INTRODUCTION

Only your kisses
Can restore my heart to life.
Oh Amon, let me keep what I've found
For all eternity.[1]

(anonymous Egyptian lyric, ca. 1330 B.C.)

POETS HAVE ALWAYS EVOKED the gods, gods appropriate to the prevailing human needs. When there is leisure and prosperity enough, poems begin to express personal rather than communal encounters with the forces beyond our control, such as fear and desire. So, in the troubadour poems of southern France, love itself becomes a deity, ennobling the lover and turning his frustrated passions into gratifying songs. The troubadour tradition died out as a result of the Albigensian Crusade, but not before it had convinced the northern French writers that love was a subject at least as compelling as war.

The earliest extant troubadour poems are the work of Guillaume, who in 1086 became the ninth duke of Aquitaine. In one of his songs he complains that Love will never reward him because he desires what he cannot have.[2] And yet he is not without hope: the heart will gain power from patience. To be acceptable to Love, the lover must be humble. He must also behave properly at court and take care that his speech be decorous. In the next stanza, identical in its complex form to the others, Guillaume abruptly turns to praise of his own

skills as a literary craftsman and musician. Then, in the envoi, he sends the poem to represent him to the lady he dare not seek out himself.

What the troubadour poems add to the vast literature of love is the connection between the lover and aristocratic society. The practitioner of what the poets refer to as *fin' amor* must have "a gentle heart," must be, in the sense of the word that persists in our own times, a gentleman.[3] Private experience—the sudden, magical, encounter with the beloved—transforms the lover not only inwardly but also in his relationship to others.[4] His courtesy is in that sense natural and sincere.

So too is his praise of the lady. In Guillaume de Lorris's *Roman de la Rose,* the Lover looks into the Pool of Narcissus and sees the Rose. Maurice Valency writes, "In the superlative worth of his lady, the lover finds the surest guarantee of his own preeminence, more particularly if his love is returned. The lover's compliments, like all self-flattery, are therefore utterly sincere. The lady, while he loves her, is for him really the loveliest and best of women, for it is in terms of his own self-love that he sees her, and we know what power to transform is residual in that."[5] When the troubadour Guillaume calls attention to the elegance of his song, he puts the lover's humility in its place.

The lover suffers from his lady's absence, or her rejection, and is terrified in her presence, but the key word in the troubadour's description of love is *joy*. Guillaume IX wrote an entire poem around *joy,* saying that it cannot be found "in will or desire, in thought or in meditation,"[6] and that nothing compares to it. *Joy* refers also to courteous social behavior; the lover, even in anguish, does not impose his mournfulness on others. *Joy* expresses his gratitude to Love, who may yet allow him that other joy, when the lady grants him her *drudari* and his hands reach under her cloak.[7]

Neither the art of Guillaume IX nor the concept of *fin' amor* could have arisen without antecedents. Various suggestions have been made about possible sources, one of which is Arabic poetry. There are clear resemblances between the strophic meters of Latin religious poems and the forms used by Guillaume and later troubadours.[8] Guillaume calls his lady *mi dons,* "my lord," and Gilbert Highet points out that Latin poets, beginning with Catullus, "call their mistresses *dominae,* and practice or advise complete subjection to the will of the beloved."[9]

Whatever gave rise to the troubadour poems had little effect on the literature of northern France. There, during the first half of the twelfth century, poetry was mainly devoted to warriors, whose love was all for the emperor or their comrades or even for God, but certainly not for women. Count Roland, dying on the battlefield and remembering his life, had no thought for Aude, the woman he was to marry and who would die when she heard of his death.

By the mid-twelfth century, northern poets called *trouvères* were creating their own version of the troubadour tradition, and the warriors of the chansons de geste were beginning to fall in love. The *roman,* or romance—a long narrative poem in octosyllabic couplets—became the dominant literary genre. The word *roman* referred to the vernacular language, which was increasingly used in place of Latin in literature. Because the subjects of the earliest romances were drawn from classical antiquity, the *roman* is "Roman" as well. The medieval authors' adaptation of their sources made romance in the sense of "love interest" central to the European narrative tradition. In Homer's *Iliad,* Briseis is simply a prize of war. Benoît de Ste-Maure, in *The Romance of Troy* (ca. 1165), causes the Trojan hero Troilus to fall in love with her. When she is to be returned to her Greek father, Troilus and Briseida swear undying love, but Briseida succumbs to the eloquence

of Diomedes, and Troilus dies in despair.[10] In Virgil's *Aeneid,* Lavinia is "a quiet dutiful passive little girl."[11] In *The Romance of Aeneas* (anonymous, ca. 1160), she initiates a passionate love affair.

In lyric poetry the lady's role is passive: she is the source of a man's aspiration. But in a romance the characters have to interact, even if the story is primarily the knight's. There had of course been lyric poems in the woman's voice, including the earliest fragments of medieval vernacular poetry.[12] In Provence there were some twenty known women troubadours, *trobairitz,* their poems similar in theme to those of the men but considerably more personal in expression.[13] In Old French dances and weaving songs, whose authors and even their approximate dates remain unknown, women joyfully proclaim their ability to triumph over loveless and brutal marriages. But the romances introduced elaborate analyses of young people overcome by unfamiliar emotions. These are the tentative first steps toward the French psychological novel.

The enhanced status of women in literature had little equivalence in real life.[14] Recent studies have shown that women in the twelfth century were more disenfranchised than they had been during the Roman Empire and under Germanic law.[15] The marriage laws to which they were subject were more constricting; wives were valued simply as property. It is a basic principle of *fin' amor* that love cannot exist without freedom. But this is, for the most part, the freedom of men. Courtly love, says Georges Duby, is a man's game,[16] although few could have been as aggressive as Guillaume IX, who said to a bald papal prelate, "The comb will curl the hair on your head before I put aside the vicomtesse."[17]

The performance of courtly song was part of the fabric of courtly society. Literature, at least, deferred to women, as well as to their aesthetic preferences, especially when reinforced by their patronage. Southern attitudes traveled north with Eleanor of Aquitaine, grand-

daughter of Guillaume IX. She married Louis VII of France, and later Henry Plantagenet, king of England. Her opinions and those of her daughter, Marie de Champagne, were evoked (or invented) by Marie's chaplain Andreas, whose *De Arte Honeste Amandi* (Art of Courtly Love) imitates the style, and perhaps the irony, of Ovid's *Ars Amatoria* (Art of Love). But the courtly literature written by men reflects their interests rather than those of women, however influential these may have been.[18]

Marie de Champagne was the patroness of Chrétien de Troyes, who made King Arthur's court the ideal of twelfth-century aristocracy, displacing its earlier models derived from ancient Greece and Rome. Before Chrétien, Geoffroy of Monmouth had described Arthur's court in his fictional *History of the Kings of Britain* and briefly expressed what would be the new connection between women and warriors: "Nor would they deign have the love of none save he had thrice approved him in the wars . . . [and the knights were] the nobler for their love."[19]

In Chrétien's romances, the Celtic magic of Arthurian legend gives a compelling charm to contemporary problems that remain relevant today. Chrétien wrote most often of conjugal love, attempting to reconcile *fin' amor* and the facts of marriage. In *Erec and Enide,* Enide is given to her future husband by her father, who certainly doesn't request her opinion. He essentially says to Erec, an advantageous match, "Here! She's yours." But Chrétien goes on to describe the passionate relationship of the young couple, whose difficulties in adjusting stem precisely from Erec's failure to distinguish between a lover and a wife. A period of estrangement allows their reconciliation to be not only romantic in feeling but also propitious for the continued harmony of their marriage. As John Stevens says, "They are renewed with all the freshness of new love."[20] The trials they have passed through have also brought them awareness of the place of that

love in relation to social responsibility. Similarly in *Yvain,* a man's obligations to his work—doing knightly deeds and maintaining his reputation—conflict with obligations to wife and home. Chrétien's *Philomena* (included in the present volume), explores the dark side of love. In this non-Arthurian work, derived from Ovid, the treatment of the female characters is remarkably sympathetic compared to that of Chrétien's source.

ALMOST NOTHING IS really known about Marie de France. The name we give her comes from the epilogue to her *Fables,*[21] where she calls herself Marie and says that she is "de France" (from France). She was probably living in England at the time, and the king to whom she dedicates the *Lais* may have been Henry II, the husband of Eleanor of Aquitaine. She was clearly at ease in courtly society, whether or not she lived "in the world," and was well educated. In the first *lai* in her collection, she addresses herself with confidence to an audience of noble lords: "Oez, seigneurs, ke dit Marie" (Hear, my lords, what Marie has to say).[22]

Marie seems to have begun writing the *lais,* which Stevens aptly calls "short story romances,"[23] somewhat before the first of Chrétien's *romans.* Her influence was certainly less extensive than his, and the scope of her works is narrower, but few writers have been her equal in quality. She does not invent stories but retells them in a style that seems transparent in its simplicity, yet her versions escape restrictive interpretation. She asserts the value of love for women as well as for men. As Joan Ferrante writes, love in the *lais* "is more than a force that inspires the lover and gives him a new sense of himself; it is also a means of overcoming the pains of the world. It frees the lover's imagination from the bonds that society imposes on it, and it is a gift that women can partake of as fully as men."[24]

TOWARD THE END of the twelfth century, Jean Renart introduced a new kind of romance, one with a much greater emphasis on details of everyday life. In his earliest known work, *L'Escoufle* (The Kite), a pair of very young lovers are separated and make their way in the world without the help of money or their aristocratic families. The young woman supports herself by doing embroidery and by giving shampoos to noblemen.[25] The hero of *Guillaume de Dole* fights in ordinary tournaments, distinguishing himself, of course, but not without bruises. His sister emerges from a sheltered life to defend herself in court, recovering her threatened honor by a bold and ingenious ruse.

The latter work's inclusion of lyric poems was widely imitated, but otherwise Jean Renart was not taken as a model. His audience may have missed the distancing quality of an Arthurian setting. His irony, often aggressive and hard to evaluate, may also have been negatively perceived. Judging from the number of extant manuscripts, Jean Renart's shorter work, *Le Lai de l'ombre* (here translated as *The Reflection*), was more successful. It is an unidealized representation of courtship in refined society—or, more exactly, seduction.

In all the works mentioned above, the author's voice suggests multiple points of view; even when the narrative ends unhappily, there is a sense that things could have been otherwise. Writing of Tristan and Iseut, Marie selects a nontragic aspect of their story. But in *La Chastelaine de Vergi,* for which Stuip gives 1240 as a probable date,[26] alternative endings are totally excluded, notwithstanding authorial comment. Misfortune, as predicted in the prologue, is the inevitable consequence of the failure to keep love secret. *La Chastelaine de Vergi* was enormously successful, surviving in a variety of forms in several languages until the original text was rediscovered in the early nineteenth century. It might be said to participate in the evolution of the idea of "romance" toward the more somber beauty that Rousseau called *romantique.*

IN THE INTRODUCTION to his *Cligès,* Chrétien lists "The Metamorphosis of the Hoopoe, the Swallow, and the Nightingale" among his works. The poem to which he refers is *Philomena.* This text came to light only in 1885, when Gaston Paris found it embedded in a fourteenth-century work called *L'Ovide moralisé,* with an allegorical interpretation attached.

Jean Frappier's *Chrétien de Troyes* devotes to *Philomena* only a very few pages.[27] These, however, emphatically attribute the work to Chrétien, despite the doubts of other critics. The question of authorship was the topic of most interest in studies of the poem until the 1980s, when feminist readers began to examine the importance of the legend itself, from its earliest literary expressions in ancient Greece.

Book 6 of the *Metamorphoses* begins with Arachne and ends with Philomela. Ovid writes of Arachne with considerable sympathy. She was foolish to enter into a weaving competition with Athena, but in fact she won the contest. Dante includes Arachne among his symbols of pride,[28] and indeed it is her presumptuousness that is said to have evoked the goddess's rage. But Athena's violence seems entirely out of proportion. She destroys Arachne's weaving, beats her until she hangs herself—or is lynched[29]—and finally turns her into a spider. Ovid tells us without comment what was depicted on Arachne's loom: women being raped by gods disguised as beasts. Feminist critics have been more inclined to speculate on the connection between Arachne's subject and the goddess's wrath, Athena being, as Patricia Joplin reminds us, "an extension of Zeus." As Joplin puts it, "For Arachne to tell the most famous tales of women raped by the gods is for her to begin to demystify the gods (the sacred) as the beasts (the violent)."[30] But the subject matter of the weaving was presumably Ovid's contribution. Arachne had assumed that the standards of craftsmanship applied equally to gods and to humans; what she de-

picts would suggest that her standards of morality should also apply to the acts of divinities. Europa and the other victims do not appear to be flattered by the attentions of the rapists—another cause, perhaps, of Athena's wrath.

Weaving in the story of Philomela is much more obviously a means of communication;[31] nevertheless, Ovid gives the weaver only the plainest materials and does not elaborate on the pictorial representation of her rape and mutilation. When Chrétien rewrites Ovid's text, taking full advantage of the freedom given translators in his day, he makes us aware of Philomena's extraordinary skill, both in his initial description of her and later on, when her weaving involves many colors and an intricate design.

The critic Geoffrey Hartman understands Philomena's victory as "a triumph of Art itself." Joplin would reclaim for "the voice of the shuttle" its own specific occasion:[32] the woman reduced to silence when she would most desire to speak, and finding in her art a source of power. We can only speculate about why Chrétien was attracted to this story, but considering the changes he made in Ovid's text and the treatment of women in his subsequent works, it would seem that both these views of Philomena were part of his intention. He may also have been interested in the story as a corrective to the contemporary enthusiasm for Love.

In Ovid's version, Philomela is simply a beautiful girl—like a naiad, but much better dressed. Chrétien describes her beauty in a long formal portrait, omitting Ovid's humorous remark, and gives equal space to an enumeration of all that Philomena *knew*. Her *savoir* includes games and amusements, falconry, embroidery, the literary arts—reading and writing both verse and prose—music, and effective speech.[33] Her conversations with Tereus, which similarly have no equivalent in Ovid, show her as self-possessed and intelligent.

Pandion's speeches in praise of his daughter are certainly to her honor, although he himself may appear self-indulgent and even improper in his attachment to her.[34]

Tereus sees Philomena as an object of desire; for him her *savoir* has not the slightest importance. But he selects as a guard an old woman whose *savoir* will be the tyrant's undoing. Not only is she skilled in embroidery, thus providing both incentive and materials, she is also compassionate, obeying the letter of Tereus's requirements but increasingly sympathetic to his prisoner, about whom she had asked many questions.[35] Tereus, says the author, had foolishly answered them, no doubt assuming the old woman would be indifferent. To include this conversation, Chrétien had to sacrifice plausibility: if Tereus had indeed told her the truth, the old woman should have recognized what was pictured in Philomena's weaving.

Tereus becomes obsessed with Philomena the instant he sees her. Ovid explains that Tereus is a barbarian from Thrace, and therefore passionate by nature. Several of Chrétien's additions to Ovid's text seem similarly intended to make Tereus appear less reprehensible. When Philomena first appears, Chrétien tells us that she did not look like a "veiled nun," which seems to suggest that she would have done better to make herself less attractive, more inclined toward piety. Even more striking is the passage that evokes an imaginary pagan law, not found in Ovid: Tereus's seduction of his sister-in-law would have been within his rights had she been his sister instead (219–33). His transgression, then, is only a kind of technicality.[36] The irresistible power of love, lengthily described in Ovidian terms, sweeps Tereus away into madness; he is, from that point of view, a victim.[37]

But one has the impression that in the very act of articulating this doctrine, Chrétien loses faith. He contradicts himself, complaining that there is in love itself a lack of wisdom (419–48) and then stat-

ing that love is *not* insanity (491–92).[38] Tereus shows that he can still listen to Reason by giving up his plan to abduct Philomena. When she is entirely in his power, he tries, briefly, to persuade her to grant him her love freely. But once the rape occurs, and the subsequent mutilation, both Love and Reason vanish from Chrétien's story.

Ovid tells us that Tereus had intervened to save Athens at a time when Pandion had no other allies, having failed to offer help to the neighboring kingdoms in their time of need. Procne was a kind of return gift, and no one, of course, asked whether she was pleased to marry a barbarian. Ovid has her flirting with her husband, but Chrétien shows her as simply deferential, and concerned lest he be distressed by her desire to visit her sister. Chrétien gives us no indication that Procne has a capacity for violence. She says nothing whatsoever when Tereus insists, without explanation, on going to Greece himself. We might, of course, imagine that her silence conceals many thoughts.

But when Tereus returns without Philomena, Procne turns his lying words to Pandion (530–536) into a self-fulfilling prophecy: she will indeed have nothing further to do with him, and he will indeed lose his son. The funeral rites she performs strangely combine Christian and pagan beliefs, but her intensity in observing them does not hint at the murderous rage she later displays. Chrétien rejects Ovid's portrayal of Procne disguised as a bacchante, a scene that connects her subsequent acts with ritual frenzy. Ovid's Procne is concerned only with revenge, debating the choice of means. In Chrétien's version she realizes that she *has* no means and prays that God will provide some (1288–91). It is at this instant that Itis, looking so much like his father, comes into the room. Even the act of murder is less gruesome than in Ovid; Procne is not compared to a tigress with a fawn, and Philomena does not wield a knife herself, although she does share in the preparation of the meat.

The transformation of Tereus and the sisters into birds comes from the Greek tradition. Ovid's Tereus becomes a warlike hoopoe; the other two birds are identified only by their habitat and united in a lurid description: "Such birds have stains of murder on their breasts / In flickering drops of blood among their feathers."[39] Chrétien states without comment that Procne became a swallow, but he gives to Philomena fifteen lines that restore her voice and define her particular way of bearing witness, of seeking revenge. Like the artfully woven tapestry that reveals a hidden wrong but is not in itself an instrument of justice, the nightingale sings that traitors deserve shame and death. She grieves for the betrayal of innocent women but sings as sweetly (*doucemant*) as she can, luring us closer to unbearable truths.

In Greek legend it is Procne who becomes the nightingale, and her song is "Itys, Itys."[40] "Oci, oci," which became the traditional cry of the nightingale in Old French, seems to have originated with Chrétien.[41] *Oci* has been uniformly understood as the imperative "kill," but it also may be a past participle, suggesting Philomena's cry of regret or lamentation.

IN MARIE DE FRANCE'S *The Nightingale,* the bird is itself a fiction within the fiction, but it is trapped in surrounding realities and slain. In the prologue to the *Lais,* Marie says that she often stayed awake at night writing her stories. Readers have noticed a resemblance to the lady of *The Nightingale,* who stayed awake to commune with her lover and who may or may not have been listening to the bird's song. The beginning of the *lai* praises both husband and lover, whose *bunté* (goodness, benevolence) "gave the city its good name" (11). But the husband is not otherwise commended, and his relationship with his wife is noticeably formal. The *bacelers*—a young, un-

married man of the knightly class—is said to be valiant and generous. "He loved his neighbor's wife" (23), and she fell in love with him because of his reputation and the eloquence of his courtship, and because he lived next door. Marie's practicality makes one smile—and at the same time remember that for a wife imprisoned in her marriage, happiness would have to be "next door," if at all.

Similarly, they are said to love *sagement,* which could be either "wisely" or "without taking any chances." But this story takes place in the real world, where nothing magical will come to the rescue. The lady is closely watched, and her husband, as we are shown, can be violent. So the young man, when he isn't at tournaments, is content to talk with his love at her window; and she takes such delight in his presence that she goes to her window too often. There are no ironic overtones when Marie describes their meetings, which resemble those of Eliduc and Guilliadun:

> . . . Never wild
> Or frivolous, they kept to mild
> Pleasures of courtship, talked and sent
> Gifts to each other, well content
> To be together when they could.
> (*Eliduc,* 577–81)

It is the lady in *The Nightingale* who distinguishes the nightingale from springtime birds in general, perhaps without thinking of the *Metamorphoses. Guigemar,* the first story in Marie de France's collection, also features a lady whose husband has enclosed her in a strong house, and a more precise reference to Ovid. On the walls of the lady's bedroom a mural depicts Venus throwing Ovid's books into a fire and "excommunicating" those who would follow his teachings. Scholars have given these lines, and also Marie's opinion of ancient authors as

expressed in the prologue, conflicting interpretations, but as Nancy Vine Durling writes, it does seem "appropriate that in this passage a powerful female figure replace Ovid."[42] In Marie's nightingale story, the violence comes entirely from the husband and is, although distressing, primarily symbolic. It does not lead to further violence. The silenced nightingale, wrapped in a cloth on which something has been written or embroidered, tells its story.

Interpretations of *The Nightingale* vary widely. At one extreme is John Fowles: "We have all known of the not very daring *affaire* between two overromantic egos that ends up as a dead bird in a precious casket, more treasured for its failure than lamented for its lack of courage." Glyn S. Burgess takes an intermediate view: "Her ephemeral relationship provides her with a happiness spiced with risk, but she is finally left with nothing but her memories and her embroidery." Jacques Ribard understands what is seen from the lady's window as a glimpse of the unknown—another world, the object of a spiritual quest, never abandoned and never to be accomplished.[43]

Marie teaches that the story transcends the conflicting views it may engender. One may say that *The Nightingale*'s lovers lack courage, but one could equally well argue that resignation is, in the real world, their only possible response. To put the dead bird in a reliquary is a pathetic sacrilege; yet the gesture in itself is a commitment to the value of shared love, as opposed to the brutal emotions of the husband. Either way, the glittering casket preserves and evokes the story, not as it would have been told by the lover himself, but made treasurable by literary art.

IN *THE TWO LOVERS,* the dominating male figure is a father rather than a husband, and the feelings of the daughter include a reluctance to hurt him. The test he devised for her suitors is neither glamorous

nor heroic, and when the princess falls in love she finds a practical means of enabling her lover to succeed. Some readers admire her good sense. Others think she should have been more adventurous: the boy had tried to persuade her to elope. Nevertheless, he accepts her more moderate solution, and when he starts his climb is fully resolved to use the strengthening potion. Marie tells us it will be of no use to him, because "he has no sense of moderation (*mesure*) at all." In fact, the reasonableness he did have is lost in the joy of holding the maiden in his arms and of reaching the halfway point. But that joy kills them both.

Like *The Nightingale,* this *lai* has often seemed to be making a moral statement. Paula Clifford, for example, says that "the tragic outcome, due to his rejecting the magic potion, is made quite clear by Marie . . . , who relates it specifically to the lack of *mesure.*"[44] Other critics admire the youthful spirit, the heroic self-confidence, and the desire to succeed without help, or perhaps a sense that otherwise it would be cheating. The *lai* makes grandiose allusions to Roland and to Iseut; some see this as mocking, while for others it gives the children heroic stature. Robert Hanning and Joan Ferrante believe that Marie deliberately overloads the slender tale in order to "urge the fragility of the literary tradition of ennobling, tragic love."[45]

Yet it seems to me that balance is the essence of Marie's art. When she writes of the boy that "To become the best knight anywhere / Was what he wanted most to do" (52–53), the statement carries a positive and negative charge at once. Similarly, there would have to be both timidity and affection in a young girl's choice not to run away from home. Hanning and Ferrante, who admire the *lai* as self-parody, nevertheless conclude: "The refusal of the potion is at once the triumph and the death of childhood's exalted vision—but the acceptance of the potion would spell the end of the illusion from another point of view."[46] Marie's synthesis of lucidity—the spirit of