut entier,
> ne pot ariere repairier;
> mes puis se mist en abandun

de mort e de destructiün. (11-20)

Tristan is "sad and worried" (25) at this time, unable to achieve a sense of happiness or peace. His sense of self is affected by the absence of his lover, and he resorts to self-injury because of the pain of the imbalance in his personality.[37] Marie emphasizes this imbalance in Tristan by altering the lengths of the final words in each couplet to achieve a different number of syllables. Lines 11 and 12 finish with words of four and three syllables respectively; lines 13 and 14 end in three and two syllables respectively. None of the couplets ends in words matching in number of syllables, though the consistent rhyme scheme maintains a sense of poetic cohesiveness. This fact means the aural experience of the poetry is not dramatically jarring for an audience. Although many of the first words of each line in Marie's poetry are monosyllabic, she often breaks up the monotony with two- and even three-syllable words. This passage, however, is made up of monosyllabic words at the beginning of every line. This might indicate a sense of balance being conveyed, yet the imbalance of the number of syllables in the final words of each line contradicts this interpretation. Examination of the content of the poetry reveals a more fitting analysis of the monosyllabic words: the imbalance in Tristan's life caused by the absence of the queen takes away any unexpected excitement during this time he spends in exile. Monosyllabic words are reflections of the monotony of Tristan's days, and his recklessness is an attempt to break up this seemingly endless repetitious mode of living.

The love affair between Tristan and the queen is not the only instance of *fine amur* in Marie's work, yet it is the only *lai* in which there are no other explorations undertaken by Marie beyond *fine amur*. The *Lais* can be divided into two groups, based on the order of their appearance in Harley 978. The first group includes "Guigemar," "Equitan," "Le Fresne,"

[37] Marie assures her audience not to "be surprised at this: / for one who loves very faithfully / is sad and troubled / when he cannot satisfy his desires" (21-4). This recklessness in the face of the absent lover is among the characteristics of the individual who has fallen under the influence of *fine amur*.

"Bisclavret," "Lanval," and "Les Deus Amanz," and the second is comprised of "Yonec," "Laüstic," "Milun," "Chaitivel," "Chevrefoil," and "Eliduc." In the first group, there are three examples of *fine amur*, the love affairs in "Guigemar," "Le Fresne," and "Lanval." In the second group, *fine amur* is found in "Yonec," "Milun," "Chevrefoil," and "Eliduc."

In "Guigemar," the protagonist, for whom the *lai* is named, is "a fine knight. / But in forming him nature had so badly erred / that he never gave any thought to love" (56-8). He is wounded by his own arrow while hunting a supernatural white hind, and is told that he will not recover from this wound

> until a woman heals you,
> one who will suffer, out of love for you,
> pain and grief
> such as no woman ever suffered before.
> And out of love for her, you'll suffer as much;
> the affair will be a marvel
> to lovers, past and present,
> and to all those yet to come. (114-21)

Guigemar travels by means of a magic ship to another world, where he meets a young woman unhappily married, and falls in love with her. The tale continues with the lovers discovering how to overcome the restricting bonds of the woman's marriage, and ends with their reunion after a long separation. At the beginning of "Le Fresne," a noble lady accuses her neighbour of infidelity because the neighbour gives birth to twins. The lady claims that "it never was and never will be / possible for such a thing to happen ... unless two men had lain with her" (38-42). Ironically, the lady herself gives birth to twin sisters shortly thereafter. To hide her shame, the

lady decides to hide one of the girls "at a convent" (113), but gives the child "a linen garment, ... an embroidered silk robe, / ... [and] a large ring" (122-8). The child is named Le Fresne, and grows up unaware of the nobility of her birth. Eventually, "a good lord ... heard about the young girl / and he fell in love with her" (243-8). Complications ensue when the lord becomes betrothed to Le Fresne's twin sister, yet before the marriage can be consummated Le Fresne's identity is revealed by means of a generous act of Le Fresne's involving the linen, robe, and ring imparted to her by her mother. Le Fresne and the lord are able to marry each other in the end. In "Lanval," the title character is disinherited and unhappy at his lord Arthur's court. He leaves the city, and meets a mysterious fairy-like woman who pledges her love for him. He returns her love, and the affair brings Lanval good fortune and restores him to his rightful social position, though he cannot speak of his lover to anyone.

"Yonec" harkens back to "Guigemar," as Marie employs the trope of the jealous husband who is inappropriately married to the young woman. Yonec is an otherworldly man who can take the form of a hawk. He manages to visit his imprisoned lover by flying up to her window. In time, Yonec is discovered by the husband, and falls prey to a mortal trap left by him. The young woman attempts to follow her wounded lover into the otherworld, yet is convinced by Yonec before he dies to return to her husband because she is pregnant with Yonec's child. "Milun" chronicles the relationship between two lovers who are separated for more than two decades, and are not reunited with each other or their child until more than twenty years later. "Milun" is recounted in chapter three, where it is also analyzed in the light of the idea of *mesure*. "Eliduc" contains the most complex exploration of *fine amur*, and is examined in chapter four.

In "Guigemar," the interest of the audience lies in the journey Guigemar must make to achieve *fine amur* and the manner of the reunion between the two lovers. The focus of "Le

Fresne" is the result of the behaviour of the girl's mother rather than the relationship between the two lovers, though the audience is invested in the outcome of this relationship because Le Fresne is such an admirable character. The central relationship that results in conflict in "Lanval" is that between Lanval and his lord, Arthur, rather than between Lanval and his lover. It is not until "Yonec" and "Milun" that the audience receives an exploration of the romantic relationship, and both of these are studied in the face of external obstacles—jealous husbands, geographical separation, and limitations imposed on the lovers by social expectations. In both these *lais*, there is a child involved in the equation, and the complexity of how the lovers fit as a couple into their social surroundings receives more examination than the nature of the erotic relationships themselves.

Tristan and the queen are two of the few characters in the *Lais* involved in a romantic relationship in which both participants possess *mesure* at the beginning of the story. Both Guigemar and Lanval must learn the virtue of *mesure* during the course of the story, as neither exercises the quality at the start of their respective *lais*. Although Le Fresne possesses an extraordinary amount of patience, which indicates her *mesure*, her lord, Gurun, is almost a secondary character in the *lai*, and the relationship between the two is not examined thoroughly. The lovers in "Milun" and "Yonec" all exhibit evidence of *mesure*, yet these *lais* are filled with actions taken by characters and other events which continually re-shape the world of the lovers. These complex plots reveal the *mesure* the characters practise, yet the *mesure* itself is not scrutinized. "Chevrefoil" does not have an adventurous plot or even an interesting sequence of causes and effects because there is no central event that complicates the progression of the story. In "Chevrefoil," the intimate moment between the lovers captivates the audience's attention because there are no other factors distracting from the examination of the connection between

these two people. Moments such as these do appear in earlier *lais*—the time Guigemar spends in the otherworldly land of his mistress and the meeting between Lanval and his lady—yet they are overshadowed by the preceding events and the action of the narrative that follows. Marie includes in her collection a *lai* with a straightforward plot in order to draw the audience's attention to the essence of the bond between two lovers who share *fine amur*. During Marie's time, the story of Tristan and Isolde was the quintessential example of *fine amur*, and her audience would have recognized it as such. Marie depicts her characters as examples of those who are able to practise *mesure* in their love affair. She deliberately neglects to address other parts of the story because she wishes to examine the romantic relationship without the interference of other characters or external forces.

In order to explore the nature of the love between these two characters, Marie isolates them from the surrounding environment. Even "Brenguein, who was loyal to" (90) the queen, and accompanies her into the woods, disappears as soon as the lovers are reunited. The love between Tristan and the queen is an ideal example of *fine amur*, though it is an extramarital affair. Marie describes the relationship as mutually dependent:

> With the two of them it was just
> as it is with the honeysuckle
> that attaches itself to the hazel tree:
> when it has wound and attached
> and worked itself around the trunk,
> the two can survive together;
> but if someone tries to separate them,
> the hazel dies quickly

and the honeysuckle with it. (68-76)

The delicate balance achieved by the two plants is a reflection of the *mesure* exhibited by the queen and Tristan. They are neither too eager nor too prudent in their love, and neither is placed above the other in power or esteem; there is no hierarchy present in this relationship. Instead, the two lovers work in harmony. The description of the love affair continues with the only dialogue present in "Chevrefoil." After the portrayal of the entwined honeysuckle and hazel, Tristan's own voice is heard when he concludes, "'Sweet love, so it is with us: / You cannot live without me, nor I without you'" (77-8). Tristan stresses the importance of the symbiotic nature of his relationship with the queen because he understands that the existence of a romantic relationship depends on the success of the balancing of the co-dependent elements of that relationship: the lovers. An equilibrium, which elevates this love to the status of *fine amur*, must be maintained to preserve its qualification as such.

During Marie's era, the husband was the head of the household,[38] and she held a lower place on the hierarchy established by medieval matrimonial politics. The twelfth-century marriage ceremony involved "the kneeling of the bride before the man who became her 'master'" (Duby 5). Marie, however, takes exception to this submission of the woman to the man, and conveys her dispute by presenting the hierarchical erotic relationships in her *lais* in a derogatory manner and by casting in a flattering light the characters who practise symbiotic relationships with no hierarchies. Tristan and the queen are a couple who belong in the latter category, indicated by the description of them both taking "great joy in each other" (94) as well as the comparison of their relationship with the hazel tree and the honeysuckle. Further evidence of the ease and comfort both find in communicating with each other is the description of their

[38] "For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body" (Ephesians 5:23).

conversation during their tryst: "He spoke to her as much as he desired, / she told him whatever she liked" (95-96). Both are able to communicate as much as they wish with no priority given to one over the other which springs from a relationship built hierarchically.

The reflective imagery of "Chevrefoil" does not end with the romantic relationship mirrored in the portrayal of the "honeysuckle / that attaches itself to the hazel tree" (69-70). Although Marie is keen to emphasize the *mesure* present in the love between Tristan and the queen, she also reiterates her belief that the practice of *mesure* ought to be applied to the audience's vision of the relationship between orality and textuality. She draws a subtle parallel between the *fine amur* and the connection between the oral and written traditions in the language of the text. Tristan and the queen are able to hold a tryst during which they converse and take pleasure in each other, yet inevitably they must part. In describing this meeting and its end, Marie says:

> A li parla tut a leisir,
> e ele li dist sun plaisir;
> puis li mustra cumfaitement
> del rei avra acordement
> e que mult li aveit pesé
> de ceo qu'il l'ot si cungée,
> par encusement l'aveit fait.
> A tant s'en part, sun ami lait;
> mes quant ceo vint al desevrer,
> dunc comencierent a plurer. (95-104)

As soon as the queen and Tristan begin to converse, the rhyming words at the end of each couplet have the same number of syllables. These lines read aloud provide an aural balance which reflects the balance of the relationship and the *mesure* with which the two treat their relationship. As soon as the two must separate, however, the rhyming words of the couplets have three and two syllables respectively, indicating—without discordantly disrupting the aural experience of the poem—that the separation of the lovers throws the relationship out of balance, which is why they "comencierent a plurer" (104). This imbalance in the number of syllables in the final words of each line can be noticed by both reading and listening audiences; even in the articulation of the presence of balance in the relationship of the two lovers, Marie avoids a hierarchy between the oral and the written methods of communication. Both solitary reading and oral performance present the language in their different ways with different advantages: by reading the lines, the audience is able to see the lengths of the words, which indicate that there is a change in the final couplet; by hearing the lines spoken or sung aloud, the audience is able to hear the pronunciation of the words, and is thereby able to determine that the final couplet does not adhere to the same structure as the preceding ones. Vitz notes, "to commemorate their meeting ... Tristan composes a *lai*, which he later plays on his harp. Marie thus downplays the purely written element of the text, emphasizing instead ... the musical composition to which [the lovers' tryst] gave rise" (41).[39] Like Tristan, Marie is focussed on both the power of the written word and the oral rendition of this story, the two methods of storytelling connected by the music to which both Tristan's and Marie's *lais* are performed.

[39] Although I agree with Vitz that the musical element of the work is emphasized by Marie, I am reluctant to accept the argument that "Marie thus downplays the ... written element of the text" (41). The most debated part of the text are the lines describing the written message from Tristan to the queen and the ambiguity of what that message specifically says.

Marie is concerned with telling "the truth / about the *lai* men call *Chevrefoil*" (2-3). She is so preoccupied with the idea that she repeats it at the end of the *lai*, informing her audience that "I have given you the truth / about the *lai* that I have told here" (117-8). Although literal interpretation of these lines makes sense—Marie wishes to imbue her rendition of the Tristan and Isolde story with as much authority as possible—the lack of details concerning the events surrounding the love affair and death of the two lovers implies that there is a different "truth" to which she is referring. Busby qualifies Marie's obsession with "truth" by arguing that it "is not necessarily the literal truth concerning Tristan's encounter with Iseut, but rather the poetic truth of the marvellous adventure" ("Ceo fu la summe de l'escrit" 4). Since Marie establishes a connection between Tristan's and the queen's relationship and the link between orality and textuality, Busby's argument concerning her preoccupation with "truth" can be pushed farther by seeing this "truth" as a commentary on the relationship between oral and written communication. At the same time that Marie is offering her audience the truth about the nature of the lovers' relationship, she is also establishing a perspective which upholds orality and textuality as equally effective methods of communication. With this perspective, the hierarchical perspective of the relationship between orality and textuality dissipates, and a symbiotic link between the two takes its place.

Tristan's composition at the end of "Chevrefoil" shows that it is not only Marie who possesses a memorializing impulse; Tristan feels the need to make a lasting record of events, as well. After the lovers' tryst, he composes his *lai*:

> For the joy that he'd felt
> from his love when he saw her,
> by means of the stick he inscribed

as the queen had instructed,

and in order to remember the words,

Tristan, who played the harp well,

composed a new *lai* about it. (107-113)

There are two reasons Tristan yields to the memorializing impulse: "the joy that he'd felt ... and in order to remember the words" (107, 111). The joy he feels which prompts him to seek a creative outlet is poetic inspiration. The desire to "remember the words" is an individual's unwillingness to lose a poetic experience with the death of that individual. If the artist who participates in a poetic experience leaves a lasting record of that experience, the communication of the event is not dependent on the presence of the artist, and can, therefore, outlive the artist by centuries. By means of his *lai*, Tristan is successful in preserving the elements of the story which Marie heard from the oral renditions of the tale during her research for her own *lai*. "Chevrefoil" has the distinct advantage of being able to be read silently or performed orally, which ensures that it will be remembered for as long as possible by as many people as possible. In this way, Marie contributes to the definition of the *lai* genre by being among the first to write down the "*lais* I'd heard" ("Prologue" 33). In Marie's hands, the *lai* becomes an example of literary *and* performance communication. By means of "Chevrefoil," Marie reveals to the audience that the marriage of the written and oral spheres results in the successful preservation of a story. Marie's memorializing impulse emphasized so keenly in the "Prologue"[40] is satisfied in her choice of the *lai* as the versatile form of her creation. Tristan's own *lai* is a reflection of Marie's "Chevrefoil," and its composition is a self-reflexive moment whose complexity is belied by the grace with which it is integrated into the sequence of the story.

[40] "I don't want to neglect or forget [the *lais*]. / To put them into word and rhyme / I've often stayed awake" (40-2).

Tristan returns to Wales after he and the queen must separate, yet he is not in the same dejected frame of mind described at the beginning of the *lai*. The emotions evoked by the lovers' meeting transform Tristan from one willing "to expose himself / to death and destruction" (19-20) to an artist who is able to "wait until his uncle sent for him" (106). The tryst imbues Tristan with the ability to exhibit patience in the face of frustrated love. He is a practitioner of *mesure*, and is not in search of the quality, as Guigemar is. Although Tristan's voyage to Cornwall can be seen as an act of impatience, it is important to note that he "entered the forest all alone— / he didn't want anyone to see him; / he came out only in the evening / when it was time to find shelter" (29-32). He exercises caution and patience during his journey, evidence of the *mesure* he already possesses. The queen is also patient throughout the *lai*. Although she is afforded fewer freedoms than Tristan (such as travel) because she is a woman, she also waits for a year without the consolation of communication with her lover. While en route to Tintagel to meet with her husband and the rest of the court, she notices the message Tristan leaves for her, yet she does not act without patience. She turns to "The knights who were accompanying her" (83), and "ordered [them] to stop: / she wanted to dismount and rest" (85-86). This delay before she is able to meet with Tristan indicates that she is able to moderate her actions in situations where less patient lovers might immediately abandon the rest of the company for a lovers' tryst. Such impatience would lead inevitably to discovery of the extra-marital affair and bring about its end. The queen realizes this, and exhibits a degree of *mesure* which maintains the covert nature of the affair between her and Tristan.

By the end of the *lai*, both lovers are able to adhere to the dictates of *mesure* which Marie deems essential to the achievement of *fine amur*. Out of this relationship come two works of art, the *lai* Tristan composes and the *lai* Marie writes. Tristan's *lai* is composed chiefly "to remember

the words" (111) that appear on "the stick he inscribed" (109), the moment which marks the beginning of the tryst. The only word which the audience knows for certain appears on the stick is Tristan's own name. The rest of the message is paraphrased by Marie in her *lai*:

> He cut a hazel tree in half,
>
> then he squared it.
>
> When he had prepared the wood,
>
> he wrote his name on it with his knife.
>
> If the queen noticed it ...
>
> she'd know when she saw it,
>
> that the piece of wood had come from her love.
>
> This was the message of the writing
>
> that he had sent to her:
>
> he had been there a long time,
>
> had waited and remained
>
> to find out and to discover
>
> how he could see her,
>
> for he could not live without her. (51-67)

Marie would have heard more than one version of Tristan's message from the "Many [who] have told and recited [the story] to me" (5), and she decides to paraphrase the message instead of choosing one direct quotation. This decision creates an ambiguity in exactly what is written on the hazel stick. Is it only Tristan's name on the stick, and the rest of the information is implied with that name? If this is not the case, then why is it that only the queen notices the stick when knights should be on the watch for anything out of the ordinary? Is Tristan's name accompanied

by "runic inscriptions which only the specially trained could read" (Hanning and Ferrante 191, n.1)? For the exact message Tristan carves into the stick, the audience would have to hear Tristan's own *lai*. Marie's *lai*, however, includes the details of the arrangements that lead to the lovers' meeting, the meeting itself, and the artistic creation that arises from the romantic relationship. In her *lai*, Marie has no interest on focusing on the specific message. Instead she places emphasis on how the message is communicated, what it means, and what occurs thereafter. It is not the sign, therefore, to which Marie wishes to draw attention; it is what the sign signifies.

Whether or not the entire message paraphrased by Marie is inscribed on the hazel stick by Tristan is insignificant in the face of what this subtle and successful communication means concerning the connection between Tristan and the queen. When the queen spots the hazel stick Tristan has set up for her, "she knew what it was, / she recognized all the letters" (81-2). Even though this lovers' tryst "had happened before" (57), it is still surprising that the queen manages to notice one inscribed branch among all the other trees of the forest. In "Marie de France et la Légende de Tristan," Lucien Foulet asks, "pouvait [Iseut] se douter que son ami était soudainement revenu d'exil après une longue année d'attente" (280). The queen, however, does spot the branch, and her power of observation implies a connection between her and Tristan, one that draws her to the message. This supernatural inclination of the queen towards the hazel stick has a precedent in "la poésie ancienne irlandaise, où un morceau d'écorce (avec une inscription ogamique), une branche de saule, etc., placés sur le chemin d'une troupe, ont la force magique de l'arrêter" (Spitzer 82). What does this "magic" indicate, though? Tristan is able to send his message part of the way to the queen, yet it is left to her to finish the message's journey by taking notice of its presence along the path. She is able to finish this journey, which indicates

that she is in tune with Tristan's mode of thinking and his behaviour. The audience becomes aware of an unusual link between the sender of this message and its recipient, and it becomes evident that the "magic" lies in the connection between the two lovers. The symbiosis present in this affair allows Tristan and the queen to communicate in this manner. They are so attuned to each other's behaviour that they can infer conclusions concerning each other's actions before they occur. It is, therefore, no surprise when the queen manages to find Tristan "in the woods" (92) without any specific direction.

Tristan's hazel-carved message to the queen has been the subject of scholarly debate for decades. Frank points out that Tristan's message "bears a striking resemblance to an episode in the Tristram legend which has been preserved for us in no less than five different versions: those of Eilhart von Oberge, Gottfried von Strassburg, the Old Norse *Saga*, the Oxford *Folie Tristan*, and the English *Sir Tristrem*" (407). In all these renditions of the legend, Tristan leaves wooden chips in a stream to communicate to Isolde that he wishes to meet her. In some versions of the story, these chips contain inscriptions on them. Although Marie does not mention specific written or oral works for her research of this story, it is likely that some—if not most—of the *matière* contained reference to these wooden chips as a message sent from Tristan to Isolde. Marie adapts the idea to her *lai*, and this inclusion of Tristan carving words on the hazel stick places emphasis on the importance of the written method of communication. The queen cannot use the hazel stick alone to interpret everything Tristan means to communicate to her. She sees "the piece of wood; she knew what it was, / she recognized all the letters" (81-2). The wood alone, without the letters, would be a message impossible for the queen to interpret.

Many scholars have tried to impose logical readings onto the description of the hazel stick message. It is improbable that Tristan would have been able to include everything on one

stick. It is just as unlikely that the queen would have been able to read this entire message mounted on her horse. Some scholars suggest that Tristan communicated with the queen ahead of time, thereby preparing her for the appearance of a message during her journey to Cornwall.[41] This argument means that Tristan could write only his name on the stick, and the queen would be able to deduce its meaning, an argument supported by the fact that a meeting between the two lovers "had happened before" (57). Because Marie is ambiguous about the details of this communication, "such questions, and others like them, are legitimate, [though] they are perhaps excessively literal and spring from a critical assumption that all texts have to 'make sense'" (Busby, "Ceo fu la summe de l'escrit" 2). It is important to remember that medieval texts do not often "make sense" the way a modern audience might expect them to do. Frank claims that "if Marie writes of werewolves, magic potions, speaking hinds, birds that turn into knights, ships that sail themselves, a fairy mistress who appears and disappears at will, I do not ask how such things can be. Tristram might carve a message whose import fills twice seventeen lines and I should not question Marie's poetic right to have him do so" (406). Puzzlement, however, lingers among scholars, rooted in the question of precisely how Tristan and the queen have established such an elegant and efficient mode of communication.

Instead of either attempting to sort out the exact message Tristan sends to the queen or disregarding the ambiguity of the text because its presence reveals the unimportance of such details, the lack of clarity can be read as Marie's continuing project to convey the importance of the symbiotic relationship between orality and textuality. As far as the plot of the story is concerned, this is the crucial moment of communication for the audience. It is at this point of the *lai* where the tension is highest (Will Tristan and the queen be able to meet?), and becomes the

[41] Keith Busby's "'Ceo fu la summe de l'escrit' (Chevrefoil, line 61) again" asks, "Had [Tristan] earlier communicated with the Queen during his stay in the forest?" (2)

catalyst of the lovers' tryst, which, as the climax of the story, acts to relieve the tension. It is indeed odd that Marie is vague about the exact message sent from one lover to the other. The audience is unsure of whether this vital message is sent entirely by means of immediate writing (again, this scenario is unlikely), by means of an earlier letter in addition to the immediate writing (of which there is no evidence), or by means of connotation which the queen can infer, set up by precedence, an argument whose claim is strengthened by the later description of the hazel stick which Tristan "inscribed / as the queen had instructed" (109-10). The latter set of circumstances implies that the message is successful because it is a combination of both written and oral communication—the details of this sign sent from Tristan to the queen would have been organized during their last meeting, the one that "had happened before" (57). This reading of the text is supported by the fact that the moments shared between Tristan and the queen are taken up with conversation. The marriage of written and oral communication in this excerpt of the love affair is an example of the overall nature of the connection between the oral and written traditions. It is this treatment of orality and textuality as equal methods of communication that leads to the exquisite understanding between the two lovers and the ability for them to communicate so effectively. Furthermore, the equal esteem in which Tristan and the queen hold orality and textuality is mirrored in their own relationship, which they approach with *mesure* and enjoy with a lack of any hierarchy between them.

The image of Tristan carving a message on a wooden stick would not be commonplace to a twelfth-century audience. Although writing was done on parchment, vellum, and wax tablets, "Wood was not a usual material for writing on in the late twelfth century, but there was one form of written record current in the period that did make use of it, namely tally-sticks" (Busby, "Ceo fu la summe de l'escrit" 11). Merchants would use tally-sticks "as receipts for money or goods"

(11). They would carve writing into the wood, which "was normally hazel" (11), just as Tristan carves his message to the queen into his own hazel stick. Tally-sticks consisted of two pieces that fit together (the folium and the stock), and, "Like the couple Tristan and Iseut ... they achieve meaning only when reunited" (11).[42] The likening of Tristan and the queen to the two parts that make up a tally-stick might be too much of a stretch of the imagination for some scholars, yet the connection remains between the message in the text and the use of tally-sticks. While the purchase and receipt of goods is not particularly romantic,[43] this connection implies a contractual element in the relationship between Tristan and the queen. This is no lord-and-vassal relationship in which one lover is submissive to the desires of the other. It is a mutual connection based on equilibrium, which is achieved by the practice of *mesure*. Tristan, by carving his message into the hazel stick, is demonstrating his willingness to participate in a romantic relationship free from hierarchical restrictions. The queen, by receiving and responding to his message, indicates that she is disposed to engage herself in this relationship as well. The hazel stick is, therefore, a symbol of the *mesure* present in this example of *fine amur*, one which Marie presents in a positive light, despite the tragedy the audience knows the two lovers will encounter.

There is a confusing moment in the conversation between Tristan and the queen:

Then she assured him

that he would be reconciled with the king—

for it weighed on him

that he had sent Tristan away;

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[42] In "Ceo fu la summe de l'escrit," Busby pushes this argument further, insisting that "If Tristan is the codre or hazel branch, and Iseut the chevrefoil (caprifolium) that embraces it (cf. Chevrefoil, 68-78), then she is the foil or folium to his stock" (11). I am not convinced that Marie deliberately had this metaphor in mind, as there is no reference to tally-sticks anywhere in the text, yet the erotic element of this image is in keeping with the behaviour of the characters and the tone of the text.

[43] Andreas Capellanus discourages the mixing of love and money when he says, "Real love comes only from the affection of the heart and ... cannot be ... cheapened by a matter of money" (144).

he'd done it because of the accusation. (97-101)

Does the queen truly believe that a reconciliation between her husband and her lover will take place? It is unclear whether she is attempting to sweeten the sorrow of parting with Tristan or whether she trusts that King Mark will invite his nephew back to Cornwall. A more pressing question concerning this moment is why Marie decided to include this detail of the queen's hope for a reunion that the audience knows will never take place. She cannot have meant to provide her audience with the hope of a happy ending for the two lovers, as she alludes to the tragic ending of the story at the beginning of the *lai*. These five lines are included to provide the audience with portraits of two characters, the queen and King Mark. In this passage the queen is depicted as an optimist, a reassuring friend, even a diplomat. Because the audience is given no evidence that the queen is lying about her husband's feelings, it is logical to assume from these lines that King Mark is a rational man who is searching for a way to reinstate his exiled nephew without tarnishing his own reputation in the eyes of his court—there is still "the accusation" (101) to consider. The description of Tristan's exile weighing on King Mark shows that the king loves his family. The guilt he feels over Tristan's exile is a physical burden which prompts him to consider reconciliation, even in the face of the accusation of adultery. The impression with which the audience is left is of three admirable characters mired in an impossible situation, a love triangle. Marie does not endeavour to tackle the love triangle in this *lai*. In "Laüstic" and "Eliduc," however, Marie does address the dilemma of the love triangle, and these undertakings are studied in detail in chapters three and four respectively. It is noteworthy that in the context of the well-known story, the *fine amur* between Tristan and the queen is bound to end. Even in this instance of perfect erotic love, the *mesure* required to maintain it proves too much for the stressful situation of the love triangle.

The queen's optimistic assessment of the situation between Tristan and King Mark and her behaviour in this instance reveals a further notable element of her character. Even with the hope of a happy outcome of her separation from her lover, the queen advises and exercises patience and caution. Instead of the two lovers pushing for a pardon for Tristan or even deciding to run away together,[44] they patiently wait for Tristan's invitation to Cornwall to come from King Mark. Their passion for each other is undeniable—it encourages them to break vows of matrimony in an appropriate marriage between the queen and King Mark. The only element in their relationship strong enough to keep the passion in check is the practice of *mesure*, which permeates every aspect of this love affair. The *mesure* that defines the friendship between Tristan and the queen goes beyond their treatment of each other. Both the queen and Tristan exercise *mesure* in their relationship as a couple with King Mark. Instead of deliberately seeking to hurt King Mark in the interest of fulfilling their desire, Tristan and the queen attempt to maintain the clandestine nature of the affair by reigning in their passion, by resorting to *mesure* instead of unchecked passion. Although these admirable traits are not enough to save Tristan, the queen, and King Mark in the end, they are enough to endear all three to an audience who feels sympathy for them and will remember them after the story has finished.

The reflection of literary creation in the content of the *lai*, Tristan's message to the queen and the composition of his own *lai*, strengthen the power of written communication in "Chevrefoil." Similarly, Marie's mention of the *matière* "I have found ... in writing" (6), which she consulted before composing her own *lai*, implies that she believes in the communicative force of the written word. Oral communication, however, is equally present in "Chevrefoil." Along with Tristan's written message to the queen, Marie's and Tristan's *lais*, and the written

[44] This is what occurs in the case of Diarmuid and Gràinne, the Celtic tale which many scholars view as a predecessor to the Tristan and Isolde story.

work used by Marie, there is also the oral rendition of the story which "Many have told and recited" (5). Busby argues that the presence of these literary creations reveals that "The reflection of the poetic act is ... quintuple in *Chevrefoil*: Tristan's writing on the hazel branch (52, 61); his composition of the *lai* by setting the words to music (112-13); the oral *lai* that Marie has been told (2, 5); the written work she uses as *matière* (6); and the poem as she composed it (118)" ("Ceo fu la summe de l'escrit" 4). He neglects, however, to distinguish between the reading of Tristan's and Marie's *lais* and their oral performances, and instead groups the oral and written traditions together as one example. Although the two traditions are intertwined, both *lais* can be both read solitarily and performed orally. It is possible that Tristan's *lai* is never written, as there is no mention of him penning the words. In this case, the work would be an exclusively oral method of communication, yet Marie's use of the word "fet" (113) in reference to Tristan's composition ties it to line 4, where Marie is describing how her own *lai* was "fez." The use of the same word implies that Tristan's *lai* is able to be both read and performed, though, even if it is only a performance piece, it contains the potential to be written, as the oral renditions which Marie heard were eventually taken down in writing. Along with consideration of both orality and textuality, therefore, the reflection of literary creation becomes increasingly complex, and can be organizationally rendered thus:

1. The written work Marie consults in her composition of "Chevrefoil"
2. The oral renditions Marie hears and adapts in her composition of "Chevrefoil"
3. Marie's written *lai*, "Chevrefoil," read solitarily by an audience
4. Marie's performed *lai*, "Chevrefoil," experienced aurally by an audience
5. The textual message sent from Tristan to the queen by means of the hazel stick

6. The oral communication between Tristan and the queen (both before and during the tryst)
7. Tristan's *lai*, perhaps including a written rendition, though certainly an oral one

This list, though effective in denoting all the occasions of communication included in "Chevrefoil," does not suggest the entwined relationship between orality and textuality present in the text. The scholar who separates the oral and written aspects of these modes of communication loses the connections between them. The attempt to list the instances of communication in "Chevrefoil" and to categorize them as written or oral results in a simplification of the relationship between the two methods, and the connection between the oral and written traditions becomes impossible to comprehend. This is not to say that the two modes of communication are equal in nature, yet they are esteemed by Marie to be equal in value. Divided study of orality and textuality implies a hierarchy where Marie believes none exists. The scholar who wishes to understand Marie's intentions regarding the relationship between the oral and written traditions must exercise *mesure* in the consideration of oral and written communication by recognizing the symbiotic relationship between them.

Chapter 3 - *Le Cisne e le Russignol*: "Milun" and "Laüstic"

In "Milun" and "Laüstic," Marie's imagery substantiates the opinion that orality and textuality are elements of a symbiotic relationship and are equal in value. In neither *lai* is the romantic relationship examined as closely as the *fine amur* between Tristan and the queen is in "Chevrefoil." Furthermore, the plot and character interaction are not as complex as they are in "Eliduc." "Milun" and "Laüstic," however, evoke strong visuals which communicate to an audience that *mesure* pervades the relationship between the oral and written traditions of storytelling. "Milun" and "Laüstic" both contain songbirds to represent the oral tradition, a swan in "Milun" and a nightingale in "Laüstic."[45] In both cases the image of the bird is juxtaposed with the image of a piece of written work. In "Milun," the swan carries love letters back and forth between two lovers. In "Laüstic," the nightingale is at first an excuse for a young married woman to meet secretly with her lover through a window,[46] then, after its death, wrapped in a shroud with embroidered writing, the means by which the young woman communicates to her lover that they must end their affair. The images of "Milun" and "Laüstic" are literally entwined representations of orality and textuality. The swan surrounding the writing in "Milun" and the nightingale surrounded by the writing in "Laüstic" reveal the non-hierarchical model of Marie's treatment of oral and written communication.

"Milun" opens with Marie speaking of "a variety of beginnings" (2) being necessary for the storyteller who wishes to tell "a variety of stories" (1). This comment, as logical as it may

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[45] Marie believed the nightingale held enough importance in "Laüstic" to merit having the *lai* named after it: "*Laüstic* was the name, I think, / they gave it in their land. / In French it is *rossignol*, / and *nightingale* in proper English" (3-6).

[46] The source of this detail in "Laüstic" is most likely Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, which recounts the tragic story of Pyramus and Thisbe, who each find the same hole in the wall separating their gardens from one another. They "found / And made of [the hole] their voices' passageway, / And safely flowed the whispered words of love" (IV. 69-71). Similarly, in "Laüstic," "if [the lady] went to the window / she could talk to her love / on the other side, and he to her" (40-42). Marie refers to "Ovid's book" in "Guigemar." Though this book is *Ars amatoria*, not *Metamorphoses*, Marie would have been familiar with *Metamorphoses* as well as the rest of Ovid's body of work.

seem on its own, is puzzling in context, as Marie never returns to explain why she has included it. Juxtaposed with this observation is another commentary urging the storyteller to "speak so intelligently / that people will enjoy listening" (3-4). Marie's text does not include the word "listening," though it is a sensible translation of the line.[47] Instead, the two lines recommend that the storyteller should "parler si raisnablement / que il seit plaisible a la gent" (3-4). Marie has carefully constructed this dictation so that it may be interpreted as the voice of a narrator writing a text for a reading audience or as the voice of a performer reading aloud—or singing—a story for a listening audience. Marie manages to reject the common view of a written text being a higher mode of communication than an oral rendition by tying the two together, even in general advice for other storytellers, who may be either reading or listening to her work. The position of this advice, at the beginning of the *lai*, demonstrates the importance Marie places on the joining of textuality and orality as methods of communication which are stronger when considered covalently, not hierarchically.

Between this advice for storytellers and the beginning of the story is an introduction where Marie says she will "comencerai Milun / e musterrai par brief sermun / pur quei e coment fu trovez / li lais ki issi est numez" (5-8). The word "*trovez* ... could also be rendered 'composed,' if Marie is referring to a musical setting" (Hanning and Ferrante 162, n.1). This is another example of Marie employing ambiguous language that conveys literary and oral elements of the *lai* without confusing the reader or listener, thereby interrupting the balanced pace of the narrative action. The catalyst of the link between the two traditions is, once again, music.

[47] Hanning and Ferrante's translation of the *Lais* is widely acknowledged as an excellent one, and is considered by many to be the definitive scholastic edition to date.

In "Chevrefoil," "Milun," and "Laüstic" Marie ensures that there is a tangible connection between orality and the written word. In "Chevrefoil," the *lai* composed by "Tristan, who played the harp well" (112), is a correlative of the entire story in a work which is itself at once literary and oral. In "Laüstic," the "piece of samite, / embroidered in gold and writing" (135-36) is the adornment the lady chooses for the dead nightingale. Encased in this literary shroud, the bird arrives at the home of the lover, where the servant "related the whole message to him" (143) by spoken word. Song is lovingly encased in text and given to the lover along with oral communication. In one moment, Marie deftly demonstrates the use of both orality and textuality with a strong emphasis on the musical bridge, the songbird, between the oral and written traditions to communicate this vital message from one lover to the other. In "Milun," Milun hides his letter by tying it "to [the swan's] neck," and hiding "it among the feathers" (165-66). The lovers' letters penetrate the outer shell of the swan, and become an intimate part of the bird; thus are orality and textuality rendered inextricable in the world of Milun and his lady.

Textuality and orality are further intertwined in "Milun" in the lady's message to her sister concerning the child to whom she gives birth out of wedlock. The lady takes care to "send word to her [sister], in writing / and also orally" (71-72). From the point of view of simple plot development, this act is a precautionary one, ensuring that the lady's sister will definitely receive the message the lady is sending if not by one method of communication, then by the other. Marie, however, is commenting also on the value of the two traditions of communication, demonstrating that even her admirable characters see the two methods—written and oral—as complementary, not linearly related, one arising from the other, inevitably creating a hierarchy. When the lady's sister receives the child and the messages, "she cherished" (120) the child, and brings him up as her own, ensuring that he knows about his true parentage. The child's aunt "told

him who his mother was, / and his father's story as well" (297-98), yet she also "gave him the letter" (296) which contains a written account of his parental background and the reasons his parents sent him to be brought up by his aunt. This combination of textual and oral communication demonstrates the perspective of the written and oral traditions as co-existent and supportive, each strengthening the authority and effectiveness of the other.

When Milun decides to travel to Brittany in search of his son and renown against "the knight without equal" (342), it is the effectiveness of oral communication that spurns him on his voyage. Milun's son, the knight without equal "was judged the best combatant" (326). It is

> Because of his excellence and fame
> [that] the news spread to his own country
> ... [The] young knight of that land,
> who had gone abroad to seek honor,
> had so excelled in prowess,
> goodness, and generosity
> that those who didn't know his name
> called him, everywhere, "the knight without equal." (335-42)

By dubbing this otherwise unnamed character "the knight without equal," Marie is highlighting the importance of oral communication in the world of her *lais*. Dissemination of the knight's reputation reaches across the channel between England and France by means of only orality. It is this widespread communication that ultimately results in the reunion of Milun and his son and, thereafter, the reunion of the woman with both Milun and their son. The power of oral communication and its distinct advantage over written communication of not requiring a material aspect of its manifestation (a written account of the knight's deeds could be easily lost or

destroyed, especially on a voyage as long as a twelfth-century crossing of the channel between England and France) is revealed in this moment, and the happiness of the characters depends on this example of oral communication. Marie avoids the tendency to value textuality over orality by making a bold example of the effectiveness of oral communication in order to support her model of orality and textuality working in conjunction with aspects of *mesure*, rather than one method linearly developing into the other. Juxtaposed with this moment of the power of oral communication is an example of the advantages of written communication. Before Milun leaves his country,

> He let his mistress know his scheme,
> and asked her leave to go;
> he revealed his intentions
> by sending her a sealed letter,
> by the swan, I believe;
> now she had to let him know how she felt. (361-66)

Written communication ensures the amount of secrecy required for clandestine communication between two secret lovers. The fact that Milun "asked [the woman] leave to go" (362) demonstrates the *mesure* present in this romantic relationship. The two lovers keep each other informed of their actions, and value each other's opinions concerning their decisions. The reappearance of the swan in this example of textuality again recalls to the audience the fact that music is the link between the worlds of orality and textuality. The *mesure* evident in the relationship between Milun and the woman elevates this couple to the status of lovers participating in *fine amur*.

Unlike the complex and drawn-out affair between Milun and his mistress, the relationship between the lovers in "Laüstic" could be the beginning of a blossoming love between two characters, yet the nature of the love is never fully explored because of the violence committed by the jealous husband. Although the example of romantic love in this *lai* may not be one of the most memorable in the collection of Marie's works,[48] the treatment of the oral and written traditions is solemn and without irony. At the end of "Laüstic" there is an image similar to the letter-carrying swan found in "Milun," a visual symbol which binds together the oral and written traditions. In order to communicate a message to her lover, the lady recovers the corpse of the nightingale, which her husband has killed. She must manage to communicate to her lover that her husband has discovered her infidelity and that their romantic relationship must end. Instead of sending only a written message to the knight or sending only the corpse of the nightingale, the means by which the lady was able to conduct the affair in the first place, she wraps the body of the bird in a piece of cloth with "gold and writing" (136) embroidered on it. The enshrouded nightingale is then delivered to the knight by a messenger, who "related the whole message to him" (143). Thus, the knight receives an oral rendition of the message as well as a written one. At the heart of both modes of communication lies the nightingale, as much a classical symbol of song as Milun's swan is,[49] recognizable by a twelfth-century audience listening to or reading this *lai*. The lover has a beautiful coffin built, made of "all pure gold and good stones" (151) to preserve the nightingale's corpse and its literarily embroidered shroud. The treatment of the representation of a love affair in which the lovers never participate in a physical erotic relationship, as the most memorable couples of the *Lais* do, is perhaps overly dramatic.

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[48] There is academic debate as to whether the two lovers are united by love or convenience, by *fine amur* or infatuation.

[49] The swan is said to sing a beautiful song in the moments before its death. Chaucer makes mention of this song in his poem "Parlement of Foulys": "The ielous swan, a□ens his deth that syngith" (342).

Symbolically, however, the entombed nightingale acts as another example of the view that the oral and written traditions should be considered equal in merit as methods of storytelling. The casket holds within it symbols of both orality and textuality, and is "sealed" (155) by the lover, indicating the permanence of the intertwined nature of the two.

At the beginning of "Milun," the lovers are separated by war and marriage, Milun having left his homeland in military service and the lady unwillingly given away in marriage by her father. There is no secret way they can meet each other, and so Milun "undertook to plan" (159) a different method of communication, a method which is suitable to the measure of secrecy necessary to conduct an affair such as the one in which he and his lady are participating. In the twelfth century, letters were often the only means by which two people could communicate,[50] travel being limited and an arduous undertaking. The image of the letters caressed by the swan is singularly romantic, yet it is also another symbol of Marie's treatment of the relationship between the oral and written traditions. Milun's message of love delivered in cryptic speech by his squire is supplemented by the communication in the handwritten letter. The two are connected by the swan, a songbird out of the antiquarian tradition of Pliny[51] and other classical poets being read during Marie's time. The marriage of the oral and written messages by means of the swan shows that the story does not develop linearly from orality to textuality, firmly leaving behind the spoken manner by which it was first communicated.

In order to demonstrate contrast to the ideal, Marie creates characters who exhibit *demesure*, such as the husband of the lady in "Laüstic." When he grows suspicious of his wife's

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[50] Baudri of Bourgueil, a writer who precedes Marie by about sixty years, writes to religious women in an erotic fashion, but never meets these women. In the early medieval era, it was possible for a relationship to become romantically intimate, even erotic, exclusively in writing. The writers explored the limits of a romantic relationship developed through text, while never intending to meet in person.

[51] Pliny refers to the myth that a swan sings in the moments before death, and states that this myth has no basis in reality, "Some say that the Swans sing lamentably a little before their death, but untruly, I suppose" (10.XXIII).

actions, he "grew angry" (80) without concrete evidence to justify the need he feels "to question her" (81). Even if the husband is correct in his distrust, he overreacts to what is only in his mind a puzzlement about his wife's strange night-time behaviour. The audience despises the husband for his reaction. He becomes the villain of the *lai* the moment he refuses to give his wife the nightingale when she "asked her lord for the bird" (113). Instead, he "killed it out of spite" (114). The violence with which he treats the innocent animal renders him a character with no measure of restraint or empathy, one remembered with bitterness by an audience reading or listening to Marie's *lai*. Marie herself condemns the husband's cruel deed as "too vicious an act" (116), taken even farther when he "threw the body [of the bird] on the lady; / her shift was stained with blood" (117-18). This punishment is most undeserved because, although the lady may have committed an indiscretion by gazing into the window of her lover and exchanging small gifts with him, the two never meet to engage in an extramarital affair that would warrant the condemnation adultery received in the twelfth century.

Unlike the husband in "Laüstic," Milun and his lover demonstrate an extraordinary amount of *mesure* in their erotic relationship. For more than two decades, the two remain unswervingly devoted to each other. They maintain, however, a cautious distance in order to keep the affair secret, according to Marie's moral expectations, as long as the lady is married to another man suitable to her station in life and ethical beliefs. The patience and steadfastness with which the two approach their devotion to each other are rewarded in the end when the lady's husband dies, an event so convenient that it is seemingly ordained by fate. This *mesure* employed by Milun and his lover can be compared to the lack of such a quality in the relationship of the lovers in "Les Deus Amanz." In this story, the "two young people who loved each other ... both died" (3-4). The relationship is doomed from the beginning because of the

boy, whom Marie describes by saying there "n'ot en lui point de mesure" (189). The two lovers are victims of the youth's *demesure*, and love never flourishes between them the way it does between Milun and his lady because the young man is "entirely lacking in control" (179).[52] Even during the beginning of their relationship, the young man in "Les Deus Amanz" only grudgingly accepts to "hid[e] their love" (65), as "This restraint disturbed them greatly" (67), whereas Milun is accommodating to the situation in which he and his lover find themselves, confining himself to moderation and secrecy. *Mesure* is a difficult state to maintain because one must be aware of when to abandon secrecy and take action to achieve the beloved. The measure of a situation can require taking action to achieve a balance. *Mesure* does not always connote moderation; Burgess states, "Indeed, it often seems that *mesure* is closer in meaning to 'understanding' or 'sensible behaviour' than to 'moderation, restraint[']" (*The* Lais *of Marie de France: Text and Context* 39). Where the boy in "Les Deus Amanz" prematurely identifies this moment, Milun succeeds. He decides to cross the ocean in search of the child whom his lover sent away at birth. The father and son are reunited and, while returning to Milun's homeland to fight for his lover, they meet "a boy / coming from [his] mistress" (510-11). The boy has been sent to communicate to Milun that the lady's "husband was dead" (518), saving him from having to destroy his lover's marriage, an act which would likely require the murder of his lover's husband, a sin hardly in keeping with the practice of the virtue of *mesure*. In the end, Milun's demonstration of *mesure* is rewarded, and the *lai* ends happily. A harmony is achieved and maintained in the romantic relationship, emphasizing the harmony found in Marie's marriage of the written and oral traditions and the dissolution of any hierarchy established between the two by conservative literary conventions.

[52] There are discrepancies between the line numbers of Hanning and Ferrante's translation and Harf-Lancner's edition because of the variations of this *lai* in more than one manuscript. The word "control" in Hanning and Ferrant's *Lais* is the translation of *mesure* in the original texts.

In examining "the importance of the Celtic contribution to [Marie's] lays" (148), Maria A. Rebbert explores the significance of the chess game which makes a brief appearance in "Milun." Rebbert claims that the chess game "represents the public winning of a bride from those in authority over her" (154). It is when Milun first sends his messenger with the swan that the chess game appears in the text: "The porter went to the main hall / and found only two knights there, / seated at a big table / amusing themselves at chess" (197-200). Rebbert claims, "Since the two knights seated at the game remain unnamed, they could easily figure Milun and the lady's husband" (157). When setting up this argument, Rebbert admits, "At first glance, the role of the chess game in Marie de France's ... *Milun* ... appears to be strictly anecdotal" (154). Why then does Marie include these lines at all? Perhaps she is emphasizing Milun's "rivalry with the lady's husband and Milun's failure to negotiate with her father" (157), yet the audience is already aware of these obstacles. There is another reason Marie introduces the chess game symbolic of the bid for a bride, and that is to illustrate the utter control under which the woman in this story is held. Chess was a game most commonly played in the hall or *la salle*. Medieval architecture positioned *la salle* in a public place, close to the entry of the castle. This area, as a traditionally military space, "constituted its personification as a purely masculine domain" (Jaritz 29). On the other hand, "The female quarters were positioned in the segregated innermost and uppermost spaces" (Jaritz 29). The game of chess, therefore, is gendered as masculine, and the woman's role is rendered insignificant. In "Milun," when the lady's father plans a marriage for her with "a rich lord of the region, / a powerful man of great repute" (127-28), she is "grief-stricken, / and she cried for Milun" (130-31). There is no chance for the woman to make her own decisions regarding her marriage because she is considered the property of men. By marrying, the woman is "handed over to the power of another male, no longer the head of the house from

which she came, but of the house she was entering" (Duby 5). Despite the respect with which Milun treats her and despite the *mesure* which they are able to practise together, the woman is considered to be only a possession by the other authoritative men in her life, and Marie is indicating the *demesure* inherent in this model of relations between men and women.

In "On the Interpretation of *Laüstic*," Burgess examines the lines describing the lady being closely guarded, "la dame ert estreit guardee, / quant cil esteit en la cuntree" (49-50), in order to determine to whom Marie is referring with the pronoun "cil." There are four possible interpretations of these lines: the lady is closely guarded when her husband is at home, when her husband is away from home, when her lover is at home, or when her lover is away from home.[53] The ambiguity of the phrase "en la cuntree" results in the audience being unable to determine if the "cuntree" is the region where the lady lives or the area surrounding the region. It is reasonable to assume that the description is not meant to be read as when the lady's lover is away from home, as increased surveillance of her activities at this time would make no sense. The elimination of this interpretation, however, still leaves three reasonable and different ways of reading these lines. The use of a pronoun in line 49 lends further ambiguity to the description because "cil" could easily refer to the lady's husband or her would-be lover. Burgess argues, "we can begin by rejecting the notion that the wife was closely guarded when her husband was at home. Such an interpretation is too banal to meet the needs of the context. It goes without saying that the wife would not have the opportunity to make a visit to her lover next door or to entertain him at home whilst her husband was in residence" (11). This leaves us with two possible interpretations: the lady is closely guarded while her husband is away from home or while her lover is at home. The latter reading of the text implies that the husband is suspicious of the lady's

[53] In his article, Burgess provides multiple sources supporting different interpretations of the lines including when the lady's lover is at home, when the lady's husband is at home, and when the lady's husband is away from home. He does not, however, defend the interpretation of the line meaning when the lady's lover is away from home.

behaviour even before she begins to arise from their bed during the night, yet there is no evidence of this suspicion in the rest of the text. It is important to note that even after the lady's nocturnal wanderings begin to irk her husband, "there is no confirmation in the text that the husband's wrath was directed specifically at his neighbour" ("On the Interpretation of *Laüstic*" 11). It is possible that the husband places the guilt of an extra-marital affair solely on his wife, regardless of who her lover may be, yet this argument is weak considering the degree of passionate aggression the husband exhibits when confronting his wife with the nightingale. The logical interpretation of the lines, therefore, is that the lady is closely guarded when her husband is away from home, which is the interpretation Burgess endorses in his article. Burgess observes, "Perhaps the act of getting up from beside him to listen to the song of the nightingale was an unacceptable sign of freedom on her part, an indication of a desire to escape from his control" (11). It is this manifestation of independence which prompts "too vicious an act" (116) from the lady's husband. Such behaviour indicates the husband's desire to control completely his wife's actions, which in turn reveals a hierarchy in this relationship. The trust and confidence between the partners in a relationship involving *mesure* preclude any sort of censure by one partner of the other's behaviour. The love between the lady and her husband, therefore, is not an example of *fine amur*.

At the beginning of "Laüstic," both men are friendly neighbours and treat well those in their charge, and the lady is a faithful wife to a husband suitable to her position and situation. She is described as "wise, courtly, and handsome" (14), one virtue arising from her intellect, another indicating the admirable quality of *mesure* which she applies to her treatment of others, and a third demonstrating her outer appearance as a manifestation of her social situation in life and as a reflection of the measure of her character. The stresses on these lines are numerous in

multiple possible readings of the line, including the one Le Mée chooses to include in *A Metrical Study of Five* Lais *of Marie de France* as a legitimate hypothesis as to how the line might have been read aloud in oral performance during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Line fourteen reads with emphases on the first, third, and final syllables, "sage, curteise e acesmee" (Le Mée 165). This pattern of stresses starkly stands out against the surrounding lines, most of which do not begin with a stress on the first syllable. This pattern forces the speaker or singer to slow down and read with a deliberately jarring rhythm, making the content of the line more noticeable to the audience, yet the line still remains within the parameters of a reasonably regular octosyllabic rhythm. A stress on the first syllable of a line likewise calls attention to its content by contrasting it with surrounding lines, which more often have stresses on the second syllables. The lady's character is being described, and the stresses are placed in specific positions with the intent of conveying her true nature by means of emphasis. She possesses three excellent qualities, seemingly personifying the epitome of noble and admirable behaviour. The rhythm of the line calls attention to itself with the accented complimentary description of the wife, yet there is a detectable sinister element to the organization of these syllables because they are received by the audience in such dramatic aural contrast to the standard rhythmic pattern of these *lais*. This underlying sinister aspect presents itself in the content of the *lai* as well as in its poetics, foreshadowing the end of the story, which is much more tragic than its beginning. Despite the wife's noble and admirable nature, she still finishes by falling short of her husband's expectations.

Along with deviations from a regular metrical pattern, Marie uses changing rhyming patterns in "Laüstic" to emphasize the content of defining moments. Just as the description of the lady offers us a true reading of her character, another moment in the *lai* demonstrates the true

nature of another character. The lady's husband, at first thought to be good and, therefore, to possess the quality of *mesure*, reveals his jealous and overly-possessive nature to the audience when the regular rhyming pattern is disrupted. He grows angry with the lady, and begins "to question her" (81). At this line, Marie's consistent pattern of rhyming couplets is disrupted by four consecutive rhyming lines:

> Tant i estut, tant i leva
>
> que sis sire s'en curuça
>
> e meinte feiz li demanda
>
> pur quei levot e u ala. (79-82)

The disruption is not particularly unpleasant to the ear, though it is an indication of the imbalance now present in the relationship between the wife and her husband. The more restricted rhyme scheme for these four lines indicates the rigid and hierarchical nature of the relationship between the man and his wife.

In reference to the narrative tone Marie adopts in the *Lais*, Vitz argues, "While Marie is not lacking in sympathy for her various lovers, there is something very cool about her treatment of love" (42). Although Vitz's claim does have some textual support, Marie does not treat all erotic relationships in a "cool" manner. When the lady in "Milun" discovers she is pregnant, she passionately makes "her lament" (56) to Milun, and he tells her that "he would do / whatever she counseled" (65-66). The devotion between the two lovers is apparent both here and in their ongoing written communication to each other. When Milun and his lady are "brought ... together ... In great happiness and well-being" (529-31), the audience is satisfied, and Marie offers her own opinion of the story in her conclusion, where she states that she has "thoroughly enjoyed retelling it" (536). There is, however, an aloofness in the narrative tone of "Laüstic," the "cool"

treatment to which Vitz refers. Although Marie passes judgement on the lady's husband's murder of the nightingale by referring to it as "too vicious an act" (116), her narrative voice is not distinctly heard at the end of "Laüstic" as it is heard in "Milun." Since the characters in "Laüstic" are seemingly no less admirable than those in "Milun"—who participate much more fully in an extra-marital love affair than the lovers in "Laüstic"—it follows that in this relationship there is another element which prompts this impersonal narrative tone.

Since Marie treats romantic relationships with empathy and passionate interest, it is not the *fine amur* or the sexual element of the relationships of these couples which she finds distasteful.[54] In "Laüstic," it is the introduction of a hierarchy which is the disturbing element in the relationship of the woman and her husband. When the husband begins to assert control over his wife's behaviour, the lack of *mesure* and the cruelty of his personality are demonstrated. It is, therefore, the position of a husband as his wife's master to which Marie takes such offense. Often pointed to as one of the first feminists of literature, Marie presents in a complimentary manner only the romantic relationships in which the participants work as partners.[55] Any superiority assumed by the man[56] in the relationship ends in tragic circumstances and the loss of sympathetic response from the audience for that character.

There have been multiple readings of "Laüstic," including both understanding this *lai* as a genuine tragic story and interpreting this example of a romantic relationship ironically. "The lady

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[54] In "Lanval," Marie indulges in a lewd sexual pun at the moment when the mysterious fairy lady "granted [Lanval] her love and her body" (133) by saying, "Now Lanval was on the right road!" (134), the road being an innuendo for the vagina.

[55] The exception to this statement is the woman and the king in "Equitan," who work as partners towards an evil plot—the murder of the woman's husband—instead of towards the achievement of the state in which the love they share can develop into an example of *fine amur*. These characters, however, are not manifesting *mesure* in their behaviour, as the woman's husband is not an evil man, and his murder is considered a sin.

[56] The superiority of a woman never arises. The otherworldliness of Lanval's lady seems to lend her a certain air of superiority, yet she does not treat Lanval as an inferior. Instead, she comes "from far away" (112) to courteously ask him for his love, and when he grants it to her, he is "well cared for" (140). The reason Marie addresses men assuming superiority and not women is most likely because men held a politically superior status over their wives during the twelfth century, and Marie had to contend with this standard.

in *Laüstic* is not presented as a fabliau wife" ("On the Interpretation of *Laüstic*" 11), and the *lai* is not meant to be comic at the end. It is the description of the reasons why the lady decides to participate in an extramarital affair that supports the ironic reading of the text: "she loved him more than anything, / as much for the good that she heard of him / as because he was close by" (26-28). The dramatic ending to an affair in which the two lovers "couldn't come together / completely for their pleasure" (47-48) also lends weight to an ironic interpretation of the text. Marie's emphasis on *mesure*, however, shifts the focus from the qualification of the true feelings of the lovers to the effect of a hierarchical marriage on two people deemed to be good, and whether the *lai* is taken seriously or interpreted ironically becomes irrelevant. The man apparently undergoes a personality transformation when he confronts his wife concerning the nightingale with sudden and explicitly violent behaviour. Another, less unexpected, explanation for the man's behaviour is that he has been corrupted by some external force. His wife is also good, yet the external corrupting force must be somehow related to the woman, for the husband's behaviour, the exacting of such a cruel punishment, is directed towards her. A. P. Tudor claims, "Marie does not view [the lady's extramarital affair] as a sin, presumably because the lady is a *malmariée*" (2). There are no indications supporting this claim, though. There is no mention of an inappropriate age difference between the husband and his wife, and both are nobly born. Their estimable natures complete their compatibility. There must be, therefore, another explanation as to why this relationship becomes poisoned. There is one moment which calls to mind a *malmariée* situation: "the lady was closely guarded" (49). This is, in fact, the reason the two lovers cannot begin a physical relationship. This treatment implies that there is a lack of trust between the husband and wife, which, in turn, implies that there is a hierarchy present in the relationship. Until this *lai*, Marie has explored in detail multiple different examples of romantic

love, presenting unambiguous opinions about different types of romantic relationships. She has not offered, however, a definitive opinion on the laws and conventions surrounding twelfth-century matrimony, though her depiction of married couples from the beginning of the *Lais* implies that she holds a troubled view of the practice.

There is nothing at the beginning of "Laüstic" to alert the audience to the husband's violent tendencies towards his wife. In fact, the husband and the neighbour are indistinguishable at the beginning of the narrative. Both are "knights ... [who] had strong houses" (9-10), and "From the goodness of the two barons / the city acquired a good name" (11-12). The interchangeableness of the husband and the neighbour implies that the husband is a man no worse in character than his neighbour. Even the ambiguity in line 49 involving the pronoun "cil" can be read as an implication that the husband is no less an admirable baron than his neighbour. What, then, is responsible for his unforgivable behaviour concerning the nightingale?

Marriage between men and women in the twelfth century is divided by Georges Duby into "two radically different and antagonistic models—the lay model of marriage, created to safeguard the social order, and the ecclesiastical model, created to safeguard the divine order" (*Medieval Marriage* 3). Although the ecclesiastical model of marriage theoretically granted women certain freedoms within the bonds of matrimony, the practice of marriage more often resembled the lay model in which "males occupied a dominant position in all noble houses" (*Medieval Marriage* 3). Furthermore, it was possible for the husband to "repudiate his wife. This was permissible not only, as one would expect, in case of adultery but also if it seemed to be in the interest of the patrimony to take another wife, either because the former wife was slow to give her husband the son who would carry on the house or, quite simply, because it seemed advantageous to the house to receive a woman of greater value" (7). By these standards, women

are no more than possessions to be traded as goods between families in exchange for political connections. Indeed, a typical twelfth-century marriage would adhere to "the policy of marrying off all the daughters of the house in order to create a widespread network of alliances" (10). In such a relationship, an insurmountable hierarchy prevents the couple from finding a balanced position in which both the man and the woman are esteemed equal. The *demesure* inherent in the raising of the man to a higher socially esteemed situation than the woman precludes the possibility of *fine amur*. There are, therefore, no descriptions in the *Lais* of a married couple[57] sharing *fine amur*[58] because, from a perspective built on the idea that men and women are equal in worth, the twelfth-century matrimonial system is flawed.

Even without any definitive knowledge of Marie's individual identity, she must have been Christian (as evidenced by her work), and might have been a nun, which would account for her literary education. As such, she could never explicitly denounce the practice of marriage. Most especially, she could not do this in writing, an act deemed authoritative and unalterable. The nature of the distribution of these texts, sometimes by solitary reading, though mostly by court performances, would also negate the opportunity for Marie to defend such a controversial opinion as an anti-marriage stance would certainly be during the early medieval period. Examination of these *lais* hardly reveals a flattering depiction of matrimony, though. What was

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[57] In "Milun," the son wants to free his mother from her marriage, and vows, "Sun seignur qu'ele a ocirai / e espuser la vus ferai" (499-500). There is, however, no mention of a wedding at the end of the text: "lur fiz amdous les assembla, / la mere a sun pere dona" (527-28). The son brings his parents together after they have been apart for twenty years, yet not necessarily together in marriage This moment is peculiar if interpreted as a marriage ceremony, since the son is certainly not a priest. Even if the audience interprets this ending to mean Milun and his lady are married, there is still no detailed description of a happily married couple in the *Lais*.

[58] In "Le Fresne," "the knight married his beloved" (505), yet there is no description of the lovers after they have been married. Furthermore, Gurun's behaviour calls into question whether he possesses the quality of *mesure*, which, therefore, renders the qualification of the relationship between him and Le Fresne as *fine amur* dubious. He makes himself "a benefactor of the abbey [where Le Fresne lives] ... but he had a motive / other than receiving pardon for his sins" (262, 269-70). He convinces Le Fresne to come away from her home with him, telling her, "I'll never let you down— / and I'll take good care of you" (287-88) before he abandons her to marry the noble Codre. It is only because of Le Fresne's own actions and her mother's confession that Le Fresne is able to marry Gurun. His own behaviour is motivated by *demesure*.

only investigated and hinted at before, though, is more resolved in "Laüstic" into a derogatory implication of the effect of the twelfth-century model of marriage on two moral people.

It is not the sacrament of marriage, however, with which Marie takes issue. The idea of one devoting oneself by means of *fine amur* to another person in the name of God would, in fact, seem appealing to Marie. It is the twelfth-century conventions surrounding marriage against which she sets her argument. Furthermore, the love triangle model cannot remain in limbo, stagnant because the characters are all admirable people caught in an irresolvable situation. The husband, therefore, must fulfill the role of the jealous, vengeful partner who believes his wife's position to be subordinate to his own. He becomes the head of the marriage, and the wife becomes a victim of a brutal hierarchy. In this way, the husband is victimized by the twelfth-century model of marriage, just as his wife is. Without an unworthy character in the triangle love model, the characters all continue to elicit sympathy from the audience, and there is no available solution to the problem of two individuals in love with a third. The husband, therefore, must submit to violence in order to break up the problematic love triangle. In the instance of "Equitan," the *lai* in which Equitan and his lover plot to kill the woman's husband, the dilemma does not arise because Equitan and the woman are immoral characters from the start, capable of setting a trap for a worthy man. Marie similarly avoids addressing the irrevocability of the triangle love model in "Chevrefoil" by not introducing one of the characters to the audience. In "Laüstic," however, she cannot neglect to focus on the insolvability of the love triangle, yet her solution leaves the audience with questions regarding the nature of the husband, who seems so admirable at the beginning of the *lai*. Marie does attempt to solve the love triangle in a different way in "Eliduc," and this solution is analyzed in the following chapter.

Tudor argues for the Christian symbolism of the nightingale's rich tomb in "Laüstic": "The motif of the blood sacrifice and the strong (pseudo-) christian *merveilleux* element in the (holy) relic-of-love symbol are both unmistakably religious" (2). Blood sacrifice is found repeatedly in the Old Testament, and is performed as a rite in conjunction with holy events.[59] Tudor acknowledges that there were many false relics traded in the Middle Ages, yet he reminds his audience that "the absolute belief of the pious in reliquaries must not be underestimated" (2). The outer appearance of the nightingale's tomb, "The valuable, bejewelled reliquary made out of precious metals[,] was one of medieval Europe's most potent symbols of faith, and Marie is not slow to exploit its allegorical possibilities" (2). Marie does not offer her own qualification of the lovers' relationship, whether or not the couple achieves the desired state *fine amur*. Examination of the nightingale's tomb reveals two possible interpretations of the relationship: "On one level, the nightingale's rich tomb ... might represent the beauty and eternal nature of the couple's love. But it could also symbolize the opposite: inside a worldly vessel is entombed a rotting corpse which no amount of exterior value ... can hide" (Tudor 2). Tudor elaborates on this observation by stating, "the knight's locket has no other value than the price of its jewels and gold; it is but a sad trinket which denotes a fateful lack of profundity" (2). Tudor concludes his argument by noting that the nightingale's tomb, "whose value is material, somehow represent[s] a devalued love which has become a spiritually worthless memory" (2-3). The only moment in which song and writing come together is this image of the tomb, a blatant symbol of death. This juxtaposition implies that the *mesure* required to maintain *fine amur* is impossible, as is also implied in "Equitan," where Marie states, "Whoever indulges in love without sense or

[59] "Then you shall kill the bull before the LORD, *by* the door of the tabernacle of meeting. / You shall take *some* of the blood of the bull and put *it* on the horns of the altar with your finger, and pour all the blood beside the base of the altar" (Exodus 29:11-2). "He shall kill the bull before the LORD; and the priests, Aaron's sons, shall bring the blood and sprinkle the blood all around on the altar that *is by* the door of the tabernacle of meeting" (Leviticus 1:5).

moderation / recklessly endangers his life; / such is the nature of love / that no one involved with it can keep his head" (17-20). If "no one involved with [love] can keep his head," how is one supposed to apply sense and moderation to its practice? Burgess asks, "Are we being told that moderation in love is both essential and impossible? ... the lover finds himself in a paradoxical world, aware of the importance of moderation, but ensnared by a force to which moderation is a stranger" (*The* Lais *of Marie de France: Text and Context* 37). Where can the lady of "Laüstic" turn, if both the love in her marriage and the love in her extramarital affair have failed her and *fine amur* is perhaps forever out of reach? If the nightingale's tomb is symbolic of a false relic, it follows that the lady could adopt a true relic, and turn her attentions towards an incorruptible love. Such a relationship is not to be found in the earthly realm, yet can be shared with a divine being. An English courtier's relationship with the Christian God in the twelfth century is inarguably a hierarchical one, yet this is the proverbial exception to prove Marie's rule of *mesure*. An individual's relationship with God is hierarchical and non-negotiable because of God's divinity. He is the ultimate authority.[60] He can fulfill the role of the dictating subjugator while retaining admiration from an audience, whereas the husband in "Laüstic" loses audience sympathy when he tries the same in his marriage.

In "Milun," marriage is portrayed chiefly as an obstacle to *fine amur*. The love affair between Milun and his mistress takes place for longer than two decades before the lovers are united the way the audience expects them to be, yet they do not endure punishment for having a romantic relationship out of wedlock. The audience sympathizes with the main characters, and it is clear that Marie takes up their cause as well, even neglecting to pass moral judgement on Milun's son when the boy decides he will "kill [his mother's] husband" (501) in order to free her

[60] "And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of many thunderings, saying, 'Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns!" (Revelation 19:6).

from the bonds of matrimony restraining her from joining her lover. Perhaps the most noteworthy detail of all in this *lai* in the defense of this argument is that, although Milun's son says he will "see [Milun] married" (502) to his long-term lover, there is nothing said of a marriage taking place between them. Marie relates, "they lived happily ever after" (532), but matrimony is not mentioned, even if the audience presumes it takes place. Marie proves her accomplishment as a poet, neatly organizing plot sequences and personalities of her characters so as not to create any discrepancies. Though marriage is never mentioned, the audience does not believe that Milun and his lover are living together out of wedlock either. In a fine example of rhetorical ambiguity, Marie manages to retain the *mesure* and integrity of Milun and his lover while also refraining from locking them together in a hierarchical model of marriage.

In "Milun," there is no superiority of the man over the woman. The *mesure* maintained between Milun and the lady results in a relationship of equals instead of a hierarchical version of an erotic relationship. At the beginning of "Milun," while the relationship is being established, it is the woman who pursues the man before he professes his love for her. The woman has

> heard of Milun,
>
> and began to love him.
>
> She sent a messenger to him,
>
> to say that, if it pleased him, she would love him.
>
> Milun was happy with the news,
>
> and thanked the girl;
>
> he willingly granted her his love,
>
> and said he would never leave her (25-32)

Though the woman is markedly active in the romantic relationship, Milun reacts appropriately as well, granting "her his love" (31). Orality, as well as textuality, is at work at the beginning of this text. The conversation between Milun and the messenger who delivers the first message of love from the woman culminates in Milun deciding to give his "gold ring" (39) to the messenger so that he may give it to the lady. This is the same ring that identifies Milun's son later in the text, and its juxtaposition with the first instance of oral communication reveals that multiple methods of communication are important to Marie. In "The Poetics of Androgyny in the *Lais* of Marie de France," Rupert T. Pickens notes that at the beginning of the *lai* "it is the woman who plays the more active role as inventor of text and promoter of its transmission; she engages herself as much as Milun in commitment to the enterprise" (215). The woman is the creative figure of the opening of the story, as Marie is exploring "the powers of female-generated textuality" (Pickens 215). In this portrayal of *fine amur*, the woman is a creator, a reflection of Marie herself as the creator of the *Lais*. The capacity to create a text is a powerful ability, considered even more powerful in the twelfth century, when literacy was limited to certain members of the nobility and those employed by the church. A twelfth-century audience would recognize this power, and deem the lady to be a well-educated woman yet also a strong character, possessing the capability to achieve her desires while continuing to practice the valuable attribute of *mesure*. Marie's creation of such a self-sufficient woman in "Milun" contributes to the collective of literary female characters who paved the way for the strong-willed female frame of mind adopted by those spurning on the feminist movement, which occurred centuries after her time. Later in the *lai* "it is Milun who initiates communication with his lady by introducing the stratagem of the mediatory swan" (Pickens 215). Marie, therefore, ensures that both characters involved in the romantic relationship possess both the ability to create—the letters and oral messages written to

one another—and the virtue of *mesure*, which is responsible for the discretion both lovers employ to conceal their affair, rendering it a quintessential example of *fine amur*.

As much as the relationship in "Milun" fits the criteria necessary to fulfill the idea of *fine amur*, an examination of the individual characters reveals a mutual dependence so strong as to eclipse the value the characters have as separate people. Milun and the woman both contribute to the creative aspects of the story, both participating in "textual composition, transmission, reception, and retransmission" (Pickens 217). The woman is responsible for the majority of the creative energy at the beginning of the *lai*, yet Milun's creative ability pervades the second half of the story, a more masculine-dominated portion of the *lai* than the beginning. It is true "that it is indeed Milun who engenders the *lai* bearing his name, but it is his lady who gives birth to it" (Pickens 217). Because it is a combination of efforts that results in the creativity of this romantic couple, they become inseparable when considering how the *fine amur* is accomplished. This reading of Milun and his lady can be taken even farther: "Marie focuses on the couple rather than on its individual members as the locus of fruitful discourse" (Pickens 217) because the two characters are indistinguishable. There is never conflict between Milun and the woman; they are in perfect harmony. Marie might have been satisfied with her exploration of *fine amur* by the end of "Chevrefoil," which contains the only instance of *fine amur* which occurs after this *lai* until the end of the collection. She is determined, however, to investigate the elements of *fine amur* when it arises among more complex, realistic characters caught in a less straightforward situation. This determination gives rise to the *lai*, "Eliduc," which is examined in the following chapter.

The identification of Milun and the woman as indistinguishable entities when considered as two parts of an example of *fine amur* is not to say that these characters are any less admirable,

though they are perhaps less accessible as realistic human portraits. With them, Marie demonstrates how well two people can fit together when practising *mesure* in their treatment of each other. Pickens notes that Marie uses the same word, *assembler*, when describing both Milun and the woman coming together—"lur fiz amdous les assembla" (527)—and her own act of the compiling of the *matière*, which results in the *Lais*: "m'entremis des lais assembler, / par rime faire e reconter" ("Prologue" 47-48). The connection of these two descriptions by means of the word *assembler* means that "The couple-made-one, who individually resemble Marie as generators of fruitful discourse, also recall in their oneness her artistically arranged collection of tales" (Pickens 218). As a unit, Milun and the lady are a reflection of the poet Marie, all three applying their own degree of *mesure* to their respective acts of creation.

Marie offers her audience a new definition of marriage, one that places the two elements—whether they be two lovers or two disparate traditions commonly viewed as having a linear relationship rather than a co-dependent one—on the same plane rather than placing one in a higher position than the other. It is difficult to create poetry that can be both read and performed to evoke a sense of harmony and equilibrium, yet Marie undertakes the feat and communicates by means of this poetry the idea that a position supported by *mesure* is an ethical achievement to which one should aspire. It is much more difficult to understand and, therefore, to maintain a balanced relationship than a hierarchical one because, although the two elements of the relationship are inevitably different, they must be considered equal in quality. By working towards a multi-faceted manifestation of *mesure*, Marie successfully conveys to her audience the importance of this quality by means of all aspects of the *Lais*.

Chapter 4 – *L'aventure pruz*: "Eliduc"

Throughout the course of the twelve *lais*, Marie investigates many different romantic relationships, culminating in the ultimate example of *fine amur* in "Chevrefoil" between two participants of a love triangle. Tristan and the queen, however, are doomed "to die the same day" (10). The audience knows their love is limited by the fate to which they must succumb, and King Mark does not even appear in the *lai*, whose plot is no more than a few happy moments suspended in time alongside the inherently tragic story. Preceding "Chevrefoil," there are the three characters of "Laüstic" who are also participants in a love triangle. These characters, though, do not find a solution to the dilemma of the love triangle. They becomes victims of the hierarchy unavoidably present in the twelfth-century model of marriage. There is another love triangle, however, which Marie shares with her audience in the *lai* positioned last in Harley 978, in which the characters are not limited by a pre-destined mortal fate or a jealous revenge-seeking spouse. Marie explores a lesser known romantic relationship in "Eliduc," the end of which is not necessarily already known by the audience, as in the case of "Chevrefoil." "Eliduc" is the longest of Marie's *lais*, and contains the most complex character interactions.

The focus of the narrative is on the romantic relationships, yet there are other relationships investigated in this story, such as those between lord and vassal, between comrades in war, and between noble and courteous women in love with the same man. In many ways, "Eliduc" is a typical medieval romance, containing marvels and supernatural plot devices, such as the weasel finding the red flower, which he puts "inside his companion's mouth" (1051) to revive her from a death-like state. The relationships in this lai, however, are the most realistically portrayed in Marie's entire body of work. In the conclusions the *lai* draws the audience finds Marie's views on the practice of twelfth-century marriage. Eliduc and Guilliadun, despite finally

achieving the status of *fine amur* in their relationship, do not live out their lives in matrimony. The marriage dissolves with no clear explanation. It is in the *lai* that contains the most realistic depictions of human nature and interactions that Marie reveals the complexity of the relationships she observes in her world.

"Eliduc" is not among the most studied of Marie's collection. Despite containing three main characters who participate in complex interactions, which lead to intricate relationships, "Eliduc"—the longest of Marie's *lais*, at 1184 lines—has never been as popular in the academic world as "Chevrefoil" or "Laüstic." Whether due to the length, the complicated relationships between characters unfamiliar to an audience, or some other factor, "Eliduc" has not garnered as much scholarly attention as many of the other *lais* have. It begins with a description of the relationship between Eliduc and Guildeluec, which seems to be a good one, and there is no evidence of a *malmariée* situation, as there is in "Milun." Despite their happy circumstances, Eliduc is tempted to be unfaithful to Guildeluec when,

> because of a war,
>
> he went to seek service elsewhere.
>
> There, he fell in love with a girl,
>
> the daughter of a king and a queen.
>
> Guilliadun was her name" (13-17)

Eliduc neglects to tell Guilliadun that he is already married. He returns to Guildeluec without participating in a physical relationship with Guilliadun, yet he "exchanged gold rings" (701) with her. Not long after he returns to Brittany, however, he leaves his wife again to seek Guilliadun, and tries to return to Brittany with her. The lovers are able to leave Guilliadun's father's castle undetected and to board a ship headed for Brittany, yet "when they were about to arrive, / a

storm broke out at sea" (815-6).[61] One of the sailors suggests throwing Guilliadun into the sea as penance for Eliduc's "defiance of God and the law / of right and of faith" (837-8) by attempting to return home with a second wife. Guilliadun overhears the sailor's betrayal of his lord's secret, and succumbs to the "distress she felt ... from what she'd heard / of her lover having a wife / other than herself in his country. / She fell faint on her face" (849-53). Eliduc cannot revive Guilliadun. Believing her dead, he leaves her in the chapel of "a holy hermit" (891). He visits her often, and "It seemed a great wonder to him / that she was still white and red; / she never lost her color" (971-3). On one of his visits, Guildeluec "had him watched / by one of her valets" (980-1), and discovers her husband's secret. Guildeluec visits the chapel, and is moved by the girl's beauty. "She began to weep / and to mourn for the girl" (1029-30), when she notices a weasel approaching the altar. Her valet kills the weasel "with a stick" (1036), yet the weasel is saved by her mate, who feeds her a certain red flower to revive her. Guildeluec successfully revives Guilliadun with the flower, and withdraws to a nunnery, leaving Eliduc and Guilliadun free to marry. Eliduc and Guilliadun "lived together many days; / there was perfect love between them" (1149-50), yet, in the end, Eliduc retires to a monastery and Guilliadun joins Guildeluec as a nun. Marie concludes the *lai* with the conviction that all three characters "took great pains / to love God in good faith / and they made a very good end" (1177-9).

Human interactions in this *lai* are the most detailed and complicated of Marie's collection. After Eliduc meets Guilliadun for the first time,

> He was gloomy and worried,
>
> concerned about the lovely girl ...

---

[61] This scene in "Eliduc" is reminiscent of the Pearl manuscript poem "Patience," in which Jonah is cast into the sea by sailors during a divinely ordained storm because he has been disobedient in ignoring God's command to "Nym þe way to Nynyue wythouten oþer speche, / And in þat ceté My sa□es soghe alle aboute" (66-7). Marie and the Pearl poet make use of the same *matière*, the story of Jonah in which God commands him to preach at Nineveh, "But Jonah arose to flee ... from the presence of the LORD" (Jonah 1:3).

because she had summoned him so sweetly,

because she had sighed.

He thought it unfair

that he'd been so long in the country

and had not seen her often.

But when he said that, he was sorry;

for he remembered his wife

and how he had assured her

that he'd be faithful to her,

that he'd conduct himself loyally. (314-326)

There is no joy in Eliduc, despite the immediate affection he feels for Guilliadun. He recalls his wife, his marriage vows, and his pledges of fidelity, and descends into a depression concerning the predicament in which he finds himself. Likewise, instead of unthinkingly throwing herself into an erotic relationship with Eliduc, Guilliadun suffers following their first meeting, after which "All night she was awake, / she couldn't rest or sleep" (331-32) and feels she has "gotten myself into a sorry mess" (338). Although the convention of sudden and powerful love manifesting itself as suffering[62] or as a physical symptom[63] is common in medieval texts, Guilliadun's plight is described in more detail in subsequent lines. Marie reveals Guilliadun's annoyance at her own perceived submission to a man, her hesitation to fix her affection on a man so quickly, her doubt of the qualification of the relationship as *fine amur*—she even employs the contrasting term to *fine amur* when she describes her affection for Eliduc: "Folement ai mise

[62] Andreas Capellanus says, "Love is a certain inborn suffering ... That love is suffering is easy to see, for before the love becomes equally balanced on both sides there is no torment greater" (28).

[63] In Chrétien de Troyes' "The Knight with the Lion," "This wound lasts longer than one made by lance or sword, for a sword cut is soon healed and made whole when a physician tends it. But the wound of Love worsens the nearer its physician" (273).

m'entente" (392)[64]—and an unprecedented concern of Guilliadun's that she does not know this man well enough to love him:

> Oh, how my heart was assaulted
>
> by a man from a strange land.
>
> I don't even know if he is nobly born,
>
> he left so quickly.
>
> I shall remain in grief.
>
> I've fixed my desires foolishly.
>
> I never spoke to him before yesterday
>
> and now I'm asking for his love.
>
> I think he will blame me (387-95)

The complexity of a couple's transition from strangers, to acquaintances, to companions, to lovers is detailed in "Eliduc" as it is nowhere else in Marie's *Lais*. These details render the relationship and the individual characters more memorable to an audience as well as convincing an audience of the story's credibility. Guilliadun admits that her love seems foolish because she "never spoke to him before yesterday / and now I'm asking for his love." Nowhere else in the *Lais* does a character doubt his or her feelings because the acquaintance has been so short-lived. This realistic moment reveals the sophisticated intricacy which Marie includes in the personalities of the characters in this *lai*. Medieval texts do not conform to any modern definition of realism, and the application of a realist reading to any medieval text is imprecise. Realistic moments, however, stand out in "Eliduc." I employ the word "realistic" without intending any

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[64] Andreas Capellanus reveals in the second book of *The Art of Courtly Love* that "Love decreases ... if the woman finds that her lover is foolish and indiscreet, or if he seems to go beyond reasonable bounds in his demands for love, or if she sees that he has no regard for her modesty and will not forgive her bashfulness" (155). This is the definition of *fol'amors*, the term complementary to *fine amur*.

modern connotations which are now implied with the literary term "realism." The character complexities and the involvedness of the plot of "Eliduc," which render the *lai* longer than any other, imply that, with this *lai*, Marie is presenting her audience with a scenario which more closely resembles her own world and the noble people of the twelfth century whom she would have been observing.

"Eliduc" is "a very old Breton *lai*" (3). It is an established story whose age lends it authority and credence. Eliduc is introduced as "brave and courtly, bold and proud" (6), and in the superlative tradition of the protagonist of medieval texts, there is "no man in the country ... more valiant" (8). The audience instantly identifies Eliduc as the hero of the story, and he is deemed a good man. Equally good in character is his wife, who is "noble and wise, / of high birth, of good family" (9-10). When the *lai* begins, the two have already "lived together a long time / and loved each other loyally" (11-12). The audience is presented with an established relationship, which is full of affection, yet Marie introduces the conflict of the *lai* at its beginning with the description of Eliduc falling "in love with a [different] girl, / the daughter of a king and a queen" (15-6). Unlike any other *lai* in the collection, "Eliduc" has three named main characters, two of whom are women. Eliduc's wife, Guildeluec, and his later lover, Guilliadun,[65] supply Marie's preferred title for the *lai*: "At first the *lai* was called *Eliduc*, / but now the name has been changed, / for it happened to the women" (23-25). By including this alternative title, Marie is shifting the focus of the story from Eliduc to the women, even though the *lai* remains titled "Eliduc" in publications of the twelve *lais*.[66] Marie is restoring an equilibrium by re-titling

[65] At line 22, Eliduc's young lover's name is spelled "Gualadun" without explanation. Since there was no standardized spelling during the thirteenth century, it is probable that the scribe did not mean the two different spellings to denote any literary significance.

[66] In Harley 978 the *lai* is headed with the title "Eliduc" because the scribe either copied it from another manuscript with the older title or decided to retain the older title, possibly in the interest of linking it to a story with which the audience might already be familiar.

the *lai*, keen on drawing the focus of the audience to the women. She is not, however, highlighting the women more than the man, as she also states that the *lai* "was called *Eliduc*," which calls the audience's attention to Eliduc as a central character as well as Guildeluec and Guilliadun.

An audience knows a named character better than an unnamed character because the identity tied to the name renders that character an individual rather than any noble lady or any knight among many other noble ladies and knights.[67] The act of naming provides an individual with more than an opportunity to distinguish herself or himself from others; it also lends the individual a sense of self-identity and self-worth. After the creation of Earth, God delegates the task of naming all the new animals to his first creature, Adam: "Out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought *them* to Adam to see what he would call them. And whatever Adam called each living creature, that *was* its name" ("Genesis" 2:19). Naming God's creations is Adam's first assignment, given to him directly by God, and the precedence that the act of naming takes over all else reveals its importance.[68] Many of the main female characters in Marie's *Lais* are unnamed ladies of noble birth, yet there are four who are named: Le Fresne, Codre, Guildeluec, and Guilliadun.[69] Unlike the rest of the *Lais*, both "Guigemar" and "Le Fresne" contain secondary and even tertiary named characters.[70] Too many named characters, including those who make only a brief appearance in the introduction of the *lai*, become confusing for an audience, especially a listening audience. In other *lais*, Marie names only the central characters, emphasizing their importance compared to the unnamed

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[67] Occasionally, Marie includes the name of a villain in her *Lais*, such as Meriadoc in "Guigemar" or Muldumarec in "Yonec." These villains are also more memorable to an audience because they are named.
[68] Marie, a well-read scholar, would be familiar with the significance of the act of naming in this passage from "Genesis."
[69] The queen in "Chevrefoil" is understood to be Isolde, yet she is never named as such.
[70] Guigemar's father's "name was Oridial" (31) and his sister's "name was Noguent" (36). Le Fresne's lover's name is mentioned once: "they called him Gurun" (246).

characters. Marie's conviction that "Eliduc" ought to be renamed to "*Guildeluec and Gualadun* ... for it happened to the women" (22, 25) shows that she puts thought and effort into the naming of her *lais*, an act as important as the naming of characters.

When Eliduc leaves his country and his wife, "he assured Guildeluec / that he would be faithful to her" (83-84), and the fact that he commends her "to his men, / to guard her loyally, / and to all his friends as well" (72-74) shows that he cares for her. Eliduc is not an irresponsible man who forgets his wife and seeks out a new woman as soon as he leaves his country. He is caught up in a set of circumstances which brings about the extra-marital affair he has with Guilliadun. Unlike the husband in "Laüstic," who is driven to fulfill the role of the tyrannical lord, Eliduc chooses to take on the role of the unfaithful husband. When Guilliadun

> asked Eliduc, begged and summoned him
> to come visit her,
> to speak with her and become acquainted ...
> Eliduc answered that he would go,
> that he would *willingly* make her acquaintance. (276-82, emphasis mine)

Eliduc's behaviour is not unexpected or shocking to the audience as is that of the husband in "Laüstic." The audience witnesses Eliduc being confronted with the choice to be unfaithful to his wife, and though he remains sexually faithful to her during his first visit to the kingdom of Guilliadun's father,[71] "he couldn't keep himself / from loving the girl, / Guilliadun" (468-70). Eliduc is not a character who loses the audience's sympathy because of his choices concerning

[71] Although Eliduc and Guilliadun do not begin a sexual relationship at this point in the narrative, Guilliadun gives Eliduc "a gold ring / and ... [her] belt" (379-80), symbols of wedlock and the act of sex respectively. Eliduc and Guilliadun also make "pledges to each other" (537), a phrase which calls to mind the act of taking a wedding vow. Since Guilliadun does not know about Guildeluec, she is free from the sin of *choosing* to commit bigamy (though she is guilty of inadvertently committing the act). Eliduc, however, is aware of the fact that he is already married, yet he still participates in these acts which represent a matrimonial bond between him and a second woman.

infidelity in marriage. He remains the hero of the *lai* despite his sins because the love he has for Guilliadun does have the potential to be *fine amur*. The difference between Eliduc and the husband in "Laüstic" is that the husband has no control over the violence he exhibits towards his wife—he *must* take up the position of the cruel, jealous husband—and Eliduc possesses the power to choose his own actions. This is further evidence of the text realistically reflecting human nature, as people are all endowed with the freedom to choose their own actions. A moment which reveals Eliduc's complete understanding of the illegitimacy of his connection to Guilliadun while he is still married to Guildeluec is his inner monologue when he is despairing of leaving Exeter: "I am forced of necessity to go. / If I were to marry my love, / Christianity would not allow it. / This is bad in every way" (600-03). Eliduc's admission of the Christian doctrine's prohibition of his marrying Guilliadun disqualifies any ignorance on his part in reference to his bigamist actions. Though he enjoys exercising free will, Eliduc is also burdened with the responsibility of dealing with the consequences of his actions. He chooses to partake in the immoderate behaviour that leads to the love affair between him and Guilliadun, which means he must make amends for this sin. In "The Implications of Love and Sacrifice in *Fresne* and *Eliduc*," Deborah Nelson[72] describes "Eliduc" as a *lai* "in which redemption occurs" (153), indicating that there has been some moral lapse in judgment and behaviour. Though Eliduc endures much suffering for the *demesure* in which he indulges, he does manage to retain the admiration of the audience in the end.

When Eliduc first arrives in Guilliadun's country, he is intent on finding a lord to whom he can offer his service. He comes upon

[72] Nelson's argument in this article is that "Eliduc" and "Le Fresne" are "twin *lais* based on the same theme — the temptation, fall and redemption of man, the theme most commonly found as the basis of medieval drama" (155). Although Nelson's claim that Eliduc requires redemption may raise scepticism, Eliduc's behaviour concerning his simultaneous romantic relationships with Guilliadun and Guildeluec is certainly *desmesurable*.

a very powerful man,

old and ancient.

He had no male heir of his own flesh,

but a daughter of marriageable age.

Because he did not want to give her

to his peer, the latter made war on him,

laying waste his whole land.

He had cut him off inside a castle (92-99)

Eliduc is not acquainted with either of these lords, yet "He wanted to remain in that country" (106). The manner by which he decides which side of the war to join reveals his devotion to the quality of *mesure* in the martial aspect of his life: "To the king who was most pressed / and injured and hurt, / he'd give all the help within his power / and remain in that king's service." (107-10). He assesses which side of the war requires more help, and joins that side because his quest for balance, for the dissemination of *mesure* is most important for him. After the war is done and the enemy of Guilliadun's father is defeated, Eliduc demonstrates further *mesure* when

he divided the booty among the others;

for his own use he kept only three horses,

which were allotted to him;

he divided and gave everything,

his own share as well,

to the prisoners and the men. (259-64)

Eliduc's sense of moderation and his generosity towards the men who fight for him reveal his morality and the *mesure* he practises. He acknowledges that the soldiers who follow him deserve

reward for their devotion and trust, and gives them munificent portions of the war spoils, including the division that is rightfully his. Eliduc's application of *mesure* to his military endeavours renders him an admirable soldier, yet it is Eliduc the lover in whom the audience is most interested.

Guilliadun hears of Eliduc's bravery and generosity, and "was quite astonished / that he had not come" (279-80) to make her acquaintance. For "a handsome knight" (272) with no romantic attachment, avoiding a young princess of marriageable age would be astonishing, yet Eliduc is a married man. It is not strange for a man who already has a wife to neglect meeting with a young woman like Guilliadun. When "she asked Eliduc, begged and summoned him / to come visit her, / to speak with her and become acquainted" (276-78), however, Eliduc does not share with her the information that he is already married. Instead, he "answered that he would go" (281) meet with her, the actions of a man available to offer his love to another woman. There is a moment when the audience perceives Eliduc's hesitation and caution in meeting with Guilliadun: "When he was about to enter the chamber, / he sent the chamberlain ahead. / Eliduc delayed somewhat, / until the other returned" (286-89). Eliduc's uncertainty belies the doubt he harbours concerning these actions because he is already tied to Guildeluec, yet he ignores these feelings, enters Guilliadun's chamber, does not tell her that he is already married, and participates in a lengthy conversation during which "Love sent [Guilliadun] a message, / commanding her to love him" (304-05). As a lover, Eliduc does not employ the same *mesure* which he has no problem accessing as a warrior. He indulges in two romantic relationships simultaneously. This act, for which an audience would denounce any Christian man as a bigamist, places Eliduc in a position which reveals the immoderation to which he succumbs when it comes to the romantic aspect of his life.

Marie reveals Eliduc's *demesure* in respect to his romantic interests in the poetics of "Eliduc," just as she mirrors similar themes in the poetics of "Laüstic," "Chevrefoil," and other *lais*. When Eliduc leaves Guilliadun after their first meeting,

> Mult par se tient a entrepris
> que tant a esté el païs
> que ne l'a veüe sovent.
> Quant ceo ot dit, si se repent:
> de sa femme li remembra (319-23)

While he is mourning the fact that he has not met with Guilliadun sooner, each line begins with a word starting with the letters "q" and "u." The next line begins with the same letters, and the consonance is recognizable to both a listening and a reading audience. This example of alliteration emanates both an aural and a visual consistency, which are interrupted when Guildeluec is mentioned. Line 323 begins with the word "de." The "qu" sound—represented by "k"—is a voiceless stop pronounced in the velar area of the mouth, whereas the consonant "d" is a voiced stop articulated in the alveo-dental region.[73] This introduction of the "d" sound brusquely breaks up the repetition of the "qu" sound. By disrupting the regular sound which appears at the beginning of the lines in which Eliduc complains that he has not spent more time with Guilliadun, Marie reveals the *demesure* present in these thoughts, driving the point home by entwining the *demesure* into the language of the *lai*, and interrupting it abruptly to draw attention to the preceding imbalance. In this way, Eliduc's *demesure* is disclosed, and orality and textuality are once again revealed to be covalently related in Marie's poetics.

Eliduc and Guilliadun both elicit sympathy from the audience, despite their participation in an extra-marital affair in a case which does not fulfill the requirements of a *malmariée*

[73] (see Appendix B).

situation. The reason the audience still considers the lovers to be admirable characters after this initial meeting is that the frustration which both endure reveals that neither went to meet the other with the sole intention of beginning a romantic relationship. The audience observes Guilliadun's inner turmoil as she confesses her actions to her chamberlain:

> this is terrible.
>
> I have gotten myself into a sorry mess.
>
> I love the new soldier,
>
> Eliduc, the good knight.
>
> Last night I had no rest,
>
> I couldn't close my eyes to sleep. (337-42)

Similarly, Eliduc is suffering from "distress / he felt since he'd seen her. / He had no joy or pleasure / except when he thought of her" (458-61). The realistic tone that pervades this situation—the awkwardness Guilliadun feels about developing such strong feelings so quickly and the guilt Eliduc feels about experiencing such passionate emotions for a woman who is not his wife—renders the characters more complex and, therefore, more sympathetic despite the mistakes they might make. These qualities also render Eliduc and Guilliadun memorable characters who are differentiable from unnamed generic characters who appear in other *lais*.

When Guilliadun accepts the fact that she is in love with Eliduc, she orders her chamberlain to "bring [Eliduc] a gold ring / and give him my belt. / You will greet him a thousand times in my name" (379-81). This is the first communication Eliduc receives from Guilliadun following the couple's realization of their amorous feelings for one another, and the excessive number of greetings shows Guilliadun's respect for Eliduc and the fervour of her emotions towards him. This first occasion of romantic communication between Guilliadun and

Eliduc takes the oral form in order to emphasize, once again, the importance of orality and to upset the conventional hierarchy of viewing the oral tradition as a lower form of communication. Marie further demonstrates the effectiveness of oral communication when the chamberlain

> came to Eliduc
>
> and greeted him in secret
>
> with what the girl had sent;
>
> he presented the ring
>
> and gave him the belt.
>
> The knight thanked him.
>
> He put the gold ring on his finger
>
> pulled the belt around him;
>
> the youth said no more,
>
> nor did Eliduc ask anything,
>
> except that he offered him something of his.
>
> But the chamberlain took nothing and departed (403-14)

Without any further clarification required, Eliduc understands what Guilliadun is communicating to him, and reacts with equally efficient communication by offering something in return for Guilliadun's gifts.[74] The chamberlain does return to his mistress with something from Eliduc: "he brought her Eliduc's greeting / and his thanks for the present" (417-18). It is orality with which the chamberlain returns, something which he considers is a sufficient gift in return for Guilliadun's offering. It is important to note that the chamberlain holds the gift of orality and

[74] When the chamberlain returns to his mistress, he tells her that "the king holds [Eliduc] / by an oath until a year from now ... You'll have sufficient time / to show him what you please" (450-54). The chamberlain is displaying caution arising from the quality of *mesure* by not accepting Eliduc's offering to Guilliadun. This is a moment revealing the nature of the character of the chamberlain, who induces both respect and sympathy in an audience recognizing the *mesure* in his personality.

oral communication in higher esteem than a material gift by telling his mistress that Eliduc sends her a greeting before he tells her that Eliduc also thanks her for her present. The chamberlain neglects to inform Guilliadun that Eliduc did offer her a material gift in return because he does not consider materiality to be as worth mentioning as orality. The chamberlain's disregard for the importance of materiality is further underscored when he describes to Guilliadun how Eliduc reacted to her offerings: "The knight is not frivolous; / I find him courtly and wise ... I brought him your greetings / and presented your things" (422-26). In this moment too, orality takes precedence over materiality, as the chamberlain brings Eliduc first Guilliadun's "greetings" and then "presented your things." The mistake these two characters make in indulging in this affair notwithstanding, Marie communicates to the audience that these are two characters who possess some degree of *mesure* and employ the quality when approaching new and delicate issues and circumstances. The temptation to succumb to *demesure* in these circumstances is strong enough to pull in two characters who do exhibit signs of *mesure* in other aspects of their lives.

Although the chamberlain's role in initiating romantic contact between the two lovers is crucial, Guilliadun becomes frustrated with her position as a party receiving oral communication second-hand through a mediator. She declares, "Never, through you or anyone else, / until I speak to him myself, / do I want to ask him for anything" (443-45). Whether or not the chamberlain is deliberately encouraging Guilliadun to approach Eliduc herself by confessing ignorance as to whether or not Eliduc cares romantically for her is difficult to prove,[75] yet his conversation with his mistress does result in her resolve to speak to her beloved directly. It is Eliduc who approaches Guilliadun—a further demonstration of *mesure* and equilibrium, as she sends him the first message—and the action he decides to take is, once again, oral

[75] Guilliadun asks her chamberlain: "' He didn't receive [my gifts] as a love token? / If that is so, I am betrayed.' / He told her, 'By my faith, I don't know [']" (431-33).

communication: "He mounted with no more delay ... At the castle he went to speak to the king: / he would see the girl if he could— / that's the reason he bestirred himself" (478-82). Although the main purpose of Eliduc's visit to the castle is to see and speak to his love, this action also shows his respect for the lord whom he serves, which means that he retains his status as a sympathetic character in the opinion of the audience.

When Eliduc arrives to see both Guilliadun and her father, he finds that

The king had gotten up from dinner
and entered his daughter's chambers.
He began to play chess
with a knight from overseas
who, on the other side of the chess board,
was teaching his daughter. (483-88)

In medieval texts, "Chess is often an allegory of the love game" (Hanning and Ferante 209, n.4). Although the observation of chess as a metaphor for outlining the conditions of a romantic relationship is pertinent to the reading of this moment in the story, the *mesure* required to negotiate a game of chess as an echo of the *mesure* needed in both beginning and maintaining a romantic relationship is also important. Guilliadun is just starting to learn how to play chess, reflecting her inexperience in erotic relationships and her willingness to learn how to negotiate the complexities of *fine amur*. Eliduc, however, does not participate in the chess game. He is commended by the king to Guilliadun, which makes the girl "very happy" (499), yet he and Guilliadun then abandon the game in order to sit "down far from the others" (501). This is a moment during which Eliduc has the opportunity to profit from the *mesure* being displayed by other characters, yet he avoids embracing the quality, instead indulging in deception and

demesure by not admitting to his lord that he is infatuated with Guilliadun and not admitting to Guilliadun that he is already married. Shortly after Eliduc's failure to recognize and accept the requirement of *mesure* in this situation, he becomes "afraid to speak" (504). The power of orality abandons him in the face of being "fired with love" (502), which he has no intention of moderating. Guilliadun, with her rudimentary instruction in the art of practising *mesure* in respect to feelings of love, senses Eliduc's own oral helplessness, as "She didn't dare broach the subject" (503) of the newfound love which is growing between them. This instance of arrested oral communication indicates Eliduc is keeping something from Guilliadun and prevents the lovers' relationship from achieving the status of *fine amur*, despite the strength of the passion they feel for each other.

According to Burgess' *The* Lais *of Marie de France: Text and Context*, *mesure* can mean temperance of behaviour—"moderation"(39)—or free expression and communication, stemming from "'understanding' or 'sensible behaviour'" (39). Eliduc finds he is able "to thank [Guilliadun] / for the present she had sent: / he'd never had anything more precious" (505-07), yet Guilliadun, unhampered by the restriction of hiding a secret, is able to tell him that

> he had taken possession of her being.
> She loved him with such love
> that she wanted to make him her lord;
> and if she could not have him,
> he could be sure of one thing:
> she would never have a living man. (512-17)

Guilliadun's orality is pure and direct. She is not attempting to conceal anything from Eliduc, so her communication is unhindered by guilt and *demesure*. After her confession, however, she

wants "him [to] tell her his desire" (518). Eliduc's response is measured, yet in such a way as to propitiate the lie under which he is labouring:

> "Lady," he said, "I am very grateful to you
> for your love, it gives me great joy.
> Since you hold me in such high esteem,
> I must be happy.
> I shall not forget it.
> I've been retained by the king for one year;
> he has accepted my pledge,
> I shall not leave him under any condition
> until the war is over.
> Then I shall return to my country
> if I can get your leave,
> because I don't want to remain." (519-30)

Since Guilliadun "love[s] and trust[s] [Eliduc] more than anything" (536), she believes that by the time Eliduc leaves her country, they will have found a solution for their situation. Eliduc, however, never promises her that he will take her with him, as he is still bound to Guildeluec by matrimonial ties, which he is attempting to honour in letter, if not in spirit. At the end of this meeting, "They made their pledges to each other" (537). Though these are not official marriage vows, after the confession of love, these "pledges" are symbolic of a promise of love and loyalty made to each other. Juxtaposed with this bigamist act is another instance of frustrated orality, as "they spoke no more that time" (538). Because Eliduc is not moderating his behaviour or being honest with Guilliadun about his romantic status, communication cannot easily flow between the

two lovers, as it does between Tristan and the queen in "Chevrefoil"—"He spoke to her as much as he desired, / she told him whatever she liked" (95-96). Although these characters are also participating in an extra-marital affair, arguably also lacking a *malmariée* situation,[76] they are truthful with each other and practitioners of *mesure* when the occasion demands moderation of passionate emotions.

When a year's time has passed, and Eliduc has been in the service of Guilliadun's father for as long as he has been retained, "the king of Brittany sent to find him ... he was being hard pressed and hurt, / damaged and harmed; / he was losing all his castles / and his land was being laid waste" (551-56). Eliduc finds he does not want to leave Exeter to return to his homeland, yet his king is "summoning and begging him— / in the name of the alliance that bound them / when the king received homage from Eliduc— / to come and help him" (566-69). Eliduc cannot refuse such a summons without forfeiting the honour he possesses in the relationship he has with his original lord. By this time, though the relationship between Eliduc and Guilliadun has not reached the status of *fine amur*, "there was no folly between them, / no frivolity, no shame" (575-76).. They are experiencing a true romantic connection, not a passing instance of *fol'amor*. After considering the difficulty of the predicament in which he finds himself, Eliduc admits, "I have acted very badly" (585), revealing the guilt he feels concerning the abandonment of his wife and the lie he has told to Guilliadun. Instead of attempting to make amends, however, Eliduc decides to "do whatever [Guilliadun] wills, / act as she advises" (607-08). Guilliadun, a character ignorant of her lover's marriage to another woman, cannot make an informed and, therefore, ethically sound decision in this situation. The action Eliduc takes is to "go and speak to the girl"

[76] Different versions of the Tristan and Isolde story portray King Mark differently, sometimes as an unworthy character, other times as more sympathetic. Little information about King Mark is included in "Chevrefoil," and he is not a factor crucial to consideration when analyzing the nature of the relationship between Tristan and the queen. "Chevrefoil" is a *lai* with a personal tone, and the intimate romantic relationship of the story leaves no room for a third character.

(615), an act of oral communication, yet one lacking the element of honesty. When Eliduc visits Guilliadun's father and tells him he must leave Exeter for his homeland, "the king thanked him / and graciously gave him leave. / All the possessions of his household / the king put at his disposal" (641-44). At this moment, Eliduc exhibits *mesure* once again after so long indulging in *demesure*: he "took in moderation" (647) of the king's offerings. Marie uses the word "mesurablement" (647) to describe Eliduc's behaviour in this case to demonstrate that he still possesses the quality of *mesure* in other aspects of his life, even if he has no measure of moderation in his erotic interests. Juxtaposed with this display of *mesure*, however, is Eliduc's resolution to "go and speak most willingly with [the king's] daughter" (650), a reminder of his dishonesty and *demesure* in his relationship with Guilliadun as well as his willing decision to take this action.

The conversation between Guilliadun and Eliduc before he leaves Exeter for Brittany is a dramatic parting between two lovers unsure of when they will see each other again. Eliduc enters Guilliadun's chambers in order "to speak to her" (654), though with no intention of admitting his guilt to his young lover. When Guilliadun sees him approaching, "she called him, / greeted him six thousand times" (655-56), behaviour which implies that she is gifted with the ability to effectively communicate orally and illustrates the strength of the passion she feels. Eliduc tries to tell Guilliadun that he must leave her country, yet "Before he'd told her everything, / taken or asked for her leave, / she fainted in sorrow / and lost all her color" (659-62). With one character reaction, Marie succinctly communicates to her audience both the magnitude of the feelings Guilliadun has for Eliduc and the power of orality, so strong that it can cause a body to lose consciousness. Before Eliduc can even communicate to Guilliadun the details of the situation in which he finds himself, she is overcome by the sorrow of learning "the news of his journey"

(658). Eliduc comforts Guilliadun "until she recovered from her faint" (668), and confesses to her, "You are my life and my death, / in you is all my comfort" (671-72). This spiritual-sounding language proves the strength of the love the two feel for each other, yet it takes more than strength to elevate a relationship to the status of *fine amur*; it takes *mesure* as well. Before Eliduc leaves Guilliadun and her country, "they exchanged gold rings / and kissed each other sweetly" (701-02), symbolizing their devotion to each other and paralleling the actions which occur during a marriage ceremony. This exchange of rings and embraces underscores the wrongness that still pervades the relationship between Guilliadun and an already-married Eliduc.

When Eliduc returns to Brittany and Guildeluec,
he was always preoccupied
because of the love that had seized him.
Nothing that he saw
gave him joy or a happy look,
he would never have joy
until he saw his love. (711-16)

He decides not to tell his wife that he has fallen in love with Guilliadun while exiled from his homeland. He compounds the sins he has already committed by lying once again about the romantic part of his life. Guildeluec misinterprets Eliduc's brooding mood,

and worried about it to herself.
She asked him often
if he'd heard from anyone
that she had done something wrong
while he was out of the country;

she would willingly defend herself

before his people, whenever he desired. (720-26)

Guildeluec has behaved as a loyal wife is expected to behave, and has no qualms about officially defending herself in the presence of witnesses because she has nothing to hide. Her loyalty is so absolute that she does not even consider the option that it is Eliduc who has been unfaithful during their separation. Because this is a long *lai* with multiple named characters, Marie takes care to reiterate the goodness of Guildeluec, "who was very lovely, wise, and worthy" (710), yet has not made an appearance in the story since the beginning. A listening audience especially benefits from this reintroduction of Guildeluec, as one cannot return to the start of a story when it is being told aloud.

When the day Guilliadun chooses for Eliduc's return to Exeter arrives, Eliduc "prepared to travel ... and chose the people he would take. / He took ... one of his chamberlains— / the one who knew the situation, / who had carried his messages" (749-54). From the perspective of plot and character development, it makes perfect sense for Eliduc to include this chamberlain in the number of people who will accompany him back to Guilliadun's country. This servant already knows Eliduc's secret, and has proven himself discreet, loyal, and efficient at facilitating communication between the two lovers. This relationship is an example of the vassal-lord relationship, much like the relationships Eliduc has with his first king and Guilliadun's father. The chamberlain, however, is a more loyal vassal than Eliduc is to the king of Exeter, as he never betrays his lord, and follows his orders without complaint, whereas Eliduc breaks the trust Guilliadun's father places in him by fleeing Exeter for Brittany with Guilliadun without the king's permission. The chamberlain once again fulfills his role as messenger when Eliduc "prepared his chamberlain / and sent him to his love, / to tell her that he had come" (767-69).

The chamberlain's journey through the castle to Guilliadun's chamber and back to Eliduc in the company of the king's daughter is not an easy feat: "He asked and sought / until he got inside her room" (779-80). He searches for the girl himself, yet he also "asked" others for help, using oral communication, one of his greatest strengths, in order to find her. When he does gain entry to Guilliadun's chamber, instead of leaving with her immediately, "All day they stayed there / and planned their journey carefully" (789-90). The journey is executed without incident, yet Guilliadun "was very much afraid that someone would see her" (795), revealing that she is aware that she is betraying her father's trust by leaving with Eliduc without the king's blessing. The chamberlain, on the other hand, retains his honour, demonstrates unswerving loyalty to his lord, and becomes the master of oral communication in the *lai.*

Although there are multiple examples of oral communication in this *lai*, there are not as many instances of textuality as there are in "Chevrefoil," "Laüstic," or "Milun." Communication in "Eliduc" is mainly oral, and there is a distinct lack of representation of the written tradition on the part of Eliduc. He takes care to retain any secrets he is harbouring from other characters, yet he divulges other emotions and thoughts without hesitation in the form of oral communication. In the romantic aspect of his life, Eliduc surrenders to the temptation of *demesure*, and this is reflected in his exclusive devotion to the sphere of orality and his disregard for the realm of textuality. A moment which forces Eliduc to honour his original fidelity to Guildeluec is when the letter arrives from Brittany,

> sending for Eliduc,
>
> summoning and begging him—
>
> in the name of the alliance that bound them
>
> when the king received homage from Eliduc—

to come and help him,

for the king needed him badly. (565-70)

At first, it is unclear if this case of communication is written or oral. When Eliduc tells Guilliadun's father that he must leave, however, "He told and related the adventure to [the king], / showed and read him the letter / his lord had sent, / by which, in his distress, he had summoned Eliduc" (621-24). Eliduc, however, never reads the letter himself. One of the messengers from Brittany relates the message to him, and "Eliduc heard the news" (571). Even in a moment when *mesure* is being thrust onto an unwilling Eliduc, he is presented as an adherent to *demesure* in his devotion to orality and neglect of textuality.

Eliduc's *demesure* may allow him to begin a relationship with Guilliadun while he is still married to Guildeluec, yet it also prevents their love from achieving the quality of *fine amur* in the relationship's inception. Eliduc neglects to exhibit any *mesure* in his relationship with Guilliadun's father, too. The terms of the relationship between lord and vassal dictate that Eliduc is trusted by Guilliadun's father to obey and remain faithful to him in his superior position. As "The peasant proverb says[:] ... the love of a lord is not a fief: / he is wise and clever / who gives loyalty to his lord" ("Eliduc" 61-65). The trust which Guilliadun's father has in Eliduc is betrayed when, on his second visit to Exeter, he leaves the king's home with the king's daughter without the king's knowledge. This behaviour, indicating a lack of *mesure*, leads to the exposure of the relationship between Eliduc and Guilliadun.

A dramatic manifestation of Eliduc's *demesure* occurs when the immoderate romantic relationship between him and Guilliadun is revealed. When

one of the sailors, loudly,

cried: "What are we doing?

Sire, you have inside with you

the one who is causing our deaths.

We'll never reach land.

You already have a faithful wife

but you're bringing another back

in defiance of God and the law

of right and faith.

Let us throw [Guilliadun] into the sea,

so we can get home safely[,]" (830-40)

Eliduc "almost went mad with anger" (842), curses the sailor, "and struck him so hard with an oar / that he knocked him down. / He grabbed his feet and threw him overboard; / the waves carried the body away" (861-64). This utter lack of moderation, this indulgence in *demesure*, results in personal suffering. Guilliadun cannot reconcile herself to the idea that Eliduc is already married, and "fell faint on her face, / all pale and without color. / And she remained in a faint / without recovering or sighing" (853-56). Eliduc witnesses what he believes is Guilliadun dying of shock, and he thinks "he would die of grief" (936). Guilliadun must suffer a supernatural death-like state for her mistakes, including the immoderation in which she consciously indulges by leaving her father's kingdom without his knowledge, yet Eliduc's suffering is more acute. While she sleeps, his "heart is filled with sorrow" (946) and "He wept in anguish" (975). Eliduc's recovery of happiness is filled with more suffering than Guilliadun's because he knowingly commits multiple acts of *demesure*. While Guilliadun commits her most serious sin of bigamy unknowingly, even if she consciously betrays her father, "Eliduc sins consciously and overtly in his adulterous love for the beautiful Guilliadun" (Nelson 154). Guilliadun and

especially Eliduc are themselves responsible for the pain they must endure, and they are separated until the *demesure*, which dictates their actions for the first half of the *lai*, can be resolved.

"Eliduc" contains yet another realistic moment when Eliduc believes Guilliadun has died. He "was very unhappy; / if he could have had his way, he would have died with her" (873-74). In "Les Deus Amanz," the girl dies of a broken heart immediately following her lover's death by exhaustion. The poetic symmetry and the outcome of unchecked *demesure* are more important to Marie than any realistic moment. The use of criticism referring to a lack of realism in a medieval text is anachronistic in any case, yet this moment in "Eliduc" includes an explanation of the protagonist's wish to die with his lover and also his inability to do so. Is Eliduc's incapability to join Guilliadun in death a punishment for his *demesure* in matters of romantic love? Perhaps Marie keeps Eliduc alive because Guilliadun is not dead, and if Eliduc were to die of a broken heart, Guilliadun would then be left uncared for. There are multiple possible interpretations of this moment, yet the story's realistic elements themselves, which are asserted again and again, are more fascinating, as they appear in a medieval text included in a collection with few other examples of moments like these. Much like the many named characters in this *lai*, realistic moments render the story more accessible to an audience. Listeners and readers alike are able to identify with the predicaments of the characters more than they could with unnamed characters succumbing to supernatural deaths. As a result, it is more likely that the audience will learn the same lessons the main characters are learning as well and retain the moral conclusions Marie offers in this *lai*, and her observations concerning romantic relationships reach their zenith here.

Although Eliduc and the husband of "Laüstic" is a logical comparison, as they are the two male figures in each *lai*, the examination of Guildeluec in conjunction with the husband in

"Laüstic" yields a more fruitful analysis because of their similar positions as characters whose spouses are unfaithful. The knight of "Laüstic" is unable to overcome the role of the jealous husband into which he is thrust without choice, yet Guildeluec, who is just as unwittingly thrown into the position of one whose spouse is participating in an extra-marital affair, manages to transcend the audience's expectations for a character in her position. She does not indulge in violence or even insist that Eliduc unwillingly remain faithful to his original marriage vows. She could seek out harsh punishment for her husband, as "The Church condemned adultery, [and] judged it as severely in men as in women" (Duby 17). She demonstrates enormous magnanimity and compassion when "she addressed her lord; / she sought and asked his leave / to depart from him, / she wanted to be a nun, to serve God" (1121-24) so that Eliduc is left free to marry his true love, Guilliadun. The solution to the *demesure* in the relationship between Eliduc and Guilliadun is an act of overwhelming generosity and love performed by Guildeluec. She is the figure responsible for breaking the tendency towards violence in the triangle love model seen in "Laüstic." Guildeluec's actions reveal the selfless nature of the love she has for her husband and for Guilliadun as well. When Guildeluec discovers Guilliadun's seemingly dead body, she, as Eliduc does, assumes that Guilliadun is dead, and states, " ['I shall never have joy again.' / She began to weep / and to mourn for the girl" (1028-30). She finds relief from her grief only when she revives Guilliadun.

Guildeluec, unlike the cuckolded husband in "Laüstic," manages to rise above the role of the betrayed lover into which she is thrust. When she does discover Guilliadun, she does not seek vengeance for Eliduc's infidelity; she does not even condemn Guilliadun for taking her place as Eliduc's true love. She reacts with unconditional compassion and generosity of spirit. It is because she reacts with love that Guildeluec is able to revive Guilliadun and restore her to

Eliduc. Although the husband in "Laüstic" seems unable to overcome the burden of the role into which he is thrown, Guildeluec's compassion in the face of betrayal conveys the idea that everyone is given the power of free will. In this spectacular break in the pattern of the behaviour of a character suffering an unfaithful spouse, the character is a woman. It is because of moments like these that Marie is often looked to as one of the forerunners of feminist writing. Guildeluec achieves what the husband in "Laüstic" cannot; does this imply that Marie believes that the female gender is superior to the male one? There is subtle commentary here in choosing a woman to fill the role of compassionate generosity. Women in England were particularly restricted in their behaviour during the twelfth-century, as "Noblewomen in poet-Conquest Britain appear to have enjoyed [even] less political and economic power than either Anglo-Saxon women or their counterparts in France" (Weiss 7). By having a female character demonstrate the appropriate manner in which to act in these circumstances, women are elevated, rendering them equal to men. It is possible to argue that Marie values women more than men, yet it must be noted that, as a woman, Marie undertook the necessary task of raising the female place on the hierarchy adhered to by twelfth-century European society. She is not elevating women to a position higher than that occupied by men; she is rendering both genders equal in value. To do this, Guildeluec must be promoted farther than a male character in a similar situation, for example, the husband of "Laüstic." If Eliduc had simply abandoned Guildeluec, an audience would lose all sympathy for him and pity Guildeluec as a victim of female subjugation by males. Marie avoids this scenario, however, by managing to find a socially acceptable way by which Guildeluec can dissolve the marriage vows between her and Eliduc. By retiring to a convent, Guildeluec breaks free from the misogynistic restrictions of the twelfth-century model of marriage of her own volition, and the audience retains respect and sympathy for all three

characters. Guildeluec takes matters into her own hands by bringing about the end of her marriage to Eliduc, and the audience admires "The refusal of Guildeluëc ... to be [a] victim of her husband's errors in judgment" (Nelson 154).

The manner by which Guildeluec manages to revive Guilliadun is fantastic and in keeping with the tradition of medieval texts. Although the weasels do not have the power of speech which humans posses, they are able to communicate. When the female weasel is killed by Guildeluec's valet, her mate "prodded her several times with his foot. / When he couldn't get her up, / he gave signs of grieving" (1042-44). These animals also possess a natural wisdom which humans lack. Guildeluec observes the weasel's resurrection of his mate, and discovers the means by which she is able to save Guilliadun. As soon as she awakens, Guilliadun "sighed; / then she spoke and opened her eyes" (1064-65). Although she most likely speaks and opens her eyes at the same time, Marie chooses to position the act of communication before the action providing the most concrete evidence that Guilliadun is indeed revived. The power of orality is given precedence over physical evidence of awakening. Juxtaposed with Guilliadun's awakening is Guildeluec's praise to God for gifting Guilliadun with the power of speech: "When the lady heard her speak / she began to thank God" (1067-68). Orality is an occasion for divine exaltation, and the communication between the two women which follows changes Guilliadun's present opinion of Eliduc and her assessment of her own situation. Guildeluec's command of language and her power to persuade Guilliadun of Eliduc's goodness and his love for her are strong enough to be compared to the chamberlain's own gift for orality. After this moment, the audience is left with two masters of orality, a male character and a female one, emphasizing, once again, the equal nature of the two genders.

Though the physical relationship between Eliduc and Guilliadun does not last, this does not mean that the love between them does not qualify as *fine amur*. Eventually, both find that they wish to devote their lives to the church, yet there remains communication between all three characters. Guildeluec "received [Guilliadun] as her sister / and gave her great honor; / she encouraged her to serve God / and instructed her in her order" (1167-70) and Eliduc "sent messages to them / to find out how they were, / how each was doing" (1174-76). Marie does not specify whether these messages are oral or written. The disparity between orality and textuality does not exist in this moment, where *mesure* is now found in abundance. Because orality and textuality have now been demonstrated as equal modes of communication, it does not matter whether these messages are written letters or sent by means of a mediator, such as the chamberlain. The messages are valued for their content, not for their form. Orality and textuality function equally well to bring important relationships between characters to fruition.

After Eliduc and Guilliadun are married, "They lived together many days; / there was perfect love between them" (1149-50). The relationship between them has reached the status of *fine amur*. Why, then, does the relationship between Eliduc and Guilliadun not last? The relationship cannot endure in part because it begins in such *demesure*. In the end, even the relationship between two characters who feel such strong *fine amur* must fall apart. The *mesure* required to hold together the relationship proves too difficult to maintain. After Guilliadun enters the nunnery with Guildeluec, Eliduc "sent messages to them / to find out how they were, / how each was doing" (1174-6). It follows that he would be checking on Guildeluec's situation prior to this. The shadow of Guildeluec, therefore, is still present in the relationship between the two lovers. *Mesure* cannot be upheld among three characters in the situation of *fine amur*, as its construction appealing to the utmost intimacy is intended for only two people. More importantly

than the *demesure* in which the relationship starts, Marie cannot reconcile a set of circumstances which provides for two married characters participating non-hierarchically in *fine amur* with the state of twelfth-century marriage in which there is no equality between husband and wife. Most importantly of all, *mesure* in *fine amur* is so difficult to maintain, that any instance of *fine amur* will result in some instance of *demesure*, as Marie warns at the beginning of "Equitan." Guilliadun and Eliduc, therefore, "turned to God" (1152). Eliduc "gave and rendered himself up / to serve almighty God" (1163-64) and Guilliadun joins Eliduc's "first wife" (1165) in the convent. The love between Eliduc and Guilliadun does not dissipate, though. Affection and compassion abound among all three characters, proven by the women's attitudes towards each other and Eliduc's continued communication with both of them. Despite the fact that the marriage must end, *fine amur* is still triumphant at the end of the *lai*, and the audience is left with sympathy intact for all characters and a sense of satisfaction concerning the perceived needs of each character. The end of "Eliduc" is the only practical solution to a *lai* containing more complexly human moments than many medieval texts.[77]

[77] The story of Guildeluec, Guilliadun, and Eliduc is paralleled in the later story of King Arthur, Lancelot, and Guinevere, popularized by Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*. In Malory's work too, the lovers experiencing *fine amur*, Lancelot and Guinevere, must suffer the dissolution of their relationship.

Conclusion

The conventional view of the relationship between orality and textuality adheres to a linear developmental model, which is seen as a more sophisticated means of communication. The perspective which endorses the unilateral shift from the oral tradition to the written tradition troubles Marie de France because it does not make allowance for turning back to the oral tradition to complement and strengthen the art of writing texts. In Marie's *Lais*, the relationship between orality and textuality is shown to be mutually dependent and reciprocal. There is no absolute development from one tradition to the other which inhibits harmonious movement between the two in an effort to render the work a product of both the oral and written spheres. The *Lais* are at once poems of an oral and a written nature, created to be read and performed. Music is often the catalyst in the relationship between orality and textuality, rendering the fluidity between the two traditions smooth, with no jarring disruption. The versatility of the form the *Lais* can take means that a variety of audiences can absorb the view of the world Marie puts forth in her work. An individual can solitarily read the *Lais*, yet can also listen to musical renditions of the poems. Likewise, a group audience can participate in a reading or in a performance of the *Lais*. Combinations of reading and performance are also possible, and are perhaps most common in classrooms where the works are being taught and studied. Both as an individual and as a part of a group, an audience member can appreciate the twelfth-century poetry set down by a woman intent on conveying these stories in as many ways possible, "in order to preserve / [the] adventures" ("Prologue" 37-38).

The two-way movement between two components of a relationship is a model Marie applies to more than the connection between orality and textuality. Marie presents the romantic relationship in her *Lais* as a communion between two individuals who consider each other and

are considered by others as equal in value. Marie challenges the medieval perspective that women are subject to the rule of men by insisting through the examples in her work that two individuals in an erotic relationship are partners, and neither is esteemed more than the other. The happiest couples in the *Lais* are those who treat each other as equals in their association, such as Milun and his lady and the queen and Tristan ("Chevrefoil"). When a hierarchy arises in the relationship between characters in the *Lais*, tragedy inevitably ensues, and the poem ends unhappily, such as "Laüstic," in which the husband jealously punishes his wife, who does not deserve to be the victim of the violence to which he resorts.

It is not only in the romantic relationship that Marie depicts a covalent connection. The relationship between a lord and his vassal is also examined in the *Lais*. A social hierarchy is acceptable to Marie not least because it is the basis of twelfth-century feudal society. The relationship between a lord and a vassal in Marie's England is in part defined by the social superiority of the lord over his servant. This does not mean, however, that the lord and vassal are estimated different in value as individuals. In "Eliduc," the chamberlain is one of the most admirable characters in the story. He initiates communication between Eliduc and Guilliadun, brings the two lovers together again after their separation, and maintains confidentiality during the entire proceedings. He serves his lord, Eliduc, better than Eliduc himself serves his own lord, Guilliadun's father.[78] Marie drives home the point that the lord and vassal are equal as individuals by stating "that the love of a lord is not a fief: / he is *wise and clever* / who gives loyalty to his lord" ("Eliduc" 63-65, emphasis mine). Marie elevates the character of the chamberlain because he is already deemed inferior to Eliduc because of his social status. She

[78] This, in turn, is not to say that Marie believes the chamberlain is a more worthy individual than Eliduc. Eliduc is neglecting to access the quality of *mesure* in his romantic relationship with Guilliadun, and his disregard for the relationship he has with Guilliadun's father is the result of the *démesure* which pervades the romantic aspect of his life.

must compensate for his disadvantageous position by rendering him a character who garners much sympathy and admiration from the audience.

Another character in "Eliduc" who is as admirable as the chamberlain and who requires elevation by Marie because of her social position is Guildeluec. Eliduc's first wife is the victim of dishonesty and adultery. She has every right to assert her marital claim on Eliduc and insist that he put aside his young lover, Guilliadun. She reacts, however, with awesome generosity and kindness. She is able to rise above the role of the covetous and resentful spouse in order to bring happiness to all the characters of the story. Because of her femininity, Guildeluec is trapped by the beliefs and customs of the twelfth century. Marie overcomes the prejudices held by her contemporaries concerning the female sex by introducing *mesure* to the social inferiority imposed on Guildeluec. Guildeluec begins as socially estimable as Eliduc. She is "noble and wise, / of high birth, of good family" (9-10). She occupies the same social position as her husband, yet Marie elevates her character beyond Eliduc because she must contend with being a woman in the twelfth century. Eliduc does not behave in the manner expected of a married man when it comes to his relationship with Guilliadun. In the end, Guildeluec surpasses Eliduc in the eyes of the audience because of her observance of the virtue of *mesure*.

Marie's preoccupation with the idea of *mesure* extends beyond her appreciation of the virtue practised by her characters. *Mesure* is encompassed in many of the relationships which appear in the *Lais*, for example, the connection between the poetics and the reader or performer. *Mesure* must be applied to behaviour in relationships with others, to be sure, yet it must also be a consideration in the study of orality and textuality, the analysis of the oral and written elements of poetry, reading, and performance. The appearance of the term again and again and the evidence of it in the actions of admirable characters in the *Lais* reveal that *mesure* is a virtue, yet

also a practice which Marie holds in high esteem. *Mesure* thus evolves into more than a quality by which actions can be moderated; it becomes a state of mind, a mode of living, and the term becomes dynamic.

As commendable as the practice of *mesure* is, however, a romantic relationship in which it is found cannot be reconciled with the twelfth-century model of marriage (Duby). There is no description in the *Lais* of lovers who share *fine amur* in a marriage which lasts the rest of their lives. The examples of *fine amur* end in the following ways: "Guigemar led away his mistress with great rejoicing; / all his pain was now at an end" (881-82), "With her he went to Avalun ... No man heard of him again" ("Lanval" 641, 645), "When he'd told her and shown her everything ... he sent her away. / She left" ("Yonec" 437-41), "In great happiness and well-being / they lived happily ever after" ("Milun" 531-32), "Then she departed, she left her love" ("Chevrefoil" 102), and "They gave great alms and did great good, / so much so that they turned to God" ("Eliduc" 1151-52). "Eliduc" is the *lai* in which a couple sharing *fine amur* achieves marital status, yet the marriage dissolves, and they retire to a convent and a monastery, devoting their lives to God. While the nature of marriage encourages inequality between husband and wife, *fine amur*, as Marie defines it by the presence of *mesure*, cannot end in matrimony. Furthermore, Marie implies with her description of love in "Equitan," the depiction of *fine amur* in "Laüstic," and the *fine amur* of "Chevrefoil" put into context of the well-known Tristan and Isolde story that the maintenance of *fine amur* in the world outside the literary realm is impossible. This is ultimately why the marriage between Equitan and Guilliadun must fall apart.

The *Lais* are poems simple to read and perform, yet they convey complex ideas about the association between two elements of a relationship, whether they are people participating in *fine amur*, two traditions of communication, or other types of relationships in which the components

are judged equal in value. The content of the *Lais* discourages the presence of a hierarchy in any worthy relationship, including *fine amur*. A hierarchy throws the elements of the relationship out of balance, and there is no more *mesure* between the elements to be maintained. Sustainment of *mesure* is no easy task. In poetry, language in which *mesure* can be found is difficult to produce, as balance between all aspects of the poetics—rhythm, rhyme, number of syllables, et cetera—must be upheld. In a case of *fine amur*, the task is also demanding, as the individuals in the relationship must continuously value each other as equals and behave in moderation when it comes to the passionate feelings they have for one another. They cannot lose control, as the young man in "Les Deus Amanz" does. They must hone the skill of practising *mesure* until it is second nature, as Tristan and the queen do in "Chevrefoil." The maintenance of *mesure* is a strenuous undertaking, yet the sense of equality, balance, and distinction which arises from the maintenance renders the relationship valuable and memorable to the audience. Marie's rare gift of employing *mesure* in all the aspects of her *Lais* communicates the indispensability of the virtue in all relationships.

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Appendix A

Sample of hand – "faire" ("Prologue" 29):

Markings denoting *puntus elavatus*:

Qui Deus a duné esciënce ;

e de parler bone eloquence .

ne s'en deit taisir ne celer ;

ainz se deit voluntiers mustrer .

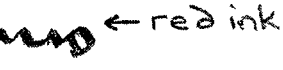
("Prologue" 1-4)

Other Markings:

soventes feiz en ai veillié

En l'onur de vus, nobles reis

("Prologue" 42-3)

e la cuntree tut en tur  ← red ink

("Guigemar" 340)

e merveille ne la preisast

("Le Fresne" 248)

Appendix B

Table 2.7 *French consonants by place (horizontally) and manner (vertically) of articulation*

			bilabial	labio-dental	alveo-dental	palato-alveolar	palatal	velar	uvular
stops	nasal		m		n		ɲ	ŋ	
	oral	voiceless	p		t			k	
		voiced	b		d			g	
fricatives	voiceless			f		ʃ			
					s				χ
	voiced			v	z	ʒ			ʁ
Affricates	voiceless				ʦ	ʧ			
	voiced				dz	dʒ			
trill					r				ʀ
approximants	lateral				l				
	central							ɰ	

(Fagyal 41)