THREE OLD FRENCH NARRATIVE LAYS

TROT, LECHEOR, NABARET

Edited and translated by

Glyn S. Burgess and Leslie C. Brook

Liverpool Online Series
Critical Editions of French Texts

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Timothy Unwin
Series Editor

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Foreword

The Old French lay is related to romance rather as the modern-day short story is to the novel. The lay flourished alongside romance in the latter half of the twelfth century and during the thirteenth. We have selected three lays which have so far received relatively little critical attention and which we consider worthy of being more widely known. We have edited them afresh, together with a separate introduction to each one and a line-by-line translation in English. A composite bibliography provides full bibliographical details of other editions, translations and studies.

The idea of preparing an edition of these lays was first mooted several years ago, but the stimulus to bring it to fruition has been provided by the decision to set up the Liverpool Online Series, which our venture will inaugurate.

We would like to express our thanks to Timothy Unwin, who has guided us through the technical problems relating to online publication, and also to Peter Ainsworth, Rose Donohue, Penny Eley and Eliza Hoyer-Millar, who have made valuable comments on points of detail.

Leslie C. Brook
Glyn S. Burgess

July 1999

General Introduction

Lays were originally sung compositions, and probably some time in the 1160s or early 1170s a lady whom we call Marie de France appears to have been the first to turn them into short, narrative poems without any musical or specifically lyrical element. Also extant are a number of narrative poems from the late twelfth or early thirteenth century, many of them anonymous, and they too can be designated as lays. Whether all these poems should be called simply narrative lays or more specifically Breton lays remains problematic. For the title of the present volume we have kept to the designation 'narrative lays', but it cannot be denied that the origin of the genre owes a lot to Brittany and that Breton elements, including geographical locations, have a significant role to play within the corpus. Whether the three poems edited and translated here should be called Breton or narrative lays is a question which we leave to the preferences of individual readers.

The precise number of Old French poems which can be classed as lays is difficult to determine with confidence. It is now generally agreed that Marie herself composed twelve lays: *Guigemar*, *Equitan*, *Le Fresne*, *Bisclavret*, *Lanval*, *Les Deus Amanz*, *Yonec*, *Laüstic*, *Milun*, *Chaitivel*, *Chevrefoil* and *Eliduc*.[1] Mortimer Donovan's book *The Breton Lay: a Guide to Varieties* contains a chapter entitled 'The Later Breton Lay in French', in which he discusses a further twenty lays: *Aristote*, *Conseil*, *Cor*, *Desiré*, *Doon*, *Espervier*, *Espine*, *Graelent*, *Guingamor*, *Haveloc*, *Ignaure*, *Lecheor*, *Mantel*, *Melion*, *Nabaret*, *Oiselet*, *Ombre*, *Trot*, *Tydorel*

[1] The order given here is that found in MS British Library, Harley 978. Nine of Marie's lays are found in MS Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, nouv. acq. fr. 1104, but here the order is *Guigemar*, *Lanval*, *Yonec*, *Chevrefoil*, *Deus Amanz*, *Bisclavret*, *Milun*, *Le Fresne* and *Equitan*. Moreover, in this manuscript Marie's compositions are intermingled with other lays. References to the *Lais* of Marie de France in the present work are taken from the edition by A. Ewert (for full details of all items mentioned see the Bibliography).

and *Tyolet*.[2] The list of lays provided by Renate Krolle at the end of her book *Der narrative Lai als eigenständige Gattung in der Literatur des Mittelalters* includes all those mentioned so far, plus a further four: *Amours, Piramus et Tisbé, Narcisus* and *Le Vair Palefroi* (p. 234). Kroll's list thus contains a total of thirty-six lays.[3] Some scholars, however, would remove one or two of these texts from a list of lays on the grounds that the comic elements they contain suggest that they should be classified as fabliaux, eg. *Aristote*, *Espervier* and *Mantel*. In addition, one is tempted to add to the list of lays *La Chastelaine de Vergi*, a poem which in the extant manuscripts is not designated as a lay but which is in many ways hard to distinguish from a poem such as the *Lai de l'Ombre*. 'The appearance of *La Chastelaine de Vergi*', writes Paula Clifford, 'is closely allied to that of the *lai* as it was established by Marie de France'.[4] If length were to be regarded as an important criterion, we could note that *La Chastelaine de Vergi* (958 lines) is significantly shorter than Marie de France's *Eliduc* (1184 lines). Most of the lays which are not attributed to Marie de France remain anonymous. The exceptions are *Aristote* by Henri d'Andeli, *Cor* by Robert Biket, *Ignaure* by Renaut de Beaujeu and *Ombre* by Jehan Renart.[5] Some scholars like to designate all the narrative lays as Breton lays, either because they refer within the text to a Breton origin or setting, or because the entire genre owes its origin to Breton minstrels. Mortimer Donovan, as we have seen, entitled his book *The Breton Lay: a Guide to Varieties*, and he divides the lays into two principal groups, those by Marie de France and the 'later Breton' ones. However, he subdivides the later lays

[2] These twenty lays form the corpus of texts in G.S. Burgess, *The Old French Narrative Lay: an Analytical Bibliography*.

[3] Ferdinand Lot suggested that the *Folie Tristan d'Oxford* and the *Folie Tristan de Berne* should be classified as lays ('Etudes sur la provenance du cycle arthurien', p. 513).

[4] *La Chastelaine de Vergi and Jean Renart: Le Lai de l'Ombre* (London: Grant and Cutler, 1986), p. 12.

[5] A number of lays which are now regarded as anonymous have been considered at some stage to be by Marie de France. B. de Roquefort included *Espine* and *Graelent* in his edition of the *Lais* (Paris: Chasseriau, 1819-20) and in his third edition K. Warnke included *Guingamor* (Halle: Niemeyer, 1925). F. Hiller's dissertation was entitled *Tydorel: ein Lai der Marie de France* (Rostock: Lewerenz, 1927). When publishing *Doon*, *Guingamor*, *Lecheor*, *Tydorel* and *Tyolet* in 1879, Gaston Paris asked whether all these lays could be attributed to Marie de France. He concluded that only *Lecheor* is definitely not by her (p. 37).

into (i) 'Anonymous Breton Lays' (*Desiré*, *Graelent*, *Guingamor*, *Doon*, *Melion*, *Epine*, *Tydorel* and *Tyolet*), (ii) the 'Didactic Lay' (*Trot*, *Oiselet*, *Conseil*, *Ombre*, *Ignaure*), (iii) the 'Elevated Fabliau' (*Espervier*, *Aristote*, *Cor*, *Mantel*, *Nabaret*), (iv) the expression 'Breton Lay applied to Non-Breton Material' (*Haveloc*) and (v) *Lecheor*, which is seen as a parodic lay.

Harry F. Williams examined the corpus in his article 'The Anonymous Breton Lays', and he concluded that there are thirteen lays which fit this designation: *Desiré*, *Graelent* and *Guingamor* (the fairy-mistress stories), *Doon* and *Melion* (which treat subjects dealt with by Marie de France), *Tyolet*, *Tydorel* and *Espine* (which refer to the Bretons and contain Celtic motifs), *Trot*, *Lecheor*, *Nabaret* and *Haveloc* (which invoke Breton songs and place the action in Brittany, or Great Britain in the case of *Haveloc*) and *Mantel* (the prologue is suggestive of the Breton lay and the geography of the text is Celtic). To these thirteen lays one could add two with known authors: *Cor* and *Ignaure*. Williams shows that over the years only the first three in this list (*Desiré*, *Graelent* and *Guingamor*) have consistently been accepted by scholars as Breton lays. The authenticity of all the rest has been questioned at some stage. Poems such as *Conseil*, *Narcisse* and *Le Vair Palefroi* should, in Williams' view (p. 84), be classified as 'other types of narrative lays' (courtly, comical, classical, etc.).

Of particular significance for the present purpose is Prudence Tobin's edition of eleven lays, published in 1976 under the title *Les Lais anonymes des XII^e^ et XIII^e^ siècles: édition critique de quelques lais bretons*. The poems edited in this volume are: *Graelent*, *Guingamor*, *Desiré*, *Tydorel*, *Tyolet*, *Espine*, *Melion*, *Doon*, *Trot*, *Lecheor* and *Nabaret*. In comparison with the list drawn up by Williams, *Haveloc* and *Mantel* are omitted.[6] Tobin (p. 10) divides her lays into five categories: (i) 'les lais féeriques dans le cadre breton' (*Graelent*, *Guingamor*, *Desiré*, *Tydorel*, *Tyolet*, *Espine*), (ii) 'les lais plus réalistes dans le cadre breton, toujours avec un élément surnaturel' (*Melion*, *Doon*), (iii) 'le lai didactique dans le cadre breton, toujours avec

[6] For Tobin the subject of *Mantel* 'l'éloigne de nos lais' (p. 10). She mentions the exclusion of *Haveloc*, but does not provide a reason for it (*ibid.*).

son élément de mystère' (*Trot*), (iv) 'un lai burlesque à la mise en scène bretonne' (*Lecheor*) and (v) 'un lai dans le cadre breton sans élément surnaturel' (*Nabaret*).

It is to be noted that the three lays edited in the present work are printed at the end of Tobin's volume and that each is placed in a category of its own. Indeed, without these three poems Tobin would have eight lays divided into just two categories: 'lais féeriques' and 'lais plus réalistes'. These eight would then possess, uncontroversially, the main features of a Breton lay: a geographical setting in Britain or Brittany, a commemorative account of an *aventure* (frequently with reference to an earlier lay composed by the Bretons), supernatural elements, an account of the love between a knight and his lady (including the way in which they meet, the obstacles they encounter and the suffering they are forced to undergo), the relationship between the lovers and society (particularly as represented by the court), the presence of some form of chivalric activity, the absence of any significant comic element, etc. The last three lays in Tobin's edition, *Trot*, *Lecheor* and *Nabaret*, have undeniable links with the themes of the other eight, especially the reference to the Bretons (*Trot*, v. 303, *Lecheor*, v. 2) and to Bretaigne (*Trot*, v. 6, *Nabaret*, v. 1). But although the relationship between men and women is also central to the thematic structure of these three, in each case the relationship operates differently from that found in Tobin's other lays or in those of Marie de France, in which the *aventure* remembered brings the principal protagonists together in some form of passionate union.

A number of scholars have commented on the fact that *Trot, Lecheor* and *Nabaret* fit uneasily into the corpus of Breton lays. *Trot*, writes Jean-Charles Payen, has 'rien à voir avec cette histoire d'un couple qui constitue le sujet favori de Marie de France'.[7] *Lecheor*, states Tobin, 'a peu de points communs avec les autres lais de ce recueil. Il ne s'agit pas d'une aventure, ni d'une rencontre amoureuse' (p. 349). *Nabaret* is scarcely accepted as a lay: Donovan describes it as an 'elevated fabliau' (p. 99) and Alexandre Micha, in his *Lais féeriques des XII^e^ et XIII^e^ siècles*, labels it a

[7] *Le Motif du repentir*, p. 324.

'plaisanterie sans grand sel'.[8] Micha in fact prefaces his translation of Tobin's lays by stating that *Trot*, *Lecheor* and *Nabaret* 'semblent dévier du genre' (*ibid*.).

By bringing together these three poems and presenting them with a translation and extended commentary, we aim to permit the reader to assess them as individual compositions and to estimate their right to form part of a collection of Breton or narrative lays. To what extent do they, in Micha's words, 'dévier du genre'? Are there elements within these poems which would suggest that they should be denied the title 'lays'? If they are accepted as lays, what contribution do they make to the genre?

All three poems have been edited afresh after consulting either the manuscript (*Lecheor*), a photostat (*Nabaret*) or a microfilm (*Trot*), which has enabled us either to make adjustments to the published editions or to confirm their readings. We have edited the texts conservatively, with scrupulous attention to spelling and a consistent resolution of manuscript abbreviations. Following other editors a few hypometric lines have been modified in order to produce complete octosyllabics. For metrical reasons, too, the diaeresis has been used in some diphthongs, but we have tried to avoid overusing it, and in general we have taken account of the recommendations concerning the use of accents found in *Romania*, 52 (1926), 243-49. In conformity with convention, any letters, syllables or words added have been supplied in square brackets, while any deleted, usually through dittography, are put in round brackets. Attention has been drawn in the Notes to the readings of previous editions only where they offer alternative interpretations. The line-by-line translations aim to render the texts in straightforward modern English, maintaining, as far as possible, the tenses and precise wording of the original.

[8] Tobin writes with reference to *Nabaret* that 'le sujet du poème ne se trouve nulle part ailleurs dans les lais' (p. 361).

TROT

Introduction

Manuscript, Editions, Translations

The lay of *Trot* is preserved in MS Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, fr. 3516, f. 344v, col. 1 - 345v, col. 4. This manuscript, which appears to date from 1267 or 1268, was written in the Artois region.[1] The poem was first edited in 1832 by L.-J.-N. Monmerqué and Francisque Michel, then in 1935 by E. Margaret Grimes and again in 1976 by Prudence M.O'H. Tobin in *Les Lais anonymes des XII^e^ et XIII^e^ siècles* (pp. 339-46).

Tobin's edition of *Trot* has been reprinted, with a facing translation in Italian, by Walter Pagani (1984) and, with a facing translation in French, by Alexandre Micha (1992). This lay has also been translated into French by Danielle Régnier-Bohler (1979), into Dutch by Ludo Jongen and Paul Verhuyck (1985) and into Spanish by Isabel de Riquer (1987).

Date, Author

There is no clear indication of a possible date for this poem. Following earlier scholars, Tobin inclines towards assigning it to the years 1200-1220, but acknowledges that it could have been composed any time between 1184 and 1267 (p. 336). She suggests that the author may have come from Picardy, because of traces of Picard dialect in the poem, and thinks that he was probably influenced by the *De Amore* of Andreas Capellanus (see below, Possible Source). She points out, too, that the poem is characterized by colourful description and that the emphasis of the poem reveals in its author 'un côté moralisant et didactique' (*ibid*).

[1] 'On the first two folios there is a calendar which ends with a table of *lettres dominicales* from 1268 to 1367, and which was probably written about 1268. From the names of two of the Saints in the calendar, Saint Erkemboden and Saint Omer, both Bishops of Thérouanne, we may infer that the MS was written in Artois' (Grimes, p. 313).

Outline of the Story

One April morning, a knight from Arthur's Round Table named Lorois, sets out to hear the song of the nightingale. Just as he is getting close to the forest, he sees eighty beautiful young maidens approaching, each accompanied by an elegantly dressed man and forming couples which appear to be very happy. Then another group of eighty ladies appears, each one with her beloved. Shortly afterwards, to the accompaniment of a great deal of noise and lamentation, Lorois catches sight of around a hundred young maidens emerging from the forest on emaciated and exhausted horses. The maidens in this group have no lovers to accompany them, and their suffering is intensified by the fact that their horses are trotting rather than ambling. Not far behind them is a group of one hundred men, who are experiencing a similar degree of torment. Finally, Lorois sees a lady approaching on horseback. Her horse's trotting movement is causing her so much distress that her teeth are chattering. He goes over to ask her the cause of what he has seen, but she has difficulty in responding because of the pain she is suffering. She manages, however, to tell him that the maidens in the first group have been faithful servants of love, whereas those who are suffering are merely reaping the reward of their attitude towards love, which they have treated with scorn and arrogance. This will be the lot of any woman who has failed to love during her lifetime. She adds that it is no use shutting the door once the horse has bolted. Lorois returns to his castle, and as a warning to the ladies there he relates his adventure.

Structure

The text can be divided into the following episodes:

Prologue (vv. 1-4)
(i) Introduction: Lorois and his castle (vv. 5-24)
(ii) Lorois dresses for his departure (vv. 25-46)
(iii) He sets off towards the forest (vv. 47-74)
(iv) He encounters eighty happy maidens (vv. 75-112)
(v) Their male companions (vv. 113-46)
(vi) The unhappy women and their companions (vv. 147-208)
(vii) Lorois sees a lady on her own (vv. 209-33)

(viii) Their conversation (vv. 234-88)
(ix) Lorois returns to court (vv. 289-302)
Epilogue (vv. 303-04)

As in the lays of Marie de France and in most of the other extant narrative lays, the story is framed by a Prologue (four lines) and an Epilogue (two lines). The remaining 298 lines can be divided, as above, into nine sections, or alternatively into three parts of differing length: (i) vv. 5-74 (70 lines), (ii) vv. 75-208 (134 lines), (iii) vv. 209-98 (90 lines). The first of these three parts introduces the hero and prepares him for his *aventure* in the forest. At this stage neither he nor the reader / listener has any inkling of what the *aventure* will be. In the second part the hero sees something which he cannot understand and which he regards as a *merveille* (vv. 136, 137, 213). In part three he receives an explanation for what he has witnessed and he passes on the information he has gained to the ladies at court. Each of these three parts has, as we have seen, three subdivisions.

Possible Source

As the *Lai du Trot* is commonly compared for content and didactic purpose to the *De Amore* of Andreas Capellanus (Grimes, pp. 313-14, Tobin, p. 338), a brief word needs to be added concerning this text and how it relates to our lay. As the title implies, the *De Amore* is a Latin treatise on love dating from the late twelfth century. In the first book there is a series of discussions in which a man attempts to persuade a lady to yield to his professed love for her. In one of these discussions (Book 1, Chapter 6, Section E), a nobleman relates the story of a vision in which he saw groups of ladies riding on horseback, led by the god of Love. Here, too, the ladies are divided into groups according to their responses to love in their lifetime, and the significance is again explained to the young man so that he can warn ladies of the fate which awaits them. In this text there are three distinct groups: those who responded appropriately to love, those who were too promiscuous, and those who refused love. The emphasis is less on whether the horses were ambling or trotting than on whether they were good horses, which give a smooth ride, or stumbling nags suitable for the last group who had spurned love. Moreover, this group had dust

thrown in their eyes from the riders ahead. In the *De Amore*, the ride forms only part of the symbolic rewards and punishments, as the groups are then settled in three distinct areas, the comforts or discomforts of which reflect their deserts.[2]

The Setting

Lorois is a typical hero of a romance or a lay. He is a 'molt riche chevalier' (v. 7) and he possesses the qualities required for success in knighthood ('Hardi et coragous et fier', v. 8). Like the eponymous hero of the lay of *Melion*, he is a member of King Arthur's Round Table (Tyolet also joins Arthur's court, but only during the course of the narrative). Within the lay, Lorois is not given the opportunity to demonstrate his chivalric skills in tournaments or war, but the combination of his general elegance and his response to nature suggests his worthiness and, as we shall see, the theme of riding, an important knightly pursuit, plays a fundamental role in the structure of the poem. The *aventure* (vv. 1, 5) begins once Lorois has set off from his castle on horseback.

The action of the lay takes place near the Castle of Morois (vv. 14, 294), which is situated in *Bretaigne* (v. 6). Morois can be identified as Moray or Murray in Scotland, so the term *Bretaigne* would refer either to Great Britain or to the territory ruled by King Arthur.[3] Lorois has benefited from Arthur's largesse and he possesses five hundred librates of land (vv. 14-15) and a fine castle (v. 17).[4] The castle is close to rivers and forests (vv. 21-22), to which he often goes for relaxation (vv. 23-24).

The adventure commences one April morning, a time of year which is ideal for a new adventure in a hero's life and which is regularly associated with the theme of love in romance, lay and lyric poetry. Lorois dresses himself elegantly and sets off into the forest to hear the song of the nightingale ('Por le rossegnol escouter', v.

[2] *Andreas Capellanus on Love*, ed. and trans. by P.G. Walsh (London: Duckworth, 1982). For the development of the theme of punishment meted out to those who scorn Love see Grimes (pp. 313-17), who quotes texts in French (Richard de Fournival, *Conseils d'Amour*), Catalan (*Salut d'Amor*), Italian (Boccaccio, *Decameron*) and Latin (Helinand de Froidmont, *De cognitione sui*).

[3] In the lay of *Desiré* the King of Moreis appears with the King of Leoneis at Desiré's knighting ceremony in Calatir, which is almost certainly Calder in Scotland (vv. 729-30).

[4] A librate is a piece of land worth one pound per year.

46). The description of his clothing is so lengthy that it is clear that the author attaches considerable importance to it: 'He had put on his shirt, / Made of linen, soft and delicate, / And he girded on a belt, / I have seen many worse. / He looked nothing like a fool, / For he had put on a surcoat / Of splendid, blood-red cloth, / Trimmed with an ermine hem. / He was very well shod, / As he had on laced-up shoes / And he wore hose with slashes / Very fittingly arranged' (vv. 29-40). This description of Lorois' clothing and the fact that he is very elegantly attired ('molt bien acesmés', v. 28) can be seen as a preparation for the lengthy description of the first group of ladies (vv. 80-98), who are also 'molt bien acesmees' (v. 81, cf. v.143). This author is clearly at pains to create linguistic and thematic links between the various elements in his narrative, for the men who are the ladies' male companions are also said to be 'molt bien acesmé' (v. 118). Both Lorois and the knights wear a coat which is trimmed with ermine ('Foree d'une pene ermine', v. 36; 'Forrés d'ermine et haut coés', v. 121). The ladies in the second group are badly dressed, being clad in ragged black frocks, which leave their legs and arms bare (vv. 181-85). Lorois himself is 'bel chauciés assés' (v. 37), whereas these ladies are 'totes deschauces' (v. 178).[5]

Lorois' desire to hear the song of the nightingale (v. 46) and his determination not to return home without doing so (vv. 70-74) confirm his status as an unmarried man in need of love or an amorous adventure. It also recalls the symbolism of the nightingale, which, as we see in Marie de France's *Laüstic*, is an ambivalent symbol of love, proclaiming the potential of love to produce both ecstasy and sorrow.[6] Moreover, the way in which the search for the nightingale, a creature from the natural world, draws Lorois into an adventure with Otherworld characteristics also

[5] Lorois' early-morning departure from his castle is reminiscent of that of Desiré, who one day in early summer ('en l'entree d'esté', v. 95) rises early, dresses himself elegantly and departs to seek his pleasure ('Qu'il fu par .I. matin levés', *Trot*, v. 27; 'Par un matin s'esteit levez', *Desiré*, v. 97; 'Il ot chemise de cainsil', *Trot*, v. 29; 'Chemisë ot de chensil', *Desiré*, v. 101; 'Assés bien seanment chaucies', *Trot*, v. 40; 'Chausez s'esteit mut richement', *Desiré*, v. 99).

[6] For the symbolism of the nightingale in *Laüstic* see G.S. Burgess, 'Symbolism in Marie de France's *Laüstic* and *Le Fresne*', *Bibliographical Bulletin of the International Arthurian Society*, 33 (1981), 258-68, and June H. McCash, ''The Swan and the Nightingale: Natural Unity in a Hostile World in the *Lais* of Marie de France', *French Studies*, 49 (1995), 385-96.

reminds us of other lays in which the hero is drawn to an amorous adventure by a similar quest: e.g. the quest for the white hind in *Graelent*, the white boar in *Guingamor* and the stag in *Desiré*, *Tyolet* and *Melion*. In these poems, the hero sets off in search of pleasure and meets a woman who initiates him into the true nature of love. Although in the lay of *Trot* Lorois does not encounter a lady with whom he will fall in love, he does come into contact with a lady who possesses an understanding of the nature and exigencies of love. She provides him with an explanation of the rewards which come from serving love and of the punishment which is consequent upon failure to do so. The conversation between Lorois and the lady, which is dominated by the theme of love, acts as a cautionary tale for both the hero and the *puceles*, *dames* and *damoiseles* at court, to whom Lorois is later able to recount his adventure (vv. 297-300). The moral is that love is very severe on those who fail to follow its dictates.

Trotting and Ambling

Horses are encountered frequently in medieval texts and we can assume that references to them would always have been of interest to a contemporary audience. In world symbolism horses often take on symbolic properties and they have been seen as possessing links with human passions. But rarely can the relationship between horse-riding and love have been as close as it is in the lay of *Trot*, in which a rather trite anecdote about the rewards and punishments of loving or failing to love is transformed into what we might call a tale of two sittings.[7] The lovers who are happy and have served love faithfully ride horses which move along very swiftly and very evenly. The verb used to designate the movement of the horses belonging to these true lovers is *ambler*, and the adverb which describes the way these horses carry their riders is *souëf* (vv. 100, 124): 'Li destrier sor coi seoient / Molt tost e molt souëf ambloient' (vv. 123-24). When a horse ambles, it lifts its two feet on one side together and moves forward at an easy pace, causing no discomfort to the rider. The ride is therefore pleasing and smooth.

[7] See G.S. Burgess, 'The Lay of *Trot*: a Tale of Two Sittings'.

The horses ridden by the unhappy ladies, who have failed to serve love loyally, are not ambling, but trotting (*troter*). When a horse trots, it proceeds at a steady pace, faster than walking pace, lifting each diagonal pair of legs alternately with brief intervals during which its body is unsupported. This creates for the rider a painful jolt to the lower spine, which is therefore traumatized. This trotting movement is such that the rider's body is forced to act as a shock-absorber, and the rider's very bowels are shaken up as the horse advances: 'Com estoient les damoiseles / Qui si hochoient les boëles' (vv. 199-200). The harshness of the act of *troter* is confirmed by its association with the verb *hocher* 'shake, jolt' (vv. 200, 224) and with the terms *dur* and *durement*: 'Et trotoient si durement / Qu'il n'a el mont sage ne sot / Qui peüst soffrir si dur trot / Une lieueté seulement' (vv. 162-65). In v. 162 the movement conveyed by the verb *troter* is transferred from the horses to their riders, who themselves are said to 'trot painfully'.

The lady with whom Lorois conducts his conversation also rides a horse which is trotting. Her teeth almost shatter as they are forced together by the jolting movement of the horse: 'Et trotoit issi durement / Que, sachiés de fi que si dent / Ensamble si s'entrehurtoient / Que por .I. poi ne s'esmioient' (vv. 205-08). As she rides, she is in such discomfort that she can scarcely utter a word: 'Car a paines parler pooit / Por son ceval que si trotoit' (vv. 221-22). Even if she were stationary, the lady would have been shaken to the very core, as her horse is said to hop or jump about constantly (*hoper*): 'Et encore arestast la dame, / Por ce ne hochoit pas mains s'ame, / Car si li hopoit ses cevals' (vv. 223-25).[8] Even the most expert rider, we are told, would have been unseated, yet she is compelled to remain on her horse and to continue her suffering (vv. 226-31).

Such distinctions in the manner in which the horses proceed would not have been lost on a medieval audience, so it is no surprise that Lorois' message to the ladies at court, and as such the poet's message to all ladies, is couched in terms of the distinction between *troter* and *ambler*: 'Qu'eles se gardent del troter / Car il [fait]

[8] The verb *hoper* seems to be rare. Tobler-Lommatzsch give only this example with the meaning 'hopsen, hüpfen'. The allusion seems to be to a certain friskiness or skittishness on the part of the horse, which makes it difficult for the rider to remain on its back.

molt meillor ambler' (vv. 299-300).[9] But it is not only the horses themselves and their gait which are of interest in this lay. Also important is the distinction between the horses' equipment or harness (*harnas*, v. 297; *harnois*, v. 125). The *lorain* ('harness strap, trappings') belonging to the horses ridden by the first group of maidens is of such high quality that even a rich duke or castellan could not have afforded it (vv. 108-12). The men who accompany the first group of ladies ride horses whose *harnois* is beyond the means of a wealthy king (vv. 125-26).[10] However, the harness of the horses ridden by the ladies who are suffering torment is predictably of inferior quality. These horses have lime-wood bridles (vv. 167-68), which are said to be unsuitable for their purpose ('molt mal seoient', v. 168). Their saddles are broken and patched up (vv. 169-70) and their *panel* ('saddle cushions, horse cloths'), stuffed with straw, have so many holes in them that the ladies leave a trail of straw behind them as they advance (vv. 171-75). They ride without stirrups ('sans estrief', v. 176) and without appropriate leg-coverings or footwear ('Et si n'orent solliers ne chauces', v. 177). Lorois himself had set out with the correct foot and leg wear, which the author is at pains to describe for us (vv. 37-41).

The horses themselves also differ in type and in colour. The ladies in the first group ride palfreys (*palefrois*, v. 99), horses which are entirely suitable for female riders. Their beloveds ride warhorses (*destrier*, vv. 113, 123), also a perfectly appropriate mount for those who have enjoyed success in this world. Lorois himself rides a *destrier* (v. 44). The riders who are suffering are on hacks (*roncis*), which are 'maigres et las' (v. 153). The lady who speaks to Lorois is also seated on a *ronci*, one which is described as *sor* 'sorrel, chestnut' (v. 204).[11] The suffering ladies ride

[9] Verse 301 is unrecoverable because of a hole in the manuscript (Tobin, p. 346), but v. 302 reads: 'Deriere que si dur trotoit'.

[10] Cf. Marie de France, *Lanval*: 'Un blanc palefrei chevachot, / Que bel e süef la portot / ... / Suz ciel nen ad cunte ne rei / Ki tut [le] peüst eslegier / Sanz tere vendre u engagier' (vv. 551-52, 556-58).

[11] *Sor* is a deep yellow colour with brownish or reddish overtones. Although it can have positive associations (Enide rides a horse which is 'sor' and 'soëf amblant', *Erec et Enide*, vv. 5269, 5274, ed. Roques), it is generally linked, like the colour *fauve*, to negative characteristics such as ugliness, treachery or defects of character. The pagan Marganice 'sist sur un ceval sor' (*Chanson de Roland*, v. 1943, ed. Whitehead) and in the *Apocalypse en français au XIII^e siècle* the rider of a sorrel-coloured horse is assimilated to the devil and the horse itself to worldly tyrants: 'Par le cheval sor sunt signifié li tyrant qui espandirent le sanc au martyrs, & cil qui siet sure signifie le deable a qui fu

'noirs roncis' (v. 153) and they wear black frocks (v. 181), whereas their happier counterparts ride 'blans palefrois' (v. 99) and have a rosy complexion ('face vermeille', v. 96).[12] The faces of the ladies who have not loved properly are drained of colour: 'Et ont taint et pales le[s vis]' (v. 263). In the opening lines of the poem the positive colours and experiences of the contented ladies are prefigured by the blood-red cloth of Lorois' tunic ('De chiere escarlate sanguine', v. 35) and by the abundant flowers he encounters by the river ('flors a grant plenté / Blanches et vermeilles et bloies', vv. 66-67). The allusion to these flowers is soon followed by reference to the chaplets of roses and eglantine, which the first group of ladies wear on their heads (vv. 84-85).

Joy and Sorrow

In addition to the crucial distinction between ambling and trotting, the poet creates linguistic and thematic contrasts between the emotions experienced by the two groups, the lovers and the non-lovers. Those who have loved correctly live a 'delitouse vie' (v. 134) and they know 'grant joie' (vv. 145, 242). They have nothing which displeases them ('Eles n'ont riens qui lor desplai[se]', v. 254) and they possess the freedom to act as they wish ('grant aise', v. 253, 'a loisir', v. 78, 'a son (lor) plaisir', vv. 245, 257). They can enjoy the pleasure of kisses and embraces (vv. 131, 246) and they have the leisure to speak of the two supreme values of courtly society: love and chivalry ('Et de tex i a ki parrolent / D'amors et de chevalerie', vv. 132-33). The contented ladies, who are described collectively as a 'bele compaignie' (v. 97), have lovers who are 'envoisié et bien cantant' (v. 116), men who are strangers to envy, since each one can take his pleasure with his own beloved constantly and without any hindrance ('sans anui', v. 129). The lives of those who

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donné poesté de guerrer S. Eglise' (ed. by L. Delisle and P. Meyer, Paris: Firmin Didot, SATF, 1901, VI (4)). For the symbolism of this and other colour terms see Audrey C. Stimpson, 'Colour Symbolism with Particular Reference to the French Literature of the Twelfth and Early Thirteenth Centuries', PhD thesis, University of Liverpool, 1978.

[12] Jacques Ribard comments that, like black and white, red and white have in Old French literature both complementary and antagonistic associations (*Le Moyen Age: littérature et symbolisme*, Paris: Champion, 1984, p. 46).

enjoy the fruits of this loving relationship are conveyed to us by adverbs such as *belement* (v. 78), *doucement* (v. 86) and *souëf* (v. 124) and by references not only to such things as clothes and flowers but also to their freedom to rest and sleep whenever they wish (vv. 257-58). Even the weather is more favourable to the lovers than to the non-lovers. The former enjoy such warmth that the ladies need few garments: 'Totes estoient en bliaus / Sengles, por le tans qui ert chaus' (vv. 87-88). A number of them even prefer to travel ungirdled: 'S'en i ot maintes / Que por le chaut erent desçaintes' (vv. 91-92). They wear no hats (v. 83) and allow their tresses to fall free from their hair and hang down over their ears (vv. 94-96). The non-lovers, on the other hand, are subjected to inclement weather, with the result that the combination of thunder and snow with their 'grant paine' and 'dolor' makes the very sight of their miserable existence unbearable to Lorois (vv. 187-92). In contrast to this, the lovers enjoy permanent summer whatever the weather or the season: 'Ne por yver ne por oré / N'ierent eles la sans esté' (vv. 255-56).

If the lovers can enjoy *repos* and *sojor* whenever they require them (v. 273), this freedom is denied to the non-lovers. Their life is characterized by permanent suffering (*grief torment*, vv. 161, 186, 262, *dolor*, v. 191, *mals*, v. 278, *grant paine*, v. 191). They suffer (*sueffrent*, v. 192), sigh and bewail their fate constantly ('Plaindre dolerousement', v. 149; 'Plaignant e sospirant a[dés]', v. 260; 'Por ce en getoit maint sospir', v. 232) and they consider themselves to have been born at an evil hour ('molt dure eure', v. 275). The adverbs which convey their unhappy existence are *laidement* (v. 185), *mal* (v. 179) and *durement* (vv. 162, 205, 261). For this group, the terms *dur* (v. 164) and *durement* are linked, as we have seen, to the trotting motion of their horses. The concluding lines of the poem also contain an allusion to this link: 'Deriere que si dur trotoit' (v. 302).[13]

Unlike their more fortunate counterparts, the ladies who have been poor lovers have no male companions ('Seules, que home n'i avoient', v. 155; 'Sans homes

[13] The adverb *durement* is also employed in more positive contexts. It is used with reference to Lorois as he gallops towards the lady who will act as his informant ('Le ceval broche durement', v. 215) and to the quality of the love which binds the faithful lovers ('Qui les amoient durement', v. 249).

cevalcent t[ot dis]', v. 264). The 'grant noise' (v. 148) which is associated with them as they approach Lorois contrasts with the tranquillity of the first group of ladies who progress in a serene and untroubled fashion ('tot belement et a loisir', v. 78). Similarly, the smoothness (*souëf*, vv. 100, 124) of the ride enjoyed by the lovers, whose movement is such that they appear stationary in spite of their great speed (vv. 101-07), contrasts with the uncomfortable, jolting movement experienced by the lady who speaks to Lorois. She is forced to stay on her horse when even a skilled rider would have found difficulty in clinging to its saddle or mane (vv. 226-31).

In the world of Lorois and the lovers, everything fits correctly into its place. One could not find a castle which was 'miex seant' (v. 16) than that belonging to Lorois. When he sets off from his castle, he is 'assés bien seanment chaucies' (v. 40). The ladies who have served love loyally have had the leisure, as they ride along in the heat, to do things such as arranging their hair to suit the circumstances of their journey ('por miex seïr', v. 93) and each of them has a beloved who is completely appropriate for her needs ('Cointe et mignot et bien seant', v. 115). But, for the ladies who have not loved, the objects in their lives do not serve their purpose well: 'Les regnes de lor frains estoient / De tille, qui molt mal seoient' (vv. 167-68). Unlike Lorois ('Et si ert bel chauciés assés', v. 37), these ladies lack appropriate clothing and footwear ('Les piés orent mal atornés', v. 179). The use of the verb *seoir* ('sit, be suitable') creates an interesting semantic link between the concept of appropriateness and that of sitting on a horse: 'Et li destrier sor coi seoient' (v. 123), 'Ki sor .I. sor ronci seoit' (v. 204, cf. also vv. 101, 227). Lorois' informant sees each group of riders as sitting on the type of horse which befits her behaviour towards love. Those on the unsuitable mounts, including herself, have repented too slowly (v. 288). Moreover, the poet, perhaps with intentional humour, brings the story to a close with a proverb which unites repentance for what one has not done with regard to love with what has not been done with regard to horses: 'Qui a tart commence a fermer / S'estable, cil qui a perdu / Son ceval, dont est irascu' (vv. 284-86, i.e. it is no use shutting the stable door once the horse has bolted). The association between what affects horses and what affects the human heart is actually made within the text

itself: 'Li cuers de nos est ensement; / Repenties somes trop lent' (vv. 287-88). The author has brought horses and humans together here, just as the entire text brings together, in complementary or opposing fashion, diverse elements, all relating in some way to the theme of love. This is a poem in which everything has its place within a very tightly controlled thematic structure.

The Author's Purpose

Tobin describes the lay of *Trot* as a 'conte moral', one aimed at demonstrating the rewards and punishments which are meted out in terms of one's obedience to the dictates of Love (p. 338). Love demands to be obeyed and those who do so attain true joy: 'Bien fisent son commandement. / Or lor en rent le guerredon / Amors, k'il n'ont se joie non' (vv. 250-52). Those who 'ainc por Amor ne fisent r[ien]' (v. 266) pay dearly for their wrong-doing (*molt (chier) comperer*, vv. 268, 270). Those in the first group obeyed the principal command of love, to serve it loyally ('Ont Amor loialment servie', v. 248), whereas those in the second group were guilty of scorning love ('Ne ainc ne daignierent a[mer]', v. 267). Lorois' informant offers two complementary explanations for the sufferers' disobedience: (i) they were ill-starred in that they lacked any intimate acquaintance with love and its requirements ('A molt dure eure fumes nees / Quant d'amor ne fumes privees', vv. 275-76), and (ii) in not deigning to love they manifested great pride (*grant orgoil*) and arrogance (*posnee*) (vv. 267-69). These are arguably two ways of looking at the same thing: the non-lovers may blame their ill-fated make-up, but it is in fact through their choice and their personal failings that they will be judged not to have participated in love.[14]

Lorois himself, his informant and the author all attribute a didactic purpose to this *aventure*.[15] The informant states that, if they do not want to repent too late,

[14] In a different context, the theme of non-participation in love forms the trigger for Guigemar's adventure in Marie de France's lay. But he is forced into conformity by the episode of the wounded stag.

[15] Donovan states that this lay has a 'didactic tendency' (pp. 84-85) and Tobin also sees the lay as a 'conte didactique' (p. 339).

women in the future must pay heed to themselves and act to avoid the suffering they are undergoing:

> ‘Mais se nule dame ot parler
> De nos et nos mals raconter,
> Se ele n’aime en son vivant,
> Ce sachiés, bien certainement,
> Qu’ele avoeques nos en venra,
> Qui trop tart s’en repentira.’ (vv. 277-82)

Lorois is said to hear and to understand these words (*escoter*, *molt bien entendre*, vv. 290-91). It is as if, possessed of some special quality, he has been let into a secret by a supernatural being, and he realises that in turn he must relate to the ladies at court the valuable information he has acquired during his *aventure*: ‘S’a l’aventure racontee / Que la dame ot ramenbree’ (vv. 295-96). The lady has *ramenbré* the *aventure*, i.e. brought it to his attention, rescued it from oblivion, just as the author of a lay remembers and commemorates a lay (‘Talent me prist de remembrer / Un lai dunt jo oï parler’, Marie de France, *Chaitivel*, vv. 1-2). He duly passes on the message (*mander*, v. 297) to the ladies in the castle and subsequently the Bretons turned the adventure into a lay (v. 303). In his turn, the composer of the *Lay del Trot* has brought the story to the attention of his own audience, using his skills in the art of rhyming: ‘Une aventure vos voil dire / Molt bien rimee tire a tire; / Com il avint vos conterai’ (vv. 1-3). The lay thus plays a part in a chain of transmission of information vital to the salvation of women.

Chi commence Li Lay del Trot

f. 344v col. 1

Une aventure vos voil dire
Molt bien rimee tire a tire;
Com il avint vos conterai,
Ne ja ne vos en mentirai.
L'aventure fu molt estraigne,
Si avint jadis en Bretaigne
A .I. molt riche chevalier,
Hardi et coragous et fier;
De la Table Reonde estoit
Le roi Artu, que bien savoit
.I. bon chevalier honorer
Et riches dons sovent doner.
Li chevaliers ot non Lorois,
Si ert del castel de Morois,
S'ot .V^{c}. livrees de terre,
Miex seant ne peüsciés querre.
Et si ot molt bele maison,
Close de haut mur environ,
Et si ot molt parfont fossés
Trestot de novel regetés.
Et desos le castel aprés
Avoit rivieres et forés
Ou li chevaliers vout aler
Sovent por son cors deporter.
Tant k'il avint en .I. avril
Al glorious tans segnoril
Qu'il fu par .I. matin levés
Lorois, et molt bien acesmés.
Il ot chemise de cainsil
Vestue, delie et sobtil,
Et s'ot une coroie çainte,
De piors ai jo veü mainte.
Il ne resambloit mie sot,
Car il ot vestu .I. sorcot,
De chiere escarlate sanguine,
Foree d'une pene ermine;
Et si ert bel chauciés assés,
Car il avoit chauciers fretés,
Si avoit chauces detrancies
Assés bien seanment chaucies.
Quant il fu chausiés et vestus
Iluec ne volt demorer plus,
Ains commanda son escuier
K'il li amenast son destrier.
En la forest s'en veut aler

I want to recount to you an adventure,
Very well rhymed, with nothing left out.
I shall relate it to you as it happened
And never tell you a word of a lie.
The adventure was very remarkable,
And it happened once upon a time in Brittany
To a very rich knight,
Bold, courageous and fierce.
He was from the Round Table,
Which belonged to King Arthur, who well knew
How to honour a fine knight
And how to make frequent, lavish gifts.
The knight's name was Lorois;
He was from the Castle of Morois
And had five hundred librates of land;
You could not find land better situated.
He had a very fine dwelling,
Surrounded by a high wall
And with very deep ditches,
Which had been dug out very recently.
Below the castle, close by,
There were rivers and forests,
Where the knight liked to go
And take exercise frequently.
Then one April came,
That glorious and splendid season,
When Lorois rose one morning
And dressed himself elegantly.
He had put on his shirt,
Made of linen, soft and delicate,
And he girded on a belt,
I have seen many worse.
He looked nothing like a fool,
For he had put on a surcoat
Of splendid, blood-red cloth,
Trimmed with an ermine hem.
He was very well shod,
As he had on laced-up shoes
And he wore hose with slashes,
Very fittingly arranged.
When he was dressed and shod,
He had no wish to delay any longer;
So he ordered his squire
To bring his horse to him
He wanted to go into the forest

Por le rossegnol escouter.
Li vallés sans nul autre plait
Ce que ses sires volt a fait.
f. 344v col. 2 Il mist la sele en son ceval,
Puis si li laisse le poitral;
Et quant il i ot mis le frain
- Li cevals n'iert pas mort de fain,
Molt ot bel poil, bien fu gardé -
Devant son segnor l'a mené
Li vallés, sans nul autre conte.
Li chevaliers el ceval monte;
Ses escuiers li a es piés
Uns esperons a or chauciés;
Aprés li a çainte l'espee,
Dont l'endeüre fu doree.
Quant ce ot fait, sans compaignon
S'en est issus de la maison.
Ensi en vait grant ambleüre
Envers la forest a droiture,
Lés la riviere par le pré
U avoit flors a grant plenté,
Blanches et vermeilles et bloies;
Et li chevalier, totes voies,
S'en vait alques grant aleüre,
Et si s'afiche bien et jure
C'ariere ne retornera
De ci adont que il avra
Le rossegnol, que il n'avoit
Oï .I. an passé estoit.
Et quant la forest aprocha,
Lorois devant lui esgarda
Si voit de la forest issir
Tot belement et a loisir
Dusc'a .IIII^{xx}. damoiseles,
Ki cortoises furent et beles;
S'estoient molt bien acesmees:
Totes estoient desfublees,
Ensi sans moelekins estoient,
Mais capeaus de roses avoient
En lor chiés mis, et d'aiglentier,
Por le plus doucement flairier.
Totes estoient en bliaus
Sengles, por le tans qui ert chaus;
S'en i ot de teles assez
Ki orent estrains les costés

To listen to the nightingale.
The servant, without further bidding,
Did what his lord wished.
He put the saddle on his horse,
Then laced up its breast-piece,
And when he had put on the bridle
- The horse was not dying of hunger,
It had a very fine coat and was well cared for -
The servant brought it before his lord,
Without more ado.
The knight mounted the horse
And on his feet his squire
Fixed a pair of golden spurs.
Then he girded on his sword
With its gilded handle.
When he had done this, without any companion
Lorois left his dwelling.
Then he galloped off
Straight towards the forest,
Alongside the river, by the meadow
Where there were flowers in abundance,
White, red and blue;
And, without stopping, the knight
Rode at a good pace,
Affirming and swearing
That he would not go back
Until the time came when he had heard
The nightingale, which he had not
Heard for a whole year.
And when Lorois drew near the forest,
He looked ahead of him
And saw emerging from the forest,
In fine and leisurely fashion,
As many as eighty maidens,
Who were courtly, beautiful,
And very elegant;
None of them wore cloaks,
And also they did not wear a hat.
But they had chaplets of roses
And of eglantine, set on their heads,
In order to smell as sweet as possible.
They were wearing a tunic
And nothing over it, as the weather was hot;
And there were a number of them
Who had around their waist

De çaintures; s'en i ot maintes
Que por le chaut erent desçaintes.
Et si orent por miex seïr
Lor treces fait defors issir
De lor ceveus, ki sor l'oreille
Pendent, lés la face vermeille.
La ot molt bele compaignie,
Cascune ert de bende trecie.
f. 344v col. 3 Totes blans palefrois avoient,
Que si tres souëf les portoient
Qu'il n'est hom, se sor .I. seïst,
Se le palefroi ne veïst
Aler, que por voir ne quidast
Que li palefrois arestast,
Et si aloient tot plus tost
Que ne fesissiés les galos
Sor le plus haut ceval d'Espaigne.
Et sachiés dusqu'en Alemaigne
N'a riche duc ne castelain,
Qui mie esligast le lorain
Que la plus povre ki estoit
A son palefroi mis avoit.
Et sor .I. destrier delés lui
Avoit cascune son ami
Cointe et mignot et bien seant
Et envoisié et bien cantant.
Et si sachiés de verité
Qu'il erent molt bien acesmé,
Car cascun d'aus a bien vestu
Cote et mantel d'un chier bofu,
Forrés d'ermine et haut coés,
Esperons d'or es piés fermés.
Et li destrier sor coi seoient
Molt tost et molt souëf ambloient;
Et sachiés bien que l'un harnois
N'esligast mie .I. riches rois.
Entr'eus n'en avoit point d'envie,
Car cascuns i avoit s'amie,
Si se deduisoit sans anui,
Ces a celui, cele a cestui.
Li un baisent, li autre acolent,
Et de tex i a ki parrolent
D'amors et de chevalerie.
La ot molt delitouse vie.
Et Lorois, qui les esgarda,

A belt, and there were many
Who, because of the heat, were ungirdled.
And to give themselves more freedom they had
Let their tresses fall free
From their hair, which hung down
Over their ears, brushing their rosy cheeks.
There was a very fine company of them,
And each lady had ribbons in her hair.
They all had white palfreys,
Which carried them so serenely
That there was no one, if he were seated on one of them,
And did not see the palfrey move,
Who in truth would not have believed
That the horse was still.
Yet they were riding faster
Than one would have galloped
On the tallest Spanish horse.
And, I assure you, that from there to Germany,
There is no rich duke or castellan
Who would not have bought the bridle
Which the poorest maiden there
Had placed on her palfrey.
And on a horse beside her
Each maiden had her lover,
Elegant, noble and becoming,
Merry and singing gaily.
And I assure you in truth
That they were very elegantly attired,
For each man had dressed carefully
In a tunic and mantle of costly silk,
Lined with ermine and high tails,
And spurs of gold fixed on their feet.
The horses on which they were sitting
Were ambling speedily and very steadily.
And I assure you that one of the harnesses
Could not have been afforded by a wealthy king.
Between them there was no envy,
For each man there had his own beloved,
And each made merry without impediment,
This maiden with this man, that one with that man.
Some of them were kissing, others embracing,
And there were those who were talking
Of love and chivalry.
Their life was one of great delight.
And Lorois, who looked at them,

De la merveille se segna
Et dist bien que ce est merveille,
Jamais ne verra sa pareille.
Et que que il s'esmerveilloit,
Fors de la forest issir voit
.IIII^{xx}. dames tot alsi;
S'avoit cascune son ami,
Et totes erent acesmees
Si com celes c'ai devisees.
S'aloient grant joie menant,
Et les autres aprés suant.
Et .I. petit d'iluec aprés
Avoit grant noise en la forest,
f. 344v col. 4 De plaindre dolerousement.
Si vi puceles dusc'a cent
Fors d'ice[le] forest issir,
Qui molt erent a mal loisir
Sor noirs roncis, maigres et las,
Et venoient plus que le pas,
Seules, que home n'i avoient,
Et en molt grief torment estoient.
Mais ce sachiés molt bien de fi
Qu'eles l'avoient deservi,
Ensi com vos m'orrés conter,
Se vos me volés escouter.
Molt estoient en grief torment
Et trotoient si durement
Qu'il n'a el mont sage ne sot
Qui peüst soffrir si dur trot
Une lieueté seulement,
Por .XV. mile mars d'argent.
Les regnes de lor frains estoient
De tille, qui molt mal seoient,
Et lor seles erent brisies,
En plus de cent lieus reloïes.
Et lor panel tot altresi
Estoient de paille fori,
Si que on les peüst sans faille
Sievre .X. lieues par la paille
Qui de lor paneaus lor chaoit.
Cascune sans estrief seoit,
Et si n'orent solliers ne chauces,
Ains estoient totes deschauces.
Les piés orent mal atornés,
Car eles les orent crevés,

Crossed himself at this marvel
And said that it was truly a marvel,
Never would he see its equal.
And whilst he was marvelling at it,
He saw coming out of the forest
Eighty ladies just like the others;
Each one had her lover,
And all the ladies were elegant,
Just like those I have described.
They rode along with a great display of joy
And were following the others.
And a short while afterwards
There was in the forest a great noise,
Of moaning and groaning,
And he saw as many as a hundred maidens,
Coming out of this forest,
Who were in a very sorry plight,
On black jades, emaciated and weary,
And the maidens advanced at more than walking-pace,
Alone, for they had no men with them,
And they were suffering the greatest torment.
But you can be absolutely certain
That they had deserved this,
As you will hear me relate,
If you are willing to listen to me.
They were in very grievous torment
And they were trotting in such pain
That there is no wise man or fool on earth
Who could have endured such a painful trot
For even a single league,
Even if he were given fifteen thousand marks of silver.
The reins of their bridles were made from
Lime-bark and they were very ill-fitting,
And their saddles were broken
And patched up in more than a hundred places.
Their saddle cushions, in similar fashion,
Were stuffed with straw
So that one could, without a doubt,
Have tracked them for ten leagues by the straw
Which was falling from their cushions.
Each of them rode without stirrups,
And they had no shoes or hose,
In fact their legs were completely uncovered.
Their feet were in a bad state,
For they were covered in cracks,

Et de noir fros erent vestues,
Si avoient les ganbes nues
Dus c'as genols, et tos les bras
Avoient desnués des dras
Dusc'as coutes molt laidement;
S'estoient en molt grief torment.
Sor eles tonoit et negoit
Et si grant orage faisoit
Que nus ne le puist endurer,
Fors seulement de l'esgarder
La grant paine ne la dolor
Qu'eles sueffrent et nuit et jor.
Et Lorois, ki les esgarda,
A poi que il ne s'en pasma;
Et quant tot ce ot esgardé,
N'a gaires iluec aresté
Quant il voit homes dusc'a .C.
Qui estoient en tel torment
f. 345r col. 1 Com estoient les damoiseles,
Qui si hochoient les boëles.
Et quant il ot tot ce veü,
N'a gaires iluec atendu
Quant une dame venir voit,
Ki sor .I. sor ronci seoit,
Et trotoit issi durement
Que, sachiés de fi que si dent
Ensamble si s'entrehurtoient
Que por .I. poi ne s'esmioient.
Li chevalier, qui l'esgarda,
En li meïsme s'apensa
Que a la dame ira parler,
Por enquerre et demander
Quele merveille estre pooit
Que devant lui passé estoit.
Le ceval broche durement;
Envers la dame isnelement
Vint Lorois, si le salua,
Et la dame le regarda.
Un poi aprés molt lentement
Sachiés que son salu li rent,
Car a paines parler pooit
Por son ceval que si trotoit.
Et encore arestast la dame,
Por ce ne hochoit pas mains s'ame,
Car si li hopoit ses cevals,

And they were dressed in black frocks,
And they had bare legs,
Right up to their knees, and their arms
Were left completely uncovered
Up to the elbows, most inelegantly;
They were suffering most grievous torment.
On them it was thundering and snowing
And there was such a mighty storm
That no one could have endured it,
Beyond merely watching
The great pain and sorrow
Which they were suffering night and day.
And Lorois, who looked at them,
Came close to fainting;
And when he had seen all this,
He scarcely had to wait
Before he saw as many as a hundred men,
Whose torment was similar
To that of the maidens,
Whose innards were being shaken up.
And when he had seen all this,
Scarcely had any time passed
When he saw a lady coming
Who was sitting on a chestnut-coloured jade,
And she was trotting in such a painful way
That, I assure you, her teeth
Were chattering in such a manner
That they were almost breaking into pieces.
The knight, who was watching her,
Made up his mind
That he would go and talk to the lady
In order to enquire and ask
What this marvel could be
Which had passed by before him.
Lorois spurred his horse vigorously
And galloped towards the lady;
He came up to her and greeted her,
And the lady looked at him.
A little later, very slowly,
I can tell you that she returned his greeting,
For she could hardly speak
Because of the trotting movement of her horse.
And even if she had stopped
This would not have prevented her from shaking,
For her horse was prancing about so much.

K’i n’est ne chevelus ne caus,
Se il sor le ceval seïst
Ja en tel lieu ne s’aërsist
A sele, a crigne, amont n’aval,
Qu’il ne chaïst jus del ceval;
Mais la dame n’en pot chaïr,
Por ce en getoit maint sospir.
E lors li dist li chevaliers:
‘Dame’, fait [il], ‘molt volentiers,
S’il vos plaisoit, quel gent ce sont
Saroie, que ci passé sont’.
Ele respont: ‘Jel vos dirai
Al miex que dire le porrai,
Mais ne puis gaires bien parler,
Por ce me covient a haster.
Celes qui la devant s’en vont
Entr’eles si grant joie font,
Car cascune solonc lui a
L’omme el monde que plus ama;
Si le puet tot a son plaisir
Baisier, (et) acoler et sentir.
Ce sont celes ki en lor vie
Ont Amor loialment servie,
f. 345r col. 2 Qui les amoient durement;
Bien fisent son commandement.
Or lor en rent le guerredon
Amors, k’il n’ont se joie non.
Certes, eles sont a grant aise,
Eles n’ont riens qui lor desplai[se],
Ne por yver ne por oré
N’i erent eles la sans esté;
Si se poent a lor plaisir
Colchier, reposer et dorm[ir].
E celes qui s’en vont aprés
Plaignant et sospirant a[dés],
Et ki trotent si dureme[nt]
Et ki sont en si grief torm[ent]
Et ont taint et pales le[s vis],
Sans homes cevalcent t[ot dis],
Ce sont celes, ce sachiés b[ien],
C’ainc por Amor ne fisent r[ien],
Ne ainc ne daignierent a[mer].
Or lor fait molt chier compe[rer]
Lor grant orgoil et lor pos[nee].
Lasse! Jo l’ai molt comperee,

No knight, young or old,
If he had sat on that horse,
Would have been able to cling on in that position
To saddle or mane, or to anything else,
And avoid falling off the horse.
But the lady could not fall off,
And for this reason she uttered many a sigh.
Then the knight said to her:
'My lady', he said, 'very gladly,
If you please, who these people are
I should like to know, who have passed by here.'
She replied: 'I shall tell you
As best as I am able to do,
But I can scarcely speak properly,
So I have to say this to you quickly.
Those women who are riding out in front
Are displaying such great joy amongst themselves,
For each of them in her opinion
Has the man in all the world she has loved the most;
She is able, just as she wishes,
To kiss, embrace and caress him.
These are the women who in their life
Have served Love loyally
And who loved them passionately.
They obeyed Love's commands fully.
Now they are being rewarded
By Love, so that they have nothing but joy.
They are certainly fully at their ease
And have nothing to displease them;
Neither winter nor storm
Can spoil the eternal summer which they enjoy,
And they can, whenever they wish,
Lie down, rest and sleep.
And those women who ride behind them,
Lamenting and sighing constantly,
And who trot so painfully
And are in such grievous torment
With faces which are pale and wan,
Ride at all times without men.
They are those, I assure you,
Who never did anything for Love,
Nor did they ever deign to love.
Now Love is making them pay dearly
For their great pride and their arrogance.
Woe is me! I have paid a high price for it.

Ce poise moi que n'ai amé,
Que ja en yver n'en esté
N'arons nos repos ne sojor,
C'adés ne soions en dolor.
A molt dure eure fumes nees
Quant d'amor ne fumes privees;
Mais se nule dame ot parler
De nos et nos mals raconter,
Se ele n'aime en son vivant,
Ce sachiés, bien certainement,
Qu'ele avoeques nos en venra,
Qui trop tart s'en repentira;
Car li vilains nos seut conter:
Qui a tart commence a fermer
S'estable, cil qui a perdu
Son ceval, dont est irascu.
Li cuers de nos est ensement;
Repenties somes trop lent'.
La dame a sa raison finee,
Li chevalier l'a escoutee
Molt bien et entendue l'a;
Aprés la route s'en ala.
Lorois iluec plus ne demore,
Al castel de Morois retorne,
S'a l'aventure racontee
Que la dame ot ramenbree
De harnas; et mande as puceles,
As dames et as damoiseles
f. 345r col. 3 Qu'eles se gardent del troter
Car il [fait] molt meillor ambler.
[T... ...l....oit]
f. 345r col. 4 Deriere que si dur trotoit.
Un lay en fisent li Breton,
[Le lay del Trot] l'apele l'on.

[Chi fine li lais del Trot]

It grieves me that I have not loved,
For never in winter or in summer
Will we have any repose or comfort
And not be constantly in anguish.
We were born at a very inauspicious hour
When we were not one of Love's intimates;
But if any lady heard tell
Of us, and our plight was related to her,
If she does not love during her lifetime,
I assure you that most certainly
She will come with us
And repent too late.
For the peasant is accustomed to tell us:
Anyone who begins too late to shut
His stable door has lost
His horse and then is in distress.
Our hearts work similarly;
We have repented too slowly.'
The lady finished her speech,
And the knight listened to her
Intently and understood what she said;
Then she continued on her way.
Lorois delayed no longer;
He returned to the Castle of Morois
And recounted the adventure,
Which the lady had related to him,
About the harnesses, and he told maidens,
Ladies and young girls
That they should guard against trotting,
For it is much better to amble
.....
Behind someone who was trotting so painfully.
The Bretons made a lay of this;
It is called the lay of the Trot.

Here ends the lay of the Trot.

NOTES

This text has been revised after consulting a microfilm of the manuscript in the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, Paris. We have relied on the readings of Grimes and Tobin for the completion of lines now partially or totally missing on f. 345r cols 2, 3, and 4, where a miniature has been clumsily ripped from the folio. Because of more recent repairs to the manuscript more letters and words have disappeared since the preparation of their editions, and consequently more appear in the present edition in square brackets from v. 254 onwards than in theirs, since our edition reflects the present state of the manuscript. The last six lines of the lay (vv. 299-304) were originally evenly distributed over the tops of columns 3 and 4 of the damaged folio, with the missing miniature below.

26. This line, added by the scribe after realizing the omission, is inserted at the bottom of col. 1 and indicated *in loco* by a letter 'a', which is repeated at the foot of the column.

92: 'Que': the manuscript abbreviation could equally well be read as 'Qui'.

100: 'Que': again, the abbreviation could be read as 'Qui'.

152: 'Qui': Grimes reads the abbreviation as 'Qui'; Tobin misreads as 'Ki', as she frequently mistakes 'Q' for 'K'.

189: 'le' inserted by the scribe above the line.

264: 't[ot dis]: Grimes, probably through a misprint, has 'tot [vis]'.

LECHEOR

Introduction

Manuscript, Editions, Translations

The lay of *Lecheor* is preserved in MS Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, nouv. acq. fr. 1104, f. 43r, col. 1 - 43v, col. 1. This manuscript, dating from the end of the thirteenth or the beginning of the fourteenth century, is a well-known manuscript containing in all twenty-four lays, including nine normally attributed to Marie de France. The text of *Lecheor* is written principally in Francien, but it contains some slight traces of dialectal forms from the north, especially Norman, and it is probably of Norman provenance (Tobin, *Les Lais anonymes des XII^e^ et XIII^e^ siècles*, p. 347). The poem was first edited in 1879 by Gaston Paris, then again in 1969 by Mortimer Donovan in *The Breton Lay: a Guide to Varieties* (pp. 105-09). Nathaniel E. Dubin included an edition of it, along with four other parodic lays, in his 1974 dissertation. The most recent editions are by Prudence M.O'H. Tobin (1976, pp. 354-57) and, with a facing translation in Italian, by Charmaine Lee (1980). Tobin's edition has been reprinted, with a facing translation in Italian, by Walter Pagani (1984) and, with a facing translation in French, by Alexandre Micha (1992). This lay has also been translated into English by Robert Cook and Mattias Tveitane (1979), into French by Danielle Régnier-Bohler (1979) and Alexandre Micha (1992) and into Dutch by Ludo Jongen and Paul Verhuyck (1985). A fragment (the first fourteen lines only) of an Old Norse translation of *Lecheor* is preserved in the *Strengleikar* collection (MS Uppsala, De la Gardie 4-7, p. 69), edited by Rudolph Keyser and Carl Unger (1850, p. 58) and by Robert Cook and Mattias Tveitane (1979, pp. 207-11).[1]

[1] At some stage the leaf containing the Old Norse text was purposefully cut out of the manuscript 'quite likely because the contents proved altogether too offensive to some medieval reader' (Cook and Tveitane, p. xxvi).

Date, Author

Taken together with the author's apparent awareness of the *Lais* of Marie de France, the appearance of *Lecheor* in the *Strengleikar* collection would indicate a date of composition in the last decades of the twelfth or the beginning of the thirteenth century. Tobin suggests that the author came from the north of France, or perhaps from England (p. 348), as the lays in the *Strengleikar* collection seem to have been based on a lost Anglo-Norman original. Nothing is known about the author, but as the lay revolves around an observation concerning male behaviour made by a woman, *Lecheor* itself could have been composed by a woman. Rosanna Brusegan (p. 257) has recently suggested that the author belonged to the 'milieu des clercs et des professionnels de la littérature liés à un puy ou à une confrérie' and seen the poem as being aimed at 'une école de confrérie, en tout cas à des connaisseurs du genre ("Cil qui savoient de note", v. 33)'.

Outline of the Story

At the time of the festival of St Pantelion, men and women, including the noblest and most beautiful ladies in the region, are accustomed to gather together in their finery to honour the saint. They exchange news about the noble deeds of love and chivalry which have been accomplished during the past year. The finest of the adventures are turned into a lay, named after the person whose adventure it is. The lay then circulates and becomes widely known, even in other lands. On the occasion in question, those assembled recount their adventures as normal, and they prepare to decide which one will be chosen for the new lay. But there is a particular group of courtly ladies there, the flower of Brittany, and one of their number produces a new idea for a lay. Claiming to be very surprised by something, she lists a range of knightly activities and suggests that there is a single reason why knights act as they do, dress as they do and indulge in amorous dalliance. After keeping her companions in suspense, she finally reveals that the reason is the knight's interest in the woman's cunt. No woman, however beautiful, will find a lover if she has lost her cunt. This, she says, should be the subject of the new lay. The other ladies agree (it seems that

there were eight in the group), as do the other participants in the festival. This new lay is said to have good subject-matter and it is highly praised. As in the past, the lay was carried abroad and still enjoyed. Many people say that its title is the lay of *Lecheor*. I would be considered wrong, says the author, if I used its rightful name.

Structure

The text can be divided into the following episodes:

Introduction: the annual ritual of composition (vv. 1-36)
(i) Preparation for this year's lay (vv. 37-52)
(ii) Proposal for a new lay (vv. 53-100)
(iii) Reaction to this proposal (vv. 101-20)
Epilogue (vv. 121-22)

Unusually, there is no formal Prologue. If the text is divided as suggested, a central section of 48 lines (vv. 53-100) is flanked by two episodes of 16 lines. It is also possible to divide the text into two equal parts, each containing 60 lines: (i) preparation for the lady's observations on knightly motivation (vv. 1-60), (ii) the lady's speech (vv. 61-100) and its aftermath (vv. 101-22).[2]

St Pantelion

The action of this lay is set at a particular time of year, the festival of St Pantelion, whose feast day falls on 27 July (but see note to v. 1 for a challenge to the reading *Saint Pantelion*). St Pantelion was a martyr who died around 304 A.D. His cult was principally connected with Bithynia (a mountainous region of Turkey on the Black Sea and the Sea of Marmora). He is reputed to have been court physician to Emperor Galerius and to have lived a life of self-indulgence, from which he was deflected by a Christian friend. He was arrested during the persecutions of Diocletian, but efforts to put him to death in six different ways proved fruitless. He was finally beheaded

[2] Rosanna Brusegan (p. 249) divides the text into five sections (based on the edition by Charmaine Lee, which leaves v. 9 and v. 13 blank): (1) vv. 1-14 (prologue), (2) vv. 15-38 (first amplification of the prologue), (3) vv. 39-54 (second amplification of the prologue), (4) vv. 55-102 (the group of ladies, the 'pointe plaisante' and the idea for a new lay, (5) vv. 103-24 (the realisation of the new lay). Carlos Alvar envisages vv. 1-36 as a form of prologue and states that the last six lines constitute the 'final del lai' (p. 27). From this point of view, forty-two lines (one third of the text) are taken up by framing material.

successfully amidst a halo of marvels. Because of his profession, he became a popular patron of medical men and a relic of his blood, kept at Ravello, is said to have manifested the phenomenon of liquefaction. Mortimer Donovan, in his article '*Lai du Lecheor*: a Reinterpretation', expresses the view that the understanding of this poem depends on the realization that St Pantelion's Day was never to be desecrated. It can therefore be considered as somewhat ironical that the lay associated with his name has as its principal subject-matter the preoccupation of knights with the cunt.

The Protagonists

Unlike most other Breton lays, which have a single *chevalier* as their principal male protagonist (or at most two, as in *Yonec* or *Tydorel*), *Lecheor* has no specific male hero. In the first instance, the male characters in *Lecheor* are those knights who are present at the festival of St Pantelion (v. 41). But the observations concerning masculine behaviour target *chevaliers* as a whole (vv. 63, 69, 113), those who are present at the ceremony and those who are not. Nothing specific is said about the knights present other than that they dress well for the occasion (vv. 11-12), enjoy talking about love and chivalry (vv. 13-16) and react very positively to the ladies' questioning of knightly motivation. They have clearly experienced an active year, as they are all keen to impart details of their *aventures* to the assembled company.

Although the knights present at the festival are evidently worthy individuals, emphasis is laid to a greater extent on the female protagonists, who are the finest and most beautiful ladies and maidens in the land (vv. 5-7). So significant is the annual gathering that it attracts every woman of note (vv. 8-9), and they arrive dressed in all their finery (vv. 11-12). On two occasions, the ladies are collectively described as noble and beautiful (vv. 5, 43). But from amongst the large number of female participants, the author concentrates on the contribution of a smaller group, possibly eight in number (see note to v. 53). These ladies are accorded a number of positive attributes: 'Sages erent et ensaingnies, / Franches, cortoises, et proisies' (vv. 55-56). They are described as the flower of Brittany (v. 57) and as representing everything

which is worthy about the region (‘la proesce et la valors’, v. 58). Such is the eminence of these ladies that the earthy subject-matter of their lay becomes all the more surprising and effective. It must also be noted that in general this poem emphasises the contribution of women to two areas: (i) the understanding of knightly behaviour and (ii) the composition of the lay in question. They are able to think in a novel way and therefore to disturb the normal pattern through which lays were created. Their innovative thinking is the reason why the present author has composed a lay to commemorate both the insight of one of their number and the composition of the ‘lai novel’ itself.

Genre

Lecheor is presented to us as a Breton lay, one which is still being recounted and enjoyed: ‘Ce nos racontent li Breton’ (v. 2); ‘Encore n’est il mie haïz’ (v. 116). The subject-matter of the tale might tempt us to classify it as a fabliau, but the aim of those present was undoubtedly to compose a lay (‘.I. lai en fesoient entr’eus’, v. 25), and no suggestion is made that the subject-matter, however down-to-earth, is inappropriate for a lay. The term *lai* appears in the title and twelve times in the 122 lines of the text (vv. 25, 29, 31, 97, 103, 106, 108, 111, 114, 117, 118, 122), including its use by the author in the last line to designate his own composition (‘Vos ai le lai einsint feni’, v. 122). It is therefore evident that reference to human sexual organs in short narrative is not the exclusive preserve of the fabliau and that the construction of a lay does not need to revolve around the theme of love or a personal *aventure*. Those who had come together for their annual gathering to compose lays have no qualms at all about placing this new composition in the same category as its predecessors. Everyone present is convinced that the ‘bone matire’ of this lay makes it worthy to be spread abroad (vv. 110-16). Moreover, the fact that the lady’s comments relate only to knights, the natural heroes of courtly literature, serves to maintain *Lecheor* within the domain of aristocratic society. Rosanna Brusegan (p. 259) has recently proposed that this poem, and other early thirteenth-century lays such as *Aristote*, *Mantel*, *Nabaret* and *Ombre*, should be called a ‘lai plaisant’, a

category which forms a transitional stage between the traditional lay and the *dit* (e.g. the *Dis du sentier batu* of Jean de Condé). The 'lai plaisant' would cater for both aristocratic and bourgeois interests and blur the distinction between fabliau and lay (see pp. 56-57 for further comments on the question of genre).

Composition

As we have it, *Lecheor* describes how a Breton lay came to be composed. It is about a certain part of the female anatomy, but also about the notion of composition itself. We know that the author was not one of those involved in the original composition, as we are told that his own poem is drawn from a *conte* which he had heard ('Selonc le conte que j'oï', v. 121). Of particular interest is the account of the way in which the Breton lay of *Lecheor* came into being and the description of the method of composition for a number of earlier lays. These lays resulted from annual gatherings and the composition itself was the product of a form of ritual. Many people ('granz genz', v. 3) would gather together to honour St Pantelion. Discussion at these gatherings, it would appear, ranged principally over the two main preoccupations of the courtly world, love and noble deeds of chivalry ('nobles chevaleries', v. 16). Evidently there was a great desire to keep others up to date concerning what had happened in these two domains during the preceding year, and by so doing to articulate all events worthy of note. People listened, we are told, to what others had to say, and once the gathering had broken up they recalled what they had heard and communicated the most significant elements to others (vv. 17-24). The participants in the festival, who could be considered as typical members of an audience for a courtly romance, were clearly interested in the spectacular and the unusual, in whatever constituted an 'aventure' (v. 19). Particular emphasis was placed on the best adventure of all ('tote la meillor', v. 21), which no doubt lent a competitive edge to the proceedings. The best story was recounted and then turned into a lay. Clearly, to be good enough for acceptance, the subject-matter had to be of very high quality, and having been chosen as the purveyor of the most effective story the person concerned enjoyed the admiration and praise of others. His *aventure* 'de touz estoit

loe[e]' (v. 24). Moreover, at a time when the naming of a text was of considerable significance, it is important to note that the name of the lay was drawn from the name of the person whose adventure was used.

Although the new lay composed within the lay of *Lecheor* has some unusual features, the process of its composition appears normal. Once knightly motivation has been identified, the other seven ladies in the group support the idea of a lay on this subject (v. 101). Working as a group, they turn the idea into a 'lai ... cortois et bon' (v. 106) by providing it with 'son et chant / Et douces notes a haut ton' (vv. 104-05). So effective is this new lay that all the other participants abandon their own compositions and heap praise on the ladies' achievement (vv. 107-10), even to the point of helping with the finishing touches (v. 111). The lay is appreciated and made known not only by knights but also by clerics (vv. 113-14).

Question and Answer: What Makes Knights Tick?

The initial circumstances surrounding the gathering described in the lay of *Lecheor* are perfectly normal. Those present leave the church and make their way to the appointed place, where they all assemble. Each person tells his tale (v. 48) and recounts his own *aventure* (v. 49). Then they make preparations for the lay which they will 'metre avant' (cf. Marie de France, Prologue, v. 38, *enveier avant*, and *Chaitivel*, v. 232, *porter avant*). But in v. 53 the narrative takes a different turn. We are introduced to a group of ladies, and to one lady in particular, on whom interest will now focus. This lady does not simply wish to propose an individual *aventure* for the new lay but to broaden the role of a lay by using it as a vehicle to reveal the underlying reason for the activity of all knights, to show why their 'grant bien' (v. 68) are accomplished (cf. Marie de France, 'Quant uns granz biens est mult oïz', Prologue, v. 5). We should note that, in spite of the conclusion she reaches about knightly motivation, the lady takes a very positive view of the contribution which knights make to society. She has no wish to call into question the end-product of chivalric activity. She is concerned, provocatively, with something which in her

view has escaped the attention of the knights themselves and of other members of society.

The lady presents her case through the rhetorical device of anaphora, the repetition of a word or a phrase in successive lines. She also makes ample and effective use of rhetorical questions, beginning with 'Par cui sont li bon chevalier?' (v. 69). Does the term *cui* refer here to a person or a thing? When the answer is finally given, we shall discover that it is a thing. It is a tantalising and profound question, an existential question: who or what is the source of knightly goodness? It is certainly a question which is calculated to hold the interest of a society in which knights play such a crucial part. Is the lady referring to one particular person? In v. 70 she shifts to the more clearly identifiable 'por qoi' ('for what thing') and then to 'por qui' ('for whom'), which is used three times in vv. 71-73 and again in v. 75. For what reason do knights like attending tournaments? (v. 70). There is already a subtle, gradual build-up in her questions. Tournaments are a good starting point, for they are a specific way for knights to show that they are *bon*. For whom, she goes on, do young men dress? (v. 72) Only young knights, we note, are at stake here, and again we observe the importance of dress as a sign of status and intention. In v. 72 the lady repeats her allusion to clothing ('For whom do they put on new clothes?') and then goes on to say: 'For whom do they send gifts of their rings, their ribbons and their jewels?' (vv. 73-74). If it was not clear at first, we now know that the answer in some way relates to women.

If we should be nurturing the belief that the answer to these questions is now in sight, we are sadly mistaken. There are sixteen lines remaining before the answer is finally delivered. What will her next question be? 'For whom are they *franc* and *debonere*?' We can now be sure that whoever it is has a strong civilising influence on the knights and makes them better individuals, certainly from the point of view of courtly society, for which *franchise* and *debonereté* are key concepts. After four consecutive 'por qui's, the lady reverts in v. 76 to 'por qoi': 'For what reason do they refrain from doing harm?' So women, if women do indeed constitute the answer, are seen as having a very beneficial influence on men and knights are presented as men

capable of being inspired to eschew *mal*, i.e. socially destructive behaviour. 'For what reason do they like dalliance and kissing and embracing?' (vv. 77-78). This question introduces a change of perspective. Up to this point, the answers could in each case have been 'love' or 'women', depending on the question. A lady could have been envisaged as idealizing the power of love in a knight's life. Now it is beginning to look likely that the answer will be something more specific, and this is a view which is reinforced by the next question: 'Do you know of any explanation / Apart from one single thing?' ('por une chose non', vv. 79-80). Whatever this *thing* is, men are presented as being obsessed by it.

We are now exactly half way through the lady's forty-line speech, but this is the last of her nine questions. The answer to her string of rhetorical questions is given in v. 90, half way through the remaining twenty lines. Suspense is maintained by the use of the demonstrative pronoun *(i)ce* 'this' (vv. 84, 85) and by one further example of 'por coi' (v. 86), which confirms that those listening are definitely not being asked to think in terms of an individual or a group of individuals as the answer to the question. No knight, she says, will take his leave of a lady, however effusive his amorous entreaties may have been, without coming back to this (vv. 81-84). Returning to her earlier observation concerning the great benefits ('grant bien', v. 68) this *thing* brings, she goes on to remark that all the honourable deeds which knights perform are done for the 'granz douçors' which derive from it (vv. 85-86). Even worthless men have been greatly improved ('amendé') by it and have acquired as a result of it a good reputation (vv. 87-89). It is clearly something very special and of crucial importance to male behaviour. Finally, in the thirtieth line of her speech, the lady puts the audience out of its misery. This thing is the 'entente du con', interest in, or preoccupation with, the woman's cunt (v. 90). Knightly motivation is therefore entirely sexual.

The lady goes even further. She affirms that no woman's face is so beautiful that, if she were to lose her *con*, she would find anyone to love her (vv. 91-94). All good deeds ('tuit li bien') are performed because of it (v. 95). From this point onwards, the text is dominated by the notion of the *con*, normally a fabliau word but

here firmly linked to the courtly world of chivalric activity.[3] The idea that a lay should be composed on this subject ('Faisons du con le lai novel', v. 97)[4] is a delightful irony, and it has given rise on the part of a critic such as Charles Méla, to the use of the term paradox and to frequent questioning of generic boundaries on the part of readers of this text. Does the introduction of this word force us to change our view of this text as a lay? The term *con* is, of course, as common in the fabliau as it is rare in true courtly literature, which shuns description of the sex act and allusions to human genitalia. But what the lady does in this poem is to transfer the emphasis from the fabliau writer's preoccupation with the woman's cunt to courtly literature's concern with chivalric deeds. The fabliau author tells us what women are like, where their true nature is located. In fabliaux, writes E. Jane Burns, 'female identity resides in one key body part: that stereotypically female orifice, the vagina'.[5] In *Lecheor* a knight's identity does not reside in his sexual organ but in his *entente*, i.e. his eagerness for something. He is inspired and dominated by something outside his own person. There is, of course, an element of comedy in the application to a woman's cunt of the term *entente*, which can convey intellectual control ('Ceste beste ad entente e sen', Marie de France, *Bisclavret*, v. 157) and commitment to the improvement of the mind ('Que cil amender se peüssent / Ki lur entente en bien eüssent', Marie de France, *Fables*, Prologue, vv. 10-11).[6]

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[3] Both Méla (p. 61) and Brusegan (p. 260) use the term 'renversement' to convey what they see as a sudden change in the stylistic level of the text after the introduction of the term *con* in v. 93. For Méla the use of the term *con* is ironical ('dans l'ironie d'un tel renversement', p. 61). He also calls it parodoxical, rhetorically unexpected, contrary to the logic of the Breton lay and a true 'merveille' (pp. 62-63).

[4] Cf. Marie de France, *Chaitivel*, v. 207 ('Fetes le lai novel') and *Chevrefoil*, v. 113 ('En aveit fet un nuvel lai').

[5] 'This Prick which is not one: how Women Talk Back in Old French fabliaux', in *Feminist Approaches to the Body in Medieval Literature*, ed. by L. Lamperis and S. Stanbury (Philadelphia: University of Philadephia Press, 1993), 188-212, p. 188.

[6] See also Chrétien de Troyes, *Erec et Enide*, ed. by M. Roques, vv. 411-13: 'Molt estoit la pucele gente, / Car tote i ot mise s'antante / Nature qui fete l'avoit'; *Le Chevalier au lion*, ed. by M. Roques, vv. 226-27: 'En li esgarder mis m'antente, / Qu'ele estoit bele, et longue, et droite'. In *Nabaret* there is an example of the syntax *aveir entente vers aucun* 'to take an interest in someone' ('[Ke] ententë at vers autrui', v. 20).

But, as we have seen, neither the poet nor any of the personages in the text suggest that either the new composition or the extant poem is anything other than a lay. The lady expresses her conviction that this new lay will be pleasing and will attract people to listen to it (vv. 98-100). The seven other ladies in her group agree and they begin the composition of the new lay, providing it with music and song ('son et chant', v. 104) and with sweet notes with a high pitch (v. 105). Thus a fine and courtly lay is produced (v. 106) and the lady was right; it does attract the other participants and everyone duly praises their achievement ('lor fet', v. 110). Impressed by the fine subject-matter, they all join in the final stages of composition (vv. 111-12). The knights feel no rancour at what the ladies have discovered about them, which indicates that they possess the capacity to enjoy a joke at their own expense. No one suggests that the discovery is in any way harmful to the knights or their ladies.

Title

The lay of *Lecheor*, as we have it, is said to be drawn from a *conte* which the author had heard: 'Selonc le conte que j'oï' (v. 121). It is entirely possible that there is a pun here on the terms *con* and *conte* and that the author is therefore deliberately linking sexuality to textuality.[7] Verse 121 is also reminiscent of v. 2 of Marie de France's *Le Fresne* ('Sulunc le conte que jeo sai'), which suggests that the poem is drawing on literary tradition. It is not clear if we are intended to interpret the *conte* as the original lay itself or as some intermediary account containing, like the extant lay, a summary of the events leading up to the new composition on the subject of the *con* ('Faisons du con le lai novel', v. 97). It is also, of course, possible that the author is indulging in a conceit or playing a game with us and that neither the original lay nor the *conte* ever existed, i.e. that the extant lay of *Lecheor* is an original composition which exploits the audience's assumptions about lays. But if we assume that an original lay

[7] This pun is found in a number of fabliaux. See R. Howard Bloch, *The Scandal of the Fabliaux* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1986), esp. pp. 105-10, 121. In *Lecheor*, in addition to the term *conte* (v. 119), the verb *conter* is used in v. 14 and *raconter* / *reconter* in vv. 2, 19, 23, 48.

and / or the *conte* did exist, did they / it use the very effective ploy of presenting the lady's diagnosis of masculine activity in direct speech, with a careful, rhetorical build-up? Probably not.

If the *conte* was indeed a separate composition, neither it nor the extant lay receives a title within the text. The only title given, *Le Lai du Lecheor*, is attributed to the original Breton lay (vv. 117-18), the one which was composed by the original participants at the St Pantelion ceremony. The presence of this title, however, provides a further element of subtlety and sophistication on the part of the present author. We expect the title to be *Le Lai du Con*, but the author claims that he would be rebuked if he gave the lay this title: 'Ne voil pas dire le droit non, / C'on nu me tort a mesprison' (vv. 119-20).[8] Indeed, if the lay were known under the title *Le Lai du Con*, which the author says is its 'rightful name' ('droit non', v. 119), the element of surprise and a large part of its effectiveness would be destroyed, as the answer to the lady's questions would be known in advance.

A major difference between the original lay, if it existed, and the extant lay would seem to be that the former would have concentrated on what the lady had to say in her speech and omitted most of the details relating to the preliminaries and the reaction of participants in the festival. The extant lay, and probably the *conte*, have therefore two functions: (i) to reproduce the lady's questions and her conclusion concerning knightly activity, (ii) to explain the circumstances of the composition of the 'original' lay. No title is given in the opening lines of the extant lay, but, from the allusion in v. 118, it was presumably known (as it is to modern readers) as the *Lai du Lecheor*, in conformity with a supposed original composition. As we have seen, the lay effectively cannot be known as the *Lai du Con*. If, on the other hand, it is known as the *Lai du Lecheor*, the audience on first acquaintance with it may suspect an element of sexuality in the answer to the lady's questions, but could not be sure. The

[8] Brusegan (p. 256) points out that in v. 120 ('C'on nu me tort a mesprison') the word *con* is 'paragrammatisé' and that the same device is used by Gautier Le Leu in *Du C.* (vv. 106, 110, 113, 186). Gautier's poem, which is classified as a *dit*, may have been inspired by *Lecheor* and, like the author of *Lecheor*, Gautier makes use of anaphora based on the term *por* (vv. 84-87, 89-93). See C.H. Livingston, *Le Jongleur Gautier le Leu: étude sur les fabliaux* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1951; reprint New York: Kraus, 1969), pp. 233-49.

term *lecheor*, which survives in English as *lecher*, had in Old French a fairly wide range of meanings: 'glutton', 'debauched person', 'the lover of a married woman', 'trickster' and perhaps 'minstrel'.[9] The term is thus associated principally with food, sexual activity, ruse and musical performance. It was largely a pejorative term and it was used as a general term of opprobrium.[10] Etymologically, the term is linked to licking (Frankish **lekkôn*).[11]

One sees immediately that these meanings are not appropriate for the behaviour of young knights, as it is envisaged by the lady. They are not fornicators or debauchees, i.e. men given to lewdness or to immoderate or illicit sexual indulgence. They are just young men who are said to enjoy the sex act and to be inspired by thoughts of it. From this point of view the use of the term *lecheor* helps to retain the lay within the domain of courtly literature whilst at the same time suggesting and camouflaging the explicit sexual motivation attributed to knights and seen as the principal influence on their behaviour. Whether used by the present author or by rival *conteurs*, the term *lecheor* in the title keeps the semantic options open and does not give the game away. It is a successful literary ploy.

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[9] A number of fabliaux do contain the term *con* in their title; e.g. *Le Chevalier qui fist parler les cons*, *Du Con qui fu fait a la besche*, *Le Jugement des cons*, *L'Evesque qui beneï le con*. Charles Muscatine reports that the term *con* 'appears in at least twenty-six fabliaux' (*The Old French Fabliaux*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1986, p. 113).

[10] The sense 'glutton' occurs in Geffrei Gaimar, *L'Estoire des Engleis* ('Ke lecheür nes eschaçast / Ne malmë st ne defrussast', vv. 5991-92, ed. by A. Bell) and in Jean de Meun, *Le Roman de la Rose* ('Tant iert delicieus lechierres, / Tant ot les volatilles chieres', vv. 20134-35, ed. by F. Lecoy). The meaning 'debauched person' is found in Gautier Le Leu's fabliaux *Del sot chevalier* ('Cest grant trau vos fist uns leciere', v. 230) and *Du C.* ('Qui la maintient, il est lecherre', v. 240). The meaning 'lover of a married woman, paramour' is found in Marie de France, *Fables*, 45 ('E ses baruns li respundi / Qu'il ot veü sun lecheür / Ki li fist hunte e deshonur', vv. 10-12). When Beroul describes Iseut as a *lecherresse* ('Oiez que dit la tricherresse! / Molt fist que bone lecherresse', ed. by A. Ewert, vv. 519-20), the sense is 'trickstress' (see also *lecherie* 'trickery' in v. 3693, 'Mais il le fait par lecherie'). For v. 9932 of *Protheselaus* ('Li lecheres Jolif est pruz', 3 vols, ed. by A.J. Holden, ANTS, 1991) the Anglo-Norman Dictionary gives the meaning as 'minstrel', but the editor suggests 'jolly knave' (III, p. 68). In Wace's *Roman de Brut* ('Bien sembla lecheür u fol', v. 9109, ed. by I. Arnold), the term seems to be one of general abuse, 'scoundrel, wretch'. Similarly, in the *Chanson de Guillaume* the term *lecheor* is frequently applied by Christians to Saracens as an insult (e.g. v. 789, 'Ultre, lecchere, malveis Barbarin!', see also vv. 1965, 2604, 2674, etc., ed. by D. McMillan). See Méla, pp. 67-68.

[11] Modern French has retained the verb *lécher* 'to lick', but the notion of lechery is conveyed by such terms as *lubricité* and *luxure*. A *lécheur* is now largely, in a metaphorical sense, a bootlicker or groveller.

The Author's Purpose

Why did our author compose the lay of *Lecheor*? Entertainment was obviously a prime objective. But Lucien Foulet, for example, sees the author's main goal as literary satire, and Donovan, in his article '*Lai du Lecheor*: a Reinterpretation', tells us that in this lay the 'parodist reaches the heights of irony' and manifests a 'conscious attempt to copy stylistic features of the Breton lays' (p. 84). For Tobin, both the style and the form indicate that 'le lai est une parodie des autres lais' (p. 354). She also identifies within this lay a desire on the part of the author to 'démythifier la théorie de l'amour courtois'. In the ideas expressed Tobin detects echoes of Marie de France's *Equitan* and *Chaitivel* and claims that in *Lecheor* the physical side of love is promoted in order to provoke laughter (*ibid*.).

In true courtly fashion, the author has composed a poem about the relationship between knights and their ladies. But ironically it is a relationship which revolves around the lady's *con* rather than, more traditionally, around the concept of *fin'amor*. Whereas in other courtly texts knights perform for love, honour, land, etc., here they perform their courtly deeds because they are thinking of the sex act. But, in spite of this, neither the author nor the ladies make any attempt to denigrate knightly talents or performance and there is no criticism of love or of those lays which had been composed at earlier gatherings. *Lecheor* is not only concerned, however, with knights and ladies; it also treats the relationship between subject-matter and textual production. It is, as Méla points out, a *conte* about the *con* (p. 65). Just as a beautiful woman without her *con* would have no lover ('Nule fame n'a si bel vis / Par qu'ele eüst le con perdu, / Jamés eüst ami ne dru', vv. 92-94), there would be no lay without the *con*, no inspiration to compose. Thus the true existence of woman, of this tale and of all other tales based on chivalric deeds depends on the *con*. Moroever, just as the *con* can promote on the part of knights significant social and courtly deeds ('grant bien', v. 68), it can also promote something of great literary value, what Marie de France calls a 'granz biens' (*Lais*, Prologue, v. 5), something which, once heard and praised by others, reveals its full potential. When it is heard, the good

material in *Lecheor* ('Quant la bone matire oïrent', v. 112) is not presented as inferior in any way to the good material on which traditional lays, such as those by Marie, are based ('Ki de bone mateire traite, / Mult li peise si bien n'est faite', *Guigemar*, vv. 1-2). Sexuality and textuality are seen in *Lecheor* as deliberately linked and able to flourish together. The *fet* ('actions') of the ladies in *Lecheor*, their highly praised achievement in composing the new lay ('Si ont lor fet forment loé', v. 110), reminds us of and merges with the *fet* of the knights who performed 'nobles chevaleries' and of the ladies who participated in acts of *amor* and *druerie* ('Et la erent conté li fet / Des amors et des drueries / Et des nobles chevaleries', vv. 14-16). Achievement is not restricted to one domain. Deeds inspired by chivalry and love combine with literary inspiration to form what Chrétien de Troyes would call a 'bele conjointure'.

So, far from being a parody of the lays of Marie de France, *Lecheor* appears to be a complement to them, and perhaps even a compliment, in that so many features of her poems are here reworked. *Lecheor*'s stress on sexuality even reminds us of Marie's notion of the *surplus*, which in her vocabulary has two functions. It can convey the additional literary and intellectual activity required to give extra meaning and depth to the stories which she and earlier writers have chosen to relate: 'Ki peüssent gloser la lettre / E de lur sen le surplus mettre' (Prologue, v. 16). But at the same time it can denote the additional sexual activity which Marie says is normal amongst true lovers and which is capable of providing a love relationship with the consummation, that sense of completion and perfection, it deserves: 'Bien lur covienge del surplus, / De ceo que li autre unt en us!' (*Guigemar*, vv. 533-34). If in Marie sexuality perfects and completes a relationship, in *Lecheor* love, chivalry and the lay itself have sexuality not only as their objective but also as their source. In this lay men think about the *con* and then perform their deeds, whereas in Marie and other courtly narrative the reverse is the case: knights perform their deeds and are then rewarded by the lady's love and body ('Que de s'amur l'aseüra, / E el sun cors li otreia', *Equitan*, vv. 179-80; 'M'amur e mun cors vus otrei', *Bisclavret*, v. 115; 'S'amur e sun cors li otreie', *Lanval*, v. 133). This is both a fine and a fundamental

distinction. By articulating and recording a truism about knightly activity, the lady in *Lecheor*, and those who adopt her view, have shown themselves to be, in Marie's words, 'sutil de sens' (*Lais*, Prologue, v. 20), and by implication they have put a clever gloss on Marie's *lettre*.

Another aim of this lay seems to have been to show women in a good light. They appear as perceptive and as able to penetrate beneath the surface of things. It is knights who are viewed here in a new light and 'démythifiés', to use Tobin's term, rather than courtly love itself. If *fin'amor* or courtly values were being criticised by the ladies, the knights would surely have reacted in a less positive fashion. On the contrary, they are full of praise for the ladies ('Si ont lor fet forment loé', v. 110) and happy to join in the composition of the new lay. The lady in fact accomplishes an astonishing balancing act: she deftly takes on the entire population of young knights, with whom she has to live, and entertains them by revealing an essential psychological truth about themselves, which they readily accept. Could the author of the extant lay have been a woman? Would a man, in fact, have made the central point of this lay so bluntly?

There is also a sense in which this lay, like many other texts, is about power, here the power enjoyed by women. The impression is gained from hearing or reading this poem that it is a woman's body which controls all knightly activity, and in a society in which most women were granted little status such recognition could only have enhanced their self-esteem. Women are presented here as the source of great deeds, even if it is the *con* which performs this service for them. The implication is that without her *con* a woman would be ineffective and unable to help a knight to improve and raise his status within society ('Maint homme i sont si amendé / Et mis em pris et em bonté', vv. 87-88). But with it she is all-powerful. In her analysis of knightly behaviour the lady skilfully accomplishes the delicate task of boosting the image of women without damaging that of knights. How could the knights present have disagreed with her in view of the glowing picture of them which she paints? In most courtly texts, women are the object of love. In the world of *Lecheor*, which remains a courtly world, women are the object of lust, but

nevertheless their *con* has inspired a *conte*, and in turn this *conte* has inspired an author to compose another new lay about the *con*.

C'est le Lay dou Lecheor

f. 43r col. 1 Jadis a Saint Pantelion,
Ce nos racontent li Breton,
Soloient granz genz asembler
Por la feste au saint honorer,
Les plus nobles et les plus beles
Du païs, dames et puceles,
Qui dont estoient el païs.
N'i avoit dame de nul païs
Qui n'i venist a icel jor;
Molt estoient de riche ator.
Chascuns i metoit son pooir
En lui vestir et atorner.
La estoient tenu li plet
col. 2 Et la erent conté li fet
Des amors et des drueries
Et des nobles chevaleries.
Ce qu'en l'an estoit avenu
Tot ert oï et retenu.
Lor aventure racontoient
Et li autre les escoutoient.
Tote la meillor retenoient
Et recordoient et disoient;
Sovent ert dite et racontee,
Tant que de touz estoit loe[e].
.I. lai en fesoient entr'eus,
Ce fu la costume d'iceus;
[Et] cil qui l'aventure estoit
Son nom meïsmes i metoit;
Aprés lui ert li lais nomez,
Sachoiz ce est la veritez.
Puis estoit li lais maintenuz,
Tant que partout estoit seüz;
Car cil qui savoient de note
En viele, en herpe et en rote,
Fors de la terre le portoient,
Es roiaumes ou il aloient.
A la feste dont je vos di,
Ou li Breton venoient si,
En .I. grant mont fu l'asemblee,
Por ce que miex fust escoutee.
Molt i ot clers et chevaliers,
Et plusors gens d'autres mestiers;
Dames i ot nobles et beles,
Et meschines et damoiseles
Quant du mostier furent parti,

On St Pantelion's day, in days gone by,
So the Bretons tell us,
Many people used to assemble
To honour the festival of the saint,
The noblest and most beautiful women
In the land, ladies and maidens,
Who were in the region at that time.
There was no lady in the land
Who was not present on that day;
All were very richly attired.
Each one made a great effort
To be well dressed and well attired.
Many things were discussed there,
And deeds were recounted
Concerning love and passion
And noble acts of prowess.
Whatever had happened in that year
Was fully heard and retained.
They related their adventures
And the others listened to them.
They retained the best of them,
Repeating and recounting it;
It was often told and recounted
Until it was praised by everyone.
Between them they composed a lay about it,
Such was their custom
And the one whose adventure it was
Would put his own name to it.
The lay was named after him,
This, you must know, is the truth.
Then the lay was preserved
Until it was known everywhere;
For those who were skilled musicians,
On viol, harp and rote,
Carried it forth from that region,
To the countries to which they journeyed.
At the festival of which I am speaking,
To which the Bretons came in this way,
The assembly took place on a steep hill
So that everyone could hear more easily.
There were many clerics and knights there
And many people from other professions;
There were noble and beautiful ladies
And young girls and damsels.
When they had left the church,

Au leu qu’il orent establi
Communement sont assemblé.
Chascuns a son fet reconté;
S’aventure disoit chascuns,
Avant venoient uns et uns.
Dont aloient apareillant
Lequel il metroient avant.
Les dames sistrent d’une part,
f. 43v col. 1 Si disoient de lor esgart;
Sages erent et ensaingnies,
Franches, cortoises et proisies:
C’estoit de Bretaingne la flors,
Et la proesce et la valors.
L’une parla premierement
Et dit molt afichiement:
‘Dames, car me donnez conseil
D’une rien dont molt me merveill.
Molt oi ces chevaliers parler
De tornoier et de joster,
D’aventures, de drueries,
Et de requerre lor (lor) amies;
D’icelui ne tienent nul plet
Por qui li grant bien sont tuit fet.
Par cui sont li bon chevalier?
Por qoi aimment a tornoier?
Por qui s'atornent li danzel?
Por qui se vestent de novel?
Por qui envoient lor aneaus,
Lor treceors et lor joiaus?
Por qui sont franc et debonere?
Por qoi se gardent de mal fere?
Por qoi aimment le donoier,
Et l’acoler et l’embracier?
Savez [vos] i nule achoison,
Fors sol por une chose non?
Ja n’avra nus tant donoié,
Ne biau parlé ne biau proié,
Ainz qu’il s'em puisse departir,
A ce ne veille revertir.
D’ice vienent les granz douçors,
Por coi sont fetes les honors;
Maint homme i sont si amendé
Et mis em pris et em bonté,
Qui ne vausissent .I. bouton,
Se par l’entente du con non.

In the place which they had arranged
They all assembled together.
Each one recounted his deeds;
Each one related his adventure
And they came forward one by one.
Then they set about considering
Which one they would put forward.
The ladies sat to one side,
And they gave their opinion;
They were wise and well-bred,
Noble, courtly and esteemed.
They were the flower of Brittany,
Its finest and most worthy women.
One of them was first to speak
And she said with great conviction:
'Ladies, let me have your advice
On a matter which is a great marvel to me.
I hear these knights talking a great deal
Of tournaments and jousts,
Of adventures and love,
And of entreaties addressed to their beloveds;
They never mention the reason
For which all these great deeds are done.
How is it that these knights are brave?
For what reason do they enjoy tourneying?
For whom do these young men dress so well?
For whom do they put on new clothes?
For whom do they send gifts of their rings,
Their ribbons and their jewels?
For whom are they courtly and noble?
For what reason do they refrain from doing harm?
For what reason do they enjoy dalliance
And kissing and embracing?
Do you know of any explanation
Apart from one single thing?
None of them will ever have dallied so much,
Or uttered enough fine words or entreaties,
That, before he can take his leave,
He does not wish to come back to this.
From this come the great benefits
For which all honourable deeds are performed.
Many men have been greatly improved by it,
And increased their fame and reputation,
Who would not have been worth a button
Were it not for their desire for the cunt.

La moie foi vos em plevis,
Nule fame n’a si bel vis
Par qu’ele eüst le con perdu,
col. 2 Jamés eüst ami ne dru(i).
Quant tuit li bien sont fet por lui,
Nu metons mie sor autrui.
Faisons du con le lai novel,
Si l’orront tel cui ert molt bel.
Commant qui miex savra noter
Ja verrez toz vers nos torner.’
Les set li ont acreanté;
Dient que molt a bien parlé.
Le lai commencent a itant;
Chascun i mist et son et chant
Et douces notes a haut ton.
Le lai firent cortois et bon.
Tuit cil qui a la feste estoient
Le lai lessierent qu’il faisoient,
Vers les dames se sont torné,
Si ont lor fet forment loé.
Ensemble o eles le lai firent,
Quant la bone matire oïrent;
Et as clers et as chevaliers
Fu li lais maintenuz et chiers.
Molt fu amez, molt fu joïz;
Encore n’est il mie haïz.
D’icest lai dient li plusor
Que c’est le lai du Lecheor;
Ne voil pas dire le droit non,
C’on nu me tort a mesprison.
Selonc le conte que j’oï,
Vos ai le lai einsint feni.

I pledge you my faith,
No woman has such a beautiful face that,
If she had lost her cunt,
She would ever have a friend or lover.
Since all good deeds are performed for it,
Let us not attribute them to any other cause.
Let us compose the new lay about the cunt,
And those it will truly please will hear it.
However well the best composers perform,
You will soon see them all turn towards us.
The seven were in agreement with her;
They say that she has spoken truly.
Then they begin the lay;
Each one put music and song to it
And sweet notes with a high pitch.
They made the lay a fine and courtly one.
All those who were at the festival
Abandoned the lay which they were composing.
They turned towards the ladies
And lavished praise on their work.
They composed the lay along with them,
When they heard the excellent subject-matter;
And by clerics and knights
Was the lay preserved and cherished.
It was much loved and much enjoyed;
It is still not hated.
Many people say of this lay
That it is the lay of the Lecher.
I do not wish to utter the true name
In case I am reproached for it.
According to the tale which I heard
I have thus brought the lay to an end for you.

NOTES

Title. The word *lecheor* has been scratched out in the manuscript, but is legible.

1. The initial 'J' and 'A' (v. 37) are coloured capitals: the 'J' extends over the first eight lines of the poem and is in gold, with blue and white decoration on one side, and pink and white on the other; the 'A' is a blue letter, with red surrounding decoration. It has been suggested that 'Saint Pantelion' is a mistake for a place name such as 'Saint Pol de Leon' (see Skårup, 'Notes sur le texte du *Lai du Lecheor*', pp. 53-58).

5. Skårup (p. 58) supposes that two lines are omitted after v. 4. They would indicate that numerous rich knights attended the ceremony (cf. vv. 41-42).

8. Gaston Paris and Tobin emend to 'nul pris'.

11. Tobin corrects to 'poër' to preserve the rhyme for the eye. Paris thought that two lines were missing here, one after v. 10 and one after v. 12. This implies that the rhymes *pooir*: *atorner* are not acceptable. But, as Skårup points out (p. 59), the rhyme is acceptable in Norman and Anglo-Norman. See the edition by Ch. Lee, p. 124, and Philipot and Loth, p. 329.

27. '[Et] cil': we have adopted Dubin's reading. Paris, Tobin and Lee read 'cil a qui'.

53. 'Les dames': Paris and Tobin emend to 'Huit dames' to account for the reference to 'Les set' in v. 101.

74. 'joiaus': the manuscript repeats 'aneaus' from the previous line. Paris and Tobin correct v. 73 to 'joieaus' and leave 'aneaus' in this line.

79. '[vos]': we have adopted Dubin's suggestion.

99. 'savra noter': MS 'savra monter'. For a defence of the reading 'monter' see Brusegan, pp. 261-65.

NABARET

Introduction

Manuscript, Editions, Translations

The lay of *Nabaret* is preserved in MS Cologny-Genève, Bibliotheca Bodmeriana, Codex Bodmer 82 (formerly Cheltenham, Sir Thomas Phillipps 3713), f. 12v, cols 1-2. The manuscript is Anglo-Norman and it dates from the end of the thirteenth or the beginning of the fourteenth century.[1] Only forty-eight lines long, *Nabaret* is the shortest of the narrative lays. It was first edited in 1836 by Francisque Michel, on pp. 90-91 of the 'glossarial index' to his edition of a poem now known as the *Pèlerinage* (or *Voyage*) *de Charlemagne*, but which he called simply *Charlemagne*. Michel provided an edition of *Nabaret* in the context of his explanation of the term *gernuns*, which occurs in vv. 479 and 588 of his text and in v. 39 of *Nabaret* ('E ses gernuns face trescher'). In 1855 Auguste Geffroy included an edition of *Nabaret* by Sir Frederick Madden in his *Notices et extraits* (pp. 13-14). The lay was edited in 1973 by Povl Skårup and again in 1976 by Prudence M.O'H. Tobin in *Les Lais anonymes des XII^e^ et XIII^e^ siècles* (pp. 362-64).

Tobin's edition of *Nabaret* has been reprinted, with a facing translation in Italian, by Walter Pagani (1984) and, with a facing translation in French, by Alexandre Micha (1992). This lay has also been translated into French by Danielle Régnier-Bohler (1979) and into Dutch by Ludo Jongen and Paul Verhuyck (1985). A translation into Old Norse is preserved in the *Strengleikar* collection (MS Uppsala, De la Gardie 4-7, pp. 75-76). The text of this translation has been edited by Rudolph Keyser and Carl Unger (1850, pp. 81-82), by Povl Skårup (1973) and by

[1] The manuscript, purchased in 1963 by Dr Bodmer from the library in Cheltenham belonging to Sir Thomas Phillipps, also contains *Haveloc*, *Desiré*, the *Roman des Eles* and the *Donnei des Amanz*. For an account of the manuscript (dimensions, layout, contents and history) see Gaston Paris, '*Le Donnei des Amants*', *Romania*, 25 (1896), 497-541, especially pp. 497-99, and Alexander Bell, *Le Lai d'Haveloc and Gaimar's Haveloc Episode* (Manchester: The University Press, 1925), p. 90. For Tobin this manuscript is MS P (pp. 14-15).

Robert Cook and Mattias Tveitane (1979), who also include a translation into English (pp. 248-51). The translation of the Old Norse text into French by Geffroy (pp. 14-15) is reproduced by Skårup (pp. 265, 267). *Nabaret* also appears, under the title *Nobaret*, in the Shrewsbury School manuscript published by G.E. Brereton.[2]

Date, Author

Prudence Tobin dates the composition of *Nabaret* to the period between 1178 and 1230, the dates to which she assigns the composition of the *Lais* of Marie de France and the *Strengleikar* respectively (p. 360). But neither of these dates is certain. Marie's *Lais* could be a good deal earlier than 1178 and the *Strengleikar* later than 1230 (see Cook and Tveitane, pp. xiv-xv). Lucien Foulet dated *Nabaret* to the beginning of the thirteenth century.[3] Ahlström (*Studier i den fornfranska Lais-Litteraturen*, p. 151), Skårup (p. 268) and Tobin (*ibid*.) take the view that *Nabaret* was written in England. Tobin thinks that the author was a talented and cultivated man with a good knowledge of the traditional Breton lay and of 'la mode et l'esprit féminins' (*ibid*.).

Outline of the Story

Nabaret is a knight who is married to a lady of high lineage. His wife devotes a great deal of attention to her appearance and she is said to be excessively proud. Troubled by this, Nabaret chastises her and accuses her of dressing to please other men. She refuses to mend her ways, so he has recourse to her family. She tells them that if her husband does not wish her to dress 'in noble fashion' (v. 35), she knows only one method of revenge for him: 'He should let his beard grow long and have his whiskers braided; that is the way for a jealous man to avenge himself' (vv. 38-40).

[2] Brereton comments that 'this is not a true Celtic *lai*, but a joke in verse' (p. 44, n. 53). The text of the Shrewsbury School manuscript is also found in Donovan, *The Breton Lay: a Guide to Varieties*, pp. 116-17.

[3] 'Marie de France et la légende de Tristan', *Zeitschrift für romanische Philologie*, 32 (1908), 161-83, 257-89, p. 264.

The members of the family then depart in great merriment and they let others know of the pleasure they derived from this reply.

Structure

The text can be divided into the following episodes:

Prologue (vv. 1-2)
(i) Description of Nabaret and his wife (vv. 3-7)
(ii) The wife's behaviour (vv. 8-11)
(iii) Nabaret's reaction to this behaviour (vv. 12-22)
(iv) His recourse to her family (vv. 23-31)
(v) The wife's response to her family (vv. 32-40)
(vi) The family's reaction to her reply (vv. 41-44)
Epilogue (vv. 45-48)

The poem thus consists of a Prologue (2 lines), an Epilogue (4 lines) and 42 lines of narrative, which can be divided neatly into two parts consisting of 20 and 22 lines respectively (vv. 3-22, 23-44), the slight inequality being accounted for by the fact that all the sections divide at the rhyme.

The Interpretation of vv. 37-40

An understanding of vv. 37-40, in which the wife suggests a course of action for her husband, is fundamental to our reading of the lay as a whole. Why does she make this particular statement to her relatives and why do they regard her response as extremely amusing? It was the view of Paulin Paris that in her response to her family the wife was agreeing to change her behaviour, provided that her husband would 'laisser croître sa barbe et tresser ses moustaches' (p. 68).[4] However, it is clear in the text as we have it that the lady does not make any promise to amend her behaviour. Geffroy (pp. 15-16) interpreted the wife's reply as a suggestion that her husband should dress in such a way as to make her jealous of him ('qu'il se fasse plus coquet et plus élégant que moi ... qu'il me rende jalouse, s'il peut, comme il l'est lui-

[4] In full the comment reads: 'Le chevalier qui donne son nom au lai de *Nabaret*, fait demander à la dame qu'il a épousée de prendre moins de soin de sa parure et de supprimer une partie de ses riches atours. La dame répond à ses parents qu'elle y consentira dès que son mari voudra bien, de son côté, laisser croître sa barbe et tresser ses moustaches. Tel est le sujet du lai'.

même'). On the other hand, Axel Ahlström, in his *Studier i den fornfranska Lais-Literaturen*, expressed the view that the lady was suggesting that her husband should make himself look as odd as she herself would look if she adopted his wishes with regard to her method of dressing (p. 152).[5]

In her article 'The Old French *Lai de Nabaret'*, Gertrude Schoepperle cites examples of braided beards and moustaches from Old French texts and also from medieval churches and town halls. It appears that they were worn by patriarchs or persons of great weight and dignity, whereas it was normal at the time for men to shave their beards. Schoepperle paraphrases the lady's retort as: 'If you disapprove so much of being in the fashion, go and look like a doddering old patriarch yourself. Don't expect *me* to' (p. 291). Mortimer Donovan takes a similar view, stating that the 'point' of the story is contained in the word *gernuns* (p. 99) and paraphrasing the lady's remarks to her relatives as: 'She tells them that her husband should have his beard braided like a patriarch: only then can a jealous, old-fashioned husband take vengeance on a wife who wants to follow the styles' (p. 100).[6]

Donovan is certainly right to include in his paraphrase of the lady's retort the notion of vengeance. Mentioned twice by the lady ('I do not know of any other revenge', v. 36; 'That is the way for a jealous man to avenge himself', v. 40), vengeance plays a fundamental role in the way she responds to her family. However, the lady does not say that the vengeance will be taken after her husband has transformed himself, as Donovan claims ('only then can ...'); rather she states that the very nature of what the husband is to do to his beard and moustache will constitute his revenge ('That is the way for ...'). But even if the husband were to transform himself artificially into a patriarch, just how this would constitute an act of vengeance against his wife remains unclear. For if the lady did in fact intend her

[5] As translated by Skårup (p. 270), Ahlström's interpretation reads: 'Si tu veux mêler de ce qui ne te regarde pas et de ce que tu ne comprends pas, à savoir de ma toilette, je veux, de mon côté, avoir mon mot à dire sur ce qui te regarde. Je t'ordonne donc de laisser pousser la barbe, assez pour que tu puisses tresser les moustaches; ainsi tu seras aussi bizarre que je le serais si je suivais tes ordres sur ma toilette'.

[6] Tobin takes a similar view to that of Schoepperle: 'La dame dit, en effet, que si son mari n'aimait pas sa façon d'être à la mode, qu'il allât se donner l'air d'un vieillard jaloux'. He should 'faire croître sa barbe' and 'tresser ses favoris' (p. 360).

husband to turn himself into a patriarchal figure, as Schoepperle suggests, such a transformation could have the consequence of turning his wife into a genuine 'mal mariée', thereby providing a justification for her behaviour. It would not be an act of revenge on the husband's part, for the lady, as Skårup observes (p. 264), is not a 'mal mariée'; she is merely married to a wealthy knight who takes exception to her expensive taste in clothes and interprets this as a sign that she is keen to be attractive to other men. Moreover, there is no evidence that the husband is elderly and therefore subject to Marie de France's observation that all old men are intrinsically jealous,[7] or that the author of this poem is mocking jealous husbands, as Tobin would have it (p. 362).

Skårup reviews earlier interpretations of vv. 37-40 and comes down in favour of Geffroy's view, that the husband should deliberately make his wife jealous by improving his dress and facial appearance. Indeed, if a longer beard and a braided moustache could turn Nabaret into someone who was, in Geffroy's words, 'plus coquet et plus élégant' than the lady, such a procedure might well constitute vengeance. But it is unlikely that this would be the effect. Turning himself into a patriarch could only make a practising knight, a man who is 'hardi e fer' (v. 4), a comic figure.[8] Moreover, Geffroy's interpretation does not explain why a knight should wish to outdo his wife in this way. A medieval husband would surely not attempt to incite jealousy on the part of his wife, over whom he would expect to, and be expected to, exert control.

We can be certain that when they put to her the criticism levelled by the husband, the lady's relatives would have anticipated either a promise on her part to mend her ways or some form of justification of her behaviour. But one of the

[7] 'Li sires ki la mainteneit / Mult fu velz humme e femme aveit, / Une dame de haut parage, / Franche, curteise, bele e sage; / Gelus esteit a desmesure; / Kar ceo purportoit sa nature. / Ke tut li veil seient gelus , / Mult hiet chascun kë il seit cous , / Tels [est] de eage le trespas' (*Guigemar*, vv. 209-17). See A. Micha, 'Le Mari jaloux dans la littérature romanesque des XII^{e} et XIII^{e} siècles', *Studi Medievali*, 17 (1951), 303-20.

[8] In the *chanson de geste* beards are a sign of wisdom, prudence and, especially in the case of Charlemagne's white beard, great age. The absence of a beard and moustache characterises youth. See A. Moroldo, 'Le Portrait dans la chanson de geste', *Le Moyen Age*, 86 (1980), 387-419, pp. 401-02, 415-16.

significant aspects of this lay is that, when cornered, the wife sees attack as the best form of defence. Instead of promising to modify her own behaviour, she places the onus on her husband to act in a particular way, thereby making it seem as if it is he who is in the wrong. Even if we cannot quite understand the import of the lady's remarks, it may be inferred that they are addressed to her family in a scornful and abrasive way, one which conveys a certain contempt for her husband and his view of her. Ahlström may have been right: for the husband to follow his wife's advice would merely make him look ridiculous, just as she herself would do if she stopped paying attention to her dress. A heavily bewhiskered knight would look as curious and old-fashioned on the battlefield as a badly-dressed lady would look in court. Moreover, her comment would be double-edged in that his revenge against her would also constitute her revenge against him.

Genre and Theme

Nabaret belongs in the broadest sense to the literature of marriage and it thus shares an affinity with the many and varied texts which offer, sometimes satirically or bitterly, sometimes merely humorously and wryly, a comment upon this state. In many such texts, the marriage does not appear to be based on love, and this appears to be the case with *Nabaret*, at least on the part of the wife. The involvement of the wife's family in the husband's complaint hints at an arranged marriage and suggests that her family is socially superior to his own. Although they obligingly interview her, her relatives appear to take her side, preferring to laugh at her witty retort rather than to insist on wifely obedience. The lady's confident tone reveals that she regards her husband as her inferior and this too suggests that she has married beneath herself. Nabaret complains of his wife's expensive taste in clothes, but not of having to fund them, which seems to indicate she has a degree of financial independence.

Critics, who like clear-cut genre boundaries, have found *Nabaret* difficult to classify. The poem is certainly presented by its author as a lay ('En Bretaigne fu li laiz fet', v. 1; 'Cil ki de lais tindrent l'escole / De Nabarez un lai noterent / E de sun nun le lai nomerent', vv. 46-48) and the two principal characters, Nabaret and his

wife, are described in terms appropriate to the hero and heroine of a lay ('Nabaret fu un chevaler / Pruz e curteis, hardi e fer', vv. 3-4; 'Femme prist de mult haut parage, / Noble, curteise, bele e gente', vv. 6-7). But few readers have been entirely satisfied with the designation of the poem as a lay, for there is nothing in *Nabaret* which one could consider as an *aventure* and there is no *merveilleux* element. Nor is there any poetic intensity in the poem, anything poignant, uplifting or thought-provoking.

The lady's concern for her appearance is not unknown in romance texts (e.g. Marie de France, *Bisclavret*, vv. 21-22, 228), and the description of her as 'orgiluse ... a demesure' (v. 11) reminds one of the description of Le Fresne's mother ('Kar ele ert feinte e orguilluse', Marie de France, *Le Fresne*, v. 27). However, one anticipates from the way in which the lady is presented that the she will be punished or will suffer in some form or other for her behaviour, as happens in the case of Bisclavret's wife and Le Fresne's mother. But one of the unusual characteristics of this lay is that the wife gains the upper hand over both her family and her husband, in a way which is reminiscent of a fabliau rather than a lay. Donovan classifies this poem as an 'elevated fabliau' (p. 99) and Foulet too calls it a fabliau. Certainly, as in many fabliaux, when confronted by a tricky situation the lady reveals what a clever person she is and she easily succeeds in outmanoeuvring her husband. Determined to be in control of her life, she obtains this control by a clever act of repartee. The characters in this poem may be aristocratic, but the tale tells of a marital mismatch in which the husband ends up looking like a fool, as in many a fabliau. There is, however, no evidence within the narrative that she has turned her husband into a cuckold or intends to do so, just that she is not willing to be dictated to by him.

If we could assign *Nabaret* to one particular genre, this would help us to understand the nature of the poem and perhaps the intention of its author. Tobin states that this lay is 'un conte légèrement didactique' without explaining precisely what the author wished to teach us (p. 362). Her view that the author's intention was to mock husbands who do not keep up with the times seems wrong. The subject of the poem appears to be power rather than fashion. The author seems to be observing that, however justified the courtly knight's complaint may be and whatever personal

qualities he may possess, he is unable to exercise control over his wife. He commits no wrong against her; he merely states that he likes her the way she is and that he sees no need for her to devote so much attention to her attire. The text is courtly in that it revolves around the question of the standards required by courtly life. The wife claims to see it as her role, even her duty, to dress 'noblement' (v. 35), whereas the husband claims to see her attire as being aimed at other men (v. 19). This is a truly courtly dilemma, one which is presented in the manner of a lay and resolved in the manner of a fabliau. The husband's loss of control, indicated by his need to call in his wife's relatives in the hope of keeping her in line, becomes comic in that it is exploited by the author in order to provoke laughter.

That *Nabaret* was thought to be a lay rather than a fabliau may be indicated by the fact that in the surviving manuscript it is preceded by the lays of *Haveloc* and *Desiré* and followed by the *Roman des Eles* and the *Donnei des Amanz*. We can also note that the compiler of the *Strengleikar* considered *Nabaret* to be a lay, and it is also of interest that the translator of *Nabaret* in the Old Norse collection shared our difficulty in understanding the import of the lady's remarks in vv. 37-40. In the Old Norse version we read: 'I know of no other response to his message than that you tell him from my part to let his beard and whiskers grow for a long time and then cut them both off' (Cook and Tveitane's translation, p. 251).[9] It is not, of course, impossible that a contemporary French audience may also have had some difficulty with the immediate recognition of the import of the lady's comment and that, faced with a degree of obscurity, listeners may have needed to 'gloser la lettre'.

[9] The Old Norse translator seems to have understood *trescher* as *trencher* or to have based his translation on a slightly different text (Cook and Tveitane suggest 'something like *e les gernuns, et puis trenchier*', p. 251). Urban T. Holmes also thought that the verb *trecier* should be read as *trenchier* and he paraphrases the lady's reply as: 'Her response is that he must first cut off his moustaches and let his beard grow, then she will yield' (*A History of Old French Literature*, New York: Crofts, 1937, p. 283). Cook and Tveitane see the lady's retort as containing 'what may be a now obscure play on words in the French'(p. 247).

De Nabarez

f. 12v col. 1
En Bretaigne fu li laiz fet
Ke nus apellum Nabaret.
Nabaret fu un chevaler,
Pruz e curteis, hardi e fer;
Grant tere aveit en heritage.
Femme prist de mult haut parage,
Noble, curteise, bele e gente.
Ele turna de tut sun atente
A li vestir e aturner,
E a lacie[r] e a guimpler;
Orgiluse ert a demesure.
Nabaret n'[e]üst de ce cure;
Asez li plu[s]t de sa manere,
Tut ne parait ele si fere.
Mut durement s'en coruça,
A plusurz feiz la chastia;
Devant li e priveement
S'en coruça asez sovent,
E dit ke pas n'esteit pur lui,
[Ke] ententë at vers autrui;
Sa beüté li fut suffrable
col. 2
E a sun oef trop covenable.
Quant ele nel vot pur li laisser,
Ne le guimpler ne le laicer,
Ne le grant orgoil k'ele mena,
De ses parenz plusurs manda.
La pleinte lur mustra e dit,
A sa femme parler les fit.
Parenz manda ço ke [des]plout,
Ke durement li enuiout
K'ele se demenot issi.
Oiez cum ele respundi:
'Seignurs', fet ele, 'si vus plest,
Si lui peise ke jo m'en vest
E ke jo m'atur noblement,
Jo ne sai autre vengement:
Ço li dites, ke jo li mand
K'il face crestre sa barbe grant
E ses gernuns face trescher;
Issi se deit gelus venger.'
Cil ki li respuns unt oï
De la dame se sunt parti.
Asez s'en ristrent e gaberent,
En plusurs lius [le] recunterent
Pur le deduit de la parole.

In Brittany was composed the lay
Which we call *Nabaret*.
Nabaret was a knight,
Brave and courtly, bold and fierce;
He held much land as his inheritance.
He took a wife of very high lineage,
Noble, courtly, beautiful and comely.
She devoted a great deal of effort
To her dress and appearance
And to the choice of laces and wimples.
She was excessively proud.
Nabaret would not have been concerned by this;
Her appearance would have pleased him greatly
Had it not been for her display of vanity.
He often became very angry
And repeatedly chastised her;
In her presence and in private,
He often showed his anger,
Saying that she was not doing this for him,
But thinking of someone else.
Her beauty was pleasing to him
And suited him well.
As she was unwilling to abandon on his account
Her wimples and laces
And the great pride she displayed,
He summoned several of her relatives.
He made his complaint to them
And had them speak to his wife.
He told the relatives what displeased him,
How it annoyed him greatly
That she behaved in this way.
Hear how she replied:
'My lords', she said, 'if you please,
If he is upset that I dress in this way
And attire myself in noble fashion,
I do not know of any other revenge.
Tell him that I give him word
That he should let his beard grow long
And have his whiskers braided;
That is the way for a jealous man to avenge himself.'
Those who heard the reply
Took their leave of the lady.
They laughed and joked a good deal over this
And recounted it in many places,
Because of the amusement her words afforded them.

Cil ki de lais tindrent l’escole
De Nabarez un lai noterent,
E de sun nun le lai nomerent.

Those who were trained to compose lays
Sang a lay about Nabaret
And named the lay after him.

NOTES

This text was revised with the help of a photostat copy of the relevant page, kindly supplied by the Bibliotheca Bodmeriana.

8. Strictly speaking, this line has an extra syllable: Skårup corrects to ‘Ele turna tut[e s’en]tente’, Tobin to ‘Ele turna de tut s’untente’. Perhaps, as in vv. 23 and 25, ‘ele’ is intended to count as one syllable only (but it does not do so in vv. 14, 31 and 32).

20. Skårup reads '[..s’]entente [aveit en] autrui’.

24. The manuscript reads *la laicer*.

29. Skårup reads ‘Par [eus li] manda [] ke [li] plout’.

Conclusion

In our General Introduction we tried to show the difficulty of defining the Breton or narrative lay and to indicate the various ways in which critics have sub-divided the surviving examples of this genre according to theme or tone. We also saw how some critics, particularly Donovan and Micha, were unhappy about accepting one or other, or indeed all three, of our lays into the corpus of the genre at all. It is our judgement that *Trot*, *Lecheor* and *Nabaret* can be safely regarded as narrative, if not necessarily as Breton lays.

Setting notional limits as to what does or does not constitute a lay is difficult, partly because medieval writers and scribes were apt to use rather loosely words designating narrative (*lai*, *conte*, *dit*, etc.). The whole concept of defining a medieval genre is a modern one and it is ultimately possible only with hindsight. In reality, any genre defines itself whilst it is being created and used, and the poets who wrote these lays would probably have had only a general notion of what constituted them, based on their awareness of subject matter, setting, theme or tone in similar poems already known to them. They would be writing within a framework which was probably changing and evolving, albeit within unspoken limits. For instance, all lays are in octosyllabic rhyming couplets, so form is a limitation; a lay could never become a full romance, so length and scope are a factor; nor could it leave the courtly world entirely and treat the sort of theme which was the domain of the epic. Stating these obvious limitations helps us to appreciate that discussion centres on the finer points of definition, resulting from modern critical disappointment regarding theme, content or tone. To talk therefore of *Lecheor* being merely a 'vilaine boutade', as Gaston Paris did, is not particularly helpful, whilst to regard such a poem as a parody is already subconsciously to have decided on a norm, which is merely subverted in some way. We prefer to accept simply as lays the three poems

we have edited and to see their authors more as exploring the possibilities of the genre and perhaps expanding the range of what a lay could incorporate.

We have deliberately followed Tobin in presenting the three lays in the order *Trot*, *Lecheor*, *Nabaret*, not because we consider this to be their likely chronological order of composition, which is in any case impossible to determine, but for reasons of content. We regard *Trot* and *Lecheor*, which both belong to the preconquest stage of love, as complementary, whereas *Nabaret* presents a married couple. So there is a loose order, based on the various stages of a relationship. The first two lays indicate two different aspects of male attitudes in respect of the pursuit of the object of their affection: *Trot* serves to frighten women into compliance and in a highly poetic way it forms part of the male armoury of pressure, whereas *Lecheor* highlights both the male intention to impress, through the narration of glorious adventures and the duality of fine sentiment and basic instinct. *Nabaret*, on the other hand, takes us into a situation which is not concerned primarily with love; the marriage may well have been an arranged one rather than the culmination of a loving courtship.

We hope to have helped the reader, nevertheless, to see that all three poems, in their different ways, raise deep and interesting issues in respect of human relationships. Although these issues are explored within the framework of the medieval imagination and the style in which it expressed itself, there are many echoes to be found in any age. These poems and the characters within them present and represent recognizable attitudes and reactions which are constants in human behaviour.

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Lecheor

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N. Uppsala, De la Gardie 4-7, AM 666b, 4, p. 69 (first 14 lines only).

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The sigla are those used by Tobin.

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