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Function and Meaning of Metamorphosis in the Lais of Marie de France

**Thesis submitted to the School of Languages and Literatures
(French), Faculty of Humanities, University of Cape Town,
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By

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Abstract

The primary object of this dissertation is to explore the concept and the manifestations of Metamorphosis, with special reference to the *Lais* of Marie de France.

In Chapter 1 the all-pervasive nature of Metamorphosis is examined. Attention is focused on the fact that Metamorphosis occurs in all spheres: it may be seen in Nature, in physical development and in many less visible forms such as emotional, attitudinal and moral transformations and transgressions in which it plays a fundamental role.

Chapter 2 focuses on the Twelfth Century Renaissance. This chapter serves to emphasize a further aspect of Metamorphosis, that of social change and intellectual development. It thus situates Marie de France in a historical context and clarifies the *Zeitgeist* to which she was exposed, which influenced her writing and which she in turn influenced.

In Chapter 3 I analyze the individual *Lais*. Marie de France's approach to her material is that her interest lies in the exploration of the emotional, spiritual, moral and attitudinal Metamorphosis which her characters undergo. The analysis reveals the beginnings of a change in *genre*. A further Metamorphosis of these tales becomes evident when an addition is made to the purely anecdotal material: the authoress adds a Christian dimension and inserts a subtle moral message.

In Chapter 4 the findings of the analyses of the individual *lais* are grouped in order to gain a more precise understanding of the kind of Metamorphosis the various topoi have undergone in the course of the tale.

Chapter 5 is devoted to the elucidation of the narratological Metamorphosis the traditional tales undergo in the process: theories on the nature of the folktale by scholars such as Lüthi, Röhrich, Jolles and Sienaert are investigated as well as the characteristics of the short story. Subsequently each *Lai* is examined in the light of these theories in order to ascertain whether and how the original material has been adapted. The conclusion reached is that the psychological perspective and depth added to the original folktales have transformed them into nascent short stories.

I would like to thank Dr. Clive Chandler and Professor Edgard Sienaert and particularly my husband Louis for their assistance and encouragement

Declaration

I declare that this dissertation is my own, unaided work. It is being submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of Cape Town. It has not been submitted for any degree or examination in any other University.

Signed

Helga Dieta van Heerden

..... day of 2007

Function and Meaning of Metamorphosis in the *Lais* of Marie de France

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Introduction

The earliest memories of the tales which stimulated my imagination were those in which magic featured strongly and in which magic feats could be accomplished. What fascinated me was the ability of these beings to bring about change of all kinds. Change was instantaneous: a fairy godmother could simply wave her magic wand and this action would result in a pumpkin changing into a magnificent coach and the heroine's rags being transformed into a beautiful ball gown. Interest in fairy tales is undoubtedly common in most young children and this was my introduction to the *Merveilleux*.

The stories in Homer's *Odyssey* soon captured my interest, particularly those which dealt with transformation, such as that of Odysseus' men who were turned into pigs by Circe.

King Arthur and his Knights soon supplanted Homer. The variation in the accounts of the same events in different versions was puzzling, as was the identity of Arthur. Two features of these tales became the focus of my interest: they were set in the Middle Ages, a fascinating period with its aura of magic, as well as accounts of brave deeds accomplished by the Knights. The magical powers of Merlin, the magician, also appealed to my imagination. Accounts differed as to who he was supposed to have been and what exactly his role in the tales was. Change was a feature of other accounts of his deeds. In fact, was Merlin evil or good?

A logical step into the world of wonder and change was the reading of the Welsh and Irish tales of magic, in which transformation featured strongly. In the *Mabinogion*, two collections of Welsh tales, probably written down between 1300-1325 and 1375-1425 respectively, there were stories of enchanters performing transformations. The hero of the Irish tales, Cúchulainn, was capable of taking on many different guises.

Another source of interest was the many legends recounting physical changes brought about by the breaking of a taboo or by the pronouncing of a curse. These stories had been in circulation for many centuries, particularly in Celtic literature. In one such tale Melusina, a fairy creature marries a human. However, her husband has been forbidden to

see her while she takes her bath every Saturday. He breaks the taboo and witnesses her transformation - she turns into a winged serpent, flies through the window and disappears. Another legend, of which there are versions in English, French, German and Italian tells of the Knight whose wife gives birth to seven children. His evil mother-in-law turns the children into swans. All except one return to their original human form when their gold chains are restored to them. This tale, *Le Chevalier au Cygne*, as well as its variants in other languages, manifests only physical Metamorphosis.

I wondered whether there was any similarity of theme between the Scandinavian and Celtic literatures. This led me to explore the Icelandic sagas. The Scandinavian colonizers of Iceland took with them slaves and women of Irish descent, an indication that there was probably reciprocal influence in the tales of the two countries. In the Icelandic *Edda* by Snorri le Godi, written in about 1230, many physical transformations are to be found.

Contact with the Icelandic sagas cast a new light on what had hitherto been merely physical changes. It brought me into contact with their concept of the *hamr* or *life force/soul* which was thought to have the ability to leave the body of a person either sleeping or in a trance and inhabit the body of another being, often an animal. It was said that if an attempt to wake the sleeper was made while his soul was absent from his body, he would certainly die. It seemed that these souls often entered the bodies of wolves, turning them into werewolves and this sparked my desire to read tales about these creatures. Montague Summers' book on werewolves provides many stories from virtually every country in the world.

Further reading on this subject was provided by Régis Boyer in his book *Le Double* and by Claude Lecouteux's books such as *Fées, sorcières et loups-garous* which contained many tales of transformation, as well as elucidating the concept of the *hamr*. I had thus discovered that the presence of the *Merveilleux* was also very strong in early Germanic literature.

A study of Dante's *Inferno* proved interesting, as, here again, there were many tales involving Metamorphosis. In order to punish sinners, they were transformed into objects or beings which suited their crimes, *la legge del contrapasso*. I considered this in my Master's Thesis, *L'Inferno e Ugone D'Alvernia: Analisi Morfologica di un testo Cavalleresco e Analisi Comparativa di Alcuni Inferni*. The present thesis in several ways, has been a continuity of interests as I had applied Propp's theory of Morphology of the folktale to an Italian medieval text in the Master's thesis, as well as drawing on the material of Dante's *Inferno* in both theses.

Any study of transformation must involve the Greek and Latin tales. The reading of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* proved fascinating, particularly as I had thought that the Latin tales were original. It appears that he drew on pre-Homeric material. The reading of Forbes Irving's book *Metamorphosis in Greek Myths* further piqued my interest.

Having taken the decision that the theme of my thesis is to be *Metamorphosis*, I would like to explore its manifestations in other fields, as thus far I have encountered it only in literature. Change is all-encompassing: children are born, mature and die; Nature abounds in examples of Metamorphosis such as the change of seasons and the rising and setting of the sun. These are obvious manifestations which can be physically witnessed. However, the workings of Metamorphosis can be subtle and invisible. Emotions and attitudes change; motivation may cause changes in one's actions.

As a result of my reading, it became clear that my chosen text should contain transformations of several kinds and be set in a period which had always interested me, the Middle Ages. Marie de France's *Lais* appeared to be ideal. There are several reasons for this assertion: she lived and wrote in the Twelfth Century, which was, to me, a mysterious time worthy of investigation., I wanted to explore the role of a woman writer of this period. Some of the tales, such as that of the werewolf, recount actual physical changes, but I wondered whether they also contained examples of emotional transformation and if they did, what was the significance of these changes?

My thesis is structured as follows:

Chapter 1: Metamorphosis: Scope of the field

This chapter has been a delight to write, as I have been able to indulge in the discussion, not only of fascinating stories involving transformation, but have discovered just how universal the concept of Metamorphosis is.

In order to alert the reader to the extraordinarily wide range which this topic embraces, this chapter deals with obvious and accepted manifestations of Metamorphosis, such as changes occurring in natural phenomena and tales of Metamorphosis found in world literature, as well as less conventional, subtler examples of change. These include psychic phenomena such as Autoscopy and shamanistic rituals, as well as the practice and result of hypnosis. It has seemed necessary to elaborate on the complexity of the concept of Metamorphosis before starting on the study of Metamorphosis in a particular text.

Chapter 2: Socio-cultural and historical context of Marie de France and of the *Lais*.

As my interest lies in a specific text – the *Lais* of Marie de France, I was curious to know something about the time in which she lived. This entailed not only looking at the historical background, but particularly at the socio-cultural conditions of the time. The term *Renaissance* is usually associated, in French literature, with the XVIth century but the Twelfth Century may justifiably be called a *Renaissance* as I was to discover. It was exhilarating to realize just how vibrant, creative and innovative the XIIth century Renaissance proved to be.

The enormous changes in many fields of daily life during this period are explored in this chapter. These include the influence of the Crusades, the increase in travel which resulted in the acquisition of a great deal of knowledge in many fields gleaned in other countries. It also signalled the birth of a literature that broke away from the accepted tradition of writing exclusively in Latin or merely translating existing Latin works, by writing in the vernacular and by making use of, until then, orally traditional (popular)

texts. This chapter deals with the context of this innovative writing in form and in content.

Chapter 3: Analysis: Metamorphosis in the individual *Lais*

Here I have come to grips with the *oeuvre* of a woman who may be regarded as the epitome of the Twelfth Century, as she was imbued with the spirit of change, searching for original material in the vernacular. This was to culminate in the creation of a new literary *genre*. Having established the nature of the traditional folktale as postulated by scholars such as Jolles, Propp, Lüthi and Röhrich, I examine Marie's output in the light of these theories. The *Lais* are examined individually to determine to what extent the original oral Breton folktales which were the source of Marie de France's material have been transformed. In this chapter the approach is analytical and each of the twelve stories is studied as an individual entity.

Chapter 4: Synthesis: Metamorphosis in the *Lais* collection

Marie's true genius shines through when the threads of all the *Lais* are drawn together, resulting in the introduction of a new *genre* to the world of literature.

After my A possible explanation for the Metamorphosis of her original material is given, as well as the methods which she used to achieve this goal.

Chapter 5: The function and meaning of Metamorphosis in the *Lais* of Marie de France

The versatility of the authoress becomes very clear from the content of this chapter. Her ability to tell a good story, her courage to insert a moral lesson and at the same time to depict complex characters are exceptional.

A conclusion will be drawn from the examination of the material in Chapters 3 and 4. The function of changes in the depiction of the characters will serve an important purpose: they will be seen to be human beings, with motivation for their actions. This will result in enriching the original material. The *humanizing* of the folktale characters will bring about a change in *genre*; a new literary form will be seen to be emerging. The

chapter focuses on a holistic transformation or Metamorphosis: genre, gender, psychology. The traditional moral lessons – implicit or explicit – that accompany, and indeed, justify the *genre* of the folktale are examined and transformed in accordance with a time steeped in change.

Conclusion:

Marie de France made valuable additions to the general literature featuring Metamorphosis. She took it to a higher level. Metamorphosis is no longer simply an external device, designed to entertain. Traditional motifs are transformed and expanded: In her tale the ferocious werewolf becomes very human, even when he retains his traditional, terrifying shape. In the story of the two lovers, assistance of the magic potion is rejected and replaced by the desire of a human being to succeed by means of his own strength and determination. These changes point to a Metamorphosis of the traditional folktale *genre*: Marie set the folktale on the road to a new *genre*, the short story. She may thus be seen as an intermediary, her output bridging the gap between the traditional folktale and the emerging short story.

Chapter 1

Metamorphosis: Scope and Field

The concept of Metamorphosis is so vast that it can be said to embrace every aspect of life. I believe that everything as I know it, indeed life itself, is a continual process of change i.e. that we are in the midst of a never-ending process of Metamorphosis.

In the body of my thesis I examine several aspects of Metamorphosis that are manifest in the *Lais* of my chosen author, Marie de France. I do not limit myself to the study of physical changes only, the traditionally accepted notion of this phenomenon, but also discuss changes that occur as a result of human contact with water, as well as emotional and moral Metamorphoses. For these reasons I intend to devote this chapter to a discussion of Metamorphosis in its broadest sense i.e. changes of all kinds. Its most obvious manifestation occurs in Nature. Seeds can be seen to germinate and produce fruit, children grow taller, and the weather changes, depending on the time of the year. How, then, can this concept be defined? It is change of all kinds, transitions, crossing of boundaries, emotional growth, mental development or even deterioration, changes in literary genres, development for good or bad in the personalities of human beings or literary figures, the sharpening and changing of our perceptions in many fields, the unfortunate psychological results of childhood trauma, changes in belief-systems or points of view, progress in the field of medical technology, such as studies surrounding cloning, and the ability of some viruses to mutate. If the view of scientists that everything began with the Big Bang is to be accepted, then Evolution and everything that followed must be considered as Metamorphosis, including the Big Bang itself.

What follows is a list of the aspects of the phenomenon which I consider may legitimately be considered to be Metamorphosis:

1. Metamorphosis in Nature: seeds germinating, the change in seasons etc.
2. Changes brought about by gods or other means in figures found in literature.
3. The adaptation of the same tale by different authors.
4. Human beings transformed into werewolves, lions, swans etc.
5. Hypnosis: a human being is transported into his own *other* world.

6. Shamanistic practices in which the life-force leaves the sleeper and enters and remains temporarily in the body of the Other, i.e. Metempsychosis.
7. The metaphor: an incomplete Metamorphosis.
8. Lyncanthropy: the belief that one has become a wolf.
9. Reincarnation and Resurrection.
10. Anamorphism: A partial Metamorphosis. When considering the contribution which Marie de France made to literature, this aspect will become clear and will be shown to be of paramount importance.

The concept of change can be illustrated by an examination of Fluidism and Formulism, two views of the Universe as postulated by Marcel Jousse. In a lecture given by him on 18th January 1939, (translated by Edgard Sienaert and Joan Conolly), he sets out to contrast two opposing world views: Fluidism (*Heraclitism*) and Formulism (*Solomonism* i.e. everything remains static.) Heraclitus was a 5th Century Greek philosopher who believed that “all flows, one cannot step into the same river twice” (Jousse 1939:136;203) i.e. *panta rhei*: everything flows. This philosophy clearly indicates his belief in change or ongoing Metamorphosis. *Formulism*, on the other hand, was a philosophy believed to have been postulated by Solomon. It appears in *Ecclesiastes*, one of the books of the Old Testament, hence its title *Solomonism*.

In order to illustrate his point of view, Jousse advises his students to observe children. What characterizes the child is his spontaneity. Children are natural thinkers, as everything is new to them and they are eager to explore. An adult may also be classified as a thinker if he retains the “childlike perception and experience of the world” (Jousse 1939:120;179). Heraclitism is, in fact, the desire to explore, to know and not to become static and rigid in one’s thoughts and outlook on life. There must be a continual *flow* of experience and exploration of the phenomena of the world.

Jousse cites the example of the sun rising: he says that it never rises in exactly the same way each day. One could add here that no natural phenomenon is static: rivers flow past us, the moon has a slightly different shape every night, flowers and forests change

infinitesimally every day. No two human beings are identical – they will react differently in the same situation, will show versatility in their handling of problems. The same person will not necessarily react to two similar situations in the same way. A *thinker* will adjust his reactions, having learnt from his experiences. Jousse outlines the attitude of a person whose perspective of life may be defined as *Solomonic*. The believer in Solomonism will maintain that “there is nothing new under the sun” (Jousse 1939:121;181). Today the sun rises in the same way as it did yesterday and as it will tomorrow. Jousse maintains, justifiably, that such an attitude can only result in profound boredom.

The idea of Time is central to one of Jousse’s theories. He says that “Time is the bringing-into-consciousness of the replay of an apparently identical geste, which is in turn, and in fact, ‘rhythm’. Rhythm and time, they are one and the same phenomenon. Whence ‘rhythm’ which means flow” i.e. *it flows therefore everything flows* (Jousse 1939:121;181). The conclusion which he reaches is this: there is no time, as it all flows and it cannot return – a perfect Heraclitean argument.

Jousse now continues his discussion on the reaction of the child. To him, everything is new, everything has to be examined, and thus he does not become bored, as everything flows. He argues that for this reason children should be brought up in the wild, preventing any possibility of boredom. This, once again, is a Heraclitean perspective. On the other hand, he says, the opposite holds true for the sick. There one is likely to find a Solomonic attitude, as time hangs heavily on the hands of the sick, who literally live from sunrise to sunset, always anticipating the next day, never living in the hour. The same applies to superficial people. “They are beings who can neither observe what is novel, nor engage with the new mechanisms of the Heraclitean discoverers” (Jousse 1939:122;182).

Jousse now advises how the child should be treated. We must continue to encourage him to explore new things i.e. foster his Heraclitean side, but also point him towards Solomonism by showing him how to insert his discoveries into existing rules, although

the replay of the rule will never be identical with the first contact. In Jousse's opinion we shall have to study the Solomonian form because people are obliged to act and not simply to watch the flow. The Solomonian rather than the Heraclitan is an active person, he says. The Heraclitean will say, "I cannot handle and manipulate things that are flowing all the time, because I cannot catch hold of anything" (Jousse 1939:123;184). On the other hand, the Solomonian will say that things never change and therefore he can always act upon them. It is for this reason, according to Jousse, that science turns Solomonian, although this too has been known to change.

On leadership and its role in the new philosophy Jousse says that a leader is someone who "reserves his or her energies in order to think and therefore, because he is not as fresh or as Heraclitean as his students, he is leaving the shaping of this new pedagogy to them who see things through new and fresh eyes" (Jousse 1939:127;189).

Jousse obviously intended his students to think for themselves, which is, after all, the aim of a good teacher. Memory, a key element in Jousse's – and Oral-style – thinking, is 'Solomonism: i.e. memory arrests time; it is arrested and re-played time. Metamorphosis can either be witnessed, seen in action, or established through comparison of two states of being – hence a memory of what was, compared to what is.

After exploring various aspects of Metamorphosis, one is inclined to agree with the philosophy of Heraclitus, who believed that the fundamental uniform fact in nature is constant change. Physicists too seem to agree with Heraclitus that change is constant. "We can look at an atom and see an electron in energy state A, then look again and see it in energy state B. We guess that the electron jumped from A to B, perhaps because we looked at it. In fact, we cannot make any statement about what it was doing when we were not looking at it. What we can learn from experiments or from the equations of quantum theory, is the probability that if we look at a system once and get answer A then the next time we will get answer B." He adds: "Nothing is real unless we look at it, and it ceases to be real as soon as we stop looking" (Gribbin 1985:161).

In the foregoing section Metamorphosis has appeared as an abstract, nevertheless valid concept. What follows will be devoted to its occurrence in literature, the field which I have chosen to explore in Chapters 3, 4 and 5, analysing in depth the *Lais* of Marie de France. The occurrence of Metamorphosis is constant and universal; it occurs in all world literature and in all literary *genres*: oral, popular, savant, performed and written. There are also instances of Metamorphosis within Metamorphosis, as when a text with Metamorphosis is re-used or re-worked i.e. metamorphosed into another literary text, resulting in a mirror effect – a distorting mirror, in fact.

Greek myths are rich in examples of Metamorphosis. I intend recounting several of these tales as illustrations, after which I shall examine what I consider to be the inspiration of the Latin poet Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and show how, in turn, his influence is felt in the work of the Italian poet, Dante Alighieri. The source of much of this information is drawn from P.M.C. Forbes-Irving's book *Metamorphosis in Greek Myths*.

A further investigation will establish the presence of this theme in some Icelandic sagas, in early Irish and Welsh literature, such as the *Mabinogion*. A section of Apuleius's *Golden Ass* will be discussed and the changes in several versions of the legend of the *Chevalier au Cygne* will be noted.

According to Forbes Irving, the earliest examples of transformation stories are probably to be found in the works of the Greek oral poet, Homer followed by the compositions of the poets of the Archaic period and then those of the Greek tragedians, who were succeeded, in turn, by the writers of the Hellenistic period.

In Homer's epics, the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad*, two types of physical transformation are to be found. The first kind is a Metamorphosis brought about by the sorceress Circe (book 10) who turns Odysseus' men into pigs in order to keep them on the island; the other occurs in Book 13 of the *Odyssey* in which there is an example of petrification:

Poseidon, the sea-god, turns the ship of the Phaeacians into stone. In this way he warns them not to carry any more travellers across the sea (*Odyssey* 13: 163ff).

A human can thus be turned into another living creature or an object may undergo another change into something equally inanimate.

Many examples of anthropomorphism are found in the *Iliad*: the gods take on the shape of human beings in many cases to help the characters whom they favour.

In the works of the writers of the Archaic period, from Hesiod to the tragedians, like Aeschylus (c.525-456 BC), Sophocles (c. 495-406 BC) and Euripides (c. 480-406 BC), the gods are seen either to punish a man for his misdeeds by transforming him, or effecting Metamorphosis out of pity for his suffering.

An example of the punitive power of the gods is to be found in the Hesiodic versions of Alcyone and Ceyx. These two humans had the temerity to call themselves Zeus and Hera (Forbes Irving 1990:239). As punishment they were turned into birds of the same name.

In the *Prometheus* and the *Supplices* by Aeschylus, Io is turned into a cow and in the *Supplices* the bizarre aspect of her appearance is emphasized:

*They saw a creature at once human and brute,
Part cow, part woman ...*(Supplices 564ff)

Forbes Irving suggests that the tragedians were interested in the grotesque and primitive “as an expression of extremes of emotional or social disorder ...” (Forbes Irving 1990:15).

The Hellenistic period is represented primarily by Boios, who wrote an *Ornithogonia* in which he postulates that every bird had once been a man, and by Nicander, in whose work, *Heteroioumena* there were many tales of transformation into animals and objects. An interesting difference between the works of Nicander and Boios is that in the writings of the latter poet, the major gods, such as Zeus, brought about almost all the transformations, whereas Nicander has the nymphs performing this function (Forbes Irving 1990:29).

The influence of the early Greek oral traditions and writing can be clearly seen in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. However, the Latin poet frequently changed details or merged accounts, a Metamorphosis in a tale of Metamorphosis.

An example of how myths were modified and re-interpreted – i.e. metamorphosed - can be seen in the story of Hecuba, the wife of Priam, King of Troy. According to Greek myth, after the fall of Troy, Hecuba was allotted to Odysseus, one of the Greek warriors. At the Thracian Chersonese where they landed, she witnessed the sacrifice of one of her daughters, Polyxena and subsequently saw the body of her son, Polydorus, washed up on the shore. Hecuba was transformed into a dog and threw herself into the sea (O.C.E.L. 1938:360). Conversely, in Homer's *Iliad* she remains in the background, destined to survive the sack of Troy.

The events after the Greek victory, however, are of more interest to subsequent poets. Euripides wrote two plays on the subject *The Trojan Women* and *Hecuba* (written in approximately 424 BC). In *Hecuba* (fr.1260ff) one of the characters, the blind Polymestor, prophesies that Hecuba will run up the mast of a ship in the shape of a dog with fiery eyes and will then disappear into the sea. No reason is given for this Metamorphosis. It may be that because she had shown a great deal of savagery in the play, the motivation for the change was psychological. In Nicander's version (fr.62) she leaps into the sea with grief and after this action, she is transformed into a dog. In later works she is stoned rather than drowned and in a fragment attributed to other writers, Hecuba is transformed, but is left to wander in the wild, howling. Ovid combines several versions: she is stoned and then, in the shape of a dog, wanders aimlessly (Met. 13 570-1) (Forbes Irving 1990:208).

Another myth is related and modified by several poets, including Ovid. Lycaon, King of Arcadia had a daughter called Callisto. She was the companion of Artemis, a goddess, who lived in a state of celibacy with her band of women (Forbes Irving 1990:202). Hesiod recounts how Zeus raped Callisto. When Artemis discovered that Callisto was

pregnant, she was so angry that she turned her into a bear. In this form she gave birth to a son, Arcas, who was cared for by goatherds. While out hunting, Arcas came across Callisto and, not realizing that she was his mother, followed her into the forbidden Lycaean grove. They were about to be put to death when Zeus intervened and turned them into stars.

Ovid combines different elements of various versions of the tale. According to him, it is Zeus in the form of Artemis who seduces Callisto. However, she is transformed, not by Artemis, but by Hera, the wife of Zeus and this transformation occurs after the birth of her son and not before. Ovid then returns to the *Hesiodic* ending (Forbes Irving 1990:204) in which Arcas pursues his mother and Zeus turns them into stars. Writers and poets have different approaches to the same material, not only modifying the content but also the atmosphere of the work.

Virgil's description of the descent into Hell of his protagonist Aeneas in the *Aeneid* and Dante's description of his own descent as described in the *Inferno* provide a distinct contrast. Both Ovid and Virgil influenced Dante's writing of the *Divine Comedy*, and, more particularly, of the *Inferno*. Virgil is Dante's guide throughout the whole of this first part of the *Divine Comedy*. What is interesting is the difference in style and intention in Dante's and Virgil's tales. Dante deliberately creates a sensation of horror and terror in order to emphasize the evilness of the sinners.

In Virgil's account Aeneas wishes to descend to Hades to seek the spirit of his father, Anchises. First he has to pass through a dense forest and is instructed by his guide, a priestess, to pick the golden bough (The Wand of Destiny) from a tree in order to be allowed to cross the river Styx (Book 6.210). He succeeds with some difficulty.

Aeneas reaches the *Jaws of Hades* (Book 6.278) and sees "hybrid beasts, ... Scyllas half-human, ... Gorgons, and Harpies" (286-289). It is a horrible sight, but the Priestess comforts him, saying that they are incorporeal. He meets Charon, a filthy, repulsive figure, to whom he must show the bough in order to proceed and who is to ferry him

across the river Styx. The Priestess also protects Aeneas from the three-headed dog Cerberus.

He passes those “who gained death for themselves” (438), crosses the river of Phlegethon – the Burning River of Hell (551). He encounters many more sinners here, those who hated their brothers, those who gloated over their riches. They finally arrive at the “Land of Joy, pleasant green places in the Fortunate Woods, where the Homes of the Blest are” (640-643). Although Aeneas is unable to embrace his father as he is now a spirit, father and son joyfully meet. In spite of the fact that Aeneas has witnessed some of the most horrifying scenes, he is destined to meet his father in a happy, tranquil place. This is not the case in Dante’s description of Hell and its inhabitants.

In the *Inferno* the horror and the suffering of those who, lodged in the equivalent circle of Hell i.e. those found in the den of the Violent against themselves (suicides) and the Violent against their possessions (squanderers), is described in Canto XIII. Accompanied by his guide Virgil, Dante too picks a branch off a tree and immediately becomes aware of the suffering of the tree, seeing the blood oozing down its side. The tree says: “Uomini fummo, e or siam fatti sterpi”: (38) (men once were we, that now are rooted here.) They have been turned into trees. The Harpies (also described by Virgil in far less terrifying detail) feed on the leaves of the trees and cause them excruciating pain. Dante paints a frightening picture of this forest of dead souls. According to Greek lore, the Harpies are described as “fierce, filthy, winged monsters, with the faces of women, bodies of vultures and sharp claws” (Gordon 1997:3).

An interesting fact emerges when one compares the approach of the two authors: although the sinners in Virgil’s account are punished severely, Dante’s description of the souls of the suicides found in the equivalent circle to Virgil’s victims is far more terrifying, as Dante considered it a heinous crime to commit suicide, the damned having brought about their own death. This signals a change of attitude in the two authors.

A very early work illustrating the prevalence of the theme of Metamorphosis is that of Apuleius in the *Golden Ass*. This is a satire by Apuleius born in about 114 AD in the city of Madaura in Africa. The book is presented as the autobiography of the author in which he observes the follies and vices of mankind. My interest lies in the description of his transformation.

Lucius travels to Thessaly and arrives at his friend Milo's house. Milo's wife Pamphile is said to be a witch. Book III describes how Pamphile, after taking off all her clothes and rubbing herself from head to foot with some ointment, becomes an owl: "she shook her arms with a fluttering motion. As they gently flapped up and down, there appeared on them a soft fluff, then a growth of strong feathers, her nose hardened into a hooked beak, her feet contracted into talons – and Pamphile was an owl" (Adlington 1923:50-51). The author, calling himself Lucius, then describes how he pulled off his clothes and rubbed the ointment all over his body. He wanted to become an owl, but... "My hair became coarse and shaggy, my soft skin hardened into hide, my fingers and toes lost their separate identity and coalesced into hooves and from the end of my spine there protruded a long tail. My face became enormous and my mouth widened, my nostrils dilated and my lips hung down; and my ears became monstrously long and hairy (Adlington 1923:52). He had become an ass.

After witnessing many examples of human folly, he wishes to regain his human form. Lucius prays to the Moon and the goddess Isis appears to him in a dream. She promises to protect him and restore him to his human form if he serves her faithfully. The next day during a procession Lucius describes what happened: "in a moment my hideous beastly shape fell away. First there vanished my rough coat, then my thick hide became thin skin, my swelling belly drew in, fingers and toes emerged from my hooves, my hands were feet no longer. My neck contracted, my face and head became round, my huge ears reverted to their former size, my boulders of teeth returned to human proportions ...my tail was no longer there" (Adlington 1923:202). Thus as early as the first century A.D. there is evidence of an author's use of Metamorphosis - in this case to satirize human failures.

Régis Boyer in the Introduction to his translation of the *Sagas islandaises* explains: Anonymous oral poets composed the Icelandic sagas, probably between the end of the 12th Century and the middle of the 13th Century. Depending on the category to which they belonged, they related stories of Norwegian and Danish Kings or the heroic deeds, real or modified by the recollections of the settlers who colonized Iceland which was discovered in 874. The sagas told stories of local events and even related legends which were brought into the country via Germanic expansion. An important fact to bear in mind is that the telling and later recording of these heroic exploits and other tales were coloured or influenced by the mind-set and spirit of the oral poets. The early settlers came from South-West Norway, Denmark and, most significantly, from the Shetland Islands, the Hebrides and from Ireland; thus the sagas underwent a double influence: Germanic as well as Celtic (Boyer 1987).

Snorri Sturluson was responsible for two important works: The *Heimskringla* written in about 1220 (Sagas of the Kings of Norway) and, more importantly, *The Prose (or Younger) Edda*, which tells of the Odinic mythology and was written in about 1230 (Boyer 1987: Introduction).

The other important work is the *Poetic (or Elder) Edda* (c.1200) “A collection of old Norse poems on cosmogony, mythology and traditions of Norse heroes ... The Eddas are the chief source of our knowledge of Scandinavian mythology” (O.C.E.L. 1938:248).

What is meant by the mind-set or vision of these early oral composers? Writing on this topic, Boyer states: “Personne ne révoque en doute l’existence d’un autre monde, d’un univers des esprits qui, sans relâche, interfère avec le nôtre” (Boyer 1986:31) and tells us that “... cette vision baigne dans la magie” (Boyer 1986:10).

It is important to understand the mind-set of the composers of the tales, as it colours the approach to the subject matter and the explanation of events.

It is particularly in the sagas of the 13th Century that this vision becomes very clear. Boyer demonstrates this claim by citing the *Vatnsdoela Saga* (Boyer 1980), a story recounting the lives of a series of chiefs in North-East Iceland. The belief in magic powers and the ability to transform oneself, to be transformed by somebody else and to inhabit a body other than one's own was fundamental. The Scandinavians believed implicitly in the *hamr* or *doubling* of the personality, which allowed them to be transformed into animals (Boyer 1986:11). Thus these people lived in a twofold world – the natural and the supernatural.

For the ancient Scandinavians the line between life and death, the body and the spirit, the material and the spiritual, the visible and the invisible was almost non-existent. As Boyer puts it “mort-vie, corps-esprit, matériel-spirituel, visible-invisible ce sont là domaines dont ... [les] délimitations sont extrêmement floues.” The *draugr* (ghost) in the saga was a character who breathed and spoke like us and who even, when reduced to ashes, was capable of reincarnation (Boyer 1986:29), usually taking the form of a ferocious bull.

The presence of supernatural beings was perfectly natural and an accepted part of life. There were three terms for the word *soul*: *hugr*, *hamr*, *fylgja* (Boyer 1986:32).

The *hugr* would indicate a force acting more or less independently. When the *hugr* became *form*, able to travel at will, it was called the *hamr* (Boyer 1986:35). Boyer adds “chacun de nous a son hamr ... il s'intériorise à la naissance, ...” (Boyer 1986:39). Thus the *hamr* can be seen as the *alter ego*, the *Double*. (A different interpretation of the *Double* will be discussed in Otto Rank's work *Der Doppelgänger*.)

To substantiate the claim that the *hamr* was not confined to the body which it inhabited and could escape this body and act on its own, Boyer quotes a passage from the *Ynglinga Saga* (chapter 7) by Snorri Sturluson: “Odhinn changeait de forme ... Alors, son corps gisait comme endormi, ou mort, mais lui était oiseau ou animal, poisson ou serpent, et il allait en un instant dans les pays lointains vaquer à ses affaires ou à celles d'autrui” (Boyer 1986:40). The animals most commonly inhabited by the *hamr* were the wolf, the bull, the bear and the eagle (Boyer 1986:41). The *hamr* could inhabit an animal or retain

the human form “qu’il dedouble exactement” (Boyer 1986:40). The belief in this ability would seem to link up with that of shamans whose life-force was reputed to have been able to leave the body and inhabit that of an animal while the host slept or was in a trance. The human being had become the *Other*.

Boyer emphasizes that shamanism played a very important role in the Nordic countries (Boyer 1986:57). He tells us that “le chaman est susceptible d’opérer ‘le voyage’ vers l’au-delà (monde des morts, monde des esprits, monde des ancêtres Il entre alors en extase, au cours de laquelle il est susceptible de se métamorphoser, éventuellement sous formes animales; il importe au premier chef de ne pas le déranger ni le réveiller pendant ce temps” (Boyer 1986:57).

What then do we understand by the term *shamanism*? The ancient Scandinavians did not consider the *other world* to be particularly different from ours. They could cross the border between the two worlds by going into a trance-like state. Lecouteux elaborates: “Der Körper, dessen ‘hamr’ in der Ferne weilt, läuft grosse Gefahr. Während er [the shaman] in lethargischer Ohnmacht daliegt, darf man ihn nicht ansprechen oder wecken, sonst könnte der ‘hamr’ nicht in ihn zurück” (Lecouteux 1987:215).

The shamans, well-known for their shape-shifting, were said to keep their souls, or at least one of their souls, in some animal. According to the Yakuts of Siberia, these souls were hidden where they could not be found and were usually entrusted to elks, black bears, boars, wolves or eagles. It was believed by the Samoyeds of the Turukhinsk that every wizard had a familiar with him: it could, for example, be a boar (Summers 1933:248).

I have discussed the belief that amongst the shamans the soul or life-force could leave the body and inhabit that of an animal, returning to the inert body of the shaman many hours or days later. The theory of Metempsychosis takes this idea considerably further. It seems that the German word *Seelenwanderung* best describes this phenomenon, as the soul may *wander* or even enter successive bodies after the death of the original host.

This is the doctrine according to which the same soul may inhabit a series of bodies in different beings, both human and animal. Metempsychosis may be defined as *Reensoulment* the progress of a monad through soul after soul: an aspect of reimpodiment (Osterhage 1997:2).

Returning to Scandinavian tales I quote the story of Balder which once again illustrates the belief in Metamorphosis. The Norse gods, unlike their Greek counterparts, were believed to be mortal. They were called the Aesir and lived in Asgard, the Nordic equivalent of Olympus. In the *Edda* by Snorri Sturluson the following story is told:

Balder the Good, son of Odin, dreamed that he was in great danger. When he told the other gods of his dream, they decided to request immunity for Balder from all danger. The gods promised that he would not be harmed by fire or water, iron, stones, the earth, trees, diseases, animals, birds, poison or snakes (Norton Online). After these promises, Balder encouraged the gods to shoot at him, strike him or throw stones at him.

However, Loki, whom Snorri calls *the father of lies*, was displeased. In the shape of a woman he went to Frigg, a goddess, who assured him that Balder would remain unharmed, as all things had taken an oath not to hurt him. However, Frigg told Loki that there was a tree, the mistletoe, which had not been asked to take the oath as it was, as yet, too young. Loki picked some mistletoe and went to the place where everyone was gathered. Here he found Hod, who was not shooting. Asked why he was not taking part, Hod replied that he was blind and had no weapon. Loki then told Hod that he, too, should honour Balder by shooting at him and that he, Loki, would take him to a place where he could do so and would supply him with a weapon. He gave him a branch of the mistletoe. Hod shot at Balder and the latter fell to the ground, dead. Frigg asked the assembled gods who would be willing to ride to Hel in order to offer her (Hel) a reward if she would allow Balder to return to Asgard. Hermod the Bold offered his services. He found Balder, and begged Hel to allow his brother to return. She conceded that if all things in the world wept, Balder could return. Hermod returned to Aesir with the

message that the gods had sent messengers to request that everybody and everything should cry for Balder.

The messengers found a giantess, (Loki transformed), sitting in a cave. She told them that her name was Thanks and that she would weep *dry tears* as she had been badly treated by Odin. Thus Loki, once more transformed, had outwitted the gods. Balder could not be rescued from Hel (Norton Online).

Much of what has been said about shamanism appears to hold true for the San and for the inspiration of their art. When we examine the San rock depictions and engraving, we must attempt to look at them through the eyes of the San themselves. J.D. Lewis-Williams draws our attention to the fact that “a great deal of recent research has shown that the fundamental ideas underlying San rock art derive from the trance experience, different ways of depicting the spirit world” (Lewis-Williams 1990: 85).

The trance, in itself a change of state, a transition from one perception of reality to another, was thought to have been produced by a tribal dance. The women would sit in a circle and clap their hands while singing special songs. The clapping would become more and more frenetic, activating their potency and resulting in the shaman’s going into the state of altered consciousness. He would go into a trance, as it was believed that the women’s songs had supernatural potency. “For them (the shamans) trance is a spirit world, and in this dimension they heal the sick, remonstrate with malevolent spirits, go on an out-of-body journey and even confront God” (Lewis-Williams 1990:28-29).

In fact, Lewis- Williams says “The trance dance and the spiritual experiences of the shamans lie at the heart of San rock art ...[they] engraved trance visions of the spirit world and symbols of the supernatural potency that enabled them to achieve their transcendent state ” (Lewis-Williams 1990: 44).

In two collections of Welsh stories the *Mabinogion*, evidence can be found of what may be regarded as a universal characteristic of early literature: Metamorphosis. There are eleven stories, most of them dating from the second half of the eleventh century, related by unknown story tellers and probably written down in the fourteenth century. I shall be

looking at several stories from the *Mabinogion* (Jones 1949), in order to illustrate my premise. The collection consists of several groups of stories: the Mabinogi proper, consisting of Four Branches, two short pieces, *Culhwch and Olwen*, the earliest Arthurian Tales in Welsh, *The Dream of Rhonabwy* and three later Arthurian romances.

The following tales clearly show the presence of Metamorphosis:

Pwyll, Prince of Dyfed, went out hunting with a pack of dogs and came upon a stag, which had been brought down by another pack of dogs. He set his pack on the stag, driving the other pack away. Arawn, King of Annwn, (the Celtic Hades) the owner of the other pack, was furious. Pwyll promised to make it up to the King. He asked how he could make up for this insult. Arawn answered that Pwyll was to rid him of the oppression of his enemy, King Hafgan from Annwn. Pwyll agreed and said that he, in the exact likeness of Arawn, would kill King Hafgan. Arawn, in turn, would be transformed to look exactly like Pwyll whose kingdom he would govern for a year while Pwyll undertook his task. Once Pwyll had fulfilled his promise, the two men met and “Arawn gave to Pwyll prince of Dyfed his proper form and semblance” (Jones 1949:7). By means of Metamorphosis the trick had succeeded.

Taliesin, a Welsh poet and shaman was thought to have lived in the Sixth Century. The story of his birth goes as follows: A witch called Ceridwen had two children, a beautiful daughter and an ugly son, Morfan. Because he was so ugly, his mother decided to make him wise. She therefore prepared a potion, granting wisdom. The cauldron was to be stirred by a young boy, Gwion. However, while the boy was stirring the potion, three drops fell onto his hand. The boy was afraid, knowing that the witch would be angry with him. He started running away, but not before he had sucked his burnt hand. He immediately gained wisdom and knowledge. Ceriden was very angry and tried to catch him.

While Ceridwen was chasing Gwion, he turned himself into a rabbit; she retaliated by turning herself into a dog. He then became a fish and jumped into the river; she turned

into an otter. He turned into a bird; she became a hawk. He became a grain of corn and the witch, now a hen, ate him. Ceridwen became pregnant. She knew that the baby she was expecting was to be Gwion. After his birth, she placed him in a coracle which she threw into the ocean. Elphin found the baby while he was fishing for salmon. He was so surprised by the whiteness of the boy that he exclaimed *Taliesin*, meaning *radiant brow*. The baby immediately started reciting poetry, much to Elphin's surprise. Thus he has passed from one state to another several times, three of which involve water: the drops from the cauldron, the liquid in Ceridwen's womb and the final rescue from the coracle floating on the water (Markale 1986: 195).

As in many Welsh legends, there is much evidence of Metamorphosis in the Irish sagas. In these tales another powerful influence on behaviour was the notion of geis, "an absolute prohibition from doing certain things" (Dillon 1948: Introduction xv). The idea of a taboo also plays a significant part in the literature of other Celtic nations. It is found for example, in the *Mélusine* stories. I shall return to these tales in a subsequent section.

The story of *Tuân Mac Cairill* a supernatural being or demi-god, who has been reincarnated in different forms at various times, tells the tale of his transformations which are reminiscent of those of the Welsh Taliesin. Tuân Mac Cairill relates how, many centuries after the flood, Partholon, an exile with 24 men and their wives, arrived in Ireland. Their descendants lived there for 5000 years. All these people died and only he, now very old, survived. The next to arrive was Nemed, but Tuân Mac Cairill did not want to show himself, as he was old and ill. However, one morning, he awoke to find that he had become a stag. Tuân next became a wild boar. Once again he got very old and was transformed. This time he took on the shape of a vulture. Every time he changed form, he was rejuvenated. After sleeping for nine days, he awoke to find that he had become a salmon. However, one day he was caught by a man called Carill. Carill's wife devoured Tuân and, while he was in her stomach, he started to speak like a human being. He had become a prophet and was called Tuân, son of Carill (Markale. 1971:23).

Cúchulainn of the *Cycle of Cúchulainn* is probably more famous than any other protagonist in Irish sagas. The god Lug is purported to have been his spiritual father and he was said to have immense strength, as well as the ability to transform himself, particularly in times of battle. There are several versions of Cúchulainn's birth, but it is generally accepted that the youth was called Sétanta (Markale 1971:79) and that he was to become a great warrior at a very early age. The change in his name occurred because he inadvertently killed Cullan, the blacksmith's guard dog and, as a result, he promised to be Cullan's guard dog until another one could be trained. So he became Cúchulainn – the dog of Culann, the protector.

In human form he meets the goddess Morrigan, in the form of a young girl. She tells Cúchulainn of her love for him, but he repulses her. Furious, she tells him that she will take revenge by transforming herself into an eel, enabling her to cause him to slip in the water; then she will become a vixen and gather other four-legged animals against him; she will also attack him in the form of a red cow and lead many horned animals against him. She carries out her threat, but is injured. Cúchulainn himself is injured in battle by his adversary Lôch. He is exhausted and thirsty. Morrigan, transformed into an old woman, arrives with her cow and offers him milk. She has been cured, but Cúchulainn has not yet recovered. Lug, his father, in the shape of a young warrior, arrives and by magic causes Cúchulainn to fall asleep for three days. He takes on Cúchulainn's form and substitutes for him in battle for three days. Cúchulainn recovers and continues the fight. The massacre of his enemies is terrifying as he routs them. After this he regains his beautiful, youthful form.

The Irish story of Tuân MacCairill and that of the Welsh bard Taliesin have much in common. Both poets undergo several changes: in the case of Tuân he was a man for 100 years, a stag for 80 years, a boar for 20 years, an eagle for 100 years, and a salmon for 20 years and finally he is reborn as a man (Matthews & Matthews 1994:163). The explanation which Matthews offers for all these transformations, in general as well as in this particular case, is that they ...”read so much like the descriptions of shamanic operations in other parts of the world to make it certain that an actual ceremony of some

kind is being recalled ... and that Tuân actually undergoes a series of shamanic trance states in which he is able to perceive the past” (Matthews & Matthews 1994:163). Tales examined so far indicate that transformations were thought to occur either by Metamorphosis (change of form), Metempsychosis (passing from one body form to another after death); or reincarnation (being born again).

The idea of werewolves and their ability to transform themselves, or the possibility of their being transformed occurs in many tales. The definition of the term *werewolf* is problematic but “It is thought to derive from either Latin *vir* (German: *we(h)r* , *we(h)ren*) (Abwehr, Feuerwehr, Bundeswehr: defense group of men), Old Prussian: *wirs* meaning men and Old English *wer* (or *were*) meaning man, man-wolf or *weri* (to wear) wearer of the wolf skin” (Webster Dictionary).

Usually it is a human being who, either voluntarily or involuntarily, is transformed into the shape of a wolf or takes on all the physical characteristics of that animal. For the most part shape-shifting is temporary and the return to the original form occurs at will. Some of the methods believed to bring about Metamorphosis are the drinking of water from the footprint of the animal in question, drinking from an enchanted stream or swimming across a particular river, after having divested oneself of one’s clothes.

Stories of shape-shifting occur all over the world. These involve the transformation of a human being into a wolf or other animal. The transformed creature retains the mind and soul present in its original form, but will have the appetites of the beast. According to legends and stories found in the literature of Greece, Italy, Portugal, Germany and the British Isles, the process may also be effected by a spell cast by a witch, an ointment applied to the skin, or by the wearing of a girdle made of wolf skin, or by means of contact with water.

Written between the years 1210 – 1214 Gervase of Tilbury’s *Otia Imperialia* (Chapter I:18) recounts how some men can be metamorphosed into werewolves at the changes of the moon. He says in Chapter CXX that there are men who at certain waxings of the

moon are transformed into wolves. He tells the story of a brave soldier, Raimbaud de Poinet. One night, while wandering alone, the soldier was amazed to realize that he had been changed into a wolf. In this guise he attacked the inhabitants of his own village. Finally a villager managed to chop off one of the wolf's hind paws and the soldier immediately returned to his human form. Raimbaud was delighted, although he had lost a foot. Gervase concludes by saying "For it is commonly reported and held ... that if a werewolf be shorn of one of its members he shall then surely recover his original body" (Summers 1933:186). It is clear that the return to the werewolf's original shape has, in this case, been brought about by an external force, not magic.

We can deduce from the accounts of most of the transformations studied thus far that human beings who assumed the shape of werewolves, whether voluntarily or not, temporarily changed their physical appearance. However, it is important to note that for a given time the transformed human being also assumed the appetites of the werewolf. In innumerable stories we are told how, with savage cruelty, the creature would devour an animal or attack a human being with the intention of killing him. The human had thus undergone not only an external change, but also adopted the nature, instincts and characteristics of its new form. However, he retained his intelligence.

Metamorphosis is a universal theme, thus African tales also abound in examples of its presence. A story called *The Lion Lady* tells of how a Hottentot was travelling with a Bush woman who was carrying a small child on her back. The Hottentot saw some horses grazing and, as he was very hungry, asked the Bush woman to kill one of the horses, as he had heard that she could turn herself into a lion. Then he saw the hair growing out of her neck. Her nails became long and sharp, her face changed and grew furry and her eyes wild and golden (Handler 1979:47). The woman dropped the child, took off her skin petticoat and with a roar became a lion, leaping after one of the horses and killing it with a single blow. The man, who had climbed a tree, begged the lion not to hurt him and asked it to resume its human form. Gradually the lion changed back and the woman put on her petticoat, picked up her baby and continued the journey.

Different versions of the same tale may be transformed. This becomes clear from a study of several versions of the legend *Le Chevalier au Cygne*. I do not claim to have made an exhaustive study of all the many versions of the tale. I shall relate what is considered to be the first version of the story, the *Dolopathos*, composed in about 1190 by Jean de Haute-Seille, followed by a second version called *Elixo* as well as another version, *Isomberte*. My aim is to show that, although the Metamorphosis of the characters in the legend may be practically identical, the content has undergone several transformations in each version, as has the attitude of the chronicler. For this material I am indebted to Claude Lecouteux's book *Mélusine et le Chevalier au Cygne*.

The *Dolopathos* version reads as follows: a young nobleman loses his way while hunting and comes upon a fairy seated at a fountain, holding a golden chain in her hand. He seizes the chain. After agreeing to marry him, she predicts that they will have septuplets, six sons and a daughter. The young man takes her to his castle and marries her in spite of the protestations of his mother. Seven children are born, each with a golden chain round its neck. The mother-in-law takes the babies away, substituting puppies, and hastens to tell her son that the young woman has bewitched him. He immediately orders that his young wife be buried up to her chest in the great hall of the castle. The mother-in-law instructs one of the servants to kill the babies, but he pities them and entrusts them to the care of a hermit who looks after them. Seven years later the nobleman, while out hunting, encounters the children and notices their chains. He tells his mother about this. She orders a servant to bring the chains to her. The servant finds six boys in the guise of swans swimming on a river, while their sister on the riverbank looks after their chains. He seizes the six chains, without obtaining that of the sister. He gives them to the mother-in-law, who orders a goldsmith to make a goblet from them. However, the chains resist all his efforts, but in the attempt, he damages one of them.

The six boys retain their form, as they need the chains to reverse the Metamorphosis. They fly away with their sister who transforms herself into a swan and all settle on a pond near their father's castle. The girl, in human form, goes to the castle to beg for bread, which she shares with the swans and with the woman buried up to her chest. The

nobleman notices the girl's strange behaviour and questions her. He learns of his mother-in-law's treachery and returns the chains to the boys, who all regain their human form, except for the swan whose chain was damaged. He will have to pull the little boat in which the nobleman travels. The children's mother is freed and the mother-in-law is punished by being buried up to her chest, thus suffering the punishment she had inflicted on her daughter-in-law (Lecouteux 1982:111-112).

A second version of the story, Elixo, exhibits some changes in content and the characters are no longer anonymous.

The additions and changes are as follows:

1. The protagonist is a King; his name is Lothaire; his Kingdom is somewhere near Hungary.
2. He lies down and goes to sleep near a spring and a young woman finds him and pulls his long sleeve over his face to protect him from the sun.
3. She is called Elixo.
4. She tells him that she will give birth to septuplets, but that she will die after their birth.
5. The mother-in-law is called Matrosilie
6. The King has to leave to fight against a pagan King.
7. The servant who is to take the children away has a name – Monicier.
8. The mother-in-law says that Elixo has given birth to seven little dragons which flew away.
9. A messenger of the king, Rudemart, by chance sees the children at the hermit's home and tells Matrosile about them.
10. Rudemart steals the boys' chains while they are asleep, but the girl, who is awake, sees what has happened and retains her chain.
11. While the boys, turned into swans, settle on a pond, the girl stays with the hermit.
12. The story follows the normal course of events, but once her evil deeds have been discovered, Matrosile is forgiven and becomes a kind and loving grandmother (Lecouteux 1982:113-114).

It is clear that, although the general course of events does not change, significant details are added and important changes are made in order to rationalize the events. What is particularly significant is that the mother-in-law changes her attitude during the course of the tale – her role is now that of a conventional grandmother.

In the third version of the story, *Isomberte*, there is an attempt to Christianise the tale. Count Eustache de Portemise marries a young woman, Isomberte. However, her mother-in-law, Ginesa, does not like her daughter-in-law. The Count has to accompany his liege lord to battle and, while he is away, Isomberte gives birth to seven babies, all boys. An angel places gold chains round the neck of each child. Bandoval, Count Eustache's seneschal, writes a letter informing the Count of the birth of the children. However, Ginesa substitutes the letter, informing Eustache that Isomberte has given birth to seven dogs. Eustache replies that no harm must come to his wife and her offspring, but again Ginesa intercepts the letter, replacing it with an order to kill the mother and the children. Bandoval, the seneschal, cannot carry out this order and spares the mother, but takes the children into the forest where he abandons them. A hermit finds them and looks after them. One day the hermit comes to court with six of the children, leaving one of them at home. Ginesa instructs him to leave them with her, as she wishes to bring them up. However, she has the chains removed and attempts to have the children killed, but they fly away as, without their chains, they have become swans. Ginesa orders a goldsmith to make a goblet from the chains. One chain, surprisingly enough, is sufficient and the goldsmith returns the others to Ginesa. On his return, Eustache is puzzled by the events; nevertheless he orders that Isomberte be put to death. An angel reveals the remaining child's identity to the hermit. This boy is to defend his mother's honour. With God's help he is victorious. Ginesa is punished and the five chains are returned to the children. Five of the swans thus regain human shape; one becomes the Chevalier au Cygne (Lecouteux 1982:115-116).

It is clear from the above synopses that, as with all tales passed down orally, changes occur in the story. The oral poet's attitude and religious beliefs also become clear, as

seen in the change of heart of the grandmother in *Elixo* and the influence of Christianity in *Isomberte*.

Water is often associated with the process of Metamorphosis, either by its presence in the legends and myths or as an agent of change. We have all read the tales of beings living under water – they may have beautiful palaces in the depths of the ocean or live in springs or rivers. These polymorphic creatures sometimes rise from the depths and take on the form of animals or humans. These beings have crossed the frontier from the *other world*, to *our world* where they often remain for many years.

I quote from *The Enchanted World: Water Spirits*. "...In the pageant of mortal lives, the sea played many roles. It was cradle and grave, the wellspring of life and its destroyer. It was both alien and kindred, a link connecting the finite shore to the mysterious realm of the infinite. ... sinister spirits, dwelled, too, in freshwater lakes and streams, and in pools that welled up far inland from the coast, from invisible sources deep within the earth. These watery creations could assume various forms, both foul and fair" (Time 1989:12).

A breaking of a taboo or the non-redeeming of a promise made many years earlier can often change the character and return the being to its original shape, sometimes bringing out a hitherto unknown side of its personality. A boundary has been crossed and a double Metamorphosis has thus occurred, that of mind and body. The story of Melusina will illustrate these points.

One day the king of Albania, while hunting, came across a fountain where he saw a beautiful woman, the fairy Pressina. He fell in love with her and asked her to marry him. Her only condition was that he was not to be present when she gave birth. They were married and Pressina produced triplets, one of whom was called Melusina. The king was so excited by the news that he rushed to his wife's bedside. Pressina was furious at the intrusion and left, taking the children with her. The taboo had been broken. When they were fifteen years old Pressina told the children about their father's betrayal and

Melusina was so angry that she decided to seek revenge by imprisoning her father. However, Pressina was enraged at Melusina's cruelty and placed a curse on her: she would turn into a half-serpent every Saturday of her life.

Raymond, the Count of Poitou, while hunting, came upon a fountain – *La Fontaine de Soif* where he saw three women dressed in white. One of them was Melusina. He fell in love with her and she agreed to marry him on condition that he did not come to see her on Saturdays. One Saturday years later the Count's curiosity got the better of him. He went to her chamber and realized that she was having a bath. He opened the door quietly and, to his surprise, saw that from the waist down Melusina's body had become a giant serpent. He kept her secret until one day, during a quarrel, he called her an *odious serpent*. He had broken the taboo. Melusina was transformed into a winged serpent and flew away (Lecouteux 1982:19).

The writers of several fairy tales have been influenced by the Melusina story, which may, of course, be an archetype theme. In the story of the Little Mermaid by Hans Christian Anderson a mermaid falls in love with a sailor whom she has rescued after a shipwreck. She wants to be a mortal to be near him and appeals to the water sorceress. She is granted her wish, but she has to give up her beautiful voice. As he cannot speak to her, the sailor does not return her love. He finally marries a princess, and the little mermaid, heart-broken, returns to the sea (Foth 1997).

In *Beowulf*, an ancient epic poem and one of the earliest English literary works, the hero Beowulf, has to descend into the *other world* beneath the water, to slay a monster, Grendel's mother. Grendel has been killing King Hrothgar's men and Beowulf, who has already killed Grendel, must deal with his mother, which, of course, he does. The lupine nature of these two monsters becomes clear when we note that words such as 'werga, werhatho, heorowearth, brimwlf and grundwyrgegne' all of which contain the elements wearg/wearth or wylf occur (Stone 1994 Online). Beowulf, (itself an interesting name) has made the transition from his known world to that of the monsters – the unknown under the water.

Water itself is sometimes considered to be an agent of Metamorphosis; thus, according to folklore, the waters found in the springs of Brittany are said to have many powers. They may be curative, (physical, mental and emotional), preventative or even malevolent. They are believed to affect both humans and animals, as well as to have an influence on the fertility of the earth.

In her book, *La Mystique des eaux sacrées dans l'antique Armor*, Claire de Marmier (de Marmier 1947) discusses many of these properties. She confines herself almost exclusively to the waters of springs or what she calls *fontaines*. In the *Dictionnaire Alphabétique et Analogique de la Langue Française*. (Robert 1997:804) *une fontaine* is defined as “eau qui sort de terre et se répand à la surface du sol.”

De Marmier writes that in the South-West and the Centre of France “l'évocation (du loup-garou) est fréquemment ... associée aux fontaines” (de Marmier 1947:19). She relates how in 1860 it was widely believed that certain men, particularly the sons of priests, were forced, at each full moon to transform themselves (probably a case of shape-shifting, as the change was accomplished by the person himself) into werewolves. They would jump out of bed and throw themselves into the water, cross to the other side and a few hours before dawn they would return home. She does not recount what happens to them between the time they leave home and their return.

She tells how, in Picardy, it is believed that every Saturday a young man rolls in the pool of the fairy forest and, on getting out of the water, has turned into a werewolf (de Marmier 1947:20).

Primitive people could either benefit from or be the victims of the elements of nature. Even as it is today, fertility of the soil was extremely important in times gone by. In Brittany early people believed that if one threw water on the statue of the patron saint Conval, from a spring near Conval, rain would result almost immediately and the formerly sterile soil would become fertile.

Forbes Irving also discusses the “magical transforming power of water”. A drowning man may be transformed into a sea bird or he may be changed into something else, even a god. In one story Ceyx is drowned in a shipwreck and his grieving wife throws herself into the sea: she becomes a halcyon, a mythical bird which makes its nest on the waves and calms storms (Forbes Irving 1990:124).

Sabine Baring-Gould (2005) tells how the swan-maidens, who, she says, are the houris of the Vedic heaven, sometimes, laying aside their feather-dresses become beautiful women. They may even marry mortals, but soon they revert and spreading their wings, they fly away. They have come from the ‘other world’ to earth, only to re-cross the boundary and return to their original state.

However, throughout the ages, water has also been an agent of destruction. According to the Bible, because of their wicked behaviour, all living creatures on earth were destroyed by a flood, except for Noah, who was told by God to build an Ark in order to save his immediate family, as well as two of each unclean animal and seven of each of those that were clean (Genesis chap.7 v.2).

Further examples of the power of natural phenomena to effect change are that rivers flow, the sun causes evaporation, resulting in rain which causes the germination of seeds; fire causes mass destruction; ice melts; the wind moves seeds from one place to another, distributing life.

In our times we have seen how the lives of inhabitants of entire villages have been rapidly transformed by flash floods. Overnight those who have been leading a life of relative prosperity have become needy, homeless people. One need only think of what happened in Florence in 1966 when the Arno burst its banks and almost destroyed many priceless treasures. The Tsunami (2004) in the Bay of Bengal, too, is a tragic example of the power of water.

According to Bachelard, in one of Poe's stories *Cottage Landor* all the objects are reflected so accurately in the water that it is difficult to distinguish between what is in the sky and what is reflected (Bachelard 1978:72). The many fish in the pond seem to be flying. They appear to be suspended in the air. In this way the water "devient une sorte de patrie universelle, elle peuple le ciel de ses poissons" (Bachelard 1978:72). Thus the fish seem to fly and swim simultaneously. Similarly one can see the clouds in the sky and their reflection in a pond. This would appear to be the ultimate crossing and re-crossing of two worlds – earth and sky, a glimpse into the other world while fettered to 'reality' on earth. One can thus contemplate the water simultaneously in its reflections and in its depth. All in all, water in all its forms was believed to bring about transformations of many kinds and to facilitate the crossing of boundaries. I believe that it is essential to note the importance of these phenomena, as they situate the theme of Metamorphosis squarely in our contemporary world and point to its scientific dimension. The theme could otherwise be seen to belong purely to the domain of fantasy and magic, which clearly is not the case.

I now turn to the less easily perceived manifestations of the theme under discussion, namely Psychiatric phenomena, the Double and Parapsychology. Here I include the theme of the Shadow, the Double, the Mirror Image and the phenomenon known as Xenoglossy. Although these themes do not appear to fit into the conventionally accepted notion of what Metamorphosis entails, they all result in change and this is, after all, the basis of all Metamorphosis – the change from one state to another. The human being is in a constant state of change, whether it be biological (physical), mental, emotional or intellectual. His way of life may alter and his interests become directed onto a different path. His physical environment will change several times in the course of his life. In adulthood he may be convinced that he has what we perceive as an illusionary companion. He is in constant contact with "somebody else", often speaking to that person and even replying. In this, what has been diagnosed as a schizophrenic state, the person is convinced that the other being exists. This is his reality. He may suffer from an even more serious mental illness, Lycanthropy, a psychosis, in which the subject has delusions of being a wild animal, often a wolf. According to a paper by Harvey

Rostenstock, and Kenneth R. Vincent (Rostenstock 1977), Patients “whose internal fears exceed their coping mechanisms may externalize them via projection and constitute a serious threat to others.” They have thus passed from what we consider *accepted* reality into their own reality, without any visible physical change.

When placed in an unnatural or dangerous situation people have been known to experience hallucinations. They are quite sure that the events which occur and the people whom they meet are real. An interesting example of this state is to be found in a book which I read recently. It recounts an actual dog and sledge race across about 1000 miles in Alaska. Gary Paulsen in his book *Winterdance* gives an account of this race (Paulsen 2003) and tells of how, suffering from sleep deprivation at 30° below freezing he entered this reality. While racing his team of dogs he saw a man clearly, who got onto his sledge and shortly afterwards a naked woman also appeared on the sledge. The author was afraid that these two people would start an argument, but when he looked round, they had both disappeared. Thus, for a short time, the author had an experience which, to him, was unquestionably real and yet it never really happened.

Another form of reaching the *other* world occurs during hypnosis. Under hypnosis the *subject* is also transported into his own world. In order to alleviate a patient’s personal problems, a psychologist may take his patient back to recall his earliest memories and thus bring to light events which have caused stress or unacceptable behaviour in the adult. For a short period the patient will be able to recall past events and deal with them, without feeling threatened. He has thus re-created his own reality of an earlier period of his life and this is believed to help to heal problems being experienced in adulthood. The controversial practice of using hypnosis as a means of entertainment clearly reveals a different situation to the subject under hypnosis. He may be given a potato to eat and, following the suggestion made by the hypnotist, believe he is eating an apple. Once again, he has been experiencing his own reality; however, post-hypnotic suggestions can last for many years and may be extremely dangerous. Similarly those people who visit mediums experience, for a short while, a wished-for, yet different reality when they believe that they are receiving messages from the *other* world through the intercession of

the medium. This may, of course, be genuine. Those who claim to see ghosts and apparitions are, once again, experiencing events in their own world and may indeed be doing so, drawing on powers and abilities of which many are unaware. During a state of deep meditation some have claimed to be in contact with other worlds and even to have left their bodies, much like the shamans, to experience contact with other beings during so-called astral travel. They too, may have powers of which others are unaware.

I have touched on the notion of the *Other* or *Double* as a manifestation of change, of crossing a boundary, of Metamorphosis. With this in mind, I shall look briefly at the theme of the Shadow, the Reflection (in a mirror or a body of water) and the Portrait. The belief in the shadow is probably anthropological; it occurs in the superstitions of nearly every country. It is thought to be a mental disease called Autoscopy.

Otto Rank in his book *The Double* quotes James Frazer as saying that our *superstition* (i.e. about the shadow) finds “an actual counterpart in the belief of savages.” Many primitive peoples believe that every injury inflicted upon the shadow also harms its owner (Frazer 1915:78). “... According to Hindu belief, one destroys an enemy by stabbing his picture or shadow in the heart.” Rank also refers to the Homeric concept in both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* that the shadow is the soul of the once living person (Rank 1971:52).

Many literary works and film scripts deal with these concepts. Rank quotes an instance in a film called *The Student of Prague* in which the protagonist, Balduin, firmly believing that he is being persecuted by his mirror-image, seizes his weapon and shoots at the mirror. He is relieved, thinking he has killed his Double. Looking at the mirror, he feels a sharp pain in his chest and notices that his shirt is soaked in blood. He falls to the floor, having killed himself unwittingly. He has passed from one state to another.

The fear of becoming old, one of the deepest problems of the self, is the theme of Oscar Wilde's *The Portrait of Dorian Gray*. The Narcissus theme in this work is also clear as Dorian is enamoured of his own beauty. Instead of the protagonist ageing, his portrait

ages, and shows signs of dissolute living. Dorian remains youthful and handsome. His portrait is “the visible conscience of Dorian. It teaches him, who loves himself inordinately, to despise his own soul” (Rank 1971:18). Eventually, in despair, aware that his *Double*, the portrait, is old and ugly, he decides to destroy the picture. He stabs it, but at that very moment Dorian, now old and ugly, falls down dead with a knife in his chest, thus destroying himself. The figure in the portrait is now seen to be young and handsome.

Rank returns to the case of Dorian Gray and his desire to remain young for ever. This fear of getting old is, in fact, the fear of death. Dorian says at one point “When I find that I am growing old I shall kill myself” (Rank 1971:77). In much of the literature on the subject of the Double the protagonists do, in fact, commit suicide, by shooting at or smashing the mirror in which they see their reflexions. This appears contradictory; it is not the coming of Death but the thought of it, which terrifies these protagonists. The result is “the paradox of the suicide who voluntarily seeks death in order to free himself of the intolerable thanatophobia” (Rank 1971:78). Surely this, in itself, is ironic, as the protagonist of the tale kills *the Other*, not realizing that the Double is himself.

Changes, real or imaginary, permanent or transitory can be seen to occur in many fields related to parapsychology and these can be considered to produce transformation, usually of a temporary nature in human beings.

Xenoglossy, a word coined by a French psychologist Charles Richert comes from the Greek *xenos* (strange, foreign) and *glossa* (tongue). It indicates the ability to speak an unknown and unlearned foreign language. It is believed to occur when a person is regressed to a previous incarnation by means of hypnosis, or when he is in a trance or in touch with a *spirit* speaking a foreign unknown language with the help of a medium. In a paper on Xenoglossy, the writer gives an account of several incidents of xenoglossy: In 1970 Doloros Jay, the wife of a Methodist minister in Elkton, Virginia, was regressed while in a hypnotic state and Gretchen Gottlieb, a German girl emerged. She had

apparently died at the age of sixteen and had lived in the late nineteenth century. Doloros herself had never studied German (Guiley 1991).

This cannot be considered to be a conventional case of Metamorphosis; however, it does illustrate a fundamental change.

It has become clear that Metamorphosis is a concept which cannot be thought to apply to one aspect of life alone. It is not simply a case of the Fairy Godmother waving her magic wand and turning a pumpkin into a beautiful coach for Cinderella. It is universal, all-embracing; in fact, without the presence of Metamorphosis life itself would be unable to continue.

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Chapter 2

Socio-cultural and historical context: The Twelfth Century

Renaissance

In order to appreciate what Marie de France wrote about in her *Lais*, an understanding of the conditions prevailing at the time is essential. This 12th Century Renaissance did not simply occur spontaneously, but was a gradual awakening or Metamorphosis that took place in Western Europe.

In the culture of the time women were largely excluded from public life. Debates occurred only between men, as it was assumed that women were inferior to men. Women had to ensure that there were children, (usually sons!) to succeed their fathers, as well as to create alliances by marrying into the correct families. Very few received education; they either made acceptable marriages or became nuns. However, some became politically important as the wives of rulers and as governors when their husbands were absent. Notable women who fulfilled this role were the Empress Matilda, Eleanor of Aquitaine, Queen Melisende of Jerusalem and the Countess Matilda of Tuscany.

Although not yet writing in the vernacular, several women contributed to the 12th Century literary Renaissance. Elizabeth of Schönau (1129-64), a nun, produced several works, which came into their own in later centuries. Another exceptional woman of the time was Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179). She too was a nun, and an abbess from 1136. Her writing career started in 1151. She wrote explanations of the gospels, a tract on Benedictine Rule, prophecies, works on medicine and nature and saints' lives (Swanson 1999:196). She was a preacher and claimed merely to be the voice of God, a *divine* mouthpiece, virtually denying her femininity. As a figure of authority, the abbess had to be strong, almost to the point of acting like a man.

Ermengarde of Narbonne (1105-54) was active in the political sphere, an unusual activity for a 12th Century woman. She was the leader of the French Royalist Party opposing the English. Not only did she fight numerous wars in defence of her domain, but was also a

patron of the troubadours and protector of the church. Ermengarde acted as judge in complex cases of feudal law. Her activities and abilities rank with those of many 12th Century men.

Under the prevailing Feudal System the King, Duke or Count was absolute ruler of his feudatory and those under his control had to obey the Knightly Code of loyalty, courage, courtesy, honesty and charity in return for which they received protection from their enemies. This was a totally male dominated system and it is probable that Marie de France, under the influence of Eleanor and the writings of Andreas Capellanus, was aware of its shortcomings. In adapting the hitherto oral Breton stories she had the opportunity to advise change by subtly inserting her opinions on conditions which she found unacceptable. Elucidation of this point of view follows later.

During this period amongst the aristocracy marriage was an arranged affair in which love played very little part. The woman's role was to provide an heir for her husband. Marriage arrangements were conducted by men only as this was considered a serious matter (Duby 1994:25). The marriage contract regulated the woman's sexual activity "or rather the part of that activity concerned with procreation" (Duby 1984:19). Karras tells us that "the conception within marriage justified for medieval authors, the otherwise sinful activity of sex" (Karras 2005:59). Sexual relationships therefore existed in marriage merely to produce offspring. Medieval women had to be subservient to their husbands, as marriage was not considered to be a unity of equals (Thomas 1995:5).

Concubinage had previously been socially accepted and legally valid and, as we have seen, marriage merely served to continue the family line. However, as the power of the Roman Catholic Church grew, the church became more active in its opposition to these practices and in 1215, with the establishment of the Fourth Lateran Council, the presence of a priest became obligatory to sanctify a marriage.

Duby, discussing customs pertaining to marriage, says: "early medieval society held concubinage as well as marriage to be socially acceptable and legally valid... while

marriage fulfilled the desire of a family to maintain or improve its social standing,” young people were expected to marry partners of equal or higher standing. “Concubinage in contrast, fulfilled the desire of the individual for companionship and/or sexual satisfaction” (Duby 1983:44.). Gratian, a Camaldolese monk from Bologna who codified Canon Law at that time believed that “the only thing necessary to create a binding marriage was the spoken willingness of each partner to take the other as spouse.” It follows that neither parental consent nor the presence of a witness was necessary (Thomas 1995:4).

We thus have the situation prevalent at this time that the male, being dominant in all things, virtually *owned* his wife. He would expect her to be sexually faithful to him only, while he, on the other hand was free to find sexual pleasure wherever he wished.

This would have resulted in many young women seeking fulfillment outside the marriage, especially when having been forced into marriage with an older man. Perhaps *Courtly Love* was a socially acceptable vehicle for this, although it had to be kept secret. Or perhaps such love, *Platonic* as it may have been, was better than none at all. The practice of courtly love appears to have had its origin in the poetry of the troubadours of Southern France who had come into contact with the Arabs and their love songs in Spain and Sicily. They put this poetry to music and the songs were sung at Court where they were much appreciated by members of the aristocracy. A further influence was the work of Ovid, a Latin poet who wrote three satirical works on love: *Ars amatoria*, *Remedia amoris* and *Amoris*.

The first troubadour was Count William of Aquitaine, Grandfather of Eleanor of Aquitaine. Other influential poets were Marcabru, Bernard Marti, Cereamon, Arnaud Daniel and Bernard de Ventadour. (Moller 1960:39-52) The central theme of the troubadours’ songs was love. Their beliefs were to be partly responsible for the birth of courtly love. Strict rules governed its practice.

According to the tenets of courtly love, marriage is no impediment to love outside of the union; both partners are aristocrats; love is to be kept secret; it ennoble both partners. Perhaps the most important change is that *La femme occupe une place au premier plan* (Boase 1977:1) i.e. she is in control and, in relation to her suitor, is of a higher than or equal social standing. He is her vassal and must obey her commands. There is no thought of marriage between the lady and her suitor however. These ideas were diametrically opposed to the 12th Century concept of the relationship of the married couple. The practice of courtly love has demanded the woman should be dominant; she was usually married and the suitor worshipped her and had to pay homage to her, in much the same way as a vassal had to pay homage to his liege lord. Courtly love thus had its origin in the 12th Century, in the same period in which feudalism flourished. Boase states “L’amour fut une invention du douzième siècle” (Boase 1977:1)

The object of the suitor’s admiration had to be of high social standing, higher than that of her admirer. This relationship would ennoble the young man. This *fin amors*, although it existed between a young man and a married woman, could often lead to consummation. There was thus very little Platonic love. Daniel Poirion describes the *fin amor* and one of the reasons for its existence: “..... il ne peut y avoir d’amour dans le mariage”. He adds “Les moeurs de l’époque interdisait à peu près d’aimer une jeune fille, l’amour courtois est donc, en théorie, obligatoirement adultère (Poirion 1983: 132) This type of courtly love was codified by Andreas Capellanus.

Andreas Capellanus codified the tenets of courtly love in three books entitled *De arte honesti amandi* (The Art of Courtly love) written between 1174 and 1186 i.e. in the century under consideration, advocates a different concept of the relationship between a woman and a man, as it completely reverses the traditionally accepted idea of male dominance. However, for centuries there have been divergent views amongst scholars as to whether this work was intended to be taken seriously or whether it was meant as a satire.

Some scholars doubt the legitimacy of Andreas Capellanus's work. Moore (Moore 1979: 621-638) cites scholars such as D.W. Robertson (Robertson 1952: 145-161) who holds that books 1 and 2 of *De Amore* are ironic and intend to show that courtly morals were adulterous and that the third book condemning love and women is the only one to be taken seriously. In E. Talbot Donaldson's opinion Andreas's work was intended as a joke (Donaldson 1970:154-163). Another scholar who refutes the seriousness of the work is John F. Benton. He says: "My own inclination is to accept the suggestion of a few critics that the intentions of Andreas and Chrétien [de Troyes] when they wrote about worldly love were conventionally moral humorous or ironic" (Benton 1961:590).

However, says Moore, many scholars have taken the work seriously. He tells of a symposium on *Eleanor of Aquitaine* held in 1973 in which most of the papers hailed her "as the patron of courtly literature and of courtly love" (Moore 1979:631). This is undoubtedly a reference to the so-called courts of love held in Poitiers under the auspices of Eleanor of Aquitaine and her daughter Marie of Champagne. Moore continues that in 1975 a collection of papers entitled *In Pursuit of Perfection: Courtly love in Medieval Literature*" the general consensus of opinion was that *courtly love is real* (Moore 1979:631) which I interpret as meaning that it was practised and did not remain merely theoretical.

The importance of the verses of the troubadours of Southern France which were dominated by the notion of *courtly love* and the love poetry of the *trouvères* of Northern France lies in the fact that both were written in the vernacular. The lyrical poetry of Southern France concentrated on personal feelings, such as love, and much of this poetry was dedicated to women. These poets retained the ideals of courage and loyalty, but added that of *courtoisie*. This word implies "gallantry, gentility, generosity and the etiquette or mannerisms conventional in the courtly life of a castle where the crudity and roughness of an earlier age had made room for refinement and delicacy" (Hoyt 1976:402).

Scholars are not unanimous on the definition of courtly love: some think that it was adulterous, others disagree; some say that it was spiritual and pure, other say that it is sensual (Moore 1979:624). The same holds true for Cappellanus's work. Did he take the ideas which were originally expressed (in French) by the troubadours seriously or did he ridicule them in the course of his books? Scholars such as Sidney Painter and Felix Schlösser express their doubts. Painter says "it seems highly probable that Andrew was not always critically serious" (Painter 1961:118). Felix Schlösser acknowledges the possibility that the third book, *The condemnation of love*, might not be serious (Schlösser 1960:375). D.W. Robertson Jr. argues that the first two books praising love were ironic, really intending to show courtly morals to be adulterous and even blasphemous. He believes that the final book, condemning love and women presented Andreas's true beliefs (Robertson 1952:145-61).

The most important woman writer of the twelfth century was Marie de France, whose *Lais* I intend to examine in detail. Her importance lies in the fact that "a reasonably extensive corpus of vernacular work survives, earning praise as perhaps the finest medieval short fiction writer before Boccaccio and Chaucer" (Swanson 1999:199). Her works – the *Lais* and *Fables* in the vernacular, and the translation from Latin of *St. Patrick's Purgatory* were composed between 1160 and 1215. Very little is known about her.

Many scholars have suggested that she may have been a nun. She has been identified as the Abbess of Shaftesbury or as an Abbess of Reading. Marie de Bologne, Abbess of Romsey has also been mentioned. Among lay women Marie de Champagne, Marie de Comiègne and Marie de Meulan have been suggested (McCash 2006:7-26).

McCash argues that Marie was not a nun, refuting the arguments put forward by other scholars. She, together with scholars such as U.T. Holmes (1932), Roger Whichard (1950), P.N. Flum (1961), Peter Grillo (1998), Yolande de Pontfarcy (1995) and Rupert Pickens (2006) believes that Marie de Meulan "remains the best candidate we have" (p18). She was evidently the daughter of Waleran de Meulan and was married to Hugh

Talbot (p18). Although there can be no irrefutable proof of Marie's identity, McCash supports her argument by pointing out that there is proof in several of the *Lais* such as *Deus Amanz*, *Eliduc* and *Milun* that the author is familiar with the area in which the tales are set. It is clear from her writing that Marie de France was highly educated in a time when most women did not have access to any form of learning. McCash observes that she came from a family "whose interest in literature and culture is well documented" and her father "was known as a poet himself" (p19). It is possible that in later years Marie retired to a convent. McCash says in conclusion that what she has postulated is a hypothesis and says "we may never know for sure" Marie's true identity (p19). In my opinion, the possibility does exist that she, at some stage of her life, was attached to the court of Henry II, who was probably the King to whom she dedicated her *Lais*. I also feel that even if she was not a nun, she had a very real sense of morality.

Swanson says of the author: "Her claim to fame rests on her role in the rise of vernacular romantic literature: her *Lais* offer a female contribution to the development of the Arthurian legends, setting Marie beside Chrétien de Troyes as a courtly writer, in French" (Swanson 1999:199).

I believe that Marie de France whose innovative spirit is so clearly visible in her writing played a pivotal role in 12th Century vernacular literature and it is for this reason that I chose to explore aspects of change occurring in the 12th Century which could, in my opinion, have had an influence on her and on her *Lais*. While an understanding of the period is essential, the thrust of my thesis will be a study of Metamorphosis in all its forms as evidenced in the *Lais* of Marie de France.

After a careful reading of Marie de France's *Lais*, I am of the opinion that she was influenced by Andreas's work, particularly since the aristocrats of the court which she frequented appeared to take the tenets of *De Amore* seriously. She did not necessarily approve of or agree with everything Andreas advocated; above all things, her interest was encouraging true, sincere love.

Many scholars believe that Marie de France was at some stage attached to the court of Henry II of England and Queen Eleanor of Aquitaine and would therefore have been fully aware of the prevailing social norms. These social conditions would have been of particular interest to her and, in the writing of her *Lais* – adaptations of the oral Breton tales – she would have had the opportunity of subtly inserting her opinions on conditions or behaviour which she found unacceptable, advocating change through the medium of her *Lais*.

In a period in which young girls were reared very strictly and were either married off to a man chosen by their father or entered a convent, most played very little part in the twelfth century politics (Weir 2001:2) However there were exceptions who “transcended the mores of society” (p2) and Eleanor of Aquitaine was one of them, even to the extent that she accompanied her husband, Louis VII, the King of France on the second Crusade to Palestine.

Born in 1122, the granddaughter of William IX of Aquitaine, the first troubadour, she received an excellent education. Her grandfather’s court was “the centre of Western European culture” (Bos: Online) where troubadours and storytellers entertained the nobles.

After her estrangement from her second husband, Henry II of England, Eleanor settled in Poitiers, a leading centre of culture. Here the Courts of Love with their codes and etiquette were said to have been instituted by Eleanor.

The promulgation of the rules of courtly love is said to have occurred in the Courts of Love presided over by Eleanor and her daughter, Marie of Champagne. A group of women would publicly debate and render judgment on cases of dissention between lovers. The criteria on which these cases were judged were based on the rules of Andreas’s treatise. All cases were anonymous and each side had an advocate to explain the position of her “client”. As these trials were meant as entertainment, no sentence could be imposed. The young men simply received instructions on how to behave

(O'Siodachain, Online). As some scholars did not take Andreas's books seriously, the very existence of these courts was doubted by many.

Just what was the Twelfth Century Renaissance? To most people the word *Renaissance* brings to mind Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci and Petrarch, as well as the concept of *humanism*, associated with the 14th, 15th and 16th Centuries. In fact, the Twelfth Century was the precursor of what is generally called the Renaissance.

A brief overview of the significant changes which occurred in the course of the 12th Century follows:

To assess the conditions prevailing in the 12th Century, I have turned to scholars such as Charles H. Haskins who wrote the definitive work on the period and R.N. Swanson whose 1999 purview allows a modern understanding of the conditions of the time. Marie de France lived in a time of profound change in almost all spheres – the Twelfth Century.

The Carolingian Renaissance of the 8th Century was vitally important as it established a tradition on which the 12th Century Renaissance could build. During the time of Charlemagne and his successors scholars were brought to Gaul from England, Italy and Spain. The Latin classics and language were studied and libraries sprang up. Charlemagne was instrumental in founding schools in the monasteries and cathedrals. Many wars and invasions followed and much was destroyed; however, a tradition had been established which would have a great deal of influence on the Twelfth Century Renaissance. This, in turn, would lead to the Renaissance, of the Quattrocento in Italy which was followed by that of the 16th century in France.

Economic conditions of the 12th Century made it possible to travel more widely. This had a significant effect, as ideas and skills could be brought back by the travellers, whether they were secular, clergy, pilgrims or other laymen. Because of the Christian conquest of Northern Spain – Toledo was conquered in 1085 and Saragossa in 1118 - the Christian

scholars came into contact with the learning of the Saracens and translations of scientific works from the Arabic became possible. The Norman conquest of Sicily and Southern Italy allowed for translation from the Greek as there were Greek monasteries and a fairly large group of Greek-speaking citizens. The city republics of the north maintained commercial and diplomatic relations with Constantinople. Mainly because of its geographical position, Salerno became the centre of medieval medicine. Although the Crusaders themselves were men of action, they nevertheless brought East and West into closer contact, thus stimulating trade, transportation and the use of money.

Many of the Greek classics, such as the medical works of Hippocrates and Galen, Euclid (Mathematics), Ptolemy (Astronomy and Geography), Plato and Aristotle (Logic) were first translated into Arabic. With the re-conquest of Sicily and Southern Italy by the Normans and of Spain by the forces of Charlemagne, these works became available to Western scholars and were translated into Latin which was the *lingua franca* of Europe.

Latin scholars could now turn, not only to Greek works, but also to those in Arabic, present in Spain, Sicily and Constantinople. As Arab translations were often made directly from Greek, Syriac or Hebrew, this led to scholars becoming more acquainted with fields such as medicine and mathematics, as well as astronomy, astrology and alchemy. Thus their contribution was extensive: to the pool of knowledge they added further information on arithmetic, algebra, trigonometry, as well as the standard astronomical tables of the Middle Ages.

Spain was, it seems, the most important source of information and learning on which the Western world could draw. After its conquest by the Saracens, Spain became a part of the Muslim East for many centuries. As a result, this country absorbed much of the learning in science, magic and astrology from the East, and Western Europe would draw on this knowledge for centuries to come. Translation was carried on in many cities in Spain, but eventually the chief centre became Toledo. Gerard of Cremona, active in the second half of the twelfth century was a prolific translator. In Toledo he learned Arabic in order to translate Ptolemy's *Almagest* in 1175. Other eminent translators from Arabic

were Michael Scot, Alfred the Englishman, and Herman the German. Alfred's main interest lay in Aristotle's natural philosophy; Michael Scot wrote the first Latin version of Aristotle's *On Animals* in 1220 and Herman the German's main focus was also on Aristotle. Words such as algebra, zero, almanac, zenith, alkali, elixir, syrup are all taken directly from the Arabic, which indicates its importance in many fields.

An aspect of the Twelfth Century which can be seen to possess the true spirit of a renaissance was the fact that classical manuscripts were being used to infuse new life and to engender enthusiasm among scholars, particularly in the fields of Science and Philosophy. However, Latin had another important role to play as it was still a spoken language. The Latin of Northern France spread to England, Spain and Southern Italy, resulting in communication and discussion amongst the speakers of different nations without the necessity of intermediary translations. Latin remained alive. New terminologies were adopted to cope with issues which had not existed previously; vocabularies had to be created for economic, political and legal issues. Knowledge of Latin was therefore most important; it was used in the church, in law and administration, having to transcend the regional dialects. People had to understand one another. Latin defined the internationality of the Twelfth Century. There was a need for communication, so practical, mundane Latin developed for teaching, administration and recording. Latin now appeared to play the role of an international language.

One of the most important aspects of the Twelfth Century Renaissance was the development of the vernacular languages and their use in the literature of the period. The change to the use of the vernacular language was not identical in all countries. Proof that there was a written vernacular in England in the Twelfth Century is supported by the fact that by 1154 English had already become a written language; the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* was already in existence and was being continued in Peterborough. There was also an Anglo-Saxon version of the *Elucidarius* of Honorius Augustodunensis, as well as Twelfth Century manuscripts of the *Solomon and Saturn*. While texts in Anglo Norman and French are also in evidence, one should differentiate between completely new work, like

that of Chrétien de Troyes, and the process of actually writing down what had been purely an oral version of a story, such as the *Chanson de Roland*.

In Italy the process was somewhat slower, because of the similarity of Latin and Italian. The verses of the Provençal troubadours, which were previously known only orally, were written down, revealing both a conscious composition, as well as mere recording of the poetry.

Works in the Spanish vernacular came a little later, i.e. at the turn of the thirteenth century. One of the earliest, if not the earliest identifiable Spanish writers was Gonzalo de Berceo, who survived until the 1250s.

In Germany, the situation was completely different. The earliest texts appeared in the eleventh century and often contained religious themes: there is the commentary on the *Hohes Lied*, the ‘Song of Songs’; there are summaries of books of the Bible and *Sündenklagen*, laments about sins. Then the epic tales, such as the *Alexanderlied* (composed between about 1135 and 1170) appeared, the *König Rother* (c.1150), followed shortly by German versions of some of the French romances.

Although vernacular writing on the saints’ lives and works on other religious subjects were accepted, it took some time before secular works in the vernacular became part of the literary body. Several texts on religious topics existed in the vernacular, such as the Anglo-Norman *Jeu d’Adam* (c.1160). There were also romancers like Benoit de Sainte-More who translated the *Roman de Troie*. Geoffrey of Monmouth dealt with the Arthurian Story in his *Historia regum brittanniae* which was later translated into French by Wace, entitled *Roman la de Brut*.

Chrétien de Troyes (1183) was responsible for much of the work on the Arthurian legends and also the story of the Holy Grail. The origin of the Arthurian tradition is obscure; Chrétien refined this material, which had thus far only existed as oral tales. He, in fact, invented this genre and his influence was widespread and lasting. It is probable

that he wrote his romances to entertain the aristocrats at the King's court, thus creating a new audience for his stories. The work of Marie de France, a contemporary of Chrétien, was aimed at the same audience, as it appears that she was attached to the court of Henry II of England. In all probability he is the King to whom she dedicated her *Lais* in the Prologue to this work.

The importance of the vernacular becomes clear when one takes into account that Latin was not understood by the masses and use of the vernacular would make understanding possible to a much wider audience.

Vernacular recording of history occurred in England where the verse biography of William the Marshal, albeit in Anglo-Norman French and not in English, was produced. Germany produced the *Kaiserchronik* in the vernacular in c.1150 and in Northern France and Flanders this kind of writing is to be found in the early 1200s. What is important is the fact that these works were being written in the vernacular, which implied "a reduction in clerical control" (Swanson 1999:180).

Developments in the field of education led to a significant increase in literacy. Haskins states: "The twelfth century ... was an age of new creation ... most of all in the institutions of higher education. It begins with the monastic and cathedral schools; it ends with the earliest universities" (Haskins 1927:368 -369).

In the Middle Ages the literate were mainly ecclesiastics; the ordinary citizen could neither read nor write. Initially only Monastic schools existed, then Cathedral schools developed and from these the development of universities followed. Monastic education before 1100 was the storehouse of knowledge, which would be passed on from generation to generation. Monastic oblation made this process possible; i.e. parents offered their children to a monastery. These *oblates* would then acquire the accumulated knowledge in order to pass it on. There was little investigation which could have brought something new to light. Life was centred on meditation rather than on discussion and debate, existing books were merely used to stimulate this aspect of life rather than as the

basis of debate and discussion. This system of education did not stimulate an inquisitive approach.

From about the middle of the Eleventh Century the beginnings of change in the pattern of education took place. Because money was now available, pupils could be educated for a fee at the monastic schools, even if these students did not wish to become monks. One can therefore make the distinction between *internal* and *external* schools, the *external* schools catering for those who did not want to take up the religious life. Lanfranc of Bec, who later became Archbishop of Canterbury, provided this type of education at Bec's *external* school. Some of his pupils went on to become abbots and prelates; others took up careers not connected with the church.

As teaching methods changed, more emphasis was placed on books, which became more compact and more copies were produced. Books became more and more important, as they provided a source of reference, ensuring that the student did not have to commit everything to memory.

With the decline of the Monastic schools, the Cathedrals became the intellectual centres. Being situated in urban surroundings rather than isolated rural monasteries, they were more accessible.

In Spain the cathedral of Toledo was very important as, after the re-Christianisation in 1085, it was the "natural place of exchange for Christian and Islamic learning" (Haskins 1927:52). Here there was a large number of Arabic books, as well as many bilingual scholars, both Arab and Jewish. This resulted in the establishment of a school for translating Arabic into Latin.

The Twelfth Century saw a wide diffusion of the works of Ovid, a sure sign of the classical revival; Ovid's influence was felt on the poets of the vernacular, such as the troubadours and the Minnesingers, particularly in their concept of love. Indeed, the classical revival influenced the vernacular poetry in several countries. From the Latin

poets the authors of writings in the vernacular learnt about classical mythology and acquired themes for imitation. They also used as models figures such as Aeneas, Alexander and Charlemagne, re-creating them as Knights. It should therefore come as no surprise that in the intellectual and cultural climate of this period innovative writings such as those Marie de France's *Lais* emerged.

After the decline of the monasteries, the cathedral schools concentrated less on the scriptures and finally individual poets felt free to express themselves, often using *pagan* classical authors as models for their inspiration. Translations of works on medicine, mathematics, logic and astronomy were also undertaken in these schools. With the evolution of the schools, came the development of curricula and improvements in academic methods. Masters taught, students debated and compared solutions, thus the secular schools became very popular. Secular schools were no longer necessarily centred at a cathedral.

Changes in learning and teaching methods had thus started to occur. Previously knowledge had been transmitted and acquired orally but by 1200 there was evidence of written records. Now teaching consisted of textual analysis and commentary, called glosses. There is thus a move from oral-style to written-style society.

The process of feudal consolidation at this time resulted in many courts becoming intellectual centres: jongleurs and actors would gather to celebrate particular festivals. They would recount stories about Troy, Thebes, Arthur and Charlemagne. Henry II of England (1154-89) was an educated multi-lingual man, having wide international relations: his daughters were married to the rulers of Saxony, Sicily and Castile respectively.

The philosophical activity of a man such as Abaelard was significant. In Abaelard (1079-1142) we have one of the most striking figures of the medieval renaissance. It was useless, he maintained, merely to quote authorities on theological issues. The students had to form their own opinions on these matters and state them clearly, not relying on the

accepted opinions of previous scholars. *Sic et Non* forced intellectuals to face the relationship between reason and revelation or between reason and tradition. “This was the only way of establishing the truth” (Hoyt 1976:381).

From the foregoing it becomes clear that enormous changes occurred in a variety of domains and disciplines during the Twelfth Century. One can therefore justifiably regard the period as a renaissance. It is also easy to understand the effect such profound changes would have had on the work of Marie de France and how she, herself, would have felt the urge to break with tradition, resulting in her innovative approach to the original tales which she used as material for her *Lais*.

Although Marie’s *Lais* were written to entertain the men and women of the court, her *Weltanschauung* shines through very clearly in her tales. I feel strongly that she did not approve of the existing conditions and that these stories were intended to change the prevailing attitudes towards women amidst all the transitions which were taking place in the 12th Century. Marie was subtly inserting a moralizing message in each *Lai*, whether it was criticism of the tradition of arranged marriages or of the often foolish practice of Courtly Love. What becomes very clear from her stories is her desire to see two people happily married. Marie was an innovator in other respects: she wrote her *Lais* in the vernacular, a fact which would probably contribute to the reaching of a larger reading public amongst the aristocracy. Some of the women, even if they had no knowledge of Latin, could probably read tales in the vernacular. She initiated a new *genre*: by motivating the actions of her characters, i.e. by adapting her material, Marie was well on the way to creating the *short story* form.

Chapter 3

Analysis of the Prologue and the individual *Lais*

The Prologue

All line references refer to: Walter, Philippe. 2000. *Marie de France Lais*, Édition bilingue de Philippe Walter, Collection Folio Classics, Paris: Gallimard.

Before attempting to analyse the *Prologue* to the *Lais* written by Marie de France and establishing its role as introduction to the collection, I shall outline the characteristics of the folktale, the material on which Marie drew for the *Lais* and those of the short story in order to illustrate the progression of one genre to another in the course of subsequent chapters. A brief overview of the historical links between England, the country in which it is believed that she composed her tales and Brittany, the part of France from which she drew her material, follows. An understanding of the *Zeitgeist* prevailing in the Twelfth Century is essential to the understanding of Marie's attitude towards her material.

Writing on the origin of the genre, André Jolles proposes the theory that all folklore, and this includes fairytales, originates from basic mental concerns which are present in the human mind. They exist, without words, in the thoughts of the human being. Such thoughts and emotions – impressions – are later expressed. At first the expression is an oral form of storytelling – and later becomes a written, literate expression. Jolles differentiates between what he calls *Formes Simples*, which would have no specific author (the folktale) and *Formes Savantes*, the literary form of which the author is known. A story belonging to the *Forme Simple* does not give the impression of a real happening and, more importantly, constantly makes use of the *Merveilleux*. The literary form or *Forme Savante*, on the other hand, concentrates on a true-to-life incident. It should be clear that the reference in our case here is to the fairy or folktale on the one hand, and to the short story on the other.

In his book *Einfache Formen (Formes Simples)* Jolles devotes a chapter to the folktale (*le Conte*), which he calls a *Forme Simple* and compares it to the short story (does not recount one striking incident, but leaps from one incident to another, neither does it try to give the impression of *la Nouvelle*), a *Forme savante*. He defines the *Forme Simple* or folktale as a story which is not a real event, but concerns itself largely with the *Merveilleux*. The *Forme savante* or short story, on the other hand, attempts to tell the story in such a convincing manner that it gives the reader the impression of an actual event.

Jolles explains that in Jacob Grimm's opinion the folktale is "poésie de Nature et création spontanée", whereas the short story is "poésie d'Art, préparation" (Jolles 1972:183.) Jolles agrees with Grimm on this point, saying that the folktale is a *creation spontanée*. This is an apparent paradox, but to be truly flowing, one needs to be stable and this stability is provided by the external form of the folktale which is governed by certain laws. Within the tale there is constant movement and this is what is meant by his statement that the folktale is a spontaneous creation, characterized by mobility. The folktale or *Forme Simple* exhibits a flowing, general, ever-changing language. (Jolles 1972:186): whereas the language of the short story can only be thought of as that of a particular person; it can only be created by the action of a writer. (Jolles 1972:186) What he has said, Jolles maintains, applies equally to the characters, location and incidents which distinguish the two forms. He then explains the *disposition mentale* of the *Forme Simple* "l'univers se transforme dans le conte selon un principe qui ne régit et ne détermine que cette forme" (Jolles 1972:188).

Jolles continues his interpretation of the characteristics of the folktale:

"... les choses se passent dans ces récits comme nous voudrions qu'elles se passent dans l'univers, comme elles 'devraient' s'y passer" (Jolles 1972:189). Things happen in these tales as we want them to happen, as they should happen. He emphasises that the reader wants justice to be seen to be done. There is an immanent justice in this world, i.e. it is the function of the folktale to bring this out by telling a tale, by an example.

The world of the folktale is diametrically opposed to that of the real universe. Reality is rarely *just* or fair. Tragedy occurs when what should happen cannot happen or when what should not happen must happen. What is tragic to this formula is the resistance of the universe. It is felt to be opposed to the demands of our ethic code. At the beginning of the folktale, the events depicted contradict our feelings of what is fair and just, however, in the course of the tale, this unjust situation is abolished and at the end, the solution fits in with our feelings of what is fair and just. He says “en entrant dans l’univers du conte, on anéantit l’univers de la réalité qui est ressenti comme immoral” (Jolles 1972:192). This explains the presence of the *Merveilleux*, a characteristic of the folktale. Because we perceive reality to be unjust, no *aventure* should resemble reality, thus, in the folktale the *Merveilleux* is not *merveilleux*, but natural. In the folktale the *Merveilleux* is the only way in which the *immorality* of reality can cease to exist. For example, if Cinderella’s rags are changed into a beautiful ballgown, this is not *merveilleux*, it is merely what we expect. This is how the folktale retains its validity (Jolles 1972:192).

It follows from the function of the folktale – it is inherent, it is in its very nature - that its events occur in a place far, far away and that the events happened very long ago. Specific location and date cause the folktale to come too close to the immoral reality “et brisent le pouvoir du merveilleux naturel et nécessaire” (Jolles 1972:193). The same applies to the characters: they cannot be historical people. The *magic* beings, too, are necessary: a magic being “est le moyen nécessaire pour que l’injustice soit réparée” (Jolles 1972:193).

Jolles concludes by saying “Le conte se trouvant en opposition à l’événement réel qu’on observe habituellement dans l’univers, son univers propre est séparé de l’univers de la réalité plus radicalement que celui de toute autre forme; ...” (Jolles 1972:194).

Vladimir Propp (Propp 1968) has a more formal approach to the narratological analysis of the folktale: there are 31 *functions* according to which the tale proceeds. He also lists seven roles: the hero, the false hero, the villain, the donor, the helper, the sought-for-person, the dispatcher. The actors in every fairytale/folktale perform essentially the same actions. The functions of the actors are constant, almost interchangeable, everything else is a variable.

Vladimir Propp's approach to the study of the folktale differs from those of scholars like Lüthi and Röhrich, but it will be seen that he reaches many of the same conclusions as they do. He states "Le résultat de ce travail sera une morphologie, c'est-à-dire une description des contes selon leurs parties constitutives et des rapports de ces parties entre elles et avec l'ensemble" (Propp 1965:28). It will largely be a morphological study, i.e. a description of the tales taking into account their various parts and how they relate to each other. What changes, he says, are the names of the characters, but what remains constant is their *functions* i.e. their actions. "On peut en conclure que le conte prête souvent les mêmes actions à des personnages différents. C'est ce qui nous permet d'étudier les contes à partir des fonctions des personnages ...". He maintains that the folktale may be studied by analyzing the 'functions' of the characters. (Propp 1965:29). There are relatively few *functions* he says, whereas there are many characters. In the traditional tale the structure is fixed, the motifs are mobile within that structure; (Jolles has emphasized this point) in the short story, the structure is not predetermined but is mobile as it depends on the fluctuations of the individual characters.

Propp points out that it is the significance of the function in the unfolding of the tale which we have to take into account. His definition follows: "Par fonction nous entendons l'action d'un personnage défini du point de vue de sa signification dans le déroulement de l'intrigue" (Propp 1965:31). There are 31 *functions* which must follow chronologically, i.e. their sequence cannot be inverted. However, each tale need not necessarily have all of the 31 functions. Some may be omitted, provided that the others follow the prescribed order.

A list of the functions follows: (Propp 1965:35 -78 – French Translations)

(English from http://www.uky.edu/~jrouhie/rae370_proppmagic.html)

<u>English</u>	<u>French</u>
I. Introductory sequence	
1. Family member leaves family— the hero is introduced.	éloignement
2. Interdiction--don't do X	interdiction
3. Interdiction is violated- -hero does X anyway	transgression
4. Villain--reconnaissance of hero	interrogation
5. Villain gets information about hero	information
6. Villain attempts to deceive hero with trickery	tromperie
7. Hero submits to trickery -- complicity.	complicité
II. Body of the story	
8. Villain causes harm or injury through villainy; villain carries off a victim, the hero or the desired magical object, which must be retrieved.	méfait

Propp adds: “Cette fonction est extrêmement importante, car c’est elle qui donne au conte son mouvement” (Propp 1965:42) This ‘function’ is of paramount importance as it stimulates the action.

- | | |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 9. Lack is made known to the hero. | Mediation, moment de transition. |
| 10. Hero agrees to counteraction | début de l’action contraire |
| 11. Hero leaves home | départ |

Propp adds that at this stage another character enters the tale – the *donateur* from whom the hero receives something, usually magic, which will enable him to right the wrong suffered. (Propp 1965:51)

12. Hero is tested/questioned.	Première fonction du donateur
13. Hero reacts.	réaction
14. Hero receives a magical agent or object which helps in quest.	réception de l'objet magique
15. Transfer to place where the lack is to be found	déplacement dans l'espace entre deux royaumes, voyage avec un guide
16. Combat with villain	combat
17. Hero is branded	marque
18. villain is defeated	victoire
19. Lack is liquidated	réparation
Object of the quest is obtained by the hero (the tale often ends here, but may continue to the fourth sphere of action)	
IV. Hero's return	
20. Hero sets off for home	retour
21. Hero is pursued	poursuite
22. Rescued from pursuit (tale often ends here, but can continue)	secours
23. Hero arrives home and is not recognized	arrivée incognito
24. False hero presents claims of true hero	prétentions mensongères
25. Difficult task is set	tâche difficile
26. Task is resolved	tâche accomplie
27. True hero is recognized	reconnaissance
28. False hero is unmasked	découverte
29. Epiphany of true hero New appearance/transfiguration	transformation
30. Villain is punished	punition
31. Marriage and rule of true hero	mariage

It should be clear that each of the ‘functions’ may be considered to be actions. What Propp considered to be the *stock* characters of the folktale follows:

Dramatis Personae

1. Hero (also the Seeker or Victim)
2. Villain
3. Donor (from whom the hero gets some magical object)
4. Magical Helper (the character that helps the hero in the quest)
5. Dispatcher (the character that makes the lack known)
6. False Hero (the character who takes credit for hero’s actions)
7. Prince/princess (person the hero marries)
8. Victim (person harmed by the villain if not the hero)

“The short story aims at telling a striking fact in such a manner as to create the impression of a real happening. That is why ... their characters, unlike those of the fairytales, are not interchangeable. A short story is a slice of life presented in such a way as to render it unique ... If we compare a fairy-tale princess with a princess in a short story, the point is clear. The princess in a short story shapes her life through her own decisions. She guides the action. She is the actor, unlike the fairytale princess, who acts according to a pre-ordained scheme” (Sienaert 1978:8-9).

Edgard Sienaert considers the characteristics of the *conte merveilleux*: about the nature of the *Merveilleux* he says “Anti-tragique par essence, le conte oppose à la vérité désolante du monde réel, la vérité consolante du monde merveilleux: dans le conte, ce qui doit être “est”, et ce qui ne peut être “n’est pas” (Sienaert 1978:27). The fairytale is *anti-tragic*: whereas the real world is sad, often tragic, the *magic* world consoles us by showing us that it is what we would like it to be and what should not happen does not happen. Thus this type of story does not draw on the every-day human experience, it attempts to console rather than give a realistic picture of life. It is the antidote to reality; therefore we must cross the threshold between our world and the world of the *Merveilleux* in order to enter its world. It follows that in this “Forme Simple, c’est à dire, indivisible, fonction

d'une seule préoccupation, demande qu'on passe de l'autre côté du miroir, inconditionnellement" (Sienaert 1978:28).

Of the structure of the *Conte Merveilleux* Sienaert says: firstly there is a *déséquilibre*, then "une serie d'épreuves qui mènent au rétablissement de l'équilibre temporairement rompu": an imbalance, then a series of tests which will lead, finally to the balance being restored. The hero reacts and this leads to a "dénouement heureux, rétablissement de l'ordre juste des choses": a happy outcome and the restoration of order (Sienaert 1978:38). He continues: "Parmi les multiples caractéristiques du conte merveilleux, la fin heureuse est une des plus importantes" Sienaert 1978:39). A happy ending is a prerequisite. This theory will be explored in Chapter 5.

Concerning the characters he maintains that a character "est donc dépourvu de toute vie intérieure, de tout sentiment ...; le personnage merveilleux n'évolue pas." (Sienaert 1978:40) and "le héros est porté irrésistiblement vers sa destination finale heureuse ..." (Sienaert 1978:41). He quotes Jolles as describing the supernatural characters "tous ces êtres sont merveilleux, aucun d'entre eux n'est véritablement un personnage agissant" (Jolles 1972:193). He adds "la structure archétypale du conte présente donc un héros, des objets et un cadre, dépouillés de tout trait individuel prononcé: (Sienaert 1978:46). It is clear from the above that Sienaert's aim is to clarify what he considers to be the characteristics of the *Conte Merveilleux*. The characters do not evolve; the hero is swept irrevocably towards the happy ending which characterises the fairy or folktale.

Max Lüthi, (Lüthi 1962) writing on the *Märchen* – fairytale or folktale – distinguishes two categories of the genre: the *Volksmärchen*, he says, have an oral tradition – they remained in the mouths of people for a very long time before being written down. *Kunstmärchen*, on the other hand, were composed by individual poets and later put down on paper.

The *Volksmärchen* usually follow a certain pattern according to Lüthi – *Schwierigkeit und ihre Bewältigung; Kamp/Sieg.Aufgabe/Lösung* i.e. Difficulties and their solution:

Battle/Victory, Task/Solution (Lüthi 1962:23). The characters are also usually universal: Hero or Heroine, the task-giver, the hero's helper, some antagonists, as well as the character(s) saved by the hero. All the characters (or *functions*), in Proppian terms, are in some way linked to the hero; enemies and/or helpers often belong to the *other* world. The story usually moves swiftly and surroundings, as well as the *inner world* of the hero, are seldom described in detail.

He comes very close to Propp's theory when he writes: "Die Ausgangslage (initial situation) ist gekennzeichnet durch einen Mangel oder eine Notlage, durch eine Aufgabe, ein Bedürfnis oder andere Schwierigkeiten, deren Bewältigung alsdann dargestellt wird" (Lüthi 1962:25). – The initial situation is characterized by a difficulty – lack, task or necessity which will be overcome. Again his theories are similar to those of Propp: the main characters are either the hero or heroine and his/her opponent. Other typical characters are: the *task-giver* (Auftraggeber), those who assist the hero, contrasting figures and a character or characters saved by the hero. All the characters in the tale are either the partner, opponent or helper of the hero i.e. they are all centred around the hero. Often the opponent or the helper belongs to the world of the *merveilleux* (Lüthi 1962:27).

A very important addition to the theories of other scholars concerns the absence of inner motivation of the characters: "Aufgaben, Verbote, Bedingungen (Tabus u.a.), Gaben, Ratschläge und Hilfen aller Art bezeugen, dass die Handlung des Märchens nicht von innen gelenkt wird, sondern von aussen". The events in the folktale result from outside forces; there is no trace of an inner motivation on the part of the hero. "Innenleben (Gefühl, Stimmung, Anstrengung) und Umwelt der Figuren spielen eine ebenso geringe Rolle wie die Regionen, in denen die Jenseitsfiguren ihren Platz haben ..." (Lüthi 1962:30).

Lüthi sums up in a very succinct manner what Ménard and Sienaert say about the structure and spirit of the fairytale. In any such tale one will find that the hero is faced by difficulties at the beginning of the story; and has to overcome them all before he is rewarded, either by marrying the beautiful princess or by making his fortune or both.

None of the characters in a fairytale has any psychological depth. They do not make decisions, as the happy outcome to all their problems is pre-ordained. One could examine any fairytale and one would find that the theories of these scholars are fully justified.

Stith Thompson defines the *Märchen* as follows: “A Märchen is a tale of some length involving a succession of motifs or episodes. It moves in an unreal world without definite locality or definite characters and is filled with the marvellous” (Thompson 1951:8).

Jack Zipes says of the folktale: “Originally the folktale was (and still is to a certain degree) an oral narrative form cultivated by the common people to express the manner in which they perceived nature and their social order and their need to satisfy their needs and wants” (Zipes 1979:5).

Lutz Röhrich defines the folktale as follows: “... the folktale does not need to specify the locale: it can take place in a ‘folktale land’” (Röhrich 1991:12). His views on this aspect are very similar to those of André Jolles. He concurs with Jolles when he says of the folktale that it is usually set in a fictional past “it is basically ahistorical and timeless” (Röhrich 1991:12). It is interesting to note that although the two scholars phrase their theories differently, they once again concur. In Röhrich’s opinion the folktale usually “begins with a situation of disorder, and then after the conflicts are overcome, order is restored” (Röhrich 1991:13). He says that the happy ending is one of the folktale’s “most important, defining features ... After all the difficulties and despite all the magical barriers, ultimate success is always certain in the folktale’s fantastic world” (Röhrich 1991:43). Röhrich maintains that at the end of the tale justice is seen to have been done – it ends the way we would want it to end.

Philippe Ménard succinctly sums up the characteristics of the folktale. Quoting Gédéon Huet and Stith Thompson, he says that it is a question of “... le rétablissement d’un équilibre rompu.” He continues “au début d’un conte, un déséquilibre apparaît un

manque ou un méfait, dans le langage de Propp” (Ménard 1979:42-46). Initially there is some sort of imbalance; by the end of the tale balance has been restored. Ménard then states: “Le corps du récit montre le héros endurent victorieusement une ou plusieurs épreuves, si bien qu’au terme du conte l’équilibre se trouve rétabli. Ce schema ... consiste à abolir le désordre, à supprimer les souffrances et les injustices craintes” (Ménard 1979:154.). About the hero he says: “Les malheurs du héros dureront assez longtemps, mais au dénouement le héros retrouvera le bonheur et l’amour” (Ménard 1979:156). The hero’s misfortune lasts for a fairly long time, but he finally finds happiness and love. In his opinion “Les récits folkloriques ne se soucient jamais de psychologie” (Ménard 1979:164). He goes on to quote Edgard Sienart: the hero is always “dépourvu de vie intérieure” (Sienart 1978:40). The hero’s misfortune lasts for a fairly long time, but he finally finds happiness and love.

Ménard has found that in these tales “il n’ est guère question de liberté humaine. Les dés sont jetés, avant même que le héros se mette en chemin Il doit suivre son destin.” Finally he says: “... les contes idéalisent et embellissent la vie. Ils s’achèvent sur des dénouements heureux” (Ménard 1979:165).

The question arises: does Marie’s rendition of the original oral material change, if so, how? Theories by eminent scholars on the nature of the typical folktale formula have been reported. Marie’s original tales were folktales; generally scholars have concurred in their opinions on the structure of the folktale, as well as on the type of content it contains. The smallest and most consistent element of any folktale is the *motif*. Horst S. Daemmrich quotes Lüthi’s opinion on this concept. He holds that it is “the smallest element in the narrative having the strength to persist in tradition, ‘motif’ directly affects the narration by moving the action along (Latin movere). It is thus the concrete nucleus of a narrative” (Daemmrich 1985:567). Daemmrich also says that “the motif functions like a switch that guides the reader to a new plane.” (Daemmrich 1985:569).

A short history, drawn from the works of Haskins and Swanson follows:

As early as 460 A.D. British Celts, mainly from Wales and Cornwall, driven out by the Angles and Saxons, immigrated to the ancient Armorica, later renamed *Little Britain* and known today as Brittany. The traditions of the mother country were thus current and familiar to the original inhabitants, as they, too, were Celts.

In 1066 the Normans, under the leadership of William the Conqueror, invaded Britain, bringing with them the French dialect spoken in Normandy.

From 1133 – 1189 England was ruled by Henry II, in whose court Marie de France is said to have composed her *Lais*. She says of herself

Marie ai nun, si sui de France. (Fables, Epilogue d'Esopé. Line 4)

so we can suppose that she was born and raised on the continent. Henry was Duke of Normandy and had inherited the County of Anjou and attached areas of Maine and Touraine. His wife, Eleanor of Aquitaine who had been married to, and later divorced from the French King Louis VII, added the Duchy of Aquitaine to Henry's French territories.

The period in which Marie wrote, possibly at the Court of Henry II, is now known as the Twelfth Century Renaissance. The *Zeitgeist* was one of change, renewal and re-birth. Marie de France was imbued with this *Zeitgeist* and also contributed to it in a large measure. Although born in France, she lived in England and possibly became the Abbess of Shaftesbury, or perhaps some other convent, thus socio-economically she held a very important position. She was also one of the earliest female writers, indeed she ranks amongst the earliest French literary figures

Marie de France was unique, because although she had translated from Latin, she did not pursue this exclusively. The sources of her *Lais* were the age-old tales which had existed as oral accounts in Brittany. She wrote them down, adapting them, writing in verse, in the Anglo-Norman dialect, i.e. the vernacular of the people surrounding her. In writing down the stories which she had chosen, she combined both her interest in popular language and literature and her religious convictions: she took these traditionally pagan

stories and imbued them with both Christian faith and morality. The Twelfth Century was a period of Re-naissance, thus by definition a time of change. Marie de France's *Lais* are multi-layered examples of this and indeed an incarnation of this metamorphic time. Her *Lais* are in an intermediate or *anamorphic* stage: they are going from one form – the traditional folktale – to another – the short story. It is as if the *narrative camera* changes perspective as it moves from one world to another. Hers are not yet fully formed short stories; they are, in fact, short stories *in-the-making*, hence the presence of folktale elements.

Marie begins the prologue by explaining to the reader from whom she has obtained authority, *in both senses of the word* (Sankovitch 1990:6), to write her *Lais*. Marie says: God gives some people – here she appears to include herself – ‘*escience*’ (line 1) and ‘*eloquence*’ (line 2). By mentioning God as the Being who endows some people with the ability to write, she establishes a Christian note, which we will find in most of the *Lais*. The first and highest authority thus comes from God, the supreme author. The writer

Ne s'en deit taiser ne celer (line 3)

He/She should use this talent and not hide it. This immediately brings to mind the idea postulated by Tilde Sankovitch (Sankovitch 1990:7) about the Biblical parable in which talents were given to his servants by their master. Two of the servants used them well, resulting in growth and the third buried his talent in the ground, hiding it. On their return, the two industrious servants were praised and the third was severely reprimanded and sent away.

Referring to the introductory lines, Philippe Walter remarks: “Ce prologue respecte les thèmes traditionnels de la rhétorique des exordes. Par exemple ici, posséder le savoir oblige à le transmettre; idée formulée chez Horace, Sénèque et Caton. L’utilisation de cette rhétorique prouve que Marie avait reçu une formation scolaire assez poussée” (Walter 2000:431).

The second authority figure to whom Marie refers is *Preciëns* (line 10): '*Institutiones Grammaticae*' were extremely popular in the Twelfth Century, and may have been used by Marie for the study of Latin, since it was the standard textbook (Sankovitch 1990:7) She gives three possible reasons for Marie's deferring to Priscian:

- i) Marie regarded Priscian as an authority as she was impressed by his linguistic ability, as well as his creative prowess; thus he set an example worth following.
- ii) Coincidentally both of them regarded

... escience

E de parler bon' eloquence (Prologue lines 1-2)

as prerequisites of a good writer. He mentions these attributes in the first lines of his *Institutiones*.

- iii) Both of them recognized the importance of the continuation of knowledge: it should be passed on to future generations who, by analyzing the content, would benefit from it (Sankovitch 1990:8).

Thus Marie has fully justified herself: she refers to Priscian, an accepted authority in the Twelfth Century and identifies with him, as she believes that she has the qualities which he demands of a writer, as well as possessing the motivation, i.e. leaving a legacy for posterity, another of Priscian's requirements.

Marie continues to discuss the literature written by Priscian's contemporaries:

Es livres ke jadis feseient

Assez oscurement diseient (lines 11-12)

This would necessitate adding glosses to the texts by readers of the Twelfth Century, requiring intelligence on the part of these readers. They would have to employ the intelligence with which they had been endowed. An effort on their part would be necessary. In so doing they would adapt the ancient texts, in a similar manner Marie adapted the Breton tales to suit her readers and brought clarity to what was said *oscurement*.

She expresses another reason for one's undertaking a difficult work of literature:

Ki de vice se volt defendre (line 23)

Walter says of this statement that it is [une] “autre idée classique des exordes antiques; il faut éviter la paresse. Ovide et Sénèque la formulaient déjà. La poésie est un remède contre l’oisiveté et le vice” (Walter 2000:432). The effort necessary to read and interpret would also prevent the readers from becoming lazy according to Ovid and Seneca. In this way they would be too busy to commit evil deeds. The author reveals that she had thought of translating a Latin work *en romaunz* (line 30); however, she realizes that this has already been done by others. Now we come to the crux of the matter: she has heard many tales being told and here she stresses the oral nature of the *Lais*. These adventures have been composed and re-told, but never written down.

*Ne[s] voil laisser nē oblier;
Rimez en ai e fait ditié,* (lines 40-41)

Marie uses the reason that they may be forgotten to justify her decision to put the oral tales into writing. It is clear that this highly educated and erudite woman could have followed in the footsteps of past authors by writing in Latin, but she prefers breaking with tradition by writing in the vernacular, thus becoming a participant in the awakening *Zeitgeist* of the Twelfth Century. Changes were occurring in virtually every aspect of life during the 12th Century- hence its name: The Twelfth Century Renaissance. A spirit of renewal flourished in this period and Marie herself was caught up in it, particularly as she chose to write in the vernacular rather than in Latin, the traditional (literary) language of the time. Finally, she humbly dedicates her *Lais* to the King, probably Henry II, establishing her third authority figure. The humility of her dedication:

Ne me tenez a surquidie (line 54)

is very clear, probably because she is addressing the King, but also because she is a woman writer in a man’s world, a most unusual situation. However, we get an inkling of the spirited, confident woman when she says

Ore oēz le comencement! (line 56)

She peremptorily adds this command:

Now listern to the beginning!

Guigemar

*Amur est plai[e de]denz cors,
E si ne piert nient defors. (lines 483-484)*

Love is the central theme in this *Lai* which Marie wrote after hearing the tales from the Breton story-tellers. However, it does not follow the traditional pattern of many of Marie's other *Lais* in which the hero or heroine experiences a *coup de foudre*, often without having seen the object of his or her desire, but merely having heard of the prowess of the knight or the exceptional beauty of the lady. In this tale the hero, Guigemar is completely indifferent to the idea of love and has to undertake a physical voyage and, what is more important, a psychological journey to transform him into a suitor, hankering for the love of his lady.

According to Antoinette Saly "l'amour est avant tout libération, ouverture, évasion Guigemar's story is that of un itinéraire intérieur": a change from "l'insensibilité" to "la découverte de l'amour" (Saly 1980:335). The subject of this *Lai* is an interior journey: from indifference to the discovery of love. This then is the subject of this *Lai*.

The heroine, too, will undergo a change. Feelings until this moment submerged in the lady, will surface, transforming her into a being capable of genuine emotion, curing her of her indifferent acceptance of the commands of an impotent, cruel old husband. Guigemar, in turn, will be cured of his hitherto phlegmatic acceptance of a life untouched by love. We have here the story of the curing of physical and emotional wounds, resulting in a complete Metamorphosis in the hearts and emotions of two people.

The *Lai* is divided into three distinct parts, the *Autre Monde* and the *Merveilleux* being very much in evidence. Motifs from the Celtic world of magic abound; an interesting juxtaposition of the real world and the *Autre Monde* occurs in some situations, the *Autre Monde* intruding on the real one and vice-versa. This technique will facilitate the meeting of the future lovers. This is a deviation from the normal format, in which there

is usually a clear indication of which world the reader finds himself in. This aspect will be discussed as the tale unfolds, thus the telling of the story too is transformed.

This shows clearly that Marie is an innovator. Other writers are still adhering to the old traditional format. A prologue of some length precedes the telling of the story. Marie defends herself because the aesthetics of the period demand fidelity to the tradition: change/newness is a defect, not a virtue at that time. She says that when there are writers “de grant pris” i.e. talented writers (line.8), envious people will often speak ill of these story-tellers. She emphasizes that she will faithfully recount the stories which she has heard from the Bretons and which she knows to be true.

The *Lai* begins in the real world, relating how the Knight Guigemar, son of Baron Oridials, sets out from the King’s court. Philippe Walter believes that the knight’s name was probably originally the Breton *Guihomar*, in its turn derived from “un des surnoms du loup ‘guyôm et l’adjectif ‘mar’ ‘grand’ . Guigemar serait le ‘grand loup’” (Walter 2000:435). The name *Guigemar*, means *the big wolf*.

Writing about the Knight Marie adds

El rëaulme nen out plus bel; (line 38)

Li vadlet fu sages e pruz,

Mult se faseit amer de tuz. (lines 43-44)

And Guigemar

A cel tens ne pout hom truver

Si bon chevalier ne sun per. (lines 55-56)

Having established Guigemar’s excellence, Marie adds however:

De tant i out mespris nature

Kë unc nul’amur n’out cure. (lines 57-58)

Guigemar has one flaw: his inability to love. This psychological wound from which he suffers could easily result in his downfall. However, a being from the *Autre Monde*, from the world of the Merveilleux will cause him to seek his salvation by his undertaking a sea

voyage, almost without his volition. This will result in an emotional and psychological change. A spontaneous desire to go hunting masters Guigemar

Talent li prist d'aler chacier: (line 76)

He leaves the familiar, feudal world and enters a forest. In Celtic legends the forest is usually a place where the Merveilleux is sure to be encountered. Guigemar crosses the boundary into the *Autre Monde* where anything is possible. He undergoes “l’arrachement au monde civilisé” (Ribard 1995:135).

True to the Melusina and Morgan narrative schemes, the hero encounters a magic animal. It is a white doe which, however, bears antlers like a stag and is accompanied by a faun.

En l'espeise d'un grant buissun

Vit une bise od un foün,

Tute fu blanche cele beste,

Perches de cerf out en la teste; (lines 89-92)

The colour white is a sign that the animal belongs to the Other World. A white animal as the avatar of a fairy intent on luring a human to her dwelling is a recurring motif in folk and fairytales.

Harf-Lancner comments on the presence of the magic deer: “Les premières apparitions du blanc cerf dans la littérature romanesque sont fidèles à la tradition folklorique: elles ont pour but de conduire un mortel dans les bras d’une fée” (Harf-Lancner 1984:222). However, this creature is unusual as, in folktales, the magic animal is always alone. It would seem that the doe is not an avatar, neither is it her mission to lead Guigemar to her fairy mistress, as is usual in the Melusina and Morgan stories. Marie has thus broken with tradition by giving the animal the attributes of both sexes and by the addition of a faun. The animal will, however, serve a definite purpose: that of conducting the hero to the magic ship.

Saly offers a plausible explanation for the strange appearance of the doe. This animal “en qui fusionnent des caractères mâle et femelle indiquerait au héros un changement de

destinée, une profonde modification de sa personnalité: le jeune chevalier rebelle à l'amour des femmes ... découvre au fond des bois la vivante image du couple qu'il est destiné à réaliser dans sa perfection, destin vers laquelle l'aventure va l'acheminer" (Saly 1980:330-331). This unusual animal is symbolic of what Guigemar is to experience – a modification of his personality.

Guigemar aims at the doe and strikes her just above the hoof. However, his arrow ricochets, penetrating his thigh. The wounded doe and the Knight lie side by side and she predicts his future:

*N'avras tu jamés garisun
De la plaie ke as en la quisse,
De s[i] ke cele te guarisse
Ki souffera pur tue amur
Issi grant peine e tel dolur
Ke unkes femme taunt ne suffri;
E tu reff[e]ras taunt pur li, (lines 112-118)*

Only a woman who is prepared to share his love and to suffer for love can cure him. Guigemar's wound is twofold: physical and emotional. "Ainsi la mutuelle blessure physique ne pourra être guérie – et expiée – que par une mutuelle souffrance morale" (Saly 1980:333).

Francis Dubost, in his article on the motifs typical of the Merveilleux remarks: "La bête blanche accomplit ici pour Guigemar ce que certaines fées, celles que l'on avait eu l'imprudence de mécontenter, accomplissaient lors du baptême d'un jeune enfant: elle formule un vœu qui ne veut pas simple pronostication, mais qui engage réellement la vie du héros. Par ses seules paroles, la bête se révèle authentique destinataire de l'aventure, laquelle se déroulera effectivement en parfaite conformité avec la prédiction" (Dubost 1995:73). This animal serves the same purpose as the fairies in the folktales: she predicts the future of the hero, ensuring the outcome of the prophecy.

Guigemar's experience can be compared with that of the Irish hero Cúchulainn in a poem entitled *Serlige Con Culainn*: Cúchulainn sees two birds attached to each other by a golden chain on the lake of Mag Murthemni. He hurls his javelin at them and wounds one, after which he falls into a deep sleep. In his dream he sees himself being beaten by two women, one dressed in green, and the other in purple. When he wakes, he is unable to speak and remains dumb for a year.

He returns to the lake and sees the lady in green approaching him. She tells him that her name is Li Ban, the sister and messenger of Fand, the young woman dressed in purple. Her sister has invited him to join her at Mag Mell where he will be cured if he accepts her love (Saly 1980:332). Here again the notion that a physical wound will be cured by love is in evidence.

Walter relates a different version of the tale of Cúchulainn. He tells the story of "La Maladie de Cúchulainn" qui présente des analogies thématiques avec 'Guigemar'. Le héros Cúchulainn blesse un oiseau blanc, qui est la métamorphose d'une fée amoureuse de lui. Après avoir blessé la fée, Cúchulainn, comme Guigemar, entre dans une maladie de langueur qui durera plus d'un an. Il ne sera guéri par la fée que dans l'Autre Monde où il se rendra sur une barque de bronze" (Walter 2000:436). Both Cúchulainn can only be cured by a fairy, but Guigemar's fate is in the hands of a very human woman. Marie has broken with tradition. In their respective tales each is taken in a magic ship to meet her.

Edgard Sienaert remarks on a vital difference between the concept of love in Irish tales and the way in which Marie refines it. Whereas Cúchulainn is simply obliged to accept the fairy's love in order to be cured, Marie humanizes the love of Guigemar and his mistress by "amour partagé." He continues "Ce n'est dès lors plus un hasard si c'est par une même flèche que sont touchés Guigemar et la biche, puisque c'est par un même amour que seront atteints le héros et la dame" (Sienaert 1978:62).

Guigemar is desperate, as he realizes

Ke unke femme nule ne vit
A ki il [a]turnast s'amur
Ne kil guaresist de dolur. (lines 130-133)

Meanwhile the doe has disappeared, as her task to cause Guigemar to find the magic ship waiting to take him to emotional and physical cure is complete. This animal is not, as in so many other Celtic legends the avatar of a fairy mistress. She is merely there to act as catalyst, to ensure that the hero becomes aware of the magic ship. It is the task of the ship to lead Guigemar to the lady and to his physical cure and to emotional awakening. Up to this point Marie has considered the hero to be emotionally asleep, even dead, so the doe is a 'deus ex machina' – a simple narrative device which causes something to happen. It could have been any object or animal or human, for that matter. But the doe is a symbol of the *Autre Monde* and alerts the reader to the fact that Guigemar is about to undergo a change. By means of this catalyst Guigemar will be steered on his way to meet the woman – the instrument of his cure.

The Knight leaves the forest and, significantly, follows

Un vert chemin (line 146)

This greenness may be considered to be a symbol of Guigemar's slowly emerging attitude to love. It is the "couleur de la renaissance" (Ribard 1995:135). He sees *la faleise e la muntaigne* (line 148) which Ribard describes as "épreuves ascensionnelles" of change (Ribard 1995:135).

He finds a harbour in which there is a single ship. This ship belongs to the world of the Merveilleux; it is destined to take him to a country where he can be cured of his physical and emotional wounds. I.e. which will lead to a resurrection. The port itself is magic, as Guigemar is aware that

En la cuntree n'el país
N'out unkes mes oi parler
Ke nefz i pussent ariver (lines 162-164)

He embarks and goes in search of the crew of the ship, but, once more, it is obvious that the Autre Monde is involved.

N'i aveit nul, ne nul, ne nul ne vit. (line 169)

There is no sign of anybody.

“... c'est le thème bien connu de la nef magique qui circule sans pilote entre le monde humain et l'Autre Monde ...” (Walter 2000:437).

A description of a sumptuous bed follows: it is made of cypress wood and ivory, the linen is made of silk, with gold embroidery. Putting one's head on the pillow, ensures eternal youth.

Ki sus eüst sun chief tenu

Jamais le peil n'avreit chanu; (lines 179-180)

Although it does not bear directly on Guigemar's fate, this motif is typical of the Merveilleux: whoever lays his head on this pillow will remain young for ever. Another indication of the magic nature of the ship follows:

Deus chandelabres de fin or - (line 183)

.....

El chief de la nef furent mis, (line 185)

Marie has deliberately included these candles in order to create a funereal atmosphere: to her the hero is emotionally dead, as he cannot experience love.

Saly remarks that it is not by chance that Marie has introduced this motif: it is found for example in the *Enéas*, written in about 1160, an adaptation of Virgil's *Aeneid*: “C'est, semble-t-il, dans un but bien déterminé que Marie évoque dans la description de cette couche la célèbre couche funéraire de l'‘Eneas’; car c'est bien comme une couche funéraire qu'elle apparaîtra à la ‘meschine’ puis à la dame” (Saly 1980:334). She adds “Si la nef féérique de notre Lai présente un caractère funéraire, c'est qu'en fait l'homme qu'elle transporte, ce chevalier insensible à l'amour, est bel et bien un mort aux yeux de Marie” (Saly 1980:335). The ship with its candles has a funereal atmosphere. Marie has deliberately described it in this way in order to emphasize Guigemar's indifference and inability to love.

Further examples of the motif are to be found in Arthurian literature: In the *Queste del Saint Graal* the embalmed corpse of Perceval's sister is transported by this method to the city of Sarras; in the *Mort du Roi Artu* the body of the lady of Shalott is taken to Camelot in a similar vessel. Guigemar, asleep in the magic ship brings to mind the description of the corpse of the Knight Brangemuer, flanked by two candles. The tale is to be found in the *Première continuation de Perceval* (Saly 1980:334-335).

Guigemar wishes to leave the ship, but he finds that

La nef est ja en halte mer, (line 192)

Saly says of this ship "... elle mène un mort vers sa resurrection... à l'amour-vie" (Saly 1980:334-336).

Similar circumstances surround Maccsen Wledig in a dream: he, too, experiences the disconcerting feeling of a ship spontaneously setting sail. He sees "... one plank ...of gold, and the next of silver. He saw a bridge of walrus-ivory from the ship to the land ... A sail was hoisted on the ship and away she went over sea and ocean" (Jones 1949:80).

Marie prepares the reader for what will happen next:

Ainz le vespré ariverat

La ou sa guarisun avrat, (line 205-206)

Guigemar's wound is to be cured and a Metamorphosis of his feelings is about to take place. One would expect these changes to be brought about by magic, by the actions of a being from the Autre Monde. He does arrive at an Autre Monde of sorts and he does meet a young woman from this world, but this is not a magic world; it is simply a different world. Marie has humanized both the setting and the person who is to save the hero by opening his heart to love, thus transforming him. The magic world has impinged on this world of humans where an old, jealous husband is keeping his beautiful young wife locked up. The magic ship has been the agent and, having completed its task, will disappear. It has not been sent by the young woman – she is human and has never been explicitly called a fairy. Marie has broken with tradition in this respect.

The lady is described as *franche, curteise, bele e sage* (line 212), all characteristics of a human. She is a *mal mariée* and she, too, is destined to discover love. She is figuratively asleep. Her transformation is to be brought about by Guigemar; her emotional wound will be healed.

Ironically the young woman is incarcerated in a room where

Venus, le deuesse d'amur,
Fu tres bien [mise] en la peinture, (lines 234-235).

She cannot love her possessive, jealous old husband. Her only companion is her young niece and she is guarded by an ancient priest. The Christian element is evident, as Marie tells the reader that the young wife has a chapel at her disposal and her guardian is a priest who conducts a Christian service.

Proof that the young wife does not belong to the world of the Merveilleux is the fact that when she becomes aware of the arrival of the ship

La dame volt turner en fuie:
Si ele ad poür n'est merveille; (lines 270-271).

If she had belonged to the *Autre Monde* of magic, she would have been expecting the arrival of the Knight and would not have been afraid.

The young niece is the first to board the ship and, finding Guigemar asleep, thinks that he may be dead – which, in fact, emotionally he is.

Guigemar's physical journey has been accomplished and his emotional transformation soon follows:

Mes amur l'ot feru al vif;
Ja ert sis quors en grant estrif,
Kar la dame l'ad si nafré,

Tut ad sun païs ublië (lines 379-382)

The verb *nafré* is significant because the hero has been wounded by love for the first time. Only if he finds a woman willing to suffer for love, will he be cured. He does not realize that the young wife

... auks esteit reschaufee

Del feu dunt Guigemar se sent

Que sun queor alume e esprent. (lines 390-392)

She has also been figuratively asleep, as she has been deprived of love and condemned to a life of sterility. The only way in which she can be liberated is by being loved and reciprocating that love. That is what happens: they become lovers and live happily for a year and a half. Here, as in many of the other *Lais*, the precision in a *merveilleux* context is strange: *real* and *unreal* are in constant interchange.

Commenting on the love which they experience, Jacques Ribard remarks: “Nous voilà parvenus au coeur du poème avec la découverte conjointe, par l’un et l’autre des deux protagonistes et dans une symétrie délibérée, de l’amour, du véritable amour. un amour qui ne calcule pas, un amour qui ‘brûle’ et purifie dans une sorte de souffrance cathartique et alchimique un amour qui vous arrache au monde du quotidien et à l’endormissement ...” (Ribard 1995:138). This is the very heart of the *Lai*: they discover love which is so powerful that their once dormant emotions are forcefully awakened. Guigemar is to meet the beautiful young *malmariée*, who will become his mistress.

The Merveilleux intrudes into the land of mortals when his young mistress tells Guigemar that she has had a premonition that she is to lose him:

Mis quors me dit que jeo vus perc: (line 547)

In other tales it is always the being from the Autre Monde who has the gift of predicting events. In this case the heroine is a mortal with a gift of foretelling the future. Her suffering is clear, as she says that should he die she too wishes to die. If he leaves her,

she is sure that he will find a new love. They pledge their love and once more, the Merveilleux comes into play: she ties a knot in his tunic, saying that he may love whoever succeeds in untying the knot and he, in turn, puts a belt round her waist, saying that she may love the man who is able to free her from the belt without breaking the clasp. These are, of course, two magic objects which unite the lovers.

Saly comments on these objects: “Chacun de ces êtres est noué, enfermé psychologiquement et sexuellement, et ne peut se libérer que par l’autre, ...” (Saly 1980:337). They are inextricably bound together.

Soon the lovers are betrayed; they have broken a social taboo and committed adultery.

*Cel jur furent aparceü,
Discovert, trové e veü
D’un chamberlenc mal veisié* (lines 577-579)

This is another crossing of a boundary, a change of accepted behaviour, which is condemned by the lady’s husband. Guigemar is forced to leave and thus returns to the world of feudal society. In an attempt to Christianize the Breton original, Marie says of Guigemar: he prays to God. He would rather die than lose his beloved mistress.

*E prie Deu omnipotent
Qu’il li dunast hastive mort* (lines 624-625)

He is a changed man, love dominating his life:

*Mut fu preisez en sun païs,
Mes tuz jurs ert maz e pensis.
Femme voleient qu’il preisist,
Mes il del tut les escundist.* (lines 643-646)

His mistress is equally distressed; saying:

*Meuz voil hastivement murir
Que lungement cest mal suffrir.* (lines 669-670)

Again there is evidence of the *Merveilleux*. The lady manages to escape from her prison - the door is mysteriously no longer locked and she finds the ship which immediately takes her to Brittany. The *Autre Monde* is hardly noticed in this world of mortals.

Another misfortune awaits the lady: Mériadoc seizes her. Marie's description of her is significant, as she describes her as

..... *la dame*

Ke de beuté resemble fee. (lines 703-704)

This justifies the assumption that Guigemar's mistress is not a being from the *Autre Monde* – she is as beautiful as a fairy, says Marie. Before being able to reach Guigemar, the lady is trapped by Mériadoc.

In this section of the *Lai* Marie describes in great detail the lady's suffering:

Ele li cunte la dolur,

Les peines granz e la tristur

De la prison u ele fu, (lines 825-827)

Not only has she suffered imprisonment by her husband, but she will have to contend with the unwelcome attention of Meriadoc. She has even contemplated committing suicide in her desperate state.

Although the lovers meet at Mériadoc's castle and Guigemar convinces him that the lady is his mistress by untying her belt, Mériadoc refuses to relinquish her, thus adding to the lady's woes. Guigemar does everything in his power to defeat Mériadoc, as he is desperate and suffering. Finally, after besieging Mériadoc's castle and eventually killing him, Guigemar is able to reclaim his mistress.

Having completed his psychological journey, after suffering a great deal for love and causing much suffering, Guigemar's emotional and physical wounds have been healed. He has been transformed by acquiring the ability to love and by being loved. The lady's

emotional state has also changed for the better. Although no physical Metamorphosis occurs in this *Lai*, two people have been profoundly changed. Both have experienced an emotional Metamorphosis, by discovering the ability to love.

This *Lai* has a certain cinematic element in the use of movement. It may be mapped as follows, bearing in mind that movement is an aspect of Metamorphosis.

1. The hero, living in Brittany, sets out to hunt.
2. He reaches the forest and is wounded by the ricochet of his own arrow.
3. In seeking a cure for his wound, he leaves the forest and reaches the sea where he sees a beautiful ship.
4. He boards the ship which starts to move without the guidance of a captain or crew. He falls asleep. (Another change of state).
5. He reaches land.
6. With the help of a beautiful young woman and her companion he is taken to the young woman's bedroom and hidden.
7. They fall in love, but Guigemar has to flee because the young woman's husband has discovered their relationship.
8. He returns to Brittany. (Movement to another country)
9. His mistress sets out to look for him. (Movement from another country)
10. However, she reaches Mériadoc's castle in Brittany and is imprisoned.
11. Guigemar is informed of this unfortunate event and leaves his castle to rescue his mistress.
12. They are re-united and Guigemar and his mistress happily return to his castle.

Another good illustration of this concept may be seen in the *Lai Eliduc*: the hero travels backwards and forwards between Brittany, where his wife lives, and Britain, the home of his mistress. All this movement mirrors the turmoil in Eliduc's mind. A solution to this problem can only be reached once the three characters are together in Brittany.

In *Le Fresne*, there is also a good deal of movement from one place to another, each resulting in a change in fortune of one of the characters and particularly that of the

heroine: she is moved from her home, is brought up in a convent; then she moves to her lover's castle where finally, after many vicissitudes, she finds happiness.

Yonec too, illustrates the importance of changes in terms of geography. In this *Lai* there is movement from the real world to the world of the *Merveilleux*, ending in a return to the real world where tragedy occurs.

Equitan

Previous to the Twelfth Century writers had concentrated on descriptions of the lives of the saints, as well as relating the heroic exploits of the Knights in the epics. In this *Lai*, however, as in all the others, love is the pivot around which the tale revolves.

“... La crise que traverse l'amour est toujours au coeur même du Lai”, says Dubuis (Dubuis 1973:386).

In *Equitan* the exploration of Marie's chosen theme – love – will result in the change of fortune, in one way or another, for the protagonists. There will also be evidence of transgression of the tenets of courtly love in this story. A surprising feature of this tale is the strong explicit moralistic tone, something which is not so explicit in the other *Lais* of the collection; usually the *lesson* is implicit and subtle. Marie has thus broken with her own tradition.

The story of of this *Lai* is largely concerned with the practice of courtly love, *la fine amor*. The tenets of this convention have been discussed in Chapter 2. The social structures of the feudal world with its relationship between the Knight and his liege lord were examined in the same chapter.

In this *Lai* the story of King Equitan is told. As the King, he should be the very embodiment of the feudal values required of a Knight. As to the origin of the King's name, Philippe Walter suggests: “ce nom ne semble pas celtique. Il semble plutôt évoquer le latin ‘equitem (de ‘eques’: cavalier) et souligner le caractère chevaleresque du roi. Mais il pourrait aussi bien être rattaché du latin ‘aequitas’ ‘équité, justice’ puisqu’il

est indiqué ... que le roi était 'juge souverain'. However Walter concludes: "Toutefois il ne méritera guère son nom, comme on le verra plus loin" (Walter 2000:441). Although his name may indicate that he is a chivalrous Knight, he does not live up to it. Instead, the reader finds the King distorting the rules of courtly love, crossing the boundaries of behaviour acceptable from a Knight and, more significantly, from a King, representing the pinnacle of the feudal system. He reverses the social order by making himself the vassal, not only of his seneschal's wife, but of the seneschal himself, abrogating his power to him.

According to the tenets of Courtly Love it is usual for the lady to be of a higher social standing than that of the Knight, so both have to overcome a social obstacle. Although Equitan's mistress is probably a member of the nobility, it will become evident that her behaviour is a far cry from that expected of an aristocratic lady. She would be more suitable as a character in one of the *fabliaux* of the time. Roger Dubuis describes the seneschal's wife as "cupide, sensuelle, rouée", in fact, entirely unsuitable as a source of inspiration of brave deeds (Dubuis 1973:380). Dubuis also emphasizes "ses calculs et sa coquetterie" (Dubuis 1973:382). The truth of this comment will become clear in the course of the tale.

It is significant that Marie, although tacitly disapproving of the King's committing adultery and thus breaking a social taboo, is more determined to condemn and punish him for the heinous crime in which he has agreed to participate. i.e. the murder of the seneschal. Thus the moral of her tale is to be found at the end of the *Lai*

*Tel purcace le mal d'autrui
Dunt le mals [tut] revert sur lui.* (lines 309-310)

In this *Lai* there is the crossing of boundaries on three fronts: social, moral as well as that of the tenets of the chivalric code.

Marie introduces her tale by crediting the origin of the story to Breton composers, then adding that she has heard one of them and wishes to preserve it lest it be forgotten. Once

again the oral tradition of these stories has been made clear. Marie intends to write down this story and does not claim to have composed it herself.

The reader is introduced to the hero, Equitan, who *mut fu curteis* (line 11). She continues, saying that he was much admired and loved

*Equitan fu mut de grant pris
E mut amez en sun país;* (lines 13-14)

However, Marie gives one a hint of what is to come by saying that the King loved *drüerie* (line 15) a rather pejorative word, which has the connotation of *lust* rather than *love*. Marie's own comment emphasizes this idea

*Tels est la mesure de amer
Que nul n'i deit reisun garder.* (lines 19-20)

He is obviously a pleasure-loving man who oversteps the boundaries of what is seemly as Marie remarks

*Ja, se pur ostier ne fust,
Pur nul busuin ki li creüst
Li reis ne laissast sun chacier,
Sun deduire, sun riveier.* (lines 25-28)

This man certainly does not possess the qualities required of a good King. Having established the character of the King, Marie turns to a description of his loyal seneschal. He is described as *Bon chevaler, pruz e leal*: (line 22), who manages the King's estates. By neglecting his normal duties, the King comes close to exchanging roles with the seneschal. The narrative voice, describing the seneschal's wife says that she is very beautiful:

La dame ert bele durement (line 31)
.....
*Gent cors out e bele faiture;
En li former uvrat nature:* (lines 33-34)

but states unequivocally that the lady is a person

Dunt puis vient el país granz mal[s]. (line 30),

thus preparing the reader for the disaster which affects the whole country, as well as paving the way for a moral lesson.

As it occurs in so many of Marie's tales, the protagonist falls in love with the lady without having seen her: *Sanz veüe la coveita* (line 41). The King sends greetings and presents to her. In other *Lais* where this situation occurs, the outcome is often a happy one. Here, however, because the reader is aware of the King's reputation, and because the lady is already married, one has the uneasy feeling that no good will come of this state of affairs.

Certainly, according to the code of chivalry, a Knight may admire a married lady, so the King's actions in themselves may be acceptable, but there is an important difference: he desires her, without considering that she is married to his faithful seneschal. The *fine amor* praised by the troubadours will soon degenerate into lust, resulting in tragedy. The King is intent on ignoring the code of chivalrous behaviour, which he warps in the process. It would seem that Marie is implying that this love should remain unreal – not realized. Once again reality is the problem.

Equitan organizes a hunt which is to take place close to the seneschal's manor, careful not to take any of his men along

Priveement esbanier (line 43)

It is interesting to note when Equitan meets the seneschal's wife,

Mut la trova curteise e sage, (line 51).

She thus behaves in an appropriate manner in his opinion. Soon, however, the King develops all the symptoms of a love-sick suitor. He decides to take action. From this point Equitan seeks to justify his actions: he says.

Allas, queil destinee

M'amenat en ceste cuntree? (lines 65-66)

It is obvious that he tries to blame everything but himself, even fate, for his feelings, although he himself has deliberately arranged the hunt. He does this so that he may meet the seneschal's wife and convince her of his love in order to satisfy his own

desires. The moral in this and other *Lais* is clear: one should take responsibility for one's deeds and thoughts. If that notion does not exist, then neither does *sin* and this is an important consideration at the time. This is part of the *agenda*: a *new* morality. Possibly Marie is aware of this new morality and takes the opportunity to illustrate its evil effect by means of this *Lai*. Equitan concludes that the only solution to his problem is to give in to his feelings for her:

Jeo quit que mei l'estuet amer; (line 70).

He does have doubts, as he says to himself that she is his seneschal's wife. But, he argues, it would be even worse if he, Equitan, should go mad because of his unfulfilled desire and, after all it would be a pity if such a beautiful woman did not have a lover.

Mes nepurquant pis iert asez

Que pur li seië afolez.

Si bele dame tant mar fust,

S'ele n'amast u dru eüst! (lines 77-80)

He distorts the tenets of chivalry by reasoning that any man in the world would be improved by the love of such a woman. He is justifying what he wants to do. Equitan is aware of how faithfully his seneschal serves him, but finally he convinces himself of his right to love the lady because it would be unfair if the seneschal were to keep her entirely for himself. There is a moral debate here: it is an exercise in ethics on the part of the King. Hence this is a *casus* whereby he seeks to justify his actions even though his reasoning is not valid.

In his mind Equitan has justified his behaviour and all he needs to do now is to put his intentions into practice. His love may very well be genuine, but he is also consumed by passion and lust and a selfish desire to fulfil his urges.

When revealing his love to the lady, the King dramatically tells her:

Saver li fet qu'il meort pur li;

Del tut li peot faire confort

E bien li peot doner [l]a mort (lines 114-116)

Shrewdly the seneschal's wife reminds the King of one of the tenets of courtly love

Vus estes rei de grant noblesce;
Ne sui mie de teu richesce
Que [a] mei [vus] deiez arester
De driërie ne de amer, (lines 121-124)

According to the practice of courtly love, this is true, as the lady whom the Knight admires should be of a higher social standing than he. The lady continues:

Së [is] si fust que vus amasse
E vostre requeste otreiasse,
Ne sereit, pas üel partie,
Entre nus dues la driërie. (lines 129-132)

.....

Amur n'est pruz se n'est egals. (line 137)

But the King insists on inverting their social positions: He says:

Ne me tenez mie pur rei,
Mes pur vostre hum e vostre ami! (lines 170-171)

.....

Vus seiez dame e jeo servant,
Vus orguilluse e jeo preiant! (lines 175-176)

The tone in which Equitan expresses this desire is almost hysterical in its eagerness. The lady acquiesces and they exchange rings. This action legitimises their relationship, which will create a dangerous situation.

Philippe Walter remarks: "l'échange des anneaux suggère évidemment un véritable mariage courtois selon le rite de la 'fine amor' (c'est le rite du guerredon; don réciproque" (Walter 2000:442). Their liaison is kept secret

Lung tens durrat lur driërie,
Que ne fu pas de gent oïe (lines 185-186))

true to the code of courtly love. Even their meetings are a parody of the spirit of courtly love, because the King tells a blatant lie – he tells his servant to say that he is being bled, (according to a custom of the times). This deception on his part is necessary in order to receive his mistress in his chambers. This does not conjure up the picture of a romantic

tryst between lovers; it is simply the satisfying of an appetite. Their love is doomed to be short-lived. Marie predicts:

Puis en mururent e finerent (line 184)

The roles of the King and the seneschal are reversed. The seneschal undertakes the King's duties:

Li seneschal la curt teneit,

Les plaiz e les clamurs oieit (lines 195-196)

The king takes the vassal's place as *husband*.

Equitan's courtiers urge him to take a wife so that he may have an heir, but he has no desire to get married. The rumours of a possible marriage reach the ears of his mistress, who is devastated, believing that he will marry a princess and desert her.

The sight of her grief results in Equitan's making a rash statement, which, in turn, will cause an idea, already partially formed, to take hold in his mistress's mind. The King says

Si vostre sir fust finez,

Reïne e dame vus fereie;

Ja pur [nul] humme nel lenneie. (lines 226-228)

“Transported by his passion, Equitan makes the lady an extravagant proposition: to translate their courtly play into feudal reality. The price of this extraordinary transformation, however, is nothing less than the life of her husband, the seneschal” (Kinoshita, 1999:46). This *transformation* will lead to a disastrous end to the tale.

It is probable that Equitan made this statement merely to propitiate his mistress, but she is only too ready to put it into practice. They are ready to transgress by crossing a moral boundary. She will plan the murder. She asks him whether he will help her. The moral Metamorphosis of the lovers is complete: the King agrees to connive in the plan.

Pur ceo k'il li vousist aidier. (line 236)

.....

Turt a folie u a saveir. (line 240)

Equitan has been completely transformed into a willing accomplice to murder. Of the King's mistress Walter says: "l'amante courtoise se transforme ici en femme diabolique et criminelle. Il s'agit bien de la femme fatale et de l'Ève pécheresse des clercs et non plus de la dame parfaite des troubadours" (Walter 2000:443). She is no longer the perfect lady of the troubadours, but has become a calculating sinner.

In an article on *Equitan*, Sharon Kinoshita (Kinoshita 1999) relates an example taken from history and then discusses its relationship to *Equitan*. "The plot of the King who covets his vassal's wife occurs in history as well In 1092, Philip I of France repudiates Bertha of Frisia in order to marry Bertrade de Montfort, the wife of his vassal, Count Fulk of Anjou ..." (Kinoshita 1999:43). "... The strange case of Philip, Fulk and Bertrade ... turns on the King's deployment of power in his determined pursuit of political or sexual goals. 'Equitan', in contrast, narrates the raw assertion of royal power through the discourse of courtly love. At the outset, the two are distinct and mutually exclusive. When Equitan first falls in love with the lady, he acknowledges the fundamental contradiction between erotic passion and feudal responsibility" (lines 71-74). "The relationship between the King and his seneschal is unequal but is mutually binding; in order to command his vassal's allegiance, Equitan must conduct himself as a good feudal lord ... [But] from his vantage point atop the feudal pyramid, he yields to the seduction of courtly discourse, casting aside all feudal scruples." (lines 79-84). "In the quick transition between his original compunction at the thought of pursuing his vassal's wife to his justificatory rhetoric of mutual self-improvement Equitan has rationalized away all political responsibilities and concerns, plunging headlong into the alternate reality of courting and love" (Kinoshita 1999:43-44).

One should not 'real-ize' an 'idea-l' love: these two worlds need to remain separate, the alternative being catastrophe: the destruction of both these worlds.

The final irony and inversion of events occurs when both Equitan and his mistress die in the scalding bath which has been prepared for the seneschal. Equitan who was once described as *mut ... curteis* (line 11) and ... *mut amez en sun país* (line 14) has become a ridiculous and pitiable figure as he jumps stark naked into the bath of scalding water.

The genre has been modified as there is a strong farcical element at the end of this *Lai*.

Farce can be described as a comedy characterized by broad satire and improbable situations, tragedy always being close. This, too, is a literary genre. Marie clearly states the moral of the tale, an unusual feature not found in many of the other *Lais*.

Tel purcace le mal d'autrui

Dunt le mals [tut] revert sur lui (lines 309-310)

In this *Lai* Marie has shown how Equitan is transformed by crossing established boundaries. He has ignored the tenets of courtly love, betrayed his faithful vassal by entering into an adulterous relationship with his wife and stopped short of being a murderer, not by his own volition but by pure chance.

The author expresses her conviction that one should take one's responsibilities seriously. Her purpose is to spread this idea by illustrating the disastrous results of ignoring one's obligations and pursuing illicit pleasure without considering the consequences.

Le Fresne

Marie de France once again quotes a source as the original of the story she is about to recount

sulunc le cunte que jeo sai (line 2)

The tale is set in Brittany. The title, *Le Fresne*, is significant: the name of one of the characters is *le Fresne* (the ash tree), a masculine noun. Applied to a girl it denotes transference or change which will be of importance as the tale progresses.

The *Lai* opens with a description of two Knights - *Dui chevaler* (line 4) - who remain anonymous, as do their wives. One of the wives, however, provides the impetus for the tale: without her initial actions none of the changes in the life of her daughter yet to be born could have occurred: there would have been no reason for Metamorphosis in its many forms to take place. Ironically she, the true mother, eventually undergoes an epiphany and a subsequent fundamental change of perception, vital to the outcome of the tale. Her change of emotion introduces the reader to yet another kind of Metamorphosis.

One of the wives becomes pregnant, a joyful change in any marriage and cause for happiness.

L'une des dames enceinta: (line 9)

Al terme ele delivra (line 10)

Two sons are born. Both remain nameless, indicating that they are of little importance, as they do not play an active part in the *Lai*. However, their birth will set off a train of events which will lead to the moral degeneration of one of the protagonists. They provide the reason for the jealousy and subsequent actions of the neighbour's wife. On hearing the news of the births, the babies' father is so happy that he suggests that his good neighbour looks after one of the boys and gives him his name. The Knight thanks God, a Christian touch added by Marie de France,

Li sire en ad Deu mercié (line 23)

but his wife, who is envious, full of pride and cruel

Kar ele ert feinte e orguilluse

E mesdisante e envüuse (lines 27-28),

now transgresses, and proclaims to everybody that a woman cannot have twins unless they are fathered by different men.

Si dues hummes ne li unt feit. (line 42)

Her malicious act of accusing her neighbour of adultery, thereby ruining her reputation, arises from the fact that she herself has not been able to produce an heir and the perceived insult by her husband in that he has been willing to "adopt" one of his neighbour's sons. Her words cause an instant reaction in her husband who criticizes her - *Mut durement l'en ad blamee (line 44)* - saying that the children's mother has always had an excellent reputation. People start disliking her as a result of her harsh and spiteful words. A change in the attitude of the general public has occurred, a fact which will be a contributory factor to her actions when her own twins are born.

It is possible that her subsequent behaviour could have resulted from what Freud calls an aggressive *drive* which had been repressed, but which surfaces when she hears the news of her neighbour's good fortune. In the text we are told that she has always been envious and spiteful. The happiness of her neighbours may have released this drive and caused

her to spread malicious rumours. Her hatred and spite have undergone a further development, resulting in her true nature being revealed. This intensification of her own innermost feelings causes her to commit the heinous crime of spreading malicious rumours in an attempt to denigrate her neighbour's wife, perhaps in trying to compensate for her own feeling of inadequacy as she has not produced any offspring. The birth of the two boys has acted as a catalyst, evoking an unexpected reaction not only from her husband, but from the rest of all Brittany:

Asez fu dite e coneüe,

Par tute Bretagne seüe:

Mut en fu la dame haüe (lines 51-53.)

Marie hints that changes for the worse are to occur in this evil woman's life:

Pois en dut estre maubailie; (line 54)

She will pay dearly for her crime.

The authorial voice is preparing for the moral lesson which is to be learned from this tale. The reader will also be shown that redemption is possible even in what seems to be a lost cause. The mendacious statements of the neighbour's jealous wife have a disastrous effect on the twins' father. Immediately after the birth he is

liez e joianz. (line 12)

However, when he hears the story being spread by his neighbour's wife, the once loving, joyful father and husband becomes sad and does not know what to do –

Dolent en fu, ne sot quei faire (line 60),

he distrusts his wife

E durement la mescreï (line 62)

and finally keeps her well guarded

E mut la teneit en destreit (line 63)

The neighbour's wife, because of her transgressions, has thus been the cause of many emotional upheavals, cruel reactions and changes: her husband dislikes her and people hate her, her neighbour distrusts his own wife and treats her cruelly and the mother, innocent of any crime, is strictly guarded, without deserving it

Sanz ceo que ele nel deserveit (line 64)

Nothing more is heard of the two boys and their parents. They have served their purpose as their experiences, i.e. the birth of the twin boys, will determine the further fate of the main protagonist in the *Lai*. The scene shifts. A change occurs in the life of the evil woman: she, too, falls pregnant and, ironically also gives birth to twins, this time a pair of girls. This type of occurrence is typical of a folktale. However, there is a change – girls are born instead of boys, providing the possibility of several different outcomes to the tale. The birth of the girls will give the necessary impetus to the tale: if she had not accused her neighbour's wife of adultery, this story would probably not have followed the course that it does, nor have had the outcome that it has.

Whereas no mention is made of any suffering on the part of the mother of the twin boys and they are joyfully received, the mother of the twin girls suffers terrible physical pain and mental anguish, symbolic of her daughter's suffering and eventually her own mental anguish.

Mut durement en est dolente; (line 71)

Her mental state is emphasised.

quei ferai? (line 73)

She asks.

Jamés pris nē honor n'avrai! (line 74)

As a result of her transgression she has opened the way to her own humiliation and feelings of desperation. Her emotions have undergone a change, albeit that they still centre on her own inner world. She regrets what she has said, not because it has harmed somebody else, but because she has brought shame on herself, as she has branded herself an adulteress. She has condemned herself by denigrating the character of her neighbour.

Kar jeo meïsmes me jugai: (line 79)

In order to protect her good name she is faced with an unavoidable decision, she must commit a criminal act by killing one of her babies. There has thus been a progression in her actions: slander has inevitably led to her contemplating murder.

Pur mei defendre de hunir,

Un des enfanz m'estuet murdrir: (lines 91-92)

Once more Marie de France changes the original oral, pagan tale and places it in a Christian setting. The woman would rather answer to God than face dishonour:

Meuz le voil vers Deu amender

Que mei hunir e vergunder. (lines 93-94)

Spiteful and malicious she may be; to these feelings has now been added fear for her reputation, which, in turn, leads to a desperate decision to kill one of her daughters, revealing a resourceful mind, able to devise a plan quickly to escape censure. In her arrogance, the only thing which she fears is the criticism of others.

Freud tells us that the psyche consists of three parts, the Id which comprises those actions basic to survival and which are found in small children and animals, the Ego, our perception of ourselves and what we would like others to perceive us to be, and the Superego which is our conscience governed by what society expects of us clearly. There is evidence here of the Ego and the Superego.

The neighbour's wife has moved on from being a jealous critic, unjustifiably accusing her neighbour's wife of adultery, to becoming an unscrupulous woman who will stop at nothing to protect her good name in the community. A moral degeneration, a Metamorphosis is occurring, fuelled by feelings of desperation.

Both fathers, as well as the twin boys, disappear from the scene as they are superfluous and no longer play a part in the tale. However, a new character, a young woman devoted to her mistress, the mother of the twin girls, is introduced. She, too, remains anonymous, and will disappear from the story when she has fulfilled her role. The description of the mistress's caring attitude towards this young girl is significant:

Lung tens l'ot garde e nurie

E mut amee e mut cherie. (lines 101-102)

This concern for the young woman demonstrates that the mistress is a many-faceted character. She can experience affection. Perhaps the insight which we gain here points to the climax and denouement of the *Lai*. The wife had been a caring and sympathetic

adult, but jealousy of her neighbour's wife after the birth of the two boys has caused her to become malicious and unscrupulous.

The young God-fearing girl - *si Deu plest*, (line 116) - has a plan: she will take one of the babies and leave her at a convent where she will be found and cared for.

The change in the mother is immediate:

Grant joie en out, (line 118)

Her sorrowful state immediately turns to joy: she will be relieved of her burden of guilt and retain her good name. One could be charitable and say that the mother will no longer have to live with the idea that she has killed her child. However, her reaction is instantaneous: she expresses no remorse or hesitation, as the revelation of the multiple birth could ruin her reputation. The change which she undergoes so quickly merely emphasises her growing cruelty. All her reactions are the result of the fear of sullyng her reputation as the upstanding and virtuous wife of a Knight.

They wrap the baby in fine linen and silk brocade and attach a beautiful ring in which a precious stone is set to her arm.

Un gros anel li lie al braz. (line 128)

Anybody who finds her will know that she comes from a noble family.

Que ele est nee de bone gent. (line 134).

Once again the child is known merely as *l'enfant* (line 135), the masculine form of the noun. I have already mentioned that the name *Le Fresne* by which she will be called is also the masculine form, perhaps a transferral of the mother's feelings of guilt about her actions towards the neighbour's sons or a reflection of feelings current at that time that the first child should be a male heir.

By this stage the child's life has already undergone several changes or Metamorphoses: her mother has contemplated murdering her; a young woman comes to the rescue – albeit to assuage the suffering of the mother – and carries her through a dark forest placing her on the steps of a very wealthy convent. Once again Marie de France emphasises the

Christian spirit of the tale, which was not present in the original, sung version. She describes a convent - *abeïe* (line 151) *Durement richë e garnie*; (line 152) - where there is an abbess. - *E abbeesse kis guardot*. (line 154).

It must be remembered that Marie herself was probably an abbess. The young girl says a fervent prayer:

Deus, fait ele, par tun seint nun;
Sire, si te vient a pleisir,
Cest enfant garde de perir. (lines 162-164).

Once again there is proof of Marie's determination to introduce a Christian element into the *Lais*. *The scholarly consensus suggests that* *lais* were originally musical compositions without words, the performers would probably have told the story which the *Lais* were supposed to commemorate before performing the composition on an instrument.

The resourceful and practical young woman changes her mind when she sees an ash tree

Un freisne vit lé e branchu
E mut espés e bien ramu, (lines 167 -168)

.....
Pur umbre fere i fu planté. (line 170)

She puts the child in the fork of the tree. The baby's physical position has changed again. The maiden has played her role and she, too disappears from the story.

A porter notices the bundle in the tree and discovers the baby. He thanks God.

Il en ad Deu mut mercié, (line 190).

He takes the baby to his widowed daughter who has a baby of her own. She immediately agrees to nurse the foundling. They notice the beautiful ring

Entur sun braz treve l'anel; (line 207)

and realize that the child belongs to a noble family.

We have seen how the focus changes throughout the *Lai*. First we learn what happens to the *good* wife and her husband, and then we have a story of the jealous wife and her plans to get rid of one of her baby daughter. A young woman, one of this lady's companions

comes onto the scene to take charge of the baby; next our attention moves to the porter, who sees what he thinks is a piece of cloth in the ash tree, probably hiding the stolen goods of a thief. We briefly meet the porter's daughter who is called in to feed the child; they realize that the baby is nobly born. The baby's story will be the focal point of the rest of the *Lai*. The narrative focus remains on *Le Fresne* and the events of her life, the other characters being there merely to implement the changes in her life.

Another change of fortune awaits the baby. The porter takes the child to the Abbess of the convent, who agrees to look after her, promising that she will say that she is her niece.

For the first time one of the characters in the *Lai* is given a name. The baby is baptised and given the name *Le Fresne* after the tree in which she was found. The sacrament of baptism is believed to bring about a Metamorphosis in one's spiritual life. Religious beliefs are much in evidence in this *Lai*. A child is believed to be born tainted by original sin and the sacrament of baptism cleanses and purifies it. In the context of this tale the child is most probably thought to have been born out of wedlock or of an adulterous affair and thus the baptism will be a symbolic new start.

The masculine gender of the child's name is significant. The ash tree, while it provides shade does not bear fruit. Once she reaches womanhood, we would expect her to be prepared for service to the church, while her twin sister whom we meet later would be free to marry and bear children.

The years pass and physical, as well as intellectual changes take place. *Le Fresne* is beautiful and clever:

En Bretagne ne fu si bele

Ne tant curteise dameisele:

Franche esteit e de bone escole. (lines 237- 239)

Another change in the maiden's fortune occurs. A nobleman from Dol, Gurun, falls in love with *Le Fresne*, after merely having heard of her excellent reputation. He

..... la cumença a amer. (line 248)

This state of affairs was not unusual; the troubadours, particularly Jaufré Rudel, often sang about the *amour de loin* (Walter, 2000:447).

By an astute plan Gurun is able to see her and speak to her every day. To this end he endows the convent with some of his land,

La ad grantment del soen doné; (line 268)

stipulating that there should always be a room at his disposal in the convent. Viewing this proposal, it becomes clear to the reader that some devious behaviour is afoot. His plan develops logically, and there is a metamorphosis of thought. He does not visit the convent merely to obtain absolution for his sins.

Mes il ad autrē acheisun

Que de recevoir le pardun (lines 269 -270)

He can be so persuasive that

Tant li pria, tant li premist

Que ele otria ceo kë il quist. (lines 273 – 274)

The young girl thus undergoes one of the most significant emotional changes possible; she is no longer the naïve virgin maiden who was loved and brought up by the Abbess, but the mistress of a rich nobleman whom she seems sincerely to love.

Count Gurun's motivation and actions may thus be seen as being the result of one of Sigmund Freud's theory on human behaviour. According to this theory, the human being is caught up in a constant conflict between his drives and the demands of society, in this case society being the conservative environment of the convent. The Count has a sexual drive demanding satisfaction, but, according to Freud, the codes of behaviour demanded by society are imprinted in the *Superego* and have the ability to punish the person by causing him feelings of guilt.

This theory would, indeed, appear to apply to Count Gurun: he cannot visit the girl every day without overstepping the boundaries laid down by the norms existing in the convent, so he donates a great deal of land. This gift salves his conscience, and entitles him to

visit the convent. The one proviso forming part of his gift is his right to reserve a room for himself where he may rest whenever he wishes.

Now the Count uses his persuasive powers to convince *Le Fresne* to come and live with him; since they are lovers she might become pregnant and this would be unacceptable to her aunt, the Abbess. Thus another change in the life of this young woman is about to take place. She leaves the convent, as she loves the Count passionately

Cele que durement l'amot (line 289)

taking her ring and silk brocade material with her. The fact that she takes these possessions along would indicate that they are to play an important role in the plot and that they are to become significant as the tale unfolds. In taking these items with her she might, indeed, have a premonition of events to come.

De ceo li pout estre mut bel. (line 294).

She puts them into a little *cofre* (line 304). Perhaps something in her subconscious is at work here. We are shown the innate goodness of *Le Fresne* by the reaction, not only of her lover, but also of all his followers and servants:

*N'i out un sul, petit ne grant,
Pur sa franchise ne l'amast
E ne chérist e honurast.* (lines 310 -312)

This general acceptance by everybody and the love and admiration which she inspires is almost too good to be true. Thus the reader will expect an imminent disaster and fear a change for the worse in the fortunes of the young woman. After some years things do, indeed, change. Gurun's vassal Knights begin to see this relationship as a problem:

*.....li chevalier fiufé
A mut grant mal li aturnerent* (lines 314 -315).

They urge the Count to send *Le Fresne* away – after all, her origins are obscure – and marry a noble lady who will provide heirs. The Knights, as well as the vassals, depend on the continuation of the line for their future well-being.

The stage is set for a change in the lives of *Le Fresne*, and the Count Gurun. The Knights arrange a marriage with the daughter of a neighbouring nobleman and, because of the threats made by the Knights, the Count agrees to a marriage with *La Coudre*, the Hazel Tree. The Knights have told him that *La Coudre* will bear fruit, whereas it is believed that *Le Fresne* (like the tree for which she is named) is not fruitful.

*En la Coudre ad noiz e deduiz;
Fresne ne portë unke fruiz.* (lines 339 -340)

This is true of the trees whose names the girls bear, a symbol which Marie de France has introduced deliberately in order for the exchange to take place. At this moment *Le Fresne*'s origins are unknown, making her an unsuitable bride, particularly since, according to local superstition she would be barren. *La Coudre* is eminently suitable; she is beautiful as well as known to be of noble birth. Once the marriage has been arranged Marie interjects:

*Allas! Cum est [mes] avenu
Que li [prudume] ne unt seü
L'aventure des dameiseles,
Quë esteient serur[s] gemeles!* (lines 345 – 348)

Le Fresne's sweet nature prevails even when she learns that her lover is to marry somebody else

Sun seignur sert mut bonement (line 353)

The expected change in her attitude, jealousy supplanting love and loyalty, does not take place, a fact which perhaps indicates that eventually she will be richly rewarded. In addition, the Knights all hold her in high esteem and regret the fact that they will not see her again, even though they have been the instrument of her rejection.

The mother accompanies *La Coudre* to the court, but is uneasy about the Count's young lover, fearing that she may make trouble. She will deal with her, she decides.

De sa meisun la getera, (line 369)

It is clear that she is still the same cruel, ambitious woman as before. To be absolutely certain, she will recommend that her future son-in-law marries *Le Fresne* off to some nobleman. Marie gives us further proof of *Le Fresne*'s innate goodness.

She:

*Ne fist semblant que li pesast
Ne tant que ele se curuçast;* (lines 377 -378)

Surprised by *Le Fresne*'s unexpected behaviour, the mother undergoes a change of heart:

*Sa mere l'ad mut esgardee,
En sun qor preisie e amee.* (lines 383 – 384)

She is so impressed that her attitude undergoes a complete metamorphosis: if she had known what this young woman was like, she would never have agreed to the marriage between her daughter and the Count and would have left the young woman to live happily with her lover.

Le Fresne goes to prepare the wedding bed for the bridal couple and, when she sees the old and unattractive bedspread which the servants have placed on the bed, she takes out her own brocade and puts it onto the bed. This is done to honour the bridal couple and is not a malicious retaliation. One could read a Freudian intention into this act: unwittingly *Le Fresne* perhaps wanted her mother to recognize her, although this desire may not have been conscious and she does not know, as yet, that *La Coudre*'s mother is also her mother, something which will undoubtedly have consequences, influencing the rest of her life. She even tells the servants how the Count likes his bed made. Once again, although in her subconscious she may wish the Count to recognise her instructions and thus bring back painful memories, *Le Fresne* does not act from any malicious desire – she accepts that she has been relegated to a position inferior to that of the bride; her only desire is to make her lord comfortable. Her position in the household has thus undergone a further metamorphosis, but she retains her sweet, humble nature and her deep affection for her lover. Again the Christian element is emphasised by Marie de France: the original Breton work would certainly not have contained the addition which Marie now makes: *Le Fresne* had put the brocade on the bed

Kar l'erceveke[s] i esteit

Pur eus beneistre e enseiner; (lines 406 – 407)

The mother recognizes the bedspread and, although *Le Fresne* is still ignorant of her parentage, believing herself to be the abbess's niece, her mother instantly recognises the material in which the baby had been wrapped. She speaks to *Le Fresne*, asking her where the beautiful material came from and the young girl tells her how she was found, wrapped in the material with the ring attached to her arm. Two traditional motifs – the beautiful piece of material and the ring act as *deus ex machina* to bring about change. Her mother immediately realizes who she is and is deeply ashamed of what she has done. The mother has undergone a complete transformation. She is delighted to see her daughter, so much so that she proclaims that *Le Fresne* is her daughter and is so emotional that she falls down in a faint

.....*si se pauma* (line 452).

She begs *La Coudre*'s husband, the Count, to forgive her

Pardun li quert de sun mesfait. (line 459).

All has been revealed, the Archbishop annuls the marriage and *Le Fresne* and Lord Gurun are married. All ends happily with a suitable husband being found for *La Coudre*.

The structure of this *Lai* illustrates very clearly my theory that Metamorphosis is the basis on which the plot is developed. One incident leads directly to and links up with the following one and emotional changes in several of the characters are clearly revealed. More importantly, the circular movement of the tale is very clear: initially the mother is so cruel that, fearing what others might say, she organises the removal of her daughter, *Le Fresne*. We hear very little about the mother in the course of the story, but finally it comes full circle and the mother, filled with remorse, but also with love, sees to it that her once abandoned, but now much-loved daughter is happily married to the man of her choice. However, her other daughter is not abandoned – she also finds happiness with a suitable husband.

Le Fresne, too, although rejected at birth because of her mother's spiteful attitude towards her neighbour's wife, comes from a noble family. During the course of the *Lai*

her fortunes dwindle – she is a humble inhabitant in a convent, becomes the mistress of a Count, a not ideal situation, and is restored to an acceptable social position by marrying the nobleman whom she loves. Although she retains the masculine noun, *Le Fresne*, for her name, the ambiguity of her position as the Count's mistress has been resolved and she will come into her own as his wife, as she has been respected and loved by all who have come into contact with her.

Although many of the events are typical of the folktale tradition, Marie has humanized the main characters, particularly the mother. The method by which the mother is made aware of her daughter's identity is conventional and traditional, but Marie's great contribution to this tale is the believable way in which she has convinced the reader that change in a person's character is possible. We see the flowering of maternal love in a woman who is prepared to sacrifice everything for the well-being of her child, not because she is afraid of punishment, but because she truly loves her daughter. In a subsequent chapter I shall discuss the effect of sentiment of this kind on the changing *genre* of the tale.

Bisclavret

The concept *werewolf*, (Breton *bisclavret*) is defined as follows by Summers: "A werewolf is a human being, man, woman or child (more often the first), who either voluntarily or involuntarily changes or is metamorphosed into the apparent shape of a wolf, and who is then possessed of all the characteristics, the foul appetites, ferocity, cunning, the brute strength and swiftness of that animal. In by far the greatest majority of instances the werewolf to himself as well as to those who behold him seems completely to have assumed the furry lupine form" (Summer 1933:2). *Furry* in this particular context as against *hairless* or smooth human skin, could indicate that the beast is evil. This word brings to mind the Biblical story of Jacob and Esau, sons of Isaac and Rebecca. Isaac was blind and identified his sons by touching them, as he knew that the elder son, Esau was hirsute, whereas Jacob's skin was smooth. Esau sold his birthright to his younger brother, Jacob, when they knew that their father was dying. Jacob killed a goat and draped it over himself and in this way Isaac was tricked into believing that he

was touching his elder son. By doing this Jacob, impersonating Esau, received his father's blessing, hence the association of *furry* and *cunning* (Genesis XXV and XXVII).

Summers continues: "This shape-shifting is for the most part temporary, of longer or shorter duration, but it is sometimes supposed to be permanent. The transformation, again, such as it is, if desired can be effected by certain rites and ceremonies, which in the case of a constitutional werewolf are often of the black goetic kind. The resumption of the original form may also then be wrought at will" (Summers 1933:2). This shape shifting is usually temporary, but it may become permanent. The transformation may be brought about by the performance of ceremonies or rites. On occasion, the return to the original form may be effected by will.

The question arises: is this a predisposition in certain humans? Is this an extreme case of our dual nature, as in: angel as opposed to beast? Summers continues "Werewolfery is hereditary or acquired; a horrible pleasure born of the thirst to quaff warm human blood, or an ensorcelling punishment and revenge ..." (Summers 1933:2).

In order to illustrate Summers' concept of the traditionally accepted view of the werewolf, I shall relate briefly several tales dealing with werewolves, written by some of Marie de France's predecessors, as well as by her contemporaries. From her treatment of this subject in the *Lai Bisclavret*, her *tour de force* will become clear, as she reverses the position of *victim* and aggressor, as well as allowing her sympathetic attitude to the maligned creature to emerge. She will make the reader wonder: who is the *malmariée*, who is the human and who is the beast? At the very core of this tale lies the difference of opinion implied by the author.

The first story which illustrates the ferocity and blood-lust generally associated with the werewolf comes from the Latin poet Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (Book 1). Zeus, ruler of the gods, arrives (in human form) at Lycaon's home. Evening is falling and Lycaon invites Zeus to a meal. The god recounts how Lycaon, in an effort to determine whether his guest is a human or a god, serves human flesh which he has prepared and roasted for

dinner. Zeus, in anger, releases a thunderbolt and turns Lycaon into a wolf. Greedily Lycaon starts attacking and slaughtering sheep, clearly illustrating his lupine nature.

In a Jefferson Lecture given by Caroline Walker Bynum she discusses the Metamorphosis found in this tale: she says that there are several kinds of Metamorphosis in this tale. Perhaps the most shocking form is that of Lycaon, the cannibal. While in the shape of a human being he eats human flesh, thus turning another person not merely into food, but also into himself (Bynum 1999:2).

In the first century A.D. Petronius, author of *Satyricon*, gives an account of the Metamorphosis of a soldier. Niceros, a former slave, tells the story of how, while travelling with a soldier, the latter divests himself of his clothes, urinates around them and, completely naked, is transformed into a werewolf while his clothes turn to stone. A friend tells Niceros of how a wolf came onto the farm, killed all the animals and was wounded in the neck. Returning to the place where the soldier was transformed, Niceros finds nothing but blood. On going home he finds the soldier, wounded in the neck, being attended to by a doctor. The identical wound suffered by the werewolf and the soldier would seem to offer proof of the theory of the *Double*, according to Claude Lecouteux. Originating with the ritual of the shamans, the life-force of a human being leaves the sleeper and enters the body of an animal, in most cases that of a wolf. However, the sleeper is not to be woken before the return of the *fylgia* because, if this happens, the person will die. In the case of the soldier in Petronius's tale, only the discarded clothes are left behind and not the body. Lecouteux explains:

“... si nous admettons que le corps reste sans vie tandis que le Double voyage sous forme de loup, nous découvrons que les vêtements sont en fait le substitut du corps”

(Lecouteux 1992:135). This could be seen as proof that the soldier and the werewolf are one and the same being.

Montague Summers writes about the tradition of werewolfism in Ireland: “The evidence for werewolfism in Ireland is of immemorial antiquity and persists through the centuries” He quotes an early tradition related in the *Cóir Anmann (Fitness of Names)*. *Laignech*

Fáelad was a man who used to shift into *Fáelad*, i.e. into wolf-shapes. “He and his offspring after him used to go, whenever they pleased, into the shapes of the wolves, and, after the custom of wolves, kill the herds ...” (Summers 1933:205).

In Claude Lecouteux’s opinion, after reading these texts, one can only conclude that “c’est l’autre moi qui prend forme animale tandis que le corps gît quelque part sans vie apparente” (Lecouteux 1992:130). He continues: “Entre 1202 et 1216 Saxo Grammaticus écrit simplement: Autrefois, les magiciens s’entendaient fort bien à changer leurs traits à se montrer sous diverses formes.” In his opinion “Jusqu’ à une époque récente, on croyait en Livonie que, lorsque l’âme d’un loup-garou était partie accomplir ses méchantes besognes, son corps restait comme mort; si, pendant ce temps, le corps bougeait par accident, l’âme ne pouvait plus jamais y rentrer et elle restait dans le corps d’un loup jusqu’à son trépas” (Lecouteux 1992:130-131). The possibility of the *life-force* leaving the body and entering another creature seems to be widespread. The shamans and witchdoctors are reputed to be capable of achieving this trance-like state.

The werewolf theme appears to be anthropological. According to Summers the belief in werewolves is to be found in England, Wales, Scotland, Ireland, France, Germany and Russia. In India the weretiger was said to exist; wereleopards were believed to roam Java and Borneo. In the West Indies there was a belief in the transformation into hyena (possibly a memory carried over by slaves from Africa) and in North America a belief in the werewolf and werebuffalo was strong (Summers 1933:21). Researchers investigating ancient art sites in France and Spain, Africa and Australia have discovered that a belief in werewolves is as old as humanity. It seems legitimate to conclude that the werewolf theme is indeed anthropological.

Dubost quotes several other authors who were interested in the possibility of the Metamorphosis of a man into a werewolf and the consequent ferocity of the beast. I shall confine myself to those writers who were contemporaries of Marie de France.

Gervais de Tilbury in his *Otia Imperialia* (1209-1214) tells the stories of Rimbaud de Pinet and Chaucevaire. Rimbaud de Pinet, a soldier, frightened by an extremely loud noise, turned into a werewolf. In this form he devoured many children and bit several adults. Finally he was badly hurt by a woodcutter who chopped off one of the werewolf's feet. When he regained his human form, he was glad to find that one of his feet had been amputated because that meant that he would escape eternal damnation as he would never turn into a werewolf again. Once a werewolf had lost a limb or part of it, the human could never take on his form again (Dubost 1991:547-548); (Gervais de Tilbury III 120 éd Liebrecht:51).

The anonymous *Lai Méliion*, written at approximately the same time as Marie de France's *Bisclavret*, resembles the latter in many respects. However, there is one difference of paramount importance. After being transformed at his own request, by means of being touched by a ring, Méliion becomes a vicious, savage beast, a typical characteristic of the traditionally accepted view of the werewolf. Initially Méliion, the Knight is described as

*Molt par estoit cortois e prous,
e amer se faisoit a tos:
molt ert de grant chevalerie
e de cortoise compaignie. (lines 7-10)*

brave and loved by everybody (O'Hara Tobin 1976:297). However, once turned into a werewolf he becomes a savage beast and devours everything in his path.

*En une forest est alés,
vaches e bues i a trovés,
molt en ocit e estrangla,
iluec sa guerre comencha;
plus en i a ocis de cent
a cest premier commencement (lines 253-258)*

And

molt a ocis de lor almaille: (line 265)

Joined by ten other wolves:

tot le país ont degasté,

homes e femes ocioent,
tote la terre destruoent. (lines 276-278)

Dubost describes this werewolf's behaviour: "Parvenu en Irlande sur les terres de son beau-père, Mélion, qui a gardé conscience humaine sous sa forme de bête, va se livrer à une série d'actes terroristes dirigés d'abord contre les animaux domestiques, puis contre les hommes et les femmes. A la tête de ses dix loups, il est devenu un chef de bande redoutable et conduit une 'guerre' cruelle et implacable" (Dubost 1991:560). It is interesting to note that in the form of a werewolf, Mélion retains his human intelligence. Restored to human form Mélion becomes the exemplary Knight, but as a werewolf, his behaviour is typical of those creatures.

We shall see that, although the subject matter in Marie de France's *Lai Bisclavret* is very similar to that of Mélion, the description of *her* werewolf and his behaviour differs radically from that of the protagonist of the anonymous *Lai*. An analysis of Marie's *Lai* will furnish the explanation.

The first change to which Marie de France draws the reader's attention is the fact that she is going to recount the tale of *Bisclavret*, not 'a' bisclavret. The word *Bisclavret* is to be understood as a proper noun, as well as the Breton word for *werewolf*. She does not call him a *Garwaf*, the general Norman word for the animal because she clearly dissociates herself and her *hero* from the Norman *Garwaf*, by reputation a savage beast

beste salvage: (line 9)

which devours men

Hummes devure, grant mal fait, (line 11)

Having established that she has heard tell of these beasts *Jadis* (line 5) i.e. in times gone by, she sets that concept aside

Cest afere les ore ester, (line 13)

to tell the story of Bisclavret. She has virtually humanised her protagonist, having written his name with a capital letter.

Marie wishes to establish the reputation and character of her hero: she has heard about him:

Merveille l'ai oï loër;
Beaus chevalers e bons esteit
E noblement se cunteneit. (lines 16-18)

She takes great care to establish the loving relationship which the hero and his wife enjoy:

Il amot li e ele lui; (line 23)

The wife is described as *mut vailant* (line 21) and she tells him that when he disappears on a regular basis for three days

El quor en ai mut grant dolur
E de vus perdre tel poür, (lines 45-46)

She suspects him of having an affair, when, in fact, he spends three days a week as a werewolf.

Dubost observes: “Le garouage devient alors, pour un temps, le secret qui divise le couple et derrière lequel la femme croit deviner d’abord la présence d’une rivale, apportant ainsi une réponse naturelle à une situation surnaturelle” (Dubost 1991:552). The cyclic nature of Bisclavret’s Metamorphosis brings to mind the Melusina tales in which the heroine, after taking a bath on Saturdays, becomes a serpent. This occurs in the privacy of her chamber, as her husband is forbidden to see her.

Bisclavret undergoes a Metamorphosis after contact with water. There is no explicit taboo in his case, but he is careful not to show himself in this guise. Belonging partly to the world of the *Merveilleux*, being half man and half wolf, he is extremely reluctant to tell his wife about his double existence, as, with his ability to foresee coming events, he says

Mal m'en vendra, si jol vus di,
Kar de m'amur vus partirai (lines 54-55)

Marie’s sympathy and compassion for Bisclavret are clear from the way she treats the confession of her werewolf: quietly and timidly he tells his wife of his Metamorphosis

which occurs every week, seemingly without any reason or any action on his part. It appears to be involuntary.

Marie implies that he has not done anything to deserve this change and does not understand the reason for its occurrence; it simply happens to him, a passive victim. Neither does Marie enlarge on that part of his life: he is not taking revenge, neither is he being transformed by a specific person for any particular reason. He simply endures this regular change without comment. Very little is said about his *actions* in his guise as werewolf, unlike in the gory tales of slaughter which we have come across in previous accounts of the man-wolf. All he says is

S'i vif de preie e de ravine (line 66) i.e. he lives by eating his prey.

No further details are added; Marie appears to want to protect her unfortunate hero. This is a complete reversal of the attitude, even if merely implied, of other writers on the subject.

The wife's reaction is understandable; nevertheless it is cruel. Dubost says: "Le jour où elle apprend la vérité, un revirement complet se produit en elle. La femme amoureuse qu'elle était (cf. vv. 21-23 et 80) se transforme en femme haineuse. Avant la révélation, elle tremblait à l'idée de perdre son mari; après, elle ne cherchera plus qu'à s'en débarrasser ..." (Dubost 1991:552). She has undergone a complete change of heart, becoming sly and devious, after having obtained the information by flattery and cajoling:

Tant le blandi e losenga (line 60)

She obviously has some *diabolical* plan in mind when she insists on the details of his transformation. It is she, now who changes – to a lower level. Her complete emotional transformation parallels that of her husband's temporary, involuntary change; now she insists on details of his Metamorphosis. She asks

S'il se despuille u vet vestu. (line 69)

She experiences fear and disgust and he becomes sexually repulsive (Dubost 1991:552). Immediately "La femme refuse de reconnaître et d'admettre la part d'animalité qu'elle vient de découvrir dans son mari. Interrompant le cycle des metamorphoses, elle

voudrait l'exclure définitivement de la société et de sa forme humaine. Elle s'empresse de le chasser de son intimité amoureuse" (Dubost 1991:553)

Ne voleit mes lez lui gisir. (Line 102)

Bisclavret has, in a naïve manner, revealed to her how she can condemn him to remain in his animal form for ever. In order to discover his secret, the wily woman has flattered him by saying:

Jeo vus eim plus que tut le mund:

Nel me devez nient celer, (lines 80-81)

She obviously has been hatching a plan because Marie remarks:

Tant l'anguissa, tant le suzprist,

Ne pout el faire, si li dist. (lines 87-88)

Although the wife may consider herself to be the *malmariée*, it is, in fact, Bisclavret who is the *malmarié*, being married to a scheming, meretricious woman.

He tells her that he hides his clothes under a *buissun* (line 95) Philippe Walter says: "il s'agit peut-être d'un buisson d'épine (aubépine) qui, selon les croyances celtiques, marque toujours une frontière entre les deux mondes (humain et divin.)" (Walter 2000:451-452). The hawthorn is thought to mark the boundary between the world of humans and the *Autre Monde*. Water is also considered to be a boundary. Bisclavret has to cross a river before becoming a werewolf.

Ruthlessly, the wife summons a Knight who has always loved her, although the love is not reciprocal, saying

M'amur e mun cors vus otrei, (line 115)

He is sent to fetch Bisclavret's clothes, which he does only too willingly. She has taken advantage of the Knight's desire for her. Marie de France once again shows her sympathy for her hero when she writes:

Issi fu Bisclavret trahiz

E par sa femme maubailiz. (lines 125-126)

He has been betrayed.

Bisclavret disappears and a year later his wife marries her accomplice, the Knight.

Up to this point we have seen Bisclavret only as a man, i.e. the reader has been aware of his sadness and confusion in the *real* world. We have also been shown the evil side of humanity, as illustrated by the betrayal of Bisclavret by his iniquitous wife. Marie now inverts the position: although Bisclavret is a werewolf, the King, the incarnation of kindness, sees his human side. Dubost writes: “En présence de l’homme [Bisclavret], la femme n’a vu que la bête; en présence de la bête, le roi ne verra que l’homme” (Dubost 1991:553). The two worlds have thus been inverted. Both the wife and the King are faced by a *merveille*, but whereas the wife, almost immediately upon hearing of her husband’s recurring Metamorphosis, starts setting in motion a plot which will ensure that he retains his wolf-like shape, (proving that it is not the mythical werewolf who is evil, but the real human) the King, after his initial fear, perceives the human non-threatening quality of the werewolf when Bisclavret begs for mercy by kissing the King’s foot. The King, too, realizes that he is witnessing a *merveille*, saying

Cum ceste beste se humilie!

Ele ad sen de hume, mercie crie (lines 153-154)

He immediately decides to protect this animal, as he is convinced that it possesses intelligence and the capacity to reason.

The instructions which the King gives to his men about the treatment of the man-wolf are in direct opposition to those given to her *friend* by his wife. She has ordered her lover to find her husband’s clothes so that he may never regain his human form; the King, on the other hand, orders his men to take great care of the beast, sensing his human side:

A tuz les suens ad comaundé

Que sur s’amur le gardent bien

E li ne mesfacent de rien, (lines 170-173)

Marie subtly allows her opinion to emerge when she recounts how fond all the King’s men are of Bisclavret and what they think of him.

N’i ad celui que ne l’ad chier;

*Tant esteit franc et deboneire,
Unques ne volt a rien mesfeire.* (lines 178-180)

This is a vastly different picture of a werewolf from the traditional view expressed in a great deal of the literature of Marie's time.

In order to bring about a face to face encounter, not only of Bisclavret and his wife, but of the sympathetic, affectionate King and the malicious wife, Marie (or the original teller of the tale) organizes a feast to which all the noblemen and their wives are invited. This is a typical fairy-tale device: at the end, everybody must be present – there has to be public recognition of the fact that what was wrong has been put right.

On the arrival of his wife and her husband at the court, Bisclavret immediately attacks the Baron, his wife's husband: Marie again shows Bisclavret up in a good light, indicating not only her support of him, but also his human qualities when she describes the surprise of the Knights at his actions. They have never known him to act in this manner. His human side is again high-lighted when Marie, as well as the Knights, justifies the wolf's actions: he must have a reason for his actions.

.... il nel fet mie sanz reisun; (line 208)

The sycophantic, scheming wife dresses herself very elegantly and goes to the King:

Avenantment se appareilot (line 228)

and

Riche present li fait porter. (line 230)

It is only the second time that Bisclavret acts in a way typical of a werewolf: he attacks her and bites off her nose. By this action *she* is made animal-like.

Again Marie condones the action, sympathising with the wronged husband and remarks with relish:

Oiez cum il est bien vengiez! (line 234)

One of the King's men once again emphasises the fact that throughout his stay with the King Bisclavret has been behaving like a human being, rather than exhibiting the characteristics of the beast in whose body he resides.

Unke mes humme ne tucha

Ne felunie ne mustra, (lines 245-246)

He adds:

Aukun curuz ad il vers li,

E vers sun seignur autresi. (lines 249-250)

Revenge in the form of a physical attack is perfectly in keeping with the behaviour of a wronged human being, albeit that Bisclavret's limited physical form forces him to act like a werewolf. His human emotions and intellectual capacity have not been affected by his metamorphosed appearance.

It is clear that the King still sides with Bisclavret, as he extracts the truth from the woman by means of torture. Neither does Marie de France appear to disapprove of this method. When his clothes are returned to him, the werewolf, exhibiting human characteristics of modesty and shame, will not don his clothes in the presence of the King. The King himself accompanies the wolf to his chamber, where, on his return, he finds Bisclavret, the Knight, asleep on the bed. He is overjoyed, kisses the Knight and showers him with gifts, returning all his lands.

The wife is condemned to eternal suffering, as some of her offspring will be born without noses. Dubost comments "Cette mutilation peut s'interpréter comme une blessure symbolique en relation avec la triple trahison commise par la femme (divulgation du secret, vol des vêtements, remariage)" (Dubost 1991:555).

An interesting point to note, says Dubost, is the inverse effect of the injury. In the other werewolf tales, the loss of a body part, usually a paw restores the werewolf to its human shape. In this case, the loss of her nose and the fact that this is a hereditary trait will prove the woman's guilt in the future.

A careful reading of this *Lai* will show Marie's intention of representing *her* werewolf, Bisclavret in a totally different light from the traditionally accepted voracious, terrifying monster, eager to kill. She recounts the tale of a Knight *Beaus chevalers e bons* ... (line

17) and by her interjections, as well as by the King's treatment of what was usually considered to be a dangerous beast her opinion will become clear.

Here Metamorphosis is physical and moral – physiques and characters change, and so does the traditional tale. Subtly Marie is trying to help her audience to see things differently by means of the events of this tale.

Lanval

In this *Lai* the *Merveilleux* plays a very significant part. A fundamental characteristic of the *Merveilleux* is the *surnaturel* (supernatural) which Francis Dubost in an essay defines as “tous les éléments qui transgressent, ou paraissent transgresser, aussi bien l'ordre de la Création et 'l'ordo naturae' qui en procède, que les données de l'expérience commune, sans nous interroger pour l'instant sur leur origine” (Dubost 1995:44). He adds “Volontairement réduite à sa composante élémentaire, la proposition qui exprime le trait merveilleux exprime en même temps une impossibilité en regard du sens commun” (Dubost 1995:46). These descriptions thus place it fair and square in the domain of the supernatural. However, the *hero* does show a strong psychological side to his character which enables him to think and not to act as a mere puppet. We shall also find influences of the Melusina and Morgan le Fay legends so popular in early oral tradition, both belonging to the universal folklore. They may be considered, in some aspects, to be mirror images of each other.

Although the hero is powerless to resist the influence of the *Merveilleux* on many of his actions, within this *Lai* he does make decisions and act independently and is not merely driven willy-nilly by forces beyond his control. Thus there are opportunities for Metamorphosis and change, as well as traces of a nascent short story form. Proof of the development of a new *genre* is the hero's ability to think and reason and to act on these impulses, rather than allow himself to be driven by uncontrollable and uncontrolled forces outside of himself.

The following narrative scheme for the Melusina legends is suggested by Harf-Lancner:

1. The meeting between a mortal and a fairy (*La rencontre du mortel et de la fée*).
The hero leaves home, goes into the forest and arrives at a clearing, usually near some form of water. He discovers an exquisite young woman who appears to be waiting for him.
2. The pact.
The young woman accepts his passionate declaration of love and agrees to marry the mortal. There is one condition however: he has to respect a taboo (*interdit*) which, if broken will put an end to their life together. The young man accepts. They get married, live a happy normal life on earth and have several children.
3. The pact is violated.
The hero is either persuaded to break his vow or he makes this fatal decision himself. He transgresses, by breaking his promise and, as a result, his wife reveals that she is a fairy and disappears. The physical Metamorphosis is clear. The children remain with their father. He loses everything that the fairy had brought as her dowry.

The above is a free translation of the relevant part of Harf-Lancner's book (Harf-Lancner 1984:113). The narrative scheme of the tales based on the Morgan le Fay story differs in many respects from that of the Melusina legends. However, the presence of the *Merveilleux*, i.e. magic, is very clear.

A summary of this scheme as found in Harf-Lancner's book follows:

1. The hero leaves home to go hunting, an act which will set the tale in motion. He finds himself in a forest. An enchanted (magic) animal appears. "... l'animal est un messenger de l'autre monde, parfois même un avatar de l'être surnaturel qui veut attirer l'héros dans l'au-delà.
2. The hero sets out in pursuit of the animal and he finally finds himself in the *Autre Monde* where the supernatural being awaits him. He remains

in this world with the fairy for a very long time, unaware of the passing of the years. Once again his happiness can only last for as long as he respects a taboo which the fairy imposes on him.

3. The taboo which the hero has to observe serves a different purpose from that in the Melusina tales: whereas the breaking of the taboo reveals the true identity of the fairy in the Melusina stories, it serves to make the young man aware of the passage of time when encountered in the tales relating to Morgan. “Il est lié au thème de l’oubli magique.”
4. Overcome by home-sickness, the hero decides to return to the world of mortals to spend some time with his kind. The fairy agrees to his request, but stipulates that he is to return to her and he must observe a certain taboo. He returns to the mortal world and discovers that hundreds of years have passed and everybody whom he knew has died. In the *Other* world he was unaware of the passing of time. He now becomes subject to human laws, ages very quickly and dies of old age (Harf Lancner 1984:204-208).

The *Other World* is a world in which nothing changes. When something changes, for example the breaking of a taboo, then that world vanishes. This motif is found in all folktales. The human laws and those of the *Other World* are irreconcilable. The denouement of a folktale is linked with the breaking of the taboo which the fairy has imposed to protect her lover from mortal laws. Time is essential in order for Metamorphosis to occur – timelessness implies immobility, thus no change can occur. Time is ever-changing, never static, even for a moment. If we make a video clip of some event, we have not stopped time, merely captured one small facet of it, so we can see Marie’s *Lais* as a small clip of the time, which shows us what was occurring during that time.

From my reading of the *Lais*, I have become aware that, not only did she depict the era in which she lived, but, more importantly, she incorporated her desire for change of the generally accepted moral behaviour of the time by adapting the original tales in order to

convey a lesson. Even the *genre* of the stories is seen to be changing. Marie is thus clearly imbued with the spirit of change which manifested itself in the Twelfth Century. The body of her work can therefore be seen as a *Mimesis*, a *Nachahmung*, imitation, of the spirit of the Twelfth Century. There is thus an interaction between century and author: a symbiosis – one influences the other (action/reaction). Interaction is on-going; it is a process. This is the essence of Metamorphosis.

I shall attempt to justify my belief that this *Lai* may be considered to show the beginnings of the short story form; however, it is still imbued with the *Merveilleux*, a typical characteristic of the folk tale / *conte merveilleux*. To this end, I have discussed the characteristics of both genres.

My aim in what follows is to prove, that while exhibiting many of the characteristics of the *Conte Merveilleux*, the material of this *Lai* undergoes a Metamorphosis in several aspects. The genre itself is being transformed by Marie de France and the characters have become beings who can think for themselves and make their own decisions, clearly showing a psychological development which prompts their thoughts and actions.

At the beginning of this *Lai*, the only Arthurian tale of the collection, Marie immediately establishes the character of the hero: she will tell the story *Cum ele avient* (line 2) of a noble Knight Lanval *un mut gentil vassal* (line 3) who serves King Arthur of England at his court at Carduel. Arthur, too, is described as *li pruz e li curteis* (line 6), leaving the listener or reader unprepared for the unexpectedly cruel way in which the King will treat Lanval, his faithful vassal.

A realistic note is established when Marie explains that the King and his Knights have to defend the Kingdom against the Picts and the Scots because they

... *destrui[ei]ent le pais:*

En la terre de Loengre entroënt

E mut suvent la damagoënt (lines 8-10)

It is a historical fact that the Picts and Scots, living in what is today Scotland, did indeed attack Britain, although Arthur was not necessarily a historical figure. However, for the purpose of the *Lai*, Marie has established a realistic background to her tale. In a further effort to ensure a believable story, Marie mentions that the feast at the court is held at Pentecost *A la Pentecuste* (line 11), thus also adding a Christian touch. Up to this point the tale has been completely realistic. Pentecost commemorates the descent of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles – today it is known as Whitsun. It would be a happy day of feasting, representing a renewal after the cold Winter months. The court has assembled after the long Winter and the King bestows presents on the faithful Knights:

Asez i duna riches duns:

E as cuntés e as baruns,

A ceus de la table r[o]üinde (lines 13 -15)

On this custom Walter remarks: “La fête est l’occasion pour le roi de montrer sa générosité, première qualité du souverain et vertu fondamentale qui fonde la légitimité de son pouvoir. Il est dans la nature d’un bon roi de donner généreusement parce qu’il garantit ainsi le bien-être et la prospérité de son royaume” (Walter 2000:453).

The King distributes gifts on this day. In this way he is assured of the loyalty of his Knights.

An unexpected and strange oversight on the part of the King occurs: he has given rich presents to all except one, Lanval.

Ceo fu Lanval, ne l’en sovient, (line 19)

This is certainly a transgression on the part of the King, who has been described as

li pruz e li curteis (line 6).

Marie shows that he is not the perfect fairytale King; that he has a flaw; forgetting one of his most faithful vassal Knights. She has shown the King’s human side, as well as that of some of the other Knights. None of them defends Lanval. *Ne nul de[s] soens bien ne li tient* (line 20), because they envy him, while pretending to like him. They would not be sorry, however, if misfortune befell him:

L’envioënt tut li plusur;

Tel li mustra semblant d’amur,

S'al chevaler mesavenist,

Ja une feiz ne l'en pleinsist. (lines 23-26)

These are convincingly shown to be fallible, rather unpleasant human beings and not Knights in shining armour whom one expects to find in fairytales. They pretend to like him, but are secretly gratified when something unpleasant befalls him. Marie has given them a psychological richness which makes them easily recognisable as complex characters. She also emphasises the solitude and nobility of birth and mind of Lanval.

Fiz a rei fu de haut parage,

Mes luin ert de sun heritage. (lines 27-28)

He is a well-rounded character: perhaps pride, not arrogance prevents him from asking the King for gifts.

The only thing which we are told is that he is sad *Mut est dolent* (line 34) but, being of noble character, he does not ask for anything from the King, neither does he exhibit anger or a wish to retaliate in any way. Arthur's thoughtless actions provide the impetus for Lanval's decision to leave the court. There is thus a realistic reason for the Knight's departure. Marie addresses the readers directly, making clear her opinion *Seignurs ne vos esmerveillez*: (line 35) She is clearly sympathetic when she states:

Le chevaler dunt jeo vus di,

Que tant aveit le rei servi,

Un jur munta sur son destrer, (line 39-41)

We are being prepared for a contact with the *Merveilleux*. Lanval reaches a meadow *un pre* (line 44) where there is a river.

Sur une ewe curaunt descent;

Mes sis cheval tremble forment: (line 45-46)

The presence of water is very often an indication that magic is at hand, water implying a boundary. The trembling of Lanval's horse also indicates that there is something unusual nearby. The hero could be entering the world of either Melusina or Morgan.

Tales of the *Morgan* type often introduce a white stag at this point, as the hero is usually hunting. This stag may be considered to be the avatar of the fairy who wants to entice the

hero. In *Lanval* at this point, while he is lying on the ground contemplating his misfortunes, he sees two beautiful young women, richly dressed. They are fairies, substitutes for the white stag.

The noble and well-mannered Knight immediately rises from his supine position when he sees the two ladies: he is surprised when they address him by name: *Sire Lanval* (line 71) as he has not introduced himself to them, proof that magic is at work.

In this section of the *Lai* there is no doubt that the folktale element is very strong indeed. The structure and much of the content follow the traditional folktale format. We shall see, however, that Marie's influence is to be felt even among the fairy-folk. The Melusina/Morgan *heroine* is no longer the flat, cardboard stereotype, but shows distinct signs of psychological complexity. At first she is simply described as ... *tant est pruz e sage e bele* (line 72). Later, however, Marie will ascribe more *human* characteristics to the fairy. For the moment she belongs entirely to the Melusina fairy world, the *other* world, as seen in the description of her *paveilluns* (line 76) (the description of tents is an aspect which Marie borrowed from the traditional antique romances such as the *Roman de Thèbes*.. The Knight, under a spell, accompanies them; he forgets about his horse, enchantment being so powerful.

De sun cheval ne tient nul plait, (line 78)

The description of the fairy's dwelling is typical of the folklore tradition. Even Marie herself interjects that she cannot guess the value of the *aigle d'or*. (line 87) *De cel ne sai dire le pris*, (line 88) which crowns the pavilion. The description of the beautiful fairy maiden is conventional. She is extraordinarily beautiful; however, one realistic note is introduced:

Tut ot descobert le costé,

Le vis, le col e la peitrine; (lines 104-105)

The encounter between the Knight and the fairy can be seen to follow both the *Melusina* and the *Morgan* pattern, except for the presence of the messengers i.e. the two young women, which is not found in the Melusina tales. Marie has also taken the liberty of changing the pattern slightly: instead of the hero going hunting, he sets out because of the

inexplicable callousness of King Arthur. The messengers, too, differ: usually a white animal entices the hero to the fairy's bower: here her two maidens bid Lanval follow them. We are about to experience other changes, adaptations and the combination of the two patterns followed by the traditional tales. The fairy has crossed a boundary: up to this point it would seem that the hero is in the *other world* of the fairy, particularly if we are to follow the *Morgan* pattern, but she says:

Pur vus vienc jeo fors de ma tere. (line 111)

In neither of the two types of folktale does the maiden admit this. This is probably an addition made by Marie de France to *humanise* the story, i.e. to round the personality of the fairy and, in so doing, gradually change the genre of the tale.

A trace of the traditions of courtly love is to be found in the Knight's reply to the fairy's avowal of love:

Ne savriëz rien comander

Que jeo ne face a mien poeir, (lines 124-125)

.....

Jeo f[e]rai voz comandemanz (line 127)

He will obey her every command and wish. Even this touch of traditional behaviour of the time adds to the feeling that one is dealing with two real people. To reinforce this idea Marie is even more specific when she describes the maiden's actions:

S'amur e sun cor li otreie (line 133)

One is rapidly moving away from the age-old conception of a fairy as a being of little substance and hardly any personality; the act of giving herself to her lover is very human. She also bestows many presents on him; he is now an extremely wealthy man, independent of the King. The maiden's behaviour is the very antithesis of King Arthur's inexplicable actions.

However, a taboo in the Melusina tradition follows: he is not to reveal their love under any circumstance, otherwise he will lose her.

This interdiction is a Proppian *function*, typical of his theory on the structure of the folktale genre. The prohibition will be violated in the course of the tale, another traditional *function* of Propp's theory. The villain, in the person of the Queen will enter, a task will be set – Lanval must prove his point by summoning his fairy mistress and finally a happy ending follows. It is interesting that this is a happy ending in the Proppian sense, whereas in the *Melusina* and *Morgan* traditions it could not occur. Propp's theory is elucidated in Chapter 5.

The fairy instructs Lanval to leave, but adds that whenever he needs her, (provided he has not broken the taboo) she will come to him. She will be invisible to everyone but him. The conditions of this taboo differ from those found in traditional tales. The latter usually exhibit only a negative aspect: if the taboo is broken, something unpleasant, indeed tragic, will occur. This aspect is found in this *Lai*, but a reward for observing the taboo is put into words: if Lanval refrains from revealing their love, his lover will come to him whenever he desires to see her. The fairy has been *humanised*; a psychological depth to her character has been achieved.

If this *Lai* had followed the *Morgan* pattern, at this stage of the tale the couple would have been living in Avalon and the Knight would have been the person asking to go back to the world of men for some time. There is thus a reversal of situations: he has been told to leave. In the *Morgan* type of tale the taboo would have been linked to the notion of time: the *other* world i.e. the fairy's domain is timeless and, should the Knight return to the world of men and its concept of time, he would find that the world had aged by hundreds of years and he himself would turn to dust. This does not happen in the events that follow Lanval's departure.

Marie's audience was the courtly world. True to the convention of courtly behaviour, Lanval promises to obey the maiden without questioning her commands. He will obey her instructions and leave – but he is also very human: she has told him that she will not reveal herself to anyone else and she will come to him when he calls. He is filled with joy.

Quant il l'oï, mut en fu liez, (line 171).

This is significant because he, too, appears to be a more psychologically rounded character, ignoring his sadness for the moment and revelling in his lover's promise to come to him. Once more the human aspect is emphasised:

L'ewe li donent a ses meins

E la tuaille a [es]suer (lines 178 – 179)

He is given water to wash his hands, a normal human action. Of course water also plays an important part in the *Merveilleux* of the *other* world as an agent of magic.

Lanval and his mistress have a delicious meal and he embraces her many times.

Then he sets out on his journey home. His emotions undergo a change:

Mut est Lanval en grant esfrei; (line 196)

He wonders whether this meeting did, in fact, occur. He doubts his own experiences.

The scene changes: he arrives at his castle and a sumptuous feast follows: Lanval's generosity is overwhelming: he bestows presents on everybody; he ransoms all the prisoners and even strangers benefit from his largesse. His actions contrast sharply with the treatment he received from King Arthur. A stylistic feature serves to emphasise his generous behaviour: lines 209, 210, 211, 212 all start with his name, Lanval. His joy and generosity spring from the fact that he can see his mistress whenever he wants to:

Mut ot Lanval joie e deduit:

U seit par jur u seit par nuit,

S'amie peot veer sovent (lines 215 – 217)

To authenticate the story, a device which she frequently employs, Marie says:

Ceo m'est avis (line 219)

According to her, the time of year is the feast of St. John

Aprés la feste seint Johan (line 220)

This statement serves a double purpose: once again Marie attempts to *Christianise* the tale, it also serves to indicate that there is to be a downward turn or change in Lanval's fortunes: "La saint-Jean: le 24 juin marque un tournant dans l'année; c'est le moment du solstice d'été, véritable fracture du temps, qui introduit ici un renversement analogue

dans l'existence de Lanval" (Walter 2000:455). In the same way that this is the turning point of the year so also it is the turning point in Lanval's existence.

There has been a deliberate change of scene: not only has Lanval returned to the land of mortals, but he is being invited to join the Knights who are disporting themselves where, unbeknown to them, they can be watched by Queen Guinevere. Her name is not mentioned in the *Lai*, but it was and still is generally accepted that in the tales surrounding King Arthur, his wife's name was Queen Guinevere.

Once more we are made aware of Lanval's excellent reputation when Gawain (Walwains) says

*Par Deu, seignurs, nus feimes mal
De nostre cumpainun Lanval,
Que tant est larges e curteis, (lines 229-231)*

The focus now falls on the Queen and her cunning plan specifically designed to meet Lanval. This section of the *Lai* may be seen to be the part of the story which will lead to the climax and eventual denouement. The Queen is a character of flesh and blood, but also the conventional wicked *antagonist* of the fairytale. However, what differentiates her from the wicked witches of fairy stories is the fact that she will not try to achieve her aim by magic, i.e. by a poisoned apple or the waving of a magic wand, but by very human means. She will use her feminine wiles and beauty to try to attract Lanval's attention. She and a number of her most beautiful attendants will amuse themselves close to where the Knights are.

The Knights enjoy the company of the maidens, but Lanval withdraws.

*... s'en vait a une part,
Mut luin des autres; ceo l'est tart
Que s'amie puïst tenir,
Baiser, acoter e sentir;
L'autrui joie prise petit
Si il nen ad le suen delit (lines 253 – 258)*

This is a natural reaction on Lanval's part, as he cannot bear to be the only Knight without his beloved companion, but it is also a clever structural ploy on the part of Marie de France to propel the action forward: Lanval is alone and this gives the Queen the opportunity to reveal her love for him. The Queen, who is used to having every whim and all her orders obeyed, makes herself very vulnerable when she says to Lanval that he may have all her love. She expects him to reciprocate her love, as she has previously said to him

Lanval, mut vus ai honuré (line 263)

She reveals herself as the imperious Queen, who never anticipates refusal of any kind. The unexpected occurs. Contrary to the Queen's expectations, Lanval firmly tells her that he would never betray the king, her husband, reflecting not only his integrity, but the fact that a vassal's loyalty is, first and foremost, to his liege lord. His reaction, as well as that of the Queen, fits neatly into the short story form, showing us that, typical of the short story, the characters are capable of many emotions. Lanval's loyalty towards the King sparks the anger of the Queen, who feels herself doubly rejected as a woman as well as a Queen. A swift change of emotions follows: her retaliation is quick and cruel. He has no interest in women, she says.

Que des femmez n'avez talent. (line 280)

The virtuosity of Marie's ability to represent the complex human psychology is clear, when the Queen, ever resourceful, now focuses on her *beloved* husband saying God will surely punish the King for having included such a wicked person in his group of Knights. With a masterful stroke Marie has shown, in the course of very few lines the Queen's malicious nature. Her change in attitude towards Lanval is remarkable: she professes her love, is rejected and quickly accuses him of being homosexual and just as swiftly pretends concern for her husband who has, unknowingly, harboured such an evil man as Lanval has proved to be, in his court.

Lanval, too, has been experiencing a gamut of emotions in the course of the tale: surprise at the King's action, followed by resignation and acceptance; sadness which results in his leaving the court; passion and joy on discovery of the fairy, puzzlement at being sent

away by her; loneliness and sadness at the court without his mistress, utter surprise at the Queen's revelation of love and now sadness as a result of her accusations:

Quant il l'oi, mut fu dolent; (line 287)

Finally he can stand it no longer and furiously he retaliates, saying something which Marie observes he will regret: he loves the most beautiful of all women.

Mes jo aim, [e] si sui amis

Cele ke deit aver le pris

Sur tutes celes que jeo sai, (lines 293 – 295)

He continues angrily, saying that one of his beloved mistress's serving women is worth more than the Queen herself. The Queen experiences a mixture of emotions: she cries, perhaps from shock or anger, as well as sadness:

Mut fu dolente e curuciee (line 305)

She feels so keenly insulted *avilee* (line 306) that she pretends to be ill, taking to her bed and refuses to leave it until the King sees to it that justice be done. Once again Marie's talent for drawing believable characters comes to the fore.

There is a change of scene: the King comes back to find the Queen in her bedroom, ready to take revenge on Lanval for his rejection of her. Now she becomes the offended and insulted victim; another reversal of roles. She falls at the King's feet, saying that Lanval has made advances to her and when she rejected him, he said that even one of his mistress's attendants was worth more than the Queen.

This is a Biblical theme found in Genesis in the story of Potipher's wife who accused Joseph of trying to seduce her when she had not succeeded in seducing him. This reversal of roles is purely of Guinevere's making. In truth, Lanval is the victim here; it is the Queen who has the power. Without trying to verify the story, the King is furious:

Li reis s'en curuçat forment, (line 325)

and sends three Barons to fetch Lanval. Lanval is about to experience a whole gamut of emotions. After his rejection of the Queen and the revelation of his love for somebody else – a transgression on his part, as he has been forbidden to do so – he is tortured by the

thought that he has lost his mistress: desperate and alone in his room he calls on his mistress repeatedly, but in vain:

Il se pleigneit e suspirot, (line 341)

.....

Puis li crie cent feiz merci

Que ele parolt a sun ami. (lines 343 – 344)

He curses himself and even contemplates suicide, believing that he will never find happiness again. Ironically, he has broken his word to her because of his love for her, as well as in an attempt to discourage the Queen and also to prove to the Queen that he is passionately in love with another woman and is loved by her. A further insult to him is the Queen's accusation, hurled at him in the heat of the moment and in an effort to goad him, that he is homosexual.

The fairy does not reveal herself and he asks himself the question

Oi las, cument se cuntendra? (line 351)

Filled with loathing of himself because of his betrayal of his mistress, Lanval accompanies the barons to court where he will be tried.

Mut fu dolent, taisanz e mu,

De grant dolur mustre semblant. (lines 360 – 361)

His guilt and anger are directed at himself and, in his defence, he says that he has not dishonoured the king. He refutes the Queen's claims that he has tried to seduce her. However, he proudly affirms what he has said about his love:

Mes de ceo dunt il ot parlé

Reconut il la verité,

De l'amur dunt il se vanta; (lines 375 – 377)

But he is very unhappy to have lost his beloved mistress. In despair he says that he will do whatever the court wants:

De ceo lur dit qu'il en ferat

Quanque la curt esgarderat. (lines 379 – 380)

The court decides that Lanval may go free until the day of his trial, but he has to furnish hostages in order to ensure his return. Gavain and the other Knights agree to being kept

hostage. This is proof of their regard for Lanval, never doubting his word. They pledge all their possessions, which the King will claim should Lanval fail to appear at the trial. They do not, however, understand the depth of feeling which Lanval so clearly shows. None the less his loyal companions go to see him every day.

For further proof of Lanval's popularity, Marie adds:

*Mut furent tuz pur lui dolent:
Jeo quid k'il en i ot teus cent
Ki feïssent tut lur poeir
Pur lui sanz pleit delivre aveir;* (lines 419 – 422)

In Marie's own words

Il iert retté a mut grant tort. (line 423)

She intervenes several times in the course of this *Lai* to indicate to the listener or reader that her sympathies lie with Lanval. Even the Barons who sit in judgment on Lanval have his interests at heart:

*Mut sunt pensifs e esgaré
Del franc humme d'autre païs
Quë entre eus ert si entrepris.* (lines 428 – 430)

The discussion among the Knights and their decision could easily fit into a modern short story. They have considered Lanval's *crime* and do not blindly come to the kind of decision one would expect in a feudal society where the Knights come to the conclusion expected of them by the King. On the contrary, the Count of Cornwall says

Nuls ne l'apele fors le rei: (line 443)

and advises that they should merely request evidence of Lanval's statement – he is to produce his beautiful mistress – and if she is truly as beautiful as Lanval claims, he should be pardoned. If the lady does not appear, Lanval will no longer be allowed to serve the King and will be exiled. Once again, Marie has produced a complex character, capable of independent thought and of change.

They inform Lanval of their decision. He is now in a quandary. He knows that he has not lied to the Queen, that he has spoken the truth and broken his promise to his mistress

in the heat of the moment. However, he cannot bid his fairy mistress to show herself, as he has asked her to do many times, because she has threatened that dire consequences will follow if he reveals their secret. He is certain that he will not be able to disprove the Queen's accusation if his mistress refuses to show herself. Although he knows that he has told the truth, the Queen, whose vanity has been piqued, will never retract her accusation.

The Queen, in her heart of hearts is suffering from hurt pride, a most powerful emotion. She cannot forgive him and retract her accusation without losing face. She has also drawn the King into this insoluble situation and he, as monarch and husband, cannot ignore his wife's complaints and refuse to take action. The climax of the short story has been reached: Lanval cannot hope for help, so the inevitable punishment will follow; the King has to come to the aid of his wife and must pass judgment on Lanval, or for ever incur the displeasure of his wife. He has to vindicate her and restore her *honour*. The Queen, believing herself to have been deeply insulted, insists on Lanval's humiliation and punishment.

Just as everything seems to have gone terribly wrong for Lanval, in the nick of time two beautiful young women appear. This seems to be a sort of *deus ex machina*, but even more surprising is the reversal of roles which, we suspect, is about to follow: usually it is the Knight on his beautiful horse who arrives when all seems lost to rescue the maiden. Here the fairy, who, in spite of her threat to Lanval and the fact that she has not appeared to him ignoring his pleas, will come to save him. Two exquisite maidens arrive, an event which serves to heighten the tension, as nobody knows who they are or where they come from. They ask that a room be prepared for their mistress who is about to arrive. King Arthur readily agrees. They say nothing more and tension mounts. It is possible that they are the fairy's ladies-in-waiting, but, as yet, nobody knows the truth and they are silent. Tension grows: the King demands a verdict from the Barons; they say that they have been distracted by the maidens. They settle down to consider their verdict, but once again, Marie cleverly delays the outcome: two more exquisite young women arrive. Once again Lanval's friends hasten to tell him of the arrival of two beautiful ladies and

add that one of them must be his mistress. But Lanval does not recognise either of them. They, too, are splendid and Marie herself adds;

N'i ad cele meuz ne vausist

Que unkes la reine ne fist. (lines 531 – 532)

No doubt the courtiers are of the same opinion. Again one of them asks that a room be prepared for her mistress.

Here the folk or fairytale motif comes to the fore: events very often happen in threes: one pair of beautiful girls arrives, then another; this seems to be a preparation for the arrival of the most beautiful of all and of the one person who will provide the solution of the tale. However, these beings from the *Other World* are skilfully interwoven and form part of the *short story* world: the maidens serve the purpose of proving Lanval's hasty and unwise declaration to be correct, that even his mistress's ladies-in-waiting are more beautiful than the mortal Queen, as well as building up tension in a typical short story fashion. The two worlds have come together and she will provide a solution to both.

Once again, sentence is about to be passed because:

Puis ad tuz ses baruns mandez

Que le jugement seit renuz:

Trop ad le jur esté tenuz; (lines 542 – 544)

At that very moment when they are about to sentence Lanval, a young woman, even more beautiful than the others, appears. She is richly dressed, exquisite and has all the attributes of a fairy princess. She has a hawk on her fist and a greyhound follows her horse. She has arrived at the last moment to save Lanval, an interesting reversal of roles, which again combines her two functions. Walter says of the hawk “cet oiseau de proie ne signifie peut- être pas seulement le contexte de la chasse ... Le lien de l'épervier du mythe de la fée est bien établi.” Of the fairy he says: “en apparaissant, telle Diane, sous les traits d'une chasseresse, la fée manifeste sa souveraineté, aux yeux de la cour. En même temps, Lanval est évidemment la proie qu'elle chasse” (Walter 2000:457).

In her role as fairy, she is seeking her prey, but as the loving mistress of the short story, she has come to rescue her lover. The fairy thus has a part to play in both the real world and in the *other world*, providing not only a link between the two, but by her presence creating interdependence. Lanval's friends come to call him, telling of the arrival of a young woman, the most beautiful of all.

*Ceo [e]st la plus bele del mund,
De tutes celes kē I sunt* (lines 591 – 592)

The maiden solves the problem by telling the King that Lanval has been accused unjustly by the Queen. She requests that he be freed.

Lanval and his mistress leave; their destination is Avalon, the *Other world*, traditionally the home of Morgan. This ending is not typical of the legends surrounding *Morgan le Fay*, as she is usually considered to be evil and entices her lover into the *other world*. Here Lanval eagerly accompanies his lady, providing a fitting ending to the embryonic *short story*.

Marie has succeeded admirably in creating the fairytale atmosphere of the folktale and describing in realistic terms the activities at Arthur's court, thus expertly welding the two parts together, allowing them to form a unified tale.

This leads on to the question, was Marie deliberately adding a Christian touch to this *Lai*? As we have seen this tale has elements of the *Merveilleux*, as well as containing some very realistic touches. I intended to examine this question by a comparison of this *Lai* with the anonymous *Lai Graelant* which could have been the predecessor of our *Lai*. In an attempt to establish whether it was indeed Marie de France who added a Christian touch to her *Lais*, or whether it was already present in the anonymous *Lai Graelant* in which the content was very similar to that of Marie's *Lais*, I shall briefly compare the content and tone of the two tales. Most scholars agree that *Graelant* was written several years before *Lanval* and that it was a less refined version of the original tale of its Breton ancestors.

Gaston Paris says of the relative dating of the two *Lais* “Parmi les lais qui ne sont pas de Marie, mais dont quelques uns sont plus anciens citerons *Graelant* (Paris 1800:92). In the same work, he says, in his opinion, Marie’s *Lais* were written in about 1175, while *Graelant* made its appearance “at the beginning of the last third of the twelfth century” (p247-8).

William C. Stokoe Jr. in *The source of Sir Launfal*: says “I propose to prove that Marie de France as a literary artist of skill and despatch, starting with *Graelant* as we know it or an earlier text, made those changes she considered necessary to transform the folktale into a courtly short-story” (Stokoe 1948:395)

I do not intend to make a detailed comparison of the content of the two *Lais*, *Graelent* to be found in *Les Lais Anonymes des XII^e et XIII^e Siècles*. (O’Hara Tobin 1976:96-121) and *Lanval*. It is sufficient to say that Marie’s tale follows a more logical pattern and creates a feeling of anticipation and expectation as she does keep the listener or reader in suspense, before the final revelation and unexpected denouement.

She also draws on literary sources, for example the description and introduction of the fairy’s pavilion is featured in the *Roman de Thèbes*, as well as inspiration from Wace’s *Brut*: the Queen becomes more devious by devising a plan for *Lanval*’s downfall. Psychologically she is a more interesting and more rounded figure.

Marie may have been inspired by *Graelant*, as well as drawing on the Breton folktales for material, but she certainly enriched her tale and undoubtedly it was she who added the Christian element to her story. Certainly no trace of Christianity is to be found in *Graelant* and, if one accepts that the author of the latter, as he says, is recording Breton folktales, this material was also devoid of any Christian element. It was thus one of Marie’s insightful innovations to draw her listener’s/readers attention to this religious element.

Les Deus Amanz

The type of Metamorphosis which occurs in this *Lai* can only be clearly understood after an examination of the notion of *genre*. What occurs in this tale is a gradual shift from the type of story known as a *fairytale* with its particular characteristics to the *genre* known as the *short story*. Certainly, both sets of characteristics are present; they are, in fact, intertwined, as we shall see. It must be borne in mind that Marie's *Lais* are still very *gestual*: things move at all times in these tales. Hers is a *putting-in-writing* of tales which had existed only as oral accounts. The protagonists – the two lovers – will mirror the change of *genre*. Gradually the two stock fairytale *functions* become the human beings typical of the short story.

In this *Lai* we shall encounter several elements typical of the fairytale, such as a beautiful princess whose father sets an insurmountable task which a suitor has to accomplish in order to gain her hand in marriage, and a magic potion which will aid the handsome young man to achieve his goal. The *Merveilleux* is in evidence, but what is more important, is the fact that Marie humanizes her characters, eschewing the accepted happy ending, thus transforming what could have been a conventional fairytale into a touching short story, a *tranche de vie*, which has a telling impact on the reader.

From the very beginning we are aware of a new approach to the tale. We are immediately told that this is a story about love between two young people, but because of their love *ambedeus finerent* (line 4). i.e. they will both die. Fairytales invariably have a happy ending; in this account this is not going to happen, according to the narrative voice. In addition, the reader is told where the young people are buried

Ad un haut munt merveilles grant:

Las sus gisent li dui enfant. (lines 9-10)

According to Philippe Walter: *au XII^e siècle existait sur cette colline un couvent d'augustins dédié à sainte Madeleine et connu sous le nom de Prieuré des Deus Amanz* (Walter 2000:459).

In the city of Pîtres in Normandy lived a King who had a daughter

..... *bele*
[E] *mut curteise* ... (lines 21-22)

However, in spite of her father loving her so much that he did not want her to marry, she fell in love with a young man. (This motif is typical of folk stories e.g. Stith Thompson's motif T50.2:) (Thompson 1989). This theme could be considered to be one of incestuous love of a father for his daughter. However, any imputation of an incestuous relationship between the father and his daughter is, at best, tenuous; it is rather the normal fear of an old man to be left alone. Although the daughter loves the young man very much, she nevertheless has strong feelings of love for her father, who will be deprived of her emotional support, but she wants to marry with her father's approval, thus the young man must needs meet his requirements.

In order to prevent any suitor from claiming his daughter, the King sets an impossible task: only he who can carry the Princess to the top of the mountain without stopping to rest, may marry her. This setting of the difficult task is also typical of the fairytale and folktale genre. Stith Thompson includes this motif:

- H 331 Suitor contest: bride as prize
- H 331.1.1 Suitor contest: riding up Glass Mountain
- H 114.2 Carrying ever-increasing burden up mountain.

The King proclaims that:

*Ki sa fille vodreit aveir,
Une chose seüst de veir:
Sortit esteit e destiné,
Desur le munt fors la cité
Entre ses bras la portereit,
Si que ne se reposereit.* (lines 33-38)

Many suitors try, but none succeeds until a young man, the son of a Count comes to the King's court. He is described as

... *gent e bel*, (line 50)

and ambitious:

De bien faire pur aveir pris

Sur tuz autres s'est entremis. (lines 51-52)

He is also

... pruz ... e curteis (line 59)

The Princess accepts his love. At first he is patient, preferring to suffer for love, hoping that eventually he will overcome all obstacles. This is a human quality. However, finally, realizing that the King is adamant, he begs the Princess to elope with him. At this point, Marie has *humanised* the lovers. They are no longer the stock characters of a fairy-tale. The young man has become impatient, but knows that her father will not consent to their marriage. His desperate plan to elope is the result. She is prudent. The Princess realizes that she cannot elope with her lover, as she loves her father and cannot bear to anger him. She is human and can anticipate her father's feelings; filial love dictates her actions. However, a fairytale element emerges: the Princess suggests that her suitor fetches a magic potion which, once he has drunk it, will give him sufficient strength to carry her up the mountain. He is to go to Salerno where her aunt will supply him with this magic drink. The *Merveilleux* interrupts the flow of what is becoming a short story. "In the Märchen, such realities as time, place, natural and supernatural enemies, social restrictions, and above all, death, are abolished" (Sienaert 1976:4). For a short time the *Merveilleux* of the fairytale seems the only solution. The magic, strength-giving gift also occurs in Stith Thompson's Motif Index – D 1335.2 (Thompson 1989).

Marie does not dwell on the details of the quest and soon the young man returns, having obtained the potion. All is ready for the test.

Marie once again shows the human side of the young woman:

Mut se destreint, mut jeüna

A sun manger pur alegier, (lines 164-165)

Here we are face to face with a human being: the Princess has thought about the test and has done whatever she can to lighten the young man's burden. This is not the conventional, flat figure found in a fairytale. We are dealing here with the character with personality, the person of flesh and blood of the short story. Not only does the Princess

take care to eat very little, she also wears her lightest clothes in an attempt to help the young man to carry her successfully:

N'ot drap vestu fors la chemise; (line 173)

The young couple prepare for the test: he gives her the vial to hold, trusting her implicitly. Here Marie has added another human touch.

Now the author interjects:

Mes jo creim que poi [ne] li vaille,

Kar n'ot en lui point de mesure. (lines 178-179)

The transformation is complete: love has given the young man self-confidence, thus he has no intention of taking the magic potion. Marie has painted a fine psychological picture of a young man's inner strength, as well as effecting a change of *genre*: the fairytale has become a short story with characters whose emotions and reactions are genuine.

The young man refuses all the efforts made by the Princess to encourage him to restore his strength by drinking some of the potion. They reach the top of the mountain where the young man collapses. The Princess tries to revive him by means of the potion, but realizes that he is dead. Marie adds

Issi murut cum jeo vus di. (line 211)

The reader was warned of this tragic conclusion at the beginning of the *Lai*. The Princess pours out the contents of the vial and this causes the mountainside to become very fertile; showing the potency of the potion.

Meinte bone herbe i unt trovee,

Ki del beivrë orent racine. (lines 218-219)

The heroine, grief-stricken, dies, having chosen to die with her lover rather than continuing to live without him. Her love for the young man is stronger than her filial obligation.

Ilec murut la dameisele

Que tant ert pruz e sage e bele. (lines 227-228)

The mountain in this story would seem to be a Metaphor representing the difficulties the two young people face. The young lady wishes to change her father's desire to keep her by his side and allow her to live her own independent life as the wife of the young man, while the young man, very much in love, seeks to do everything he can to win her hand. He does as she requests and seeks the help of the aunt, but in the end decides he must climb both the physical and psychological mountain on his own. He does, but it costs him his life. It would at first appear that his efforts have been pointless. However, by the young lady's spreading the elixir on the mountain top, she achieves something special that could perhaps represent the culmination of their love in that many precious herbs spring up from it. This could be considered to be the child of their love.

Sienaert remarks on the young man's rejection of the magic potion "C'est la dissociation du héros et de la merveille, la prise en main par le héros de son propre destin et son refus de suivre les dictées du genre merveilleux C'est aussi, et d'abord, l'acceptation de la possibilité de l'échec, exclu dans l'aventure merveilleuse, mais propre à l'aventure humaine" (Sienaert 1978:117).

Marie has turned the story, which started like a typical fairytale into a short story by transforming the stock characters of a fairytale into beings capable of making their own decisions and thus deciding on their own fate. The contrived and traditional ending of the fairytale has given way to a tragic, but more realistic conclusion often encountered in short stories.

Yonec

Love is the central theme running through all Marie de France's *Lais*. As such it often acts as an agent of the Metamorphosis which her characters undergo, thus revealing their psychological depth. Philippe Ménard says that in the tales love surges up with remarkable force at the first meeting: "l'amour surgit dès la première rencontre avec une force remarquable" (Ménard 1979:12). It must be borne in mind, that there were many aspects of these traditional, oral stories which Marie de France undertook to adapt for her audience of aristocratic ladies and gentlemen of the court where they were presented,

moving from *popular* to *aristocratic*. She chose to adapt the tales to suit the tastes of her listeners / readers, as well as allowing her own opinions to emerge, particularly on the so-called moral behaviour of lovers. She had to take into consideration the moral norms of the era, at the same time subtly demonstrating what she thought of the lovers. She had to ask herself what the predominant and current religious beliefs were and whether they were valid. She wondered about the accepted behaviour of married people and, most importantly, about how the word *love* was interpreted by her audience. Was adultery ever justifiable? She was, in all probability a nun, an abbess: the mores of her time had to change, to be Christianised as paganism was still rife.

All these questions lead to Metamorphosis of many kinds in and of the original Breton tales: transgressions, the crossing of boundaries, as well as changing attitudes, emotions and behaviour of some characters will become evident; a Christian element will be introduced, sometimes at variance with the accepted traditional norms. Marie frequently voices her own opinions of and feelings about her characters and their behaviour. She warns of events which will result from certain acts. All these elements point to a Metamorphosis, not the least of which being that these tales, previously oral accounts, were being written down for the first time.

In order to appreciate Marie's courage when adapting these traditional tales, particularly where the relationship of men and women was concerned, one must ask oneself the question: what was the general attitude of the Church to marriage, women and adultery in the Twelfth Century? What was Marie's opinion? As we have seen marriage was considered to be an institution with the sole purpose of continuing the family line. Love played very little or no part in the relationship and sexual intercourse, although permitted was still considered to be sinful. Courtly love on the other hand, although supposedly a system of admiration from afar of a married lady, did not exclude consummation. This appeared to be socially accepted by society.

Jennifer Willging sums up the Lais of Marie de France: "Her 'Lais' do not offer a standard morality; a set rule for behaviour, for her treatment of a particular transgression

is too varied for us to arrive at a single ‘moral of the story’. ... She sides with him (or more often with her) who has been done wrong. ... In religious matters, her women demonstrate surprising independence of mind ... They design a ‘morality’ that is conducive rather than destructive to their natures and their happiness and that is consequently often at odds with the morality of their societies” (Willging 1995:133).

“La grande affaire qui intéresse notre auteur, c’est l’amour réciproque d’un homme et d’une femme ...” (Ménard 1979:12). “Seul l’amour triomphe. C’est même l’amour qui engendre ses propres lois, sa propre morale. La dame n’a cure de respecter les règles de la morale et de la religion” what interests the author is the reciprocal love between a man and a woman. Love will triumph; it creates its own laws and moral standards (Ménard 1979:13). Love and *Metamorphoses* are closely linked in this *Lai*. There is evidence of many kinds of *Metamorphoses*, the most obvious being that of physical change of a human being.

Lecouteux explains how these Scandinavian beliefs could have influenced Celtic thought: “Si nous rapprochons les traditions celtiques et germaniques- qui ont par ailleurs tant de points communs, ne serait-ce que par le biais de l’Angleterre où Saxons, Danois et Norvégiens furent au contact des populations celtiques ou par canal des mariages mixtes, qui eurent lieu quand existait un royaume scandinave en Irlande, et quand Shetland, Orcades, Hébrides et île de Man étaient scandinaves ...”

(Lecouteux 1992:84). Lecouteux believes that the Celtic and Germanic traditions had much in common. In England Danes and Norwegians were in contact with the Celts and marriages between members of the Celtic population and the Scandinavians took place. He adds: “On n’ignore point combien Marie de France, née en Normandie, région de peuplement scandinave, et vivant en Angleterre dans l’entourage du roi Henri II Plantagenêt, était attentive aux traditions et aux croyances populaires” (Lecouteux 1992:82).

I return to the analysis of this *Lai*. The first surprise awaiting the reader is the title of the *Lai*. Although his name is mentioned several times in the first ten lines, Yonec does not

play a significant part until the final scene of the *Lai*. Marie must have had a reason for doing this. In fact, Jeanne-Marie Boivin in her article *Bisclavret et Muldumarec*, states that although this *Lai* is the first written version of the story, a later one was called *L'Oiseau bleu*, a title which indicates who the hero of the story is (Boivin 1995:149). *D'Aulnoy's* story however deviates considerably from the incident in Marie's *Lai Yonec* and reads like a fairy-tale, with the typical happy ending. A discussion of the probable reason for the title given by Marie de France will follow later.

At the beginning of the *Lai* Marie de France says that she is acquainted with the material of this tale. She will recount it in verse, which is an obvious change of presentation as the originals were oral narratives not composed in verse.

Les aventures que j'en sai

Tut par rime les cunterai (lines 3-4)

A second innovation becomes obvious when one examines the structure of this *Lai*: the first section concerns the lady and her incarceration in a tower by an old and jealous husband. It is impossible for her to escape from her prison. The events narrated take place in the world as we know it. The second section is filled with the *Merveilleux*, in which there is very little participation by the characters of the first section. The third section is once again a down-to-earth description of what happens in the every-day world. The lady, and later her son, Yonec, provide the link between the two worlds. As I pointed out, Yonec (*ce nom signifie en gallois "desire"*, according to Philippe Walter (Walter 2000:462) plays no part in the unravelling of the tale until the very end when his presence is indispensable to the conclusion. Once again, the *Merveilleux* and the realistic elements are intertwined.

A rich old man, desiring to have a child to whom he can leave his vast fortune, marries a beautiful young noblewoman. She is described as follows:

De haute gent fu la pucele,

Sage, curteise e forment bele (lines 21 -22)

Her husband's awareness of her beauty soon leads to jealousy

En li garder mist mut s'entente: (line 26)

He locks her up in a tower with his widowed sister to guard her.

The noblewoman has been living in this tower for seven years without producing an heir. The theme of sterility, presumably on the part of the old man, seems to reflect his sterility of character: he has deteriorated from being a possessive and jealous husband to becoming the cruellest of men, unwilling to take into consideration the suffering of his young wife, incarcerated with an irate old widow and forbidden to speak to another living soul.

Ne fors de cele tur ne eissi

Ne pur parent ne pur ami (lines 39-40)

The focus changes: the husband is relegated to the background and our full attention is focused on the young woman.

Mut ert la dame en grant tristur;

Od lermes, od suspir e plur

Sa beuté pert en teu mesure

Cume cele que n'en ad cure (lines 45-48)

Her sadness has changed her appearance: she is no longer beautiful (albeit temporarily) and in desperation she wishes to die.

A change of weather takes place: April, a portent of Spring, has arrived. The lady, still desperately unhappy, seems to have undergone a slight, but subtle change of attitude. At first she notices the sun's brightness

Choisi la clarté del soleil (line 62),

and she bemoans her fate. Slowly she becomes angry and her anger increases, almost driving away melancholy thoughts. Her change of mood and increased fury is evident when she calls her husband *Cist viel gelus* ... (line 71). He is mad and stupid, in her opinion

Mut par est fous e esbaiz (line 73)

She is indignant that he won't even allow her to go to church

Jeo ne puis al muster venir

Ne le servise Deu oïr (lines 75-76)

Once more Marie's attempt to Christianise the *Lai* is clear. The young woman's anger turns to fury when she says that if she could talk to other people and enjoy herself in their company, she would do so

Jo li mustrasse beu semblant (line 79)

Her fury reaches boiling point when she curses her parents for making her marry the old man. He simply will not die:

Dur sunt li nerf, dures les veines,

Que de vif sanc sunt tutes pleines (lines 89-90)

At this stage she is truly a *malmariée*, thinking of all the handsome Knights who in the past have found young, noble and beautiful girls and of other girls with their lovers who are

Beaus e curteis, [pruz] e vaillanz, (line 98)

This tirade ends with a heartfelt prayer to God to find her such a young man.

Here Marie's attitude to marriage is unusual for a writer of the Twelfth Century. She does not condemn the young woman for desiring an exciting lover, in spite of the fact that she is married. On the contrary, the damsel prays to God to grant her wish, an action of which Marie seems fully to approve, believing that it will be sanctioned by God. This would certainly not have been the general attitude towards marriage in the Twelfth Century. However, Marie sides with the person who, in her opinion, is right in spite of the general condemnation by others. She also advocates true love, even if one of the partners is married.

Marie whole-heartedly supports the heroine of this *Lai*, as she legitimises it: the damsel prays to God for help in her search for a brave young man, albeit that he will be visible only to the heroine. Here there is a curious mixture of attitudes towards this wished-for transgression: the general public, including her husband would not approve, God could approve – she has been praying to him – and the teller of these tales, Marie, obviously approves and accepts this desire without any hint of condemnation on her part. The reason for the intended transgression of the heroine is the direct result of injustice (another transgression) of her parents – marrying her off to a rich old man, also of her

husband who crosses the accepted boundaries by locking his wife in a tower when she has not committed any act to deserve this. The sole motivation for her husband's acts is his overpowering jealousy, perhaps stemming from a feeling of insecurity, as he knows that he is old and unattractive.

A Metamorphosis takes place: the captive is about to experience the fulfilment of her wish.

L'ombre d'un grant oisel choisi

Par mi une estreite fenestre. (lines 106-107)

We now enter another realm: that of the *Merveilleux*. Even before the actual magic action occurs, i.e. the transformation, we are told that the window is

... *une estreite fenestre* (line 107)

But that she had seen the shadow

d'un grant oisel (line 106)

Magically the large bird is able to enter through the narrow window. This initiates the second part of the *Lai*. In contrast to part one, the *Merveilleux* is ever-present, the *Other World* will feature strongly, as will the magic Hawk-Knight. The heroine will be the only link between the Real World and the world of Faery, the husband and his sister having been relegated to the side-lines (The sister will, of course, be the instrument setting in motion the final tragedy). Nevertheless, the two worlds are interwoven.

A deviation in the format of the traditional Melusina and Morgan le Fay legends which were so well-known at this time is to be seen in this *Lai*. Usually the fairy heroine is a woman, i.e. she has already transformed herself into a human being when the hero, a human, encounters her. In the Melusina tales he encounters her either in a forest or in the vicinity of a fountain, often having been led there by her avatar or Double in the form of a white stag or sometimes a bird. She comes to live with him for a certain number of years. The structure of the Morgan le Fay tales is similar in that the fairy is a woman; it differs, however, from the Melusina stories when the hero is enticed to live with the fairy in her kingdom.

In the *Lai* under discussion the fairy is a man and he seeks out the heroine because she has wished for his arrival; there is a double Metamorphosis: he arrives in the form of a bird – the Double or avatar of the fairy King of the other world and instantly he becomes a handsome, loving and sincere Knight. The heroine of this story witnesses the second Metamorphosis:

*E il l'ot bien esgardé,
Chevaler bel e gent devint.* (lines 114-115)

There is an even more specific purpose for his arrival: he will engender a child who will avenge the cruel treatment which his mother-to-be is presently suffering, and which has been inflicted by her jealous husband. Surprisingly, the fairy King is not immortal. This deviation from the norm is essential for the unfolding of the plot; were the King to survive, Yonec himself would be of no particular importance to the tale.

Once more Marie brings a Christian element into the *Lai*. The heroine agrees to become the Knight's mistress *son dru* (line 138) if he proves that he believes in God. This curious juxtaposition of what is considered to be a sin – becoming the mistress of a man, other than one's husband – and the insistence that the lover proclaim his belief in God – may be explained by the fact that Marie felt perfectly justified in a *malmariée* taking a lover, as her heroine is desperately unhappy in a marriage arranged by her parents.

The fine character of the Knight is clear when he assures the lady that he believes in God, and to prove it, he will take communion, after being transformed into her likeness

La semblance de vus prendrai, (line 161)

Although she had doubted the Knight's story, the heroine's mind is now set at rest and she is prepared to deceive the priest - a transgression – into believing that she is ill and needs to take communion. She even pretends to faint

Semblant fist que ele se pasma (line 181)

A Metamorphosis occurs; the Knight takes on the form of the lady and, at the same time, the transfiguration of the host occurs. The Knight assures her

Le cors [Damne] deu recevrai (line 162)

the priest

Corpus domini aportot. (line 186)

In this way the lady has made sure that the Knight has not been sent by Satan. According to medieval tradition, a diabolical being would have been unable to take communion: the devil is a metamorphosed angel.

Li chevaler l'ad receü

Le vin del chalice beü (lines 187-188)

“Si l’oiseau était vraiment d’origine diabolique, il refuserait de communier au corps du Christ. Une légende mélusinienne de femme-oiseau racontée par Gautier Map (dans son recueil de contes latins “De nugis curialium”, chap 9) rapporte que l’épouse féerique d’un jeune seigneur n’assistait jamais à la communion lorsqu’elle venait à la messe avec son mari. Elle finit par disparaître définitivement sous sa forme animale témoignant ainsi de nature diabolique” (Walter 2000:464).

The Metamorphosis is reversed and the Knight reverts and becomes a man once more. There have thus been three instances of physical Metamorphosis: Fairy – Bird – Knight – Lady and a reverse Metamorphosis. This is contrary to the church’s teaching, but is completely justified in Marie’s eyes because of the undeserved unhappiness of the lady. She has been forced into a loveless marriage with an old man who has married her for selfish purposes – to bear an heir. Also, referring to the relationship, hoping that she may enjoy this love for a long time, Marie says of the lady

Or li duinst Deus lunges joïr! (line 224)

The fairytale element is once again evident when the Knight promises to come to her whenever the lady wants him to: she merely has to wish for his return. The Knight, because he comes from the *Other* world has the ability to foresee a change in their fortunes. He says of the widowed sister

Ceste veille nus traïra, (line 203)

He foretells, that, she will betray them to the lady’s husband. He also predicts his own death (line 210). A physical, as well as a mental change takes place in the heroine. After the Knight’s visit she experiences a *grant joie* (line 212) and recovers her former beauty

(line 216). Whereas she hated being alone and longed for other entertainment, she now revels in the love of her Knight, her only desire being to see him and to be loved by him.

Sun ami volt suvent veer (line 219)

Ironically it is the very change in the heroine's attitude and the return of her beauty

Esteit tut sis semblanz changez (line 227)

which arouses her husband's suspicion: she is

autrement ... k'i[l] ne suleit; (line 230)

The husband experiences new feelings – suspicion and surprise – because his wife now dresses beautifully and is happy. The heroine's obvious pleasure in being alone betrays her. This is the surprise change which the sister has noticed in her and it alerts the old widow that something different has happened in the life of the lady. The sister is instructed to change her normal routine and in the morning when she usually goes out, she is to hide and spy on the lady. Marie makes her own feelings very clear when she writes:

Allas! cum ierent malbailli

Cil ki l'un veut si agaitier

Pur eus traïr e enginner! (lines 254-256)

She emphasises once more that she is recounting a story which she heard

...ceo oi cunter (line 257)

A change in the husband's behaviour occurs: he starts plotting, pretending to go on a journey, saying that the King has sent for him. The sister is shocked and fearful when she sees the Metamorphosis which the Hawk-Knight undergoes. The husband has a lethal trap made – spikes in the window will certainly kill the Hawk-Knight. Once more Marie makes her feelings known. Her sympathy for the happy couple is clear.

Deus! qu'il ne sout la traïsun

Quë aparailot le felun. (lines 295-296)

The next morning, on rising, the husband again dissembles, saying he is going hunting. The trap succeeds and when the hawk flies into the room, the bird is fatally wounded by

the sharp spikes. In human form the Knight's wounds are identical to those which were inflicted on him in his metamorphosed bird form. Here the theory of the *Double* appears to hold true: whatever injury a creature suffers in one form will be felt when he reverts to his original form. However, the Hawk-Knight has yet another form: he is the King of a fairy realm. He retains his human form for the sake of his mistress and is thus prepared to die. The Knight reveals to his mistress that she will bear him a son who will be called Yonec. This important change in the lady's state will have momentous consequences: Yonec will avenge his parents and will kill their enemy, the lady's husband. Once more there is proof that this fairy being, known to his mistress as the Hawk-Knight, has the ability to state with absolute certainty what is to happen in the future. He is the agent of change: by him a young man will be conceived who will destroy the enemy, albeit that the heroine will not live to enjoy her freedom from the tyrant, nor will her lover survive to live happily with his beloved.

Reality changes: the *Merveilleux* dominates the scenes following this revelation: the lady is able to escape her incarceration by means of magic wrought by her lover. Not only can she pass unscathed through the window, but she also survives a fall of twenty feet:

C'est merveille k'el ne s'ocist, (line 338)

These are all changes in circumstance brought about by the action of the *Merveilleux*. Further change is to follow: the lady is able to follow a trail of the Knight's blood (reminiscent of the bread crumbs followed by Hänsel and Gretel). In the real world the possibility of accomplishing such an action is remote. We are brought up smartly against the presence of the *Merveilleux* – the heroine reaches a *hoge* (line 346) (*tetre / tumulus*). According to legend, this is the entrance to the *Other* world. The change of scene as such is important, but it is the change of reality which permeates the *Lai* at this point. The very *unreality* of what the lady sees emphasises the change. The huge wall enclosing the fairy city reinforces the feeling of *otherness*; all the houses and towers are made of or covered by silver, the buildings are rich:

Munt sunt riche li mandement. (line 364)

Even the silent marshes create an eerie atmosphere, characteristic of the *Merveilleux*. The description of the surroundings is typical of the setting found in a Celtic tale. Water is important as it is associated with the presence of magic.

De l'autre part vers le dunjun

Curt une ewe tut envirun; (lines 367-368)

The dearth of inhabitants and the silence of those few who are in the city again illustrate this different reality.

Unkes nul a li ne parla; (line 375)

Marie insists on the prodigious amount of blood lost by the Hawk-Knight, which enables the heroine to follow him to where he lies. This can also be seen as proof that magic is at work: although he is in human form, no human suffering such excessive blood loss could survive for even the shortest period of time.

The magic number *three* once more establishes the fact that we are in the world of the *Merveilleux*, (This technique is present in most fairytales). The lady passes two sleeping Knights until she reaches the third who is her lover. Typical again of the *Other* world is the description of the bed on which he lies

Li pecul sunt de or esmeré; (line 388)

And the candles and chandeliers which burn day and night

Valent tut l'or d'une cité. (line 392)

The Knight embraces her and begs her to leave. He knows that he is about to die and tells her that if she is found by his subjects, they will kill her. He explains:

Bien iert entre ma gent seü

Que me unt vostre amur perdu. (lines 407-408)

Here there is a sharp contrast between the genuine love of the Hawk-Knight and the superficial, self-serving *love* shown by the lady's husband. This lustful old man simply *loves* her because she is beautiful and can bear heirs. The Knight, on the other hand, does not resume his *otherworldly* form (we are not told why). The magic is there, but is not used. This is a choice. The Knight will take his destiny in hand even if he has to die. At

the same, time his main concern at this point is to urge her to leave before his people harm her.

Once more the *Merveilleux* has a role: when the lady says that she would rather die there with him and expresses her fear of her husband when she returns, the Knight gives her a ring with magic powers: as long as she keeps the ring safe, her husband will not recall anything about her past. The Knight can also foretell the future and gives the lady his sword which, in the future, is to be used to kill their enemy, the lady's husband. With his magical powers he prophesies that their son will be

pruz e vaillant (line 426)

He also relates how, one day, she will be taken to a festival where they will see an abbey. One of the onlookers will be heard to tell the story of his (the Hawk-Knight's) death and her husband's part in it. Her son will also be told the true story of his birth and his real father's name, after which he will be given the sword which the lady has brought with her. This detailed knowledge which the Knight imparts proves once again that he is an inhabitant of the *Other* world. The tolling of the bells signals the Knight's death. Her joy at seeing her lover again gives way to great sorrow

Quant ele oi les seins suner

E le doel al chastel mener,

De la dolur quë ele en ad

Quantre fiees se pasmad. (lines 445-448)

She crosses the boundary

... la hoge (line 450)

and enters the reality of the world of man.

Yonec, the perfect knight, is born:

El regne ne pot hom trover

Si bel, si pruz e si vaillant

E larges e bien despendant. (lines 460-463)

Again Marie intervenes in the tale, saying

Oëz cum[ent] est avenu! (line 466)

The family is instructed to go to the Feast of Saint Aaron at Caereon to which they are led by a young man and taken to a castle where there is an abbey. Once more the presence of magic can be felt.

Even when they want to leave, after attending Mass, the Abbott asks them to stay. This plea could also be construed as intervention from the *Other* world. They set out to explore the abbey. In the chapter room they find a magnificent tomb

*De or fin erent li chandelier,
D'ametiste li encensier, (lines 503-504)*

The inhabitants recount the sad story of the killing of their King and add that they are expecting his son to arrive in order to rule the kingdom. This is a fine example of a story within a story: *un récit à tiroirs*. We have crossed the boundary to the *Other* world again; there has been a change in reality, proved by the fact that the people of the city are aware of the circumstances of their King's death, as well as having the knowledge of his son's birth and expected arrival, saying

Si cum il dist e cumanda. (line 524)

Vengeance floods back into the lady's mind and she says

... Deus nus ad mené ici! (line 528)

Once more Marie's Christian spirit dominates the scene, perhaps putting into practice the Biblical injunction of *an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth*. The lady instructs her son to kill his step-father, who has been the cause of his father's death. After telling her son the truth, the lady falls down, unconscious and dies, lying across her lover's tomb. There could have been no happier ending for her, as her lover is dead and she goes to join him after seeing justice being done.

Yonec strikes off the head of his step-father who dies and Yonec takes his rightful place as ruler of his people. Judith P. Shoaf in a footnote to her translation of the *Lais* remarks as follows: "Marie's texts call Yonec the son of the lady and her husband 'their son', 'his son'. This intensifies a kind of Oedipal family romance in the final lines of the *Lai*: the

boy must suddenly kill the man he has known all his life as a generous and loving father” (Shoaf 1992:13).

Philippe Walter writes: “... l’histoire de Yonéc n’est pas sans analogie avec le mythe de Persée, fils de Danaé. Cette dernière est enfermée dans une tour d’airain puis fécondée par Zeus métamorphosé en pluie d’or. Le fils de Danaé tue son grand-père Acrisios, geôlier de sa mère. (Yonéc tue son beau-père, lui aussi geôlier de sa mère)” (Walter 2000:466).

This *Lai* clearly involves many examples of Metamorphosis. There is literal and literary metamorphosis, as well as emotional change. Adultery, although accepted and tacitly approved in this case, is obviously a transgression. Marie’s attitude towards adultery (in this *Lai*) differs completely from the church’s condemnatory stance. She feels that the *mal mariée*’s actions are completely justified.

The proof that Marie is not bound by the accepted *rules* of the fairy or folktale can be seen in the ending of this *Lai*. She appears to attempt the impossible: a story invented for one purpose is now meant to serve another – opposite purpose. Traditional fairytales start with imbalance which the tale rectifies so that a sense of relief is obtained: there is an immanent justice, often going against morality. How then can one turn such a tale into a defence of the accepted morality? One concludes that this *Lai* is an example of Anamorphosis – the tale is evolving from its original fairytale form and slowly taking on some of the characteristics of the short story.

Anamorphosis is defined as follows:

- (i) The evolution of one type of organism from another by a long series of gradual changes.
- (ii) Evolutionary increase in complexity of form and function.

Greek: ana + morphē (shape) - to transform (American Heritage Dictionary, 2003)

There is also a continual crossing of boundaries or change of reality: there are two worlds with two sets of morals; that of the world inhabited by humans and that of the *Other* world, where the influence of the *Merveilleux* dominates. In the real world, killing would be seen as wrong; in the world of the *merveilleux* it serves only to right a wrong.

Laüstic

In my discussion of the *Lais* I have been exploring the many manifestations of the concept of Metamorphosis. The most immediately accessible and obvious example of this phenomenon is a Metamorphosis wrought by magic – le Merveilleux. This remains relatively superficial, as it appeals immediately to our conventional idea of this occurrence and we can see it happening; it is an obvious, physical change. The word *Metamorphosis* has thus been employed in its literal sense: a man may be turned into a werewolf by magic or through a spontaneous action. This is the most generally accepted meaning of the word. However, I have become aware, after examining this idea, that Metamorphosis is a phenomenon present in all aspects of life. A suitable definition and description, in my opinion, would therefore be the following: change of any kind, the crossing of boundaries, literally or figuratively. Not only would one be crossing from one world to the other, there may be changes in thought, emotions and opinions. Long-held ideas may change, such as the accepted concepts of traditional moral values; transitions may occur, taboos may be broken, psychoanalysis may reveal a change in personality, which is often dangerous to us and sometimes to others. Literary genres, too, may undergo change.

The *Lai*, *Laüstic* will be examined, keeping in mind the concept of Metamorphosis in all its manifestations.

The word *dirai* in (line 1) already indicates a Metamorphosis: Marie de France says that, for the first time, she is about to record in written form the oral tales narrated by the poets of Brittany. There are thus two changes: the oral rendition will be committed to paper and it will, thus, no longer be narrated. There will be a change in the mode of transmission, - no longer in oral style but in written style - or, at least in written-down

style. The first according to Jolles is a *Forme Simple*. As soon as it loses its orality, i.e. it is written down, it becomes a *Forme Savante*.

The name of the story has changed: the Bretons called the tale *Laüstic* in *lur pais* (line 4) and Marie states that the *Lai* will be called *russignol en franceis* (line 5) and (line 6) *nihtegale en dreit engleis*. Possibly she decided to keep the original Breton name as a distancing device, such as we find in the typical introduction to a fairytale: *Once upon a time ...* The use of the word *engleis* is an indication that she certainly had contact with English, probably at the court of Henry II where Anglo-Norman French was spoken – the dialect in which the *Lais* are written down.

We are told that one of the knights was married and that his wife loved the knight who was their neighbour.

la femme sun veisin ama (line 23)

and *ele l'ama* (line 26)

All the characters remain anonymous in this *Lai*, whereas in most of the others at least one character has a name. The neighbour transgresses: this ideal, highly respected Knight becomes a man desiring his neighbour's wife. She too, breaks the social and implicit taboo. The physical distance may be short, the moral one is vast.

The object which separates the lovers physically is

un haut mur de pierre bise (line 38).

There can thus be no physical contact between the lovers in this *Lai*; the very lack of contact is an unexpected change from the usual train of events as related in a traditional love story or folktale.

Marie gives no names to the characters in this *Lai*; one is led to speculate whether perhaps in Freudian terms this story does not reflect her own feelings towards courtly love. No mention is made of the husband's characteristics in the *Lai*. One wonders if this omission is significant. Is he noble, honourable, faithful etc?

In this *Lai* we are not looking for narrative realism yet, as one would find in a modern short story. The short story has *characters* who have *character*. Here we are rather looking for narrative devices – the so-called characters being like allegories/masks in morality plays. Yet, in spite of the lack of characterisation, Marie succeeds in convincing the reader of the suffering of the three protagonists: the husband's reaction shows real anger, the lover's reaction reveals his sorrow and the lady's words betray her sadness. Marie is well on the way to creating a short story.

The lovers' desire for each other is clear and, just as the change in the seasons

Tant que ceo vient a un esté, (line 58)

(a season being a boundary) brings about a transformation in Nature, so their love develops: woods are revitalised and green, flowers bloom and the birds sing. Marie hints at the increased desire experienced by the lovers; the renewal of Nature signifies an even deeper devotion on both their parts. Their only recourse is to get up at night and gaze at each other until daybreak. Of course daybreak, too, is a boundary. During the day there is little opportunity to spend any length of time at their windows.

Up to this point we have merely been told that

la dame ert estreit gardee (line 49),

but now there is a change in the attitude of the lady's husband, as he has perceived a change in her. He is angry *ses sires s'en curuça* (line 80) because of his wife's behaviour and he wants to know why she gets up at night. She explains that the song of the nightingale is so sweet that she feels compelled to rise in order to listen to its singing. In this way she manifests her growing love for her neighbour. Just as Nature is changing – Spring leading to Summer, the lady's increasing desire becomes clear. The husband is not fooled, however

De ire e (de) maltalent en rist (line 92).

He will trap the nightingale and kill it. Once again we are in the realm of allegory – the nightingale and the characters may be considered to be representation, not reality. The now vindictive husband's anger has intensified, causing him to plan revenge, as well as punishment in the cruellest possible manner.

The servants trap the bird, which the husband subsequently kills, and the lady transfers the anger which she feels towards her husband on to them. The nightingale, which also furnishes the title of the *Lai*, has now become the metaphor and symbol of, and surrogate, for her lover.

When the lady realizes that her husband has caught the bird, her joy turns to unspeakable sorrow.

Dolente e cureçuse fu. (line 112)

She has become victim of her own deceit. Further anguish follows. Her husband hurls the bleeding corpse at his wife, striking her on the breast, exactly where the heart is situated

Sur la dame le cors geta

Se que sun chainse ensanglanta (lines 117-118).

The nightingale now becomes, not only the message which the husband sends to his wife, but also the only way in which she can inform her lover of the change in their circumstances. She says:

Le laüistic li trametraï

L'aventure li manderai (lines 133-134)

The body of the nightingale has undergone a twofold Metamorphosis: it is the end of their relationship and their ability to communicate their love; it also embodies the jealousy, anger and cruelty of the husband. Whereas at one time they had sent each other little gifts to express their feelings, this final *gift* embodies the tragic end of all communication.

Once again the body of the bird undergoes a Metamorphosis. The Knight fashions a beautiful casket:

Tut fu de or fin od bones pieres

Mut preciuses e mut cheres; (lines 151-152)

which serves as a memorial to their love.

All the characters have thus been guilty of transgression: the lovers by breaking the taboo of the church and society, which traditionally forbids an amorous relationship between a married woman and a man other than her husband; the neighbour for being part of the deception and the lady's husband for crossing the boundaries of acceptable behaviour. On the literal level the characters have undergone emotional changes: the lady's spontaneous happiness has become irremediable sadness, the faithful loving husband has turned into a ruthless, heartless spouse, consumed by jealousy and the neighbour who had joyfully accepted the lady's tokens of love is left with the pitiful body of the bird to remind him of his lost love.

Milun

The writer's voice is very clear at the beginning of this *Lai*: Marie de France intends starting her tale *Diversement* (line 2). This is the only time that she says this in the *Lais*. In order to avoid boredom, there must be variety. Her purpose too, is clear:

K'il seit pleisibles a la gent (line 3)

It is obvious that she is writing this story for a specific audience. It is designed to entertain the courtiers. One wonders whether *diversement* could mean not only *différement*, but also *comme divertissement*.

Once again the theme will be love, but this time the *Lai* will focus on love of chivalry, rather than on love between man and woman, although this, too, is present. The instinctive love of a father for his unknown son also emerges in the tale. The content of this *Lai* is reminiscent of tales found in several other traditions, such as the Irish and the Persian, the anonymous *Lai Doon*, the *Hildebrandslied* in Old High German as well as in Arthurian legend.

The first story which comes to mind is that of the Irish mythological hero, Cúchulainn. In the course of his many adventures he meets the warrior princess, Aifé, who bears him a son. Before leaving her, Cúchulainn instructs Aifé to educate the boy and then, when he is old enough, to send him to Ireland. The youth must observe two taboos: never to reveal who he is and never to refuse to fight an adversary. She is to teach him how to

fight, using all kinds of weapons, except the *gai bolga*. The dramatic irony will become evident when the father uses the very weapon he has forbidden his son to use to kill an opponent, unaware that the latter is his son.

Conlae, the son, arrives in Ireland. In combat Cúchulainn, unaware that his opponent is his son, kills him with his *gai bolga* (i.e. with the weapon the young man has been forbidden to use) (Markale 1971:94).

A similar motif appears in the *Shahnameh (Book of Kings)*, the classical Persian epic written in the tenth century by Ferdowsi about events which were said to have occurred in the legends of the area. It contains the historic and mythological material that had been handed down for a millennium. It tells the story of Rostam, a powerful warrior, *flawed by a quality of blinding pride* (Farhat-Holzman 2001:2). He has a son by Tahmina, and leaves to go into battle, leaving his son Sohrab, who is still an infant. Sohrab's mother, Tahmina warns her son that his father is a powerful warrior. Sohrab goes into battle and, fighting on opposing sides in single combat, the father slays his son, tragically unaware of who he is.

Another tale, this time of Germanic origin, is to be found in the *Hildebrandslied*, a *Heldenlied*. It is said to be the earliest document written in German. The term *Heldenlied* or *Heldendichtung* (Fricke 1954:10) is appropriate because it recounts scenes of brave battles to the exclusion of any love interest. This is significant as the heroes of all the tales of this kind are sought after for their bravery in battle and do, indeed, achieve almost miraculous feats, while their wives or mistresses receive scant attention. Fricke says "Das Lied berichtet, wie der lange verschollene alte Recke im Einzelweikampf vor der Schlacht dem Sohn begegnet, den er als Kind einst hatte verlassen müssen" (Fricke 1954:10). Hildebrand accompanies Dietrich and his army of Huns to Bern. Before the battle begins, a challenge is issued from both armies that a member of each side should meet in single combat. Hildebrand, the father, accepts, as does Hadubrand from the opposing side. Neither knows that they are father and son. Subsequently Hildebrand realizes that Hadubrand is his son and tells him that he cannot fight against him as they

are closely related. He offers him an armlet of fine gold, but Hadubrand refuses it, as he suspects his adversary of treachery, saying that a warrior must receive gifts with his spear, otherwise his opponent will throw his spear at him. According to Fricke, the end of the tale appears to have been lost, but the end is “unzweifelhaft: der Sohn fällt vor der Hand des Vaters” (Fricke 1954:11).

In the anonymous *Lai, Doon*, chivalry once again plays an overwhelmingly large part. Doon, before the birth of his son, bids his wife adieu saying,

Dame je m'en irai,

Ne sai se mes vos troverai (lines 175-176),

and gives her a gold ring to give to their son when he grows up. He instructs her to send their son to France once he is an adult. At the court of the King of France the son is made a Knight and

Au mont Saint Michiel en Bretagne (line 214)

is involved in single combat with an unknown, older warrior. Unbeknown to him, this Knight is his father. The son unhorses Doon in the fight, wounding him severely. Doon is aware of the young man's identity and, after the tournament, asks to see his hands. He recognizes his son

Par l'anel que il a veü

a bien son filz reconneü (lines 251-252)

Once again, the concept of chivalry is of major importance in this *Lai* as its anonymous composer mentions, in passing, that father and son return to England and are reunited with the Knight's wife (O'Hara Tobin 1976). Service of the King takes precedence over the service of the Lady.

This motif may also be found in the Arthurian tales. Although there are many different versions of the story of King Arthur and Mordred, Malory in his *Morte Darthur* makes the evil Mordred the son of King Arthur and his sister. Mordred usurps the throne in Arthur's absence and on the King's return there is a fierce battle between the two armies. In the final scene between them, Arthur kills his son, Mordred, but is mortally wounded by him.

It is possible that the composers of the oral tales on which Marie drew for her *Lais* were familiar with the Irish tales as well as the Persian stories brought back by the Crusaders, and were known long before the Breton tales were in circulation. However, this cannot be proved. Fortunately Marie's tale ends on a far happier note.

In his notes to the collection of Marie's *Lais* Philippe Walter comments on the possible origin of the hero's name: "ce nom peut rappeler celui du célèbre athlète grec Milon de Crotone, invincible à la lutte et plusieurs fois vainqueur aux jeux Olympiques. Il y a la même vertu athlétique et chevaleresque chez le Milon de Marie de France" (Walter 2000:468-469). Perhaps this name foreshadows a happy ending to Marie's hero's tale. The name *Milun* may also be etymologically associated with the Latin *miles* meaning *soldier*.

At the beginning of the *Lai* Marie does not emphasise Milun's physical attributes, but concentrates on his sterling qualities of bravery and his prowess in battle. She ensures that the reader is aware of Milun's prowess and particularly of the danger any other Knight runs should he attempt to challenge Milun in battle:

*Puis le jur k'il fu adubez
Ne trova un sul chevalier
Ki l'abatist de sun destrier.* (lines 10-12)

He is also

Francs [e] hardiz, curteis e fiers, (line 14)

He enjoys an impeccable reputation in many countries which, however, excites the jealousy and envy of a number of Knights.

The folktale motif of a Knight falling in love with a beautiful lady whom he knows only by reputation emerges. A young woman *mut curteise* (line 24) has heard of Milun's bravery and falls in love with him without ever having seen him. Again no mention is made of his appearance. This is an unusual reversal of roles, as noble young ladies do

not usually take the initiative in Marie's accounts. However, the author has promised *divers cunte* (line 1).

The young woman's love is not based on the hero's handsome appearance, but on his fine reputation, a fact which will reveal to the reader that the hero's love of battle will eclipse love between the sexes. Neither does Marie dwell on the beauty of the young woman. She is *une fille bele*, (line 23) and *curteise* (line 24). Marie highlights inner qualities to the almost total exclusion of any other attribute. This approach fits in with that of the Irish, Persian and German tales which stress the valour and ability on the battlefield of its heroes, Cúchulainn and his son, Rostam and his son, and Hildebrand and his son.

The young woman sends a messenger to Milun with a declaration of her love and Milun accepts it, giving the messenger a gold ring as a token of his good faith. This is not a magic ring in the true sense of the word, as it has no magic properties, but it will work its own magic at the end by preventing a tragic conclusion to the story. It is internalised magic: 'humanised' magic – no longer an extraneous force. Again there is an inversion of the usual train of events: the young lady receives the messenger who has been sent to convey her declaration of love. She is delighted:

Mut fu la dameisele lie[e]
De l'amur issi otrie[e] (lines 47-48)

It is usually the suitor who expresses his delight on receiving a favourable reply to his suit. The lovers meet on many occasions in her private garden. These meetings result in her pregnancy. The young woman knows that, because she has lost her honour, she will be severely punished should her father become aware of her behaviour.

A gleive serat turmentee,
[U] vendue en autre cuntree (lines 61-62)

Marie, the narrator, intervenes briefly to explain this:

Ceo fu custume as anciens, (line 63)

Now it is once again the young woman who takes action and makes a decision:

Milun respunt quë il fera

Ceo quë ele cunseillera. (lines 65-66)

It is noticeable that up to this point in this *Lai Milun*, the warrior, has deferred to his mistress in practical decisions relating to matters of the heart. It is she who decides that when the baby is born Milun is to take it to her married sister in Northumberland. Marie's heroine is a quick-thinking, strong and practical woman. Her mind is quickly made up: she will hang Milun's ring round the baby's neck and send a letter of explanation to her sister. Her sister is to care for the child and, once he reaches adulthood, she is to give him the ring and the letter, instructing him to seek his father. Unwittingly the young woman has set in motion events which will lead to the denouement and happy conclusion of the tale: the ring, although not belonging to the world of the *Merveilleux*, is of vital importance to the outcome of the *Lai*.

Milun accepts all the arrangements passively. He is the follower and she is the leader; an unusual situation for a brave Knight. This behaviour is re-inforced when, once he has been given the baby to take to the lady's sister, he simply entrusts it to his people

Il le cumaunda a teu gent (line 107)

who look after the child carefully, carrying out all Milun's orders. Marie is not implying that Milun is a weakling; his actions on the battlefield reveal his strength and courage. She is simply emphasizing the reversal of roles where love is concerned and decisions pertaining to its consequences: the young woman approaches Milun, expressing her love for him, she invites him to visit her in the garden; she deals with the arrival of the child and makes plans for its future.

In a matter-of-fact manner Marie deals with Milun's subsequent actions. He goes off to war.

Milun eissi fors de sa tere

En sude[e]s pur sun pris quere. (lines 123-124)

Now the author returns to the story of her young heroine. The heroine now becomes subservient, in sharp contrast with her assertive behaviour up to this point. She is to be married. Marie simply says:

Sis peres li duna barun, (line 126)

She has no say in the matter. Traditionally fathers simply arrange suitable marriages for their daughters. Up to this point the behaviour of the heroine of this *Lai* breaks with tradition. It is clearly a reflection of the *Zeitgeist* of the time: a society in mutation – tradition versus modernity. There are thus several new kinds of behaviours in this *Lai*: the lady feels free to approach a man, rather than waiting passively for an arranged marriage; she also takes the initiative of organising her baby's future. Milun, although a brave warrior, follows her lead passively, behaviour which is not usually characteristic of a brave Knight. But she has to obey her father - this tradition still remains in many parts of the world. All we know about her husband-to-be is that he is

Un mut riche humme del pais,

Mut esforcible e de grant pris. (lines 127-128)

The young lady now joins the group of *malmariées* found in several of Marie's *Lais*.

We are told nothing more about the husband-to-be, but one can assume that he is considerably older than our heroine and probably rather unattractive. All that matters to the fathers in Marie's *Lais* is that their daughters should be comfortably off and well looked after, preferably by a man of high standing in the community.

With her lover far away, the young woman is obliged to conform to tradition. She is obedient. However

Mut est dolente a demesure (line 130)

and desperate, as she knows that when her future husband discovers that she is not a virgin,

A tuz jurs mes serai ancele, (line 138)

She had hoped to marry Milun. No explanation is given for the lack of commitment on his part: The text implies that he is not rich enough to marry, hence his need to go touring. Unlike the assertive traditional hero, he simply accepts the situation. However, he does have a ruling passion - his desire for glory on the battlefield. Although he loves his mistress, he feels that his priority is to fulfil his role as a Knight; that the world of chivalry is more important than the mundane, domestic world. It must be borne

in mind that it is the maiden who initiated the relationship and not the Knight, eager to distinguish himself on the battlefield.

As in so many of the other *Lais*, the unfortunate bride, the *malmariée* will be surrounded and guarded by servants. For the first time she resigns herself to her fate, as the only way out would be for her to die and this she cannot do because she has a son with whom she wishes to be re-united. She says:

Or m'estuvrat issi suffrir,

Lasse, quant jeo ne puis murir. (lines 149-150)

The scene changes: Milun returns from the battlefield. Not only has the geographical scene changed, but the hero's psychological strength is revealed for the first time. It is he who takes the initiative:

Milun se prist a purpenser (line 159)

He writes a letter, seals it and attaches it round the neck of a swan

Un cisne aveit k'il mut ama, (line 164)

hiding the missive under the swan's feathers. The swan and its letter are to go to his beloved.

The swan motif also appears in Hindu/Indian Mythology. More exactly it is to be found in the Hindu epic, the *Mahabharata* and in the *Naiadhiyacarita*, a poem written by the poet Shriharsha.

The story goes that Nala, the ruler of Nishada was a very handsome man and a bachelor. One day a Brahmin came to his court and, seeing the state of affairs, suggested that Nala marry Damayanti, the exquisite daughter of the King of Vidarbh. Nala had heard such wonderful things about this lady that he immediately fell in love with her, without having seen her. Nala became very depressed, as, by tradition, the lady or her father had to present their suit. It would be unacceptable for him to approach the princess himself. A flock of swans lived on the lake in the vicinity and saw what was happening to Nala. One day the leader of the swans came up to Nala and asked why he was so despondent.

The King explained that he was in love with the Princess Damayanti, but, by custom, was forbidden to approach her. He had no courtier trustworthy enough to send to her to plead his suit. The swan offered to deliver the message. Nala waited patiently and, on the return of the swan, was informed that Damayanti, having heard of this great King, had fallen in love with him. Nala was overjoyed. Finally the King, father of Damanyanti, seeing his daughter pining away for love, gave permission for the marriage.

In both tales the swan acts as go-between: in Marie's tale it carries messages between the lovers and in the Indian poem its actions are instrumental in bringing the suitor and his bride together (Nevatia, Online). The swan which Milun sends is a real creature. . It does not undergo a physical metamorphosis like many of its kind which we find in other tales and legends, such as the *Chevalier au Cygne*.

Milun's swan, although it is a real bird in a real world, a messenger, can also be seen to be the substitute for the Knight. In order to deliver the swan to the lady, Milun's squire has to show initiative. He tells the porter that he is a fowler and has snared a swan and would like to present it to the young woman. He will persuade her in a subtle manner, without revealing its true purpose that the swan is not meant to be eaten.

An interesting point to note is that although this is the Twelfth Century, the lady is able to read. Marie is painting an ideal woman – an uncommon one and one held up as an example to her audience.

Now that Milun has returned from battle, he suffers

..... *granz peunes e la dolur* (line 235).

In the letter he asks the lady to organize a meeting and to send the bird back with a message. Another one of Marie's interventions follows: the young woman does not have access to ink and parchment, so again she has to use her initiative: she has to obtain it:

Tant quist par art e par engin

Kë ele ot enke e parchemin; (lines 255-256)

The swan has had to be starved so that it will return to Milun to be fed and receive a reply from the lady. It becomes a symbol of the lovers' unfulfilled desire for each other. The bird acts as go-between for twenty years.

There is a change of scene: the reader learns how Milun's son is being educated and trained by his aunt. He becomes a Knight and is given the ring.

A chevalier l'ad adubé, (line 294)

This event will introduce an interesting development in the tale, as a Knight must go out into the world and seek his fortune, as well as meet the challenges of other Knights with similar aims. He has become a *chevalier errant*. His aunt tells the young man who his mother is, but all she says about his father is that he is the very best warrior. This is significant because the young man knows his father only by reputation. She tells him:

E cum il est bon chevaliers,

Tant pruz, si hardi e si fiers,

N'ot en la tere nul meillur

De sun pris ne de sa valor. (lines 299-302)

The young man's interest is sparked and proudly he decides that with a father such as his, he must leave and seek glory in battle. He realizes that he would not be worthy of his blood if he did not try to merit his name. The scene is set for possible disaster. A change in his fortune while fighting could even lead to his death.

On reaching Brittany, he engages in many jousts where he is considered to be a *meillur* (line 326). Marie ensures that the reader realizes that the young man is truly worthy of his father, preparing the reader for the battle between equals when he encounters his father. She tells us that the young Knight gives much of what he wins to his poorer adversaries and that he spends generously on others; his behaviour is impeccable:

Mut fu curteis, mut sot honur. (line 334)

Nobody knows his name and because of his valour and generosity he is called the *Knight Peerless*

L'apel [ou] ent par tut Sanz Per. (line 342)

Milun, ever eager to prove his worth, hears about the fame and courage of the young Knight, called Knight Peerless and determines to seek him out. His reaction to the news is unexpected; it seems that his pride has been hurt that so young a Knight should be so widely acclaimed.

... mut se pleigneit

Del chevaler que tant valeit (lines 345-346)

No other knight should have the power to inspire so much admiration. He is determined: he will joust with this Knight and unseat him.

Si justera al chevalier

Pur lui leidier e empeirer;

Par ire se vodra cumbatre,

S'il le pout del cheval abatre: (lines 353-356)

His aim is to shame the young man. Milun, too, may be considered to be a hero with a fatal flaw, his pride, which fortunately in this tale stops short of bringing about his downfall. However, his excellent reputation is and always has been an obsession. It becomes clear once again that Milun's thirst for glory far surpasses his desire to find his son. Only after accomplishing the unknown Knight's downfall, will he set out in search of him.

Aprés irra quere sun fiz (line 358)

However, despite this overpowering drive to be the best, he retains his generous and kind nature, which augurs well for the future encounter with the unknown Knight.

Riches osteus teneit sovent

E si dunot curteisement (lines 379-380)

Marie intervenes to express her opinion of Milun:

Tant vus voil dire de Milun:

Mut le fist bien en cel estur

E mut i fu preisez le jur. (lines 404-406)

Now she focuses on the young man, making sure that he may be considered a worthy adversary. Of him she says

Ne s'i pot nul acumparer

De turneer ne de juster (lines 409-410)

Milun's jealousy yields to grudging admiration when he sees the young man jousting:

Par mi tut ceo k'il l'enviot,

Mut li fu bel e mut li plot. (lines 413-414)

The young Knight's character is revealed when, while they are jousting, he causes Milun to fall off his horse and notices his grey hair and beard:

Mut li pesa k'il fu cheüz. (line 424)

While the young man is returning his horse to him, Milun sees the ring on his finger. Although this ring is not endowed with magic powers, it is a substitute for the magic potions and other objects or people belonging to the world of the *Merveilleux* because it brings about the turning point of the *Lai*. It may not be magic, but it is a *signe*.

The moment of recognition has arrived and both men are overjoyed. They exchange stories and the young man has no hesitation in saying about his mother and her husband:

Sun seignur que ele ad ocirai

E espuser la vus ferai. (lines 501-502)

Happily this meeting has ended differently from that of other tales on a similar theme: as promised in the introduction. The husband of Milun's lover has died and the young Knight acts as a link between his father and mother.

Sanz cunseil de tut' autre gent

Lur fiz amdeus les assembla, (lines 528-529)

Throughout the *Lai* it has been clear that Milun prizes chivalry more highly than he does love, but when he meets his son, we are made aware of Milun's great love for his family and no further accounts of his exploits on the battlefield follow. He no longer holds the supreme chivalric position, but love is sufficient to satisfy him. His son's stretching out his hand to his father has accomplished this reverse of priorities in Milun's life. The young Knight's life has also undergone a change: instead of killing the older man and claiming the position of supreme chivalry, he stretches out his hand in friendship and respect to his adversary, this feeling changing to love when he realizes who the older man is. Thus this *Lai* also has as its core the overpowering effect of love, but, as we have seen, there is a distinct change in the type of love portrayed. Finally Milun, to whom

chivalry has always been more important than love, has realized that this obsession could have had dire consequences. If it had not been for his son's considerate action, helping an older man, especially his adversary, back onto his horse, Milun would, in all probability, have been slain.

Chaitivel

As in all Marie's *Lais*, the subject of *Chaitivel* is love. If the heroine had been less egotistical and undecided, it could very well have become a story of courtly love. However, as we shall see in the course of the discussion of the *Lai*, love and devotion are one-sided. According to the tenets of *la fine amor*, true love can only exist between two people, one noble lady and one Knight. It echoes the feudal tradition of the love between the King and his vassals. In this *Lai* where the heroine, purporting to love four Knights equally, a break with tradition occurs, crossing the boundary of what, according to the unwritten code of courtly love, is considered to be acceptable behaviour and what is not.

Roger Dubuis says of the heroine of this *Lai*: "Toute l'intrigue repose sur l'impossibilité, pour la dame, de se décider à préférer l'un des quatre barons qui lui font la cour" (Dubuis 1973:460). Philippe Walter writes: "La dame s' imagine à tort qu'elle pourra vivre son amour sans se choisir un favori. Elle veut ignorer que la 'fine amor' est un amour exclusif entre deux êtres seulement" (Walter 2000:11 Préface). Both scholars agree on the egotistical nature of the 'heroine'.

The usual short prologue introduces the *Lai*. Marie says that she is going to tell the tale *dunt jo oï parler*. (line 2). This is one of the two *Lais* in the collection which bears two titles. It is called *Chaitivel* and *Quatre Dols*. In *Chaitivel*, one of the participants in the tale claims, at the end, to have written the story down. In this case it is the heroine of *Chaitivel*. This is thus an example of a *mise en abîme* in Marie's collection of *Lais*, Marie having deviated from the norm in both these aspects. This *chapeau* or prologue (lines 1-8) and the ending (lines 223- 230) could be considered a kind of *poetics of literary theory*. If one brought the two together it would be a kind of mini *ars rhetorica*, explaining what the author has taken from the tradition and how she has changed the

tradition: two titles are given at the beginning – an unusual procedure – and, at the end, Marie again insists on the fact that this *Lai* be entitled *Quatre Dols* or *Le Chaitivel*. After a discussion of the *Lai* I shall advance possible reasons for this unusual procedure.

We are introduced to the heroine, who appears to be a paragon of beauty and virtue: she is

*Une dame que mut valeit
De beauté e d'enseignement
E de tut bon affeitement* (lines 10-12)

True to tradition, many Knights love her at first sight. Marie diverges to tell the reader what a lady should do in these circumstances if a Knight declares his love for her:

*Nes deit de paroles leidir,
Mes enurer e tenir chier,
A gre servir e mercier.* (line 26-28)

It follows that if she cannot love the Knight who wishes to court her, she should treat him graciously and thank him. This behaviour implies that she should not give him false hope simply because she is flattered by his attentions. Marie continues her tale, saying that in Brittany there were four barons in love with the lady.

Mes jeo ne sai numer lur nuns; (line 34)

It is significant that the author dismisses these men so lightly, casually stating that she does not know their names. They are to remain anonymous, their individuality ignored because the only aspects which interest the heroine are their bravery, their generosity and the fact that they are esteemed by everybody. Marie's effort to describe them

*Mes mut erent de grant beauté
E chevalers pruz e vaillanz;
Larges, curteis e despendanz;* (lines 36-38)

only reinforces the impression that it is of no importance that they are different people, with different thoughts or indeed with any individuality. They are as one in their devotion to the lady and are handsome, rich and brave – prerequisites for any suitor.

They are significant only in what they are prepared to do to win her love: in other words they are narrative devices, not characters.

*Icil quatres la dame amoënt
E de bien faire se penoënt:
Pur li e pur s'amur aveir
I meteit chescun sun poeir, (lines 41-44)*

Each suitor, in his own right, has the characteristics of a typical Knight of the courtly love tradition. However, their feats are never described individually, indicating that the lady merely sees them as an amorphous whole and that her so-called *love* for them is very superficial, if indeed it ever existed. Each of these men could probably fulfil the role of courtly lover, but the lady's egotism does not allow for this. Had she allowed herself to be courted by a single Knight of her choice, this *Lai* could have been a tale of *fine amor*: but "l'amour qui n'est pas représenté par un couple, n'est pas une réalité ..." (Dubuis 1973:386).

Her selfishness and superficiality are clearly indicated by Marie: the heroine cannot make a choice because she wants to retain all of them and their love.

Ne volt les treis perdre pur l'un: (line 55)

She is careful to treat them all in the same way: she smiles, sends them all messages and gives each of them a token of love. Again Marie does not differentiate between the actions of the suitors:

*A l'assembler des chevaliers
Voleit chescun ester primers
De bien fere, si il peüst,
Pur ceo que a la dame pleüst. (lines 63-66)*

The repetition of the word *chescun* emphasises individual effort, yet places the Knights in a group, all doing the same thing in an effort to win the lady. During the tournament in which the Knights wish to prove their prowess, they will fight bravely, but no individual deed is described and the lady still cannot decide:

Ses druz i vit mut bien aidier:

Ne seit [le] queil deit plus preisier (lines 109-110)

Nobody is singled out:

Si quatre dru bien [le] feseient,

Si ke de tuz le pris aveient (lines 115-116)

Even when they should stop fighting at nightfall, they continue

Trop folement s'abaundonerent

Luinz de lur gent (lines 119-120)

For the first time Marie singles out one of them: three of the Knights are killed and one badly wounded. Significantly the three who die are still regarded as a group, as no individual's encounter with an opponent is described. Ironically, the remaining Knight who could marry the lady is so severely wounded that he will never be a suitable husband, as he will be unable to father children. The lady is distraught. She mourns for them.

Chescun regrette par sun nun. (line 146)

However, their anonymity remains: the reader is not told what their names are.

Even in death they are treated as one – there is no individuality. The heroine laments:

Il m'amoënt sur tute riens.

Pur lur beauté, pur lur priëse,

Pur lur valur, pur lur largesce

Les fis d'amer [a] mei entendre;

Nes voil tuz perdre pur l'un prendre; (lines 152-156)

The three Knights are buried with great pomp and ceremony. Marie remarks:

Deus lur face bone merci! (line 172)

Although her grief appears to be genuine, the heroine again reveals her egotistical nature when she explains the reason for her unhappiness to the remaining Knight:

Jamés dame de mun parage –

[Ja] tant n'iert bele, pruz ne sage –

Teus quatre ensemble n'amera

N[ë] en un jur si nes perdra, (lines 195-198)

She wishes to call the *Lai* which she intends to compose about her sorrows

Quatre Dols (line 204)

She is still thinking only of herself, her poem springs from her own suffering. Her selfishness knows no bounds.

Finally the remaining Knight tries to get some recognition: he asks her to call the *Lai Chaitivel*, the Wretch (etymologically: from *captivus*: *caught*, prisoner). He believes that he is suffering a worse fate than that of the three dead Knights: their suffering is over, but he cannot fulfil the role of a husband. He is a prisoner in his own body, as it cannot function normally. He cannot hope to marry, as his body has let him down: he is unable to father a child. He believes that he would be better off dead. She accedes to his request. Marie reclaims her part in the telling of the *Lai*:

Plus n'en oï, ne plus n'en sai,

Ne plus ne vus en cunterai. (lines 239-240)

The lady's refusal or inability to choose one of her suitors not only leads to the death of three worthy men and the mutilation of a fourth, but excludes the possibility of its being considered a tale in the tradition of *la fine amor*.

It would seem that there is a hidden moral in the *Lai*. The lady does not appear to be in love with any of her suitors, but rather she is looking for a suitable husband. She must be aware that the men find her attractive, as she grants them all favours. All her scheming, however, comes to nothing and not only results in the deaths of the three, but by the injury inflicted on the only one remaining makes him useless as a husband. It could be argued that this is her punishment for not following the path of true love.

This story is not dynamic and has very little substance. The name change seems to be the most important element, as it turns on narrative perspectives: *Quatre Dols*: this is the heroine's perspective. She, four times deprived experiences four sorrows. As for Chaitivel's perspective: he will never find love, as he will be rejected because of his inability to father children. His seems to be a far sadder fate than that of the superficial heroine.

The moral is clear: selfishness and superficiality have the potential of causing sorrow, not only to ourselves, but also to those around us. In the case of the remaining Knight, his attempt to emulate others in order to impress have resulted in tragedy. It would probably have been better had he died honourably with the other Knights.

Chevrefoil

It is no surprise to find that the theme of this *Lai* is, once again love. This is the only *Lai* in which only part of the tale is told. It is a mere anecdote. Marie starts the story *in media res*, an unusual procedure in the body of the rest of her works. Marie, as well as her readers, must have known the complete story of Tristram and Iseut, but she chooses to describe the most poignant part where the protagonists' love for each other is probably most in evidence.

While wars are being fought, they are of little consequence to the story. The lovers have been forbidden to see each other; Tristram's presence in the country is illicit, because he has been banished by the King who has forbidden any contact between Tristram and the Queen. It would reflect badly on the King, as Supreme Authority in the realm if it was seen that a Knight was flouting his authority. Were their relationship to become public knowledge, the King would lose face. Marie, true to her interest in the fates of lovers, chooses to relate only one particular incident. However, in this vignette the author has chosen to represent the passion of the lovers by means of a Metaphor.

The Knight Tristram and the Queen Iseut, whose name is never mentioned, are identified with a hazel tree and a sweet-smelling honeysuckle which twines itself around the tree. In the same way the two lovers are inseparable; their love is beautiful and binding. However, it is also potentially fatal: the separation of the two will cause the death of both plants. The tragic end of the human relationship, is however, not described to the reader, as the short *Lai* depicts a moment of idyllic happiness between the two lovers, the fatal outcome being mentioned only briefly. Love is seen as *double-edged*. It is a state of euphoria, but may also be a fatal affliction.

It is uncertain whether this encounter as it stands ever formed part of the original accounts of the tale. It is possible that Marie, in fact, heard this short diversion from the Breton story-tellers. Didier Fontaine says: “Tout en précisant clairement ses sources vis-à-vis de la légende, Marie de France prend toutefois quelques libertés [e.g.] Le passage correspondant du poème d’Eilhart” (who also recounted this tale) “est sensiblement différent, puisque Tristram y est accompagné de Koherdin, et que la baguette de coudrier lancée sur le cheval d’Iseut n’entraîne pas une entrevue immédiate” (Fontaine 1999:3).

About the origin of the tale Roger Sherman Loomis says: “Abundant evidence for the Celtic origin of the legend has been assembled by Zimmer, Bédier, Deutschbein, Gertrude Schoepperle, and Rachel Bromwich, among others. Their studies have revealed the contribution of Irish, Welsh, Cornish, and Breton tradition to the formation of the Tristram story before it was transmitted to the French romancers, as Bédier in particular has maintained, by the Breton ‘conteurs’. The composite legend reaching the romancers of the late 12th century included not only Celtic tradition but elements from such heterogeneous sources as folk-tales, Arabic romance, and Oriental tales of trickery and deception” (Loomis 1959:124-125). Thus this *Lai* has, as its source many different traditions.

Because of the brevity of the *Lai*, it seems advisable to situate it, very briefly, in its context. Several forms of the story exist, including the mention of Tristram as the ideal lover by the troubadours, Cercamon and Bernard de Ventadour, before 1160. In about 1170 Eilhart von Oberge gave a faithful rendering of a fragment of the poem by Thomas, who wrote in French in about 1155. Part of the poem has been lost. A Norman poet, Bérout, wrote a version of *Tristram* of which about 4,500 lines have been preserved (Loomis 1959:122). Loomis adds that the various forms of the legend are fairly consistent (Loomis 1959:123).

A very brief synopsis of the tale follows:

Tristram was a young Knight, the nephew of King Mark of Cornwall. The King, who had been persuaded that he should marry, sent Tristram to fetch the Irish Princess Iseut as his bride. During their return journey to Cornwall, a magic love potion intended for Mark and Iseut was erroneously given to Tristram and to King Mark's bride-to-be, after which Tristram and Iseut fell passionately in love. King Mark and Iseut were married, but the two lovers continued their adulterous affair. On discovering the relationship, Mark sent Tristram into permanent exile.

This is where Marie's *Lai* slots into the story. Tristram returns surreptitiously from exile. It is uncertain whether this part of the tale forms part of any of the accepted versions of the story. However, it is a very happy little episode, although the metaphorical representation of the lovers could alert the reader to an unhappy ending.

Earlier versions of the Tristan story recount the story of the tryst between Queen Iseut and Tristram. To us it seems improbable that such a long message could have been written upon a wooden staff. Scholars give various interpretations; she received the staff with only his name on it and becomes aware of his presence. "For my part, if Marie writes on 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" (Frank 1948:406)

This whole passage – Tristram's cutting the Hazel and writing upon it with his knife in order to apprise the Queen of his presence – 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 Oberg, Gottfried von Strassburg, the old Norse Saga, the Oxford *Folie Tristan* and the English *Sir Tristrem*.

In the Oxford *Folie* (784-86) Tristram recalls to the Queen the ruse by which he and she were wont to meet, the chips fashioned by his knife and thrown into the stream, as a sign of when he could come to her. Similar methods are used in other versions of the tale (Haidu 1973:712-717).

Metamorphosis of many kinds has been discussed in the course of the examination of Marie's *Lais*. Relatively few of her tales contain examples of literal Metamorphosis, i.e. of a human or any other creature literally changing shape. However, many examples of emotional, psychological and attitudinal changes in human beings are present in the *Lais*. We have also seen changes in literary genre: some of the original oral folktales have become nascent short stories in Marie's versions of the tales.

Metamorphosis functions like a Metaphor, as it juxtaposes two concepts. During the course of the discussion of *Chevrefoil*, I shall attempt to clarify this statement. If one examines the morphology and definition of these two concepts, their similarity becomes clear:

Metamorphosis: transformation: change of form, structure, substance, appearance, character etc., by natural development or by magic change of condition (e.g. of affairs) ... Gr. *meta*, expressing change, *morphe*, form. Metaphor: a figure of speech by which a thing is spoken of as being that which it resembles, not fundamentally, but only in a certain marked characteristic Gr. *meta*, over, *pherein*, to carry (C.E.E.D. 1966:394-395). I would thus define Metaphor as an incomplete Metamorphosis. I consider this *Lai* to be an illustration of these definitions as, although the two lovers do not undergo a physical change – they do not become the honeysuckle and the hazel, the two plants represent Tristram and Iseut intertwined. The Metamorphosis may thus be considered to be merely partial. They are compared to the two plants, not transformed.

Kai Mikkonen in an article on theories of Metamorphosis writes “In order for a change to be described as a metamorphosis, it requires a presupposition of the original form. Consequently, we may think of the construction of the new form in terms of a metaphor that both replaces and compares one form with another and creates two or more forms into a new, meaningful image” (Mikkonen 1996:2).

Mikkonen quotes the opinions of other scholars on the subject: “As Michel Le Guern suggested, metamorphosis can be interpreted as a form of metaphor into which time has

been introduced. The objects or creatures being compared are not separated by a barrier of different identities, as in metaphors, but are merely two states (the before and after, as it were) of the same creature. The being is at once divided from itself by time and unified in identity” (Mikkonen 1996:27-36).

Analysing Roman Jakobson’s (Jacobson 1980:69-96) opinions expressed in “Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances,” Mikkonen states:

“On the one hand, metamorphosis combines signs together into a new sign and creates a sense of contiguity and/or displacement. On the other hand, metamorphosis also functions like a metaphor as it substitutes or replaces one thing with another” (Mikkonen 1996:10).

“Each metamorphosis is a change of shape that in its most general form can be defined as the lateralization of the metaphor” (Mikkonen 1996:30).

Mikkonen quoting Sokel’s theory of metamorphosis says that it is an *extended metaphor* and that Irving Massey in *The Gaping Pig* argues that what is envisaged as a metaphor is “really a metamorphosis of one thing into the other, so that one never does go back to seeing the thing itself” (Mikkonen 1996:26).

In an analysis of Chevrefoil in the light of the above theories I shall attempt to illustrate and validate the use of Metaphor by Marie de France in terms of my investigation into Metamorphosis. As in the other *Lais* Marie does not take credit for the original composition of this tale, but, more importantly, undertakes to tell her readers *la verité* (line 3). This implies that there will probably be changes in her version of the story, something which she has claimed to have done with most of the material. She states that she heard the story.

Plusurs le me unt cunté e dit

E jeo l’ai trové en escrit (lines 5-6)

Walter in his notes remarks on the use of the word “trové: Le verbe ‘trové’ signifie ici ‘composer (une oeuvre poétique)’ Il remonte au verbe ‘trophare’ Le troubadour (dans le Midi de la France) ou le trouvère (au nord de la France) est étymologiquement celui

qui compose ('trouve') des chansons. Marié de France est ainsi à l'école des trouvères" (Walter 2000:473).

It seems that *tropare* is not to be identified with the modern French *trouver* "to find", which would imply that the tale had already been written down. In fact, a surprise relating to the author of the *Lai* awaits us at the end. She briefly outlines the plot. She intends to tell the story of Tristram and *la reine* (line 7) (whose name is not mentioned) and of their love *que tant fu fine*, (line 8), *fine amur* being the perfect love featured by the troubadours. We are warned that much sorrow will accompany this love *meinte dolur* (line 9) but, significantly she does not dwell upon the reason for this sorrow, i.e. the circumstances of the death of the lovers. *Puis en mururent en un jur* (line 10). The focal point is the love they bear for each other and she intends to stress this aspect rather than describe the tragedy of their death.

None of the events leading up to King Mark's banishing of Tristram are recounted, as Marie wishes to concentrate on what is, to her, the most important episode – the meeting of the lovers. The Queen is another victim of an unhappy marriage, a *malmariée*. As to the position of the episode in the Tristram story, Walter remarks "On peut donc situer approximativement dans la légende l'épisode raconté dans le *Lai*. Il prend place après le mariage de Marc et d'Yseut et après la dénonciation des amants adultères au roi" (Walter 2000:474). This anecdote is placed in context: the events occur after the marriage of Yseut and Marc and after the discovery of the Queen's adulterous affair with Tristram.

After only one year of banishment Tristram is driven by his love for the Queen to return and is willing to face death for her love.

Mes puis se mist en abandun

De mort e de destructiun (lines 19-20)

We are not told what he did during the year of absence in South Wales because to Marie this part of the story is of little importance. She telescopes her tale, dismissing the events of a year in a single sentence in order to devote the account to what she considers important – the love between a man and a woman. This is a technique used by many

modern writers; it is akin to Flaubert's *une tranche de vie*. Were one to read subsequent accounts of this legend, one would find detailed descriptions of the events which occurred during their separation. Marie comments on Tristram's feelings, a technique frequently found in her other *Lais*:

*Ne vus esmerveilliez neent:
Kar ki eime mut léalment,
Must est dolenz e trespensez,
Quant il nen ad ses volentez. (lines 21-24)*

Here she concentrates on the suffering occasioned by love, as she does in so many of the *Lais*, rather than on its joys. However, the lover accepts suffering without complaint, anticipating the overwhelming joy to be experienced once united with his mistress.

The fairytale motif of the forest enters the tale – Magic abounds in the forest and many *marvellous* events occur there. In the Middle Ages the forest is seen as a place of mystery, nature being the 'enemy', the unknown, the uncivilised, as against the city: the 'civil' world where nature has been tamed. The forest is also an *Other World* – a world of possibilities, versus the world of realities. Tristram is overjoyed to hear that the King is to hold court at Tintagel *A Pentecuste* (line 41), - the festival to celebrate the harvest - as the Queen has to pass through the forest to reach Tintagel. Marie has once again introduced a Christian element by timing the King's assembly at court during a Church festival.

In the forest Tristram cuts a length of hazel wood, squares it and fashions it into a staff

*Une codre trencha par mi,
Tute quarreie la fendi. (lines 51-52)*

Although no reference is made to magic properties, according to folklore, branches of the hazel tree were used to fashion magic wands which were (and still are) used in dowsing for water (Walter 2000:474-475). Now Tristram engraves his name on the piece of wood. Walter remarks that this writing "est un acte à caractère magique dans l'ancienne tradition celtique. Pour Tristram, c'est ici un moyen d'attirer magiquement Yseut vers le bâton entaillé" (Walter 2000:475). Thus far there has been no trace of the *Merveilleux*,

but the very fact that he is able to write a message on so small a piece of wood, indicates magic properties. Evidently this had happened on previous occasions,

Autre feiz li fu avenu (line 57)

but Marie prefers to concentrate on this meeting, rather than on what had previously occurred.

The lovers are the hazel and the honeysuckle; seeming to have become these plants, their love is all-encompassing. One cannot exist without the other. The honeysuckle entwines itself round the hazel tree, just as Tristram and the Queen are united in love. We do not know which of them has become the hazel tree or who the honeysuckle is. Common sense dictates that Tristram, the decision-maker, the firmer of the two is the hazel staff, whereas the Queen, the *malmariée* clings tightly to her lover. Emphasising this mutual dependence, Tristram writes:

Bele amie si est de nus:

Ne vuz sanz mei, ne mei sanz vus. (lines 77-78)

These two lines are a very poignant resumé of the *message* of this *Lai*. In fact, one without the other is doomed to die.

Now Marie paints a picture of their love:

Entre eus meinent joie [mut] grant.

A li parlat tut a leisir,

E ele li dit sun pleisir; (lines 94-96)

However, this meeting also has a practical purpose: the Queen explains to Tristram how to effect a reconciliation with the King. This will also, of course, permit them to continue their relationship.

Marie's voice is heard once more at the end of the *Lai* when she surprisingly attributes its original composition to Tristram. This constitutes a *mise en abîme*, thus adding another layer to the text. Tristram recounts the story which, Marie says, is called *Gotelef* (*Goatsleaf*) in English. She once more vouches for the veracity of the tale, this time told by Tristram. A possible explanation of Marie's English translation of the title of the *Lai*

(Gotelief) is that she was probably attached to the court of the English King for part of her life and thus knew English.

In spite of the brevity of this *Lai*, it makes a very powerful impression with its identification of the lovers with the symbiotic or even parasitic relationship of the two plants; in fact, it is a Metamorphosis of two people who cannot exist singly, their existence being eternally linked by their love.

Rita Lejeune sums up the appeal of this short *Lai* when she writes:

“Les noms envoûtants des deus amants célèbres, l’aventure secrète de leur brève rencontre amoureuse, les circonstances à la fois simples et subtiles d’une fugitive étreinte, le décor de la dense forêt longeant, le chemin creux où s’étire le cortège royal, le coeur fendu d’un noisetier où s’entrelaçaient les branches d’un chèvrefeuille, le mystère entourant les circonstances du rendezvous tout cela s’accumule, serré, noué, enroulé sur soi-même, comme si Marie, d’instinct, avait imité, dans son récit la sinuosité du chèvrefeuille enserrant les branches du coudrier” (Lejeune 1980:187). Lejeune compares the winding course of the tale with the symbiotic relationship of the honeysuckle entwined round the hazel tree.

Eliduc

Although this *Lai* contains only one example of physical Metamorphosis - the resurrection from the dead of one of its characters – it is rich in psychological and emotional shape-shifting. Duality, change and even contradiction abound in this tale and Marie de France’s moral code is clarified in the course of the story, as she subtly transforms the once ancient pagan Celtic story by the addition of her Christian outlook on life.

Marie does not dwell on the serious transgression of adultery if, in fact, it occurs in this *Lai*, partly because her readers, the aristocracy of the court, were fully aware of and, in fact, tacitly accepted it, provided it remained hidden. One is also given the impression

that Guilliadun, the Princess, remains chaste in spite of her desires. Another interesting inversion of tradition is found in the fact that an unmarried young woman seeks the love of and pursues a (married) man, a complete reversal of the norm according to which a Knight paid court to a married lady of high social standing.

The very title is unusual, as, although Eliduc acts as the link between the ladies, and is the cause of their reactions, the tale centres mainly around the actions and feelings of the two women. There are thus three protagonists, all playing a vital role. This is an innovation on Marie's part. As for the content, once more Marie changes the *normal* structure: instead of two men vying for the love of one woman, two women are in love with the same man, one of the relationships being initiated by a woman. These two women, however, do not have equal functions, neither socially nor narratively. Guilliardun, the Princess, is the unwitting *villain* in Proppian terms and Guildelüec, the wife, finds herself in the strange position of being the *helper* towards the end of the tale.

The concept of *duality* is very strong in the type of love borne by the two women and in Eliduc's behaviour. Eliduc is alternately loyal to the King of Brittany and the King of England (Logres); depending on which King he is serving at the time. His love for his wife is supplanted by his passion for Guilliadun. The women personify two kinds of love: selfish versus selfless love.

The actions and reactions of the two women are also unexpected: the younger Guilliadun has no compunction in pursuing the man she loves as she does not know that he is married and can thus be considered to be innocent. Eliduc's wife, who would be fully justified in being bitter and vindictive, not only causes her husband's lover to be restored to life, but blesses their union and facilitates it by retiring to a convent. Literally, this means that she becomes Christ's bride.

Dubuis's remarks on *Eliduc* are pertinent: "Tout, en effet, dans ce Lai est psychologique. Pris isolément, chaque personnage vit un drame intérieur et ne nous est guère présenté que dans ce drame et à travers lui. Quant à l'action du Lai, elle est tout entière tirée du

jeu des sentiments qui rapprochent ou écartent, lient ou séparent les personnages ...” (Dubuis 1973:403). Dubuis’s opinion serves to illustrate my contention that this *Lai* is a short story in-the-making, as it shows very clearly that the psychological aspect is of paramount importance.

A detailed analysis of the *Lai* follows, in which the points mentioned in the introduction, will be elucidated.

In her prologue to the *Lai* Marie states that she will tell the story

De un mut ancïen Lai bretun (line 1)

What is important is that she is going to tell it according to how she understands it

..... si cum jeo entent

La verité, mun esciënt (lines 3-4)

There is thus room for her interpretation, as the tone of this tale may be adapted to the taste and moral code of Twelfth Century courtiers. One will expect a certain measure of variety and change. Edgard Sienaert observes “En cela, le recueil reflète fidèlement la ‘renaissance’ du douzième siècle ...” (Sienaert 1978:215).

The hero’s reputation is immediately established: he is “... *un chevalier Pruz e curteis, hardi e fier;*” (lines 5-6) Marie interjects her opinion of this Knight to establish his excellence for the reader:

... ceo m’est vis.

N’ot si vaillant hume al païs (lines 7-8)

Philippe Walter gives a possible explanation of Eliduc’s name: “Nous y verrions un composé de ‘eleuc’ ‘troupeau’ et ‘duc’ ‘porte, emporte”. He says “Ce nom semble faire référence au caractère guerrier du personnage, conducteur de troupes et amateur de razziers guerrières ...” (Walter 2000:477). He is thus a true warrior.

The married couple’s love and loyalty are established, as well as the Guildelüec’s nobility, and particularly her wisdom and intelligence. She is *sage* (line 9), a

characteristic which will stand her in good stead when the time comes to make a fateful decision. She is also described as “*noble, ... De haute gent, de grant parage*”(lines 9-10). Walter explains that Guideluec’s name is composed of two parts: *guil* (modest, honest) and *deluoc* (form, aspect). He says: “Guidelüec est donc la femme ‘d’aspect aimable” (Walter 2000:278). There will be ample proof of her modesty and honesty in the course of the tale.

Guilliadun is the young daughter of the King of England who hires Eliduc as a mercenary. We are told that in *El rēaume nen ot plus bele* (line 18) (than Guilliadun). Significantly, the women’s names are similar, but Eliduc’s wife has the wisdom and the Princess has youth and beauty. Marie makes an interesting remark when she says that the *Lai* used to be called *Elidus* (line 23), but is now called *Guidelüec ha Gualadun* (line 22)

Kar des dames est avenu

L’aventure dunt li lais fu, (lines 25 -26)

This would point to the fact that, although the three characters are of equal importance, it is the women who cause the most significant events to occur: a socio-narrative change. Usually it was the men who initiated the action in the Twelfth Century. Marie puts her personal stamp on the *Lai* when she assures her readers:

La verité vus en dirrai. (line 28)

In the course of the tale the reader will become aware of Marie’s subtle Christianisation of the *Lai*.

Eliduc, the warrior and loyal Knight is described: the King of Brittany

..... mut l’amot e cherisseit,

E il lēaument le serveit (lines 31 – 32)

He is appointed to govern the country in the King’s absence. However, because of their jealousy, some of the Knights at the court carry false tales to the King about Eliduc. They transgress by lying to the King. This will bring about not only physical but also emotional change in Eliduc. He is dismissed by the King and his attempts to defend himself are repulsed.

He will cross a physical boundary when he decides to seek his fortune. He will also cross an emotional boundary; in fact he will break the married man's taboo once he has crossed the sea.

Ainz passera la mer

Al rëaume de Loengre ira, (lines 68-69)

Having taken the decision to leave, he orders his men to look after his wife, who evinces

... grant dolur (line 81)

and, promising to be faithful,

Mes il l'aseüirat de sei

Qu'il li porterat bone fei. (lines 83-84)

Eliduc, the warrior, goes to seek his fortune. He wishes to offer his services to one of the warring Kings. At this stage of the *Lai*, Eliduc attaches a great deal of importance to his prowess as a soldier.

Unaware of how his life is about to change, he seeks employment with the ageing King living near Exeter. This decision will bring about momentous consequences, as Eliduc is about to meet the beautiful young daughter of the King. He has heard the account of this King's quarrel with one of the neighbouring noblemen who wishes to marry the King's daughter, but has been refused. This rejection results in the nobleman's vindictive actions.

..... cil le guerriot,

Tute sa tere si gastot. (lines 97-98)

In order to emphasise Eliduc's prowess in battle, Marie reveals that

N'ot el chastel hume si os

Ki cuntre lui osast eissir (lines 100-101)

In spite of the fact that Eliduc is aware of the fear inspired in all the surrounding noblemen by the King's adversary, he chooses to serve this King who is most in need of help.

Li reis ki plus esteit grevez

E damagiez e encumbrez

Vodrat aider a sun poeir (lines 107-109)

Eliduc is capable of unfailing loyalty to the King whom he has chosen to serve, even to the point of transgressing the code of chivalry by ambushing the King's enemies when he awaits them in a narrow defile. As we have seen, there is a great deal of transgression in the *Lais* and from all sorts of quarters and points of view: all of Marie's stories are about transgression in one form or another.

The crossing of the geographical border between Brittany and England is symbolic of other changes about to take place in Eliduc's life which will, however, be psychological and emotional. His loyalty to the King is unswerving. Eliduc's philosophy about warfare is clearly stated. He says

*Ki en tel liu ne va suvent
U il quide perdre a scient,
Ja gueres ne gaainera
Në en grant pris ne muntera.* (lines 187-190)

Such *morality lessons* are frequent in the *Lais* and bring the genre close to *morality plays*.

Eliduc and his men rout the enemy, albeit by ambushing them. The narrator's voice is heard again:

*Aprés cel fet que jeo vus di,
Mut l'amat li reis e cheri.* (lines 265-266)

.....
*La fiance de lui en prist;
De sa tere gardein en first* (lines 269-270)

Once again Eliduc is praised.

*Eliduc fu curteis e sage,
Beau chevaler [e] pruz e large.* (lines 271-272)

The traditional order of events is reversed. Hearing of his reputation, Guilliadun

... que mut fu bele, (line 294)

daughter of the King , invites Eliduc to visit her. She initiates the meeting, which will cause Eliduc to examine his feelings very closely. We are told of her feelings before becoming aware of Eliduc's reactions. It is usually the Knight who is immediately smitten and of whose love for the lady we are informed. However, she falls in love with him:

*Amurs i lance sun message,
Que la somunt de lui amer;* (lines 304-305)

Eliduc's emotions are in turmoil: he is torn between love for his wife and nascent love for this young girl. Immediately he repents and thinks of his wife:

*De sa femme li remembra
E cum il li asseïra
Que bone fei li portereit
E læaument se cuntendrait.* (lines 323-326)

While Eliduc is vacillating, thinking of his faithful wife and the promise made to her, Guilliadun, unaware that Eliduc is married, decides to act: she is one of the most assertive of all the women in Marie's *Lais*.

*La pucele ki l'ot veü
Vodra de lui fere sun dru.* (lines 327-328)

In his vulnerable state, it is not difficult for Eliduc to fall prey to a beautiful young woman's advances. She is the one who decides to take the first step. It is usually the Knight who first approaches the lady whom he admires. Marie's use of the word *dru* (line 328) is significant, as it implies that she is willing to be his mistress. The naïve young woman wants Eliduc's love at any cost. She cannot rest or sleep, telling her chamberlain

*Si par amur me veut amer
E de sun cors asseïrer,
Jeo ferai trestut sun pleisir,* (lines 343-345)

Passion of this intensity is usually expressed by an amorous Knight, who will then set out to court the woman he loves. Marie ensures that we are aware of Guilliadun's love, as Eliduc's nascent love will be fanned by the knowledge of her feelings and will render his

transgression understandable, if not acceptable. She is advised by her chamberlain to make the first approach by sending Eliduc a belt, a ribbon or a ring.

Hardly have the gifts been sent, than the young woman, doubtful of her impetuous actions, berates herself

Lasse, cum est mis qours surpris

Pur un humme de autre pais! (lines 387-388)

However, the die is cast and she believes

E si il n'ad de m'amur cure,

Mut me tendrai [a] maubaillie; (lines 398-399)

Guilliadun sends him a belt. A gift of this nature implies that the recipient will be faithful to the donor and that she is his.

In a brief scene the reader observes the manner in which Eliduc receives the token of love. He is silent; this indicates his troubled state of mind. On the other hand, Guilliadun is frantic, not having received any indication of Eliduc's feelings. She decides that:

Jeo meïsmes li voil mustrer

Cum l'amur de lui me destreint (lines 446-447)

Eliduc's perturbed state of mind is clear: he wishes to be loyal to his wife, but is captivated by Guilliadun. He feels torn: he is honour bound to serve the King, so he cannot accept the love of his daughter, neither does he want to break his promise to his wife:

Mes ja ne li querra amur

Ke li [a] turt a deshonor

Tant pur sa femme garder fei,

Tant pur ceo qu'il est od le rei (lines 473-476)

This is a fine psychological study of a mind in turmoil. Marie depicts every nuance of Eliduc's emotions: he is torn between the loyalty he owes his wife on the one hand and, on the other hand, the love he feels for Guilliadun, as well as his loyalty to the King, her father.

In contrast, Guilliadun, after some hesitation, is absolutely certain of what she wants and will pursue her desire without doubting its validity. Here Marie delves deep into the human mind; spontaneously this inexperienced young woman, ignoring the niceties of courtship, according to which it is the suitor who should initiate a relationship, tries to determine whether Eliduc loves her. Eliduc's inner struggle too, is clear. He decides to go to the King's court and see the young woman, after which he will depart. In spite of the Knight's soul-searching, it is easy to guess that he will eventually succumb and declare his love for Guilliadun. Marie has drawn a very clear picture of the contrast between the reactions of the couple. Guilliadun is naïve and honest, and declares her love immediately; Eliduc, after fiercely wrestling with his conscience, is forced by the power of his feelings to reveal his love for her. The belt which she has sent to Eliduc and which he wears round his waist is a symbol of her desire to belong to him and also acts as a bond between them.

In admitting his love for the young woman to himself, Eliduc has transgressed – he has crossed a very important boundary; he has fallen in love with somebody else, thus breaking his promise to his wife, albeit against his will. His betrayal is twofold: he does not tell Guilliadun that he is married, and he has revealed his feelings to the young woman. He thus betrays both women.

It is interesting to note, that up to his point it is Guilliadun who has taken the lead, and that in response Eliduc has almost reluctantly reciprocated. However, Eliduc, the warrior, still excels. He fights valiantly freeing the land of enemies. His reputation is unsullied:

*Mut fu preisez par sa priësce,
Par sun sen e par sa largesce;* (lines 547-548)

In fact the King has said of him:

Entre cinc cenzen ad meillur (line 496)

This is a cruel irony, as the reader is aware of Eliduc's multiple betrayal.

He has almost completed his year of service to the King when once again there is to be a change of scene: the king of Brittany is in dire need of Eliduc's help. His country is being invaded and destroyed. He has realized that he was tricked into believing the men who had falsely accused Eliduc and he begs him to return. Clearly the King of Brittany has undergone a change of heart and opinion once the truth has been revealed. The Knight is in a dilemma: he does not want to leave the young woman.

*Mut li pesa pur la pucele;
Kar anguissement l'amot
E ele lui ke plus ne pot.
Mes n'ot entre eus nule folie,
Joliveté ne vileinie: (lines 572-576)*

Their love has remained pure; they have merely exchanged gifts and spoken lovingly to each other, Eliduc always behaving decorously. Nowhere has Marie hinted that their love has been consummated.

Guilliadun has opened her heart to the Knight, telling him that she wishes to marry him (lines 512-518). Failing that, she will die unwed. This is a very brave step for a young girl to take. Although she is aware of Eliduc's feelings for her, it is customary for a maiden to wait for her suitor to approach her. She throws caution to the wind and, by reversing the order of courtship; Marie not only breaks with tradition, but makes the reader aware of the strength and courage of this young girl, characteristics which are usually attributed to Knights, i.e. to the men in the *Lais*.

Although it is a very cowardly act, it is understandable that Eliduc does not reveal his marital status, taking refuge in the fact that he has been contracted to her father, the King, for one year only. The year has almost expired and he must ask leave to return to his own country, as his King needs his services. Marie does not say anything explicitly, but she implies that Eliduc will leave, hoping to forget Guilliardun. There is a certain duality here: Eliduc is cowardly in not wanting to tell his beloved the truth and so lose her, but at the same time it takes courage to leave the person he loves so desperately, considering

that he might never see her again. Yet he must retain his loyalty to the King of Brittany. Whichever choice he makes will be unfair to or hurt one of the women involved.

Paradoxically he has treated Guilliadun honourably and dishonourably at the same time, not having had the desired physical contact, yet hiding the secret of his marriage. He realizes that his actions have been unwise.

Allas! fet il, mal ai erré! (line 585)

His loyalty to his King and to his wife is unquestionable: he has taken an oath to serve the King of Brittany and, in spite of his love for Guilliadun, he must return to his wife:

E ma femme d[el]' autre part

Or me covient que jeo me gart! (lines 597-598)

The underlying Christian message of this *Lai* is clear: Eliduc realizes that should he marry Guilliardun, it would be contrary to the tenets of Christianity.

S'a m'amie esteie espusez,

Nel suff[e]reit crestientez. (lines 601-602)

He tries desperately to find a compromise. He speaks to the King, who attempts to persuade him to stay, but his determination to return to Brittany cannot be shaken in spite of the English King's promise of land and riches. However, Eliduc does find a compromise when he promises the King that he will return should he require his services. This is to be merely a leave of absence, as his year of service has not yet run its course. As in several of the other *Lais*, Marie shows clearly that she aims to entertain a cultured audience: both Eliduc and the King of England read the letter from the King of Brittany without difficulty. Finally the situation is resolved. He again assures Guilliadun of his love. They exchange rings and he promises to return on the day of her choice.

Unwillingly Eliduc crosses the physical as well as the emotional boundary when he returns to Brittany and his wife. He has to pretend:

Mut se cuntient sutivement (line 717)

Marie's knowledge of human nature is evident from the way in which she describes Guildelüec's reaction to her husband's strange frame of mind. She is perceptive, but immediately blames herself:

*Ele lui demandot suvent
S'il ot oï de nule gent
Que ele eüst mesfet u mespris,
Tant cum il fu hors del païs; (lines 721-724)*

This inherent goodness will surface again in her treatment of Guilliadun at a later stage.

The workings of the human mind are clearly very interesting to Marie, as well as the changing emotions of her characters. In the process of recounting an interesting tale, the author examines the gamut of feelings present in the minds of her characters. Marie sympathises with her hero in spite of his transgressions; Eliduc is not punished for his actions; he is merely human: indecisive, passionate, fiercely loyal and brave, but also capable of betrayal when driven by uncontrollable emotions.

Evidence of weakness lies in the fact that he tells his wife half-truths: he explains to her that his disquiet is because he has promised the King of England that he will return to help in the battle against his enemies, adding that he does not want to break his promise. This is a half-truth, told because Eliduc still has his wife's welfare at heart. He carefully selects the men who will accompany him; he intends taking men who will not betray him:

*A cues fist plevir e jurer
De tut sun afaire celer. (lines 757-758)*

Again Marie does not describe the journey in detail. It is a boundary which he must cross as quickly as possible, fully aware that the cause of his transgression resides on the other side, but unable to resist its power.

*En mer se mist, plus n'i atent;
Utre furent hastivement. (lines 759-760)*

The contrast between Eliduc's treatment of his wife and that of Guilliadun mirrors his feelings for the two women: he has returned to Guildelüec only briefly and seen to it that

she is comfortable while he is away. In short, he has done his duty. However, on his arrival in England, Eliduc avoids being seen:

*Luin des hafnes s'est herbergez;
Ne voleit mie ester veüz* (lines 764-765)

He takes every precaution to ensure Guilliadun's safety and to avoid sullyng her good reputation. They are to meet in secret. The Princess too, transgresses. Before the return of her Knight, she has been shown to be a determined woman, willing to set aside conventional behaviour and even begging to accompany Eliduc. Now that she has been called on to desert her father and her country, she does so without any hesitation. They board a ship and set sail for Brittany.

Marie does not spend time describing any doubts the young woman may have. Guilliadun has crossed the threshold between the states of naïve, adoring young girl to that of a mature, decisive woman who is not afraid to take action.

Eliduc and Guilliadun embark for Brittany and at first all goes well. Then a terrifying storm arises and the ship loses its rudder and its sail. The mariners pray to Saint Nicholas, patron Saint of sailors, to St. Clement and to Mary, mother of Jesus to intercede with Him for their safety. Walter makes an interesting remark about the appeal to St. Clement: "il s'agit ainsi d'attirer la clémence du ciel. Au Moyen Age, c'est souvent le nom du saint qui définit ses pouvoirs" (Walter 2000:479).

Finally the sailors who have become aware of the situation blame the storm on the presence of Guilliadun on the ship. The mariners say to Eliduc:

*Femme leale espuse avez
E sur celë autre en menez
Cuntre Deu e cuntre la lei,
Lessez la nus geter en mer* (lines 835-838)

Marie's attitude as expressed by the sailors clearly reveals her Christian outlook on life.

The men want to cast Guilliadun overboard; as they believe that it is her presence which is causing the storm. According to them, if the guilty person is thrown into the sea, the storm will abate and all will be well. This brings to mind the story of Jonah as found in the Bible. However Philippe Walter adds: “Le motif n’est pas spécialement celtique puisqu’on le trouve dans la Bible (Livre de Jonas) mais aussi dans l’*‘Electre’* d’Euripide ...” (Walter 2000:479-480). Taking into account Marie’s Christian background, it seems fairly certain that she drew this motif from the Bible.

On hearing of Eliduc’s marital state from the sailors, Guilliadun collapses and appears to have died. Now the reader is shown another side of Eliduc’s character: with those whom he loves he is gentle and kind; he is a brave warrior in battle and will kill an adversary when necessary. However, in this situation, driven by grief because of the death of the woman whom he loves, he strikes the sailor who has suggested killing Guilliadun and throws him into the sea. At this point in the *Lai*, the reader is tempted to accept the alternative title: *Guilliardun and Guildelüec*, as Eliduc is gradually revealing himself as an *anti-hero* rather than a *hero* by his deceitful behaviour.

On reaching Brittany, Eliduc, overcome with grief, decides that Guilliadun is to be buried in holy ground with all the pomp and ceremony befitting a Princess. She is to be laid to rest in a little chapel in a forest where a holy hermit lives. The Christian element once more surfaces when Eliduc says that he will give the hermit a tract of land where he can found an abbey in which the monks or nuns will pray for Guilliadun. However, his plans go awry, as the hermit has died and Eliduc bids his men place the lady on the altar until he can seek the advice of the priests of his country.

It is possible that Marie de France, when including the *holy hermit* in her tale, is, in fact, Christianising a pagan belief of beings such as fauns who lived in the forest and whose help could be invoked to obtain a cure for the sick. “C’est à un rite semblable que s’adonne Éliduc dans une forêt christianisée cette fois. Il s’agit de rendre force et vigueur à son amie” (Walter 2000:480).

Eliduc is overcome with sadness and regret. This is the first time that he has regretted any of his actions: he is a very complex character often egotistical, even weak, but sincerely devoted to Guilliardun..

*Bele, ja fuissiez vus reïne,
Ne fust l'amur leale e fine
Dunt vus m'amastes læaument.* (lines 943-945)

He has decided that he will take holy orders once she has been buried.

Marie has revealed to the reader another facet of Eliduc's character. He is prepared to renounce the world of military service, once so dear to him, in order to devote himself to prayer. His love for Guilliardun and his sorrow are so profound that he cannot live in the world of men without her. Marie's ability to reveal the complexity of the human mind is very much in evidence here.

Now the focus shifts to Guildelüec. She instructs a servant to follow Eliduc in order to discover the cause of her husband's grief. The servant reveals Eliduc's secret and Guildelüec hastens to the chapel. Her reaction on seeing Guilliardun's body is surprising, nevertheless in character. She has always been a gentle, loving wife, but one would expect a woman to be furious and jealous when she realizes the depth of her husband's betrayal. Throughout the *Lai* it has been clear that there is an interweaving of characteristics typical of the folk and fairytale and those of the short story. Guildelüec's character is proof of this. True to the fairytale tradition, she may be considered to be the personification of virtue, rather than a rounded character of the short story. Representational figures of this kind are also to be found in the morality plays. However, this *Lai* need not be considered to be a purely morality tale, it rather exhibits characteristics of two genres: the morality tale and the short story.

This aspect becomes clear from Guildelüec's reaction when, on looking at the beautiful young girl, she says:

*Tant par pité, tant par amur,
Jamés n'avrai joie nul jur.* (lines 1027-1028)

She weeps for the loss of the maiden. Very few women, betrayed by their husbands, would have reacted in this manner.

For the first time the *Merveilleux* is to play a part in this *Lai* so greatly influenced by the author's Christian view of life. A weasel, possibly chosen by Marie because of the whiteness of its fur, which could represent purity, runs over Guilliadun's body and a servant kills it. Soon its mate comes in search of the dead weasel and here Marie adds to the pathos of the tale by anthropomorphising the weasel's behaviour. When she cannot get any reaction from her mate she

Semblant feseit de doel mener (line 1044)

and, although not physically metamorphosed, the weasel's reactions mirror those of a human being when, purposely, she runs out of the chapel into the forest only to return with a red flower, perhaps representing blood, but also life, which she places on the dead weasel's mouth. It immediately leaps up and the pair of animals scampers off. Guildelüec shows no surprise, imitates the weasel's action and Guilliadun is immediately restored to life. So instead of acting jealously or being happy that the girl is dead, Guildelüec, in a wonderful spirit of selflessness, brings her back to life.

The choice of the weasel as the animal which guides Guidelüec's actions can perhaps be attributed to the fact that it plays a considerable part in mythology. According to Walter (Walter 2000:481) Giraud de Barri in his *Topographia Hibernia* (chapter 27), dated 1188, recounts the belief that if a young child died of an injury, a weasel would nurse it and bring it back to life by breathing into the wound and the mouth of the afflicted child and placing a crocus on its mouth and nose, as well as on the wound.

It was also believed that, according to myths and legends, the weasel was an animal *psychopompe*: *Conducteur des âmes des morts* (Robert 1977:562). Guildelüec's selfless conduct is once more emphasized by Marie: she thanks God when Guilliadun starts to speak, indicating that she is alive.

Quant la dame l'oï parler,

Deu cumençat a mercier. (lines 1067-1068)

Guilliadun relates her story to Guildelüec, saying that she has been betrayed by Eliduc, but Guildelüec, his wife, defends Eliduc explaining how desperate he is, and how he has visited the chapel every day. She adds:

Que vive estes grant joie en ai (line 1098)

and

Del tut le voil quite clamer,

E si ferai mun chef veler. (lines 1101-1102)

Finally Guildelüec takes the veil. In a supreme act of sacrifice she allows Eliduc to marry Guilliadun. One cannot imagine a nobler action. It is because she loves Eliduc so much that Guildelüec is prepared to give him up in order that he may find happiness.

After many years of happiness, Eliduc has a monastery built which he enters in order to serve God. The abbess, Guildelüec, receives Guilliadun into her convent

Mut se pena chescun pur sei

De Deu amer par bone fei (lines 1177-1178)

Marie ends her *Lai* by saying that the Bretons composed this tale so that the three lovers would not be forgotten. Again she wants to make sure that her readers are aware that she has heard this story and written it down. She does not claim to be its author. It is clear, however, that she must have changed the ending. Not only is the *Lai* imbued with Christian sentiment, but the ending clearly shows by its content that the writer is a devout Christian.

Once again the theme of this *Lai* is love; but it is a love of two different kinds.

“Guildelüec, by the willing sacrifice of her position as Eliduc’s wife, makes possible Eliduc’s ‘parfite amur’ with Guilliadun on the one hand and eventually, the devotion of his entire heart to God” (Barban 2002:25).

In this *Lai* Marie delves deeply into the human psyche and narrates, as well as illustrates by the actions of her characters the ever-changing emotions leading to the crossing of

accepted boundaries. There is very little trace of an external change of form by miraculous means, but Marie has followed meticulously each movement of the mind, all the uncertainties and decisions of her characters with consummate skill.

To conclude: several changes take place during the course of the *Lai*. All of the three human heroes become spiritual; there is also a distinct change of *genre*, as some of the flat folktale characters have become many-sided human beings, causing this tale to become a nascent short story. It must be added, however, that, as yet, characteristics of the original folktale can still be detected: Guidelüec retains her symbolic status. She is a wonderful, selfless character, virtue personified.

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Chapter 4

Synthesis: The *Lais* as a collection – Crossings; Proverbs and Sayings; the type of Metamorphosis found in each *Lai*

In Chapter 3 each *Lai* was examined and analysed individually. In this chapter I shall be looking at the *Lais* as a collection, making a synthesis of the following aspects:

- (i) Border Crossings
- (ii) Proverbs and sayings
- (iii) The type of Metamorphosis found in each *Lai*

Border-crossings

Border-crossings in Marie's world certainly do occur in the literal sense of the word: her heroes cross to and from one country to another, as well as from the physical/geographical world to the *Autre Monde*. However, she is more concerned with moral, emotional and psychological border-crossings which result in change, Metamorphosis, as well as at times, transgressions. I shall examine each *Lai* in order to determine which of these crossings is present.

Guigemar, an admirable young Knight suffers from a strange emotional malady – he is incapable of love. In order that he may cross this border, something will have to happen, as he cannot cure himself. The catalyst in this process is a creature from the *Autre Monde* which he encounters in the forest, a place of magic. He is wounded by the ricochet of his own arrow and now suffers from two wounds, physical and emotional. It is obvious that Guigemar has nothing to do with his own cure; he is unaware of where he is going when a ship from the *Autre Monde* takes him to a place where he will be cured of both wounds. His physical wound is easily cured by the young *malmariée* whom he meets, but of greater importance is the emotional border-crossing which he undergoes when she accords him her love, having awakened his capacity for love. He has, however, also committed a moral border-crossing, by initiating a relationship with a young married

woman. However, his emotional healing is more important to Marie: one gets the impression that the husband is hardly ever present – he remains in the background.

Equitan's border-crossing is reprehensible. Initially he is shown as a much loved, chivalrous King. The reader is alerted to the fact that, in spite of his excellence, he likes nothing better than pleasure of some sort, particularly love. Marie's warning that one should be moderate in all things is significant. Equitan is quick to cross a moral boundary when he falls in love with his seneschal's wife. Here, too, there is an early warning from Marie: this woman is destined to bring about the downfall of the country. Equitan continues on the path of moral boundary-crossing when he repeatedly justifies to himself his desire for the seneschal's wife. They are spurious, but Equitan continues on the path of destruction. His careless remark that he would make the seneschal's wife his Queen if the husband were dead culminates in the final moral border-crossing of both characters: they plan to murder the seneschal. Their ignominious and ludicrous death is the last border-crossing, which they both richly deserve.

Le Fresne is the tale of a mother's moral border-crossing and redemption resulting from her latent maternal instinct. The first time that she crosses a moral border occurs when she maligns her neighbour who has given birth to twin boys. Spitefully she says that her neighbour must have had a sexual relationship with two men in order to have produced twins. However, when she gives birth to twin girls, she is precipitated into committing another moral crossing, as she cannot allow anybody to become aware of her situation. She would be ridiculed and criticized. She wishes to have one of the babies killed. This is another step in her moral degeneration. A sympathetic young servant offers to take the baby away. At the end of the *Lai* when her mother recognizes Le Fresne, after identifying the cloth which the child had been wrapped in as a baby, one would expect her to dismiss her feelings and let things take their course. However, she redeems herself, showing that she is not, in fact, completely morally corrupt. Her maternal instinct has triumphed and the story ends happily, justice is seen to have been done.

In *Bisclavret* it is the hero who has a border-crossing imposed on him by an unknown force, the *Merveilleux*. His border-crossing takes the form of a spontaneous physical and temporary Metamorphosis: he becomes a werewolf. However, although he takes on the outer form of this animal, his inner world does not change – he retains his human emotions and awareness. It is his wife whose gradual moral deterioration signals a moral crossing of borders. At first the relationship between man and wife is normal – she wants to know where her husband spends several days a week. When he will not answer her, the rot sets in: she cajoles him into telling her what has happened. A plan is starting to form in her mind: she badgers him until he tells her where his clothes are hidden, also revealing to her the fact that he cannot regain his human form without them. She crosses an even more sinister border: she asks a man who has desired her for many years for help: if he finds Bisclavret's clothes, she says, she will become his mistress. And this is what happens. Bisclavret's wife has thus committed the heinous crime of condemning him to retain his lupine form for ever. It is only because the wise and perceptive King realizes that Bisclavret is a human being in a wolf's body that he is restored to his human form, his wife having been punished by producing noseless children, proof of their mother's treachery.

In *Lanval* the moral border-crossing which compels the hero to act is committed by King Arthur when he neglects to give Lanval, his noblest and bravest Knight, the customary presents. The hero leaves the court (Propp: Function 1). Lanval now encounters a beautiful fairy in the *Autre Monde*, the forest – an ideal world where every wish is fulfilled. The fairy being and the hero are very happy together until he has to leave. She instructs him not to reveal their love (Proppian function 2). However, once the hero has crossed the border from the ideal, fairy world where everything is possible, he reaches the real world of King Arthur's court. The *villain* makes her appearance - the Queen – who offers Lanval her love. He crosses another moral border by breaking the taboo imposed on him by his fairy mistress. (Propp 4 –transgression). When he rejects the Queen she immediately accuses him of homosexuality. In anger he claims that even one of his mistress's serving maids is more beautiful than the Queen. She, the villain, goes to her husband, the King, lies to him (a moral border-crossing), saying that Lanval has sought

her favours, but that she has refused (Propp 8: Villain causes harm or injury). The Proppian *donateur*, in the form of the fairy mistress, arrives and takes Lanval to Avalon – to the *Autre Monde* (another border-crossing) where they will live happily together. This magic world is a far better place than the real one. Marie has shown the reader that nobody can ever get the best of both worlds – one has to find moral escape in the *Autre Monde*, where, in this case, Lanval is free of both the King and the Queen.

Les Deus Amanz is arguably the most human of all the *lais*, in spite of the many folktale aspects. The King crosses an emotional boundary when he sets an impossible task for any young suitor who wishes to marry the Princess. He does not want to part with her because he is jealous and possessive. But the real focus falls on the young people, particularly the young man. On the advice of the Princess, he has acquired a magic potion to help him to reach the summit of the mountain while carrying her. It is his refusal to take advantage of the magic drink which distinguishes him from all the heroes of the other *Lais*. This is a personal boundary which he has crossed: he wants to conquer himself and his own weakness. This may appear foolhardy, but, even in death, he is victorious because he has retained his integrity and has been unwilling to compromise himself in any way. This is a moral, as well as a personal victory. His beloved Princess joins him in death and one feels that this is as it should be. Beautiful flowers grow in abundance on the mountain where he had emptied the vial. In spite of tragedy, all is well. When death is unavoidable and a person assumes his/her fate, that is tragedy, but when the person does not assume his or her fate but succumbs to or is defeated by it: that is pathos. This tale does end tragically, but the reader has the feeling that this is how the *Lai* should end: the lovers are united in death.

Yonec is the *Lai* where the *Autre Monde* and the *real* world are inextricably interwoven, to such an extent that the reader is hardly aware in which world the events are taking place. The old husband has already committed a moral border-crossing when the tale begins: he has imprisoned his beautiful, young wife in a tower because of jealousy. Her initial border-crossing is only in her mind when she ardently wishes for a handsome young lover. Muldumarec, a young Knight, arrives in his metamorphosed form – he is a

Hawk-Knight and, as such has crossed a physical border. He visits the young woman regularly, as the Hawk-Knight who is able to take on human form. The reader is aware that he comes from the *Autre Monde* and is in fact, a fairy being. He is also crossing a moral boundary by visiting a married woman. Once he is aware of Muldumarec's visits, the husband, by planning the death of the Hawk-Knight and installing sharp spikes in the window, crosses a moral boundary. However, he is already too late, as his wife is pregnant by Muldumarec: and she is carrying the instrument of her husband's doom. Yonec, Muldumarec's son will kill his evil stepfather. Finally, just before he dies, Muldumarec, now in the *Autre Monde*, gives the young woman the weapon with which Yonec is destined to kill his step-father. This is the fairy being's last border-crossing. However, when the time comes for Yonec to commit the deed, although this border-crossing is reprehensible, the reader does not see it as such because justice has prevailed. Restoration of justice i.e. reparation of an injustice is the *raison d'être* of the fairy tale.

Laüstic is a curious tale in that the characters are static, nevertheless there are two worlds in this *Lai*, that of the two *lovers* – the real world – and that of the nightingale, at first immaterial and then material. It is the nightingale which takes centre stage. At first it is heard by the *lovers*, known to exist, unseen and the excuse for their having crossed the moral borders. The wife is mendacious, telling her husband that she rises at night to listen to the nightingale's beautiful song. In actual fact, she and her *lover* spend the time communicating by sending each other little gifts and by fond gazing. The nightingale's song can be heard. It is not visible. The husband crosses a moral border when he kills the innocent victim, the nightingale. The bird's body is real: it has become the symbol of their love, as well as the physical manifestation. Thus there is fluidity, movement, change, crossing of borders in spite of the apparent static nature of this *Lai*.

In *Milun*, the first crossing of a moral boundary occurs when the heroine gives birth to Milun's illegitimate son. Milun, at this stage, cannot marry her, so she sends the boy to her sister. Milun, an able warrior, has the reputation of being able to defeat all comers. He becomes arrogant – his crossing of an emotional boundary – and, when he hears of the young Knight, *Sanz Per* (Peerless) (line 342) and his fine reputation, Milun is furious

that anybody could be considered to be a better warrior than he. In anger he sets off to find the young man, determined to trounce him. The combination of his obsession, his prowess and his determination to defend his reputation make him a formidable opponent. Here a comparison of the mother/daughter theme in *Le Fresne* and the father/son connection in this *Lai* seems obvious. Milun is redeemed when he is brought face to face with the unknown man's generosity of spirit. All his aggression disappears and he welcomes his son with open arms. His paternal instinct has triumphed in the same way as the maternal instinct of Le Fresne's mother.

In *Chaitivel*, no such redemption occurs. Both the remaining Knight and the lady whom he is wooing are steeped in self-pity. Their egotism can be clearly seen in the fact that each wishes his/her suffering to be immortalized by the title: the wounded Knight wishes the *Lai* to be called *Le Chaitivel* in order to commemorate his suffering, whereas the lady wishes it to be called *Quatre Dols* so that the world will know that she has four reasons for suffering: three of her suitors have been killed in battle and the fourth is so badly wounded that he cannot be a suitable husband. The Knight, on the other hand, mourns the loss of his manhood, making it impossible for him to marry and raise a family. Both have crossed emotional boundaries and both adhere tenaciously to their belief in their martyrdom.

In *Chevrefoil* Tristram crosses a geographical boundary. This may not seem important, but in the light of his having been banished from the country by the King, it is of paramount importance, as it allows him the opportunity of a clandestine meeting with the Queen. This meeting does, in fact, occur in this short *Lai* and it is clear that the lovers are very happy to have the opportunity of crossing a moral boundary, as long as they can be together.

In *Eliduc* the crossing of geographical boundaries is important, as it gives him the opportunity to meet Guilliadun in England and to return, conscience-stricken, to serve his King and to see his wife, Guildelüec in Brittany. Eliduc crosses both moral and emotional boundaries. He falls in love with Guilliadun, thus crossing an emotional

boundary, but does not tell her that he is married – he crosses a moral boundary. Neither of the women crosses any moral boundary; Guilliadun is innocent and Guildelüec is saintly. Eliduc is strong when he has the opportunity to betray his wife, but decides against it:

*Mes ja ne li querra amur
Ke li [a]turt a deshonor,
Tant pur sa femme garder fei,
Tant pur ceo qu'il est od le rei: (lines 473-476)*

After Guildelüec has taken the veil, Eliduc and Guilliadun get married, and, some time later, Guilliadun joins her. Eliduc enters a monastery where no more transgressions can occur. Eliduc, although he has crossed an emotional boundary, largely retains his integrity. Certainly, he does have the best of both worlds, but he has done very little to deserve it. It is Guildelüec's unbelievable willingness to sacrifice her happiness which allows this to happen.

After a close examination of each of the *Lais* I have concluded that the predominant type of border-crossing is, most certainly, moral. In addition, in many of the stories the decision taken by the character has adverse results, thus the crossing occurs from *good* or *neutral* to *bad*. This is a significant, as Marie's main reason for writing these stories was to teach, i.e. to impart a moral lesson. By bringing the reader face to face with the reality of what may happen if one's actions are driven by jealousy, lust, lack of direction, pride or selfishness, she has achieved her goal. Thus the external mechanics of the fairy-tale have become internal mechanics: fairy-tale motifs become short story motivations.

Expansion of proverbs in the *Lais*

Another example of change and fluctuation so prevalent in the Twelfth Century is to be seen in the accepted opinions on marriage and customs of this time as discussed in a previous chapter. Assuming that Marie de France was attached to the court of Henry II, she must have been aware of the tenuous bonds constituting marriage, as well as the

changes taking place within this practice. This may account for both the choice and the treatment of the stories that constitute her collection. In all probability this knowledge influenced her approach to the subject of love and marriage, as well as her mindset during the writing of the *Lais*.

During the Twelfth Century attempts were made by the Roman Catholic Church in France to regulate marriage laws and it was only in 1215 that the Fourth Lateran Council made the presence of a priest obligatory at a wedding ceremony. His task was to witness and bless the marriage (Thomas 1995:5). Bearing these changes and fluctuations in mind, it is not surprising that Marie's attitude to the relationship between men and women is somewhat ambivalent.

Marie's tacit acceptance of adultery comes as something of a surprise to the modern reader. While concubinage was socially acceptable in the Twelfth Century, it would seem that true love was more important to Marie.

Another possible explanation for this situation is the example set by Eleanor of Aquitaine, the English Queen. She was a modern woman in the sense that she flouted many rules, even divorcing King Louis VII of France, a man whom she did not love.

To Marie it is natural to love, so she finds it surprising that the hero of the *Lai Guigemar* is incapable of love. She puts it down to an aberration of Nature:

De tant i out mespris nature

Kë ine nul' amur n'out cure. (lines 57-58)

Marie describes the chamber in which Guigemar's mistress-to-be is incarcerated. A mural depicting Venus, the goddess of love, shows her instructing lovers how they should behave:

Cument hom deit amur tenir (line 237)

She is seen to be throwing Ovid's book the *Remedia Amoris* (Walter 2000:438) into the fire. In this book Ovid teaches how love can be suppressed. The fact that Venus is seen

throwing Ovid's book into the fire indicates that she (Venus) does not approve of what he recommends.

Coment chascun s'amur estreine. (line 240)

Marie seems to be saying that it is not only Venus who doesn't approve of suppressing love, but also the men and women of the Twelfth Century.

After equating love with a wound to be found inside the stricken person, Marie says that it will last a long time because it has been inflicted by Nature, i.e. love is a natural state. She then turns her attention to those people for whom Love is merely a joke and who boast about their conquests. This is not true love, but folly. She exhorts those who have found a loyal lover to love and serve him or her (lines 483-495). Here Marie has expressed her own opinion.

She continues discussing this theme, but does this by putting the words into the mouth of the hero of the *Lai*. In order to persuade the lady to enter into a sexual relationship with him immediately, Guigemar explains to her that a woman of easy morals would expect her suitor to woo her for a long time, in order to convince him that she has not had other sexual relationships. However, an honest woman, having found her true love, will bestow her favours on him immediately (lines 515-523). In many of the *Lais*, the lady joyfully accedes to her lover's request without saying a word, as she does in this case:

E li otreie sanz respit

L'amur de li, e il la baise. (lines 528-529)

and

Ensemble gisent e parolent

E sovent baisent e acolent,

Bien lur convienge del surplus,

De ceo que li autre unt en us! (lines 533-534)

The same situation occurs in several of the other *lais*:

Le Fresne:

Cele que durement l'amot

Bien otriat ceo que li plot: (lines 289-290)

Lanval:

When Lanval meets his fairy mistress:

S'amur e sun cors li otreie, (line 133)

Laüstic:

Even when the lovers are only able to gaze at each other, separated by a high wall, their desire is clear. They are happy to be able to bestow presents on each other but they cannot be together:

Fors tant k'il ne poënt venir

Del tut ensemble a lur pleisir; (lines 47-48)

Milun:

The young woman sends a messenger to Milun, saying

..... si li plest, el l'amera (28)

i.e. she will give him her love, with the result that she is soon expecting his child:

Tant i vint Milun, tant l'ama

Que la dameisele enceinta. (lines 53-54)

Chevrefoil:

Marie says of Tristram:

..... ki eime mut léalment,

Must est dolenz e trespensez,

Quant il nen ad ses volentez. (lines 22-24)

It is rare that lovers do not consummate their love immediately: this situation occurs in two *lais*: *Yonec* and *Eliduc*.

Delez li s'est couché al lit;

Mes il ne vout a li tucher

[Ne] de acoler ne de baisier. (Yonec lines 166-168)

The very fact that Marie mentions this restraint on the part of the lover is significant: it is unusual! However, this situation does not last, as Yonec is the product of Muldumarec and the young woman.

Perhaps because of Eliduc's sense of guilt and his desire to be faithful to his wife in spite of his love for Guilliadun, he makes no attempt to indulge his desire for her.

*Mes n'ot entre us nule folie,
Joliveté ne vileinie:* (lines 575-576)

Marie also makes it clear that sexual favours can be used as a bargaining chip: the Queen says to Lanval:

*Tute m'amur poëz aveir,
.....
Ma drüerie vus otrei;* (Lanval lines 265-267)

Bisclavret's evil wife, in order to persuade her suitor to help her says:

*M'amur e mun cors vus otrei,
Vostre drue fetes de mei!* (Bisclavret lines 115-116)

Although the foregoing are not *proverbs* or *sayings* in the pure sense of the word, they are nevertheless summations of Marie's awareness of men and women's contemporary behaviours. Nowhere does she express approval of this behaviour; she merely records it. However, one gets the feeling that Marie does in fact approve of genuine love, even if it is adulterous. The only *Lai* in which one becomes aware of her disapproval is in *Equitan*. In this *Lai* the situation differs from that found in the other *Lais*: the King is filled with lust, rather than love. This leads to a conspiracy to murder his mistress's husband. That is why Marie says in the opening line:

*Cil met[ent] lur vie en nu[n]cure
Que d'amur n'unt sen e mesure;* (lines 17-18)

An examination of the *proverbs* found in Marie's *Lais* will indicate another important reason for which she wrote these tales: to convey a moral lesson. Some lessons are explicitly stated; others are implied and leave the reader to extract the moral from the story.

1. Guigemar:

On loyalty

Ki un en peot leal trover,

Mut le deit server e amer

[E] estre a sun comandement (lines 493-495)

This is an injunction to those who love, to remain faithful. Marie had probably experienced some form of betrayal by someone whom she loved. She intimates this in the *Prologue* when she says that one should undertake a difficult task so as to remain free from *grant dolur* (line 27).

2. Equitan:

2.1 On Love:

Cil met[ent] leur vie en nu[n] cure

Que d'amur n'unt sen e mesure; (lines 17-18)

Marie's message is clear: when in love, one should be prudent, never going to extremes. This is another aspect of love which Marie is investigating and on which she feels confident to give advice, considering her own experience. Love should never become an obsession and drive one to act foolishly, as such actions could have disastrous results.

2.2 On loyalty:

Meuz vaut un povre[s] hum lëals,

Si en sei ad sen e valur,

[E] greinur joie est de s'amur

Quë il n'est de prince u de rei,

Quant il n'ad lëauté en sei. (lines 138-142)

Marie amplifies the idea which she expressed in *Guigemar*. Loyalty, above all, is to be cherished in a relationship. It is far more valuable to have as one's companion a poor man who is loyal than a King who will betray one. Again she appears to be speaking from personal experience.

3. Le Fresne:

On honesty

Ki sur autrui mesdit e ment

Ne seit mie qu'a l'oil li pent, (lines 87-88)

Although this *Lai* tells the tale of an imprudent woman who maligns her neighbour, it seems that Marie intends the reader to interpret her lesson in a much wider sense. One never knows, she says, what the consequences of spreading malicious tales about others could be. Again, she is probably speaking from experience.

In the other *Lais* of the collection the moral is implicit: the reader has to deduce the message from the content of each tale.

4. Bisclavret:

On betrayal

The moral of this story is clear: evil will be punished. However, Marie specifies the kind of evil which she has in mind: betrayal of one's loved one. By means of cajoling and flattery the evil woman in this *Lai* extracts her husband's secret and immediately betrays him. Marie's views are very clear: betrayal cannot be countenanced, it must be punished.

5. Lanval:

On sincere love

The message of this *Lai* is clear: forgive those you love even if, in the heat of the moment, they have said or done something which offends you. This is clearly illustrated by Marie's treatment of the traditional Melusina/fairy motif. Usually when the hero

unthinkingly breaks the taboo which the fairy has imposed, she disappears and is never seen again. In this tale the fairy (who has been *humanised*) returns to rescue Lanval. She has recognized that he spoke in haste and is willing to forgive him.

6. Les Deus Amanz:

On the tragedy of love

Marie is clearly sad about the outcome of this tale, but she is realistic enough to realize that young people, particularly lovers, may sometimes act foolishly as a result of pride and a desire to prove their worth. Love does end tragically at times.

7. Yonec

On compensation

This tale also ends in tragedy, but the young man born of the love between the Hawk-Knight and the heroine brings happiness and stability to Maldumarec's people.

8. Laüstic:

On constancy

Marie indicates in this *Lai* that in the face of adversity, constancy can triumph. The two lovers will never meet, but in spite of their sadness, they will treasure what little they have had.

9. Milun:

On instinctive love

Just as Milun was able to feel an instinctive affection for the unknown young man, so members of the family, in spite of differences of opinion, should stand together.

10. Chaitivel:

On indecisiveness (in love)

If one has to make a choice, it is essential to be decisive or one runs the risk of losing everything.

11. Chevrefoil:

On true love

The message in this *Lai* is crystal clear: it is possible to love unreservedly. Tristram writes to Iseut

Ne vus sanz mei, ne mei sanz vus. (lines 77-78)

12. Eliduc:

On unconditional love

Although it appears to be somewhat unrealistic, the message in this *Lai* is clear: it is possible to love so much that one sacrifices one's own happiness to ensure that of one's loved one.

Love is the thread which runs through and unites all the *Lais*. However, Marie makes the reader aware of many kinds of love, the most frequent being the genuine love between a man and a woman. This erotic love is portrayed in *Guigemar*, *Lanval*, *Yonec*, *Laiüstic* and *Eliduc*.

There are instances of young women married to old unattractive men. The *malmariée* remains with her lustful possessive husband until a young virile Knight rescues her. This situation occurs in *Guigemar*, as well as in *Yonec* when the heroine escapes from her aged husband with the help of the metamorphosed Hawk-Knight.

Love of fame and glory is to be found in *Eliduc* and *Milun*. Although he is already married, Eliduc, a mercenary soldier, falls in love with the daughter of the King of Brittany and this love eventually supersedes his desire to shine in battle. Milun too after realizing his son is his unknown opponent is no longer driven by ambition.

Maternal and filial love finally triumph in *Le Fresne* and *Milun*. Filial love triumphs when Milun's son, although the stonger opponent, realizing that his adversary is his father, refrains from killing him and is reunited with his family. *Le Fresne*'s mother,

recognizing her daughter, is overcome by maternal love and instead of sending her away, arranges for her to marry Gurun.

Pure, unadulterated love ending in tragedy is to be found in *Les Deus Amanz*. The young suitor refuses to take the potion which will ensure success and chooses to die if he cannot rely on his own prowess.

Platonic love is shown by the Abbess in *Le Fresne* when she agrees to look after the abandoned baby, Le Fresne. This *Lai* is also imbued with with divine love, *agape*, present in the actions of the Abbess. In *Bisclavret* it is evident that the King's love for the werewolf is perceptive and pure.

An interesting example of lack of love i.e. the inability to love is clearly demonstrated in *Guigemar*. Fortunately he does fall in love at a later stage of his loveless life.

Chevrefoil deals with the rather unrealistic practice of courtly love.

Although one would expect all the *Lais* to deal with what is probably the most important emotion, namely the love between a man and a woman, it is interesting to note that Marie de France has covered practically the whole gamut of the emotion which we call love.

A grouping of the type of Metamorphosis found in each *Lai*

In this section I intend grouping the various kinds of Metamorphoses present in the *Lais*, showing a humanization of some of the traditional themes which, in turn, result in concomitant narrative metamorphosis.

Yonec: the *Merveilleux* plays a significant part in this *Lai*. Firstly, there is a reversal of the metamorphic sequence of change. In most fairytales it is the human being who is changed into an animal, and not vice versa. Here the Hawk-Knight becomes a handsome young man. In spite of his being magic, he is not immortal as is usually the case with beings from the *Autre Monde*. Another break with tradition occurs when the ring, a

traditional motif, is used to induce the lady's husband to forget what has happened, rather than to produce a magic change of some sort. The two modifications, the Hawk-Knight being mortal and the ring not having the traditional magic powers, lead to a tragic end to the tale and result in a narrative Metamorphosis: in spite of its elements of magic, the folktale is undergoing transformation into a short story. Its *genre* has mutated.

Bisclavret: falls into the same category as *Yonec*. A motif typical of the folktale is present – a metamorphic change. The *Merveilleux* is very much in evidence. The picture which Marie paints of this human being/werewolf differs completely from the traditional conception of the savage creature of other tales. This werewolf has been *humanised*, something which the King recognizes. By contrasting Bisclavret with his evil wife who betrayed him, Marie is emphasizing the beastliness of the woman and the humanity of the werewolf. The traditional motif has thus been inverted and finally justice is seen to have been done when Bisclavret bites off his wife's nose, making her look like a savage creature, a characteristic usually associated with werewolves.

Lanval: once again the *Merveilleux* plays a part in this tale. Marie has modified a traditional motif. Instead of the hero's being conducted to the fairy by a white stag, Marie uses two beautiful young girls to lead the hero to the fairy. However, the more important change which Marie makes concerns the breaking of the taboo and the fairy's subsequent behaviour. Lanval is told not to reveal their love to anybody, but when he does break the taboo, the unexpected happens. The fairy, instead of disappearing, comes to his aid and takes him with her to Avalon. The magic being has been humanised, ensuring a happy ending. Here, too, in spite of the presence of several traditional folktale motifs, the *Lai*, has a distinct leaning towards the short story genre.

Guigemar: In this *Lai* again the presence of the *Merveilleux* is very strongly felt. This time Marie uses the doe, with the horns of a stag, to give Guigemar a message. Guigemar is unable to fall in love, but when he meets this magic creature, she is endowed with the ability to speak and tells him that he must find a woman who is willing to suffer for love. She will cure him of his physical and emotional pain. The animal does not lead him to a

fairy, as is customary in folktales, but points the way to his healing. In this way Guigemar meets a human being who opens his heart to love. Marie has used the traditional folktale motif, modified it and ensured, in this way, that the tale becomes an embryonic short story.

Les Deus Amanz: This is probably the *Lai* which is closest to the short story *genre*. It has all the makings of a folktale – a King, a princess, a suitor, an impossible task set by the King and a magic potion. However, at the climax of the tale, the young man refuses to use the magic potion, relying rather on his own strength. He does not succeed in his task, thus the ending is sad as both the protagonists die, yet the tale is very satisfying to the reader. It is genuine and, in the end, neatly fits the short story *genre* because of Marie's clever *turning around* or modification of the plot.

Le Fresne: The only trace we have of what is considered to be a motif typical of the *Merveilleux* is the ring which the mother attaches to the baby. This, together with the beautiful piece of brocade which accompanies Le Fresne, serves as a means of recognition. There is thus no trace of the *Merveilleux* in this tale, but what is magic, is the way Le Fresne's mother's heart softens when she recognizes her daughter. Marie changes the traditional ending of a story such as this. In a traditional tale the end determines the development of the tale: the point to be established comes at the end of the tale and is there to prove it correct. It is a moral thing. Short stories are not moral, they are human. In the folktale the wicked mother would have been punished, but in Marie's version all is forgiven and ends well. The evil stepmother/mother motif has undergone a humanization.

Milun: The ring in this tale serves the same purpose as that which is found in *Le Fresne*. It serves merely to identify Milun's son. This, too, is the tale of psychological and emotional Metamorphosis. Milun, the bravest of all warriors is furious when he hears about a young Knight called *Peerless*. Up to this point Milun has always been considered to be the bravest and best, but his reputation is being threatened by the young Knight. He is determined to meet him and defeat him. However, the *Lai* clearly reveals how paternal

love can overcome personal rancour. When Milun and the young man meet, the older man immediately feels a certain affection for the young Knight. The young man, not knowing that his opponent is his father, is generous when, after unseating Milun, he helps him up. When Milun recognizes the ring, his feelings are justified: his initial inexplicable feelings and the young man's kind actions have brought father and son together. Both have undergone an inner Metamorphosis - the son is no longer so eager for victory and the father is no longer angry that another Knight enjoys such a fine reputation. These feelings are clear and this enrichment of the story once again illustrates the gradual change of *genre*.

Laüstic: The non-existent nightingale of the title metamorphoses /changes into something real – it is turned into the token of the love between the young woman and her neighbour, the couple who are fated never to meet. Her husband throws the dead bird at her and the blood makes a mark on her garment exactly where her heart beats. She sends the dead bird, wrapped in a cloth on which she has embroidered their story to her *lover*. He, in turn, has a beautiful jewelled box made for the bird in order to carry their love close to his heart. The bird has thus acquired, not only a symbolic meaning, but is real proof of their love.

Eliduc: The Metamorphosis which takes place in this *Lai* is once again both emotional and psychological. Eliduc, married to Guildelüec and fiercely loyal to her, goes to England as a mercenary soldier. It is here that his moral Metamorphosis takes place. Guilliadun, the King's daughter sends Eliduc tokens of her love and gradually Eliduc's resolve weakens and he falls in love with her. She becomes more assertive and he, very much in love, is incapable of telling her that he is already married. Once Eliduc and Guilliadun arrive in Brittany and Guildelüec becomes aware of the situation, she grows more and more saintly, even resuscitating Guilliadun who appears to have died. Guildelüec organizes the marriage between her husband and Guilliadun, having had her own marriage annulled. All of them renounce the world; Guildelüec and Guilliadun take the veil and Eliduc retires to a monastery. Marie has depicted the Metamorphosis of

Guilliadun and Eliduc's characters, thus, once more, illustrating her ability to modify the *genre* of the *Lai*.

Equitan: This *Lai* shows very clearly how, by the Metamorphosis of the emotions of the hero, the original folktale has been modified and has changed its *genre*. By depicting Eliduc's moral degeneration, this folktale has been turned into a farce. Equitan, the King is in love with his seneschal's wife and will do anything to win her love. It is she who suggests that Eliduc and her husband should take their baths side by side. She will fill her husband's bath with scalding water which will kill him. However, things do not work out this way and Equitan and the seneschal's wife die in a ludicrous manner. Once again, Marie has succeeded in effecting a Metamorphosis of *genre* by drawing a very clear picture of the licentious King and the ambitious, unscrupulous seneschal's wife.

It is clear that Marie did not simply write down the tales as she heard them, but using the material as a starting-point, she drew a picture of well-rounded characters and adapted the traditional motifs, including the *Merveilleux*, to effect a change of *genre*. The short story was starting to emerge.

Chapter 5

The function and meaning of Metamorphosis in the *Lais* of Marie de France

A brief recapitulation of some of the main issues discussed in Chapter 2 is necessary in order to clarify my conclusions. A discussion of several other aspects has been added.

The following aspects will be discussed:

- i) Modifications of the roles played by women.
The beginning of the Crusades would result in noblewomen playing a greater role in the running of their estates
- ii) It became possible to travel more widely, with the result that ideas and skills were spread. These changes created a certain *Zeitgeist*, enabling Marie to break free (Paris 1800:92) from the written tradition in Latin, with an emerging written literature in the vernacular.
- iii) Although there is no written evidence, it is likely that Marie spent considerable time at the court of Henry II of England and his Queen, Eleanor of Aquitaine, both of whom were strong people with innovative ideas. Eleanor was one of the really powerful and authoritative women of the time. Alison Weir describes Eleanor: she “grew up to be an energetic and consummate sportswoman.”

She continues “The court in which Eleanor grew up was sophisticated and highly civilized ... Her patronage of poets and writers in later life suggests that she was captivated early on by the troubadour culture that pervaded society in Poitou and Aquitaine” (Weir 2001:13). (Weir 2001:14). She certainly was very different from other women of that time, which would have interested Marie de France once she came into contact with Eleanor at the English Court.

Henry II of England was a remarkably astute man who “created a monarchy of enduring strength and an empire that crumbled soon after his death” (Hoyt 1976:244).

These two remarkable people – Eleanor, a forceful and independent woman and Henry, a powerful and fearless King could have influenced Marie and encouraged her to think and evaluate. This concept has been discussed at some length in Chapter 2, but it must be mentioned in the context of this chapter in order to understand Marie’s purpose in writing her *Lais*, as courtly love plays a significant part in several of Marie’s *Lais*.

- iv) Having situated Marie de France in this historical and social context, the question arises: what was the literary context of the period in which she produced the *Lais*?

During the Twelfth Century Latin retained its importance, as it was the language of the church, the courts and the monastic schools. However, only the privileged few were able to read and write in Latin. Several *Romans Antiques*, such as the *Roman d’Alexandre* (c.1150) and the *Roman de Thèbes*, as well as the *Roman de Troie* by Benoît de Sainte-Maure appeared. These were destined for the consumption of the aristocrats.

Chrétien de Troyes, a contemporary of Marie de France, related many of the tales centered around King Arthur and his Knights. These stories were also destined for the aristocracy.

Satirical literature made its appearance in the Twelfth Century in the form of the *Roman de Renard* and the *Fabliaux* (Lagarde 1970:77). These latter works were very much appreciated by the bourgeoisie.

In all probability Marie came into close contact with the *chansons courtoises* sung at the courts of the nobles, a genre “dont les troubadours passent pour être les

inventeurs” i.e. which were probably *invented* by the troubadours (Dragonetti 1979:7).

Both the *troubadours* and the *trouvères* composed and sang love poetry. The troubadours were attached to the courts of the nobles in the South of France, while the *trouvères* composed their songs in the North. In the Introduction and Conclusion to his work Dragonetti defends the *oeuvre* of the *trouvères* by specifying the techniques used in the composition of their songs.

The compositions of the *trouvère* are often compared unfavourably with those of the *troubadours*. Dragonetti introduces his defence of the *trouvères* by saying that critics are mistaken in assuming that their songs were a mere feeble imitation of a genre in which only the troubadours showed any sign of originality. (Dragonetti 1979:7). They were not to be considered monotonous or lacking in originality: he insists that the poets were obliged to obey certain rules in order to develop a good style. He says “Rhétorique est tout ce qui se rapporte aux moyens d’écrire et de parler selon certaines règles” (Dragonetti 1979:539). He continues his defence: these rules played a constructive role in the composition of their poems. Invention of a song for the poet consisted of selecting two or three themes typical of the lyrical tradition of the time. He concludes that “la réussite reside dans la seule application adroite des règles” success, he says, depends on the skilful application of the rules (Dragonetti 1979:580). In short he defends the poets of the North, saying that their songs were not merely imitations of the lovesongs sung by the *troubadours*. According to him, they obeyed strict rules and he believes that their success was due to the fact that they could apply these rules successfully and produce beautiful lovesongs.

It is not surprising that Marie de France did not choose this tradition with its strict rules, but preferred to explore an oral tradition which offered interesting avenues to explore and transform. She had been exposed to the influence of two highly intelligent and innovative people at the court of Henry II, as well as being a product of the *Zeigeist* of the time. Marie’s choice marks her as an original thinker, having a particular mindset which encouraged her to search for a new approach.

An analysis of the individual *Lais* follows in which I shall examine in how far they conform to the theories on the nature of the folktale and in which respects they differ.

Living in the Twelfth Century, a time in which so many changes were occurring, Marie de France undoubtedly felt the urge to bring about change. In order to do this she made use of the material of traditional Breton folktales and, writing in verse in the vernacular and using more sophisticated narrative devices than those used in the originals, she intended to produce interesting stories which would please and instruct her audience.

In addition it would seem that, either by inserting succinct moral *messages* or by allowing the members of her audience to draw their own conclusions from the outcome of her tales that she wished to modify the behaviour of those among whom she lived. For the most part her *lesson* is subtle, but at times she uses her authorial voice to warn her audience of the consequences of unacceptable behaviour.

The central theme of her *Lais* is love. In this respect an interesting fact to note is that, although several of her *Lais* tell the story of adulterous behaviour, Marie's attitude is ambivalent. However, there is a hint of approval in the tales in the *Lais* in which one of the partners has been unfairly treated – usually a woman in a loveless marriage. The only *Lai* in which she openly expresses her disapproval is *Equitan*, as his behaviour cannot be condoned or even accepted.

In each of the *Lais* the traditional pattern is largely followed as far as the external structure is concerned. The folktale *motifs* within the tales serve to drive the narrative forward: there is constant movement. However, where the real Metamorphosis occurs is through Marie's perceptive description of the emotions which drive her characters i.e. she supplies the motivation for their actions: they are no longer the flat, traditional characters of the folktale, but living beings. As a result of this innovation a change in *genre* is occurring: Marie is transforming the raw material of the folktale into something else – each *Lai* is on the verge of becoming a short story. The real Metamorphosis is the

transformation of the genre. The folktales are no longer pure folktales, but embryonic short stories.

Guigemar

Marie prepares the reader for the *extraordinary* when she introduces the hero of the *Lai* Guigemar, saying that although he is *sages e pruz* (line 43) and beloved by all, Nature has made the extraordinary mistake of causing him to be indifferent to love. This is the very reverse of what the traditionally brave, admired hero ought to feel. This situation fits neatly into the folktale pattern. Both Lüthi and Röhrich's theories apply: according to Röhrich, the tale usually begins with a situation of disorder; according to Lüthi's definition the initial situation is one of *Schwierigkeit*: difficulty. Something must happen.

Guigemar encounters a strange creature - a doe with the horns of a hind: the traditional folktale *motif* is introduced. He wounds her and is wounded in return by his own arrow ricocheting. This is the first step towards his *cure*, the beginning of awareness. The animal tells Guigemar that he can only be cured by a woman who is prepared to suffer for love. All the components of the *Merveilleux* are there, but there is a reason for this: the Knight who does not know how to love will have to find a woman who will suffer for love in order that his physical wound may be healed. However, the tale would have stopped here if there had not been a further development, so a new *motif* is introduced. Once again, Marie has recourse to the *Merveilleux*, this time a ship without a crew. The vessel sets sail while Guigemar is resting on a sumptuous bed. We are still in the realm of the folktale.

The reader meets a new character. A beautiful young woman, - married to a jealous old husband who has imprisoned her – she is a *malmariée*. Marie says that the husband

Gelus esteit a desmesure; (line 213)

She is preparing the reader for the motivation for the young woman's future actions. Guigemar and the young wife meet. Guigemar's reaction is revealed

Mes amur l'ot feru al vif; (line 379)

He is so enamoured of her that he forgets his own country.

According to Lüthi's theories the description of an *Innenleben* does not exist in the traditional folktale. Thus Marie's addition is significant – she shows the hero's feelings clearly. This is certainly a huge change: Metamorphosis has occurred: the character is no longer *flat* and puppet-like. There is a glimmer of the short story form.

His feelings are very human:

Tute la nuit ad veillé

E suspire e travaille (lines 410-411)

He recalls the lady's bright eyes and beautiful mouth. He desperately wonders if she returns his feelings. The young wife, too, is suffering

Veillé aveit, de ceo se plaint, (line 429)

Once again Marie stresses Guigemar's fine character. The motivation is clear: he is afraid to declare his love because

Aveit poür, s'il li mustra[s]t,

Que el l'en haïst e esloina[s]t, (lines 479-480)

We are aware of the *inner* struggle of the two young people. Should they declare their love? The detailed description of the inner turmoil of the two characters makes the tale completely human. It gives a *human* touch to the tale, clearly indicating the progress of the original folktale material towards a change in *genre* – the short story in which the characters are *real*. The introduction of a young woman, the wife's companion, (Propp's adjuvant – one of the functions) serves to make the couple's declaration of their love easier, as she can act as a go-between. Their discussions may be considered to be a *débat amoureux* as they were 'debated' at the courtly love courts of Eleanor of Aquitaine and her daughter. The subtle influence of Eleanor's intellect may be seen in Marie's inclusion of innovation in her version of the tale.

By creating a situation in which two people are about to declare their love for each other, Marie is able to insert her *message*, her moral teaching. She says:

*Amur est plai[e de]denz cors,
E si ne piert nient defors.
Ceo est un mal que lunges tient,
Pur ceo que de nature vient;
Plusurs le tienent a gabeis,
Si cume li vilain curteis,
Ki jolivent par tut le mund,
Puis se avantent de ceo que funt;
N'est pas amur, einz est folie
E mauveisté e lecherie.
Ki un en peot leal trover,
Mut le deit server e amer
[E] estre a sun comandement. (lines 483-495)*

This is Marie's yardstick which will be applied in most of the other *Lais*. The short story form is emerging: it still has an external frame, an outside form, with laws and commandments just like the folktale, but it also has a psychological motivation coming from the inside, replacing the *magic* or the *Merveilleux* or *deus ex machina*. The external form has been *breached*, allowing an inner world to emerge.

Marie has, almost certainly added Guigemar's persuasive speech to the original Breton material: Lüthi's theory that "die Handlung des Märchens nicht von innen gelenkt wird, sondern von aussen" does not apply in Marie's *Lai*, as both the characters have clearly shown why they act as they do. She has added depth to her characters: she is providing the motivation for the lady's agreeing to becoming Guigemar's mistress. A woman *jolive de mestier* (line 515) will make her suitor wait, but a *dame de bon purpens* (line 519) will joyfully accept her lover's advances. The author has, in this manner, prepared the reader for the description of the joys or vicissitudes of love which will be at the core of the other *Lais*. It seems that this is the reason for portraying a hero who,

initially, is impervious to love; he changes and now spells out the *rules* for the readers, so that they may be able to judge the kind of love portrayed in each *Lai*.

The tying of the knot in Guigemar's shirt and the wearing of a girdle by the lady are traditional motifs, which belong to the *Merveilleux*; however these actions do reveal the fear of a *real* person faced with the departure of her lover. Guigemar has to leave because their relationship has been discovered. He does not disappear, however, before the lady once again expresses her fear that he might find a new mistress once he returns to his own country. She is a human being, not merely a stereotype.

Now Marie shows us a strong woman who decides that she cannot bear to suffer any longer and thus goes to seek her lover. She takes her fate into her own hands. The stereotyped wife of the folktales, imprisoned by her jealous husband, would not have questioned her lot. This is true love which is finally rewarded. Guigemar has suffered, as has his mistress. They have explored their feelings and have learned to love. One would expect that, in a tale filled with the *Merveilleux*, the hero would have acquired this feeling and ability by some magic potion. However, the *Merveilleux* has been used by Marie merely as a tool to propel the story so as to right the wrong which Nature inflicted on this very human hero. Here both Jolles's theory of justice being done and Röhrich's contention that order has been restored come into play. The outer structure of the folktale has been maintained, whereas the inner world of the characters has been explored, motivating their actions and bringing about a gradual change in the *genre* of the original material. Marie's is a *genre in-the-making* in which the threads of both the folktale and the emerging short story form are interwoven.

Equitan

Marie adopts an ironic approach in the Introduction to *Equitan*. i.e. she knows something about her hero, which the audience is yet to learn. Readers will be led to discover that appearances are deceptive. Initially it appears that Equitan is a man of similar moral fibre to Guigemar: firstly, he is tacitly identified with the noble Knights of Brittany, who composed the tales. Equitan is said to be *curteis* (line 11) and *mut amez en sun país*,

(line 14), just like Guigemar. However, one gets a hint of what is to come when Marie says of him *Deduit amout e drierie*, (15) immediately followed by a warning:

Cil met [ent] lur vie en nu[n]cure

Que d'amur n'unt sen e mesure; (lines 17-18)

She subtly contrasts the King with his worthy seneschal who is *pruz e leal*; (line 22) and has, in fact undertaken all the King's duties, while Equitan pursues a life of pleasure.

This is a reversal of roles. The lady, the seneschal's wife, who is to become Equitan's mistress, is also described in an ironic manner: she is *curteise e sage*, (line 51). We shall discover that she is capable of base actions. Like that of the King, her propensity for committing evil deeds will emerge. However, only the author is aware of her true nature at this stage. Once again it will become clear that appearances are deceptive.

Significantly, Marie concentrates on a description of her external beauty, perhaps hinting that she does not possess any other attributes. Equitan, the libertine, falls in love with her.

Marie clearly reveals the King's state of mind when trying to decide his course of action in order to succeed in seducing the seneschal's wife. To all intents and purposes Equitan is a noble King and a good man. He supposedly experiences a conflict, undecided what to do, but this *conflict* is not genuine. He has already decided that the seneschal's wife is to become his mistress. Marie makes this abundantly clear from the description of the King's feigned hesitation.

We are shown the simulated inner conflict and supposed torment of the King and his spurious wrestling with his conscience: should he become the lover of the seneschal's wife? Marie conveys his hesitation as hypocritical. The reader is perfectly aware of the King's intentions. He motivates his actions by using excuses: he might go mad if he doesn't declare his love; the seneschal is selfish to be the only man to enjoy the lady's favours. Marie is exploring the Knight's inner world and revealing a fallible human being.

Equitan is a fully rounded human being. Again Marie has adapted her material by showing that it does not fit in with Lüthi's definition of the stock folktale character. Equitan's actions simply reflect what most human beings have experienced: he has to find a justification for his actions, knowing full well what he intends to do. Marie has given the reader an insight into the emotions of a *real*, living human. He may not be the most admirable of humans, but the reader can understand Equitan's reasoning, even if he disapproves.

There is an element of farce in this tale – this whole *Lai* has a different tonality from a *Lai* like *Guigemar* which never leads the reader to ridiculing the *hero*. *Farce* is defined as a tale which frequently focuses on a transgression or a character's urge to hide something from the other characters, and the unforeseen chain reaction that results. Usually this outcome is somewhat risible

Farce is distinguished from folktale: "Vom Märchen jedoch trennt den Schwank die Neigung zur Parodie, zur Satire und Entstellung. Der Schwank soll zum Lachen bringen, das Märchen nicht." (Bicher 2000 Online) Thus here the reader has been shown another possible facet of the emerging story and a distinct change of *genre*.

Marie's clever description of the Knight's reasoning is a far cry from what would simply happen in a folktale. We would not be given an insight into the protagonist's mind; events simply occur. The lady's protestations, too, are feeble: she cannot consent because she is of a lower social standing than that of the King. However, in the course of the lady's protestations Marie causes her to utter a sentiment which she wishes the reader to grasp:

*Meuz vaut un povre[s] hum lëals,
Si en sei ad sen e valor,
[E] greinur joie est de s'amur
Quë il n'est de prince u de rei,
Quant il n'ad lëauté en sei.* (lines 138-142)

Another one of Marie's moral lessons follows

*Cil ki de amur sunt nov[e]lier
E ki se aturnent de trichier;
Il sunt gabé e deceü; (lines 163-165)*

Those who are inconstant in love and cheat, will, in turn, be cheated.

This is of course, exactly what will happen to the lovers. Without thinking, again a very human trait, Equitan plants the seed of a plan which will have fatal results, in the lady's wicked mind. Because Equitan is being importuned by his courtiers to get married, he tells the lady that if her husband were dead, he, Equitan, would make her his Queen. Marie has provided the motivation for the husband's demise by causing Equitan's advisors to try to force a marriage. But it has another purpose: to show the devious workings of the lady's mind. She is real! Equitan's revelation of this desire to the lady will set a plan in motion in her mind. It is clear that Marie has carefully orchestrated the end of the *Lai*, each event being motivated by the reasoning of one of the characters, which will result in action being taken. She is persuasive; Equitan is vulnerable – Marie's *enriching* of the original has made the actions believable, if, at times, shocking.

Now we see this astute woman's plan put into action: the scalding bath is prepared and, as it turns out, the lovers are burnt to death, a just punishment and an ironic reversal of what they had planned for the seneschal.

Marie has given the reader a picture of a strong woman, albeit that she is wicked, and has carefully traced the motivation for each act in the protagonists' minds. Her message is clear:

*Tel purcace le mal d'autrui
Dunt le mals [tut] revert sur lui (lines 309-310)*

This final comment is intended to convey a moral lesson: the *Lai* may therefore be classified as an *exemplum*, resulting in change of the *genre* from folktale to *exemplum*. The tone too, has been changed. It is interesting to note that although it does not have the typical *happy ending* of the folktale – at least not for main characters, it does fit in with Jolles's theory that at the end of a folktale the reader should be satisfied that justice

is seen to have been done. The genre has changed; the tone has changed and the *hero* has shown his human failings of a man caught in the trap of a wily woman.

Le Fresne

Paul Zumthor maintains that the “‘exemplum’ nous est connu spécialement en qualité d’ornement prédicatoire ou demonstrative” (Zumthor 1972:392). He explains that its occurrence in works such as *Le Dialogue du Pape Grégoire*, in *Vies des Pères* and *dans des ouvrages de type didactique’*... (Zumthor 1972:393), points to the fact that the purpose of an *exemplum* was to teach a moral lesson. This *Lai* too, is characterized by this desire, but it differs from *Equitan* in that its tone does not change. It is not meant to ridicule, as the farce does. The reader would be mistaken, however, to think that this is merely a moral tale – it also demonstrates clearly Marie’s ability to depict *real-life* characters and to allow the reader a glimpse of their minds and hearts. Motivation for the actions of the characters very clearly differentiates between one *genre* – the folktale – and another, in this case an *exemplum*.

The knowledge of a folkloric tradition according to which a woman who gives birth to twins has had a sexual relationship with two men and is therefore an adulteress sets the *Lai Le Fresne* in motion. What follows affords Marie the opportunity to express a moral, to examine the traditional view of marriage in the Twelfth Century and to demonstrate the motivation behind the actions of her characters in order to show how a mother’s love will assert itself against all odds. The latter characteristic is the most pertinent, as my intention in this chapter is to illustrate Marie de France’s ability to bring the stock characters of her original material to life, thus bringing about a change of *genre*.

At the beginning of the tale a woman gives birth to twin boys. Her neighbour immediately starts maligning her. This affords Marie an opportunity to state:

Ki sur autrui mesdit e ment

Ne seit mie qu’a l’oil li pent; (lines 87-88)

Early on in the tale she has revealed one of her intentions: to teach a lesson. Inevitably the neighbour, too, gives birth to twins – two girls. Her fear for her reputation and terror of what might happen to her are clearly depicted when she says:

Lasse! ... quei ferai?

Jamés pris nē honur n'avrai! (lines 73-74)

She realizes that she has brought this on herself and that something drastic has to be done. Her thoughts and fears are clear.

Kar jeo meïsmes me jugai, (line 79)

This clearly motivates her decision: one of the babies must die:

Un des enfanz m'estuet murdrir (line 92)

She would rather be accountable to God than to shame herself. The events that follow bring the story of Hansel and Gretel to mind.

A good woman, one of the attendants, promises to deal with the situation. She may be considered to be a Proppian *helper/adjuvant*. One of the babies, wrapped in a cloth of silk brocade, with a beautiful gold ring tied to her arm, is left near a convent. This traditional folktale motif – the introduction of the gold ring and the beautiful cloth – will be utilized in this *Lai* to illustrate the virtue of humility and its reward, as well as to point out that people are not inherently bad; opinions held by the author. So far the story still has remnants of the folktale tradition, for example the problem at the outset, the wicked mother and the golden ring.

The abandoned twin, Le Fresne, grows up in a convent, believing that she is the niece of the Abbess. Gurun, a nobleman sees her, falls in love with her and wishes to make her his mistress. The shrewd young man, after donating a large piece of land to the convent, obtains permission from the Abbess to spend some time there supposedly to receive absolution for his sins. However, Marie is well aware of the desires of human nature when she says:

Mes il ad autrē acheisun

Que de recevoir le pardun. (lines 269-270)

There is a hint of the short story genre when Marie, who understands human nature, implies that Gurun has some other plan in mind. He intends to remain close to le Fresne in order to persuade her to become his mistress. Soon le Fresne and Gurun elope and go to his castle.

Marie draws attention to the fact that, in the Twelfth Century while extramarital sex was condemned in a woman (Hurtig 2001:8), men could indulge in sex outside of marriage. It was unheard of for men to marry their mistresses, particularly if they were not of the same social status. In the feudal tradition of the Twelfth Century, noblemen married noble ladies, mainly to produce heirs; usually love played no part in the union.

Gurun and Le Fresne love each other and live happily, until his Knights, in a similar situation to that of Equitan, start importuning Gurun to get married. Again Marie shows her understanding of human nature – Gurun is motivated to agree to the proposal of his men, because they leave him no choice:

*Jamés pur seinur nel tendrunt
Ne volenters nel servirunt,
Si il ne fait lur volenté.* (lines 325-327)

Marie is astute and understands the human mind. Ultimately, a bride is found – La Codre, Le Fresne's twin sister. She arrives, accompanied by her mother. Their mother is another adjuvant in Propitian terms. She is a human *deus ex machina* as it were. It is necessary for her to be present so that she may recognize the cloth and facilitate the happy ending of the tale.

Marie now hints at what is about to happen. Le Fresne uncomplainingly prepares the bridal bed. Her kind and caring disposition is clearly shown when, because of the shabbiness of the bedspread, she spreads her own piece of beautiful silk brocade cloth over it. The mother is at this moment undergoing a change of heart which she is at a loss to understand. She feels affection for the unknown young woman. The folktale is gradually acquiring a different feeling. The sight of the piece of cloth allows everything

to fall into place – she recognizes that she loves this girl who is, in fact, her abandoned daughter. Marie shows the innate good nature of the mother when she reveals the situation to Gurun. This is a fundamental change from the narrative pattern of the folktale. If a mother is ill-intentioned at the beginning of a folktale, she remains so. In Marie's *Lais*, the mother discovers compassion and love in herself and is unable to carry out the plan which would have been advantageous to her and to La Codre. Without considering the danger to herself or the consequences of her revelation, she bravely and altruistically explains the situation to Gurun. This is no longer a fairytale where the wicked mother/stepmother carries out her plan regardless of the unhappiness or even death of one of the other main characters. This mother is human, willing to accept whatever punishment might be meted out to her. The textures of the two *genres* have become interwoven at this point.

Gurun and Le Fresne are now free to marry, as the mother has recognized their love for each other. A husband is found for La Codre. In a folktale the wicked mother would have been punished. This is the traditional fate of wicked stepmothers; stories like Cinderella, Hansel and Gretel and Snow White all end in this way. However, she is forgiven and lives out her life happily. Order has been restored, but Marie has not deemed it necessary to punish the mother. She has conveyed a message to her readers: humility will be rewarded. She has also adapted the tale to show that everybody has the ability to repent and to reveal that there is some good even in the most misguided of people.

The marriage situation, too, has been examined. Marie paints a picture of what a marriage should be – a most revolutionary idea on the part of the author. This is no mere marriage of convenience, the traditional arranged marriage. This is a marriage for love between partners. Marie has proved that these two aspects can go hand-in-hand, albeit that this is virtually unheard of in the Twelfth Century, as it was customary for marriages to be arranged by parents. The Metamorphosis can again be seen in the intertwining of the folktale motifs and the short story's depiction of more psychologically motivated characters.

Bisclavret

In the *Lai* of Bisclavret as in *Equitan* we are in the presence of a loathsome woman. She, too, is a strong woman whose machinations cause her ignominious end.

There is little doubt that Marie had a good knowledge of the many tales dealing with werewolves and their evil deeds. In the introduction to this *Lai* she gives the reader a description of the typical folkloric werewolf with its voracious appetite and savage behaviour. However, a perceptive reader would wonder why this creature is called a *Garwaf* (line 3), whereas her story is going to concern *Bisclavret*, the Breton name for this animal. The name probably means *dual natured*, as *bis* means *dual*.

Marie adapts the traditional motif of a marauding *Garwaf*. Her hero is called *Bisclavret*, a proper noun. We are given the picture of a bewildered man, Bisclavret who, three days a week becomes a werewolf. He plays no part in the transformation and when he returns to his human form he cannot understand why it is happening, as he is fully aware of his Metamorphosis and his compulsion to divest himself of his clothes before transformation. This is a far cry from the traditional picture of the typical werewolf. Traditionally a werewolf is a terrifying animal which attacks and kills without provocation. In fact, the werewolf is so terrifying because he combines the ‘savagery’ of the beast with the intelligence of the human. In this case, the scale tips towards the humanity of the wolf: his ‘wêr’-side. Very soon the reader becomes aware that it is the woman who assumes the characteristics of a beast: she becomes a *wolf* because of her cunning and cruelty. Again, the story starts with an imbalance that needs to be redressed: Bisclavret’s wife has by her machinations, condemned him to retain his lupine form for ever.

Marie clearly shows Bisclavret’s wife’s scheming, motivating the consequent betrayal of her husband:

Tant le blandit e losenga
Que s’aventure li cunta; (lines 60-61)

The wife also uses her feminine wiles to get the information on Bisclavret's periodic disappearance. Marie knows human nature well: the wife has only to appeal to the other Knight's desire for her in order to persuade him to help her:

*M'amur e mun cors vus otrei,
Vostre drue fetes de mei!* (lines 115-116)

After his wife's betrayal, which results in his retaining the form of a werewolf, the disconsolate Bisclavret seeks refuge with the King. The King senses the werewolf's *humanity* and admires the beast. It acts like a human being, revealing its affection and intelligence. Bisclavret never becomes a werewolf, except in appearance. Marie has cleverly turned Bisclavret into the victim, rather than attributing the actions of a predator to him. She has transformed the folktale motif and the roles of the protagonists. He is the hero, his wife the villain.

Even when Bisclavret attacks the man who has usurped his place as a husband, the courtiers and the King are sympathetic, saying that the animal must have suffered some wrong at the hands of this man and his wife. The King has no hesitation in supporting him. The animal has no way of expressing his feelings verbally, but everybody at the court is convinced that his obvious feelings and strange behaviour are justified. He is, to all intents and purposes, a human being. In this way Marie has inverted the traditional conception of the nature of the werewolf.

Even when taking revenge on his wife, Bisclavret prefers to leave her alive, choosing to make her look repulsive, bearing the mark of her betrayal, by making her look animal-like. He has bitten off her nose and some of her descendants will suffer the same fate. Finally proof of his human feelings becomes evident when he indicates that he feels awkward getting dressed and changing form in public. Even in his transformed state Bisclavret is a faithful, loving and modest being, because he has retained his human sensibilities.

Marie has succeeded in showing how one's perspective can change: the wife sees only the bad in a good man, while the King is aware of the good in a traditionally savage

beast. The reason for the King's behaviour has been conveyed in a very subtle manner. The werewolf is unable to explain the situation, but by Bisclavret's unusually docile, even loving behaviour towards the King and the latter's perceptive and sensitive nature, Marie has achieved her aim. There can be no dialogue between the King and the werewolf, making Marie's feat all the more remarkable.

This *Lai* is particularly interesting as it has reversed the conception of the traditional werewolf *motif* as found in the folktale; Marie preserved the concept as promulgated by both Röhrich and Jolles that justice has to be seen to have been done at the end of a tale. As in *Equitan* a moral lesson emerges: evil will be punished. *Bisclavret*, too, is an example of the genre known as an *exemplum*. It is clear that in this *Lai*, once again, there are elements of the folktale: the situation at the beginning is one of disorder, but in the end order is restored, justice is seen to have been done. However, Marie has carefully motivated the actions of Bisclavret's wife, showing the reader the character of the evil woman instead of merely telling us that she is wicked. This is a genre *in flux* – it is becoming a short story; in this case with a moral.

Lanval

The presence of the *Merveilleux* is very strong in this *Lai*. In fact, it is essential for the unfolding of the tale, bearing the imprint of the traditional *Melusina* stories. The hero, profoundly sad, leaves King Arthur's court after being ignored by the King who neglects to reward his Knight's services. The reason for the King's actions is never explained, but they do serve as motivation for Lanval to leave the court, thus driving the action forward. In Proppian terms, the hero departs. According to Röhrich disorder has been created. We are thus still in the realm of the folktale.

Lanval reaches a river. It, usually a magic place in folktales, serves as the place where Lanval is approached by two beautiful maidens who have been sent to fetch him. In the traditional tale, the magic being which is sent to guide the hero to the fairy is usually a white hind. It may be the fairy's avatar. Here, instead, Marie has substituted maidens.

The format of the folktale has been modified slightly, but so far we are still very much aware of the traditional folktale motifs, in this case the *Merveilleux*.

Lanval, like Guigemar, also encounters a magic being, a beautiful fairy, a feature typical of the traditional folktales. Usually the fairy is rather enigmatic, but in this tale she explains her motivation:

Pur vus vienc jeo fors de ma tere; (line 111)

She has come to find him; this is a motivated, human action. The humanization of the fairy has been initiated.

Lanval falls in love with her, but soon she instructs him to leave. However, there is an important taboo motif. He may not speak of their love to anybody. If he does, he will have lost her for ever. This is typical of the folktale taboo. *Loss or departure*, according to Propp's theory is one of the *functions*. It is a traditional taboo: there is no justification for it except narrative. When it is broken, the story will unfold. This is different from e.g. breaking a social taboo (such as infidelity) which is the breaking of a moral imperative.

On his return to King Arthur's court, Lanval encounters the Proppian villain in the form of the Queen. Because he does not reciprocate her *love* she taunts him, implying that he is homosexual. Although she is odious, the queen is undoubtedly human. This is a clear case of motivation which will elicit a response on the part of the hero. Marie shows once again her ability to create a flesh and blood character. In fact, both the Queen and Lanval react in a predictable human manner: – their reactions are clearly motivated - she has been spurned and reacts in a spiteful manner; he has been goaded to react, saying that even the serving maids of his mistress are far more beautiful than the Queen. This is a very human reaction, if rather unwise.

The Queen, mortified, retaliates, accusing him in the presence of King Arthur of having solicited her favours. Again this is an understandable reaction from a humiliated woman. The break with the folktale tradition is very clear: these characters react like human

beings. The King, very angry, demands that Lanval be tried, as he has slandered the Queen. One of the King's men suggests a compromise: if Lanval can produce this beautiful lady and prove his assertion, he will be vindicated. True to the folktale tradition, Lanval has to admit to himself that his mistress will not appear, as he has broken the taboo. However, Marie transforms the traditional ending. The beautiful fairy arrives and despite, Lanval's rash behaviour, she saves him and takes him with her to a happier place, Avalon. Marie seems to be saying that rash and foolish behaviour can be forgiven and loyalty rewarded. By endowing the fairy with human feelings, she allows the tale to end happily.

This *Lai* clearly indicates Röhrich's definition of the folktale: it begins with a situation of disorder – King Arthur's strange rejection of Lanval, and ends with order being restored. Thus the outer structure of the folktale has been preserved, while the characters in the tale have been clearly depicted as motivated human beings.

Les Deus Amanz

In the *Lai of Les Deus Amanz*, a nascent short story, the rejection of the *Merveilleux*, is significant.

Initially Marie allows the traditional story to take its course. There is the traditional King with his daughter, the Princess. The King, who is possessive and does not want to part with the princess, sets an impossible task for his daughter's suitors: they have to carry her to the top of a mountain without stopping to rest. Fairytales make use of this kind of motif. It is again, as in *Lanval*, a gratuitous test, i.e. one without rational or moral justification.

As in any folktale, the Princess falls in love with a young man and the scene is set. He will attempt to carry her to the summit of the mountain. The young woman takes the initiative: once again the reader is shown an intelligent and strong woman. She is portrayed as a real human being, in spite of the fact that this tale has many traditional elements of the folktale. The King, it is true, is a stock character, but the Princess and her

suitor, on the other hand, although usually stock characters, act in an independent and human manner. They have the ability to reason and make their own decisions. Thus their actions have been motivated.

The Princess urges the young man to fetch a magic potion which will give him enough strength to carry her up the mountain; she eats very little in order to lessen his burden; she dresses lightly for the same reason. She is seen to be a fully rounded, thinking human being, trying to assist her lover in every possible way. However, when the time comes for the trial, the young man reaches the summit, is completely exhausted and dies, having refused the help of the potion. Tragically the Princess, too, dies of a broken heart. This rejection of the help of the *Merveilleux* is almost certainly an innovation on Marie's part.

In many respects, this is an extremely modern tale an example of anamorphosis , a mixture of the old and the new in that it does have one stock character, as well as a traditional setting, but there are also flesh and blood protagonists. One of the stock characters, the Princess, becomes a human being; the young man has always been human.

A striking feature of the tale, which is a fore-runner of the modern short story, is the fact that it ends tragically. Justice and happiness have not triumphed as they would have done in a traditional folktale, thus the genre has been modified. To the reader the end is tragic, but the characters have accepted the inevitable, not been crushed by it. They can therefore not be considered to be pathetic. There is a certain triumph in accepting one's fate as they do. The fact that they are buried on the summit of the mountain and will therefore be remembered once again points to triumph rather than pathos.

Yonec

Yonec is the *Lai* in which the *Merveilleux* features more prominently than in any of the others, and it is also in this *Lai* that Marie most clearly promulgates the Christian faith. This combination is unusual. Initially it reads like a fairytale: the parents of a beautiful young woman arrange for her to marry a rich old man. He keeps her imprisoned in a tower because he is jealous. He is, in fact, imprisoning her both physically and

emotionally as he is an old, sterile man. She longs for a lover and would rather die than spend her life in this way. A Hawk-Knight flies in through the window. He immediately becomes a handsome Knight and they fall in love. Naturally he cannot stay, but the young woman can summon him simply by thinking of him, much in the same way as Lanval is able to summon his fairy mistress. Marie inserts one of the traditions of the Christian ethos when she tells the reader how the young woman regrets not being able to go to Mass because of her imprisonment.

There is more evidence of Marie's determination to include a Christian slant. When the Hawk-Knight, Muldumarec, arrives, the young woman agrees to become his mistress if he can prove that he believes in God. He also suggests his taking on her appearance in order to take communion as well as saying the Creed in her guise. He thus undergoes two metamorphoses of the traditional kind. The juxtaposition of the *Merveilleux* amidst an atmosphere of Christian sacraments is most unusual. These are also elements of the short story form.

Marie has drawn the picture of a trustworthy human being in spite of the folktale element of his initial appearance as a hawk. At the same time she conveys a strong Christian message, creating a blend of the magic and Christian elements. The magic element is very much in evidence when the lovers are inevitably caught and the Hawk-Knight is fatally injured by the spikes which the husband has had inserted in the window through which the bird enters.

Clearly Marie has deviated from the folktale tradition of *flat* characters, which Max Lüthi has emphasized as being typical of the folktale. The author shows Muldumarec's ability to reason and to solve problems. The young woman, too, has the ability to reason, act and persevere. She follows her lover's trail of blood, until she finds him, very close to death. She loves him so much that she says that she would rather die with him than go back to her husband; this is a very human reaction which one would expect in a short story.

Even on his deathbed the Knight has a solution. Telling her that she will bear him a son, he gives her a magic ring which will cause her husband to forget everything that has happened. The magic ring is a traditional motif, typical of the folktale. In other *Lais* such as *Le Fresne* and *Milun*, the ring is not magical, but its purpose is identical: it serves as a means of recognition, vital to the happy ending. In *Yonec*, however, it induces oblivion in the husband, making for acceptance of the situation. The sword, too, plays a vital role as Yonec; Muldumarec's son will kill his stepfather with it. They enter the real world once Muldumarec has died. There is a mixture in this tale of the real and the *Merveilleux*.

The strong Christian orientation of this *Lai* is evident again when the family is instructed to go to Caerleon in order that Yonec may avenge his father's death. They are housed in the abbey and go to Mass. The mixture of the *Merveilleux* and the Christian element is surprising. This occurs when the family finds that Muldumarec, in spite of belonging to the world of the *Merveilleux*, is buried traditionally within the precincts of the abbey.

According to Lüthi there is a fairytale morality, a belief in immanent justice. This allows for a simple solution: the killing of this malevolent stepfather. This is very different from *exempla* or morality plays which are based on civil and religious values. Jolles, too, justifies an action of this kind – by the death of the evil stepfather a wrong has been righted. Röhrich, too, would be in full agreement. This *Lai* again conforms in its outward structure to that of the folktale, but Marie has enriched it by peopling it with characters who reason, even when one of them belongs to the world of magic. This tale is filled with magic, however Marie is moving toward the short story form by including some of its elements. The heroine is very real and is able to take the initiative when a decision has to be made and is even able to find her dying lover. Muldumarec, a magic being reveals very clearly that he has the emotions and the ability to reason of a human being.

Laüstic

The theme and motifs in the *Lai Laüstic* are reminiscent of several of Marie's other ampler *Lais*: in *Laüstic* there is a jealous husband; *Guigemar* and *Yonec* both feature old jealous husbands; the wives concerned are all *malmariées* and all commit adultery, although for the lady in *Laüstic* it is merely adultery of the mind, the desire to commit adultery; *Laüstic* and *Yonec* both concern birds, the one being a symbol of love and the other turning into the lady's lover by the process of physical Metamorphosis.

A young bachelor is in love with his neighbour's wife and she with him. At night they both rise and communicate with each other. Although they are unable to meet, they exchange gifts by throwing them across the wall which separates them. The lady's husband becomes suspicious and asks her why she gets up at night. She replies that it is in order to hear the sweet song of the nightingale. The husband realizes what his wife is doing and, in a jealous rage, has the bird killed, hurling it at her. She is grief-stricken and has the dead nightingale, the symbol of their love, sent to her admirer. It is wrapped in a cloth on to which she has embroidered the story of their love. He puts the dead bird into a beautiful jewelled box.

Robert T. Cargo interprets Marie's *Lai* as follows. "In the lay of Le Laustic, ... we feel that love, quietly, unassumingly, but with certainty, has triumphed over evil. Although it will forever remain enclosed within the hearts of the two, it will endure" (Cargo 1966:165). There is very little of the traditional folktale to be found in this *Lai*; one simply feels that it is a *tranche de vie* and, as such, firmly anchored in the real world.

Milun

Having stated in the Introduction to this *Lai* that in order to entertain one's readers, there should be variation, Marie immediately puts this undertaking into practice. It is the heroine who initiates a relationship by sending a messenger with a ring to Milun, a brave Knight. As the *Merveilleux* plays no part in this *Lai*, this ring is not magic, as it is in *Yonec*. This is the tale of two very human people who recognize each other's worth. The two young people fall in love and the young woman gives birth to Milun's son and,

because she realizes that she will be disgraced should her relationship be revealed, she sends Milun to her sister with the baby and a letter of explanation. She ties Milun's ring round the baby's neck. She has thus revealed an ability to plan ahead, as well as an astute recognition of her plight.

Milun becomes a mercenary soldier. He has never been defeated in battle and is proud of his reputation, a very human characteristic. However, he has one failing: he cannot accept the fact that another warrior, a younger man, bears the name - *Sanz Per* –without equal. This enrages Milun who decides to seek out the young man and defeat him. Marie has shown the reader a very human trait – excessive pride, coupled with the vulnerability of an ageing warrior who fears defeat. This is no *fairytale* hero – he is very much alive.

Milun and his opponent meet in single combat. They are driven by personal motivation, the older man from anger that any other warrior should be thought to be his equal, or his better, the younger from youthful self-confidence. They make their own decisions and act on them, typical reactions of the characters who people the short story.

This *Lai* illustrates a father's instinctive recognition of his adversary as a worthy opponent, as well as his instant strange upsurge of love for the unknown, gallant young man. Inexplicably, Milun's anger is dissipated during the course of the joust. Marie's knowledge of human nature and her ability to depict her characters' reactions are obvious.

The young man is to be admired for his generosity of spirit. When Milun is unhorsed, he helps his ageing adversary to re-mount. He could easily have killed the older man while he was vulnerable, but innate compassion prevents him from doing so. Marie has once again shown a profound understanding of the human being. Their son is instrumental in re-uniting his parents, so the *Lai* concludes happily, conforming to the traditional structure. However, Marie's ability to show clearly the feelings and motivation of her characters, once again, places the *Lai* in a different genre – that of a nascent short story.

Chaitivel

Chaitivel is a comment on the practice of *courtly love*, which was prevalent in the Twelfth Century. Four noblemen court a rather foolish and fickle woman who says that she loves them all equally well. In the tradition of courtly love, they all undertake the most hazardous exploits and three are killed, whereas the fourth is left miserable, wounded so badly that he is unable to continue a normal life. He can no longer father children. Marie clearly indicates that she regards the practice of courtly love as foolish, as she does not show any sympathy for the poor wretch who survives the brave deeds in which he has participated in order to merit his mistress's love.

Although the author has touched on the feelings and motivation of the lady, she clearly indicates the superficial nature of her *heroine*. She is indecisive and when three of the suitors die, she concentrates on her own sense of loss, while the unfortunate remaining suitor is left to bewail his fate. The tale thus ends unhappily for both the remaining characters. Marie clearly lays the blame on her vacillating *heroine*. Once again in this *Lai* Marie has given the reader a clear picture of two human beings. We may not admire the heroine, but this *Lai* very clearly reveals the type of indecisive human being who is the cause of her own unhappy fate.

Chevrefoil

The *Lai Chevrefoil* describes a very brief scene taken from the tragic story of Tristram and Iseut. It hints at the briefest of meetings between Queen Iseut and her lover, Tristram. Her metaphor of the honeysuckle and the hazel entwined and Tristram's message

Ne vuz sanz mei, ne mei sans vus. (line 77)

hints at Marie's attitude, but it also shows the abiding love two people may feel for each other. This *Lai* can only be classified as an anecdote from a much larger work with which Marie was undoubtedly familiar.

Eliduc

In *Eliduc* Marie clearly shows her remarkable capacity to delve deeply into the human psyche. She is able to tell the tale of Eliduc's simultaneous love for two women without its turning into a sordid tale of betrayal. She could easily have called her *Lai Guidelüec ha Gualadun* which would have implied a dastardly tale of betrayal of two good women by one evil man. Instead, she chooses to show the reader the inner turmoil and very real soul-searching of this Knight.

He is married and, having fallen in love with another woman, he does not simply give in to his passions, but wrestles with his conscience, very much aware of his promise of fidelity to his wife. Although it is clear from the content of the tale that he has wronged both his wife and his mistress, Marie has engaged her readers completely, allowing them to share in his plight, hoping that neither of the two good women will suffer.

Surprisingly, this is what happens. Guidelüec enters a convent and, by her selfless sacrifice, she paves the way for Eliduc to marry the young woman whom he loves.

Although Guidelüec's beliefs are steeped in Christianity, this does not prevent her from making use of the *Merveilleux* when the necessity arises. Having seen a weasel using a flower to revive its mate, Guidelüec uses the same flower to revive her rival who appears to have died. The flower immediately revives the young woman. The Christian element and the *Merveilleux* are juxtaposed, but this does not appear incongruous. Again folktale traditions are intertwined with the elements typical of the short story.

At the end of the tale, after having married Eliduc, Guilliadun joins the Abbess Guidelüec in her convent and Eliduc enters a monastery. The ending is not entirely satisfying to the reader of the *happy-ever-after* kind. However, it does satisfy the sense of what is considered to be moral. One could say that again the two *genres* feature side by side.

This is one of the most complex of all the *Lais*, with its mixture of magic and Christian teaching and its unexpected ending. Even though one may not admire Eliduc and regard him as rather egotistical, Marie has made the reader aware of his dilemma by presenting him as very human, unwilling to inflict suffering on his wife, but equally unwilling to

give up his new love. The picture of this complex character once again reveals Marie's mastery and understanding of the human psyche. This is no mere folktale: it is a story about real people whose actions are motivated by real feelings. This then is what is to be understood by *Metamorphosis*: by motivating the actions of her characters and giving them psychological depth, Marie succeeds in bridging the gap between two *genres*: the folktale is in the process of becoming a short story.

Transformative aspects of the *Lais*

1. Concerning love/marriage

One of the aspects of Marie's *Lais* is her determination to challenge some of the conventions entrenched in the society in which she lived. These related particularly to the status of women, the conventions of marriage and the concept of love between the sexes, including the artificial tenets of courtly love. While relating absorbing tales to her readers, Marie also wanted them to become aware of some of these unfair, and even, to her, ridiculous practices.

Marriage

Young girls were often seen as a means of cementing a political relationship by a suitable and arranged marriage. Women had no choice; they had to obey the accepted social practices which dictated that a father could choose a prospective husband for his daughter, even if the groom-to-be was old and unattractive. As a result, there were many unhappy young women – the *mal mariées*. Marie sought to draw attention to this practice and hoped to succeed in liberating women and thus allowing them a free choice of marriage partners. In an effort to achieve this aim she depicted women who sought their own happiness. Clearly none of these women, forced to enter into loveless marriages could be happy. United with the men they loved, they found happiness, even if the relationship was adulterous.

2. Courtly love

By following the tenets of Andrea Capellanus's treatise (*De Arte Honeste Amandi*) the practice of courtly love flourished in the Twelfth Century. This entailed, once again, inequality between the sexes.

Dolliann Margaret Hurtig writes, quoting from Philippe Ménard's essay *Marie de France et nous* (Menard 1995:7-24). "As evidence that Marie does not value the superficiality of courtly love games Ménard judiciously comments upon Marie's penchant for authenticity in love. 'En outre, loin d'accepter aveuglement les rites élégants, mais un peu artificiels de l'amour courtois Marie préfère la spontanéité et les élans d'un coeur sincère.' Love, in Marie, demands equality between the sexes and thus defies the domination / submission precept of courtly love" (Hurtig 2001:1).

3. Gender equality

In her *Lais* Marie subtly advocates equality of the sexes, freedom to choose one's life partner for love, as well as indicating what she considers to be acceptable behaviour. She does this by transforming the stereotyped characters found in the original material, turning them into real people who think for themselves; make their own decisions, not all of them good, allowing for their motivation to become clear.

4. Genre

As we have seen, Marie adapted the original folktales, even modifying their *genre*. This aspect is arguably her greatest contribution to the body of literature in the vernacular or, for that matter, to literature of the Twelfth Century in general.. Her output may be considered to be the bridge between two *genres* – the folktale and the short story. She is thus instrumental in adding a psychological element to the tales, bringing them closer in structure to what is considered to be the short story form. The *Lai* which most clearly exhibits this *tour de force* is the *Les Deus Amanz*. This *Lai* is no longer a folktale, albeit that it retains some of the characteristics: it recounts one striking feature only, not moving from incident to

incident; thought processes and reasoning of the two main characters become clear. The heroine's motivation for her actions is described; the magic potion, so typical of the *folktale* is rejected as the hero is determined to prove himself without the help of a magic agent. Indeed, the tale still retains several elements typical of the *folktale*: the King, a possessive father; the suitors for the hand of the Princess; the wellnigh impossible task set which the suitor has to accomplish in order to gain the consent of the King. However, it also reveals characters endowed with the ability to think and, in the case of the young suitor to attempts to fulfil his task by means of his prowess. The action in many of the other *Lais* depends largely on the *Merveilleux*, nevertheless, even in these tales the motivation, absent from the traditional folktale, is very strong in the minds of the characters and Marie causes them to act as a result of this motivation, after showing the reader very clearly how their minds work. Her material has undergone a process of Anamorphosis: the folktales are becoming short stories as they contain elements of both *genres*.

Of her writing Foster Damon says: "She selected material, combined and compressed it, bringing it up to date ... Her remarkable intuition developed most of the devices catalogued in modern hand-books of short-story technique: exposition, characterization, motivation, setting, economy, proportion, suspense, climax, but above all characterization."

(Damon 1929:974)

He also comments on the theme of the *Lais*: "Real love interests her above all things ... But love was not inevitably the source of all good: it might elevate, it could also brutalize." He continues: "Marie kept in touch with men and women as they actually are She knew her world and recorded it faithfully She classified human beings, not as they should have acted according to code, but as they really did" (Damon 1929:968-969).

Amanda Clossen says of Marie's ability to understand human beings "that she was someone who delved deeper into the human mind than any other of her time. But she is

not only remarkable in her time. Her 'lais' still posses (sic) the charm of the Merveilleux, a fairy-tale world where magic is a part of everyday life. As long as there is love, there will be a place for the works of Marie de France" (Clossen 2005:4)

Marie's own belief system filters through: each *Lai* carries a message of morally correct behaviour. She does not heavy-handedly state a moral at the end of each *Lai*, but allows the *Lai* to speak for itself.

A very important aspect which characterizes her *Lais* is that of the strong presence of the Christian ethos which clearly reflects Marie's own beliefs.

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Conclusion

Initially my interest in Marie de France was piqued by the fact that she was a woman writing in a period which interested me and I thus wished to explore. Gustave Cohen says about this period “C’est là ce qu’on appelle encore parfois les ténèbres du Moyen-Age, où je ne vois qu’éblouissantes clartés d’aube et d’aurore” (Cohen 1943:68). In the Epilogue he writes: “Les ténèbres du Moyen-Age, ne sont que celles de notre ignorance” (Cohen 1943:221). After some research, it became clear to me that the Twelfth Century, the period in which she wrote, was a time of enormous change in most aspects of life, such as the Sciences, Philosophy, Education and Legal Practice. However, the role of women had not changed to any great extent, although the wives of the men who went on the Crusades had to take over the running of the estates.

Feudal customs as embodied in the common law played a very large part in the lives of the men and women of the Twelfth Century. Women particularly were subjected to and affected by the laws of Inheritance and the power of their fathers’ vassal lords, who, in many cases, decided whom these young women could marry. Among the aristocrats it was usually the vassal lord himself who chose a suitable husband for his daughter in order to cement a political alliance.

Sidney Painter states: “... one can say that the feudal custom of England as embodied in the common law gave the lord effective control over the acquisition of lands by vassals’ families and marriage alliance among them” (Painter 1960:16).

No woman could marry without the consent of the vassal lord. If she were unmarried, her father’s lord would have to consent to the marriage and if she were widowed, she required the consent of her husband’s lord (Painter 1960:3).

Other areas of her life were also affected: a woman could not testify in court in a case of the murder of her husband unless she had been present on the scene (Painter 1960:13). In the Inheritance laws, “primogeniture was only partially applied to female heirs. If a man had only daughters, his lands were divided equally between them” (Painter 1960:4).

When it became clear to me that the *Lais* often expressed different views, I wondered why Marie was different from the stereotype 12th Century woman. Neither the social norms governing members of the aristocracy, nor those to which vassals were subjected appear to have affected her position. It is thought that she was attached to the Court of Henry II at some time in her life and that she later became Abbess of Shaftesbury. She appears to have been unhampered by the accepted laws. If one accepts that Marie was attached to the Court of Henry II of England, a cultured and erudite man and the Queen, Eleanor of Aquitaine, a woman who, it seemed, chose not to conform to the generally accepted code of behaviour, Marie must have been affected by what was happening around her. In fact, Eleanor had been married to Louis VII of France and, after having the marriage annulled, became Henry's wife. She was later imprisoned by the king for 16 years for plotting against him. Eleanor appeared to have made her own decisions and carried them through.

On reading the *Prologue* to the *Lais*, one gains an insight into Marie's motivation, as well as getting an inkling of her feelings. She says that one of the reasons for undertaking a task is in order to assuage one's suffering. She is obviously referring to herself, as well as to others who may be unhappy. The Breton tales all have one theme in common: love. Marie explores many aspects of this theme, enriching the stories by giving her characters psychological depth. In *Guigemar* we are shown a man gradually becoming aware of his capacity to love; *Equitan* sketches the way in which love can corrupt a man; *Le Fresne* and *Milun* show the power of maternal and paternal love respectively; *Bisclavret* reveals the instinctive recognition and subsequent affection of a good man for a creature despite its terrifying appearance; *Lanval* shows us the triumph of genuine love in the face of difficulties; *Les Deus Amanz* depicts love in its purest form; *Laiüstic* gives us a picture of unfulfilled love and in *Eliduc* the willingness of one character to sacrifice her own happiness for that of another human being is depicted.

Steeped in the atmosphere of change which predominated in the Twelfth Century, I recalled the many tales of Metamorphosis which had always interested me. Inevitably

this led to the realization that this concept is not limited to literary works alone, but to Life itself in all its aspects. As a result, the chapter on Metamorphosis came into being.

A detailed study and analysis of the *Lais* resulted in my realizing that Metamorphosis of several kinds characterized Marie's writing. She wanted to entertain her audience; she wrote in the vernacular and not in Latin, writing in verse and not in prose. She achieved all these goals, but she also subtly and, at times, pointedly inserted a moral lesson into the *Lais*. However, the most significant example of Metamorphosis of her original material was the change of *genre* which it underwent. Her *Lais* exhibit a humanization of the characters. The characters of the Breton tales now have a psychological depth and this is entirely Marie's doing. She shows clearly the motivation for their actions. They are human beings, ruled by human impulses and motivated to act by their feelings. The folktales on which she drew followed a certain pattern, the characters never analyzing the reasons for their actions; Marie's *tour de force* was to retain the external form of her material, yet allow her readers to see very clearly the reasoning leading up to decisions taken by her characters. These decisions did not always result in a happy ending, nevertheless they obeyed human reason. In short, Marie de France's tales were no longer pure folktales: a new *genre* was being born – the short story.

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