

LE LAI DU CONSEIL

Critical edition

by

**Brîndușa Elena Grigoriu,
Catharina Peersman, and Jeff Rider**

Translation, introduction and notes

by

Brîndușa Elena Grigoriu and Jeff Rider

**Liverpool Online Series
Critical Editions of French Texts**

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Le Lai du Conseil

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Introduction

Dante aurait pu dire de ce lai comme du Lancelot:
Galeotto fu il libro, e chi lo scrisse

— Paulin Paris¹

1. Manuscripts, editions, translation

The *Lai du Conseil* is preserved in five manuscripts, all of which are to be found in the Bibliothèque nationale de France in Paris:²

A = fr. 837 (formerly 7218), f. 33v, col. 1 – 38r, col. 1. This Francien manuscript dates from the last quarter of the thirteenth century. For descriptions of it and its version of the lay, see ‘Manuscrit: France [...] 837’, Barth (pp. 800, 823), Kaufman (pp. 5–8), and Capusso (‘Note’, pp. 29 n. 5, 33–36, 56–57).

B = fr. 1593 (formerly 7615), f. 136r, col. 1 – 141r, col. 2. (f. 133r–138r in earlier foliation). This volume, whose parts were perhaps compiled in the fifteenth century, includes a variety of manuscripts copied by a variety of copyists at different times. Its Francien version of the *Lai du Conseil* was probably copied in the late thirteenth century. For descriptions of the manuscript and text, see ‘Manuscrit: France [...] 1593’, Barth (p. 800), Kaufman (pp. 8–10), and Capusso (‘Note’, pp. 29 n. 5, 36–40, 57).

C = nouv. acq. fr. 1104, f. 60r, col. 1 – 60v, col. 2, 61v, col. 2 – 66r, col. 2. This Francien manuscript was copied at the end of the thirteenth or beginning of the fourteenth century. For descriptions of the manuscript and text, see ‘Manuscrit: France [...] 1104’, Gaston Paris (pp. 29–33), Barth (p. 800), Kaufman (pp. 10–14), and Capusso (‘Note’, pp. 29 n. 5, 41–44). Lines 32–191 of the lay are to be found on folio 60r–60v of the manuscript, while the first 31 lines are found on 61v, and line 192 at the top of 62r, which is the last folio of the gathering. The second and third bifolios of the gathering were evidently inverted when the codex was bound or rebound: folios 56 and 61 (which together form a single bifolio) should in fact be folios 57 and 60, and vice versa. Folios 56–57 are part of a copy of the *Lai de l’Ombre*, whose text is presumably likewise confused at this point. This anomaly is not mentioned by Barth or in any of the descriptions of C.

¹ ‘Lais’, p. 65.

² See Långfors, p. 308.

D = Rothschild 2800 (formerly IV.2.24), f. 165r, col. 1 – 170v, col. 1. Thanks to a note added by its copyist, we know that this manuscript was copied around 1329 in the region of Arras. For descriptions of the manuscript and text, see ‘Manuscrit: France [...] 2800’, Paulin Paris (‘Notice’), Wolf (cols. 139–43), Langlois (*Les manuscrits*, pp. 87–90), Picot (vol. 4, pp. 114–17), Barth (pp. 800–02), von Wartburg (pp. 289–90), Kaufman (pp. 14–18, 203–06), and Capusso (‘Note’, pp. 29–32, 44–57).

E = Moreau 1727, f. 372r, col. 2 – 375v, col 2. This volume is a collection of copies of texts from manuscripts in Paris, Bern and Turin made for Jean-Baptiste La Curne de Sainte-Palaye by George-Jean Mouchet in the second half of the eighteenth century. The above-mentioned folios contain only lines 1–335 of the poem. A note at the beginning of these lines indicates they were copied from the manuscript G.I.19 (later catalogued as L.V.32) of the National Library of Turin, which likewise contained only these lines of the poem (on the last folio of the volume). The Turin manuscript (T), which was destroyed in a fire in 1904, appears to have been a collection of texts by different copyists of Picard origin some of which, at least, seem to have been copied at the end of the thirteenth century. For a description of the Turin manuscript, see Scheler, von Wartburg (p. 289), Braccini, and Capusso (‘Note’, p. 28; ‘La Copia’). Scheler prints lines 1–4, 12–14, and 333–35 of T on p. 33 of his article, and we have taken these lines into account in establishing the text. For descriptions of the Moreau manuscript, see Omont (p. 147), Kaufman (pp. 18–21, 207–21), Braccini, and Capusso (‘La Copia’).

A seventh copy of the lay, now lost, existed in a manuscript (P) in the library of the dukes of Milan in Pavia in the early fifteenth century.³ The description of this manuscript in the 1426 catalogue of the library suggests that it contained only the *Lai du Conseil* in what seems to have been a small, fairly elegant codex.⁴ The catalogue gives the first and last lines of this copy, which suggest it was related to manuscripts A and D. The first line of P — ‘Qui a biaux dis [veut] bien entendre’ — is identical to that of D and differs from that of A only in its spelling of *dis*. The spelling of the last line of P, line 854, likewise resembles that of D (*retrait* in P and D; *retret* in all other manuscripts).

Pierre Jean-Baptiste Legrand d’Aussy published a résumé of the lay in 1779 that includes paraphrases of some passages of the text in modern French.⁵

³ See Thomas, p. 590, n. 61.

⁴ ‘A single small book [...] with wooden covers, covered in green leather, and with a little clasp’ (‘Liber unus parvi voluminis [...] cum assidibus, copertus corio viridi et una claveta’, Thomas, p. 590).

⁵ Legrand d’Aussy, vol. 2, pp. 396–402. In his preface, Legrand d’Aussy writes that ‘Je dois à M. de Sainte-Palaye les premiers matériaux avec lesquels j’ai commencé cet Ouvrage’, and notes particularly that one of the seven collections that de Sainte-Palaye gave him was ‘tiré [...] de [la Bibliothèque] de Turin’, which suggests that he saw the truncated version of the lay found in E. He also notes, however, that de

Francisque Michel printed the text of A in 1836, and noted the variants of B and D (but those of D only through line 268).⁶ Albert Barth prepared a critical edition of the lay based on A, B, C and the variants of D that he found in Michel's collection as his dissertation at the University of Zürich in 1911, and then published this edition in 1912 in *Romanische Forschungen*. Marcia Gay Williams Kaufman printed the text of A in her Harvard University dissertation in 1970, accompanied by the variants of the other four manuscripts (B, C, D, E).

A Dutch translation of the lay based on Barth's edition was published by Ludo Jongen and Paul Verhuyck in 1985.⁷

2. Author and date

The lay is anonymous. Gröber suggested, without giving his reasons, that it was of Picard origin and dated to the first quarter of the thirteenth century. Based on a thorough study of the lay's language, Barth likewise concluded that the poem was composed in Picardy during the first half — 'and indeed during the first decades' — of the thirteenth century. He also noted that the presence of certain Francien forms suggests that the author may have come from somewhere close to the border between Picardy and the Ile-de-France. His conclusions were accepted by Langlois, von Wartburg, and Suchier in their reviews of his edition, and by Capusso.⁸ They are further confirmed by the almost verbatim inclusion of lines 437–53 of the poem in *Cristal et Clarie*, a romance found in a single manuscript dated to the second half of the thirteenth century.⁹ As noted below (p. 107 n. 1), the poet's reference to the 'count of Poitiers' (rather than the count of Poitou) may suggest that the poem was composed after 1225.

Kaufman dated the lay to the late thirteenth century but did not explain her reasons for doing so. She also suggested that the lay 'is essentially a Francien text which was increasingly picardized by subsequent scribes' because the oldest of the manuscripts, A, is the least 'picardized'.¹⁰

Sainte-Palaye had copies of manuscripts A and B (which he cites under their former codes of 7218 and 7615) and that when he found multiple versions of a work, 'je me suis permis, toutes les fois que je l'ai pu, d'insérer dans la version principale que je suivais, les traits les plus agréables qui se rencontraient dans les autres' (vol. 1, pp. lxxxix–xc, xciv).

⁶ Michel, pp. i–iv, 85–145.

⁷ Jongen and Verhuyck, pp. 68–76.

⁸ See Gröber, p. 602; Barth, pp. 814–23; Langlois, review of Barth, p. 58; von Wartburg, p. 289; Suchier, p. 186; Capusso, 'Contro la *bee*', p. 64.

⁹ See *Cristal et Clarie*, 'Manuscrit: France [...] 3516', and *Cristal und Clarie*, p. 2, vv. 39–55. The passage in *Cristal et Clarie* is drawn from C or a manuscript closely related to it, though, which suggests that the dating of the two manuscripts may need to be revisited.

¹⁰ Kaufman, pp. 3, 25, 28.

3. This edition and translation

Neither Michel nor Kaufman offered a critical edition of the lay, contenting themselves with printing the version found in manuscript A, although Kaufman did note the variants of all five manuscripts (and provided very helpful notes and a glossary) in her dissertation. Barth based his edition on the three of the five surviving manuscripts known to him. He also took into account the variants of D printed by Michel, although he appears to have confused them now and again with the variants of B, also printed by Michel.¹¹ His imperfect knowledge of D, as von Wartburg and Capusso have observed, was a particular hindrance when it came to choosing between variants,¹² and his collation of the manuscripts was not always accurate.¹³

As their independent omissions show, none of the manuscripts descends from another. Barth suggested a tentative stemma according to which A and C derive from a common exemplar (x) and B and D from another common exemplar (y).¹⁴ It is true that A and C are closely related and probably descend ultimately from a common exemplar, as do B and D, but there has also been significant contamination between the two families. E may either derive separately from the original, and thus represent a third family, or, as seems more likely, derive ultimately from the same exemplar as B and D.¹⁵ However, the textual tradition of the lay is extremely complex — Capusso refers to its ‘endemic and innate vagueness’ (*‘endemica e connaturale vaghezza’*) — and it is not possible, as Capusso likewise concluded, to establish a clear stemma.¹⁶ It makes more sense in this case to talk about affinities between the manuscripts.

A and C are closely related and offer the most complete and textually correct versions of the text.¹⁷ Michel, Barth, and Kaufman all chose A as the best representative of the text,¹⁸ and Capusso agrees with them.¹⁹ Our independent study of the

¹¹ On Barth’s edition, see Langlois, review of Barth; von Wartburg; Suchier; Kaufman, p. 3; Capusso, ‘Note’, p. 44 n. 23.

¹² See von Wartburg, pp. 289–90; Capusso, ‘Note’, pp. 32–33; ‘La Copia’, p. 9.

¹³ See Capusso, ‘Note’, p. 44; ‘La Copia’, p. 9 n. 13.

¹⁴ Barth, pp. 802–14; see also von Wartburg, p. 289.

¹⁵ See von Wartburg, p. 289; Capusso, ‘La Copia’, pp. 13–14, 16–17.

¹⁶ Capusso, ‘La Copia’, p. 17; compare Suchier, pp. 184–86.

¹⁷ The critical text of the poem printed here consists of 868 lines (including six lines omitted by A). One would have to add, omit or replace 86 whole lines of B if one were to use it as the base manuscript (9.9% of the whole poem), 54 whole lines of D (6.2%), and 10 whole lines of A or C (1.2%). E breaks off at line 335, which prevents it from being considered as a base manuscript, and 22 of those lines in E need to be added, omitted or replaced (6.6%).

¹⁸ See Barth, p. 823; Kaufman, pp. 21–25.

¹⁹ Capusso, ‘Note’, pp. 56–57; ‘La Copia’, pp. 17–18.

unique readings of the manuscripts confirms that A is probably closer to the original than C.²⁰

D and E are likewise related, offer good versions of the text, and are useful when it comes to choosing between variants of A and C,²¹ but E breaks off, unfortunately, at line 335. The copyist of B (or of his exemplar) modified the text of the lay rather freely, although, as Barth observed, B also seems, surprisingly, to preserve the best reading on a number of occasions.²²

We have re-collated all five surviving manuscripts for this edition and have chosen A as the base manuscript. We have adopted the spelling of A, which we have not regularized, and have not included orthographic or dialectal variants (such as the north-eastern feminine direct object article *le* for *la*) in the textual notes. We have, however, respected the spelling of the manuscripts when variants need to be noted for other reasons. When two or more manuscripts share the same variant but their orthography differs, we have preferred the spelling of C, then that of D, then that of B. We have left all numbers as they appear in A and have not noted variants in their representation (we have not, for example, noted *///* as a variant for *.i.*) in the textual notes. We have indicated the presence of decorated capital letters in the manuscript by printing the corresponding letter in bold in the text. For the convenience of the reader, we have resolved all abbreviations, capitalized words in accordance with modern usage, and transcribed *i* and *u* as *j* and *v* when they represent consonants. The added or changed letters are not marked in any way. According to the series' editorial principles, accents have been added to the transcription for metric reasons as well as for the reader's convenience.

When A and C disagree, we have adopted the reading of A if it is confirmed by at least one other manuscript or if there is general disagreement between the manuscripts, but have corrected all but three of A's unique readings when there is agreement among other manuscripts. The three unique readings of A we have not corrected are: lines 71 and 496, which were perhaps hypometric in the original; and line 181, where the reading of BCDE makes less sense.²³ As mentioned above, A omits six lines that are present in BCD and we have included these lines in the text, numbering them 492a–b, 606a–b, and 648a–b.

When A needs correction, we have, when possible, followed the reading of C. When we have corrected a reading found in A, we have indicated the manuscript(s) whose reading we have accepted by noting them to the left of the square bracket (see, for example, the variants to lines 15, 16, and 77). We have also indicated the source of a reading to the left of the square bracket when it seems that confusion about the origin of a reading we have chosen might be possible: when, for example, one of the manuscripts omits a series of lines and a reader might be led to believe

²⁰ By our count, A has 108 unique readings that need to be corrected, while C has 150.

²¹ See von Wartburg, pp. 289–90; Capusso, 'Note', pp. 32–33, 52–56; 'La Copia', pp. 6–9, 16.

²² Barth, p. 802 n. 4.

²³ Compare Barth, p. 837, v. 181; Capusso, 'La Copia', pp. 17–18.

that that manuscript agrees with the reading we have chosen if we noted only the variant readings (see, for example, line 201).

Only on the rare occasions when neither A or C appear to have the correct reading, have we turned to another manuscript.

We have taken into consideration, but have not always accepted, the emendations suggested by von Wartburg and Suchier in their reviews of Barth's edition.²⁴

We have presumed that hypometric and hypermetric lines need correction, although in several instances the evidence suggests that such 'mistakes' were to be found in the archetype from which all the surviving manuscripts descend (see lines 26, 71, 134, 201, 216, 457, 496, 548).

Our translation is broadly speaking source-oriented rather than target-oriented. It aims principally, that is, at helping a non-expert reader understand the Old French text rather than creating an independent, idiomatic version of the text that conforms to conventional modern English usage. When this principle has, on occasion, produced translations that may be a little hard to follow, we have added an explanatory footnote. We have not, moreover, followed this principle slavishly. We have, for example, tried to translate one line of French verse by one line of English prose, and have generally succeeded, but have inverted two lines in the translation or translated a series of lines globally, so to speak, when it seemed to us that a more literal line-by-line translation would probably be the source of more confusion than enlightenment. We have also modernized the shifting Old French tenses into a consistent narrative past tense and have translated proper names by their modern equivalents.

4. Structure and outline of the poem

The *Lai du Conseil* begins at a court gathering on Christmas Eve, and since Christmas is the feast of the Word and the occasion for gifts, the lay tells a story, appropriately, of 'fair speech' and of the most 'beautiful present |[that] Had [ever . . .] been given or granted' (vv. 780–81). The story can be divided into an introduction (4.1), a long discussion about love (4.2), the consequences of the Christmas Eve encounter (4.3), and an epilogue (4.4).²⁵

4.1 Something to learn (vv. 1–27)

The lay begins by telling us that we can 'learn a lot' from 'fair words' if we are attentive to them (vv. 1–3) and goes on to describe a large, merry court gathering on Christmas Eve. The hall is full of 'people of many conditions [...] of all sorts' — especially 'many married ladies | And unmarried ones as well' — and 'carols, fiddles, and romances', and the main topic of conversation is, of course, love (vv. 8–17). The narrator focuses quickly on 'a wealthy and powerful lady', who is repeatedly sought out by three knights in the course of the evening. The lady manages to put off each

²⁴ See von Wartburg, pp. 290–91; Suchier, pp. 186–88.

²⁵ For other ways of dividing up the poem, see Brook, 'Omnia', p. 69; and Maddox. There seems to be overall agreement on the general organization of the poem.

one each time ‘without granting or refusing | Her affection to any of the three. | She parted from all three as a friend’ (vv. 24–26). As she turns away from one of them once again, the lady spies another knight sitting all alone and calls him over to her to advise her as to which of the three knights she should favour.²⁶

4.2 Teaching love (vv. 28–738)

The bulk of the poem is a lesson about the choices women, principally, face in love. The lesson is not taught didactically — this is a conversation rather than a lecture — but it nevertheless answers important questions: why should a woman love? whom should she love? how many should she love? and how should she conduct herself in love?

4.2.1 Why? (vv. 399–667)

“Nothing bad”, the knight-advisor tells the lady, “comes from good love” (v. 231). He tries to capture the joy of love in a long and complicated comparison (vv. 563–662) and concludes that:

‘No heart swells
For land or coin
Or castle or possessions,
And I can tell you this is true,
Like it does for a tender love.
[...]
No joy compares to that
Of a heart that holds a tender love.
[...]
[...] love conquers all and always will
As long as this world lasts.’ (vv. 647–62)

A second reason to pursue love actively, which likewise receives a long development in the middle of the poem (vv. 399–501), is to avoid the arid longing in which so many men and women, the knight says, “waste their youth... | Until they are old and pass away” (vv. 427–28). The knight paints a fully imagined and admonitory picture of a woman who regrets having refused suitors while longing for another man (who evidently showed no interest in her) until “her beauty starts to fade | [and...] her youth is spent” (vv. 462–63). She comes too late to the realization that

²⁶ Maddox has drawn attention to the similarities between our lady’s dilemma and that of the lady in Marie de France’s *Chaitivel* and the differences in the way they react to this dilemma. It may well be that the *Lai du Conseil* is to some degree a ‘critically motivated rewriting of *Le Chaitivel*’ (p. 403) as he suggests, but it seems to us that it is far more than a rewriting of the earlier lay, and that to see it from that point of view only is to miss the greatest part of its art and charm. Beston suggests that the *Lai du Conseil* is more closely related to Jean Renart’s *Lai de l’Ombre* (pp. 26, 28).

she will never know the joy of love and wishes then only that she might be ““burned in a fire”” (vv. 484–92). In fact, the knight tells the lady,

‘If Scripture doesn’t lie to us,
[Such a woman...] goes to live forever
In her house in Hell,
Which she will never leave
As long as this world lasts,
Which has no end or beginning.’ (vv. 496–501)²⁷

This mention of Hell leads the knight to explain — logically? lest the fear of sin and Hell discourage the lady from loving? — at some length and with biblical and theological allusions ““how | A woman who has satisfied her desire for love | Can win Paradise”” (vv. 502–59) through repentance ... at the end of her life.

The three-fold argument evidently convinces the lady who concludes that ““Anyone who does not seek a companion | In order to know immense joy in this world is a great fool”” (vv. 666–67).

4.2.2 Whom? (vv. 28–220)

The lady’s request for advice as to which of the three suitors she should favor, with which the conversation begins, leads to a general portrait of the ideal lover as the good and bad points of each candidate are set forth.

First and foremost, the man whom a lady chooses to love must be unmarried. This is never stated explicitly, but none of the ‘real’ or hypothetical men who are discussed as possible candidates for a lady’s love are said to be married and the candidate whom the lady eventually chooses is not. The other basic qualifications are that a man not be an oaf, but wise, worthy and tender-hearted, amusing, modest, gracious, worldly, courtly, elegant, well groomed, and have good manners (vv. 46–48, 57–65, 87, 92–93, 100–01, 108–10).

Beauty, while advantageous, is not necessary (vv. 73–77, 87, 106). The man should be a good knight (vv. 56–57, 118–22, 196–97), but he need not be conspicuous for his courage; he cannot, however, be a coward (vv. 78–79, 86). He need not be wealthy, although wealth, like beauty, is advantageous, but must manage well what wealth he has (vv. 65–70, 81–85, 94–107, 112–22). An ability to write well — in addition to speaking well — is likewise an advantage (vv. 160–63; compare v. 743).

It is crucial that he be able to keep secrets. ““A braggart””, asserts the knight, ““has no rights | In good love and never will have any. | [...] | For love wants to be kept very secret”” (vv. 132–33, 149). A good lover never betrays his love by word, gesture or glance: ““He hides his intentions in every way | As if he had nothing to hide”” (vv. 166–67; compare vv. 129–58, 164–73, 205–16).

²⁷ For examples of other roughly contemporary works (including the *Lai du Trot*) in which women (and men) who did not love in this world are subject to punishments in the next, see Brook, ‘Rewards’.

Much less is said about what traits are desirable in a woman, but the narrator and knight do drop hints here and there. It is noteworthy that the narrator describes the heroine as ‘wealthy and powerful’ (v. 18), ‘very wise and very noble’ (v. 746), ‘of high status and rich’ (v. 783), and ‘elegant and composed’ (v. 821). She is not described physically, nor is the knight, nor is either one ever said to be beautiful (although the fact that the lady is courted by three suitors may suggest that she is; see vv. 255–58). The knight, in turn, says that nothing can compare for a man with “the delight that comes from being with his companion, | If she is wise and well-spoken” (vv. 644–45).

4.2.3 How many? (vv. 221–353)

As the knight tells it, aristocratic women, at least, find themselves in a difficult position. They have an important social role and social obligations:

‘For by reason and by right,
A woman must be congenial.
Women must be the bridge
For all the joy of the world,
For we have all good things in plenty thanks to them.’ (vv. 304–08)

This role and these obligations expose them socially, however, and

‘If there is a lady or a young woman
Who is young, pleasing and beautiful,
She will soon be wooed by many men,
And wooed in many ways.’ (vv. 255–58)

Women themselves, moreover, naturally desire “the great pleasure | To be had in this world” (vv. 286–87).

An aristocratic woman is thus driven by nature to love, has a moral obligation to play an active social role, and faces the dilemma of being courted by many men. If all men were sincere and the world were generous, this might be an enviable position, but this world is full of both “wicked men” — who woo “without desire”, want “to be loved in a hundred places”, “And are always readier to lie | Than a sparrowhawk is to fly” (vv. 232–49) — and envy, which leads to a desire to speak ill of others that affects everyone to such a degree that the knight doubts that

‘From Cologne to Paris,
[...] there are three
So courageous, so wise, so courtly
That there is nothing in them deserving of reproach.’ (vv. 310–40)

Women are thus faced, on the one hand, with multiple suitors and no way of knowing “which one speaks more truthfully | [...] | [...] when he entreats her | And shows her the path of love” (vv. 281–84). On the other hand, they are

surrounded by sharp-eyed scandalmongers who are always ready to see things in the worst light and eager to spread unsavoury rumours (vv. 294–300, 395–98).

4.2.4 How? (vv. 354–98 and 668–738)

In order to know the joy and pleasure of love while continuing to fulfil her social obligations and without becoming an object of scandal, the knight tells the lady, a woman must, first of all, maintain a good reputation and the good will of others through a reasonable appearance of piety,²⁸ by not listening to gossip, by respecting people according to their moral character rather than their wealth or status, and by keeping company with other noble ladies (vv. 361–73). She must, moreover, hide her thoughts, feelings, intentions and actions from everyone without seeming to do so. No friend, no neighbour, no relative is to be trusted; a wise lady should show the same opaque countenance to everyone, regardless of friendship, fortune, or blood-ties (vv. 384–98). She should not even, the knight adds later, reveal her feelings to the man she would like to have as a companion until she has gotten to know him and is sure he is discreet (vv. 687–91). If she discovers that he is a wise man, she should share everything with him; if she discovers that he is a fool, she should withdraw her affection or, if she cannot, hide it from him as well as everyone else; if she falls in love with a young, inexperienced man, she should provoke his desire and use it to train him to be a good companion (vv. 692–724).

Once she has ascertained that the man with whom she has fallen in love is experienced and discreet, or, if he is inexperienced, once she has managed to teach him to be discreet, she should be entirely open with him:

‘All should be one between the two of them,
Shared contentment and joy
Without reticence or hiding.
This is what love and rectitude require.
[...]
[...] good love must have no trace
Of malice or reticence.
A faithful companion and his loyal companion
Must spend their good life
In joy, in contentment, in pleasure’. (vv. 683–86, 732–36)

4.3 Love and marriage (vv. 739–848)

By this point in the evening and the poem, the lady has learned everything she wants to know. The three suitors have been driven from her mind by the adviser himself, a most eligible companion according to his own criteria, and the lady, who has found him experienced and discreet, decides to ‘bridge’ the distance between them by a sign of her choosing. She understands, for the first time in her life, that she has a present to offer: her love, in the shape of a belt.

²⁸ This is also recommended by the *Lai de l’Oiselet*, vv. 144–60, p. 58.

The text is delightfully ambiguous about the making and the receiving of the gift. Although we have translated ‘La çainture d’entor les flans | La dame a molt sagement prise’ (vv. 764–65) as ‘He took the belt most wisely | From around the lady’s waist’, it might also be translated as ‘She took the belt most wisely | From around her waist’. This ambiguity allows one to imagine her undoing her belt and holding it out to him — a remarkable image — but the lady’s previous command to “‘take this belt | [...] | And give it away as you desire’” (vv. 754–56) suggests the first translation is the better of the two.

In either case, the Christmas miracle can begin: the belt is in the knight’s hands and he is bidden to offer it in turn to the man whom the lady should love. The chain of giving and receiving, already woven through conversation, is subtly fastened. The lady wants ‘to reveal to him | Her great desire and eagerness | To give him her love’ (vv. 749–51): her desire is oriented towards dispossession rather than possession. The knight, in turn, is invited to “‘give it [the belt] away as [he...] desire[s]’” (v. 756). And he has something to give in return: “‘I offer myself as your companion’” (v. 776). The lady’s election is not explicit, but her choice proves wise: the knight, who is ‘sensible | And wise and perceptive’ (vv. 762–63) sees that the gift is a way to celebrate the feast of love, together. The lady’s earlier comment that they “‘are at leisure | To revel in good love’” (vv. 226–27) achieves its full meaning.

The lovers enjoy their love as best they can and when they can for ‘a long time’ (v. 816). She supplies what he needs for tournaments and thanks to her generosity, ‘It often happened that, when evening came, | He won the prize over everyone else’ (vv. 790–91). He comes to see her whenever he can and ‘They were often together | In a beautiful chamber spending their time as lovers do | Many nights, many whole days’ (vv. 807–09). Their love is kept secret and they ask for nothing more, but life is generous and, through her husband’s death, it gives them the opportunity to marry. As soon as her first husband is buried, the widow gathers ‘her whole family’ (v. 822) and marries her lover. The narrator extracts the moral:

Fair speech thus won
The knight this marriage,
Which ennobled and honoured
Him and all his family. (vv. 824–27)

and applies it to his audience (vv. 828–48).

4.4 A prayer for love (vv. 849–62)

The story has reached its happy ending, the lessons have been taught to both the lady and the audience of the lay, and yet something is left to say. The narrator reveals that he is retelling a lay that was first composed by a knight ‘who did not want | This adventure to be forgotten’ (vv. 849–50). This knight is also in love with a lady, but he is not among the happy few and the only gift he receives is longing. Therefore, a prayer is needed: the narrator believes that the miracle of love related in the lay can be bestowed on its lovelorn author as well and asks the readers to join him in a prayer for him.

5. Themes

5.1 Choice and advice

The *Lai du Conseil* plays on the medieval meaning of *conseil* ('counsel' or 'advice'): a deliberation, introspective or interactional, leading to choice.²⁹ Choosing is indeed the thematic backbone of the poem in which a woman learns to choose a man. One may wonder if a thirteenth-century woman — especially a noble, wealthy one — did have a choice. The lay suggests that she can at least choose a companion, if not her husband, as long as the affair is managed 'in private' (v. 392).³⁰ In the course of an exemplary conversation with a lady of the lower nobility in Andreas Capellanus's *Art of Courtly Love*, a book that was sufficiently influential in the thirteenth century to be condemned by the bishop of Paris in 1277, a great lord claims that the affection between husband and wife cannot replace love, and adds that since any virtuous woman must love, she does no harm in gratifying a lover's prayers.³¹ Georges Duby suggested, moreover, that this game of love was a widely tolerated practice that unfolded under the surveillance of the husband.³² The threshold between the way things really were and the way they should have been was easy to cross when it came to fiction and thirteenth-century works show ladies assailed by men (like Ysolt in the *Prose Romance of Tristan*) and men assailed by ladies (like Lancelot in the *Prose Lancelot*). The husband does not prevent the game from being played and reacts only when adultery is *reported*. Literarily speaking, at least, a lady may choose her companion, if secrecy is observed.³³

²⁹ On the sense of *conseil* in the Middle Ages, see Capusso, 'Contro la *bee*', p. 51 n. 1.

³⁰ During the thirteenth century, a woman's right to choose, although not always or perhaps even often real, was at least a subject of reflection, debate and even litigation: 'While Roman law permitted parents to dictate the marriage choices of their children, especially their daughters, canon law refused to concede that power to them. Cases from this period record several successful efforts by thirteenth-century women to assert their canonical right to refuse husbands chosen for them by their families' (Brundage, p. 364).

³¹ Andreas Capellanus, pp. 100–01; compare pp. 106–07 and 184. The book seems to have been popular in Paris in the 1270s, and the bishop Etienne Tempier associates it with dark practices like invocations of the devil, necromancy, and magic (see de Libéra, pp. 189–90).

³² According to Duby, the second half of the twelfth century saw the emergence of 'a new kind of erotic relationship, better suited to the position of the *juvenes* [young, unmarried knights] — that husbands should no longer pay court to ladies, and that they should no longer prevent their wives from receiving "youths" and accepting their services of love' (p. 122).

³³ On a literary representation of the anxiety generated in courtly circles at the time by the difference between one's conduct and how it was reported, between conduct and reputation, see Rider, 'Courtly Marriage'.

The *Lai du Conseil* explores the possibilities of feminine choice, from inclination to love and marriage. Predictably, the lady's husband is 'mean and dumb' (v. 784), but at least he is not jealous or preoccupied by his wife's activities and leaves her alone as often as it pleases her. The lady is free to think, free to choose and act. At the beginning of the lay, she is her own advisor (v. 27) and chooses not to choose among her three suitors, preferring to leave things on a friendly basis (vv. 23–27). This refusal to choose opens the door to outside advice and she turns to another man, the traditional counsellor in courtly poetry (and canon law), to advise her.³⁴

³⁴ See Brundage, pp. 484–85. It is interesting to compare the lay to Garin lo Brun's 'El terminie d'estiu' — the first example we have of a genre of Provençal poems known as *ensenhamen*, or 'teachings', that are devoted to the giving of advice. At the beginning of Garin's poem, whose oldest copy is found in a late-thirteenth-century Italian manuscript (Pierpont Morgan Library, MS M.819; <<http://corsair.morganlibrary.org/msdescr/BBM0819.htm>>), after a description of the season and some general reflections on love, the pensive poet relates that: 'A lady came to me with regard to a difficult matter and asked me to tell her something frankly, out of friendship: namely, by what measures or by what chance, through what teachings and by what attitude a lady could keep herself from behaving badly, how she could be known, loved and treasured for her worth, and avoid all misbehavior according to the norms of courtesy' ('Una domna.m semos | d'un afar perillos | e.m dis, per amiatat, | que li disses vertat, | saber: per cal mesura | o per cal aventura, | ab cal ensinamen, | per cal contenemen | se poiria gardar | domna de folleiar, | que fos de preç saupuda, | amada e volguda, | e segon cortesia | gardes de vilania'; vv. 109–22, p. 412). In the course of his 'teaching', the poet notes: 'This, if you want to know, is what courtesy is: whoever knows how to speak and act well so that one has to love him, and who is never disagreeable; [...] Courtesy lies in giving and receiving graciously; courtesy lies in bestowing honour and in gracious speech; courtesy lies in good company' ('Cortesia es tals, | se voleç saber cals: | qui ben sap dir e far | per c'om lo deia amar, | e se gardà d'enucis; | [...] | Cortesia es en guarnir | e en gent acullir; | cortesia es d'onrar | e es en gen parlar; | cortesia es en solaz'; vv. 427–31, 457–61, pp. 422–23). Even more interestingly, the poet advises the lady: 'And if [a man] comes towards you, show him great kindness; if, moreover, he wants to speak to you, listen to what he says; if he wants your advice, don't forbid him your ear, nor answer him angrily if his words don't please you, for if a lady doesn't like a conversation, she can leave it and part company after a short while. But if the conversation is pleasing to you, my friend, answer him back with beautiful words, for pleasant companionship with laughter and pleasure, when well done, that's the bait for love, through which lovers are drawn and woven more easily into a friendship' ('E si per vos vengues, | faiz li moltas merces; | si de plus vos apella, | escoltaz que favella; | no·il vedez vostr'aureilla, | se el ab vos conseilla, | ni l respondaz irada, | se sos diz no·us agrada, | c'assaz se pot breumen | partir de parlamen | e desloingnar solaz | domna, can non li plaz. | Mas sie ssos parlamenç | vos es ben avinenç, | amia, siaz li | de bels diz autressi, | car bels solaz ab rire | e placers, qui·l sap dire, | zo es esca d'amor, | per que son li amador | plus leu en amiatat | enpres e enlaçat'; vv. 317–38, p. 419). For a brief introduction to the *ensenhamen*, see Rudin.

The knight does not, however, seek to compel assent: he declares that he is “only one man” and acknowledges the limits of his knowledge and experience (vv. 184–95) as well as the limited time he has to give advice (vv. 600–02).³⁵ As a result of his humility, the lady can listen to her counsellor and yet make her own choice. When, in fact, she suspects he may be attempting to manipulate her, she takes a meta-discursive step back (vv. 182–83, 218–20).³⁶ However charmed she may be, she wants to be sure that the decision is hers.

The advising ends when the lady has found in herself the reasons to love — and to choose. She realizes that the knight’s wisdom, courtliness and sophistication are a match for her own wisdom and nobility (vv. 742–46). She chooses, therefore, to declare her love (vv. 744–45, 749–51) and, as soon as she becomes a widow, to remarry according to her will. She no longer needs advice: her mind is made up. Her family can only echo her *yes*, and legitimate it (vv. 820–23).

And, since she is no longer in need of advice, the lay turns to its readers and listeners and admonishes them (vv. 828–48).

5.2 Speaking

Most of the poem’s ‘action’, and its most important action, is conversation, whose performative or, in medieval terms, rhetorical dimension is at least as important as its informational one.

The rhetorical or moral extremes of speech, according to the knight and narrator, are ‘fair speech’ (*bel parler*; vv. 645, 739, 743, 748, 824, 833, 842) and ‘slander’ (*mesdire*; vv. 145, 171, 294, 309, 325, 327, 367, 395, 396, 670, 833, 844). The knight wins the lady’s heart and hand by fair speech (vv. 739–45, 824–27) and the lay tells us “That he who is stingy with fair speech | Has a too-miserly heart” (vv. 841–42). Slander, on the other hand, is said to be an ‘illness’ that comes from ‘envy’ and ‘from our willingness | To say offensive and villainous things’ (vv. 311–13; see vv. 309–43). It afflicts society in general, has ‘ruined this world’ (v. 315), and is ‘an envious mouthful’ that ‘does no one good’ (vv. 844–45).

If slander seeks to humiliate people and reduce their social status, a third form of speech, bragging, is a ‘great folly’ (v. 205) that harms the speaker at least as much as the people about whom he or she is speaking (vv. 129, 132, 145, 205, 210). Braggarts, in the knight’s opinion, have “no rights | In good love and never will have any” (vv. 132–33) because they do not recognize or respect the importance of

³⁵ It is interesting to compare the lay with Richard de Fournival’s probably slightly later *Consaus d’amours*, a letter of advice about love supposedly written to his younger sister, in which Richard, like the knight, protests the limits of his knowledge and his inability to advise her about whom she should love: ‘For in this matter, no one can advise you except your heart’ (*car de ce ne vous porroit nus consellier, se vostres cuers non*; 1.2, p. 242; compare 17.1, p. 273). The *Consaus* touches on many of the same themes as the lay, and gives much the same advice; there is no reason to attribute the lay to Richard, a prominent canon of Notre-Dame of Amiens (1201–60), but its author must have been much like him.

³⁶ On the knight’s attempts at manipulation, see Maddox, p. 430 and p. 430 n. 76.

secrecy for love (vv. 142–58). Simple talkativeness is a lesser or inadvertent form of bragging: the wise lover is careful never to speak “too freely with people” (vv. 164–67, 715–18).

Intermediate between fair speech and loose talk, bragging, and slander is reasonable and true speech (v. 731), which seeks to represent things as they are. The knight is himself careful to avoid saying “anything | That will hurt anyone as far as I am aware” (vv. 188–89). Unlike the lady, he never repeats anything he has heard about anyone else (as she too ceases to do once the ‘suitors’ have been dismissed from their conversation: she is no Célimène). He speaks only in generalities, telling her what he knows and thinks rather than what he has heard (see, for example, vv. 563–64), and recommends that the lady (like him, at least implicitly) turn a deaf ear to gossip (vv. 364–67). The knight’s conversation thus ranges between reasonable and fair speech, between telling the truth and pleasing, and provides an example of speaking well.

5.3 Reputation

What is said about one in this predominantly oral culture is as important, perhaps more important, than what one says. One can work to create and maintain a reputation for being fair spoken, but one’s overall reputation, and the relative freedom to act it provides, depend on what others say about one.³⁷ The lady knows about her ‘suitors’ and the knight not only by her encounters with them but by what she has heard about them (see vv. 75–79, 108–09, 118–22, 128–29, 747–48). Even a literary figure like Gawain has a reputation based on what is said about him ‘in many fine stories’ (vv. 836–39).³⁸ Love itself has a reputation and the lady’s conversation with the knight is, at least on its surface, largely an effort to find out if what she has heard about it is true (see vv. 228–29, 560–62, 674–77). One might indeed suggest that love is her true suitor, whom she knows only by reputation, and that it is really about love that she wants the knight’s advice.

The lady’s description of her ‘suitors’ to the knight is a good example of the way in which reputations are constructed and promulgated in this society. She tells the knight both what she has heard about them and what she knows about them from her experience, but she cannot transmit this knowledge directly to him. Her descriptions, for him, are hearsay, as he shows himself to be aware. One of the reasons he refuses to recommend any of the ‘suitors’ to her (before he in fact goes

³⁷ On the importance of reputation in the Middle Ages, see *Fama: The Politics of Talk and Reputation in Medieval Europe*, and *La rumeur au Moyen Âge: Du mépris à la manipulation (Ve–XVe siècle)*.

³⁸ The way in which reputation affects one’s freedom to act is illustrated interestingly in the case of a literary figure like Gawain. While a medieval author could, of course, have portrayed Gawain in any way he or she liked, it was a bold author indeed, like the author of the prose *Tristan*, who wrote against his established reputation. Gawain’s own awareness of his reputation comes into play, of course, in a key way in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (vv. 901–27, 1290–306, pp. 25–26, 36).

on to recommend the third) is that “You have told me how they behave” (v. 192): he knows them only through her description of them, only by reputation.

It is thus not enough to speak fairly and avoid listening to gossip to maintain one’s reputation and freedom to act in this aristocratic society. As the knight is aware, they are surrounded by scandalmongers and jealous, frustrated lovers ready to spread nasty rumours (see vv. 294–303, 310–27, 395–98, 423–26). He is himself afraid of what people will say about him (vv. 655–62) and knows that “news never sleeps | But has soon flown everywhere” (vv. 206–07). To maintain one’s reputation and freedom, and above all one’s freedom to love, one must also hide one’s feelings and intentions.

5.4 Hiding

Power takes the form of personal relations in court society. If family relations (including both blood and marriage relations) may be said to form the ‘given’, the relatively stable ground, or warp of the social weave at court, affective relations might be said to form its woof or metamorphic element. A king’s brother and son will always be his brother and son but their affective proximity to him — and thus their power — will be influenced by their and his affective relations with other members of the court.

Romantic, erotic love is, of course, one of the strongest affective relations and the one most likely to disturb the relative social stability established by family relations: while brotherly or filial love reinforces social stability, erotic love for one’s neighbour’s husband or son is likely to upset it. Affective relations and, above all, romantic, erotic relations are thus subject to keen scrutiny in a courtly society and secrecy is essential to their success:

‘For just as one needs
Tinder to light a fire
In the forest or on the sea,
So one needs secrecy to love:
Anyone who wants joy and honour
Cannot enjoy it otherwise.
[...]
For love wants to be kept very secret.
Just as the dew
Steals up the tree
And over the marble in the church
Where it never rains nor blows,
So good love
Must walk among people
In such a way that no one perceives anything of it;
For when love is perceived
It is betrayed and frustrated’. (vv. 136–41, 149–58)

It is therefore not surprising that the lady asks the knight not once but twice how she could hide her love and keep it secret if she should desire to love (vv. 222, 354–60).

The one person from whom one's love should not be kept secret, of course, is the beloved and it is precisely the failure to make one's love known that results in the much-decried 'longing' that leads to frustration, regret, and Hell (vv. 399–501). In a society where affective relations channel power, however, confessing one's love for another places one in the power of the person to whom one confesses it, whether the beloved or a confidant. The knight thus advises the lady to tell no one of her love, unless it is absolutely necessary for its pursuit (vv. 375–94), and to hide her feelings from even her beloved until she has a chance to know him better and know if he is able to keep her secret.³⁹ The knight also offers to tell her how, if a man for whom she does not care declares his love for her to her, she can enable him to

[...] hide it and keep it secret
And draw back most seemingly
And pretend that
He never entreated you'. (vv. 178–81)

In courtly society, in sum, love always requires a great deal of what Erving Goffman termed 'face-work'.⁴⁰ Courtly lovers must project and maintain a 'positive' or public face — a 'positive consistent self-image or "personality" (crucially including the desire that this self-image be appreciated and approved of)' or 'the want of every member that his wants be desirable to at least some others' — at the same time that they defend a 'negative' or private face — a 'basic claim to territories, personal preserves, rights to non-distraction, i.e. to freedom of action and freedom from imposition' or 'the want of every [...] member that his actions be unimpeded by others', including the emotional freedom to love whom they will.⁴¹

Love in a courtly society is an elite art whose successful practice requires instruction, experience and attentiveness. Its adepts are rewarded, however, with "immense joy in this world" (v. 667) and the knight *and* the lady, despite her

³⁹ Richard de Fournival gives the same advice (15, pp. 268–72).

⁴⁰ Goffman writes that in his or her daily social contacts, a person 'tends to act out what is sometimes called a *line* — that is, a pattern of verbal and nonverbal acts by which he expresses his view of the situation and through this his evaluation of the participants, especially himself'. Goffman defines 'face' as 'the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact. Face is an image of self, delineated in terms of approved social attributes [...]. By *face-work* I mean to designate the actions taken by a person to make whatever he is doing consistent with face. Face-work serves to counteract "incidents" — that is, events whose effective symbolic implications threaten face' (Goffman, pp. 5, 12). Following Goffman, Brown and Levinson define face as 'the public self-image that every member [of a society] wants to claim for himself' (p. 61).

⁴¹ Brown and Levinson, pp. 61–62. For a scrutiny of Tristan and Ysolt as 'face-workers', see Grigoriu.

pretended naiveté, show themselves to be successful amorous ‘face-workers’, teaching the lay’s public by example how to choose a lover and declare and pursue one’s love in courtly society.⁴² The narrator never asserts that either the knight or the lady is “burning to love [...] | [...] hot and boiling | And eager and full of desire” (vv. 706–08).⁴³ The knight himself never speaks openly about his love; he simply shows availability on being asked, and joy on being elected.⁴⁴ The lady also avoids an open declaration of love. At the one moment when she hints that “we are at leisure | To revel in good love” (vv. 226–27), the ‘we’ could designate the whole court. Otherwise, she simply seems to be gathering information, just in case her desire should ever be aroused. When it is, she expresses it by the guessing game of the belt from whose twists of silk and silver she could draw back most seemingly and pretend that she has never entreated the knight.

5.5 Worldly love

As Brook has pointed out, the love promulgated by the *Lai du Conseil* is ‘a love based on reason, not passion’ (‘Omnia’, p. 75) and it is significant that the lady falls in love with the knight when she *sees* that he is wise, courtly, well-spoken and well-educated (v. 744). She more or less *decides* to fall in love with him because he seems like a good match.⁴⁵ The kind of love promulgated in this poem might better be termed worldly love than courtly or romantic love, and might in fact better be termed erotic companionship than love at all. It is firmly anchored in *this* sublunar world of growth and decay (vv. 41, 61, 239, 246, 287, 303, 315, 334, 500, 533, 567, 662, 673). Its masters are people who “are familiar with | This world” (vv. 40–41; compare vv.

⁴² The lay is overtly didactic (see Donovan, pp. 87–89; Brook, ‘Omnia’, p. 75; Maddox, pp. 417–19; and Capusso, ‘Contro la *bee*’, pp. 51, 55). The narrator begins by telling us that a lot can be learned from it (vv. 1–3), concludes with a series of moral injunctions (vv. 828–48), and notes that the lay was written ‘to teach true lovers’ (v. 852). On the role of literature in teaching ‘emotionologies’ (‘the attitudes or standards that a society, or a definable group within a society, maintains toward basic emotions and their appropriate expression’ [Stearns and Stearns, p. 813]), or ‘feeling rules’ to women, in particular, in Romance cultures in the Middle Ages, see Rider, ‘The Inner Life of Women’.

⁴³ Brook goes so far as to suggest that ‘nowhere in the poem is there any expression of an emotion’ (‘Omnia’, p. 75).

⁴⁴ It is, however, possible to read his declaration that “No heart swells | For land or coin | Or castle or possessions, | *And I can tell you this is true*, | Like it does for a tender love” (vv. 647–49; our emphasis) as a hint to the lady that his heart is swelling with love for her, then and there, as well as, perhaps, suggesting that he has been in love in the past.

⁴⁵ Capusso refers to the knight *and* lady’s ‘unscrupulous ingenuity, which allows an extreme acceleration of this delicate stage of the declaration of love’ (‘spregiudicato ingegno, il che permette un’estrema velocizzazione di questa delicata fase della dichiarazione amorosa’; ‘Contro la *bee*’, p. 63).

657–62) and its enemies are “Those who know peanuts | About this world” (vv. 302–03; compare vv. 61, 672–73). Its goal is unabashedly to partake “of the great pleasure | To be had in this world” (vv. 286–87) and it presumes that “a woman [like a man...] wants to delight | Her body with love” (vv. 719–20), to

‘[...] satisf[y]
 Herself, [...] to] indulge [...] her desires
 As much as she wishe[s] and as please[s] her,
 Secretly and at her leisure,
 [...] to] delight [...] her body well
 Beneath the flower, beneath the fruit,
 Beneath the leaf in a hidden garden,
 Indulge [...] herself in lovely rooms,
 Know [...] the contentment of holding her companion
 Day and night in her arms...’ (vv. 511–20)⁴⁶

Although lovers should be faithful and loyal to one another once they have entered into a relationship (vv. 734–38), there is no suggestion in the poem that a lover must be a soul mate, or the love of one’s life. Such a view is in fact condemned by the knight who suggests that a lady should “train her heart | To seize a good thing [a man who promises to be a good companion], if she sees one” rather than being “obsessed with one thing [man]” whom she “cannot [...] let go” (vv. 456–59). The latter path leads only to longing, wasted youth, regrets and Hell (vv. 460–501). If the goal of the kind of love promulgated in this poem is, as the lady puts it, “to know immense joy in this world”, then, she concludes, “Anyone who does not seek a companion | [...] is a great fool” (vv. 666–67). A companion, the best one available, of course, but not *the* perfect or predestined companion. ‘True love’ has no place in this poem and the world it projects where the only tragic lovers are the frustrated ones who do not seize good companions when they present themselves and waste their youth waiting for their prince or princess to come.⁴⁷ The poet and knight presume rather a world where people normally ‘try out’, so to speak, a series of potential companions, whom they may reject for various reasons, until they find one who is suited to them and their situation. This is a world where love is based on convenience rather than passion.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ The *Lai de l’Oiselet* is likewise addressed to, among others, “young women who [...] want to have this world” (“puceles | Qui [...] | [...] le siecle volez avoir”; vv. 141–43, p. 58). See Le Saux, pp. 92–93, 96–97.

⁴⁷ Capusso likewise observes that the poet condemns amorous inaction due to unrealistic hopes or expectations as well as that due to defeatism (‘Contro la *bee*’, p. 64).

⁴⁸ The lady of Marie de France’s *Chaitivel* seems to love four men equally (vv. 49–58, 71, 149–50, 197, in *Les Lais*, pp. 144–45, 147, 149), although her fate suggests to the lay’s audiences that she has perhaps been too enthusiastic about seizing the good things she sees and trying them out simultaneously rather than serially. The importance of practicality in choosing a lover is likewise reflected in Richard de Fournival’s

These worldly lovers are not, moreover, insensible to money and to the important role it can play in love, even if (relative) poverty does not automatically disqualify someone as a companion. The lady, for example, is careful to mention the financial situation of all three suitors in her description of them (vv. 65, 81–85, 94–122) and does not fail to note, even in this emotionally charged moment, that the belt she gives the knight is made “‘Of silk and silver’” (v. 755). The knight is likewise sensitive to wealth, or a lack thereof (vv. 66–70, 88–90, 565–642), and shows no qualms about accepting money and gifts from the lady, whose wealth is a prominent element of their relationship (vv. 18, 780–99, 812–14). Even the poet notes that the lady and knight meet ‘In a beautiful chamber’ (v. 807). Erotic companionship is simply more pleasurable, and easier, with money than without it.

The lady, the poet tells us, ‘had a great part of what she desired | When she could be at leisure with him [her lover]’ (vv. 805–06). This leads one to wonder what part of what she desired she did not have when she was with him. The answer, we think, is that she could not be with him all the time, could not be with him in public. If money sustains and increases the pleasure of romantic, erotic companionship, marriage perpetuates and completes it. The happy marriage at the end of the lay thus crowns the lady’s reasonable and convenient choice and ensures that their love will endure “‘As long as *this* world lasts, | Which’”, surprisingly, is said to have “‘no end or beginning’” (vv. 500–01; our emphasis). Unlike an arranged marriage that tries to build a stable social structure from bricks made without the straw of love, this marriage weaves the woof of romantic, erotic love into the warp of the social fabric to form a coherent pattern. In this poem and the fictional world it projects, marriage is not a sacramental joining of two souls for eternity in imitation of the relationship between Christ and the Church (or soul), nor is it a way of forming an economic and social bond between two families. It is, rather, a social, legal sanction of romantic, worldly, erotic love.⁴⁹

advice that his sister choose a lover locally rather than being one of those ‘women who love a stranger sooner than a familiar man whom they know. [...] the women who search out these distant loves don’t know what love is nor what joy is in love’ (‘femmes, ki aiment plus tost un estrange homme c’un privé k’eles connoissent. [...] teles femmes, ki ces lointaines amours quierent, ne se vent quel cose est amours, ne quele joie est en amours’; 16.3–5, pp. 272–73).

⁴⁹ Capusso (‘Contro la *bee*’, pp. 63–64) and Guillet-Rydell (pp. 103–04) have suggested that this unabashed interest in erotic love, money and marriage, or, as Capusso puts it, the poet’s ‘moral casualness and the quasi realistic-bourgeois touches’ (‘l’atteggiamento moralmente disinvolto e tocchi quasi realistico-borghesi’, p. 64), are a reflection of Picard — and thus, in their minds, northern, hard-working, practical, less-refined, bourgeois — influences. On the other hand, one may find a similar interest in economic values as reflected in the dynamics of an adulterous couple in non-Picard courtly literature written before the *Lai du Conseil*. Compare, for instance, Tristan’s condition in Bérout’s romance, when he must leave Mark’s court without any money or knightly equipment, as well as his successful efforts to regain his place in Ysolt’s bed and in her husband’s economic environment; or Ipomedon’s

6. A love story

The *Lai du Conseil* is a remarkable artistic achievement that offers us a realistic, sophisticated, sensitive and touching portrait of the most important moment in the imagined relationship of its two principal characters, the moment when they realize and confess their love for one another. The success of the poem, indeed, springs first and foremost from its author's decision to focus on this emotionally charged, universally familiar moment when growing affection passes over into acknowledged love, when two people reach the point where they dare to confide their feelings for one another to one another.⁵⁰ And they are reciprocated! For the *Lai du Conseil* is also a happy story, in which love is discovered, nurtured and eventually able to bloom in a socially acceptable and productive framework.

As other scholars have shown, the author of the lay was thoroughly familiar with the courtly love and literary traditions and he veils this touching moment of discovery in a largely conventional, although sometimes remarkably insightful, courtly discourse.⁵¹ His characters do something very similar. In a subtle play of

status as the queen's 'dru' in the romance of Hue de Rotelande. It seems unlikely that the thematic field of love and material success was peculiar to Picardy.

⁵⁰ Richard de Fournival distinguishes three stages of love: beginning love, confirmed love, and fulfilled love. He adds that some people consider marriage a fourth stage of love, stable love, but he does not, because such love is 'owed love' rather than 'freely given love' ('amours de dete ... amours de grace'). The lay thus covers all four degrees of love but focuses on the first two when, according to Richard, 'love first begins to grow in the hearts of the lovers and desires are shared by both together' ('l'amours se commence premierement a concevoir es cuers des amans, et que li desirrier sont consentement de l'un et de l'autre ensamble') and 'when the man tells the woman that he is her companion and she accepts him as a companion and acknowledges that she is also for her part his companion' ('quant li hom dist a le femme k'il est ses amis et ele le recoit conme ami et se reconnoist ausi, d'autre part, a estre s'amie'; 11, pp. 262–63).

⁵¹ See Brook, 'Omnia'; Capusso, 'Contro la *bee*'; Maddox; and Beston. These scholars have compared aspects or moments of the lay to such types of discourses as the *demandes d'amour* (Brook, 'Omnia', pp. 70–71, 75; Capusso, 'Contro la *bee*', p. 53), a *Salu d'Amour* (Brook, 'Omnia', p. 74), a *chastoïement (d'amour)* (Maddox, pp. 417–19), a *jeu-parti* (Capusso, 'Contro la *bee*', p. 53), and to such works as Andreas Capellanus's *Art of Courtly Love* (Brook, 'Omnia', p. 72; Maddox, pp. 422 n. 64, 426 n. 69, 428 n. 70, 432–33 n. 83), the songs of Conon de Béthune (Capusso, 'Contro la *bee*', p. 59), Marie de France's *Chaitivel* (Brook, 'Omnia', p. 75; Maddox) and *Lanval* (Brook, 'Omnia', p. 73; Maddox, p. 432 n. 83), Chrétien de Troyes's *Chevalier au lion* (Brook, 'Omnia', p. 73), the *Roman de la Rose* (Brook, 'Omnia', pp. 75–76), Robert of Blois's *Le Chastoïement des dames* (Maddox, p. 420, 422 n. 63), the *Lai du Trot* (Brook, 'Omnia', p. 72; Maddox, p. 426 n. 69; Capusso, 'Contro la *bee*', pp. 54, 59), the *Lai de l'Espervier* (Capusso, 'Contro la *bee*', p. 51), the *Lai de Doon* (Capusso, 'Contro la *bee*', p. 59), and the *Lai de l'Ombre* (Brook, 'Omnia', p. 75; Capusso, 'Contro la *bee*', p. 54; Beston, pp. 26, 28).

‘faces’, they hide — ‘couvrent’ in the language of the lay — their exploration of their feelings and those of the other person, their searching out and testing of one another, behind largely conventional discourses in order to escape the surveillance of the keen-eyed and omnipresent scandalmongers at court.⁵² This creates a realistic sort of quasi-allegorical discursive situation, which is, we presume, generally familiar to readers even now, in which seemingly general statements, or statements about third parties, in fact allude allegorically, so to speak, to the two people in conversation. This tension or play between what is said, what the speaker anxiously hopes is being understood, and what the listener anxiously hopes or fears is being meant is the second main source of the poem’s charm.

In order to appreciate the poet’s artistry, we need to imagine whom he seems to want us to imagine these characters are and the situation in which they find themselves. The poet calls the knight a ‘bachelor’ (v. 752), which probably means what Duby referred to as a ‘youth’ (*juvenis*). He is an adult, a knight, but is not yet married, not yet established on a domain of his own sufficient to support a family and a household, not yet a father, not yet a ‘man’ (*vir*). This stage in an aristocratic man’s life was not tied to age or physical development and ended only when he married, set up household and had children. It was not uncommon for it to last from a man’s late teens to his mid-forties and one could well die a ‘youth’ (Duby, pp. 112–13). The poet does not tell us how old the knight is, but he has lived in courtly circles long enough not only to have developed a reputation for being able to talk beautifully about love but for the lady to have heard of his reputation ‘some time ago’ (vv. 747–48). He also seems to speak from a certain experience and with a certain resignation (see vv. 344–47, 404–11), and his lament about how the world has gone downhill (vv. 314–23) suggests the nostalgia of someone who is no longer young. We might, therefore, reasonably imagine that he is somewhere around twenty-five to thirty-five years old, perhaps even older.⁵³

⁵² Maddox senses this as well when he writes ‘what seemingly began as straightforward didactic instruction has steadily evolved in a different direction, one in which *literary* usage of the *chastoiement* [teaching about love] transforms this vehicle of moral counsel into the malleable component of a fiction featuring manipulation for selfish ends’ (p. 430). We do not agree with Maddox that the knight (alone) uses this lesson for *his* selfish ends (alone) — we find the lady to be the more assertive of the two and see in this conversation a mutual searching out of one another — but we agree wholeheartedly with him that the poem’s lessons about love, which, while occasionally intriguing, are largely and deliberately conventional, are not the main point or value of the poem. This conventional instruction is used by the poet to tell and elegantly veil an original and charming story, and used by his characters to find their way to one another.

⁵³ The knight’s reference to “‘a poor man | Who had been in this world twenty years’” (vv. 565–67), may, as we will see, be understood as an allusion to himself. This might be interpreted as meaning that he is only about twenty, but it seems to us to suggest that he has been an adult member of aristocratic society for about twenty years. Since young men were usually knighted during the second half of their teens, this line might be interpreted as suggesting that he is around thirty-five to forty. The

The knight is, moreover, relatively poor (see v. 782) and a member of the lower aristocracy, or at least from lower in the aristocracy than the lady, since their marriage ennobles and honours not only him but his entire family (see vv. 826–27). When he is first introduced, he is sitting alone (v. 29) in a hall filled with people — most notably many ladies and young, unmarried women — and dancing, music and story-telling on a festive Christmas Eve. The company is described as ‘most joyous’ (v. 17), so why isn’t he? His attitude recalls that of the destitute Lanval at the beginning of Marie de France’s lay of that name, and it may well be that he is preoccupied by his poverty. But unlike Lanval, he remains at court and immediately joins the lady when she asks him to do so.⁵⁴ He is, that is, very happy to talk to her, and would perhaps be equally happy to talk to other people, but he is not important enough or rich enough to be surrounded by hangers-on or to think that everyone and anyone will be happy to talk to him, and he is sensitive enough not to want to intrude on others. No woman other than the lady seems to be attracted to him, which suggests that he possesses none of the outward signs or social advantages that make a man immediately desirable: he is not young, not rich, not particularly noble or handsome. He appears to be a marginal figure at this court and aware of, and resigned to, his marginality. He is, as he demonstrates when given the opportunity, a very good knight (vv. 790–93), although it should be noted that the poet tells us that he ‘often’ (v. 790) — not always — wins the prize at the tournaments in which he participates, but his most winning attributes are his ability to speak well, his wisdom, his courtliness, his sophistication, his cheerfulness, his playfulness and the fact that he is ‘most pleasant company’ (vv. 739–48, 794–95). Intimate conversation is precisely the endeavour in which he is most likely to distinguish himself and he would undoubtedly have been a familiar character, the aging ‘youth’, in thirteenth-century aristocratic society. Perhaps such aging bachelors were a significant part of the audience the poet anticipated.

The lady appears to be, or at least presents herself as, socially and emotionally inexperienced and in need of advice from a more experienced mentor. She is married but has neither children nor lover, has never known longing, and does not seem to have, or at least does not present herself as having, much experience with the ways of courtly society. The poet says nothing about her age either, but it would probably be reasonable to imagine that he wanted us to imagine that she is still quite young, younger than the knight in any case, perhaps between fifteen and twenty-five years old.⁵⁵

manuscripts, unfortunately, diverge significantly with respect to the number of years the poor man has been in this world: C avoids giving a number, D gives thirty, and B gives ten.

⁵⁴ This contrasts interestingly with the queen’s approaching Lanval, after he has returned to the court, when he has gone off by himself away from the others. See Marie de France, *Lanval*, vv. 33–52, 253–62, pp. 24–26, 43–44.

⁵⁵ According to Roman law, the age of ‘full puberty’ was seventeen, but in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, ‘most commentators continued to assert that twelve and fourteen were the canonical minimum age’ for marriage (Brundage, p. 357).

The poet tells us that she is rich, powerful, and important (vv. 18, 746, 783) and the attention she receives at the Christmas Eve gathering suggests that she, unlike the knight, possesses obvious traits that are valued by aristocratic society. She is married to an older man, evidently, since he dies of what appear to be natural causes while she is still vigorous (vv. 815–18), but she seems to be the dominant partner. She has control over their land, is able to give the knight horses and equipment as she pleases, and provides him the means to live in an enviable manner (vv. 785–89, 796–99).⁵⁶ The facts that he is able to visit her frequently and that their love remains completely hidden even though ‘They were often together | In a beautiful chamber [in her dwelling] spending their time as lovers do | Many nights, many whole days’ (vv. 807–09) also suggests that she is in charge of the household rather than her husband and that its members are more loyal to her than to him. It is likewise significant that she, rather than her father, or an uncle, brother or cousin, decides that she will remarry, chooses whom she will marry, and summons the family to her wedding (vv. 820–23).⁵⁷ And as we shall see, it is in fact she who initiates and manages the conversation with her ‘adviser’.

⁵⁶ The subject of the verb in line 785 — ‘La terre avoit toute en sa main’ — is not explicit and one could translate it as ‘All the land was under his [her husband’s] control’ rather than ‘All the land was under her control’, but it seems to us more likely that the poet intended us to understand that the land was under her control, rather than her husband’s, for two reasons. First, she is the subject of the verbs in the lines that immediately precede and follow line 785 — ‘Et ele estoit et haute et riche, | S’avoit baron mauvés et niche. | La terre avoit toute en sa main. | Maint cheval, palefroi, lorain | Donoit au chevalier sovent’ (‘And she was both of high status and rich | With a husband who was mean and dumb. | All the land was under her control. | She often gave the knight | Many horses, palfreys, harness straps’; vv. 783–87) — and it seems to us likely that these verbs form a series with the same subject. Second, her ability to give whatever she wants and as much as she wants to the knight suggests that she has control over the finances.

⁵⁷ Noble widows had three main options after their husband’s death. They could associate themselves in some way with a religious institution; they could remarry; or they could remain independent, ruling their domains on their own. This third course of action gave women an unusual degree of autonomy and authority, was usually of greater advantage to their children if they had any (see Hanawalt, p. 226, and Partner, p. 372), and was supported by the church, in whose eyes chaste widows were superior to chaste wives, although chaste wives were of course superior to unchaste widows (see Ambrose; Bernards, pp. 40–72; Heene, p. 64; and Metz). Aristocratic widows nonetheless usually came under intense social pressure, from their dead husband’s relatives in particular, to remarry (see, for example, the trials of Guibert of Nogent’s mother in Guibert of Nogent, pp. 70–71). As Brundage notes, ‘The marriages of widows who held property in fee posed particularly acute difficulties. The lord commonly claimed not only the right to require the widow to remarry, but also to select her husband. Family members also often opposed these marriages’ (p. 497). Our lady’s freedom of choice thus suggests that the author wanted us to think of her as a singularly wealthy, powerful, autonomous woman, without any overlord

The hints we have about her age, social status, wealth and marriage suggest that she finds herself in a situation that would have been generally recognized in the context of early thirteenth-century aristocratic life in northern Europe. It was common at the time for great lords to reward a collaborator's loyal service with marriage to a noble widow or girl who had inherited or stood to inherit huge tracts of land.⁵⁸ For this reason and other, demographic ones, it was also common for an aristocratic wife to be both of nobler origin and significantly younger than her husband.⁵⁹ We can thus imagine — and can imagine that many who heard or read the lay in the thirteenth century also imagined — that the lady was a wealthy, noble orphan whose overlord, and thus guardian, had married her to one of his men as a reward for his services. She, too, thus represents an important and recognizable group in thirteenth-century aristocratic society, wealthy young women of high lineage, married as a reward to socially inferior, poorer, older men.

The poet also hints here and there that the knight and lady already know one another before their Christmas Eve tête-à-tête and are perhaps even already attracted to one another. She knows him at least by reputation since she knows that he is familiar with court life (vv. 40–41) and has 'heard some time ago | That he knew how to speak fairly about love' (vv. 747–48).⁶⁰ Her calling him over to advise her about potential lovers on the spur of the moment at a Christmas Eve party is also surprising and intriguing. Perhaps she is simply so confused and so in need of advice that she turns 'right away' (v. 30) for counsel to the first man she sees; or perhaps she is confused and feels in need of advice and turns 'right away' for counsel to this particular man, who happens to be the first to catch her eye after she takes leave of her third 'suitor', because she knows of his reputation; or perhaps she does not in fact feel confused or in need of advice, sees this man — perhaps because she was looking for him? — whom she knows at least by reputation and decides to ask him

or living male relatives whom she feels obliged to consult. On widows in the Middle Ages, see also Hanawalt, pp. 220–26; Heene, pp. 123–28; Huyghebaert; Leyser, pp. 168–86; Metz, IV: 91–95; Rosambert; and Shahar, pp. 93–98.

⁵⁸ William Marshal (c. 1147–1219) was a particularly happy beneficiary of this practice (see Painter, pp. 61–81), which was so common in England at the time that two of the liberties to which the barons forced King John to agree in the *Magna carta* (1215) were: '6. Heirs shall be given in marriage without disparagement [i.e., shall not be given in 'marriage to someone of lower social status']' and '8. No widow shall be compelled to marry so long as she wishes to live without a husband' (Holt, pp. 452–53; compare pp. 52–55, 308).

⁵⁹ See Berkvam, p. 67; Bruckner, p. 222; Shahar, p. 136; and Herlihy, *Medieval Households*, pp. 120–21, and *Women, Family and Society*, pp. 149, 169–70. At some point between 1118 and 1127, for example, the Flemish knight Robert of Crecques married a woman whose uncles included the chancellor of Flanders and the castellan of Bruges because he thought he would become 'nobler' through this marriage (Galbert of Bruges, 7.33–35, p. 19).

⁶⁰ Beston also points this out (p. 27).

to help her choose between her three ‘suitors’ as a way of engaging him in conversation, of flirting, to ‘dosnoier’ in the language of the poem (vv. 58, 808).⁶¹

This third possible way of understanding her actions seems to us not only the richest from a literary perspective but also the most plausible. Would a noble woman call a relatively unimportant man she knows only by reputation over during a party to discuss her amorous affairs and tell him her “‘true thoughts’” (v. 34)? The lady has already shown herself capable of advising herself, and doing so well, with respect to the way she should conduct herself with the three suitors:

A wealthy and powerful lady
Was much wooed there
As the tale relates,
For three knights entreated her
Every time they spoke to her;
And the lady parted from them
Without granting or refusing
Her affection to any of the three.
She parted from all three as a friend
As seemed advisable to her.⁶² (vv. 18–27)

Given the lady’s ability to advise herself here at the beginning of the poem, it is ironic that, towards the end of the poem, the knight is said to be, literally, ‘altogether

⁶¹ If, writes Richard de Fournival, a knight loves a lady who is ‘so noble a lady that he dare not tell her of his desire, he should do what he can to win such favour and grace with the lady that she dares speak to him on some occasion, and if he sees that the lady will listen willingly to him, he should tell stories that relate to love and about things that relate to contentment and joy’ before he declares his love (‘si grans dame k’il ne li ose dire sa volenté, il doit pourcacier par coi il ait tant d’acés et tant de grace de la dame que la dame l’oce aucune fois parler; et quant il verra que la dame l’orra volentiers parler, si doit contes conter ki toukent a amours, et de coses ki toukent a soulas et a joie’; 13.4, p. 265). If, on the other hand, a lady loves a man and he is not aware of it, ‘she should draw the man to her either by pretending that she needs to talk to him about something or playfully and show him an amorous countenance either by looking lovingly at him or by fair speech in a friendly fashion’ (‘ele doit atraire l’omme u en maniere de parler a lui d’aucune besoigne, u en maniere de juer, et lui moustrer samblant d’amours u par regardemens amoureux, u par biau parler amiablement’; 14.1, p. 266). If one puts the two situations together — if a very noble lady is attracted to a knight without his being aware of it, or daring to believe it, and tries to draw him to her by pretending that she needs to talk to him about something, while the knight is likewise attracted to the lady but thinks that she is so noble that he dare not tell her of his desire, does what he can to encourage her to speak to him on some occasion, and then talks to her about love, contentment and joy — one has the framework of the *Lai du Conseil*.

⁶² The last line, ‘Se ses consaus li aporloit’, might be translated more literally as: ‘As her advice suggested she do’.

bereft of advice' ('molt desconseilliez'; v. 782) — although this also has the figurative meaning of 'altogether bereft of resources'⁶³ — and the poem's putative author is likewise said to be unable to 'advise himself' ('se [...] conseilier'; v. 856). These men's need of advice is perhaps intended to contrast with, and draw our attention to, the lady's self-sufficiency.

It is also noteworthy that the lady does not take the knight up on the offer he makes early on in their conversation to tell her

[...] how,
If you want to hold on to him [the man she would like to have as a companion],
You can hide it very well;
And how, if you don't want to love him,
He can hide it and keep it secret
And draw back most seemingly
And pretend that
He never entreated you'. (vv. 174–81)

The lady later shows that she is capable of managing such situations herself, in an original and inspired way, without anyone's advice, when she hands the knight her belt (vv. 752–69). The lady is thus able, without advice, to handle well such thorny matters as putting off suitors without hurting their pride (lest they tell unflattering stories about her to others) and declaring her love in a way that will allow both her and the man she loves 'to draw back most seemingly' if he does not return her affection. It is also noteworthy, and a tribute to her judgment, that of all the women at the Christmas Eve gathering, she alone perceives the worth of this knight, whose attractiveness lies in his character rather than his appearance or purse, and calls him to her. All this suggests that her appeal to the knight for advice — which flatters him — is in fact simply a propitious means to start a conversation with him, and demonstrates her talents as an amorous face-worker.⁶⁴

The poet, moreover, simply asserts the gallant intentions of the three suitors, without giving them an opportunity to speak or act. The speed with which he narrows the narrative focus from a hall full of joyful men and women to three men and one woman, to a single man and woman is dizzying.⁶⁵ The three suitors are 'on

⁶³ Brook also notices this and suggests that it may be 'a deliberate pun' since the knight 'has dispensed so much effective "conseil"' to the lady in the course of the poem ('Omnia', p. 73).

⁶⁴ Beston also believes that the author wanted us to think that the lady's initiation of their conversation is 'not impulsive, but calculated' (p. 27).

⁶⁵ This rapid narrowing of the narrative focus is reproduced and emphasized in the first two of the three illuminations found in D, the only manuscript with illuminations. The first one, which is placed at the beginning of the lay in the left-hand column of the manuscript page and separates the lay from the preceding text (165r1), shows an arcaded hall filled with standing people engaged in conversation (a woman and two men in the left arcade; a woman and three men in the right one). The next illumination is placed almost opposite the first illumination on the right-hand column

stage' for only ten lines (vv. 18–27), then serve, for a short time, as foils and points of comparison for the knight.⁶⁶ They are mentioned only once after line 217 of this 868-line poem and the lady turns from them to other, perhaps more interesting, topics of conversation quickly and easily (see vv. 218–29).⁶⁷

The lady does have some good things to say about each of the three suitors but it is possible that she is trying to make the fourth knight jealous or at least trying to see if he is annoyed when she speaks well of other men. And he evidently is! The first one is rich, and the knight belittles his wealth (vv. 66–70). The second, the lady says, is ““very handsome”” (v. 74) and she insists on the point, perhaps demonstrating a genuine enthusiasm:

[...] His body
Is so handsome, so tall, so strong
That it seems a marvel
[...]
[...] he is very handsome and well groomed'. (vv. 75–77, 87)

This provokes what seems intended to be a mildly snide remark (implying that the handsome lover has no particular merit in taking care of his body) from the knight (vv. 88–90), who asks quickly for a description of the third suitor, perhaps to prevent the lady from dwelling further on the physical beauty of the second. When the lady later remembers and mentions that she has heard that the second suitor is also a braggart, the knight launches into a twenty-nine line diatribe against braggarts (vv. 130–58), which, while providing good advice, is perhaps also intended to drive a feared rival further from the field, as well as informing her that any secret she shares with him will be safe.

The lady and knight's interaction around the third suitor is the most interesting, especially since, as we learn by the end of the poem, this one resembles strikingly the knight himself (as well as the lovelorn knight who, the narrator tells us, first composed the lay [vv. 849–54]). The lady's description of the third suitor is the longest (twelve lines for the first suitor [vv. 56–65, 124–25], nineteen for the second

of the same page (165r2) between lines 36 and 37. It shows a similarly arcaded hall with only two people seated on a bench (a woman in the left arcade and a man in the right) engaged in conversation. A similar narrowing of the narrative focus from a wide-angle shot to a close-up occurs at the end of the *Lai du cor* when the focus shifts from a hall full of feasting people to the chosen couple.

⁶⁶ We find a similar multiplication of lovers and admirers in the *Prose Tristan*, for example, where they complicate the plot and similarly increase the sense of Tristan's and Ysolt's value.

⁶⁷ Beston notes similarly that 'the lady herself abruptly changes the subject, having become more interested in being advised about love and oriented towards it by him [the fourth knight]' (p. 26).

[vv. 73–87, 126–29], thirty-nine for the third [vv. 92–122, 160–67]).⁶⁸ He is courteous, polite, wise, gracious, “full of delight and contentment” (v. 101), honourable, and a good knight. He is poor but manages “to live more elegantly | Than those who have three times as much as he” (vv. 98–99). He is utterly discreet and woos the lady “beautifully [...] | With lays, with writings, with romances” (vv. 162–63).⁶⁹ The knight approves this last suitor clearly but somewhat rapidly and then offers to tell the lady how she should conduct herself if she wishes to retain this suitor or allow him to withdraw without shame. The lady, however, wants him to be more explicit: “So you recommend this one to me more | Than the others? That’s my opinion” (vv. 182–83). The knight’s response is curious and complicated (vv. 184–217). He says, first, that he cannot choose for her both because the choice must be hers and because he does not want to say anything that would hurt anyone. He suggests that she ask the advice of other people. He then goes on, however, to say clearly that he would advise her to choose the third.

This discussion of the third suitor may be simply what it appears, but the resemblance between this suitor and the knight is sufficiently striking to give us pause. It may be that the lady merely provides an accurate description of the third suitor and the knight gives her his honest reaction. It may be that she provides an accurate description of the third suitor, whom she knows to be a worthy and attractive person, in order to see how the knight will react: will he be generous and honest enough to praise this praiseworthy man? Or will his own pride and jealousy lead him to denigrate, to ‘mesdire’, him? It is even possible that the lady enhances the description, or invents parts of it, in order to test the knight more fully. Given that we have no independent descriptions of the three suitors and no way of evaluating the lady’s descriptions of them, one might even imagine that she is describing the fourth knight — whom she knows at least by reputation — to himself to see how he will react. Will he recommend himself to her? And perhaps the knight is not sure how he should react. Should he simply praise a praiseworthy man? What if she is testing him and thinks he is praising himself? Is this third suitor real or allegorical? Who are they talking about now? Hence, perhaps, his cautious and rather contradictory answer.

The descriptions of all three suitors may, of course, be fictive, even within the context of the poem. Perhaps the lady has invented all three descriptions — even if she was indeed approached by three men — in order to test the knight and see what characteristics seem laudable to him, which deplorable; to learn what he values and how he is likely to behave.

If the poem were simply ‘the lay of the three suitors’ or ‘the lay of advice about the three suitors’, it could end here. Or the lady could follow the knight’s advice and go ask the advice of other people. But she does not appear interested in getting

⁶⁸ Maddox suggests that the lady’s ‘own inclination seems implicit in the increasing length of each portrait’ (p. 414).

⁶⁹ This suggests, we note in passing, that this third suitor has been courting the lady for some time before the Christmas Eve gathering, unless one wants to imagine that he came to the party with copies of his works ready to distribute to any likely lady he might meet there.

advice from anyone else on this matter, or even talking about these ‘suitors’ any longer, and instead asks him:

‘But now teach me how to love
And how I can keep it secret,
Good sir, most seemingly and most completely,
For I tell you that I want
Above all to follow your advice
And we are at leisure
To revel in good love,
But I dread greatly the pain
That, I hear, comes from it’. (vv. 221–29)

This is a rather surprising and telling change of topic and rather bold speech. “‘Teach me how to love’” comes remarkably close to a dropping of the allegorical veil, especially when she goes on to note that “‘we are at leisure | To revel in good love’”,⁷⁰ although she quickly brings the discussion back to the realm of theory. It is clear she does not want the conversation to end. It is clear she wants to go on talking about love with him. It is clear she is enjoying herself. Is it clear she is attracted to him? Are they already ‘in good love’?

And so when he has answered this question, there is another (vv. 240–41), and another (vv. 250–52), and another (vv. 354–60), and another (vv. 402–03), and another (vv. 560–62), and another (vv. 674–77) until finally

She found him so wise and courtly
And well-spoken and well-educated
That she set all her heart
On loving him unrepentantly. (vv. 742–45)

She then reveals to him, in a veiled fashion, her love and he his to her. It is the lady, that is, who calls the knight to her, engages and manages the conversation and decides when it should come to a happy end, who leads the dance from start to finish, as is only appropriate since she is the nobler and wealthier of the two.⁷¹ The

⁷⁰ Lines 226–27 — “‘And we are at leisure | to revel in good love’” — are especially surprising and suggest that the lady and the knight are already experiencing or will now experience ‘good love’, that they are already in love or on the verge of it (see the note to line 227 of the translation). The manuscripts are not, moreover, unanimous with respect to this line. A and B read ‘in good love’ (‘en bone amor’) whereas C and D read ‘about/with respect to love’ (‘envers amors’), and E reads ‘in right of love’ (‘en droit d’amurs’). The scribes also found this expression challenging and two of the five preferred something like “‘And we have plenty of free time to enjoy ourselves by talking about love,’” which is less bold.

⁷¹ The knight’s taking the belt from around the lady’s waist clearly has erotic overtones: it is a pretext for touching her waist while starting to undress her. In medieval iconography, moreover, a man’s gesture of taking a belt from a woman is a sign of

knight in fact acknowledges that women are usually, or at least often, the dominant partners in romantic, erotic relationships when he says to the lady that

[...] when you have a companion,
 You will have him do what pleases you,
 If you find him sensible enough,
 Just as others do,
 Whose companions are wise and courtly.’ (vv. 524–28)

It is the lady who has chosen and tested the knight and appears, in the end, much more sophisticated than she has pretended to be.

The three ‘suitors’ thus seem ultimately to be simply a ruse, a rhetorical *locus*, a place to begin a conversation. The description of their courting — ‘three knights entreated her | Every time they spoke to her’ (vv. 21–22) — makes it seem lackadaisical and haphazard, the kind of casual trying-one’s-chance one might encounter at a Christmas office party after everybody has had a few drinks, and she manages to appease them rather easily by telling them that she hopes they can just be friends. None of the ‘suitors’ seems particularly assiduous and the lady does not seem to have strong feelings about any of them. They are merely puppets in the show of love: they nourish the conversation and perhaps provoke some jealousy in the knight.⁷² And the lady is pulling the strings.

seduction, especially when the woman is a virgin (see Garnier, pp. 169–71). On the other hand, we should not forget that the lady has told the knight to take her belt (vv. 753–56). By obeying her command, even if he is more than willing to do so, the knight recognizes her authority over him. A belt was, moreover, commonly given to a new knight as part of the ceremony of dubbing or to a vassal during the ceremony of vassalage, practices which suggest that he is also recognizing the lady as his superior when he accepts the belt (on the belt as a ‘sociocultural symbol’, see Le Goff, pp. 245–46). By keeping the belt for himself, by ‘giving’ it in turn to himself, however, the knight invests himself with an authority equal to the lady’s. She gives him the belt to give and he gives it to himself. In the feudal mind, moreover, such a gift called for a counter-gift to establish a mutual relationship (see Le Goff, pp. 241, 252–53) and the knight indeed gives something in return: himself (v. 776). The whole exchange has the feel of a ceremony of investiture and recalls Lanval’s lady’s giving him ‘her love and her body’ (‘S’amur e sun cors’; v. 133, p. 33), which take the place of the wife and land (v. 17, p. 23), the investiture, Arthur has failed to give him.

⁷² Beston likewise finds that ‘critical discussions of the poem have focused unduly on them [the three “suitors”]’ (p. 26). One reason for this, as Beston has pointed out, is that the poet removes himself from the poem between lines 4 and 828 and does not provide us with much of the information we need to fully understand who the knight and lady are until relatively late in the poem (pp. 27–28). Deprived of this information and of the poet’s guidance, we don’t fully understand what we are witnessing — an exploratory conversation between two people who are already attracted to one another before the conversation begins — until it has reached its conclusion. The poet, as Beston points out, plays games with his audience, just as the lady and the

‘If a woman is courted by three men, which one should she choose?’ is a perfectly good topic of conversation for courtly society and literature — as the poet, lady and knight all seem to be aware — even if it is not a real question, and the lady takes advantage of the situation to talk with a man she thinks she might like to know better. There are, indeed, a few hints that the lady and the knight not only know each other at least a little before they talk but already find one another mutually interesting. The knight, the poet writes, ‘jumped to his feet’ (v. 31) when she called him over to her. This might be sheer politeness but it might also suggest a certain joy and enthusiasm, or both. His responses to her descriptions of the ‘suitors’, as mentioned above, could be read as suggestive of a touch of jealousy, and his advice to her starts after a while to sound as self-interested as Ronsard’s to Cassandre. The lady, in turn, spots him, calls him over, starts the conversation, keeps it going, asks him to teach her to love, indicates her availability and interest, and flatters him both directly (vv. 35–41, 224–25) and indirectly by listening to him so attentively.

The *Lai du Conseil* can thus be read as a remarkably sensitive, subtle and sophisticated story of two people who know one another a little, would like to get to know one another better, take advantage of an opportunity offered to them one Christmas Eve, and end up discovering a life-long companion.⁷³ The match parallels in interesting and different ways both Lanval’s relation with his lady, and Caradoc’s relation with his wife in the *Lai du Cor*. Like the lady of the *Lai du Conseil*, Lanval’s lady, who is likewise presented as very noble and very rich, seeks him out, provides for the poor knight’s material needs, and eventually takes him away with her to live in her land. Like Caradoc, the knight of the *Lai du Conseil* owes his fortune, his ‘establishment’, his *chacement* to his powers of seduction and the marriage they win him with a noble and wealthy woman.⁷⁴

7. A mirror of faith

As other scholars have remarked, the poet of the *Lai du Conseil* included a multi-faceted *mise en abyme* in his poem.⁷⁵ By his poverty, his valour (compare vv. 120–21 and 790–91) and his sophistication, the third ‘suitor’ resembles the knight-advisor, but they also both resemble the hypothetical

[...] poor man
Who had been in this world twenty years

knight play a game with one another, and in so doing renders his work psychologically sophisticated (p. 28).

⁷³ Beston agrees that the lady and the knight ‘are neither naïve nor cynical, but are engaged quite consciously in a sophisticated mutual seduction’ (p. 26).

⁷⁴ See Duby, pp. 116–22; Rider, ‘Courtly Marriage’, pp. 190–93; and Maddox, pp. 430–33.

⁷⁵ See Brook, ‘Omnia’, p. 74; Capusso, ‘Contro la bee’, pp. 55, 64; Maddox, pp. 430–32; and Beston, p. 27.

Without land or wealth,
 A courageous and worthy knight
 But without anyone to advise or help him' (vv. 565–69)

whom the knight-advisor evokes in the course of the conversation. Like this poor knight, moreover, the knight-advisor has 'no one to advise him' (v. 782) and later happens, after many lean years, "to inherit [...] | A large, well-furnished domain" (vv. 570–71) thanks to his marriage to the lady.

The third suitor courts the lady, furthermore, "With lays, with writings, with romances" (v. 163) and thus resembles the first author of the *Lai du Conseil*, a knight befuddled by his love for a lady (for whom, one supposes, he wrote this lay). Like the poor man and the knight-advisor, moreover, the knight-author is without advice, and, unlike the lady, cannot even advise himself (vv. 856–57; compare v. 27). Unlike the third 'suitor', the knight-advisor, and the lady, however, the knight-author cannot bring himself to court his beloved and is thus 'as trapped | As one who lives in longing' (vv. 858–59).

The third 'suitor', the knight-advisor, the poor knight, and the knight-author thus all resemble one another enough to be thought of as different hypothetical versions of the same person: What if a poor but sophisticated and valiant knight courted a lady at a Christmas Eve gathering? What if she called him over to advise her about love? What if he inherited a large domain? What if he could not 'advise himself | About a love that has taken him by surprise' (vv. 856–57)? The situation is even further complicated, of course, because one supposes that the knight-author may also be identified with the narrator and the poet.⁷⁶

Other scholars have pointed out the irony in the knight-author's ability to compose a lay of advice but inability to advise himself.⁷⁷ But we also see in this extended play of mirrors a sort of prophetic allegory, or a statement of faith. By 'commemorating' the happy outcome of this earlier amorous 'adventure' (vv. 849–50), the poet-knight-author 'visualizes' what he would like to happen in his own adventure, the way athletes prepare themselves for an athletic contest by visualizing it ahead of time.⁷⁸ Seen from this point of view, composing a lay of advice is in fact (within the fiction of the lay) the poet-knight-author's way of advising himself, of getting himself ready for his own adventure, of plucking up the courage to court his lady by convincing himself that he can be as successful as the knight of the lay, as well, perhaps, as pleading his suit and communicating discreetly to his lady, like his knight-advisor, a model for their interaction.

⁷⁶ The separate identities of the knight-advisor, knight-author, narrator and poet collapse together in a striking way in line 549, where the knight-advisor addresses himself to the lady and "anyone who hears this lay". The knight-advisor's use of the first person, as in lines 563–64 for example, also creates a monophonic alignment of the voices of the knight-advisor, knight-author, narrator and poet.

⁷⁷ See Brook, 'Omnia', p. 74; Capusso, 'Contro la bee', p. 64; Maddox, pp. 430, 435–36.

⁷⁸ For a brief introduction to the use of visualization in sports psychology, see Smith and Kays, pp. 87–104.

This helps us to appreciate the lay's completely happy ending. The lay is not unrealistic or utopian. It is realistic and its integration of love and marriage is far better founded and more integral to the story than that found in most other lays.⁷⁹ It portrays what is indeed a best-case scenario, but not an impossible or unrealistic one.⁸⁰ Two aristocrats could well fall in love at a Christmas Eve court, they could well maintain a secret and happy affair for a long time,⁸¹ they could well end up marrying one another, and one of them could well be ennobled and enriched by this marriage. And if this can happen, if one can visualize its happening, why can it not happen for the poet-knight-author or, indeed, for anyone who hears or reads the lay?

The lay thus projects a best-case (and thus improbable but not unrealistic) scenario in a fictional world similar to that we find projected by numerous other twelfth- and thirteenth-century works. It is a proposed or hypothetical world in which “‘God and love are of one accord | [...] | and he does not at all loathe good love’”⁸²; a world governed by a ‘God [...] who loves lovers’⁸³; who really does work in *everything* for the good — for the erotic, romantic, and material, as well as spiritual, good — for those who love him and do not despair of his mercy (vv. 507, 546–53); a world in which both the lady who loves and the lady who never knows love repent at the end of their life, but in which the former repents of loving and goes to heaven, while the latter repents of not loving and goes to Hell (vv. 493–559); a world in which love conquers all and always will (v. 661); a world in which faith in love is an exemplum of all faith. ‘Amen’ (v. 863).⁸⁴ Like many modern authors and film-makers

⁷⁹ See Guillet-Rydell.

⁸⁰ Maddox refers to a ‘utopian eventuality within the “real” dimension’ of the poem (p. 432), what we have called a best-case scenario, but he seems in the end to conclude that the poem is ‘less a workable paradigm for success in love and life than an elusive ideal, a utopian fiction’ (p. 436).

⁸¹ The kind of love promulgated by the lay is thus distinctly less dramatic and tragic than that promulgated in the legends of Tristan and Yseut and Lancelot and Guinevere, where love cannot be kept secret. ‘Dear God’, writes Béroul, ‘who can be in love | for a year or two without revealing it? | For love cannot be hidden: | One lover often leans towards the other. | They often talk to one another | Both in private and in front of people’ (‘Ha! Dex, qui puet amor tenir | Un an ou deus sans découvrir? | Car amors ne se puet celer: | Sovent cline l’un vers son per, | Sovent vienent a parlement, | Et a celé et voiant gent’; vv. 573–78, p. 18).

⁸² “‘Diex et amors sont d’un acort | [...] | Et bone amor ne het il mie’” (*Le Lai de l’Oiselet*, vv. 152–54 as found in manuscripts A and D, pp. 77–78).

⁸³ ‘Dix [...] qui les amans ainme’ (*Aucassin et Nicolette*, 26.12, p. 124).

⁸⁴ It is interesting that Brook seems to interpret the knight’s admonishment to “‘Always set your heart and will | On serving and honouring God’” (vv. 362–63) as referring to ‘the god of love’ (‘Omnia’, p. 71). On the ways in which the projection of this world governed by a God who loves love and lovers might in some way be a form of religious dissent, see Russell. Le Saux suggests that the doctrine of courtly love is ironically assimilated to religious values in the *Lai de l’Oiselet*, with which values it is in fact ‘fundamentally antagonistic’, and that that poet’s ultimate goal is to

— albeit with important differences as well — the poet really does believe, or wants to believe, or wants us to believe that he believes that love does conquer all and always will — in reality, in his case, and in ours. The love-friendly world projected by the poem may not be the orthodox Christian world, or the common world of our experience, but it is certainly no worse, no less realistic, and in fact seems distinctly more pleasant, than many of the other hypothetical worlds with which we surround ourselves.

encourage people to turn their thoughts from the ‘unnatural, shallow and deceptive’ charms of this world to the real and durable good of the next (pp. 93–97). See also the note to line 537, below.

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Le Lai du Conseil

On the following pages, the numbered notes to the Text refer to the appropriate line number, and the notes to the Translation are given as footnotes.

Text

f. 33v col 1 **Q**ui a biaux diz veut bien entendre
De romanz molt i puet aprendre
col. 2 Por qu'il les vueille retenir.
4 Cis lais nous conte sanz mentir
 Que la vigille d'un Noël,
 C'on tient en maint leu riche ostel,
 Fu une cort grant et pleniére.
8 Genz i ot de mainte maniere
 Qui la estoient assamblé.
 Dames i ot a grant plenté
 Et damoiseles ensement.
12 Il i ot molt de toute gent –
 De fols, de sages, de vaillanz –
 Caroles, vieles, romanz.
 D'amors en mainz leus i parloient
16 Et cil et celes qui amoient.
 Cele feste fu molt joianz.
 Une dame riche et poissanz
 I fu d'amors molt bien requise,
20 Si con li contes le devise,

¹ Qui] Cil q. CET – a] de B – a biaux diz veut bien] v. a b. d. (dire T) CET – veut] missing in P – veut bien] voudroit B. Decorated capital in ACD, preceded by an illumination in D; space left for decorated capital in B; initial letter in margin E.

² De romanz molt] M. de r. ET – De bons mos i porroit apendre B.

³ Por] Puis BD – les] le ET – vueille] vousist B.

⁴ conte] c. et dist B.

⁵ Que] Qu'a C – d'un] du D – Noël] noiet E.

⁷ Fu] En B.

⁸ mainte] moute B – maniere] tiere E.

¹¹ ensement] ausiment B, assiment E.

¹² Il] Assez B – molt] missing in B.

¹³ fols] faus D – vaillanz] vilains DET.

¹⁴ Caroles] Roteles D – Henuyers, Bretons et Flamains ET.

¹⁵ D'amors en mainz leus i CD] E. m. l. d'a. B – I peüst on assez oïr A – D'eschais de tables si gouvoient E.

¹⁶ cil et celes qui amoient CD] c. e. c. q. la estoient B, li plaser d'amors parloient E – Qui les amanz font resjoïr A.

¹⁷ Cele] La B – joianz] avenant B, plaisans DE. Decorated capital in ms. D.

¹⁹ d'amors molt bien] le jour d'amours D.

²⁰ Si] Issi CE – li] cis C – le] nous B, missing in CE.

Anyone who wants to listen attentively to fair words
 In French can learn a lot from them¹
 Provided that he or she make an effort to remember them.
 4 This lay tells us without lying
 That on one Christmas Eve,
 Which is celebrated lavishly in many places,²
 A large, plenary court gathering was held.
 8 People of many conditions
 Were gathered there.
 There were many married ladies
 And unmarried ones as well.
 12 There were many people of all sorts –
 Foolish, wise, and worthy –
 Carols, fiddles, and romances.
 They spoke of love in many places there,
 16 Both the men and the women who were in love.
 This feast was most joyous.
 A wealthy and powerful lady
 Was much wooed there,
 20 As the tale relates,

¹ *Romanz* may mean either the French language, as it does here and in line 851, or a ‘romance,’ a long, narrative poem in octosyllabic couplets, as it does in lines 14 and 163. Maddox (p. 419 n. 37) points out that lines 1–2 echo the ends of lines 11–12 of Chrétien de Troyes’s *Erec et Enide*: ‘Por ce dit Crestiens de Troies | Que raisons est que totes voies | Doit chascuns penser et entendre | A bien dire et a bien aprendre’ (‘For this reason Chrétien de Troyes says that everyone should always think about and be mindful of speaking well and learning/teaching well’; vv. 9–12, p. 28).

² Compare *Do pré tondre*: ‘Ce fu la voille d’un Noël | Q’an tient en maint leu riche ostel’ (‘It was one Christmas Eve | Which is celebrated lavishly in many places’; in de Montaiglon and Raynaud, vv. 1–2, p. 154); and *Le roman de la violette*: ‘Onques li rois Artus en Gales | A pentecouste n’a Noël | Ne tint onques si riche ostel’ (‘Never did King Arthur ever celebrate so lavishly in Wales at either Pentecost or Christmas’; Gerbert de Montreuil, vv. 6588–90, pp. 262–63).

Que troi chevalier la prioient
 Toutes les foiz qu'a li parloient;
 Et la dame si s'en parti
 24 Que n'otroia ne n'escondi
 A nul des .iij. sa druerie.
 De toz .iij. parti conme amie,
 Se ses consaus li aportoit.
 28 D'une part esgarde, si voit
 .I. chevalier tout seul seant.
 Ele l'apele maintenant.
 Li chevaliers en piez sailli,
 32 Si se va s'oir delez li
 Ou la dame l'ot apelé.
 'Sire, entendez ! Ma verité,'
 Fet la dame; 'je vous dirai,
 36 Que ja ne vous en mentirai.
 Troi chevalier d'amors me proient
 Et molt me dient qu'il voudroient
 De moi avoir l'amor entiere.
 40 Et vous savez,' fet ele, 'sire,
 Du siecle. Si m'en aprenez

²¹ Que] missing in B – chevalier] c. ml't B. Line missing in E.

²² qu'a li] que la C – parloient] veoient C, venoient D – D'amours quant en lieu en venoient B.

²³ Et] missing in B – si] si bel B, missing in C – s'en parti] s'en departi C, s'emparti D.

²⁴ Que] Qu'ele B, Qu'el C – ne] missing in B – n²²] missing in E.

²⁵ des] d'eus CE.

²⁶ De toz .iij.] D. t. .iij. c'en B, D. t. .iij. se D, Ains s'en E – parti] part BD, p. si E. One syllable too many in original (De toz .iij. s'en parti conme amie)?

²⁸ esgarde] garde B, regarde E.

³⁰ l'apele] l'apela B.

³² Si] missing in E – se va] c'en vint B, vint C, s'ala D, s'en va E – delez BCDE] joust A.

³³ Ou] con B, Quant C, Et E – l'ot] l'a E.

³⁴ entendez] or oez B – verité] volenté BCE (compare von Wartburg, p. 290).

³⁶ Que] missing in B, Ne CD – ja] j. de mot BC – vous] missing in C – en] missing in B, n'en C. Illumination in D between lines 36 and 37.

³⁷ Decorated capital in C.

³⁸ molt me] tuit .iij. B, s'il m. E.

³⁹ L'am. d. m. av. e. BE.

⁴⁰ fet ele] dou sieccle B.

⁴¹ Du siecle] fet ele B.

For three knights entreated her
 Every time they spoke to her;
 And the lady parted from them
 24 Without granting or refusing
 Her affection to any of the three.
 She parted from all three as a friend¹
 As seemed advisable to her.²
 28 She looked to one side and saw
 A knight sitting all alone.
 She called him right away.
 The knight jumped to his feet,
 32 And went to sit beside her
 Where the lady had called him.
 ‘Listen, sir! I’ll tell you,’
 Said the lady, ‘my true thoughts,
 36 For I’ll never lie to you about them.
 Three knights entreat my love
 And tell me insistently that they would like
 To have my undivided love.
 40 And you, sir,’ she said, ‘are familiar with
 This world. So teach me which³

¹ *Ami/Amie* has a wide range of meaning covering everything from ‘friend’ to ‘lover’ to ‘long-term companion.’ It is generally used in this poem to refer to a more-or-less long-term romantic relationship and we have usually translated it as ‘companion.’

² *Conseil* or a related term recurs regularly throughout the poem and giving and receiving advice forms one of its themes (see the Introduction, pp. 18–20). We have translated the word consistently by ‘advice’ or a related term.

³ *Siècle* is another word with a large range of meanings. In its broadest sense, it refers to everything that is material and subject to time and decay (as opposed to the timeless, spiritual world). In this poem, it generally has the more limited meaning of worldly or aristocratic society.

Liqueles doit estre miex amez:
 Ou cil qui premiers conmença,
 44 Ou cil qui après m'en proia,
 Ou li tiers trestoz daarrains.⁴³
 'Certes, dame, li mains vilains,
 Li plus sages, li miex vaillanz,
 48 Por qu'il soit de fin cuer amanz.
 Mes ne m'avez pas encor dit,
 Douce dame, se Diex m'aït,
 Por qoi je vous doïe loer
 52 Lequel vous devez miex amer.
 f. 34r col. 1 Mes les teches d'aus me contez
 De chief en chief, se vous savez.⁴⁴
 'Certes,' dist ele, 'volentiers.
 56 Li premerains est chevaliers
 Preus et hardiz et bien avant,
 Mes entulle et mal dosnoiant.
 Mal afetié et mal apris
 60 L'ai je trové, ce m'est avis,
 Quar du siecle est molt poi sachanz,
 Et de son cors mal acesmanz,
 Et s'est avers et sanz deduit.

⁴³ premiers] avant B.

⁴⁴ m'en proia] en parla E. Line missing in B.

⁴⁵ Ou li tiers trestoz] Biaus duz sires u li E.

⁴⁷ sages] cortois E – miex] plus CE.

⁴⁸ Por] Mes B, Puis D.

⁴⁹ pas encor] e. p. BCD. Decorated capital in C.

⁵⁰ Koi que doi a Saint Esperit E.

⁵¹ Por qoi je] Chose dont D – doïe] sache CD.

⁵³ Mes] missing in E – contez] racontez E.

⁵⁴ se vous] si les E – savez] volez BCD.

⁵⁵ dist] fet CDE – Je vous dirai ml't volantiers B.

⁵⁶ est] e. uns B.

⁵⁸ Mes entulle] Mal aviseis E – et mal] est B – dosnoiant] donant E.

⁵⁹ afaitié et] ensaigniez B. Lines 59–60 inverted in CE.

⁶¹ Quar] Et c'est B, Et E – est] missing in E – est molt] missing in B – poi] non E.
 Lines 61–62 missing in D.

⁶² acesmanz] afaitant E.

⁶³ Et s'est] Il est E. Lines 63–64 inverted in E ⁶⁴ Ainsij] Ce B, Ausi D – tesmoingnent]
 t. bien B.

Of them should be most loved:¹
 The one who asked me first,
 44 Or the second one who entreated me,
 Or the third and very last.’
 ‘Certainly, lady, the least oafish,
 The wisest, the most worthy,
 48 As long as he is a tender-hearted lover.
 But you have not yet told me,
 Gracious lady, may God help me,
 Why I must recommend to you
 52 The one you should most love.
 But tell me what you know
 About their qualities from head to toe.’
 ‘Certainly,’ she said, ‘gladly.
 56 The first is a courageous and bold
 And remarkable knight,
 But he is boring and a poor suitor.
 I found him, it’s my opinion,
 60 Poorly trained and poorly educated,
 For he knows very little about this world,
 And he is poorly groomed,
 And cross and unpleasant.

¹ Maddox (pp. 405–06) points out the similarity between this line and line 52 of Marie de France’s *Chaitivel* (‘Li queils sereit mieuz a amer’; in *Les Lais*, p. 144).

64 Ainsi le tesmoingnent trestuit.
 Riches est de terre et d'avoir.⁶⁴
 'Toutes eures fet il savoir
 Dame, quant il se tient garni,
 68 Qu'avoirs fet tel nommer ami
 Qui molt petit seroit amez,
 Se li siens estoit alouez.
Or me dites donc la maniere
 72 Des autres, douce dame chiere.⁶⁵
 'Volentiers voir. Li uns des .ij.
 Est molt biaux, mes petit est preus.
 Riens ne vaut d'armes. De son cors
 76 Si est si biaux, si granz, si fors
 Que ce ressemble une merveille,
 Et si ne vaut pas une oëille.
 Ce tesmoingne toz li pais.
 80 Hauz hom est et de bons amis.
 Grant terre a et grant chasement
 Mes molt le tient mauvesement.
 Laidure li font si voisin

⁶⁴ Ainsi] Ce B, Ausi D – tesmoingnent] t. bien B.

⁶⁵ Mes r. e. de grant pooir B.

⁶⁶ Dame se tig je a savoir B.

⁶⁷ Dame] missing in B – il] il d'avoir B.

⁶⁸ Qu'] missing in BCE – tel] missing in D, nel E – nommer] avoir B.

⁷⁰ Se] Se toz CD – siens estoit alouez] seus e. toz alez B, avoirs e. alez E.

⁷¹ Or] Mais or BD – dites] redites C – donc] missing in BCDE. Syllable lacking in original (represented by E: Or me dites la maniere)? Decorated capital in ACD.

⁷² dame] amie BC.

⁷³ voir] sire C – li uns] l'un C.

⁷⁴ Est molt] Il est E – est²] et E.

⁷⁶ Si est] Et c'est B, Il est E – biaux si granz] gens s. b. B, g. s. b. D.

⁷⁷ Que BCDE] Q. molt A – ce ressemble une CD] bien samble u. A, c'est u. fine B, bien r. u. E.

⁷⁸ Et si] Mais ilh E – pas] missing in E – oëille] orelle B, cenele E.

⁷⁹ Ce tesmoingne toz] Ce li t. B. Lines 79–82 appear in the following order in B: 81/82/80/79.

⁸⁰ et] s'a C – bons] grans D – Car si home et ses amis B.

⁸² molt] il B.

⁸³ Laidure li font CD] Que lait li f. A, Sovent le gabent E – si CDE] li sien A. Lines 83–84 missing in B.

64 That's what everybody says.
 He is rich in land and possessions.'
 'It is nonetheless well known,
 Lady, however wealthy he may be,
 68 That someone is called a friend on account of his possessions
 Who would be loved very little
 If his goods were all hocked.
 Now tell me, then, about the manner
 72 Of the others, dear gracious lady.'
 'Truly gladly. One of the two
 Is very handsome, but not very courageous.
 He's worthless at fighting. His body
 76 Is so handsome, so tall, so strong
 That it seems a marvel,
 And yet it is not worth a ewe.
 That's what the whole country says.
 80 He is of high status and has important friends.
 He has a great deal of land and many properties
 But manages it very badly.
 His neighbors treat him so abominably,

- 84 Si que si homme et si aclin
 Ont par sa defaute damage.
 Il est de molt lasche corage
 Mes molt est biaux et acesmanz.⁸⁷
- 88 ‘De ce fet il molt que vaillanz,
 Dame, quant il son cors tient chier
 Puisqu’il le puet bien esligier.
 Et du tiers que me dites vous?’⁸⁸
- 92 ‘Certes il est cortois et dous
 Et de bone maniere plains,
 Et si vous di qu’il est molt plains
 De ce qu’il n’est plus riches hom.
- 96 Il n’a mie grant garison,
 Si s’en desduit mult belement,
 Et s’en maintient plus cointement
 Que teus en a .iij. tans de lui.
- 100 Il n’est mie garnis d’anui,

⁸⁴ et si aclin] en sont enclin E – *enclin* corrected to *aclin* C.

⁸⁵ Ont] Tout E – defaute] faute E. This line is repeated in D.

⁸⁷ Mes molt est] Et s’est trop E – acesmanz] avenans E. E adds one line between 87 and 88: Et de son cors bien acemans.

⁸⁸ il] .i. C, u D – molt] missing in B, pou CD – que] le E. E adds one line between 88 and 89: Dist li chevaliers en riant.

⁸⁹ son cors tient] t. s. c. E.

⁹⁰ Puisqu’il CD] Et il A, ...es qu’il E – Quant il l’a de quoi aligier B. Lines 90–99 are incomplete in E. The copyist indicates that the left margin of the original Turin manuscript was torn (‘Ici la marge est déchirée’), and begins each line with a set of suspension marks.

⁹¹ dites BCDE] direz A. Decorated capital in D.

⁹² cortois] simples B.

⁹⁴ vous di] sachiez C – di] d. bien E.

⁹⁵ plus] pas C, mult E.

⁹⁶ mie] pas molt C.

⁹⁷ Si C] Mes A, Et BD, missing in E (see note to line 90) – s’en desduit mult E] m. se d. A, s’en d. plus BD, s’en mainne m. C – belement] noblement B, cointement D, richement E. Lines 97–98 are inverted in BD.

⁹⁸ Et s’en C] Il se A, Si s’en BD, missing in E (see note to line 90) – plus] trop E – cointement] richement C, belement D, sagement E.

⁹⁹ Que] ...s que E – en] missing in E – .iij.] .ij. D, .xx. E.

¹⁰⁰ garnis d’anui] g. d’amiz B.

84 That his men and his dependents
 Suffer because of his failings.
 He is a coward in his heart
 But he is very handsome and well groomed.’
 88 ‘It is very worthy of him,
 Lady, to hold his body dear
 Since he can well afford it.¹
 And what can you tell me about the third?’
 92 ‘He is certainly courtly and gracious
 And has very good manners,
 And yet I tell you he is much pitied
 Because he is not richer.
 96 He is not at all wealthy
 And yet enjoys what he has most handsomely,
 And finds a way to live more elegantly
 Than those who have three times as much as he.
 100 He is never filled with cares

¹ The knight’s remark is a little cryptic, but seems to indicate a certain annoyance or displeasure. The second suitor is very handsome, rich, noble and well-connected. Based on what the lady says later, he is evidently also vain (see vv. 126–27), and she suggests here that he devotes a substantial amount of attention to his grooming and dress. Andreas Capellanus includes ‘a beautiful figure’ and ‘great wealth’ as two of the five means by which love may be acquired (p. 33), and the knight perhaps feels that this second suitor is a serious rival, especially since the lady at least pretends to be quite taken with his good looks. It is, of course, possible that she dwells on his looks precisely in order to see if she can provoke the knight to jealousy. And his reply — which one might translate more freely as: ‘How great for him that he can spend so much money on making himself look so good’ — suggests that he is in fact jealous.

Text

col. 2
104 Mes de deduit et de solaz.
Si ne fu onques nul jor laz
De fere honor a son pooir
Selonc la richece et l'avoir
Et la garison que il a.
C'est li mains biaux et le mains a
De garison et d'eritage,
108 Mes molt le tesmoignent a sage
Cil et celes qui l'ont acointe.
Il set molt bien fere le cointe,
S'est sanz orgueil et sanz envie.
112 Et si vous di que il n'a mie
Tot jors esté a son talent,
Ainz a a maint tornoïement
Esté a pie, dont li pesoit,
116 Que sa terre pas ne devoit
Qu'il peüst chevaus achater.
Et s'ai sovent oï conter
Qu'il a sor maint povre ronci
120 Sovent au vespre eü le cri,
Qu'il avoit passée la route
Avoec qui il estoit trestoute.

¹⁰¹ deduit] duit D.

¹⁰² Si] Et si E – nul] .i. D, missing in E.

¹⁰⁴ la richece et l'avoir] le sens e. le savoir D – l'avoir] le pooir B.

¹⁰⁶ le] qui DE.

¹⁰⁸ molt le tesmoignent] il l. tienent m. B.

¹⁰⁹ Cil] Et c. B – Tuit chil qui sont de lui a. E.

¹¹¹ S'est] Tout E – et] s'est B.

¹¹² di que il] d. bien qu'il CDE.

¹¹³ Tot jors esté CDE] E. t. j. A, T. tens e. B.

¹¹⁴ Ainz] Il CDE – a²] en B.

¹¹⁵ Esté a pie] Esteit apre E.

¹¹⁶ devoit] li doit BCE.

¹¹⁷ Qu'il] Qu'il en BCE.

¹¹⁸ Et s'ai souvent D] Si ai s. A, Et s'ai pieça B, Et si ai ge C, Ensi l'ai je E.

¹¹⁹ Qu'il a sor maint] Que seur .i. mout D – povre] mauvais B.

¹²⁰ Sovent au vespre] De tornoier B – au] a E – eü] avoit D, en E – cri] pris B, brui E.

¹²¹ Qu'il] Et qu'il E – Et s'a trespassee sa r. B.

But full of delight and contentment.
He has never tired for a single day
Of acting as honourably as he can,
104 Insofar as his riches and possessions
And wealth permit.
He's the least handsome and has the least
Wealth and inherited the least,
108 But the men and women who know him
Say that he is very wise.
He knows very well how to behave elegantly,
But is not proud or envious.
112 And I tell you that things have not
Always gone as he would have wished,
But he has, rather, fought on foot
In many tournaments, which weighed on him,
116 Because his land did not produce enough
For him to buy a horse.
And yet I have often heard tell
That, even mounted on many poor packhorses,
120 He has often been acclaimed the winner at the end of the day
Because he had surpassed the whole band of knights
That were there.

De toz .iij. ne vous sai plus dire
 124 Fors tant que tout par maïstire
 Veut li premiers m'amor avoir,
 Et puis li biaus par estavoir
 Lors me ramentoit sa biauté.
 128 Mes j'ai en lui tant oublié
 Qu'il est vanterres, ce oï dire.¹²⁹
 'Certes, dame, molt en est pire
 Ce tant de bien qu'en lui avoit.
 132 Je di que vanterres n'a droit
 En bone amor ne ja n'aura.
 N'est mie sages qui fera
 S'amor crier a la bretesche,
 136 Car tout ausi conme li esche
 A mestier au feu alumer
 En la forest ou en la mer
 Est li celers avoec l'amor:
 140 Qui veut avoir joie et honor
 Autrement n'en puet on joïr.
 Et vous qui volez maintenir,
 Douce dame, amors et garder,
 144 Por Dieu, penez vous du celer

¹²³ toz] ces E – vous sai plus] v. s. que B, s. p. que D. Decorated capital in ACD.

¹²⁴ tant que tout] que trestout D, que tant que E – tout par] p. fin C – par] por E – Mais li riches par maïtire B.

¹²⁵ Veut li premiers] Dit qu'il voudra B.

¹²⁶ puis li biaus par] li autres por E.

¹²⁷ Lors] Tantost B, Et si C – me] missing in B.

¹²⁸ j'ai] je C – en lui tant] tost li B.

¹²⁹ ce oï] que je oi E.

¹³⁰ est pire BCDE] empire A.

¹³¹ Ce BCDE] Cel A – qu'en] en B.

¹³⁴ N'est mie sages] Cist (Il E) n'est pas s. BE, N'est pas voir s. C, N'est pas s. chius D. Syllable lacking in original (N'est pas sages qui fera)?

¹³⁶ Car CDE] Mes A, missing in B – ausi] autresi B, ensi E.

¹³⁸ En la] Soit e. E.

¹³⁹ Est] A BC, S'est E.

¹⁴⁰ Qui] Q. en D – et honor] d'amor C.

¹⁴¹ on] il C – Qu'autrement nuns partir B.

¹⁴³ et] a B.

¹⁴⁴ penez] pensez C – vous] missing in CE – du] du bien CE, de D.

I don't know what else to tell you about all three
 124 Except that the first wants
 To win my love by mastery,
 And then the handsome one as if he were irresistible
 While reminding me of his handsomeness.¹
 128 But I forgot to say about him
 That I have heard he is a braggart.²
 'Certainly, lady, this is much worse
 Because there was so much that was good in him.'²
 132 I say that a braggart has no rights
 In good love and never will have any.
 He is not at all wise who has
 His love shouted in the town square,³
 136 For just as one needs
 Tinder to light a fire
 In the forest or on the sea,
 So one needs secrecy to love:
 140 Anyone who wants joy and honour
 Cannot enjoy it otherwise.
 And you, gracious lady, who want
 To sustain and preserve love,
 144 For God's sake, take pains to keep secrets

¹ Lines 124–27 are a little elliptic and difficult to understand. They set forth the reasons the first two suitors think they will win the lady's love. The first suitor, who is outstanding for his warlike character (see vv. 56–57), thinks that he can simply dominate her as he would an enemy, 'master' her and make her love him by force of will. The second is aware that he is very handsome, evidently does what he can to draw her attention to his good looks (to 'remind' her of them), and thinks that she will inevitably fall in love with him because of them. Both the first and second suitors, that is, are vain and cannot imagine that she will refuse them.

² This comment may well be ironic. See lines 88–90.

³ In northern French towns, the *bretesche* was a partially enclosed gallery or balcony on the town hall, facing the main square, from which official announcements were made. For images of the *bretesche* of Saint-Omer, see Derville, p. 47. To have one's love shouted from the *bretesche* was thus to have it declared publicly in the town square as one would an official proclamation.

Text

Vers les vantëors mesdisanz.
Teus en maine molt granz bobanz
Qui n'en set pas adeviner;
148 Por ce s'en doit on bien garder,
Qu'amors veut estre bien celee.
Tout autressi con la rousee
Monte a larron deseure l'arbre
152 Et el moustier deseure le marbre
Ou ne puet plovoir ne venter,
Tout autressi doit trespasser
La bone amor parmi la gent
156 C'on ne s'en perçoive noïent;
Quar puisqu'amors est parceüe
Ele est trahie et deceüe.
Et li tiers comment vous en proie?'
160 'Certes, sire, je ne sauroie
Pas aconter hui en cest jor
Con bel il me requiert d'amor
Par lais, par escriz, par romanz.

¹⁴⁵ Lines 145–48 missing in B.

¹⁴⁶ Teus] Qui D, Car t. E – maine] mainent D – molt] missing in E – granz bobanz] joie g. E.

¹⁴⁷ Lines 147–48 missing in D.

¹⁴⁸ s'en] se C – garder EC] celer A – P. coi on d. amurs g. E. Compare lines 222, 356.

¹⁴⁹ Qu'amors] A. E – veut] doit B. Large capital in margin E.

¹⁵⁰ autressi] ensemment CD, asiment E.

¹⁵¹ a larron deseure l'arbre] en larrecin d. l'a. B, en larçon d. l'a. C, a cele sor le marbre E.

¹⁵² el] en D – deseure le marbre] qui est de mabre B – Et sor l'erde vers desouz l'arbre E.

¹⁵³ Lines 153–54 missing in E.

¹⁵⁴ autressi] ensemment CD.

¹⁵⁵ La bone] Doit estre E – parmi BCD] entre A, devant E – la gent] les gens E.

¹⁵⁶ ne s'en] n'en B, nel E – perçoive] aperçoive BE.

¹⁵⁷ parceüe BC] aperçute AE, aperchiue D.

¹⁵⁸ Ele est BCDE] Est ele A – deceüe CD] deçute A, mal seüe B, destruite E.

¹⁵⁹ Decorated capital in CD.

¹⁶¹ aconter] raconter BE – en] de B.

¹⁶² bel il me requiert d'amor] il m. r. bele amour D – d'amor] m'amor C.

From slanderous braggarts.
Those who lack foresight
Lead the showiest lives;
148 This is why one must take care,
For love wants to be kept very secret.
Just as the dew
Steals up the tree
152 And over the marble in the church
Where it never rains nor blows,
So good love
Must walk among people
156 In such a way that no one perceives anything of it;
For when love is perceived
It is betrayed and frustrated.
And the third, how does he entreat you?
160 'I certainly couldn't relate,
Sir, even if I had all day,
How beautifully he woos my love
With lays, with writings, with romances.

- 164 Nonques ne fu regehissanz
 Sa bouche, certes, a la moie.
 Ausi se cuevre toute voie
 Conme se riens ne l'en estoit.¹⁶⁴
- 168 'Foi que doi vous, dame, il a droit.
 Il est sages et aperçuz,
 Si ne veut pas estre deçuz
 De la fole gent mesdisant,
- 172 Ainz veut gehir son covenant,
 Ce m'est avis, molt sagement.
 Si vous dirai, dame, comment,
 Se vous le volez retenir,
- 176 Vous en poez molt bien couvrir;
 Et se vous nel volez amer,
 Il s'en puet couvrir et celer
 Et molt belement trere arriere
- 180 Et fere samblant que proïere
 N'eüst onques a vous de lui.¹⁸⁰
 'Donc, me loez vous miex cestui
 Que les autres? Ce m'est avis.'

¹⁶⁴ Nonques] C'onques D – Nonques ne fu] Si n. f. onques B, Si n. f. ains E – regehissanz] geissans B.

¹⁶⁵ Sa bouche, certes] C. de s. b. E.

¹⁶⁶ Ausi] Ainsi BD – Ausi se cuevre] Et ilh si fait ilh E – se] s'en D.

¹⁶⁹ Il est sages] Sages est CD – et] missing in B – aperçuz] aparçüz BCD.

¹⁷⁰ Si] missing in D, Ilh E – pas] missing in C – pas estre] e. p. E – deçuz] deçüz BCD.

¹⁷² Ainz veut gehir] Il vous geist D – gehir] celer BE – son covenant] ses covenans E.

¹⁷³ molt] bien D – Ml't coïement c. m'e. a. B. B adds one line between lines 173 and 174: Por ce que il n'en soit repris.

¹⁷⁴ Si] Or BC – Si vous dirai, dame] Dame or vos d. E. B adds one line between lines 174 and 175: Ce que je sai a esciant.

¹⁷⁵ le] nel B – retenir] detenir C. Lines 175–76 missing in E; lines 175–77 missing in D.

¹⁷⁶ Vous en poez molt] Ml't v. an porrez B – bien] biau BC.

¹⁷⁷ Dame s'il ne vos siet a amer E. Lines 177–78 missing in B.

¹⁷⁹ molt] missing in BE – belement trere] t. b. B – trere] retraire E.

¹⁸⁰ Et fere] Et si fait E.

¹⁸¹ a vous de] de v. a BCDE (see Capusso, 'La Copia,' pp. 17–18).

¹⁸² me] moi E – cestui BCDE] celui A.

164 Never once, certainly, has he spoken
 Too freely with people.
 He hides his intentions in every way
 As if he had nothing to hide.’

168 ‘By the faith I owe you, lady, he’s right to do so.
 He is wise and perceptive,
 And doesn’t want to be frustrated
 By foolish, slanderous people,

172 But wants rather to declare his intentions,
 In my opinion, very wisely.
 And I will tell you, my lady, how,
 If you want to hold on to him,

176 You can hide it very well;
 And how, if you don’t want to love him,
 He can hide it and keep it secret
 And draw back most seemingly

180 And pretend that
 He never entreated you.’
 ‘So you recommend this one to me more
 Than the others? That’s my opinion.’

Text

184 Dame, foi que doi Saint Denis,
Je ne vous faz nul jugement,
Mes trestout a vostre talent
Fetes vostre ami, que c'est drois.
188 Je ne dirai chose des mois
Par qoi nus perde que je sache,
Quar certes grant folie embrace
Cil qui du tout cuide estre sages.
192 Vous m'avez dit de lor usages,
Et je ne sui fors c'uns seus hom.
Or entendez autrui reson,
Si orrez c'on vous en dira.
196 Je di que grant avantage a
Trestout partout bons chevaliers.
Mes cil est trop mal entechiez
Selonc ce que vous m'avez dit,
200 Et biaux mauvés, se Diex m'aït,
S'en doit bien estre refusez.

¹⁸⁴ foi que doi Saint Denis] par Dieu de paradis C.

¹⁸⁶ trestout] del tot E.

¹⁸⁷ vostre] missing in BC, vo E – ami] avis D, bons E.

¹⁸⁸ des] de E.

¹⁸⁹ Par qoi] Ou B, Por q. E – nus perde] vous perdez riens B, vous perdés DE.

¹⁹⁰ Quar certes] Je di que BD – embrace] encharge B.

¹⁹¹ Cil] missing in B, Chis D – du tout] de trestot B, de t. CE.

¹⁹³ Et] Mais E – fors c'uns CE] que uns AB, chi c'uns D.

¹⁹⁴ entendez] requerez B, vos dirai E – autrui] autre BE.

¹⁹⁵ Si orrez c'on] S'orroiz que l'en B – orrez] sarés D – Si entendeis ke je di ja E.

¹⁹⁷ Trestout partout] P. les leus C, Certes p. E. For rime of iers/iez(s), compare lines 431–32, 537–38.

¹⁹⁸ Mes] Et E – trop] mout BD – entechiez] ensaigniez B, afaitiés DE. B adds two lines between lines 198 and 199: Qui se vante c'est vilenie | Et ne doit mie avoir amie. Compare lines 205–06: the B-copyist's eye seems to have skipped from the *entechiez/ensaigniez* at the end of line 198 to the *entechiez/ensaigniez* at the end of line 204.

¹⁹⁹ Douce dame se Dieus m'aïst B. Lines 199–204 missing in E; the E-copyist's eye seems to have skipped from the *entechiez* at the end of line 198 to the *entechiez* at the end of line 204.

²⁰⁰ Et BCD] Qu'est A – se Diex m'aït] si c'on le dist B.

²⁰¹ S'en A] missing in BCD – doit] D. ml't B – bien estre refusez] estre auques rien refusés D. Syllable lacking in original (represented by C: Doit bien estre refusez)?

184 'My lady, by the faith I owe Saint Denis,
 I will not judge this matter for you.
 It is right, rather, for you to choose your companion
 According only to your own desire.

188 I will never say anything
 That will hurt anyone as far as I am aware,
 For he who thinks to be wise in all things
 Certainly embraces great folly.

192 You have told me how they behave,
 And I am only one man.
 So listen to someone else's reasoning
 And you'll hear what they have to say.

196 I say that a good knight has¹
 A great advantage everywhere he goes.
 But this one has too many bad qualities
 According to what you have told me,

200 And a handsome bad man, may God help me,
 Should indeed be turned away.²

¹ 'A good knight' refers to the first of the three suitors: see lines 56–57.

² 'A handsome bad man' refers to the second of the three suitors: see lines 74–85 and 126–29.

Text

col. 2
Et nepourquant sovent amez
Est mains mauvés et covoitiez.
204 Mes cil est trop mal entechiez.
Qui se vante, c'est grant folie,
Quar novele ne s'endort mie,
Ainz est molt tost partout alee.
208 Maint païs et mainte contree
A cerchié en molt petit d'eure.
Li vanterres rist dont cil pleure
Qui veut estre leus amis.
212 Por ce tieng je a bien apris
Le tiers qui sagement vous proie,
Cui Diex doinst tant honor et joie
Conme en son cuer porroit manoir,
216 Quar il a proësce et savoir,
Ce m'est avis, trestout ensamble.
'Sire,' fet ele, 'ce me samble
Qu'assez dites apertement
220 De cest conseil vostre talent.
Mes or m'aprenez a amer,

²⁰² Et] missing in C – nepourquant BCD] nequedent A – sovent] s. est C.

²⁰³ Est mains mauvés A] Les biaux m. B, En plusors leus C, En maint lieus D.

²⁰⁴ Mes BCD] Et A – trop mal] ml't B, mout m. D – entechiez A] ensaigniez B, afaitiez C, afamés D.

²⁰⁵ se vante] est vantans E – grant folie] vilenie B.

²⁰⁶ Quar] Et D – s'endort] dort B, se dort E.

²⁰⁹ cerchié] passé B.

²¹⁰ vanterres] menteur B.

²¹² bien] mies E – apris] a apris B.

²¹³ sagement] parchment damaged and unreadable in B – vous] v. an B.

²¹⁴ Cui] Que D, A cui E – tant] molt C – honor] d'onnour D – honor et joie] bone vie E.

²¹⁵ Conme] Ki E.

²¹⁶ Quar] missing in BDE – il a] Et la B, Il a et D – et] et grant BE – savoir] valoir BDE. Syllable lacking in original (Il a proesce et savoir)?

²¹⁷ m'est] m'est bien E – trestout] tout E.

²¹⁸ Sire] Par foi D.

²¹⁹ Qu'assez] Qu'a ces B.

²²⁰ cest] ce E.

²²¹ Decorated capital in C; large initial letter in margin E.

And nonetheless many a bad man
 Is often loved and envied.
 204 But this one has too many bad qualities.
 If anyone brags, it's great folly,
 For news never sleeps
 But has soon flown everywhere.
 208 It quickly reaches
 Many countries and many lands.
 The braggart laughs at that which makes
 Him who wishes to be a loyal companion cry.
 212 This is why I think the third,
 Who entreats you wisely, is well instructed.
 May God give him as much honour and joy
 As will fit in his heart,
 216 For he possesses prowess and wisdom,
 That's my opinion, both together.'
 'Sir,' she said, 'it seems to me
 That you have said quite openly
 220 What you wanted to say by way of advice.
 But now teach me how to love

Et comment je me puis celer,
 Biaux sire, si bel et si bien,
 224 Que je vous di seur toute rien
 Me vueil a vo conseil tenir;
 Et nous avons molt bon loisir
 De festoier en bone amor,
 228 Mes je resoing molt la dolor
 Que j'oi dire que on en trait.
 'Certes, douce dame, non fait.
 De bone amor ne vient nus maus,
 232 Mes des felons fols desloiaus
 Qui amors vuelent escharnir
 Et toz jors sont prest de mentir
 Plus qu'esperviers n'est de voler.
 236 De ceus ne vous sai je conter
 Bon commencier ne bone fin,
 Qu'il sont tout ades au chemin
 Du siecle mener a dolor.'
 240 'Sire, de l'escharnir d'amor
 Me dites que ce senefie.'

²²² Et comment CDE] C. A; Que B – je] missing in D – me puis C] m'en porrai A, me sache bien B, m'en puisse D, moi puise E. Compare lines 148, 356.

²²³ Biaux sire] S'il vos plet C – Biaux sire, si bel et si] Monsignour douchement et D, M'ensengniés dolcement et E. Compare line 357.

²²⁴ vous di] m'en vuel B, me veil C. Compare line 358.

²²⁵ Me vueil] Du tot BC – Me vueil a vo conseil] A vo c. m. v. DE.

²²⁶ molt] missing in B.

²²⁷ festoier] bel parler B, fruitoier C – en bone amor] envers a. CD, en droit d'a. E.

²²⁸ resoing] redot BDE – la dolor] les dolors CDE.

²²⁹ Que] Con E – j'oi dire] la gent dient B – que on] com E.

²³⁰ Certes, douce dame] Dolour d'amer c. B, Par foit dame fait ilh E – non] nou BD.

²³² fols] cuers B, faus C, des D, et E.

²³³ amors] touzjours B.

²³⁴ Et toz jors] Amours et B – toz jors sont] s. t. j. D.

²³⁵ Plus] Puis B.

²³⁶ sai je] sage C. Line 236 missing in B.

²³⁷ ne] a B – bone fin] b. de f. E.

²³⁸ Qu'il sont tout ades] Qui vult a. cort B – Qu'il] Il E – chemin] declin E.

²³⁹ Du siecle mener] Dont maint s. maint B, Del s. metre et E.

²⁴⁰ Sire] Mes B.

'Gladly, lady. He who entreats love
 Without desire everywhere he happens to be,
 244 And can't remember it the next day,
 So that it seems rather to have been a dream,
 Wastes everyone's time.
 Lady, whoever lives such a life
 248 Without cost, without effort, without distress,
 Wants to be loved in a hundred places.'¹
 'Sir, now tell me if you think
 That women do likewise.
 252 Does each one have more than one companion?'
 'Lady, I'll tell you my reasoning about this,
 What I think about it and what I know.
 If there is a lady or a young woman
 256 Who is young, pleasing and beautiful,
 She will soon be wooed by many men,
 And wooed in many ways.
 One will woo her with entreaty

¹ See the note to line 401.

260 Et li autres en envoiant –
 Teus i envoïe, ja n'ira
 Jusqu'a cele eure qu'il saura
 Que ses messages a trové –
 264 Et li tiers a grant volenté
 De proier, mes ne l'ose faire,
 Ainz l'esgarde ades el viaire.
 Cil est amis en regardant.
 268 Et li quars s'en va aproismant
 Au miex qu'il set a manoier,
 Porce qu'ainsi veut essayer
 Se riens i aura de manaie.
 272 Li quins autrement le ressaie.
 Il la sert et done joiaus.
 Fermaus, çaintures, et aniaus
 Li envoie et s'ele les prent,
 276 Dont n'i cuide faillir noient,
 Ainz cuide bien avoir amie.
 Mainte dame par le païs

²⁶² Jusqu'a cele eure BC] Jusques a tant A, Desi adont D, Duzque c. e. E – qu'il BCE] que il AD.

²⁶³ ses messages] s. consaus B, son mesage C – a] aura BC.

²⁶⁴ Et] missing in BE – grant] bonne BE.

²⁶⁵ proier] parler BE – ne l'ose] n'en sait que E.

²⁶⁶ el] on B.

²⁶⁷ regardant] esgardant C.

²⁶⁸ Et] missing in D – s'en va] la v. BE, le revait D – aproismant] rapprochant B, aprochant C, rasaient E.

²⁶⁹ Au miex] Au plus bel B, Le m. CD – a] missing in BE, au D – manoier] esbanoyer E.

²⁷⁰ qu'ainsi veut] qu'il le v. E – Et cil la vuet bien essaucier B.

²⁷¹ aura] auroit CE – S. ja i trouvera manoie B.

²⁷² ressaie] ravoie B.

²⁷³ Il] Qui C. D replaces lines 273–76 with the following two lines: Que de ses joiaus li renvoie | S'ele les prent s'en a grant joie.

²⁷⁴ çaintures] afiches E – aniaus] chapiaus C.

²⁷⁵ envoie] done E – et] missing in BC – s'ele] cele BC, s'ele dont E.

²⁷⁶ Dont] Il E – n'i] ne B.

²⁷⁷ Ainz] Lors D – Ainz cuide bien avoir] Qu'il n'ait a son voloir B.

²⁷⁸ dame] foiee B, femme D – par] por E – Ne set liqex est vrais amis C. Lines 279–80 inverted in BC.

- 260 And another by sending messages –
Such a man sends messages to her, but will never go himself
Until he knows
She has received his messages –
- 264 And the third has a great desire
To entreat her, but doesn't dare,
Instead he's always gazing at her face.
He is a companion-by-gazing.
- 268 And the fourth draws near
As best he can to fondle her,
Because this is how he wants to approach her
And see if he will get anywhere.
- 272 The fifth approaches her in yet a different way.
He serves her and gives her jewelry.
He sends her clasps, belts,
And rings, and if she accepts them,
- 276 Then he thinks there is no way he can fail,
But thinks, rather, that she is indeed his companion.¹
In this way, lady, many a lady

¹ Compare *Eliduc*: “Dame, fet il, quant vus l’amez, | Enveiez i, si li mandez; | Ceinturë u laz u anel | Enveiez li, si li ert bel. | Se il le receit bonement | E joius seit del mandement, | Seüre seiez de s’amur” (“Lady, he said, if you love him | send him a message, let him know; | Send him either a belt or laces | or a ring, to see if it pleases him. | If he accepts it willingly | and is happy with the gift, | You can be sure he loves you”; in Marie de France, *Les lais*, vv. 355–61, p. 166); and *Le Lai de l’Ombre*: “[Retenez] moi par un joel, | Ou par çainture ou par anel, | Ou vos [recevez] un des miens” (“[Take me into your service] by giving me a jewel, | Or a belt or a ring, | Or accept one of mine”; Jehan Renart, vv. 515–17, pp. 48–49. In *The Art of Courtly Love*, Andreas Capellanus writes that “a woman who loves may freely accept from her lover the following: a handkerchief, a fillet for the hair, a wreath of gold or silver, a breastpin, a mirror, a girdle [belt], a purse, a tassel, a comb, sleeves, gloves, a ring, a compact, a picture, a wash basin, little dishes, trays, a flag as a souvenir, and, to speak in general terms, a woman may accept from her lover any little gift which may be useful for the care of the person or pleasing to look at or which may call the lover to her mind, if it is clear that in accepting the gift she is free from all avarice” (p. 176).

Tout ainsi, dame, est essaie
 280 De .v. ou de .vij. ou de .x.,
 Que ne set liquels dit plus voir.
 Qu'en puet ele, s'ele a espoir
 Que chascons l'aint quant il l'enproie
 284 Et d'amors li moustre la voie?
Quant ele gist seule en son lit
 Et ele pensse au grant delit
 Du siecle dont ele n'a point,
 288 Nature pres de li se joint.
 On ne se doit pas merveillier
 Se corage li fet changier,
 Ou s'ele fet plus bel samblant
 292 Ceus qui s'amor li vont proiant
 Que ceus qui noient ne l'en proient.
 Et li mesdisant qui ce voient
 Li ont molt tost a mal torné.

²⁷⁹ ainsi dame] assiment E – est essaie] e. ensaie D, a asaye E – Ainsi moine dame sa vie B.

²⁸⁰ De .vii. de .viii. de .ix. de .x. B, De .vii. d'uit de .ix. ou de dis C, De .vii. ou de .ix. ou de .x. D, De .v. de .vi. de .ix. de .x. E.

²⁸¹ Que ne set] Ne s. BE, Ne ne s. C.

²⁸² Qu'en] Qu'i B – espoir] l'espoir D.

²⁸³ Que] Se B – chascons] chius D – quant il CD] puisqu'il A, qui B – l'enproie] la proie B. Lines 283–84 missing in E.

²⁸⁴ d'amors BCD] d'amer A.

²⁸⁵ ele] la dame B – seule] missing in B. Decorated capital in AD.

²⁸⁶ au] a B.

²⁸⁷ n'a] i a D.

²⁸⁸ Nature] N. qui B – se] missing in B – S'adonkes nature la point D – Se volentés dont le repoint E.

²⁸⁹ se] s'en BD.

²⁹⁰ Se] S. son DE – li fet] estuet DE – S'ele li fait colour muer B.

²⁹¹ Ou] Et B, Ne DE.

²⁹² Ceus] A c. B – s'amor] d'amurs E – li] missing in B – proiant] querant BC.

²⁹³ ceus] cil B – noient ne l'en] de riens la B.

²⁹⁴ Et] missing in B – qui] q. tot B.

²⁹⁵ Li ont] Li i C, L'ont D – molt tost] tatost B.

Is approached throughout the country
 280 By five or seven or ten men
 Because she doesn't know which one speaks more truthfully.
 What can she do, since she hopes
 That each one loves her when he entreats her
 284 And shows her the path of love?
When she lies alone in her bed
 And thinks of the great pleasure
 To be had in this world, of which she has no part,¹
 288 Nature comes and lies next to her.
 One should not wonder
 If it makes her have a change of heart,
 Or if she shows a more cheerful countenance
 292 To those who keep entreating her love
 Than to those who don't entreat it from her at all.
 And the scandalmongers who see this²
 Quickly portray it in the worst light.

¹ Here, *siècle* refers to the material world subject to time as opposed to the immaterial, timeless world the lady will enter after her death.

² The translation of *mesdisant* by 'scandalmongers' here and in lines 395 and 670, is borrowed from Brook, p. 71.

Text

col. 2

296 S'en dit chascuns sa volenté:
Li uns dit qu'ele n'est pas sage,
Li autres la tient a volage,
Li tiers dist qu'ele est noveliere,
300 Li quars la tesmoingne a doubliere.
Ainsi en dient lor bufois
Cil qui ne sevent pas .ij. nois
Du siecle, ainz vivent d'aventure,
304 Que par reson et par droiture
Doit fame estre de biau respons.
La fame doit estre li pons
De toute la joïe du monde,
308 Quar toz li biens nous en abonde.
Nous n'en devrions pas mesdire,
Quar tuit avons mestier de mire
De garir du mal qui nous tient:
312 C'est de volenté qui nous vient
De dire outrage et vilonie.
Nous sommes tuit si plain d'envie
Que le siecle en avons perdu,
316 Si qu'il n'a pooir ne vertu,
Ainz est tuit alé a noient
Joïe, solaz, tornoïement.

²⁹⁶ S'en] Si E – S'en dit chascuns] C. en d. B.

²⁹⁹ dist qu'ele est noveliere] le tesmoigne a doubliere D.

³⁰⁰ la tesmoingne a doubliere] que trop est nouveliere D.

³⁰¹ Ainsi] A. ne B.

³⁰² ne] n'en D.

³⁰⁴ Que] Mes B – droiture] nature C.

³⁰⁶ La fame CDE] Quar f. A, F. si B.

³⁰⁸ Quar] Q. d'eles E – nous en abonde] habunde E.

³⁰⁹ Nous] Nuns B – n'en] ne B – devrions] devroit B, devons E – pas] mie BE.

³¹⁰ Quar] Mes CD – avons] ariens D.

³¹¹ De] Por C – du] d'un E.

³¹² C'est de volenté] D'une v. B.

³¹³ De dire outrage et] Ne devons dire E – outrage BCD] mal A – vilonie] felonnie C.

³¹⁵ perdu] tolu E. Lines 315–16 inverted in B.

³¹⁶ Si qu'il CDE] Qu'il A, Cil qui B – n'a BCDE] n'a mes A – pooir] forche DE.

³¹⁷ est BCDE] sont A.

³¹⁸ Joïe] Lors E – solaz] et s. D – tornoïement] tot voirement E.

296 Each one says what he or she wants:
 The one says that she is not wise,
 The other finds her frivolous,
 The third says she is fickle,
 300 The fourth swears she is two-faced.
 Those who know peanuts
 About this world and live thoughtlessly
 Speak presumptuously when they say this,
 304 For by reason and by right,
 A woman must be congenial.
 Women must be the bridge
 For all the joy of the world,
 308 For we have all good things in plenty thanks to them.
 We should not slander them,
 For we all need a doctor
 To cure the illness that afflicts us:
 312 It comes from our willingness
 To say offensive and villainous things.
 We are all so full of envy
 That we have ruined this world because of it,
 316 So that it has neither power nor strength,
 And joy, contentment and tourneying
 Have all come to nothing.

Dame, tuit li bien sont changié
 320 Et tuit li mal sont essaucié
 Et enraciné et repris.
 Mains hom cuide estre de haut pris
 De sa honte et de son damage.
 324 On ne doit pas tenir a sage
 Certes celui qui veut mesdire,
 Qui son afere ne remire
 Ainçois qu'il mesdie d'autrui.
 328 Et quant il voit qu'il n'a en lui
 A reprendre ne tant ne quant,
 Dont se doit d'iluec en avant
 Garder de dire vilonie,
 332 Quar sanz teche ne seroit mie.
 Qui ainsi, dame, porroit fere,
 Miex en devroit au siecle plere,
 Mes poi en est de si eslis.
 336 De Couloingne jusqu'a Paris
 Ne cuit je pas qu'il en ait .iiij.
 Si preus, si sages, si cortois

³¹⁹ Decorated capital in A.

³²⁰ essaucié] avancié B, efforchié E.

³²¹ Et] Et est E – enraciné] achivet E.

³²² Mains] Mais E – hom] missing in E – cuide] cuident B – haut BCDE] grant A

³²³ sa] son E – et] missing in B.

³²⁴ On ne doit pas tenir] Certes je nou tig pas B.

³²⁵ Certes celui qui] Celui q. d'autrui B.

³²⁶ Qui] Quant B.

³²⁷ qu'il mesdie] qu'il ait mesdit E.

³²⁸ voit qu'il n'a en lui] n'a trouvé celui B.

³²⁹ A BCDE] Que A.

³³² sanz teche] son bon los B, sans valour D, ses pris E – ne seroit] n'en aveit B, ne n'amande E.

³³³ Qui ainsi dame porroit] D. q. a. p. BE, D. q. p. a. D.

³³⁴ Miex] Bien B – au] a B – siecle] chaucun B – plere] faire T.

³³⁵ est de si eslis] a jusqu'a Sainlis ET. The Moreau copy (E) of the Turino manuscript (T) ends here, as did the Turino manuscript.

³³⁶ De] Des D – jusqu'a] jusque a B, dusqu'a D.

³³⁷ en] i B – ait] soit D.

Lady, all good things have degenerated
 320 And all bad things have been exalted
 And taken root and been given new life.
 Many men think they are of great worth
 Because of their shame and their loss.
 324 One shouldn't think a person is wise,
 Certainly, who wants to slander,
 Who pays no attention to his own affairs
 Until he has slandered someone else.¹
 328 And if he finds nothing whatsoever
 In himself to reproach,
 He should therefore refrain
 From saying villainous things thereafter,
 332 For then he would no longer be spotless.
 This world should be better pleased,
 Lady, by whoever acted in this way,²
 But there are few such chosen ones.
 336 From Cologne to Paris,
 I doubt there are three
 So courageous, so wise, so courtly

¹ This is perhaps a vague allusion to Matthew 7. 4–5: “Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye.”

² People, that is, should look more favorably on anyone who refrains from saying unkind things.

Text

340 Que il n'ait en eus a reprendre,
Qui bien i voudroit garde prendre.
Por ce, dame, s'estuet souffrir
Et le fol et le sage oïr
Et a la foiz mal otroier.
344 On ne puet pas tout avoier,
Dame, ne toz les max abatre.
Trop covendroit son chief debatre,
Qui tout voudroit bien metre a point.
348 Je vous di que je ne sai point,
Certes, en fame se bien non,
Mes ne sont pas d'une reson:
L'une set plus et l'autre mains.
352 Issi l'estora li souverains
f. 35v col. 1 Sires du mont a son plesir.
'Sire, c'est voirs. Por ce desir
Que se talent me prent d'amer,
356 Que je m'en sache bien celer.
Si m'en dites vostre escient,

³³⁹ Que il n'ait CD] Qu'il n'en ait A, Que ml't n'ait B.

³⁴¹ s'estuet souffrir] convint totes servir B, estuet tot s. C, couvient s. D.

³⁴² Et le fol et le sage] Et l. s. et l. f. C.

³⁴³ a la foiz] bien convient B, maintes f. C.

³⁴⁴ On BCD] C'on A – avoier] adrecier B, apaier D.

³⁴⁵ max CD] biens A. Lines 345–46 missing in B.

³⁴⁷ Qui tout voudroit bien metre] Ne mettre toute chose B – tout voudroit bien] trestout vauroit D.

³⁴⁹ fame] fames BC.

³⁵⁰ Mes] Els B.

³⁵¹ et] missing in B – l'autre] l'a. set B.

³⁵² Issi] Ausi D.

³⁵³ a] par B.

³⁵⁴ Sire c'est voirs] C'est v. s. B, S. v. est D. B adds two lines between lines 354 and 355: Que me dites vostre escient | Je vous an pri ml't doucement (compare lines 357–58).

³⁵⁶ Que BCD] Conment A – m'en] me B – sache bien BCD] porrai A – celer] garder D. Compare lines 148, 222.

³⁵⁷ m'en] me B – Biaux sire, si bel et si bien A. Compare line 223. Lines 357–58 missing in D.

That there is nothing in them deserving of reproach,
 340 If anyone wanted to look closely into it.
 This, lady, is why one must be patient
 And listen to both the fool and the wise person
 And sometimes give license to evil.
 344 One can't fix everything,
 Lady, nor do away with all evils.
 Trying to set everything right
 Would be like hitting one's head against a wall.
 348 I tell you that I find nothing,
 Certainly, except good in women,
 But they don't all reason the same way:
 One knows more and another less.
 352 This is how the Sovereign Lord of the world
 Created them, as it pleased him.
 'Sir, it's true. This is why I want
 To know how to keep it well secret
 356 If I should desire to love.¹
 So please be so kind as

¹ Compare lines 221–23. Perhaps the lady returns to this question because she is afraid the knight hasn't understood the underlying sense of her question: If I were to desire to love *you*, how could it be kept secret?

Text

Je vous an pri molt doucement.
Aprenez moi que je doi fere
360 Por plus bel couvrir mon afere.⁷
‘Volentiers, dame, a mon pooir:
Toz jors aiez cuer et voloir
De Dieu servir et honorer.
364 Et si ne vous chaut d’escouter
Ceus qui sont plain de vilonie;
Errant lor fetes sorde oïe
Que vous percevez lor mesdit.
368 Si ne tenez pas en despit
Les genz por lor petit avoir;
Selonc le sens et le savoir
Qu’il ont en aus, les honorez.
372 Bone compaignie portez
Les gentiz dames du país.
De ce doublera vostre pris,
Dame, et s’eles se fient tant
376 En vous que de lor couvenant
Vous dient, tres bien lor celez

³⁵⁸ Je BC] Quar j. A – vous an pri molt B] v. p. A, v. p. m. C – doucement BC] seur toute rien A. Compare line 224.

³⁶⁰ couvrir] seler B.

³⁶¹ Decorated capital in C.

³⁶⁴ Et si ne vous chaut] Si n’aiés cure D.

³⁶⁵ vilonie] felonnie B.

³⁶⁶ Errant] ades B.

³⁶⁷ Que] Se D.

³⁶⁸ en] a B – Et si n’aiés pas en d. D.

³⁶⁹ Les genz] La gent CD – lor] le C – avoir BCD] d’avoir A.

³⁷⁰ sens] bien C.

³⁷¹ Que chaucuns a si l’onorez B.

³⁷² portez] li tenez B.

³⁷³ Les gentiz] Aus jones B, As g. C – dames] fames C.

³⁷⁴ De ce] Si en BD.

³⁷⁵ Dame] missing in B, Dames C – et] missing in CD – fient] creioient C – tant] t. en vous B. Decorated capital in D.

³⁷⁶ B replaces lines 376–77 with the following four lines: Que de concel viegnent a vous | Concilliez sor toute rien | Et lor selez si ferez bien | Bien lor selez lor mauvistié.

³⁷⁷ tres] ml’t CD – lor] le C.

To tell me what you know about this.
Teach me what I must do
360 To hide my affairs more seemingly?
'Gladly, lady, insofar as I can:
Always set your heart and will
On serving and honouring God.
364 And don't be in a hurry to listen
To people who are full of villainy.
Turn a deaf ear to them quickly
As soon as you are aware of their slander.
368 And do not despise
People because they have little;
Honour them according to
Their good sense and knowledge.
372 Keep good company
With the noble ladies of the country.
You will double your worth in this way,
Lady, and if they trust you
376 Enough to tell you
Their intentions, keep yours most secret from them,

Et lor folies lor blasmez.
 Chastiez les sanz vilonie,
 380 Si que por ce ne lessent mie
 Ne vous ne la vostre acointance.
 Soiez lor debonere et franche
 Et celanz de vostre couvine.
 384 Gardez qu'estrangle ne cousine
 Ne sache rien de vostre afere,
 Se par li ne le covient fere.
 Et s'aucune l'estuet savoir
 388 Qui de vous aidier ait pooir,
 Onques por ce ne tant ne quant
 Ne li fetes plus biau samblant
 Que les autres devant la gent;
 392 Mes a conseil privéement
 Atornez si bel vostre afere
 C'on n'i puisse nul mal retrere.
 Quar li mesdisant sont ades,
 396 Dame, de lor mesdire pres,
 Et poi voit on de compaignie
 Que on n'i note vilonie.
 Dame, gardez vous de la bee
 400 Qui en maint leu par la contree
 S'areste et fet la gent muser.'

³⁷⁹ Chastiez] ansaigniez B – vilonie] felonnie CD.

³⁸¹ Ne vous ne la] Vostre amour ne B.

³⁸⁴ Gardez qu'estrangle] Si que e. B.

³⁸⁶ Soiez franche et debonnaire B.

³⁸⁸ Qui] Que B.

³⁹⁰ Ne li fetes] Ne lor fasciez B.

³⁹¹ Que les autres] Ne parlez B – les] as C.

³⁹³ Atornez] atirez B.

³⁹⁴ C'on] Que nuns B – n'i BCD] n'en A – puisse] sache BC – nul] missing in B.

³⁹⁵ li] missing in B – mesdisant] envieus D – sont] painent B.

³⁹⁶ de lor mesdire] des aventures C – De vraiz amans gaitier de p. B – Au m. p. et engres D.

³⁹⁷ Et] Car BD.

³⁹⁸ Que on] Qu'aucuns C – note] voie B.

³⁹⁹ Decorated capital in CD; space left for one in B.

⁴⁰⁰ Qui] missing in B – en] e D.

⁴⁰¹ S'areste] Charette B.

And reprimand their follies.
 Admonish them without villainy
 380 So that they don't avoid you
 Or your acquaintance on this account.
 Be good-natured and frank with them
 While keeping your intentions secret.
 384 Take care that neither women you know slightly nor well
 Know anything of your affairs,
 If they are not in a position to help you.
 And if one of them must know
 388 Who has the means to help you,
 Do not ever, for this reason,
 Show a more cheerful countenance to her
 Than to others in front of other people;
 392 Get her advice in private instead
 And conduct your affairs so well,
 That no one has any suspicion of wrong-doing.
 For scandalmongers are always,
 396 Lady, ready to slander,
 And when people start spending time together
 It is rare that no one suspects that some villainy is afoot.
 Lady, beware of the longing
 400 That dwells in many places throughout the country
 And makes people pensive.¹

¹ Compare lines 25–28 of the song ‘Nouvele amour’ by Jacques de Cysioing: ‘Cil faus amant qui vont par la contree | Qui font senblant et chiere de noient | Et des dames ne quierent fors la bee | Font as fins cuers maint grant ennui souvent’ (‘These false lovers who travel throughout the country | Who seem altogether innocent | And seek nothing from women but longing | Often make things very difficult for delicate hearts’; pp. 83–84). On the general sense of ‘la bee,’ which we have translated as ‘longing’ and Maddox translates as ‘yearning’ (p. 423), see Capusso, ‘Contro la *bee*,’ pp. 56–59.

Text

col. 2
404 'Sire, je ne m'en sai garder,
Quar la bée ne connois mie.'
408 'Dame, c'est uns rains de folie
Qui par le país est espars.
Li departerre en fist granz pars,
Que cascons en a grant plenté.
412 C'est d'une vaine volenté
Dont molt de gent sont deçeü,
Et si pris molt poi sa vertu,
Quar rien ne vaut, ce m'est avis.
416 Resons est que je vous devis
Que cele bée senefie.
S'il est une dame envoisie
Qui en .i. país soit mananz,
420 Chevaliers i aura beanz
Qui ne feront fors que baër,
Quar ne sevent en aus trover
Sens ne valor ne cortoisie
424 Par qoi nus d'aus son penssé die
Ne que ja li face savoir.
Ce ne vient pas de grant savoir.
De lor baër sont esbahi
Fors tant, quant de li sont parti,
Assez tost en font le mescointe

⁴⁰² ne m'en] n'en m'en C.

⁴⁰⁵ espars] apars B.

⁴⁰⁶ departerre] perdrés C – granz] mil D.

⁴⁰⁷ Que BCD] missing in A – a BCD] a a A.

⁴¹⁰ Et si] Mais je D. Line 410 missing in B.

⁴¹² Resons est] Si est droiz B.

⁴¹³ bée] b. vo C.

⁴¹⁴ dame] fame B.

⁴¹⁵ en .i. país soit] s. en .i. p. B.

⁴¹⁶ Chevaliers i aura] Mout de gent i ceront B.

⁴¹⁷ Qui] Que ja B – que] la C – baër] muser B.

⁴¹⁸ Quar] Qu'il B, S'il C, N'il D – sevent] pueent B, saront D – trover] penser D.

⁴¹⁹ Sens] Tant de s. B – ne valor] missing in B – ne²] ne de B.

⁴²⁰ nus] missing in D – d'aus] missing in BD – penssé] p. li B, p. nus en D.

⁴²² pas] mie B.

⁴²³ De] Que B.

⁴²⁴ quant de li] con il en B, q. il s'en D.

'Sir, I can't protect myself from it
 Since I don't know anything about longing.'
 404 'Lady, it is a sprig of folly
 That has spread throughout the country.
 It is handed out handily
 For everyone has plenty of it.
 408 It is an empty desire
 That frustrates many people,
 And thus I find it of little value
 For it is worthless, in my opinion.
 412 But it's only reasonable that I relate to you
 What this longing means.
 If there's an attractive lady
 Living in a country,
 416 There will be longing knights
 Who will do nothing but long for her
 Because none of them can find in himself
 The sense or valor or courtliness
 420 To speak his mind
 Or make her aware of what he is thinking.
 This is not very bright.
 They are befuddled by their longing,
 424 So much so that, when they have left her,
 They are quick to say inelegant things about her

A ceus a cui il sont acointe.
 Ainsi usent lor jone aé
 428 Tant que viel sont et trespasé.
 Cil n'en ont, se la beë non.
 Dame, par autretel reson
 Vous di s'il est uns chevaliers
 432 Bauz et joianz et envoisiez,
 Qui par le païs soit erranz,
 Des fames i aura bäanz
 Qui ja n'en averont deduit.
 436 Celes plantent jardin sanz fruit.
Dame qui maine tel usage
 Le faucon resamble ramage
 Qui est de dure afetison.
 440 Si vous dirai par quel reson.
 Le debonere tient on cras,
 Et le felon tient on si bas
 Qu'il ne porroit estre hautains;
 444 De son exploit est ce du mains,
 Qu'il n'en i a ne tant ne quant.
 Li fauconiers le porte tant
 C'une gelée le sousprent

⁴²⁶ ceus BCD] cele A – a] de B.

⁴²⁷ lor jone aé] l. joneçe B, tot l. aé C. Lines 427–28 missing in D.

⁴²⁸ que viel sont] qu'il s. v. B.

⁴²⁹ Cil] Si D – Cil n'en ont] Qu'il n'ont fait B – la bëe] muser B.

⁴³⁰ autretel reson] autre deraison B, autele achoison C.

⁴³¹ chevaliers] damoisiaus B. For rime, compare lines 197–98, 537–38.

⁴³² joianz] jolis D – Hardiz et corageus et fiers A – Cortois et avenans et biaux B.

⁴³³ En quelque lieu qu'il soit manans B – Q. en un p. s. manans D.

⁴³⁴ Des fames BC] Dames A, De dames D – bäanz BCD] abëanz A.

⁴³⁵ Qui] Que B – n'en averont] point n'en ara de B, jor n'en auront C.

⁴³⁶ Celes plantent] Cele plante B.

⁴³⁷ Dame] La fame B. Decorated capital in A.

⁴³⁸ Le faucon resamble] R. le f. BC.

⁴⁴² si] en B.

⁴⁴³ Qu'il ne porroit] Si qu'il ne puet B.

⁴⁴⁴ est ce] c. e. C, esche D.

⁴⁴⁵ n'en i a] ne l'aime B.

To their acquaintances.¹
 They waste their youth in this way
 428 Until they are old and pass away.
 Such men have nothing of what they want except the longing.
 Lady, for the same reason,
 I tell you that if there is a merry,
 432 Cheerful, and attractive knight
 Traveling through the country,
 There will be longing women
 Who will never delight in his company.²
 436 Such women plant gardens that bear no fruit.
 A lady who behaves in this way
 Resembles the wild falcon
 Which is hard to train.³
 440 I'll tell you the reason why.
 The good-natured falcon is thought to be stout,
 And the bad-tempered one is thought to be so base
 That it can never be haughty;
 444 At least it is
 Of no use at all.
 The falconer carries it
 Until a freeze takes it by surprise

¹ We are not absolutely sure of the translation here. In line 110, 'faire le cointe' seems to mean 'to behave elegantly', and 'cointise' is one of the traits that Richard de Fournival says a lover should possess. He defines it as 'a grace that allows one to behave in such a way that one never does anything worthy of blame' and that 'makes a man behave well and have a pleasant countenance, and keeps him from all untoward behavior so that he is neither too talkative nor boring in any way' ('une grace par coi on se maintient si c'on se garde de toutes choses ki font a reprendre'; 'fait l'omme estre de biau maintien et de bele contenance, et le garde de tous outrages, par coi il n'est ne trop parleres ni anieus de nule cose'; 9.8, p. 259). 'En faire le mescointe' would thus seem to mean something like 'to behave inelegantly about/towards/with respect to him/her/it.' The sense of lines 424–26 seems to be that these longing knights, befuddled by their longing, and frustrated and angered by their inability to express their feelings to the lady, vent their frustration and anger by saying inelegant things about her to their friends when they are alone with them. Brook appears to interpret these lines in the same way (p. 71) and Maddox translates them as: 'They're distracted by their yearning, except that, once they've taken leave of her, they soon give ill account of her to their friends' (p. 424; see also p. 424 n. 67 for a discussion of a similar remark in Marie de France's *Chaitivel*, vv. 19–22, in *Les Lais*, pp. 143–44).

² See note to line 401.

³ On the extended metaphor of lines 437–53 and the knowledge it demonstrates of the science of falconry as it was then practiced, see Barth, p. 868 and Kaufman, pp. 98–104.

Text

448 Qui a la mort le tret briefment.
N'i a mestier chaude geline
Quar passee est la medecine.
Si le covient a la mort traire.
452 Ainsi s'ocist la demalaire
f. 36r col. 1 Qu'en lui n'a deduit ne solas.
Mainte fame de molt biaux dras
A torne son cors et tient chier,
456 Qui son cuer ne set adrecier
A bien prendre, s'ele le voit;
Ainz est son cuer en .i. covoit
Dont ele ne se puet partir.
460 Par tel bée, par tel desir
Passe tant vespre et tant matin
Que sa biauté va a declin,
Tant que sa jovente est alee.
464 Lors puet bien dire qu'en la bee
A cele usée sa biauté.
Ele a espoir tel refusé
Dont ele se repentiroit
468 S'ele recouvrer i pooit.
Mes qu'est alé, n'est a venir,

⁴⁴⁸ Qui a] Qu'a B.

⁴⁴⁹ chaude] cos ne B.

⁴⁵⁰ Quar] missing in B – passee] p. en B – la] sa C.

⁴⁵¹ Si] Ainz BC.

⁴⁵² la] et B – demalaire] de male aire B.

⁴⁵³ Qu'en lui n'a] Qu'il n'i a B.

⁴⁵⁴ fame BCD] dame A.

⁴⁵⁶ Qui son cuer ne set] Q. n. set pas son c. B – cuer] cors C – set BCD] puet A – adrecier] drecier B.

⁴⁵⁷ bien prendre BD] son vouloir A, p. C. Syllable lacking in original (represented by C: A prendre s'ele le voit)?

⁴⁵⁸ son cuer] touz jours B, ses cuers C, tous dis D – .i.] maint B.

⁴⁵⁹ peut] set C.

⁴⁶⁰ tel¹] cele B – tel²] cel B.

⁴⁶¹ Passe] Passent B.

⁴⁶³ Tant] Et BD – jovente] joneche BD.

⁴⁶⁵ cele usée sa biauté] bien c. son tans usé B.

⁴⁶⁶ Line missing in B.

⁴⁶⁸ S'ele recouvrer i] Ml't volantiers c'ele B.

448 And quickly makes it deathly sick.
 A warm hen has no effect
 For it's too late for medicine.¹
 So it must suffer until it dies.

452 This is how the bad-natured one kills itself
 Who has no delight or contentment within.
 Many a lady holds her body dear
 And adorns it with beautiful clothes,

456 But does not know how to train her heart
 To seize a good thing, if she sees one;
 Her heart is, rather, obsessed with one thing
 And cannot let it go.

460 She spends so many evenings and so many mornings
 In such longing and desire
 That her beauty fades
 Until her youth is spent.

464 Such a one can then well say that she has wasted
 Her beauty in longing.
 She perhaps regrets
 Having turned away some man

468 She would like to have back if she could.
 But what has gone will not be back,

¹ Kaufman notes that at least one treatise on falconry, of which a French translation is to be found in a late-thirteenth-century manuscript, recommends the flesh of a freshly killed (and thus still warm) hen as part of a treatment for a falcon that has caught a cold (pp. 99, 101).

Si vient trop tart au repentir.
 Qu'ele s'en va puis que nonne est,
 472 Et si vessel sont au port prest,
 Et si voile sont ja drecié.
 A la jovente a pris congié.
 Ses chevas l'enporte sanz frain.
 476 Trahie ont cele li demain
 Et li respit et li atente.
 Lors met du tout en tout s'entente
 A sa jovente retenir.
 480 Mes nature ne puet mentir
 Qui l'enmaine plus que le pas,
 Et li chevas n'est mie las
 Qui molt tost l'emporte au passage.
 484 Lors dist que ne fu mie sage
 Quant cil et cil la requeroit
 Et ele toz les refusoit:
 'Lasse! Mar acointai la bee!
 488 Qui m'a traie et avuglee.

⁴⁷⁰ vient] est C – trop] on D – au] a B.

⁴⁷¹ Qu'] missing in D – puis que nonne est] tot sans arest B, plus de n. e. C, pres de n. e. D.

⁴⁷² si vessel] li v. B, li cheval D.

⁴⁷³ si] li B – voile] oeil D – drecié] adreché D. Lines 473–74 inverted in D.

⁴⁷⁴ A CD] Quar A, Qu'a B – la] sa BC – jovente] joneche BD.

⁴⁷⁵ Ses] Li BD.

⁴⁷⁶ Trahie ont cele] Ml't l'ont bien trahi B.

⁴⁷⁸ Lors BCD] Or A – du] de D – du tout en tout s'entente] chaucun jor grant entante B.

⁴⁷⁹ A] En C – jovente] joneche BD.

⁴⁸⁰ Mes] Et D – ne] nel D – mentir] souffrir D.

⁴⁸¹ l'enmaine] l'emporte BD.

⁴⁸² li BCD] ses A – chevas] couvenans B.

⁴⁸³ molt tost l'emporte] l'anporte droit B – l'emporte BCD] l'enmaine A.

⁴⁸⁴ que CD] qu'ele AB – mie BCD] pas A.

⁴⁸⁵ cil²] celes D – la] l'an B – la requeroit] l'emprioit D.

⁴⁸⁶ toz] tous les tous D.

⁴⁸⁷ Decorated capital CD.

⁴⁸⁸ Qui m'a traie BCD] Trahie m'a A – avuglee] avillee B, enganee C, avuelee D.

So she regrets too late.
She should go away since it is already mid-afternoon¹
472 And her ship is ready at the dock
With its sails already raised.
She has said goodbye to youth.
Her bridleless horse carries her away.
476 Tomorrow and delay and waiting
Have betrayed her.
Then she sets her mind entirely
On hanging on to her youth.
480 But nature, who leads her
Rapidly away, cannot lie,
And the horse that carries her quickly
On this voyage is not at all tired.
484 Then she says that she was not at all wise
When this and that one wooed her
And she turned them all away:
“Alas! What a shame that I ever knew longing!
488 Which has betrayed and blinded me.

¹ The ‘best’ part of the day, that is, is over.

Text

Mar vi onques mon grant orgueil,
Quar n'ai riens de quanques je vueil!
Onques ne soi que joïe ful
492 Or voudroie estre arse en .i. fu.'
492a Einsi se plaint et se gaimente
492b Cele qui s'en va sanz atente.
En la fin a tele esperance,
Mes je vous di bien qu'en balance
N'ert s'ame gueres longuement.
496 Se l'Esriture ne nous ment,
En enfer va en son estage
Por demorer a heritage,
Dont jamés ne se partira
500 Tant con cis siecles duerra,
Qui n'a fin ne commencement.
col. 2 Dame, or vous dirai bien comment
Cele puet avoir paradis
504 Qui d'amors a ses bons furnis,
Ce qu'ele puet, a son pooir.
Bien avez oï dire, espoir,

⁴⁸⁹ Mar vi onques] Dieus si m. v. B.

⁴⁹⁰ Quar] Je D – Quar n'ai riens de] Ainz non r. B, Quant r. n'ai d. C.

⁴⁹¹ Onques] Nonkes BD.

⁴⁹² Or] Si B, Je D.

^{492a} plaint C] complaint BD – se C] missing in BD – gaimente C] demente BD. Lines 492a–b missing in A.

⁴⁹³ En] A BD – a tele] en cele B, en t. D.

⁴⁹⁴ Mes je] Et se B.

⁴⁹⁵ s'ame gueres] g. s'a. C, g. cele D.

⁴⁹⁶ Se] Car s. C – nous] missing in CD – Ainz c'en ira tot erranment B. Syllable lacking in original (represented by D: Se l'Esriture ne ment)?

⁴⁹⁷ va en] a B, v. a D.

⁴⁹⁸ demorer] remenoir B.

⁴⁹⁹ Dont jamés ne se] Illuec iert ja n'en B – Dont] Que C – se partira] s'empartira C. Lines 499–500 missing in D.

⁵⁰⁰ cis siecles] Dieus B, Jhesu Crist C.

⁵⁰² Dame or] Mais je B – dirai bien] aprandrai B – bien] ge CD.

⁵⁰⁴ ses bons furnis] eu ces deliz B – furnis] fors mis C.

⁵⁰⁵ Trestouz ces bons a son voloir B.

⁵⁰⁶ espoir] pour voir B.

Damn my grand pride
 For I have nothing that I want!
 I've never known joy!
 492 Now I wish I could be burned in a fire.”
 Thus laments and complains
 The woman who goes away without delay.
 This is what she hopes for in the end,
 But I tell you indeed that her soul
 Won't be long in the scales.¹
 496 If Scripture doesn't lie to us,
 She goes to live forever
 In her house in Hell,
 Which she will never leave
 500 As long as this world lasts,
 Which has no end or beginning.
 Lady, now I'll tell you for sure how
 A woman who has satisfied her desire for love
 504 Can win Paradise,
 What it is within her power to do.
 You have already heard, perhaps,

¹ A reference, it seems, to the judging of souls.

Que a la bone fin va tout.
 508 De ce n'i a il nul redout.
 Tout ce est voirs. Ja n'i faudrons.
 Selonc la fin jugié serons.
 S'une fame a eü assez
 512 De ses bons, de ses volentez
 A son gré et a son plesir,
 Celëement et a loisir,
 Et ele a bel son cors deduit
 516 Desoz la fleur, desoz le fruit,
 Desoz la fueille el placeïs,
 En beles chambres ses delis,
 Par jor et par nuit ses solaz
 520 De son ami entre ses braz . . .
 Ainsi, dame, con je diroie
 Molt bien après, se je voloie,
 Mes du sorplus me doi bien tere.
 524 Que vo plesir en ferés fere
 Le vostre ami, quant vous l'aurez,
 Se tant de sens en lui trovez,
 Ausi conme les autres font
 528 Qui sages et cortois les ont.
 Cil et celes qui tout ainsi

⁵⁰⁷ Que a la] Qu'a B – va] v. dou B.

⁵⁰⁹ Tout ce est voirs] C'est verités BD.

⁵¹¹ fame] dame D. Decorated capital CD.

⁵¹² De] Et B – de ses²] et sa B.

⁵¹³ gré BC] bon A. Lines 513–14 missing in D.

⁵¹⁵ ele] missing in C – a] missing in B – son] s. gent C.

⁵¹⁶ desoz² CD] desor A – De joie et de flors et de f. B.

⁵¹⁷ el placeïs] esplesseïz C. Lines 517–18 missing in B.

⁵¹⁹ Par jor et par nuit] (Et B) P. n. e. p. j. BC – ses] missing in B.

⁵²¹ dame, con je diroie] le deduit toute voie B.

⁵²² après] avant BC.

⁵²⁴ Que] Qu'a C – vo plesir en ferés CD] vous f. vo p. A, vous plait en f. B.

⁵²⁵ Le] A C.

⁵²⁷ Ausi] Si D, Ainsi fis B – autres] a. dames D.

⁵²⁹ Decorated capital in D.

That everything works for good.¹
 508 There is no doubt about this.
 It is altogether true. We can take it for granted.
 We shall be judged according to our ends.
 If a woman has satisfied
 512 Herself, has indulged her desires
 As much as she wished and as pleased her,
 Secretly and at her leisure,
 And has delighted her body well
 516 Beneath the flower, beneath the fruit,
 Beneath the leaf in a hidden garden,
 Indulged herself in lovely rooms,
 Known the contentment of holding her companion
 520 Day and night in her arms
 Although I could, lady, say
 Much more about this, if I wanted to,
 I should remain silent about the rest.²
 524 For when you have a companion,
 You will have him do what pleases you,
 If you find him sensible enough,
 Just as others do,
 528 Whose companions are wise and courtly.
 The men and women who live

¹ This is an allusion to Romans 8. 28: ‘We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him.’

² Lines 511–23 recall lines 4674–84 of Chrétien de Troyes’s *Le Chevalier de la Charrette*: ‘Tant li est ses jeux dolz et buens | Et del beisier et del santir | Que il lor avint sanz mantir | Une joie et une mervoille | Tel c’onques ancor sa paroille | Ne fu oïe ne seüe, | Mes toz jorz iert par moi teüe, | Qu’an conte ne doit estre dite. | Des joies fu la plus eslite | Et la plus delitable cele | Que li contes nos test et cele’ (‘This game of kissing and holding one another | was so sweet and delightful to him | that they experienced, without a lie, | A joy and a wonder | Such that their equal has never yet | Been heard of or known. But I will never say anything about them, | For they should not be related in a tale. | The joy about which the tale is silent | and which it keeps secret was the rarest | and most delectable of joys’; p. 324). They also recall lines 510–13 of Chrétien de Troyes’s *Le Conte du graal*: “‘De pucele a molt qui la baise. | Se lo baisier vos en consent, | Lo soreplus vos en desfant, | Se laisier lo volez por moi’” (‘If one kisses a young woman one receives a great deal from her. | If she allows you to kiss her | I forbid you the rest | If you are willing to forego it for my sake’”; p. 60).

Font, dame, si crient merci
 Jhesu le nostre creator
 532 Quant par viellece ou par langor
 Les covient du siecle partir.
 Lor mesfez les fet repentir
 De si bon cuer entirement
 536 Que Jhesu Criz generaument,
 Lor pardone toz lor pechiez,
 Qui est dignes et droituriers
 Et bien nous moustre la samblance:
 540 Longis le ferri de la lance
 Et erramment li pardona
 Por ce que Longis li cria
 Merci par bone repentance.
 544 Et neporquant en esperance
 Ne vous lo je pas a pechier,
 Mes je vous os bien conseillier
 Que se vous en pechié manez,
 548 Onques ne vous en desperez,
 Ne vous ne nus qui cest lai oie,
 Que trop durement se desvoie

⁵³⁰ si CD] s'il A, s'en B – crient] prient C.

⁵³¹ creator] sauveur B.

⁵³⁴ Lor] Li BD.

⁵³⁵ De si] D'ausi B.

⁵³⁶ generaument CD] tout vraiment A – Et nostre sires bonnement B.

⁵³⁷ Lines 537–38 inverted in A. For rime, compare lines 197–98, 431–32.

⁵³⁸ est dignes CD] d. e. A – De quoi il les voit entichiez B.

⁵³⁹ Et] missing in D – bien] b. le D – la samblance] par essample D.

⁵⁴¹ erramment CD] maintenant A, tantost il B.

⁵⁴² cria] pria CD.

⁵⁴³ par] de B – repentance] esperance B.

⁵⁴⁴ esperance] espance B.

⁵⁴⁵ je] missing in C – pas] p. dame C, mie D.

⁵⁴⁶ conseillier] afichier C.

⁵⁴⁸ Onques] C'onques CD – en BCD] missing in A – desperez CD] desesperez AB.
 One syllable too many in original (represented by B: Onques ne vous en desesperez)?

⁵⁴⁹ qui cest lai oie] que c. la joie D – Vous ne nuns qui tel chose voie B.

⁵⁵⁰ durement] laidement D – se] de B, le C.

Like this, lady, beg mercy
 From Jesus our Creator
 532 When they must leave this world
 Through old age or sickness.
 Their offence makes them repent
 So wholly and whole-heartedly
 536 That Jesus Christ nobly
 Forgives them all their sins.¹
 He is lordly and just
 And provides us with a good example.
 540 Longinus struck him with the lance
 And he quickly forgave him
 Because Longinus begged him
 For mercy out of genuine repentance.
 544 And nonetheless I am not recommending that you
 Sin in this hope,²
 But I do indeed dare to advise you
 Never to lose hope
 548 If you are living in sin,
 Neither you nor anyone who hears this lay,
 For he who thinks that he is lost

¹ “I believe, however,” says Andreas Capellanus’s noble lover, “that God cannot be seriously offended by love, for what is done under the compulsion of nature can be made clean by an easy expiation” (p. 111). The poet of the *Lai de l’Oiselet* likewise assures his audience that “God listens to a fair prayer” (“Diex escoute bele proiere”; v. 155, p. 58) and four of the five manuscripts of the *Lai* assert that one can have both “God and this world” (“Dieu et le siècle”) if one conducts oneself according to the dictates of courtly love (vv. 167–68, pp. 78, 79). Manuscript D adds that if one lives in this way, “You can make amends for all your sins | For [...] | your penance will be light” (“De vos pechiez serez tuit quite | Car [. . .] | Vostre penance ere legiere”; vv. 198–200 of D, p. 79).

² The text is somewhat elliptical at this point. It seems to mean: I am not encouraging you to sin by suggesting that you can be forgiven for having done so by repenting at the end of your life.

Text

f. 36 v col. 1

552 Cil qui cuide qu'il soit perdus.
Cil seus pechiez le dampne plus
Que nus pechiez qu'il peüst faire.
Dame, por nient vestiroit haire
Cil qui ne cuide avoir merci.
556 Diex ne met onques en oubli
Le pechëor qui merci crie
Quant il deguerpist sa folie,
Ainz le reçoit molt liement.
560 'Sire, or me dites ensement
S'il a tant de joie en amors
Con j'ai oï dire toz jors.'
'Dame, de joïe vous dirai
564 Ce que j'en pens et que j'en sai.
Dame, s'il ert uns povres hom
Qui sanz terre et sanz garison
Eüst au siecle esté .xx. anz,
568 Et chevaliers preus et vaillanz
Et sans conseil et sanz aïe,
S'une grant terre bien garnie,
Dame, a cel point li escheoit,
572 Molt tres grant joie en averoit

⁵⁵¹ Lines 551–54 missing in D.

⁵⁵² dampne plus] d. et p. C.

⁵⁵³ qu'il peüst] que il pust B.

⁵⁵⁴ Dame] missing in C – vestiroit] vestroit B, v. la C.

⁵⁵⁷ qui] que B.

⁵⁵⁸ sa] la B.

⁵⁵⁹ Ainz] il B – liement] loialment B.

⁵⁶⁰ ensement] bonement C.

⁵⁶³ Dame] Joïe BD – de] d. la C.

⁵⁶⁴ Ce que BCD] Quanques A – pens] cuit CD.

⁵⁶⁵ ert] est B. Decorated capital in CD.

⁵⁶⁷ .xx. anz] .x. ans B, mananz C, .xxx. ans D.

⁵⁶⁸ Et] Biaus D.

⁵⁶⁹ Et] Tout C.

⁵⁷⁰ grant terre bien] b. g. t. D.

⁵⁷¹ a cel] en se B, a ce C, a cest D – point BCD] jor A.

⁵⁷² Molt tres] Sachiez que B – en averoit] en auroit B, avoir devroit C.

Has gone too far astray.
 552 This sin alone damns him more
 Than any other sin he might commit.¹
 Lady, if someone despairs of being forgiven
 He has no reason to wear a hair shirt.
 556 God never forgets
 The sinner who begs for mercy
 When he renounces his folly;
 He welcomes him, rather, full gladly.²
 560 'Sir, now tell me also
 If there is as much joy in love
 As I have always heard.'
 'Lady, I'll tell you what I think
 564 And what I know about joy.
 Lady, if there were a poor man
 Who had been in this world twenty years
 Without land or wealth,
 568 A courageous and worthy knight
 But without anyone to advise or help him,
 And he then happened to inherit, lady,
 A large, well-furnished domain,
 572 He would have great joy on this account

¹ Compare Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Second part of the second part, Treatise on the Theological Virtues, question 20 (Of Despair), especially article 3 ('Whether despair is the greatest of sins?'; it is) and article 4 ('Whether despair arises from sloth?'; Aquinas suggests it arises from lust as well).

Et molt le prenderoit en gré.
 Et s'il avoit tante conté,
 Tante terre con nommerai,
 576 Si con nommer oï les ai,
 Dont verriez sa joïe doubler.
 Dame, or entendez au nommer:
 S'il estoit sires de Toraine,
 580 Sires d'Anjou, sires du Maine,
 Quens de Poitiers, quens de Bretaingne,
 Rois de Navarre, rois d'Espaingne,
 Rois de Maroc, rois de Surie,
 584 Et s'eüst toute païenie
 De chief en chief a son voloir,
 Constantinoble et le pooir,
 Qu'empereres fust coronez
 588 Toute la terre environ lez,
 Et tout l'empire d'Alemaingne,
 Saïssingne, Roussie et Sartaingne,
 Et s'eüst Danemarche et Frise,
 592 Einsi con la mer le devise,

⁵⁷³ le prenderoit en] le prendroit en bon B, bien la prendroit a C.

⁵⁷⁴ conté] contree D.

⁵⁷⁵ Tante terre] Tant roiaume B – nommerai] nomeroie B, noumera D.

⁵⁷⁶ oï les ai] les sauroie B, les saurai C.

⁵⁷⁷ Dont] Bien B, Molt C, Lors D – verriez] devroit BC.

⁵⁷⁹ Decorated capital in A.

⁵⁸⁰ sires du Maine] sire d'Alemaingne B.

⁵⁸¹ Poitiers] Poitou B – quens²] ou B, dus D.

⁵⁸² Rois¹] Et r. B – rois² CD] et r. A, ou B.

⁵⁸³ rois²] et B.

⁵⁸⁵ en chief] e. c. en chief B – a] en C.

⁵⁸⁷ empereres] e. en C. Lines 587–88 inverted in B.

⁵⁸⁸ Toute la terre] Et lou pais B.

⁵⁸⁹ Et tout l'empire d'] Inde, Europe B. Lines 589–90 inverted in D. Lines 591–92 and 589–90 inverted in B (591/592/589/590). New hand starts in D after *d'Alemaingne* and continues to line 609.

⁵⁹⁰ Et toute la terre griffaigne B – Et s'eüst Saïssoune et Sartaingne D.

⁵⁹¹ Line missing in C.

⁵⁹² Einsi BC] Tout si A, Tout e. D – le] missing in D. C adds one line between lines 592 and 593: Que riens n'i faille en nule guise.

And be very thankful for it.
 And if he had as many counties,
 As many lands as I will name,
 576 As I have heard them named,
 Then you would see his joy doubled.
 Lady, listen now to the naming:
If he were lord of the Touraine,
 580 Lord of Anjou, lord of Maine,
 Count of Poitiers, count of Brittany,¹
 King of Navarre, king of Spain
 King of Morocco, king of Syria,
 584 And if the whole pagan world
 From one end to the other were at his command,
 Constantinople and its power,
 Because he had been crowned emperor
 588 Of all the land thereabout,
 And the whole empire of Germany,
 Saxony, Russia and Sardinia,
 And if he ruled Denmark and Frisia,
 592 Just as the sea divides it,

¹ In correspondence dated 14 July 2010, Dr Godfried Croenen, University of Liverpool, pointed out that while the five French provinces mentioned in lines 579–81 came under the control of the king of France during the reign of Philip Augustus (1180–1223), the count of Poitou seems to have been known as the ‘count of Poitiers’ (as opposed to the ‘count of Poitou,’ as in ms. B) only from the reign of Alphonso of Poitiers (1225–71), the brother of Saint Louis. This might suggest a somewhat later date for the poem than the commonly accepted one (see the Introduction, p. 9).

Text

Escoce, Gales et la terre
Trestoute dela Engleterre,
Et Engleterre et toz les pors
596 Ou il a tant bisches et pors,
France que j'ai avironee
Que ce fust sa chambre celee,
Autres terres que nommeroie,
600 Mes au nommer trop demorroie.
Por ce les vueil briefment nommer,
Que je vueil cest conseil finer.
col. 2 Si con li trones avirone,
604 Et conme il pluet et conme il tone,
Dame, qu'en tout le firmament
N'eüst de terre plain arpent
606a Ne bois ne riviere ne mer
606b Que jors ne nuit peüst trover,
Que tout ne fust en son demaine,
608 Tant fust en divers lieu estrange,
Dame, et s'eüst tel avantage

⁵⁹³ Escoce Gales] E. et G. BD.

⁵⁹⁴ Trestoute dela] Trestot d. B, Trestout de d. D.

⁵⁹⁶ Qu'il peüst passer ens et fors B. C adds two lines between lines 596 and 597: Provence jusques en Gascoingne | Et puis Loheraingne et Borgoingne.

⁵⁹⁷ Et France la terre honoree B.

⁵⁹⁸ celee] privee D.

⁵⁹⁹ Autres terres] Et d'autres B, Autre tere D – nommeroie] nommerai D.

⁶⁰⁰ trop] missing in C – demorroie] metroie B, m'aresteroie C – Si con noumer oï les ai D.

⁶⁰¹ Si vous vuel nonmer briement B. Lines 601–02 are missing in D.

⁶⁰² Que je vueil cest conseil] Or je vuel ma raison B.

⁶⁰³ Si] Et tant B, Et D. Lines 603–04 inverted in BD.

⁶⁰⁴ Et] Mais si B, Si D – conme²] missing in B.

⁶⁰⁵ qu'en tout] que t. B, desous D. Line 605 missing in C.

⁶⁰⁶ de terre plain] t. un seul B. C adds one line between lines 606 and 606a: Einsî con li mondes apent.

^{606a} Lines 606a–b missing in A.

⁶⁰⁷ en son demaine] siens ligement B.

⁶⁰⁸ Li sieccles et quanqu'il i apant B.

⁶⁰⁹ et] missing in CD.

Scotland, Wales and all the land
Beyond England,
And England and all its ports
596 Where there are so many does and boars,
If France, through which I have traveled,
Were his secret chamber,
And other lands that I would name,
600 Except it would take me too long to name them.
I want to name them briefly
Because I want to bring this advice to an end.
If, lady, there was not an acre of land
604 In the whole world,
As far as the sky stretches
And it rains and thunders,
No woods, no river, no sea
That day or night might find
That was not part of his domain,
608 Even in various foreign places,
And if, lady, he was lucky enough

Que tout partout peüst sanz nage
 Aler deseur son palefroi,
 612 Et sa route et tuit son conroi
 Et toutes ses genz avoec lui,
 Et ausi bien con g'iroie hui
 Une liue et demain .ij.
 616 Peüst aler en toz les leus
 De sa terre, dame, en .i. jor
 De chief en chief et tout entor,
 Et si ne li grevast noient
 620 Ne lui ne trestoute sa gent,
 Nient plus que nos en ceste sale
 Ou l'en tresche, carole et bale,
 Bien se devoit a tant tenir
 624 Sanz covoitier et sanz tolir,
 Quar molt auroit joie et deduit
 De mainte guise, flor et fruit,
 Et molt auroit chiens et oisiaus.
 628 Molt seroit sire et damoisiaus.
 Je ne puis vëoir ne pensser

⁶¹⁰ Que tout partout] Qu'en touz leus B.

⁶¹¹ Aler BCD] Errer A – deseur] desus BD.

⁶¹² Et] missing in B – son] si A.

⁶¹³ toutes ses genz] toute sa gent BD.

⁶¹⁴ Et ausi] Autresi BC – bien] missing in B.

⁶¹⁵ liue BCD] liueté A.

⁶¹⁷ De sa terre dame CD] Dame de s. t. A, De s. t. B – .i.] seul B.

⁶¹⁸ en] a D.

⁶²⁰ Ne lui ne trestoute] N'a l. n. a toute C.

⁶²¹ Nient] Ne C – nos en CD] enmi A, moi en B.

⁶²² Ou il plüet ne ne jale B – Ou nos n'öons parole male C – Ou il ne toune ne n'esclare D.

⁶²³ Bien] Ne B – se BCD] s'en A – a] de D – tant] bien B – tenir] garir D.

⁶²⁴ De couvoitier et d'acoillir B.

⁶²⁵ auroit] averoit D – joie et] de D.

⁶²⁶ flor] flors B, fueille D – flor et] *fro* exponctuated followed by *feroit* C.

⁶²⁸ Molt] missing in B, Bien D – seroit sire] Sires s. B.

⁶²⁹ puis] sai BC.

To be able to go everywhere
On his palfrey without entering a boat,
612 And take his band of knights and his whole suite
And all his people with him,
And could visit all parts
Of his land, lady, in one day,
616 From one end to the other and all about
As easily as I could go a league
Today and two tomorrow,
And if nothing troubled him
620 Neither him nor any of his people
Any more than we are troubled in this hall
Where people dance, carol, and promenade,
He should be well satisfied with so much,
624 And not envy or steal
Since he would have great joy and delight
Of many sorts, both the flower and the fruit,
And would have many dogs and birds.
628 He would be a great seigneur and lord.
I cannot see or think

Conment nus peüst plus doner
 Ne souhaider avoec .i. homme,
 632 Quar tout est clos a la parsomme
 Fors vie permanablement
 (Et ce ait bien a son talent)
 Et amors, que je ne vueil mie,
 636 Que ja en ait joie en sa vie,
 Ne anui, ne duel, ne pesance,
 Ne volenté, ne souvenance.
 Ainz di qu'il ne porroit avoir
 640 Ne por terre, ne por avoir,
 Ne por quanques je vous ai dit,
 Tant de joïe ne de delit.
 Ne tot ce ne contrevaut mie,
 644 Dame, le deduit de s'amie
 Quant on l'a sage et bien parlant
 Por avoir cuer lie et joiant.
 Cuers ne se püet glorefier,
 648 Ne por terre ne por denier,
 648a Ne pour castel ne pour avoir,

⁶³⁰ nus] on BD – peüst BCD] hom puist A – plus] missing in B, miex C – doner] adouner B, *durer* exponctuated followed by *donner* C.

⁶³¹ Ne] Pour B – .i.] .i. seul B, nul C.

⁶³² est clos] ai enclos B, auroit C, ai c. D.

⁶³⁴ Et] Et tot B – ait] ai D – bien] missing in B.

⁶³⁵ que BCD] dont A.

⁶³⁶ ja] ja i B.

⁶³⁷ anui ne duel] d. n. a. D.

⁶³⁸ volenté] mauvistie B – souvenance] souhaidanche D.

⁶³⁹ Ainz BCD] Je A – di] dit B.

⁶⁴⁰ terre] tresor B.

⁶⁴¹ Lines 641–42 inverted in D.

⁶⁴³ tot BC] que A – contrevaut] vaut B – Ne quanc'ai conté ne vaut m. D.

⁶⁴⁴ le deduit] les solas B, la joie C, l. soulas D.

⁶⁴⁵ Quand on l'a] Puis c'on l'ait B – sage] bele D – parlant] plesant BC. Lines 645–46 inverted in D.

⁶⁴⁶ avoir] faire B – lie] baut C.

⁶⁴⁷ glorefier] gaires fier B. Decorated capital in D.

⁶⁴⁸ terre] tresor BC – denier] loier C.

^{648a} Bien le povez aparcevoir C. Lines 648a–b missing in A; inverted in C.

How anyone could give more
 To a man or wish him more
 632 For he would have everything
 Except eternal life
 (Which he might well have if he desired)
 And love, which I do not wish him to have,
 636 For his life would always be full of joy on account of it
 Not of tribulation, or grief, or suffering,
 Or desire, or regret.¹
 I say, rather, that he could not get
 640 As much joy and pleasure
 From land or possessions
 Or anything else I have mentioned.
 All of this put together could not
 644 Make his heart as light and joyous
 Lady, as the delight that comes from being with his
 companion,
 If she is wise and well-spoken.
 No heart swells
 648 For land or coin
 Or castle or possessions,

¹ Lines 635–38 need to be understood in the context of the knight's long hypothetical argument that extends from line 565 to line 646. If, he says, a poor, no longer young, man suddenly inherited all the realms in the world and possessed everything one could want or imagine except eternal life (which he could eventually win by living righteously and asking forgiveness for what sins he has committed) and love, he would still trade all he has for love, for 'the delight that comes from being with his companion'. The delight that comes from being in love and spending time with one's beloved, that is, is worth more than all other earthly pleasures combined. The whole force of the argument depends on the man's having everything except love, which is why the knight does not want him to have it; if he did have it he would want nothing more for his life would be full of joy on account of love alone.

Text

648b Bien le vos puis dire por voir,
Tant conme il fet por fine amor.
.ix. colors müe chascun jor
Cuers qui bien est d'amors espris.
f. 37r col. 1 652 Ne sai que plus vous en devis.
Nule joie ne s'apartient
A cuer qui fine amor maintient.
Dame, assez m'en reprenderont
656 Les genz, ce croi, quant il l'orront,
Mes les entendanz n'en dout mie,
Ceus qui sevent qu'espiaut amie,
Ainz les en trai toz a garant,
660 Que tuit m'en erent tesmoingnant
Qu'amors vaint tout et tout vaintra,
Tant con li siecles durera.'
'Sire, molt savez bien loër
664 Amors. Ja ne cuidai trover
Qui tant m'en deïst en ma vie.
Molt est fols qui ne quiert amie
Por issi tres grant joie atendre.'
668 'Dame, amors ne se daingne prendre

^{648b} puis CD] os B.

⁶⁴⁹ fine] bone BC.

⁶⁵⁰ .ix.] Lor B, .x. C – müe] müent B – Che sevent bien li ameour D.

⁶⁵¹ bien est] e. b. C – d'amors] d'amer C – espris BC] missing in A. Lines 651–54 missing in D.

⁶⁵⁴ A] Au B – fine] bonne B.

⁶⁵⁵ m'en] me C. Decorated capital in AC.

⁶⁵⁶ Les genz, ce croi] Aucune gent B, Li mesdisant C, Je cuit la gent D.

⁶⁵⁷ les entendanz] de vraiz amans B – n'en] ne BC.

⁶⁵⁸ qu'espiaut] que font B, qu'est piaut C.

⁶⁵⁹ trai] tras B – toz] bien CD.

⁶⁶⁰ m'en] me B – erent] soient B, seront C.

⁶⁶¹ et tout vaintra] et vaintera CD.

⁶⁶² li siecles CD] cis s. A, li mondes B.

⁶⁶³ savez bien] b. s. CD – bien] missing in B – loër] parler B. Decorated capital in CD.

⁶⁶⁴ Amors] D'amors B.

⁶⁶⁶ fols] faus D – quiert] fait B.

⁶⁶⁷ issi tres grant] si pleniere B – tres BCD] missing in A – joie BCD] j. a A.

⁶⁶⁸ Dame] Mais B, Car D – daingne] doignent B.

And I can tell you this is true,
 Like it does for a tender love.
 The heart burning with love
 Changes color nine times a day.
 652 I don't know what else to relate.
 No joy compares to that
 Of a heart that holds a tender love.
Lady, I believe that people will criticize me more than a little
 656 For saying this when they hear of it,
 But I don't fear those who understand,
 Those who know what it means to have a companion,
 So I call them as witnesses,
 660 For they will all bear me out
 That love conquers all and always will
 As long as this world lasts.¹
 'Sir, you know well how to praise
 664 Love. I never thought I would find anyone
 In my life who could tell me so much about it.
 Anyone who does not seek a companion
 In order to know immense joy in this world is a great fool.'
 668 'Lady, love does not deign to ally itself

¹ Compare *Le Lai d'Aristote*: 'Veritez est, et je lo di, | Qu'Amors vaint tout et tot vaincra, | Tant com li siecles durera' ('It is true, and I say, | that love conquers all and always will | As long as this world lasts'; Henri d'Andeli, vv. 579–81, p. 90).

A ces faus cointes orguillex,
 Ces mesdisanz, ces enviex,
 Qui amors ne sevent avoir.
 672 Tex cuide, dame, molt savoir
 Du siecle, n'en set mie assez.
 'Sire,' fet ele, 'or m'aprenez
 Se c'est voirs que j'ai oï dire,
 676 Qu'amors abandonee est pire
 Que cele ou il a contredit.'
 'Dame, briefment et sanz respit
 Le vous dirai molt volentiers.
 680 Dame, s'uns sages chevaliers
 A bone amor en vaillant leu,
 Quant il ont tant loisir et leu,
 Entr'aus .ij. doit estre tout .i.,
 684 Solaz et joïe de comun,
 Sanz contredit, sanz couverture.
 Ce conmande amors et droiture.
 Et s'il est dame ou damoisele
 688 Qui commence une amor novele,
 Au conmençier se doit vers lui
 Couvrir, por connoistre celui
 De qui veut fere son ami.
 692 Se fol le trueve et esbahi,

⁶⁶⁹ faus] fox C – cointes] amans B.

⁶⁷² Tex cuide, dame] D. t. c. C – molt] assés D.

⁶⁷³ n'en] ne C.

⁶⁷⁴ fet] dist B – fet ele BCD] c'est voirs A.

⁶⁷⁶ Qu'] S' BD.

⁶⁷⁹ Le] Je BC.

⁶⁸⁰ sages CD] povres A – Cil est .i. hom coustumiers B.

⁶⁸¹ vaillant leu] sage liu D – D'amer et n'aint qu'en .i. seul l. B.

⁶⁸² Quant] Se B – ont] a C. Line 682 missing in D.

⁶⁸⁴ Line missing in D.

⁶⁸⁵ couverture] mesure D.

⁶⁸⁶ Se que mande amours par d. B.

⁶⁸⁷ Et s'il] Se il est C. Lines 687–88 missing in B.

⁶⁸⁸ une] missing in D.

⁶⁹¹ veut] doit B.

⁶⁹² et] ne B.

With these false, proud dandies,
 These scandalmongers, these envious people
 Who cannot love.
 672 Some people, lady, who think they know a lot
 About the world don't know nearly enough about it.'
 'Sir,' she said, 'now teach me
 If what I have heard said is true,
 676 That love in which nothing is withheld is worse
 Than that in which there is reticence.'
 'Lady, I'll tell you that most willingly,
 Quickly and without pause.
 680 Lady, if a wise knight
 Enjoys good love with a worthy lady,
 When they have leisure and opportunity,
 All should be one between the two of them,
 684 Shared contentment and joy
 Without reticence or hiding.
 This is what love and rectitude require.
 Then again if a lady or a young woman
 688 Begins a new love
 She should at first hide her feelings
 From him whom she would like to make her companion
 In order to get to know him.
 692 If she finds him foolish or befuddled

Text

Partir s'en doit, s'ele onques puet.
Et s'adonc amer li estuet,
Qu'ele n'en puist son cuer partir,
696 Quanqu'ele puet, s'en doit couvrir
Selonc ce qu'amors li consent.
Et s'il est .i. poi autrement,
Qu'ele aint .i. jone damoisel
700 Qui conmenst amors de novel
A amer et que rien n'en sache,
Droiz est qu'ele vers lui le sache
col. 2 Par biau samblant et par atrere.
704 Douce doit estre et debonere
Tant que cil soit si enhardis
Qu'il soit de li amer espris.
Et quant il est chاوز et boillanz
708 Et talentiz et desirranz,
Adonc si le doit chastoier
Et doctriner et enseignier
Au point qu'ele le veut avoir.
712 Et li desir et li voloir
Font donc celui d'amors esprendre,
Se jamés jor i doit entendre.

⁶⁹³ s'en doit] s'empuet C.

⁶⁹⁴ s'adonc] se dont B, se doit C.

⁶⁹⁵ n'en puist] ne puisse B.

⁶⁹⁶ Quanqu'ele] Le miex que D – s'en] se BC.

⁶⁹⁹ Qu'ele] Dame qu'ele D – jone damoisel] jovenchel D. Line 699 missing in B.

⁷⁰⁰ amors] dame C – Fame qui couvient de nouvel B.

⁷⁰¹ A amer BCD] Bele dame A – que rien n'en CD] il petit A, nulle riens ne B.

⁷⁰² qu'ele] que D – vers] envers D – lui] le B.

⁷⁰³ samblant] parler D – et] missing in BD – atrere] bel a. (araire B) BD.

⁷⁰⁵ que cil] qu'il B – soit si] se soit D – si] tant C – enhardis] hardiz B.

⁷⁰⁶ Qu'il] Qui D.

⁷⁰⁷ Lines 707–08 and 709–10 inverted in B (709/710/707/708).

⁷⁰⁸ desirranz] remuans B.

⁷⁰⁹ si] missing in B.

⁷¹¹ le] li B.

⁷¹³ Font donc BC] Feront A, F, D.

⁷¹⁴ jor] missing in C – entendre] garde prendre C.

She should leave him, if she still can.
 And if she cannot stop loving him,
 Because she cannot make her heart leave him,
 696 She must hide her feelings for him as best she can
 As far as love allows her to do so.
 And if things are somewhat different,
 Because she loves a young man
 700 Who is falling in love for the first time
 And knows nothing about it,
 It is right for her to draw him to her
 With a cheerful countenance and flirting.
 704 She should be gracious and good-natured
 Until he grows so bold
 That he is burning to love her
 And when he is hot and boiling
 708 And eager and full of desire,
 Then she should admonish him
 And instruct and teach him
 Until he is how she wants him to be.
 712 And desire and wanting
 Will thus make him burn with love,
 If the day ever comes when his attention turns that way.

Et si le doit fere douter
 716 Por l'enfant aprendre a celer,
 Qu'enfant sont de parler volage,
 Se bien ne sont appris d'usage.
 Ainsi se doit fame conduire
 720 Qui d'amors veut son cors deduire:
 Au sage tout abandoner,
 Vers le fol couvrir et celer,
 L'enfant enseigner et aprendre,
 724 S'ele le veut a ami prendre.
 Douce dame, ne créez mie
 Que ce soit voirs, qoi que nus die,
 Qu'amors contredite soit vraie.
 728 Sachiez, c'est servirs en manaie.
 C'est une amor, si vaut si vaille,
 Qui n'i puet avenir s'i faille.
 Qui veut dire reson et voir
 732 En bone amor ne doit avoir
 Ne mauvestié ne contredit.
 En joie, en solaz, en delit
 Doivent user lor bone vie
 736 Vrais amis et léal amie.
 Ainsi doit fere, ce m'est vis,

⁷¹⁵ si le doit] se d. on B, s. se d. C. Lines 715–24 missing in D.

⁷¹⁶ l'enfant aprendre] lui bien apanre B.

⁷¹⁷ Qu'enfant] Que maint B.

⁷¹⁹ fame conduire BC] dame deduire A.

⁷²⁰ deduire BC] conduire A.

⁷²² Vers le] Et au B.

⁷²³ enseigner] chastier B.

⁷²⁵ Decorated capital in CD.

⁷²⁷ contredite] a contredit C.

⁷²⁸ manaie] esmaie B.

⁷²⁹ si vaut si] que v. de B.

⁷³⁰ n'i] ne B.

⁷³¹ Qui veut dire reson] Mais qui droit voudroit dire B – et BCD] ne A.

⁷³⁶ Vrais] Bons B, Loiaus D. Unclear illumination after this line in D, at the bottom of column 1, opposite lines 770–76 in column 2. It is probably an image of the lady giving the knight her belt.

⁷³⁷ fere BC] fer A – vis] vie C. Lines 737–38 missing in D.

And she must also make him fearful
 716 In order to teach the young man to keep secrets,
 For young men say whatever comes to mind
 If they have not been taught how to behave.
 This is how a woman who wants to delight
 720 Her body with love must conduct herself:
 She must withhold nothing from a wise man,
 Hide and keep her feelings secret from a fool,
 Teach and educate the young man
 724 If she wants to take him as a companion.¹
 Gracious lady, never believe
 It's true, whatever anyone says,
 That reticent love is true.²
 728 You should know that it is service without reward.
 It's a love that's worth what it's worth,
 Which cannot reach its end and thus fails.
 Whoever wants to speak reasonably and truthfully will say
 732 That good love must have no trace
 Of malice or reticence.
 A faithful companion and his loyal companion
 Must spend their good life
 736 In joy, in contentment, in pleasure.
 This, in my opinion, is how a faithful companion

¹ These six lines (vv. 719–24) summarize the preceding forty-one (vv. 678–718): if a woman falls in love with a wise man (v. 680), she should keep nothing secret from him; if she discovers that the man to whom she is drawn is a fool (v. 692), she should withdraw her affection or, if she cannot, hide it; if she falls in love with a young, inexperienced man (v. 699), she should train him to be a good companion.

² The knight here takes up the second kind of love mentioned by the lady in line 677.

Text

Vraie amie et læaus amis.
La dame l'ot si bel parler
740 Qu'il li covient a oublier
La requeste des autres .iiij.
Tant le voit et sage et cortois
Et bien parlant et bien apris
744 Qu'ele a le sien cuer du tout mis
En lui amer sanz repentance.
Ele estoit molt et sage et franche.
S'ot bien pieça oï conter
748 Qu'il savoit bel d'amors parler.
Or se veut a lui descouvrir
Le grant talent et le desir
Qu'ele a de lui s'amor doner.
752 Ce dist la dame au bachelier:
f. 37v col. 1 'Je vous dirai que vous ferez.
Ceste çainture prenderez,
Que çainte ai, de soie et d'argent,
756 Si la donrez a vo talent.
Gardez comment vous l'emploiez
Et a cui m'amor otroiez,
Quar bien sachiez que cil l'aura
760 Qui la çainture retendra

⁷³⁸ Vraie] Bonne B.

⁷³⁹ bel] bien B. Decorated capital in ACD.

⁷⁴⁰ a oublier] entroblier B.

⁷⁴² et¹] preu B.

⁷⁴⁴ a le sien cuer du tout] a d. t. son c. C, i a d. t. sen c. D – du tout] trestot B.

⁷⁴⁶ Ele BC] Qu'ele A, Et ele D – molt] missing in D – molt et sage] debonere C.

⁷⁴⁷ conter] parler C. Lines 747–48 missing in B.

⁷⁴⁸ bel] bien D – parler] conter C.

⁷⁵⁰ Le grant BCD] Et le A.

⁷⁵¹ doner] baillier B.

⁷⁵² Ce] Lors D – bachelier] chevalier B.

⁷⁵⁴ prenderez] prendrez B.

⁷⁵⁵ Que çainte ai] Qu'est faite B.

⁷⁵⁶ Si la donrez] Donez la C, S. l. dounés D – vo] vostre C. Line 756 missing in B.

⁷⁵⁹ Quar] Et B – bien sachiez] s. b. CD – cil] il B.

⁷⁶⁰ la] ma B – retendra] prendera BD, çaindera C.

And her loyal companion should conduct themselves.¹
 The lady heard him speak so fairly²
 740 That the wooing of the other three
 Was driven from her mind.
 She saw that he was so wise and courtly
 And well-spoken and well-educated
 744 That she set all her heart
 On loving him unrepentantly.
 She was both very wise and very noble.
 She had heard some time ago
 748 That he knew how to speak fairly about love.
 Now she wanted to reveal to him
 Her great desire and eagerness
 To give him her love.
 752 This is what the lady said to the bachelor:³
 'I'll tell you what you will do.
 You'll take this belt
 Of silk and silver that I'm wearing
 756 And give it away as you desire.
 Take care what you do with it
 And to whom you grant my love,
 For you should know that he
 760 To whom you grant the belt

¹ Lines 736 and 738 have an intertwined or interlocking quality in the original — “Vrais amis et léal amie | [...] | Vraie amie et léaus amis” — that recalls lines 77–78 of Marie de France’s *Chievrefoil*: “Bele amie, si est de nus: | Ne vus sanz mei, ne jeo sanz vus” (“My dear companion, so it is with us: | Not you without me, not I without you”; in *Les Lais*, p. 153).

² The translation of *bel parler* and *biaus parlers* by ‘to speak fairly’ and ‘fair speaking’ here and in lines 748, 824, 833, and 842 is borrowed from Maddox, p. 433.

³ As noted in the Introduction (pp. 28–29), a ‘bachelor’ was simply an unmarried knight, of any age, who did not yet possess his own domain.

Et a cui vous l'otrierez.⁷⁶¹
 Li chevaliers estoit senez
 Et sages et apercevanz.
 764 La çainture d'entor les flans
 La dame a molt sagement prise.
 'Dame,' fet il, 'vostre devise
 Tendrez vous, se Dieu plest, molt bien?'
 768 'Voire, sire, seur toute rien,
 Ausi bien comme une roïne.'
 'Je le praing,' fet il, 'a l'estrine,
 Si la detieng avoec mon cors,
 772 Que j'ai sovent oï recors:
 Qui le bien voit et le mal prent,
 Il se foloie a escient.
 Mes je ne vueil pas fere ainsi,
 776 Ainz me doing, dame, a vostre ami.'
 La dame, cui il plest, l'otroie.
 Cil çaint la çainture de soie,
 Qui fu baus et liez et joianz.
 780 Droit ot qu'ainz mes si biaus presanz
 Ne fu donez, ne otroiez.
 Qu'il estoit molt desconseilliez

⁷⁶¹ cui vous] .i. seul B.

⁷⁶² estoit] fu ml't B – Il estoit sages et adroiz C.

⁷⁶³ Et sages] Preuz cortois C.

⁷⁶⁴ çainture] sainturette B.

⁷⁶⁶ fet] dist B.

⁷⁶⁷ Tendrez vous] Asserrez B, Atenderés D – molt] missing in BD.

⁷⁶⁸ Voire sire BCD] S. v. A.

⁷⁷⁰ Je] Et j. BC – fet il] missing in BC – a] par C – l'] bone BC.

⁷⁷¹ Si] Et B, Et s. C – detieng avoec] retien a C.

⁷⁷² sovent] pieça BD.

⁷⁷⁴ a] d' B.

⁷⁷⁶ me doing] m. tieng C, m'otroi D.

⁷⁷⁷ dame BCD] dame a A. Decorated capital in AC.

⁷⁷⁸ çaint] prist D.

⁷⁷⁹ fu baus et] mout en fu B.

⁷⁸⁰ qu'ainz mes] onques B, quar ainz C, car D.

⁷⁸¹ Ne¹ BCD] Ne li A – ne² BCD] n' A.

And who keeps it will have my love.’
 The knight was sensible
 And wise and perceptive.
 764 He took the belt most wisely
 From around the lady’s waist.
 ‘Lady,’ he said, ‘will you indeed do
 As you say, if it please God?’
 768 ‘Truly, sir, above all things,
 As well as would a queen.’
 ‘I will take it,’ he said, ‘as a gift¹
 And keep it on my body,
 772 For I have often heard repeated:
 Whoever sees the good and takes the bad
 Acts knowingly like a fool.
 But I don’t want to act this way.
 776 Instead, lady, I offer myself as your companion.’
 The lady, whom this pleased, granted it.
 The man put on the silken belt,
 And was thrilled and light-hearted and joyous.
 780 And he was right to be for so beautiful present
 Had never before been given or granted.
 For he had no one to advise him²

¹ The general meaning of *étrenne* (*estrine*) is ‘a gift’ or ‘a reward,’ but its original more limited meaning was a New Year’s gift. There is here perhaps an allusion to this meaning and the custom of giving gifts at New Year, since the conversation takes place shortly before New Year’s Day.

² Compare lines 568–69.

Text

Et ele estoit et haute et riche,
784 S'avoit baron mauvés et niche.
La terre avoit toute en sa main.
Maint cheval, palefroi, lorain
Donoit au chevalier sovent,
788 Et cil a maint tornoïement
Et loing et pres partout aloit.
Soventes foiz li avenoit
Qu'au vespre avoit de toz le pris.
792 Par lui ert maintenant repris
Li tornois en .i. autre leu.
Plains ert de solaz et de geu
Et de tres plesant compaignie.
796 Sa route estoit molt envoisie
En toz les lieus ou il aloit,
Et la dame biau li trovoit
Ce qu'il despendoit par reson.
800 Quant il venoit en sa meson
Li seors n'estoit pas criez,
Mes si conme il venoit montez
col. 2 Aloit coïement a s'amie,
804 Qui molt durement en ert lie.

⁷⁸³ estoit et haute BC] ert haute dame A, ert et sage D.

⁷⁸⁴ niche] chiche C – Souz .i. b. mauvais et nice B.

⁷⁸⁵ La terre avoit toute] Qui la t. tint B.

⁷⁸⁶ palefroi] et maint B.

⁷⁸⁷ Donoit] Donna B – au chevalier] a son ami B.

⁷⁸⁸ cil] il B. Space left for a decorated capital in B.

⁷⁸⁹ partout BC] a toz A, souvent D.

⁷⁹⁰ Soventes BCD] Et s. A – li] missing in AD.

⁷⁹¹ Qu'au] Qu'il B, Qu'a D – vespre] missing in B – de toz BC] eü A, missing in D.

⁷⁹² ert maintenant] est en maint leu B.

⁷⁹⁴ ert] fu BD – de solaz BCD] d'esbanoi A.

⁷⁹⁵ de tres plesant] t. plaisant d. B – tres] trop C. Lines 795–96 inverted in B.

⁷⁹⁸ Et] missing in D – biau] mout bien D – trovoit] otroioit B.

⁷⁹⁹ Ce] Si B.

⁸⁰⁰ venoit] revenoit B – sa] missing in B.

⁸⁰¹ Li] Ses C – n'estoit CD] n'i ert A – Il n'estoit mie seornez B.

⁸⁰² Mes si] Einsi CD – venoit BCD] estoit A – montez] armez B.

⁸⁰⁴ Et la dame estoit ml't l. B.

And she was both of high status and rich
 784 With a husband who was mean and dumb.
 All the land was under her control.¹
 She often gave the knight
 Many horses, palfreys, harness straps,
 788 And he went to many tournaments
 Everywhere, both far and near.
 It often happened that, when evening came,
 He won the prize over everyone else.
 792 And then he resumed the tournament
 Right away in another place.²
 He was playful and full of contentment
 And most pleasant company.
 796 His band of knights was very blithe
 Everywhere he went,
 And the lady willingly found the means
 To supply the reasonable sums he spent.³
 800 When he entered her house
 His stay wasn't shouted out loud;
 Instead, he got off his horse and went
 Discreetly, dressed just as he was, to his companion,
 804 Who was very, very glad to see him.

¹ As noted in the Introduction (p. 30 n. 56), one could translate this as either 'All the land was under *her* control' or 'All the land was under *his* control,' but the former seems to us the better and more likely way of understanding the verse. Barth (pp. 829, 872) and Jongen and Verhuyck (p. 75) also interpreted it in this way. Maddox, on the other hand, translates it as 'he had absolute dominion over his land' (p. 431). As Maddox also points out (p. 431 n. 80), C reads 'chiche' ('miserly') rather than 'niche' at line 784, which suggests that the copyist of C may also have understood the lady's husband to be the subject of the verb in line 785.

² Brook interprets this as a pun alluding, evidently, to an amorous post-tournament 'tournament' with the lady (p. 73).

³ Barth suggests that it is commonplace in the literature of the time for a lady to support her lover financially (p. 872). This was perhaps so, but it is important to remember that this lady, unlike the lady in the example cited by Barth, is (at least the way we understand the poem) using resources she has inherited, *her* money rather than her husband's money, to support the knight. She is not taking money from her husband to give to her lover. Rather, her resources support both men.

Quant ele l'avoit a loisir,
 Grant part avoit de son desir.
 En bele chambre erent sovent
 808 Ensamble o bel dosnoïement
 Mainte nuit, maint jor ajornee.
 Cele amor fu molt bien celee,
 C'onques n'en fu noise ne cris.
 812 Toz s'esmerveille li païs
 La ou li chevaliers prenoit
 La bele vie qu'il menoit.
 Ainsi joïrent lor amor
 816 Longuement jusques a .i. jor
 Qu'il convint le mari la dame
 Morir. A son jor rendi ame.
 Enfouiz fu; molt i ot gent.
 820 Et la dame, qui molt ot gent
 Le cuer et cors apris et sage,
 Assembla trestout son lignage.
 Son ami prist et espousa.
 824 Ainsi li biaux parlars dona
 Au chevalier cel mariage,

⁸⁰⁵ l'avoit] lou voit B. Decorated capital in D.

⁸⁰⁶ Grant part] Ml't par B.

⁸⁰⁷ bele chambre erent] privé leu errant B.

⁸⁰⁸ o bel] ont lor B – bel] maint D.

⁸⁰⁹ nuit] n. et B – maint jor ajornee] mainte jornee B.

⁸¹⁰ Cele amor fu molt] Ainsi fu lor a. B – bien] missing in B, *bele* with *le* expunctuated and abbreviation mark added D.

⁸¹¹ C'onques] Onques B.

⁸¹² Toz] Ml't B – s'esmerveille D] s'esmerveilloit A, s'en merveille BC.

⁸¹⁴ B adds two lines between lines 814 and 815: De donner et de despendre tant | Chaucuns c'en aloit mervillant.

⁸¹⁵ A. fu l. a. menee B. Decorated capital in CD.

⁸¹⁶ Longuement jusques a] Celëement jusqu'a B – jusques] de si D.

⁸¹⁸ son] se B – ame] l'ame CD.

⁸¹⁹ Ml't i ot grant planté de gent B.

⁸²⁰ Line missing in B.

⁸²¹ Le cuer, et cors] Le cors, le cuer B, Le cors et bien D – apris BCD] apert A.

⁸²² Assembla trestout C] Sanz le conseil de A, Si a. tot B, Après a. D – lignage] parage D.

⁸²⁵ cel] le B, ce C, tel D.

She had a great part of what she desired
 When she could be at leisure with him.
 They were often together
 808 In a beautiful chamber spending their time as lovers do
 Many nights, many whole days.
 This love was kept very secret
 For never was it rumoured or made public.
 812 The whole country wondered
 Where the knight found the means
 To lead the splendid life he led.
 They enjoyed their love in this way
 816 For a long time until the day
 The lady's husband had
 To die. He rendered his soul when his day came.
 He was buried; many people were there.
 820 And the lady, whose heart
 Was most noble and whose demeanour was elegant and
 composed,
 Gathered her whole family.
 She took her companion and married him.
 824 Fair speech thus won
 The knight this marriage,

Que lui et trestout son lignage
 Amonta et mist a honor.
 828 Et vous qui m'entendez, seignor,
 Li lais du conseil vous chastoie:
 Fols est qui va mauvese voie
 Por que la bone soit empres.
 832 Por qoi ne vous maint ausi pres
 Li biaux parlers con li mesdires?
 En est ce mauvés maïstires?
 Oïl, certes, lais et vilains.
 836 Bien savez me sires Gauvains
 Fu de pris de chevalerie.
 Molt li aida sa cortoisie;
 Oï l'avez en maint biau conte.
 840 Cis lais du conseil fine et conte
 Que cil a trop le cuer aver
 Qui est eschars de biau parler,
 Por qu'il ne soit sours ou muiaus.
 844 Mesdiz est covoitous morsiaus
 Et si ne fet a nului bien.
 Gardez vous en sor toute rien,
 Vous qui a bien volez venir

⁸²⁷ Amonta] Amanda B, Aleva C, Essaucha D – mist] tint BC. B adds four lines between lines 827 and 828: Par son dit par sa valor | Et vous tuit cil qui retanront | Cest roumans et le maintendront | Puissiez avoir joie et honor.

⁸²⁸ m'entendez] maintenés D – S'en priez Dieu nostre seignour B.

⁸²⁹ Li CD] Cis A, i B (but first letter missing from left margin B; blank left for a decorated capital) – vous BCD] nous A.

⁸³⁰ Fols] Faus BD – va mauvese] vait la male D.

⁸³¹ Por que] Tant con BD – soit empres] li s. pres CD.

⁸³² ne vous] nous B – maint] tient BC – ausi] on si B.

⁸³⁴ En est ce] N'est de ml't B, Dont n'est ce C, En esche dont D.

⁸³⁵ lais] faus B, fox C.

⁸³⁶ Gauvains BCD] .G. A.

⁸³⁷ de pris] la flor B, li p. D.

⁸³⁸ Molt li aida] Tot ce fu par B.

⁸⁴⁰ Cis] Li BD, Cil C – fine CD] dit A, fenist B.

⁸⁴³ Por] Puis B – ou] ne C.

⁸⁴⁴ covoitous BCD] uns villains A. Manuscript B ends after this line with: Explicit le lai dou consoil.

⁸⁴⁷ a bien] d'amours – venir] joïr D.

Which ennobled and honoured
 Him and all his family.
 828 And you, lords, who are listening to me,
 The Lay of Advice admonishes you:
 He's a fool who takes the wrong road
 If the right one is at hand.
 832 Why aren't you as ready
 To speak fairly as to speak ill?
 Is it because of bad models?
 Yes, certainly, ugly and oafish.
 836 You know well that my Lord Gawain
 Was the flower of chivalry.
 His courtliness helped him a great deal;
 You have heard it in many fine stories.
 840 This Lay of Advice is coming to an end and relates
 That he who is stingy with fair speech
 Has a too-miserly heart,
 Unless he is deaf or mute.
 844 Slander is an envious mouthful¹
 And thus does no one good.
 Keep yourself from it above all things,
 You who want to succeed

¹ The translation of *morsiaus* by 'mouthful' is borrowed from Maddox, p. 435.

Text

f. 38r col. 1

848 Et qui d'amors volez joïr.
Uns chevaliers, qui ne vout mie
Que l'aventure fust perie,
Nous a cest lai mis en romanz
852 Por enseigner les vrais amanz.
Le plus bel que il sot l'a fet,
L'un mot après l'autre retret,
Mes molt se puet esmerveillier
856 Que il ne se set conseilier
D'une amor dont il est surpris ;
Ainz dit qu'il est autressi pris
Con cil qui en la bée maint.
860 Or prions Dieu que il l'amaint
A droit port et a droit rivage
Qu'en la fin se tiegne por sage.
Amen.
Explicit li lais du conseil.

⁸⁴⁸ d'amors] a bien – joïr] venir D.

⁸⁴⁹ Decorated capital in ACD.

⁸⁵⁰ fust] soit D – perie] fenie C.

⁸⁵² les vrais] veraiz C.

⁸⁵³ Le plus bel] Tout le miex D – sot CD] pot A. Line rewritten in column 2 in D.

⁸⁵⁴ P ended with this line.

⁸⁵⁵ molt se puet] forment s. p. C, il s. p. m. D.

⁸⁵⁶ se] s'en D.

⁸⁵⁸ Ainz] Et D.

⁸⁶⁰ A sa grace Dieus nous amaint D. D ends with this line.

⁸⁶¹ rivage] passage C.

⁸⁶² se] s'en C.

⁸⁶⁴ Amen. Explicit li lais du conseil] missing in C.

848 And want to enjoy love.
A knight, who did not want
This adventure to be forgotten,
Put this lay in French for us¹
852 To teach true lovers.
He did it as well as he knew how,
Adding one word after the other,
But he is astonished
856 Because he cannot advise himself
About a love that has taken him by surprise;
He says, rather, that he is as trapped
As one who lives in longing.
860 So let's pray God to lead him
To a safe port and a safe shore
So that he may think himself wise in the end.
Amen.
Here ends the Lay of Advice.

¹ This might also be translated as 'Put this lay into octo-syllabic rimed couplets for us'.

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