The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women's Writing

Edited by Carolyn Dinshaw, David Wallace

Book DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CCOL052179188X

Online ISBN: 9780511999123

Hardback ISBN: 9780521791885

Paperback ISBN: 9780521796385

Chapter

11 - Marie de France pp. 172-183

Chapter DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CCOL052179188X.012

Cambridge University Press

11

ROBERTA L. KRUEGER

Marie de France

In the 1160s, an author who identifies herself as 'Marie' dedicated a collection of Breton stories or *lais* to a 'noble reis', most likely Henry II Plantagenet. Some time later, a 'Marie' who announces that she is 'de France' penned the *Fables*, which she says she translates from King Alfred's English translation of Aesopic tales; these she dedicated to 'le cunte Willame'. Finally, the *Espurgatoire seint Patriz*, an account of an Irish knight's voyage to the underworld, was translated from a religious text of monastic origin into the vernacular for the benefit of a lay audience by one 'Marie', probably around 1190. During the course of her career, 'Marie de France' thus produced works in three different genres – Breton tale, animal fable, spiritual voyage – each of which blends literary traditions and linguistic registers and whose topics progress from a tapestry of marvellous love stories, to a shrewd observation of animal and human social behaviour, and finally, to a vision of sin and redemption.

We know nothing for certain about the historical Marie de France. Some critics have even doubted that a single author penned these three disparate works or that they were necessarily written by a woman.[1] It is true that no manuscript contains all three works together, and Marie's twelve *Lais* appear together in only one manuscript, which also contains the *Fables*. Nonetheless, a strong authorial presence throughout this varied corpus leads most critics to agree that the same 'Marie' composed the *Lais*, the *Fables*, and the *Espurgatoire*. Whether or not these works portray a gendered authorial identity, and whether that gender be 'feminine' or 'androgynous', is one of the many interpretive questions raised by this provocative corpus.[2]

Literary culture flourished among elite men and women in monasteries, convents, and courts in England and France during the so-called 'renaissance' of the twelfth century. Although the vast majority of medieval texts were male-authored, women participated actively in the production of culture as audiences and patrons and, sometimes, as authors, first of Latin texts and, increasingly, of French writings.[3] In England, royal patrons included Matilda

I and her daughter, the Empress Matilda, who succeeded in placing her son, Henry II, on the English throne. Perhaps the most remarkable literary patron was Henry II's wife, Eleanor of Aquitaine, granddaughter of William of Poitiers, the first troubadour. Eleanor had divorced the French King Louis VII before marrying Henry; she has been credited with helping to disseminate the discourse of 'courtly love' within courts in northern France and England. She has been considered the dedicatee of the *Roman de Troyes* and Wace's *Brut*, among other works, and her daughter, Marie de Champagne, inspired Chrétien de Troyes' *Le Chevalier de la Charrete*, or *Lancelot*. In religious houses, women may have played an even more active role not only as patrons and readers but also as writers. Three female-authored saints' lives were produced in twelfth-century England, among them the moving Anglo-Norman *Life of St Katherine* by Clemence of Barking.[4]

During the first bloom of vernacular production, with women situated strategically in English courts and convents, it is not surprising that a single talented woman composed texts as diverse as the *Lais*, the *Fables*, and the *Espurgatoire*. Marie's works stand as an eloquent testimony to the vitality and variety of medieval women's literary voices and to the dynamic intersection of French, Latin, Breton, English, Arabic, and Irish cultures in the Middle Ages.

The *Lais*

The Prologue to the twelve *Lais*, which are collected in Harley MS 978, announces an ambitious project.[5] In a dense series of epigrams – any one of which could have stood alone to introduce such a collection – the narrator acknowledges her duty to impart knowledge, the generative effects of good works, the practice of the Ancients who wrote obscurely so that their successors could 'gloser la letre' [gloss the word] and add the 'surplus de leur sens' [the addition of their understanding] and, finally, the necessity of undertaking a 'grevose oevre' [serious work] in order to avoid sin and free oneself from suffering (1–27).

The speaker then describes her own unique enterprise: she has decided not to undertake translation from Latin into 'Romanz' (vernacular French), as so many others have done. Rather, she turns to the *lais* (narrative songs or brief tales that recall adventures) which she has heard and will commemorate. The author then dedicates her work to the noble king in whom all 'biens' take root and asks that he not think her 'surquidiee' – presumptuous – in daring to make him such a 'present' [gift] (54–5).

As she skilfully weaves together introductory topics, the author primes the audience for her complex poetic and hermeneutic project. Like the ancients,

she can be expected to write 'obscurement', enigmatically, so that her readers will add their own 'sens'. Speaker and reader are involved in an interactive process that commemorates good works, so that memory may flower and engender moral transformation.

Yet the optimistic mode of the General Prologue is countered by the Prologue to the collection's first tale, *Guigemar*, where the author finally names herself as Marie, 'not forgotten in her time'. Here we learn that success can engender not only fame but also envy and slander. The speaker sharply chastises 'bad dogs, cowards and traitors', 'jongleurs' and 'losengiers', saying that she will speak in spite of them (*Guigemar*, 1–18).

These paired Prologues present a vexed pair of narrative stances: the first, a formal voice, boldly announces an ambitious programme and presents it in a royal court; the second, a more defensive voice, is painfully aware of wagging tongues within a community formed by language, where one can all too easily be victim of 'vilenie'. Such ambivalence can be traced through the collection: the formal authoritative voice remains masterfully in control of the aesthetic project, especially in Prologues and Epilogues. The more private voice, who names herself 'Marie' [which can also mean 'marie', 'unfortunate'] as she voices her suffering, seems to ally herself at various moments with characters in the collection who are ostracized or calumniated, beginning with the hero of the first story, *Guigemar*, who is 'péri', ostracized for his failure to love.

All of the *Lais* are about men and women who suffer in love, but there is no simple lesson in this mosaic of tales. Rather, in diverse ways, each tale inscribes social and sexual transgression, the fusion of animal and human natures, real and otherworld settings in a way that encourages readers to 'gloss', or interpret, for themselves.

Marie sets the stage for interpretative activity in *Guigemar*, the first *lai*. The eponymous hero, who has shunned love, is wounded in the thigh by his own arrow, which rebounds from an androgynous hind (a doe with stag's antlers). The hind prophesies that Guigemar will be cured only when he meets a woman who suffers in love as much for him as he does for her. Transported in a marvellous ship, Guigemar comes to a land where an unhappily married lady languishes, locked up by her jealous old husband. At this point, the narrator pauses to describe the room where the lady is imprisoned: its walls are painted with an image of Venus, goddess of love, who teaches how lovers must love loyally and who casts into the fire a book about love by Ovid. This intriguing description of a work of art (technically known as an ekphrasis) intrudes strikingly into the otherworld landscape of a Breton tale. By portraying Venus casting a book by one of the great authorities on love into the flames, Marie announces both her mastery of

classical tradition and her break with it: she suggests that she will portray desire in a different guise.

If we observe this intriguing scene more closely, we see that the oppositions it seems to set up between male and female versions of love are not as clear-cut as they may at first appear to be. Questions of agency and source arise. Who painted the incendiary scene in this chamber (or who ordered it to be painted) – the jealous husband or the unhappy wife? Which one of Ovid's books does Venus burn – the *Ars amatoria*, in which the rules for seduction are spelled out, or the *Remedia amoris*, in which love is rejected? As Marie calls attention to her distinctive authority by reviving classical figures within a marvellous landscape, she complicates the straightforward identification of genders and moral positions and so launches the collection's interrogation of eros. In this and other critical moments, Marie also helps to inaugurate a debate about gender issues that will continue within many courtly French narratives.[6]

No easy 'rules' of love emerge from the ensuing stories. The lovers in *Guigemar* are adulterers, yet the marvellous elements of the *lai* – a talking hind, a marvellous ship, and knots that can be untied only by the lovers – serve to promote and maintain their passion, which is reciprocal and loyal. These faithful lovers are followed in the next *lai*, *Equitan*, by a shrewdly calculating pair of adulterers who plot the murder of the husband (a faithful, unsuspecting seneschal) and receive their due – a double death in a boiling bath – in a *fabliau*-like conclusion.

The love situations in the *lais* are rendered more complex and their psychological intensity deepened by the author's fusion of the real world and the other world, of human and bestial natures. The eponymous hero in *Bisclavret* is a werewolf whose occasional transformations into a wolf horrify his wife.[7] She steals her husband's clothes so that he will remain a beast, while she herself, behaving in a beastly fashion, consorts with another knight. The werewolf displays courtesy before the King and is adopted at court, where he behaves impeccably until his wife and her lover appear there. Taking just revenge against her treachery, Bisclavret snaps off his wife's nose. He reverts to his human nature, but some of her descendants are born nose-less. The marvellous mark of 'bestiality' has thus been passed from husband to wife, upon whose body it evokes various possible 'meanings' – castration, betrayal, shame, sexual transgression.

Animal and human nature, real world and otherworld domains also fuse in a trilogy of successive *lais* – *Yonec*, *Laustic*, and *Milon* – that feature birds in tales of transgression and transformation. Muldumarec in *Yonec* is a marvellous bird who transforms himself into a man to respond to the desire of an unhappily married lady, a *mal mariée*, who longs for an

adventure to befall her like those that she has heard sung or told. Her lover is killed by her jealous husband, but the adulterous couple's son, Yonec, eventually avenges his father's death. In *Laustic,* a jealous husband cruelly kills a nightingale, whose song served as an excuse for his wife's frequent visits to a windowsill from which she would speak to her neighbour, a handsome knight. No longer able to go to the window, the lady wraps the dead bird in an embroidered cloth that recounts the story and sends it to her lover, who preserves it in a beautiful reliquary. This transformation, which creates a poetic object to commemorate loss, seems emblematic of many of the *Lais* themselves. The most positive transformation occurs in *Milon*, where a swan has borne messages between Milon and his lady for twenty years, until the son recognizes his father in battle and reunites his biological parents in marriage. Since *Yonec*, *Laustic*, and *Milon* succeed each other in the Harley manuscript, the narrator's 'assemblage' of these tales invites comparison of their inscription of desire, loss, and poetic and moral transformations.

In contrast to much chivalric literature where women are often passive objects or marginalized temptresses, Marie's female characters are central figures who exhibit courage and ingenuity. It is often women's speech – *paroles de femme* – that launches the story and women's actions that attempt to resolve the crisis.[8] An abandoned orphan in *Fresne* recovers her birth-family and marries her beloved, thanks to her own resilience and generosity. A resourceful maiden in *Deux amants* writes a letter to her aunt and procures a potion to strengthen her lover, but she is unable to make him drink it during the test in which he expires. As she dies of sorrow, she scatters the potion on the mountainside where it flowers into 'meinte bone herbe' [many good herbs/plants] that commemorate her love and valour (*Deux Amants*, 225–9).

The otherworldly settings of the *lais* allow the narrator to critique feudal society and to imagine alternatives to courtly values. *Lanval* depicts a knight who has been passed over by King Arthur in the latest distributions of lands and women. After falling asleep near a river beyond the town, Lanval is visited by a beautiful fairy lady who has sought him out for her pleasure: she bestows her love and all the wealth that he could desire, provided that he keep their love a secret. The fairy lady's generosity and loyalty contrast with Arthur's injustice and with Guenevere's manipulative behaviour in the ensuing narrative. When, at the end, the fairy lady ravishes Lanval away with her on horseback to Avalon, Marie's seems to reject feudal courtly values and to dramatize the subversive idea that loyal love cannot survive easily in a world ruled by men.[9]

Many characters in the *Lais* are depicted as readers, writers, or storytellers. Instances of literary activity within the *Lais* invite the audience to reflect on Marie's literary artifice and on the uses of language and fiction.[10] In some

lais, Marie dramatizes the link between writing and desire (as in *Chievrefueil*, where Tristan enigmatically inscribes a message on a branch that only Iseult can read) or between writing and death (as in *Chaitivel*, where the death of three knights and the thigh-wound of a fourth are at the origin of the fiction). As she portrays the desire, transgression, and transformation of characters who read and write, Marie invites her readers to reflect upon their own activity as readers and interpreters and their investment in the making of fiction.

The *Fables*

The self-reflexivity and meta-critical framework of the *Lais* guarantee Marie's survival with modern readers well into the twenty-first century. Yet, if we judge from the ample number of extant manuscripts (twenty-five), her most popular work with medieval audiences was her collection of *Fables*. Aesopic fables – short tales with a moral, often but not always featuring talking animals – were important texts in medieval education and were an integral part of the curriculum throughout the European Middle Ages.[11] By translating the *Fables* into witty octosyllabic verse, Marie brought a key curricular text in the first extant translation to a vernacular audience, where these stories could be enjoyed by women as well as men, by lay people as well as clerics.

Even more forcefully than in the *Lais*, Marie asserts her authority as a teacher and insinuates a female voice into a tradition that she explicitly describes as male and patrilineal, that of 'li ancïen pere' (line 11).[12] In the Prologue, Marie informs us that the fables were translated from Greek to Latin by Aesop at the behest of King Romulus, who wrote for the moral edification of his son. In the Epilogue, we learn that Marie, like Aesop, translates for a patron, 'le cunte Willame', this time 'en romanz' (the French vernacular) from the English translation made from the Latin by 'li reis Alvrez' (lines 9–18). Aesop and Romulus, as Marie describes them, are legendary figures, far removed from the prose translation of a fourth-century Latin work that appears to be her closest source (the so-called *Romulus Nilantinus*). This particular King Alfred remains a conundrum, and if he made an English translation, it has disappeared. But Marie's inscription of eminent male authors and rulers valorizes her authorship and her engagement in *translatio studii* (the transmission of learning from Greece to Rome, and then to Europe). She also interrupts, as a female teacher, a masculine line of textual transmission that includes a father and son, a master and clerk, two kings, and a count, and thus cleverly inserts herself as an agent into paternal, clerical, and feudal relationships.

As in the *Lais*, a deceptively simple framework enfolds a complex mosaic of interlacing themes, colourful characterizations, sharp insights, and penetrating – and sometimes contradictory – morals. The first forty stories of these are from the *Romulus Nilantilus*; the remaining sixty-two are from a variety of other sources, including Arabic story collections, and may be compiled for the first time by Marie.[13] Scholars who have compared Marie's version with sources and analogues note Marie's distinctive features.[14] Marie is not indifferent to the gender of her animals, and often seems to pay special attention to the characterization of female animals – a pregnant sow, a bear who is raped.[15] On several occasions, she appeals specifically to women in the audience. Sometimes, she pointedly diminishes the antifeminist bent of a fable (as when she shows some sympathy for the Widow of Ephesus, who is traditionally an example of female inconstancy) or a tradition (as in her retelling of Adam's fall, which is exemplified by the curiosity of a male peasant).[16] She also repeatedly draws analogies to medieval society and life at court by her use of feudal terminology and dramatizes (through the protective cover of beast fiction) the perils of bad governance.[17]

The social world of the *Fables* is shaped by forces that divide the powerful from the weak, men and beasts, rich and poor, clever and stupid, proud and humble, wise and foolish. Yet the interplay of animals within the fables does not always support such easy distinctions. If the lion is powerful in a number of fables, he is by no means always just; in Fable 11, the hunter lion never shares his prey. The lion is portrayed as weak and sickly in Fable 14, having learned, to his dismay, that when adversity strikes the mighty they lose their power. The clever fox – who 'wins' the game in a great number of fables – is outsmarted in the end by the cat, who has only one trick (Fable 98). Marie is careful not to condemn all women, and she often defends them, but she does not shrink from blaming 'many' women who may offer bad advice to their husbands and from warning 'sage home' not to listen to 'fole feme'. No species, neither gender can hide from the moralist's critical eye.

In contrast to the *Lais*, where the marvellous register allows Marie to effect several positive social and moral transformations, the natural setting of the *Fables* provides few truly happy endings or positive examples – the mouse aiding the lion who spares his life being one of the rare exceptions. If some animals and men escape unharmed from their brush with ridicule, treachery, or danger, many more become dupes or victims – often of their own folly or corruption turned upon themselves.

Little wonder, then, that the moralist promotes scepticism and teaches strategies of self-protection. Foremost among these are circumspection and quick intelligence, often deployed in verbal manipulations. Many creatures preserve their 'bien' or save their skins by linguistic ruse. In Fable 47, a

peasant who argues that a one-eyed man would only value a horse for half of its worth manages to sell the animal at a good price; clever women in two successive fabliau-like tales use their wits to fend off charges of adultery (Fables 44 and 45); the cock made careless by the fox's flattery saves his feathers by flattering the fox, in turn, in Fable 60 (which is a source of Chaucer's *Nun's Priest's Tale*).

Throughout the collection, Marie casts an observant eye on the use and abuse of language. She also questions the ability of humans to learn from fictions like her own. The collection is framed by two tales that illustrate creatures' failure to reap the benefits bestowed on them: a cock disdains a precious stone that he finds in a barnyard in Fable 1, and in Fable 102, the 'Woman and the Hen', a hen disparages the nourishment offered by a woman, because the hen's nature cannot prevent her from scratching.

Amid their profusion of proverbs and moral endings, the fables pointedly do *not* offer a simple formula for living. If, as has been suggested, the collection might have served as a 'mirror for princes', instructing rulers on the principles of government,[18] the *Fables*' most profound lesson may have been to encourage the reader's reflection and self-knowledge. Marie invites her readers to develop, sharpen, and eventually deploy their wits – not in the shadow of a master or by the doctrine of a book, but on their own, as in the fable of 'The Crow and Her Young' (Fable 92), where the mother tells her youngster to go forth and fend for itself, so that she may attend to others.

What emerges above all from Marie's collection is the wit of the fabulist, who displays her talents artfully but prudently. Suspicious of the tendency of other clerks to claim authorship (as the author of so many tales of verbal trickery might well be), Marie reinforces her signature in the Epilogue with a final proverb: 'cil fet que fol ki sei ublie' [he who allows himself to be forgotten is a fool] (line 8). At first, in her Prologue, Marie had distanced herself from her project, saying it was not appropriate that she write such tales and that she did so only at the behest of a courtly patron, 'ki flurs est de chevalerie' (line 31). By the end of the *Fables*, she seeks to claim and to protect the work as uniquely her own. With the *Fables*, Marie has shrewdly placed her work in the mainstream of clerkly and courtly cultures, adapting an ancient form into the vernacular in a way that would ensure its appeal to readers and adapters throughout the European Middle Ages and early modern period.

The *Espurgatoire seint Patriz*

The *Espurgatoire seint Patriz* (St Patrick's Purgatory), probably written around 1190, is regarded as Marie's last work and, by many critics, as her

least original. At first glance, Marie appears to follow closely the narrative of her Latin sources, the long and short versions of H. of Saltrey's *Tractatus de Purgatorio sancti Patricii* (c. 1179–85), which recounts the sensational voyage of the Irish knight Owein down into and back from Purgatory.

Although the spiritual vision of the *Espurgatoire* seems far removed from the *Lais* and the *Fables*, Marie's last work is no less an accomplishment. She brings the important new concept of Purgatory out of monastic circles to a lay audience. The idea that sins might be alleviated through intercessors' prayers and the suffering of sinners in a liminal space between Heaven and Hell was an invention of the high Middle Ages, as the historian Jacques Le Goff has described it.[19] The Latin *Tractatus* located Purgatory in a particular geographical location, near the famous Irish pilgrimage site on Lough Dough in County Donegal, and described the lower world in trenchant detail. By bringing this fantastic yet allegedly 'real' vision to an audience of 'laie gent' and 'simple gent' in a vernacular verse translation, Marie made an important contribution to the European imagination and helped prepare the terrain for Dante's *Divine Comedy*.

As Marie translates her source, she cleverly steps to the forefront of an august literary genealogy, placing herself directly after God and St Patrick: she states that she translates 'al nun de Dieu' (line 1) at the behest of 'uns prosdom' [a worthy man] (line 9). As the text's French editor points out, Marie makes the Prologue her own through the use of feminine participles and intervenes throughout the tale, assuming the stance of author rather than mere translator.[20]

Like Patrick and Owein, Marie seeks to 'aovrir ceste escriture e descovrir' (lines 29–30) – to open and uncover writing about a place that is hidden, removed, and 'oscure' (a word that occurs repeatedly in the *Espurgatoire* and, as we recall, in the *Lais*). This realm is not only 'obscure' because it is far removed geographically, in distant Ireland; it is also difficult as a theological concept. Marie's arduous task in her final work is thus to reveal and make concrete the occult divine world through the opening of her own 'escriture'.

The narrator exclaims frequently – in interventions not in her source – to marvel at or empathize with Owein's sufferings. As Marie recounts Owein's voyage deeper and deeper into a world where moral failings are embodied as corporeal torments, she conjures up visions of organs and body parts – mouth, ears, genitals, arms – that are nailed and burning, and of the horrendous sights, smells, and sounds of suffering. These are counterbalanced by a final bright vision of the sensual and spiritual delights of paradise replete with 'herbes . . . de bone odur' (line 1589) (a leitmotif, we recall, from the *Lais*).

As the final proof of the 'truth' of her lesson, Marie adopts the long version of her sources to append several brief tales recounted by a hermit to the Abbot Florencien (intervening, again, as female narrator in the male transmission of religious teaching). The last of these stories tells how two devils attempt to waylay an honest priest and trap him into sin by placing a lovely young girl – a foundling child – in his path. After raising the girl (who recalls both Fresne and the maiden in *Deux amants*), the priest curbs his urge to rape her (induced by the devils) by cutting off the instrument of his passion. His castration recalls the corporeal suffering of Purgatory (see line 1089, 'genitailles'). Unlike Owein's horrifying vision, this painful act is not followed by an image of Paradise and salvation. Marie closes her text rather abruptly, stating that the priest then placed the young girl in the service of God. Was he therefore redeemed? The reader can only wonder. A complex knot of emotions, motivations, and intentions – transgression, violent desire, self-mutilation, divine service – forms the final resting-place of Marie's literary journey.

As she has done in both the *Lais* and the *Fables*, Marie has created a literary account whose ultimate 'truths' are difficult to grasp and whose lessons remain, at some level, dark and enigmatic. Marie's narrator makes clear that such 'obscurities' are not the exclusive purview of theologians, monks, or hermits. Just as she has insisted at several points in the journey that Owein chooses to remain a knight rather than enter religious orders (lines 1923–32; 1971–80), so Marie promotes the 'active' life by asserting, in both Prologue and Epilogue, that she has made her story memorable and suitable for lay people.

It might be tempting to see in the progression of the *Lais*, the *Fables*, and the *Espurgatoire* the story of a teacher and the changing relations over a lifetime between a woman writer and her audience. The *Lais* present an ambitious writer at the royal court who blends classical and fairy-tale elements to recount tales of young women and men in love. In the *Fables*, a mature writer translates a key curricular text for widespread vernacular circulation and addresses broader ethical, social, and political concerns. Finally, at the end of her life, Marie might seem to venture on a spiritual journey that serves as a kind of *summa*, probing deeper into the terrain of moral flaws and failings present in her earlier work and offering the hope of salvation.

Such a biography, however, arises less from Marie's words than from the will of readers who would seek to impose an authorial identity upon writing that remains, in many ways, fragmentary, enigmatic, and 'obscure'. If there is coherence and continuity in the narrative voices of the *Lais*, the *Fables*, and the *Espurgatoire*, it is because these texts lead the reader, at every turn, to reflect upon their interpretative questions.

We might conclude that Marie's works, in commemorating the 'granz bien' of the past, encourage their readers to amend their lives and to live wisely in undertaking serious work and attending closely to the truth. But these texts also tell another story about irretrievable loss, about the prevalence of human folly, the fragmentation of the self, and the difficulty of redemption. What kind of narrative do readers shape as they 'gloss' the text and add the 'surplus de leur sens'? How may the meanings readers glean from these texts serve to transform their lives? These questions arise in different ways in each of Marie's works as they continue to engage readers in reflection upon their *sens* and their transformative poetics.

As we began with the question of Marie's identity and of women's place in medieval culture, it is fitting to end with questions that keep us from erecting too hastily simple categories through which to apprehend the works of the past. The works signed by 'Marie' offer eloquent testimony to the strong female voices that characterize French vernacular culture from its earliest manifestations. The body of Marie de France's works reminds readers not only that women's intellectual communities thrived in medieval France and England, but also that medieval society was far more diverse, multilingual, multicultural, and self-reflective than some have construed it to be. Through their complex literary, cultural, and moral transformations, Marie's writings continue to offer 'meintes bone herbe' to readers today who would undertake the 'grevose oevre' of seeking meaning in her words.

NOTES

1. Single authorship has been contested by Richard Baum, *Recherches sur les œuvres attribuées à Marie de France* (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1968). The case that the feminine narrative voice of the *Lais* is not necessarily the production of a woman author has been advanced by Jean-Charles Huchet, 'Nom de femme et écriture féminine au Moyen Age: Les *Lais* de Marie de France', *Poétique* 48 (1981): 407–30.
2. Questions of gender identity in Marie have been debated for some time. For a range of views, see Michelle Freeman, 'Marie de France's Poetics of Silence: the Implications for a Feminine *translatio*', *PMLA* 99 (1984), 860–83; Rupert Pickens, 'The Poetics of Androgyny in the *Lais* of Marie de France: *Yonec*, *Milun*, and the General *Prologue*', in *Literary Aspects of Courtly Culture: Selected Papers from the Seventh Triennial Congress of the International Courtly Literature Society*, ed. Donald Maddox and Sara Sturm-Maddox (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1994), pp. 211–19; and, most recently, Miranda Griffin, 'Gender and Authority in the Medieval French Lai', *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 35 (1999), 42–56.
3. For an overview of women's writing in French from the sixth to the fifteenth century, see my 'Female Voices in Convents, Courts and Households: the French Middle Ages', in *A History of Women's Writing in France*, ed. Sonya Stephens (Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 10–40.

4. A translation of Clemence's masterful *Life of St Katherine* is provided by *Virgin Lives and Holy Deaths: Two Exemplary Biographies for Anglo-Norman Women*, trans. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne and Glyn S. Burgess (London: J. M. Dent, 1996), pp. 4–43. The other female-authored lives are an anonymous *Life of St Edward the Confessor* and a *Life of St Audrey* by a 'Marie' whose link to Marie de France is generally not accepted.
5. Marie de France, *Lais de Marie de France*, ed. Karl Warnke, trans. Laurence Harf-Lancner (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1990).
6. See my 'Beyond Debate: Gender Play in Old French Courtly Fiction', in *Debating Gender in Medieval Literature*, ed. Thelma Fenster and Clare Lees (New York: St Martin's Press, forthcoming).
7. For a fine reading of the interplay of human and animal natures in this *lai*, see Matilda Bruckner, 'Of Men and Beasts in *Bisclavret*', *Romanic Review* 82 (1991): 251–69.
8. See Anne Paupert, 'Les Femmes et la parole dans les *Lais* de Marie de France', in *Amour et merveille: Les 'Lais' de Marie de France*, ed. Jean Dufournet (Paris: Champion, 1995), pp. 169–87.
9. A reading of *Lanval* as a 'feminist' critique of courtly society has been offered by Sharon Kinoshita, 'Cherchez la femme: Feminist Criticism and Marie de France's *Lanval*', *Romance Notes* 34 (1994): 263–73.
10. Robert Sturges, 'Texts and Readers in Marie de France's *Lais*', *Romanic Review* 71 (1980): 244–64; Diana M. Faust, 'Women Narrators in the *Lais* of Marie de France', *Stanford French and Italian Studies* 58 (1988): 17–28.
11. See Edward Wheatley, *Mastering Aesop: Medieval Education, Chaucer, and His Followers* (Gainesville: University of Florida, 2000).
12. *Les Fables*, ed. and trans. Charles Brucker, 2nd edn (Louvain: Peeters, 1998).
13. On the way that Marie's knowledge of Arabic tales influenced her literary strategies in the *Fables*, see Sahar Amer, *Esope au féminin*: *Marie de France et la politique de l'interculturalité* (Atlanta: Rodopoi, 1999).
14. See the discussion by the *Fables*' editor, Charles Brucker, in his French edition of Marie de France, *Fables*, pp. 11–18.
15. Harriet Spiegel, 'The Woman's Voice in the *Fables* of Marie de France', in *In Quest of Marie de France, A Twelfth-Century Poet*, ed. Chantal A. Maréchal (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1992), pp. 45–58.
16. Sahar Amer discusses Marie's distinctive treatment of women in *Esope au féminin*. Amer also emphasizes the complex morality of the *Fables* and my analysis is indebted to her study.
17. Karen Jambeck, 'The *Fables* of Marie de France: a Mirror of Princes', in *In Quest of Marie de France, a Twelfth-Century Poet*, ed. Maréchal, pp. 59–106.
18. As argued by Jambeck, 'The *Fables* of Marie de France'.
19. See Jacques Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (University of Chicago Press, 1981), particularly pp. 193–201.
20. Yolande de Pontfarcy, 'Introduction', *Espurgatoire seint Patriz*, ed. Yolande de Pontfarcy (Louvain: Peeters, 1995), pp. 38–45. Discussion of Marie's poem is also provided by Michael J. Curley in his translation of Marie de France, *Saint Patrick's Purgatory: A Poem by Marie de France* (Binghamton, NY: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1993).

THE CAMBRIDGE
COMPANION TO

MEDIEVAL WOMEN'S WRITING

EDITED BY
CAROLYN DINSHAW AND DAVID WALLACE

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge, CB2 2RU, UK
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain
Dock House, The Waterfront, Cape Town 8001, South Africa

http://www.cambridge.org

First published 2003
Reprinted 2006

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

Typeface Sabon 10/13 pt. *System* LaTeX 2ε [TB]

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 0 521 79188 X hardback
ISBN 0 521 79638 5 paperback

The editors gratefully acknowledge the assistance of Leif Sorensen in compiling this volume.