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A notre avis, il n'y a guère de doute que, dans la *Manekine et Lion de Bourges*, la légende sur le pape Léon a influencé le conte de la jeune fille à la main coupée. Dans les deux cas nous retrouvons le thème de la mutilation de certains organes, suivi de celui de la régénération de ces mêmes organes: en effet, dans quelques versions du récit, la main (ou les mains) de la jeune fille repousse miraculeusement,¹³ tandis que dans la version de la légende sur le pape rapportée par Albéric des Trois-Fontaines et par Godefroi de Viterbe, les yeux et la langue du Saint Père repoussent également, après la disparition des coupables.¹⁴ Ces singuliers éléments communs ne pouvaient manquer d'attirer l'attention et de conduire à un rapprochement, puis à une incorporation d'un aspect de la légende au conte: à partir de la version accidentelle de la *Chronique dite Saintongeaise* donnée par le manuscrit Lee, il était extrêmement tentant de faire disparaître la main coupée de Joïe et celle de Joieuse dans l'estomac d'un esturgeon, puis de faire jouer au pape le rôle d'intercesseur auprès de Dieu pour favoriser le miracle. Après avoir connu un certain succès pendant tout le moyen âge auprès de quelques chroniqueurs, la légende sur la mutilation du pape Léon disparaît en abandonnant un de ses éléments les plus merveilleux à un conte médiéval particulièrement répandu et prisé, celui de la jeune fille à la main coupée.

The University of Wyoming

JEAN-LOUIS PICHERIT

¹³ Suchier, p. 1xxij.

¹⁴ Paris, p. 422.

Courtly Play in the 'Lai de Lanval'

SUMMARY. — This article disputes the opinion that Marie de France is "toujours grave et sérieuse" and argues for the essential playfulness of her *Lai de Lanval*. Focusing primarily on the encounter between Lanval and his lady, this essay explains how Marie consciously and ironically manipulates certain narrative building blocks conventional in medieval French fiction, e.g. the Hospitality Sequence and the *Alba* paradigm. *Lanval's* irony, however, inheres not only in the arrangement of events within a scene but also in the repetition of specific words strategically placed throughout the story. The verb *departir*, for instance, whose meaning within the text shifts progressively from 'divide' to 'decide' to 'depart', provides an ironic summary of the whole plot. Finally, irony in *Lanval* may go beyond the unit of the word to involve syllables, even letters. The clearest example of this is the hero's name, both a mirror image of itself and an anagram of Avalun.

Though judgments on Marie de France's *Lai de Lanval*¹ differ substantially,² they all converge, if only by implication on one point: that how one reacts to the text as a whole depends in large measure on what one makes of the first encounter between Lanval and his mistress.³ Thus, any re-examination of *Lanval* should

¹ A. Ewert, ed., *Marie de France, Lais*, BFT (Oxford 1944), pp. 58—74; J. Rychner, ed., *Le Lai de Lanval*, TLF (Geneva, Paris 1958); unless otherwise indicated, all citations in this essay refer to J. Rychner, ed., *Les Lais de Marie de France*, CFMA 93 (Paris 1968) pp. 72—92.

² For whatever reasons scholars have tended to describe the *Lai de Lanval* in abstract terms. M. Koubichkine, "A propos du *Lai de Lanval*", *Le Moyen Age* (1972), 467—88, views it as a saga of non-being in quest of existence. Undoubtedly influenced by Koubichkine, E. Sienaert, *Les Lais de Marie de France: Du conte merveilleux à la nouvelle psychologique* (Marseille 1978), looks upon it as a story tracing the movement from appearance to being, from obscurity to light, from misunderstanding to recognition of one's true nature (p. 99). Some scholars consider the *lai* an exemplum showing forth a particular aspect of love. M. Lazar, *Amour courtois et fin'amors dans la littérature du XII^e siècle* (Paris 1964), esteems that it is the theme of secrecy in love that Marie seeks to illustrate here (p. 177). L. Spitzer, "Marie de France — Dichterin von Problemmärchen," *Zeitschrift für Romanische Philologie* 50 (1930), maintains that the *lai* serves as a demonstration of the axiom that love when it boasts is not love at all, but folly (30—31).

³ There appears to be a consensus that Lanval's character changes dramatically as a result of this encounter with the *pucelle*. Koubichkine declares that Lanval comes into existence in the presence of the *pucelle* (475); Sienaert, too, sees the meeting with the *pucelle* as a turning point in Lanval's life: From this moment on, the separation between Lanval and the chivalric milieu becomes ever greater, at the same time that Lanval moves closer to Avalun and his true nature (p. 99). Similarly, all of the interpretations discussed below (see footnote 5) take for granted that Lanval undergoes a radical transformation during the episode under study here. It is, however, my strong belief that Lanval's character does *not* change. After his experience with the *pucelle*, Lanval is no different from before, except that now he has a lover and ready funds at his disposal. If he begins only now to practice *largesse*, it is not because he has become magically generous: His essential generosity of spirit has already been revealed to us in his silent acceptance of Arthur's injustice toward him. I would further argue that Lanval's new love for the *pucelle* does not make him abandon his feudal loyalty to his king. Shortly, he will decline the Queen's immodest proposal, ostensibly (and, I think, sincerely) because of his primary allegiance to Arthur. As I understand it, this love does not make Lanval any more of a recluse; he has been a solitary figure since the beginning of the story: Indeed it was only by withdrawing from his companions that Lanval was able to meet the *pucelle* in the first place. Nor

focus on this key passage (vv. 39—200) which, for purposes of discussion, I summarize here:

Lanval, unjustifiably neglected by his King, Arthur, and resented by his fellow knights, rides sullenly off to a meadow where he dismounts and lies down beside a river. Thus alone, he is approached by a pair of comely maidens bearing basins and a towel, who deliver an invitation from their mistress that he should follow them. No further encouragement necessary, Lanval leaves his horse unattended and enters a wonderfully extravagant pavilion, where upon an elegant bed reclines a mysterious and seductive woman — nameless — but who on account of her goddesslike beauty and her power to bestow magical gifts has been frequently identified as a fairy. This bold *pucelle* loses no time in confessing her love for Lanval, nor he in reciprocating. He vows to observe her every commandment. After enjoining him to secrecy, she grants him two favors: inexhaustible wealth and unlimited possession of her body. The couple then consummate their mutual desire and remain together in bed for several hours, that is until the lady abruptly orders her knight to depart. Though he eventually complies, he tarries long enough to receive new apparel and a lavish dinner generously spiced with kisses.⁴

This episode has attracted a wide range of interpretations, each finding its validity in a particular motif or set of motifs.⁵ If, for example, one focuses on the abandoned horse, one can construe the scene as an illustration of a shift from feudal to courtly values.⁶ By concentrating more on the basins and towel, one may view this incident as a rite of purification.⁷ The motif of sexual intercourse

does the fact that she comes from a distant and mysterious kingdom make her lover Lanval any more otherworldly, for he himself comes from an unnamed land of noble but unspecified parents.

⁴ This scene is quite different in *Graelent*, an anonymous *lai* whose story is similar enough to *Lanval* that one assumes a common source for the two. In *Graelent* the hero comes upon a beautiful female stranger bathing in the water of a spring. Thinking to trap her into giving herself up to him, he steals her clothes, but in fact his plot is pointless because this lovely creature is a fairy who has already fallen in love with *Graelent* and has been lying in wait for him. P. Ménard, *Les Lais de Marie de France* (Paris 1979), pp. 38—45, maps out the contrasts between the two stories and summarizes the Lanval-*Graelent* controversy.

⁵ All five of these readings come from J. Ribard, "Le *Lai de Lanval*: essai d'interprétation polysémique," in *Mélanges de philologie et de littératures romanes offerts à Jeanne Wathelet-Willem* (Liège 1978), 529—44.

⁶ J. Wathelet-Willem, "Le Mystère chez Marie de France", *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire* 39 (1969), 672, and Koubichkine (474), believe, as does Ribard, that Lanval's abandonment of his horse has symbolic meaning. Wathelet-Willem says of the gesture: "C'est un chevalier et il ne pense plus à son cheval qui symbolise en quelque sorte son rang social, je dirais presque son métier." Similarly, Koubichkine interprets the horse as Lanval's "dernier attribut de chevalier" and maintains that this rupture from the world of chivalry permits the hero to move into a fantasy world.

⁷ The basins represent, on the one hand, the remnant of an earlier Celtic fairy-mistress story and, on the other, the signal for the courtly handwashing ritual which was standard practice in twelfth-century France. T. Cross, "The Celtic Elements in the *Lais of Lanval* and *Graelent*", *Modern Philology* 12 (1914—15), explains: "It seems probable that originally (in Celtic legend) Lanval's mistress appeared with two attendants bathing in a stream but that when her character as a water-fée was forgotten, she was rationalized into a twelfth-century fine lady...and her fairy companions were transformed into drawers of water

engenders the notion that Lanval represents the archetypal adolescent in search of maturity. The magical gifts transform their originator into a semi-deity⁸ and turn the story into a myth of a mortal victimized by the gods. The allusion to commandments and new clothes inspires a biblical reading according to which Lanval symbolizes Man, who, despite his sinfulness, will ultimately achieve salvation through the exercise of Christian Charity.⁹

While not wishing to deny the brilliance of this panoply of explanations, I would argue that glosses of this kind serve more to obscure than to elucidate the central meaning of the text. For, even if the Lanval story lends itself to commentary of a sociological, psychological, mythological, ritualistic, or religious vein, it is above all else a literary work and hence should be analyzed primarily (if not exclusively) as such. To this end I should like to consider how the choice and organization of events within the scene recounted above reflect Marie's keen awareness of the narrative conventions at her disposal. I believe that it is possible to recognize within these verses two familiar narrative blocks, each marked not only by the presence of certain stock motifs but also by an identifying catchword.

The first of the narrative constructs used by Marie in composing this section of her poem is the Hospitality Sequence, which typically consists of a Welcome, Supper, Bedtime, and a Departure.¹⁰ Evidently Marie's scene demonstrates all of these features; in addition, this encounter between Lanval and the *pucelle* displays the following secondary traits often associated with Hospitality in the Old French romance tradition: a greeting by servants, an invitation, a description of the host's abode, a description of the host (or in this case, hostess), handwashing, mealtime entertainment, declarations of love, lovemaking, the bestowal of clothes

for my lady's hands before her twelfth-century picnic luncheon" (25—26); see also Wathelet-Willem 685; Lazar, p. 175; Sienaert, p. 101.

⁸ Wathelet-Willem, while conceding that Marie never once calls the *pucelle* a *fée*, nevertheless, believes that she is a supernatural being (680). Ménard compares her to Diana, goddess of the hunt (p. 207), as does Ribard (535—37). I tend, however, to favor the view of Sienaert, who stresses the essentially courtly nature of the *pucelle* and of the scene in which she first appears (p. 101).

⁹ According to this religious interpretation, the *pucelle* is an angel; the Queen, the Devil; and Arthur is given no particular rôle. The love of Lanval for the *pucelle* is not carnal desire, but *caritas*. Inspired by love, Lanval converts to a new set of commandments (v. 127). His new clothing symbolizes his new being in Christ, a Pauline image. The divine emissary then sends the neophyte back into the world (v. 161), where he has a mission to accomplish, i.e. to demonstrate Christian virtue, and specifically *largesse*. Lanval's pride, however, causes him to fall, as he succumbs to the temptation to defend himself against the unjust charges brought upon him by his fellowmen. (Lanval's nature at this point seems more than a little ambiguous: Ribard compares him, on the one hand, to Judas contemplating suicide and, on the other, to Jesus standing innocent before the tribunal.) God, however, does not abandon His own, and in the end His angel mercifully sweeps the mortal away to that Celtic Paradise known as Avalun (Ribard, 540—42).

¹⁰ M. Bruckner, *Narrative Invention in Twelfth-Century French Romance: The Convention of Hospitality* (Lexington, Kentucky 1980), p. 29.

and other gifts, a warning. Marie renders explicit the link between this episode and the Hospitality paradigm when, about two thirds of the way into the passage she interjects: "Ore est Lanval bien herbergiez!" (v. 154).¹¹ The single word *herbergiez*, which figures in many such sequences, strengthens my hypothesis that Lanval's visit to the *pucelle*'s tent exemplifies how Hospitality can function as a structuring device within a narrative poem.¹²

Craftily, however, Marie violates several of the most stringent requirements of the model which she has selected. One notable infraction involves the temporal frame. Whereas the Hospitality scene customarily extends from evening to morning, Marie's stretches from afternoon to night, with the embarrassing result that the hero goes out into the dark, his hostess making no apparent effort to detain him. Indeed, throughout the episode the timing seems out of kilter. Anticipated incidents get postponed without apology on at least two occasions: The basins and towel, which one assumes to be for handwashing, arrive over a hundred verses before the actual handwashing takes place; similarly, the dismissal of the guest precedes his departure by approximately seventy verses in which, among other things, Marie has made room for an unhurried supper.¹³ But the poetess deviates most blatantly from the standard pattern of Hospitality, when she inverts Mealtime and Bedtime.¹⁴ The following scheme compares the episode at the tent to the general model of Hospitality:¹⁵

¹¹ E. Mickel, "Marie de France's Use of Irony as a Stylistic and Narrative Device," *Studies in Philology* 71 (July 1974) sees the verse: "Ore est Lanval bien herbergiez" as ironic. He attributes the irony to the duplicity of *herbergiez*, which refers at once to: 1) lodging in the most general sense; 2) lodging inside the woman (288—89).

¹² Bruckner explains that some Hospitality sequences are compressed to the point where they contain little more than a statement on the order of this one from *Floire*:

Cele nuit a un hostel jurent
Ou il mout bien herbergié furent,
E el demain tres bien matin
Se remetent en lor chemin (II, vv. 1309—12).

Still, as she emphasizes, these four verses suffice, because of the power of *herbergié*, to conjure up a whole scene. The medieval audience, in her words, "knows what 'mout bien herbergié' means by reference to the motifs of the four fundamental subunits — a joyous welcome, food, a bed, and so on" (p. 69).

¹³ Wathelet-Willem wonders about the delay between the arrival and the use of the basins (665). She eventually settles the issue to her own satisfaction by focusing less on the fact of the basins than on the critical moment at which they are introduced. Lanval is on the threshold of the Other World. In this context, then, the basins suggest a lustral rite allowing select mortals to cross from this corrupt world to a purer one (680—83).

¹⁴ Bruckner cites no instances where lovemaking precedes dining or where the guest departs at night.

¹⁵ Bruckner lists as techniques for variation of the sequence: addition, substitution, summarization, negation, omission, interruption (p. 35). She says nothing, though, of reversal, which I therefore take to be either a highly unusual or a poorly recognized type of modification.

THE HOSPITALITY SEQUENCE

<i>Normal Order</i>	<i>Order in 'Lanval' (39–200)</i>
evening	afternoon
I Welcome	I Welcome signal to wash hands
handwashing	
II Mealtime	III Bedtime signal to depart
III Bedtime	handwashing
IV Departure	II Mealtime
morning	IV Departure
	evening

Measured thus against the norms of conventional Hospitality, Lanval's sojourn with the *pucelle* suggests a topsy-turvy world where delays, reversals, and other departures are the order of the day.¹⁶

Unlike the Hospitality Sequence, which effectively provides a blueprint for the whole account of Lanval's visit to the tent, the second narrative, or lyrico-narrative block that Marie employs serves as a guide for only a small portion of the adventure, i.e., the bedtime interlude. The well-known form to which Marie refers here is the *alba*, a poetic lament over the separation at daybreak of a knight and his lady who have spent the night together in amorous bliss but who, for safety's sake, must now cease their cavorting.¹⁷ The characteristics of the *alba* noticeable in the Bedtime subunit include: a pair of lovers who have been enjoying each other's company, a sudden consciousness of passing time, a fervent wish that the tryst might last forever, a monologue pronounced by one of the

¹⁶ There are numerous other indications that Marie depicts an upside-down world in *Lanval*. Twice, for example, a woman takes the initiative and proposes love to the hero (vv. 110—16, 263—68), an inversion of courtliness noted by B. Wind, "L'Idéologie courtoise de Marie de France," in *Mélanges offerts à Maurice Delbouille*, 2 (Gembloux 1964), p. 742; Lazar, p. 176; and P. Ménard, "La Déclaration amoureuse dans la littérature arthurienne au XII^e siècle", *Cahiers de Civilisation Médiévale* 13 (1970), the last of whom excuses the *pucelle*'s uncourtly audacity on the grounds that she is a fairy (36). The whole mid-section of the *lai* represents an inversion both of courtly values ("la reine sera dite inférieure à la 'plus povre meschine' de la fée," v. 299, as cited by Ribard 532) and of the tent scene ("la déclaration de la reine [est une] sorte d'inversion diabolique de celle de la fée," Ribard 539). Moreover, the physical description of the *pucelle* in the final scene deviates radically from the conventional description of feminine beauty, both in form, by its roughly ascending order, and in content, by its attribution of curly hair to a woman. See in this regard: A. Colby, *The Portrait in Twelfth-Century French Literature* (Geneva 1965), pp. 20—22; 34—35.

¹⁷ For the standard definition of the *alba* consult A. Jeanroy, *Les Origines de la poésie lyrique en France* (Paris 1904), pp. 61—62. The texts of the extant Old Provençal *albas* may be found in Martin de Riquer, *Las Albas provenzales* (Barcelona 1944).

members of the couple, a call to arise, a promise of future clandestine meetings, and a warning about the grievous consequences to the knight, should the secret love be discovered.¹⁸ As with the Hospitality block, Marie draws attention to her use of the *alba* plan by inserting a verbal clue; in v. 159 the little words *Levez sus* have double significance: They represent, on the one hand, the *pucelle's* gesture to rally her sluggish companion and, on the other, Marie's signal to her reader that the meaning of the passage lies in its relationship to the *alba*, the genre in which this particular exhortation commonly appears.¹⁹

A closer comparison between this scene in bed and that of the typical *alba*, however, reveals to what extent Marie makes sport of the melancholy dawn song. Since the *alba* as a predominantly lyric form supposes no fixed arrangement of its various motifs, the poetess cannot, as with the Hospitality plan, rely on simple shuffling to achieve parody. Rather, she alters that which more than any other factor determines the lyric mode, i.e. its tone. Whereas the *alba* characteristically conveys a feeling of urgency occasioned by certain concrete threats to the lovers' well-being, vv. 155—72 of *Lanval*, which, I would aver take as their point of reference the *alba* paradigm, generate no such sense of urgency inasmuch as they contain none of the particular menaces usually found in the model. In the first place, dawn presents no threat to Lanval and his mistress because Marie has rejected the early-morning setting of the standard *alba* in favor of mid-afternoon.²⁰ Secondly, no jealous husband stands ready to harm the lovers, for Marie portrays a *pucelle* who, unlike the lady of the conventional *alba*, is unmarried. Lastly, neither songs of birds nor cries of watchmen remind our couple of their vulnerability, since Marie has omitted these stock *alba* figures from her little intrigue.²¹ Consequently, the *pucelle's* brusque bidding: "...levez sus/Vus n'i poez

¹⁸ For a useful summary of the features of the typical *alba*, read W. Woods, "The Aube in *Aucassin et Nicolette*", in J. Mahoney and J. Keller, eds., *Mediaeval Studies in Honor of Urban Tigner Holmes, Jr.* (Chapel Hill 1965), p. 212.

¹⁹ The typical Old Provençal *alba* is marked most noticeably by the presence of the word *alba* in its refrain. Nevertheless, the expression *levatz sus* or some approximation thereof occurs frequently enough to be regarded as a secondary hallmark of the genre. I would call attention to the following examples, some of which come from *albas* postdating the *Lais*, but which, all told, provide adequate evidence that *levatz sus* must have served as an identifying formula, even in religious *albas*: "Drutz, al levar!" (*Quan lo rossinhols*), "Sus levatz" (*Sus levatz*, Raimon de Salas), "Via! Sus!" (*Us cavaliers*, Bertran d'Alamanon), "Estatz sus e levatz" (*Vers Dieus*, Folquet de Romans), "Ar levatz sus...levatz, levatz" (*Ar levatz sus*, Peire Espanhol), "Via sus" (*Eras diray*).

²⁰ The only other reference to *relevee* 'afternoon' in the *lais* occurs in *Guigemer* at a moment which in some ways resembles this one in *Lanval*. It is during an afternoon stroll that the lady and her maid come upon the boat wherein sleeps the hero Guigemer on the point of death for lack of love, an ailment which of course will soon be remedied through the solicitousness of the lady: "Cel jur meisme ainz relevee./Fu la dame el vergier alee;" (*Guigemer*, vv. 261—62).

²¹ Woods points out that the watchman, who figures in practically all of the Old Provençal dawn songs, shows up in only one of the four surviving Old French *aubes* ("Aube," 210); therefore, we should not read too much significance into his absence here.

demurer plus:/Alez vus en!..." (vv. 159—61) lacks motivation. Neither Lanval nor the reader can fathom why suddenly the big rush. Meanwhile, the *pucelle* herself, perhaps aware of the poor timing of her words, not only does not press Lanval to leave, but even prolongs his stay for an hour or more by having him ceremoniously dressed and fed. Thus, Marie enlists enough features of the *alba* to convince us of her indebtedness to this familiar genre for the frame of the Bedtime interlude, but she avoids bringing in any of those *alba* elements suggestive of fear and sadness.²²

Two points emerge from this brief look at the structure of the episode at the tent: 1) that Marie de France is thoroughly acquainted with the standard building blocks of Old French romance; 2) that she modifies them considerably in the *Lai de Lanval*.²³ Thus she infuses playful irony into the very flow of events: For, once we determine the paradigm(s) upon which a scene is based, we begin to harbor certain opinions as to what "ought" to occur next, and every time the narrative refuses to conform to our expectations, we esteem that things are happening in a "funny" way.²⁴

But if irony in *Lanval* results from the manipulation of large narrative or lyric-narrative units, it can also be produced by the repetition and placement of individual words within the text.²⁵ Three examples — *plait*, *departir*, and *esgarder* — will suffice to show how a word can accumulate ironic overtones in the course of the story. *Plait* 'plea' belongs to the technical vocabulary of the court, where it conjures up an image of civilized men and women exercising their rational capacities and appealing to others to do likewise. It occurs three times, not surprisingly, in the trial scene, where it carries its full juridical force. But it also figures at two other points, as part of the non-technical expression *tenir nul plait de*, which means 'to pay no heed to'. The first instance of *tenir nul plait* refers to the horse, which the hero carelessly abandons in his hot pursuit of the *pucelle*, and the second, to a pair of mules that receive similar negligent treatment from their mistresses much later in the story. The application of *plait* to a horse and two mules helps to undercut the gravity of Lanval's *plait*, upon which,

²² Hoepffner recognizes that Marie borrows certain themes from lyric poetry, e.g. "la mal-mariée" and "l'oiseau messenger d'amour" in *Yonec* and *Milon* (p. 160). He does not remark, however, Marie's debt to the *alba* in *Lanval*.

²³ Bruckner explains narrative elaboration in twelfth-century romance in terms of "familiar blocks, inviting the audience to perceive repetition and variation within the recognizable," p. 178.

²⁴ Mickel, more than any other scholar to date, has spotted and analyzed the irony in the *lais*. He divides Marie's irony into three types: 1) irony in names, plot and incidental situations; 2) irony in language and various passages; 3) irony in the author's interjected comments. Unfortunately, he says relatively little about the irony in *Lanval*; indeed he cites only two examples of understatement to show irony in language (vv. 252, 477) and two of authorial interjection to illustrate irony of the third category (265—90).

²⁵ W. Woods, "Femininity in the *Lais* of Marie de France," *Studies in Philology* 47 (January 1950), names repetition of individual words as a feature of Marie's "feminine" style. His examples, however, *pur*, *mult*, *vus* are singularly inconsequential (1—3).

presumably, his life hangs.

A second word upon which Marie plays, *departir*, changes meaning as the story develops.²⁶ It first appears early in the *lai* when the poetess reports that Arthur has divvied up (*departi*, v. 17) lands and women but has, for reasons never made perfectly clear, excluded Lanval in the distribution. Three times during the trial *departir* occurs, here with the specific connotation of giving a court verdict. Each new instance of *departir* in this climactic scene increases our sympathy for the hero, for even though Lanval may have wronged both the *pucelle* by betraying the secret of their love and the queen by claiming to know women more beautiful than she, the fact remains that he himself has been wronged by the King, as every use of *departir* in whatever context, recalls. The conclusion of the *lai* hinges on still another definition of *departir*. The *pucelle* departs (*s'en depart*, v. 630) for Avalun, and Lanval naturally elects to follow her. The hero having vanished, the story can go no further. In a word, then, the evolution of *departir* (from divide to decide to depart) reflects, or maybe even precipitates, the evolution of the plot.

Yet by far the cleverest word play involves the verb *esgarder*. In its ordinary acceptation it means 'to regard attentively,' 'to gaze upon,' but in the jargon of the court, it signifies 'to pass judgment'. In one form or the other *esgarder* figures prominently at every crucial moment of the narrative. We learn, for example, that the young knight Lanval has fallen head-over-heels in love with the *pucelle* from the one verse: "Il l'esgarda, si la vit bele" (v. 117). We know that he pines as he leaves her by the simple statement: "Suvent esgarde ariere sei" (v. 195). Moreover, the queen's passionate interest in Lanval first manifests itself with this same kind of attentive glance. From among a crowd of some thirty knights she singles him out and gazes upon him: "Lanval conut e esgarda" (v. 241). The next two occurrences of the word demonstrate its other meaning, for twice in a row it crops up in connection with the judges and the court decision which they must make. During the deliberations, however, the first set of lovely maidens parades by, and the judges who should be occupying themselves with *esgarder* (rational decision making) cannot keep themselves from *esgarder* (gawking). As the trial advances, punctuated by timely processions of alluring women, the judges are pulled back and forth between one kind of *esgarder* and the other, so much so indeed that, when we are apprised that Lanval has been spared by the *esgart* of the judges (v. 629), we are not altogether sure whether it is their wisdom or their lust which has saved him.²⁷

²⁶ Spitzer calls attention to the repetition of another word *vanter/vantance* which occurs with increasing frequency as the story approaches its climactic ending (vv. 320, 367, 377, 441, 622). The repetition is significant, in that *vantance*, according to his reading of the text, is the key term (30—31).

²⁷ Mickel cites v. 477 "Cil (= li baron) les esgardent volentiers" as an example of understatement and suggests: "...from the one line the reader sees what the barons' judgment will be" (282). But he does not stress the significant repetition of *esgarder* in its nominal form *esgart* in the report of their

Finally, the lexical play in which Marie engages in the *Lai de Lanval* may go beyond the unit of the word to involve syllables and/or letters. The hero's name of course affords the prime testimony of such intraverbal irony. A veritable tour de force, "Lanval" is not only a palindrome, i.e., a word that can be spelled either forward or backward with the same result, but also an anagram of Avalun, the blessed isle to which the hero retreats in the end.²⁸ Furthermore, I strongly suspect, though I cannot as yet prove, an unusually high incidence of the sounds *Lan* and *Val* scattered through the *lai*. On one noteworthy occasion Marie ends a verse with *talent* (v. 280) and begins the next one with *vallez*, thereby juxtaposing the two constituent syllables of the hero's name. And if one gives free rein to his imagination, one may even remark that the seemingly non-descript opening line of *Lanval*, "L'aventure d'un autre lai", can be rearranged to spell out "Lanval" and "Artur" or "Avalun" and "luin" and that both halves of the verse consist of virtually the same letters. Is it mere happenstance that *Lanval* is the only piece called "un 'autre' lai"? Perhaps the unobtrusive *autre* is in reality the first subtle indication that this *lai* will be somehow different from the rest.²⁹

The irony which permeates the structure at all levels, from large narrative blocks down to words, syllables and letters inclines me to take the *Lai de Lanval* lightly. While recognizing the plausibility of some of the symbolism which other scholars ascribe to the text, I would nevertheless venture to define *Lanval* as an essentially humorous piece, which pokes gentle fun at certain paradigms of courtly

verdict, v. 629. Nor does he comment on the consummate irony of the two quite different meanings of *esgarder*, which become perfectly confused in the end.

²⁸ Oddly enough, though Mickel discusses the irony implicit in the names Equitan, Fresne, and Chaitivel (269—72), he says nothing about Lanval. The most imaginative theory about Lanval's name is that of Koubichkine, who, having determined that Marie most likely invented the name and, thus, that there is nothing arbitrary about it (469), goes on to note the Lanval-Avalun anagram (which works even better if we accept the spelling found in MS.C. Launval) and the perfect symmetry of this word which is its own mirror image. (Here we must assume the interchangeability of u and v.) She reflects also on the initial and final liquid L "qui incurve le mot vers la légèreté et la fluidité nécessaire à l'envol final de Lanval" (481). Koubichkine interprets the definitive departure of Lanval for Avalun as the definitive return of Lanval to his lost identity (482). And yet, it is hard for me to understand how Lanval's retreat into a land whose name represents a confused version of his own does anything to straighten out his true being. The Lanval-Avalun anagram is in my view a game.

²⁹ P. Zumthor, *Langue, texte, énigme* (Paris 1975), especially in the chapter entitled "Des paragrammes chez les troubadours?" plays with the notion of hidden words within a poetic text (pp. 55—67). Surely more work needs to be done along these lines.

literature³⁰ (e.g., hospitality, adulterous love, justice by tribunal) and which makes no claim to profundity.³¹

Tulane University
New Orleans

ELIZABETH WILSON POE

³⁰ Most scholars agree that Marie knew the conventions of courtly love, but they differ in their views on the extent to which her writings reflect this knowledge. Wind, for instance, contends: "Nous savons qu'elle connaissait les règles de l'amour courtois, sans les appliquer avec la rigueur qu'exigeait la casuistique amoureuse de l'époque" (745). Any courtly influences, according to her, are strictly superficial and not essential (741—742). Hoepffner, too, admits that Marie knew the rules of courtly love, but he believes that she consciously rejected them in the *Lais* (p. 170). Lazar thinks that Marie represents a transition between the *fin' amors* of the troubadours and the courtly love of the romance tradition (p. 174). More recently, Sienaert has characterized her as thoroughly courtly. He has described the meeting between Lanval and the maidens beside the river as being "d'une exquise courtoisie" (p. 101).

³¹ Most scholars see Marie as humorless. Hoepffner, for example, describes her as "toujours grave et sérieuse; c'est à peine si elle esquisse quelquefois un pâle sourire, si une pointe d'humour égaie ses poèmes." According to him, she does not have "the smiling irony of a Chrétien de Troyes" (pp. 177—78). Wind speaks of the "douce mélancolie sousjacent dans les *lais*" (744), and Wathelet-Willem calls *Lanval* in particular a "sobre récit" (673). E. A. Francis, in her excellent article entitled "The Trial of Lanval," in *Studies presented to Professor Mildred K. Pope* (Manchester 1969) 115—24, has nonetheless failed to note the humor of this final scene. Woods at least, though his conceptions of "feminine style" are generally too impressionistic to be convincing, does refer to the trial scene as an "amusing passage" ("Femininity," 11).

RAOUL DE CAMBRAI OR RAOUL SANS TERRE?

Among the obscurities which critics have found in the only surviving complete version of *Raoul de Cambrai*¹ is that surrounding the tenure of Cambrai. The problem, as summed up by Dr. P. Matarasso, is this: 'Le roi Louis dépouille l'enfant Raoul pour donner son fief en garde au Manceau Giboïn. Lorsque Raoul grandit et demande la restitution de sa terre, le roi ... fait un arrangement par lequel [Giboïn] reste en possession du Cambrésis. On s'attendrait donc à ce que Raoul fût définitivement écarté du fief paternel. Pourtant il n'en est rien. Aalais continue à vivre à Cambrai... C'est à Cambrai que Raoul va la retrouver, là qu'il rassemble son armée...'² This army, furthermore, is partly composed of Cambrésiens, and on Raoul's death Aalais makes Gautier heir to the estate of Cambrai. Dr Matarasso's solution is to see two historical strata in the text: an earlier one in which Raoul remains in possession of his fief and attacks the Vermandois with the help of Louis, and a later one in which Raoul, elevated to the role of tragic hero, is driven to war by royal injustice. An alternative, that two holdings are involved — Cambrai proper and the Cambrésis — is rejected by her on the ground that 'Cambrai et Cambrésis semblent être des synonymes dont le poète use indifféremment'.³ This assertion is, however only partly true; and though there is some overlapping of the two terms, the text becomes very much coherent if we see it as distinguishing between land held by Aalais in her own name, and a fief conferred on her husband but later reappropriated, even if there is some slight terminological confusion, than if we represent it as the story of a man who both does, and does not, hold the fief of Cambrai.

The land which Louis gives to Taillefer is referred to as the Cambrésis:

De Canbresin an droit fié le vesti.

23

The line appears in almost identical form in the Brussels fragments (henceforth MS C), fol. 1 v. 29.⁴ The land bestowed on Giboïn is likewise consistently spoken of as the Cambrésis, whether by the barons (v. 107), the poet (vv. 183, 532—3), Guerri le Sor (vv. 302, 646) or Giboïn himself (v. 714). In five of these instances (vv. 23, 183, 302, 533, 714) the word Cambrésis or an orthographic variant is in the middle of the line where its selection is less likely to be the effect of metrical considerations. There seems no doubt that a single territory is in question, and

¹ Bibliothèque Nationale f. fr. 2493, ed. P. Meyer and A. Longnon (Paris: S.A.T.F., 1882).

² Pauline Matarasso. *Recherches historiques et littéraires sur 'Raoul de Cambrai'* (Paris: Nizet, 1962), p. 87.

³ Matarasso, p. 112.

⁴ A. Bayot, 'Raoul de Cambrai (Brüsseler Fragmente)', *Revue des Bibliothèques et Archives de Belgique* IV, 1906, 412—429.