

JEHAN RENART

LE LAI DE L'OMBRE

Translation and Introduction by

Adrian P. Tudor

Text Edited by

Alan Hindley and Brian J. Levy

Liverpool Online Series
Critical Editions of French Texts

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Published by
The University of Liverpool, Department of French
Modern Languages Building
Liverpool L69 3BX

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Printed by
Alphagraphics®
Tel: 0151 236 0559

First published 2004

ISBN 0-9533816-7-6

Jehan Renart

Le Lai de l'Ombre

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Acknowledgements

This volume bears witness to the work of a number of scholars. The translation is my own, the edited text is by Brian Levy and Alan Hindley, and I would like to acknowledge my thanks to Frederick Langley for most of the notes. The introduction is largely original, although one always owes a debt to previous editors and scholars when introducing (and indeed translating) a fairly well-known text. I would like to thank Frederick for talking through a number of issues, and in particular Alan and Brian—both of whose help with regard to the translation has been invaluable—for their innumerable suggestions and continued support. Many thanks also to Glyn Burgess for meticulous copy-editing and abundant helpful suggestions, and to Tim Unwin for seeing the publication through its final stages. Finally, I would like to thank the Department of Modern Languages at the University of Hull for its generous financial support.

Adrian Tudor

Introduction

Manuscripts, Editions and Translations

The *Lai de l'Ombre* is found in seven manuscripts, to which Joseph Bédier added the following *sigla*:

- A. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, f. fr. 837 (ff. 40r, col. a—44v, col. b). Thirteenth century. A photographic facsimile was published by H. Omont in 1932 and reproduced in a smaller format by Slatkine Reprints in 1973 (see Bibliography).
- B. BNF, f. fr. 1593 (ff. 157r, col. a.—162v, col. b). Thirteenth century.
- C. BNF, f. fr. 12603 (ff. 249v, col. a—255r, col. a). Early fourteenth century.
- D. BNF, f. fr. 19152 (ff. 85v, col. a—89r, col. a). Thirteenth century. A photographic facsimile of this manuscript was published by E. Faral in 1934 (see Bibliography).
- E. BNF, nouv. acq. fr. 1104 (ff. 54v, col. b—61v, col. b). Thirteenth century. This is the base manuscript for the Hindley and Levy edition reproduced here with some light re-editing. It was also transcribed by Joseph Bédier in *La Tradition manuscrite* (see Bibliography).
- F. BNF, f. fr. 14971 (ff. 48v, col. a—56v, col. a). Thirteenth century.
- G. BNF, f. fr. 1553 (ff. 495v, col. a—500r, col. b). Thirteenth century.

The manuscripts each offer different readings in points of detail, and it is not possible to map out their relationship to each other with sufficient precision to enable scholars to determine which, if any, was Jehan Renart's 'final' text. What can be said, however, is that the number of surviving manuscripts of the *Lai de l'Ombre* suggests that the text was quite popular in medieval France.

The text was edited twice in the nineteenth century, by Francisque Michel and Achille Jubinal; and although both editions are now dated, they do allow us to witness the development of editing practices as 'medieval studies' evolved. These editions seek an 'authentic' text, one which is made up from all extant manuscripts. The reconstruction of a hybrid text was no longer in fashion when Joseph Bédier published his edition of 1913. He attempted to conserve as much and correct as little as possible, a principle generally adopted by scholars today. Subsequent editors plumped for a single manuscript for whatever reasons, and used the others to highlight variant readings. So, MS A has been edited four times (Bédier in 1913, Limentani in 1970, Lecoy in 1979, Carmona in 1986), and MS E three (Orr in 1948, Hindley and Levy in 1977/1985 and Winters in 1986). Each new edition offers fresh insights and subtly different readings of a complex, intriguing, and at times ambiguous, text.

There are surprisingly few translations of this eminently teachable, 'bite-size' text: a modern French prose version (Mary 1922); two Spanish prose versions (Carmona 1986 and Riquier 1987); one Italian prose version (Limentani 1970); two

English prose versions (Goodrich 1965 and Matarasso 1971); and an English verse adaptation (Terry 1963, revised 1995).

Author and Date

The author names himself in a short epilogue to the *Lai de l'Ombre*:

N'i covient mes penser [de] rien
Jehan Renart a lor afere! (vv. 952-53)

Nothing is known of his life, but we can be sure of some of his *oeuvre*.¹ There is, for example, an explicit reference at the beginning of the *Lai de l'Ombre* to Guillaume and the kite from the romance *L'Escoufle* (vv. 22-23). At the end of the nineteenth century Paul Meyer compared these two texts with a third romance, *Le Roman de la rose ou Guillaume de Dole*, and found striking stylistic similarities.² Scholars agreed that the likelihood was a single author for all three texts, a thesis made more probable in 1913 by Joseph Bédier's discovery of a signature in both *L'Escoufle* and *Guillaume de Dole*.³ Bédier believed that Jehan Renart had concealed his name in both texts via a simple, though ingenious, anagram. The linguistic and stylistic evidence is strong enough on its own, however, to suggest a single author for these three texts. It has also been suggested—not always convincingly, it must be said—that Jehan Renart composed a number of other works which have survived from the twelfth century: *Galeron de Bretagne*;⁴ the fabliau *Auberee*, and two short comic poems, *Du plait Renart de Dammartin contre Vairon son roncin* and *De Renart et de la Piaudoue*,⁵ *Floriant et Florete*,⁶ and even the *Châtelaine de Vergi*.⁷

Scholars agree that Jehan Renart breaks new ground with his narratives: instead of setting his romances in the world of the *roman d'antiquité* or Arthurian

¹ In fact, in a recent article Rita Lejeune concludes that Je(h)an Renart is not the name of a real author at all, but the pseudonym of a prince-bishop. See R. Lejeune, 'Jean Renart, pseudonyme littéraire de l'évêque de Liège, Hugues de Pierrepont (1200-1229)', *Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire*, 77 (1999), 271-97.

² *L'Escoufle*, ed. by Henri Michelant and Paul Meyer, Société des Anciens Textes Français, 33 (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1894).

³ *Le Lai de l'Ombre*, ed. by Joseph Bédier, Société des Anciens Textes Français, 61 (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1913).

⁴ 'Galeran et Jean Renart', *Romania*, 51 (1925), 76-104.

⁵ Rita Lejeune-Dehousse, *L'Oeuvre de Jean Renart: contribution à l'étude du genre romanesque au Moyen Age*, Bibliothèque de la Faculté des Lettres de l'Université de Liège, 61 (Liège and Paris, 1935); Charles Müller, 'Les Moyens statistiques et l'attribution des textes médiévaux anonymes: à propos d'une recherche sur Jehan Renart', in *Actes du XIII^e Congrès international de linguistique et philologie romanes*, ed. by Marcel Boudraut and Frankwalt Möhren, 2 vols (Quebec: Presses de l'Université Laval, 1976), II, pp. 633-41.

⁶ Claude Levy, 'Un nouveau texte de Jean Renart?', *Romania*, 99 (1978), 405-06.

⁷ Edwin E. Okafor, 'Les Sources et la structure de *La Chastelaine de Vergi*', *Francofonia*, 12 (1987), 65-77.

Britain, the *Lai de l'Ombre*, *L'Escoufle* and *Guillaume de Dole* are set in his own contemporary France and his *dramatis personae* are quite 'realistic'. It is possible to pinpoint some dating evidence from Renart's verse. In *Guillaume de Dole*, for example, there is a tournament scene which has been identified with one held in Saint-Trond in 1212. This suggests that the romance may have been composed either in 1212 or in the early months of 1213. *L'Escoufle* is dedicated to Baudouin IX, Count of Hainault, who set out for the Fourth Crusade in 1202 and was named Emperor of Constantinople in 1204. It is not unreasonable to assume that this dedication marks a date of composition in or slightly prior to 1202. As for the *Lai de l'Ombre*, there is no clear dating evidence. In line 42 Jehan Renart tells us that he is composing his poem for an *eslit*, or *electus*. Given that *Guillaume de Dole* was dedicated to Milon de Nanteuil, who was bishop *electus* of Beauvais from 1217 to 1222, when he was consecrated bishop by the Pope, there is every reason to suspect that the *Lai de l'Ombre* was dedicated to the same person, placing its composition between 1217 and 1222. However, Félix Lecoy and Rita Lejeune argue that the *eslit* mentioned in the *Lai de l'Ombre* is not Milon de Nanteuil but Hugues de Pierpont, making its date of composition 1202 to 1204.⁸ Lecoy equally argues for a much later date for the composition of *L'Escoufle*. Suffice it to say that, as with most medieval texts, pinpointing a date of composition for the *Lai de l'Ombre* is not an exact science: the periods between 1217 and 1222, and 1202 and 1204, are both quite possible.

Outline of the Story

A successful knight falls in love with a lady of ideal beauty, who has an intelligence and skill with words which make her the paragon of courtliness. The knight sets out to win her love by visiting the lady to pay court to her. After some verbal sparring, the lady, who is not completely indifferent to the charms of the knight, firmly refuses his advances. On the point of taking his leave, he slips a ring on to her finger without her noticing, and then departs. The lady, on discovering his trick, does not wish it to be assumed that she has granted her love to him: she summons the knight to return to her. She is determined not to keep the ring and is prepared, should the knight refuse to take it back, to abandon it by throwing it into a well. Seated on the edge of the well, she tells the knight that she cannot love him and that he must take back his ring. The knight, who is deeply in love with the lady, must obey her every wish. He takes back the ring on condition that he may do with it as he wishes. He declares, on looking into the well, that he will give the ring to the one whom he loves best after the lady. He then drops the ring into the well where it is 'received' by the lady's reflection. Moved by this refined gesture, the lady offers the knight a ring of her own and grants him her love forever.

Such a brief outline scarcely does justice to the *Lai de l'Ombre*. There is not a great deal of 'action', but the theme of love is examined in a manner which is both meticulous and extremely appealing. The way in which we witness two strong

⁸ See two articles by Rita Lejeune, 'Le Roman de *Guillaume de Dole* et la principauté de Liège', *Cahiers de Civilisation Médiévale*, 17 (1974), 1-24; 'Jean Renart, pseudonyme littéraire'. See also Jean Renart, *Le Lai de l'Ombre*, ed. by Félix Lecoy, CFMA 104 (Paris: Champion, 1979), pp. xii-xv.

personalities interact is compelling, as is the knight's dilemma at the end of the narrative: how can he obey the lady whilst remaining true to himself? The solution is both unexpected and ingenious.

Structure

The story can be divided into the following sections (line numbers refer to the translation):

- (i) Prologue (vv. 1-52)
- (ii) Description of the knight (vv. 53-111)
- (iii) The knight falls in love with the lady (vv. 112-211)
- (iv) The knight and his companions ride to and are welcomed at the lady's castle (vv. 212-309)
- (v) The knight and lady meet for the first time, he declares his love and she rebuffs him (vv. 310-561)
- (vi) The knight slips the ring onto the lady's finger (vv. 562-79)
- (vii) The knight and his retinue leave the lady's castle; the lady discovers the ring and sends for him to return (vv. 580-705)
- (viii) The second meeting between the lady and the knight; the knight refuses to take the ring back (vv. 706-858)
- (ix) The knight throws the ring into the well and explains his gesture. He wins the lady's love (vv. 859-951)
- (x) Epilogue (vv. 952-62)

Courtly Love

The 'courtly love' relationship is similar to the relationship between a knight and his feudal lord. The knight 'serves' his courtly lady with the same obedience and loyalty with which he serves his liege lord. The lady's position is one of complete control of the love relationship. She is distant and (initially at least) unattainable. This contrast sharply with the position of the knight, who owes her total obedience. He is inspired by the lady—whether she knows it or not—to do great deeds of chivalry. This eventually makes him worthy of her love. The very notion of love is exalted beyond all others.

This idealised notion of 'pure' love dominated literature from around 1100 to 1300. The stylised behaviour of the knight and the lady has its roots in both the classical world—Ovid viewed love as a sickness with symptoms such as flushing, an inability to sleep, eat or drink, and sighing—and in the more contemporary tradition of troubadour poetry. The rules of courtly love were set out in Andreas Capellanus's late twelfth-century *The Art of Courtly Love*. Although we cannot be sure if this text was satirical or sincere, it was undeniably extremely popular.

Courtly love was characterised by a number of elements. The relationship was one taking place between aristocratic lovers; a sophisticated web of etiquette was spun, including the exchange of love tokens, favours and elaborate words; there was a code of secrecy; and the relationship would be adulterous. This was an idealised relationship unable to exist within the context of authentic medieval marriages: in the

Middle Ages, marriages amongst the nobility were typically for practical or dynastic reasons rather than for love. So *fin' amors* was, almost by definition, adulterous.

Scholars cannot agree to what extent courtly love was a 'real life' code of behaviour, followed by noble men and women. Its literary manifestations are, of course, greatly exaggerated, but the notion as a whole certainly held much fascination for a medieval audience.

The Poem

It is commonplace for modern scholars to note that the medieval notion of genre was very different to our own; indeed, some have argued that there are no medieval genres at all, at least in the modern sense of the term. A number of thought-provoking articles, most recently that by Paul Wackers, challenge this received wisdom.⁹ Although medieval classifications are not always easy to interpret—Marie de France frequently speaks of her *Fables* as *esemples*, of her *Lais* as *contes* and *aventures*, the *Conte du Graal* is a romance and the *Lai du Lecheor* more of a *fabliau*—there was undeniably an attempt to classify. Michel Zink has suggested that, for certain categories, precise terminology meant little in the Middle Ages:

Fabula désigne n'importe quelle fiction, *conte* n'importe quel récit et le récit de n'importe quoi, *histoire* a une valeur plus générale encore, *nuga* est dépréciatif, *lai* et *dît* s'appliquent à des formes poétiques et ne préjugent d'aucun contenu.¹⁰

But the evidence of references in *fabliaux*, romance and *récits brefs* is that, whilst we may struggle to find comfortable definitions for the texts they describe, words such as *conte*, *lai*, *essample*, *fable*, *fabliau*, *aventure*, *dît* and *histoire* really did mean something specific in a medieval context.

So where does this leave the *Lai de l'Ombre*? The best known *lais*, those by Marie de France, seem to offer a definition of a lay being a love-related *aventure*. Although it has been said that nothing much happens in the *Lai de l'Ombre*, Paula Clifford argues that Jehan Renart's text does indeed conform to this definition:

[...] there is indeed an event of some significance: love is pledged by the giving and receiving of a ring. Renart himself appears to see his work in these terms, stating that his intention is 'une aventure metre en rime'.¹¹

⁹ Paul Wackers, 'There are no Genres: Remarks on the classification of literary texts', *Reinardus*, 13 (2000), 237-48. See also Omer Jodogne, *Le Fabliau*, Typologie des Sources du Moyen Age Occidental, 13 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1975).

¹⁰ M. Zink, 'La Littérature médiévale et l'invitation au conte', in *Réception et identification du conte depuis le Moyen Age*, ed. by M. Zink and X. Ravier (Toulouse: Service des Publications UTM, 1987), pp. 1-9 (p. 3).

¹¹ Paula Clifford, *La Chastelaine de Vergi and Jean Renart: Le Lai de l'Ombre*, Critical Guides to French Texts, 53 (London: Grant and Cutler, 1986).

Although the setting is quite different from what we encounter in Marie de France's *Lais*, the psychological intrigue is not dissimilar. Love is at the centre of the *aventure*, there is an obstacle and the obstacle is overcome (or, as is the case in most of Marie's *Lais*, the obstacle proves insurmountable). The text equally sits at the boundaries of courtly literature—this is, after all, a love story about two people of high status—and of comic literature—it is about the length of a *fabliau*, composed in the same metre and contains elements that are both parodic and satirical. Indeed, modern commentators have wondered whether Jehan Renart's intentions in writing the *Lai de l'Ombre* might not have been to poke fun at the conventions of courtly love.

The text begins with a prologue in which the author sets out his intentions, justifies his composition and dedicates it to 'His Grace the Bishop Elect'. It ends with an epilogue where he briefly comments on the story. These are conventional structures, both in Old French narrative *per se*, and in the lay and *récit bref* tradition in particular. The narrative proper consists of two sections: the prelude to the couple's initial meeting and their first conversation; and the couple's parting, the lady's monologue and the stunningly effective *dénouement*.

The action takes place in an unspecified location, at an unspecified time, and between anonymous characters. This all makes for a story full of narrative possibilities and ambiguities, and although it is far from uncommon to be dealing with a medieval text marked by such precision, it must be presumed that a poet as obviously talented as Jehan Renart has made a conscious decision to cloud his tale in vagueness. The effect is startling, allowing for his apparently simple, concrete tale to take on the mantle of a universal story, a metaphor or a social commentary. In addition to this is the fact that we follow the story from two perspectives: the knight is not aware of the lady giving in to his charms until the very end, but from quite an early point in the narrative the reader sees her interest in him grow.

Sarah Kay and Paula Clifford have together outlined three possible interpretations of the actions of the characters: first, that the knight is, at the beginning of the story, 'ignorant of the nature of true love, and gradually achieves courtliness as the lady's resistance enables him to distinguish true values'.¹² The knight therefore understands the lady's polite welcome—a social obligation and a standard *topos* in courtly literature—as encouragement. Second, the lady is deceived by the knight who is able to mask his passion behind social convention. Third, both characters are worldly and experienced. They know that society presents them with a number of hoops through which they must leap before they can enter into a romantic relationship. All three interpretations have their merits, and their weaknesses. The first and second perhaps take some credit away from Jehan Renart in his (presumably deliberate) depiction of ambiguities. In other words, they leave us with a rather one-dimensional picture of the characters. The third interpretation has the potential to do the opposite: if these really are two cynical, worldly-wise individuals who understand the need to pay lip-service to social convention before jumping into bed together, then the tale loses much of its charm. After all, if their coupling is inevitable from the very beginning of the lay, then the verbal jousts and

¹² Clifford, *La Chastelaine de Vergi and Jean Renart: Le Lai de l'Ombre*, p. 65. See S. Kay, 'Two readings of the *Lai de l'Ombre*', *Modern Language Review*, 75 (1980), 515-27.

ingenious arguments are irrelevant. Of course, the fact that we can have a discussion on these three interpretations—and, without doubt, a number of others—only serves to reinforce the appeal of the *Lai de l'Ombre*.

The major part of the text consists of dialogues between the knight and the lady. Both prove themselves to be skilled in this respect, eminently able to look after themselves. The apparently respectful and infatuated knight, and the polite but perhaps mocking or scandalised lady, take part in what has been described as a 'battle of wits'.¹³ Their exchanges are very skilfully handled by Jehan Renart, leading us to perhaps the greatest irony of the tale: much of this accomplished and elegant rhetoric is for nought since it is not the knight's words which win over the lady, but rather his gesture with the ring. This gesture may be seen as a courtly masterstroke or a *fabliau*-like ruse, but it is still the turning-point in the contest between the wooer and the wooed. So, notwithstanding the narrative centrality of the 'verbal duel', the lady is not convinced by the knight's words but initially by his reputation and his tears, and then finally by his gesture.¹⁴ In fact, language itself is shown to break down in the various exchanges between the potential lovers. Jean-Charles Payen noted that the reason why, at the end of the first part of the lay, the situation cannot be resolved is not because of the characters' inability to come to some sort of an arrangement. The lady simply cannot accept the knight's advances because:

[...] le langage galant est impuissant à la persuader, parce que ce langage est trop souvent celui de la mauvaise foi.¹⁵

As Jean Larmat points out, gesture replaces language as the means of communicating true feelings or desires since it is an 'interprète plus sûr des sentiments profonds'.¹⁶ In other words, stylised discourse, conventional exchanges and arguing from accepted positions—the currency of courtly tradition—hide not only what the characters want to say, but also how they feel. This is why the text's relationship with the world of courtly literature is so ambiguous. Notwithstanding Margaret Winters' assertion that 'the *Lai de l'Ombre* is essentially a lovers' dialogue', the primacy of gesture over language, as recently shown by Linda Marie Rouillard, is an important factor to consider when studying Jehan Renart's text.¹⁷

¹³ See Pauline Matarasso's brief introduction to her prose translation of the text in her volume *Aucassin and Nicolette and Other Tales* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971).

¹⁴ There is here an interesting parallel with pious texts, where a 'veraie confession' is necessarily 'de cuer' and accompanied by tears of contrition. The words of the penitent mean much less than his deeds.

¹⁵ J.-C. Payen, 'Structure et sens de *Guillaume de Dôle*', in *Der alfranzösische höfische Roman*, ed. by E. Köhler (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1978), pp. 170-88 (p. 186).

¹⁶ Jean Larmat, 'La Morale de Jean Renart dans le *Lai de l'Ombre*', in *Mélanges de philologie romane offerts à Charles Camproux*, ed. by Robert Lafont et al., 2 vols (Montpellier: CEO, 1978), I, pp. 407-16 (p. 411).

¹⁷ Margaret E. Winters, *Jehan Renart, The Lai de l'Ombre. Edited from Manuscript E [B.N. nouv. acq. fr. 1104]* (Birmingham (AL), Summa, 1986), p. 5; Linda Marie Rouillard,

Characters: the Knight

The knight is the hero of the piece: he identifies his target, pursues her, momentarily wonders whether his ruse will work, then successfully conquers her thanks to his skilful strategy and mastery of language. He corresponds to all the necessary virtues of the courtly knight: loved and desired by women, handsome, noble, generous, modest, mildly-spoken, unequalled in his *largesse*, but also brilliant in combat. In short, he is everything a heroic knight should be. But it may be said that the description found in vv. 53-111 is somewhat ambiguous. It certainly seems to echo metaphorically his relentless pursuit of the lady, whilst the lack of emphasis placed on his physical attributes is perhaps significant. The details of his love-pangs and his falling in love with a lady he has never met are standard *topoi* in courtly literature. His lack of a true *amie* is not, however, and the lady's reaction to this piece of news may be read either as an innovation on the courtly love theme or as a satirical comment.

The knight is undoubtedly clever. We witness this from the very beginning—he manipulates his riding companions and questions them somewhat disingenuously about the lady—and then is the lady's equal throughout their verbal jousts. But are his ability to keep his intentions secret from his companions, and his not-quite-conventional courting of the lady, to be admired or criticised? What is skilled 'lovenship' for some is devious deception for others.

Ultimately, the knight is an intriguing character whom the reader feels he knows well, and yet surely does not. He appears to be all things conventionally required of a courtly hero, but has more depth to his character than the caricatures which we are used to encountering in longer romances. One thing is beyond any doubt, however: he is eminently suited to the lady of the lay.

Characters: the Lady

It should first be noted that the lady in the *Lai de l'Ombre* is married. She alludes to her husband in vv. 494-95, as does the knight in the following two lines. The topic of her husband only once reappears, when the lady tries to justify taking a lover (vv. 698-99). In one of Marie de France's *Lais*, a husband might typically provide the obstacle to a couple's love; for example, in *Yonec*, *Chevrefoil* or *Laüstic*. In romance, a husband is practically *de rigueur* for courtly, adulterous love to be truly courtly. In the *Lai de l'Ombre*, however, the husband is neither an obstacle—he is hardly mentioned at all—nor some sort of validating presence. The obstacle is in fact the lady herself, either her hesitancy to commit herself to a lover—the fact that it would be extra-marital seems neither here nor there in her reasoning—or her desire to be skillfully wooed. She is described as being beautiful, courtly and wise and subsequently proves to be sensible and worldly—she replies to the knight's initial advances *par molt biau sens* (v. 376)—and is even a little flirtatious:

'Si biaux hon de cors et de mains,
de braz, et de toute autre rien!' (vv. 382-83)

'You can lead a lady to water, but can you make her drink? Rings of rhetoric in Jean Renart's *Le Lai de l'Ombre*', *Chimères*, 25 (1998-99), 59-70.

We witness her skilled arguments and, it must be said, conventional protestations. But there is nothing conventional about the way she is finally won over: a knight's words would normally suffice for him to win an *amie*, but here it is the knight's ruse—or, depending on your point of view, his extra-courtly gesture—that is the key to his success. Her feelings as the poem progresses are uncertain. At what point is she ready to give in? Just to what extent is her initial refusal of the knight's love sincere? But we can be sure of one thing: she is no dupe and enters the relationship willingly and with her eyes wide open.

Style

Composing in octosyllabic rhyming couplets, Jehan Renart places dialogue very much at the centre of the *Lai de l'Ombre*. The text is quite unlike Marie de France's *Lais* in this respect, and perhaps closer to longer courtly romances. Dialogue is expertly handled and not merely a succession of semantically unrelated monologues. The *Lai de l'Ombre* is full of 'realistic' details of contemporary life and contains no element which could remotely be described as 'supernatural'. Although presented as a didactic text, the *Lai de l'Ombre* could equally be interpreted as an invitation to debate, not unlike other lays (and even some *fabliaux*). Its primary role, of course, is to entertain. Jehan Renart's position is often described as one of detached amusement. This suggests that he is content to set up an ambiguous situation and then step back in order to allow the reader to judge. He is an extremely proficient poet whose predilection for language and language-games is evident throughout the text. There are, for example, rhymed homonyms which intentionally blur meaning, and also a number of puns. Colloquial expressions are used in unexpected places, and as a whole the text stands out for its interlacing of registers and styles. For example, just how much does Jehan Renart bow to the conventions of the *style courtois*? And do exaggerations or strange juxtapositions necessarily imply that he is writing tongue-in-cheek? Certainly there is wit aplenty. Proverbs, *annominatio*, and litotes are found shoulder-to-shoulder with colloquialisms, leading scholars to suggest that he is poking fun at courtly conventions. All of the above, plus the richness of the rhymes, broken couplets and enjambments, add to the poem's variations in rhythm, narrative flow and overall elegance.

Conclusion

Translating the *Lai de l'Ombre* has only confirmed to me what a difficult text this is, and yet how rewarding its study can be. It is difficult linguistically, partly since there is much talk of abstract, as opposed to concrete, concepts, and partly due to the fact that Jehan Renart is such a skilled poet. It is also difficult psychologically since the reader is never absolutely sure of the knight's intentions, nor of the lady's feelings. On the surface, he is a great lover and she, persuaded by his words and gesture, eventually reciprocates his love. But ambiguities abound, and it is largely these ambiguities which make the text so rewarding to study. Every reader can have his or her own opinion, or may hold the same opinion but for different reasons. Romantic ambiguity, potential conflict and the anticipation of coming together sexually are all subjects which are hardly confined to thirteenth-century literature: the *Lai de l'Ombre*

has just as much immediacy to us today as for its contemporary audience. At just under 1,000 lines the text is short enough to be accessible to students and to general readers alike, but long enough to sustain debate and discussion. One would like to think that the discussions we still hold today concerning the *Lai de l'Ombre* would have brought a wry and knowing smile to the face of its author.

Note on the Present Translation

The present translation aims to offer, as far as possible, a line-by-line reading of the Old French. It is therefore less 'creative' than verse, and less 'free' than prose. This does not always lead to an idiomatic translation, but is intended to help those using the translation as an aid to reading the Old French. For this reason, I have also attempted to reproduce the punctuation from the Hindley and Levy edition, although again this was not always possible. I have occasionally substituted nouns for pronouns where a pronoun in English would lead to confusion, and also added nouns [*in italics*] where the syntax requires some explanation. The one 'radical' decision I have taken is to use the preterite as the narrative tense throughout. Old French allows for a mixture of narrative tenses, but whereas in that language such a practice heightens dramatic effect, in English it can lead to confusion. As the teaching of medieval literature becomes more interdisciplinary, and as a result more dependent on texts in translation, it is hoped that the present translation will be of interest to both students and scholars alike. The *Lai de l'Ombre* is without any doubt a gem of a text which deserves to be read, studied and appreciated.

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Le Lai de l'Ombre

f. 54c

CE EST LE LAY DE L'OMBRE

f. 54d

Ne me veil pas desaüser
De bien dire, ainz veil user
Mon sens en el quë estre oiseus.
4 Je ne veil pas ressembler ceus
Qui sont oiseus por tout destruire;
Mes, puis que j'é le sens d'estruire
Aucun bien en dit et en fet,
8 Vilains est qui ses gas en fet,
Quant ma cortoisie s'aoevre
A dire aucune plesant oevre
Ou il n'a rampone ne lait.
12 Fox est qui por parole lait
Bien a dire, por qu'il le sache;
Et s'aucuns fox sa langue en sache
Par derriere, tot ce li loit,
16 Que nient plus que je puis cest doit
Faire ausi lonc conme cestui,
Ne cuit je quë on peüst hui
Fere un felon debonere estre;
20 Et miex vient de bone eure nestre
Qu'estre des bons, c'est dit pieça.
Par Guillaume, qui despeça
L'escolfle et art un et un membre,
24 Si con cis contes nos remembre,
Puet on prover que je di voir,
Que miex vaut a un home avoir
Eür que parenz në amis:
28 Amis muert, et on est tost mis
Hors de l'avoir, qui bien nu garde;
Et qui a fol le met en garde,
Sachiez que tost le gaste et use.
32 Après, sa folie s'acuse,
Qu'il l'a despendu sanz mesure.
Se d'ilec avant amesure
Ses sens, sa folie entrelet
36 Et mesaventure le let,
Eürs le r'a tost mis em pris;
E por cë ai cest lai empris,
Que je voil mon sens desploier
40 A bien dire et a souploier
A la hautesce de l'Eslit.
Molt par me torne a grant delit

f. 55a

THIS IS THE LAY OF THE REFLECTION

I do not wish to refrain
From fair speech; on the contrary, I want to put
My wits to a use which is not idle.
4 I have no wish to resemble those
Who are worthless and destroy everything;
But, since I have the ability to create
Something worthwhile in word and in deed,
8 He is a mean-minded person who makes fun,
Whenever my noble sentiments display themselves
In creating some pleasing work
In which there is neither coarse abuse nor vileness.
12 He is a fool who, merely for what might be said about him,
Fails to relate something seemly if he knows to be so;
And if some fool makes fun of me
Behind my back, then let him do so,
16 For no more than I can make
This finger as long as that one
Do I think that one can today
Make a wretch noble of spirit;
20 And it is better to be born under a lucky star
Than to be born noble, as was said a long time ago.
Through the example of Guillaume, who dismembered
The kite and burnt each piece,
24 As the story reminds us,
We can prove that I speak the truth;
For it is better for a man to have
Good fortune than family or friends:
28 A friend can die, and we soon run out
Of money if we do not look after it;
And whoever invests it foolishly
Quickly wastes and spends it all, as you well know.
32 Then his folly is revealed,
For he has spent it without moderation.
But if from then on he tempers
His reason, renounces his foolish ways,
36 And if bad luck ceases to pursue him,
Good fortune will quickly in its turn embrace him;
And for this reason I have undertaken this lay,
For I wish to display my talents
40 In composing a good poem and in bowing
To His Grace the Bishop Elect.
It gives me great pleasure

44 Quant la volenté m'est eslite
A fere ce que me delite:
D'une aventure metre en rime.
On dit, 'Qui bien nage, bien rime'.
Qui de haute mer vient a rive,
48 Fox est së a la mer estrive;
Miex l'em prisent et roi et conte.
Or escoutez en icest conte
Que ferai, s'aucuns ne m'encombe,
52 Et dirai ci, du Lay de l'Ombre.
Ci dit quë uns chevaliers iere
En cele marche de l'Empiere
De Loheraingne et d'Alemaingne.
56 Je ne cuit pas con tex en maingne
De Chaalons jusqu'en Perchois
Qui eüst toutes a son chois
Bones teches conme cil ot.
60 De maintes ressemble au fil Lot,
Gauvain, si conme nos dison;
Mes je n'oï onques son non,
Ne je ne sai se point en ot.
64 Proesce et cortoisie l'ot
Eslit a estre suen demainne;
De la despense qu'il demainne
Se merveillent tuit si acointe.
68 Ne trop emparlé ne trop cointe
Nu trovissiez por sa proesce.
II n'estoit pas de grant richesce,
Mes il se savoit bien avoir;
72 Bien sot prandre en un leu l'avoir
Et metre la ou point n'en ot.
Pucele ne dame n'en ot
Parler que durement [nu] prist;
76 N'onques a nule ne s'emprist
A certes quë il n'en fust bien:
Car il estoit sor toute rien
Et frans et doz et debonnere.
80 Qanque chascuns en vosist fere,
En peüst fere entor ostel;
Mes as armes autre que tel
Le trovast on [que je ne di]:
84 Estout et ireus et hardi
Quant il avoit l'eaume en son chief.
Bien sot un renc de chief en chief

f. 55b

To have been chosen
44 To do what brings me happiness:
To put an adventure-story into rhyme.
They say 'Steer well, rhyme well'.
He who comes ashore from the high seas
48 Is a fool to upbraid the sea,
As kings and counts esteem him more for his success.
Now listen to this tale
Which—if I am not hindered—I will tell
52 And I recount here: the *Lay of the Reflection*.
 This story is of a knight
In that borderland of the Empire
Of Lorraine and Germany.
56 I do not believe there was anyone like him
Dwelling between Châlons and the Perchois
Who could have laid claim
To as many good qualities as he.
60 In many of these he resembled Lot's son
Whom we know as Gauvain;
However, I never heard his name,
Nor do I know if he had one.
64 Prowess and courtliness had
Chosen him as their kinsman;
His lavish spending
Amazed all of those who knew him.
68 Yet you would not have found him too talkative
Nor too proud, for all his prowess.
He was not of great wealth,
But he knew very well how to conduct his affairs;
72 He well knew how to take money from one place
And put it where there was none.
No maiden or lady heard speak of him
Who did not hold him in high esteem;
76 Nor did he ever pay attention to any woman
Without being well received:
For he was above all else
Noble and generous of spirit.
80 Whatever dealings anyone might wish to have with him,
He was eminently approachable in social surroundings;
But when it came to fighting you would
Find him a very different person from my description:
84 He was daring and violent and courageous
When he had his helmet on his head.
He knew well how to ride up and down a line of knights

88 Cerchier por une joste fere.
A cē ot torné son afere
Li chevaliers dont je vos di,
Qu'il vosist que chascun lundi
Qu[ë] il estoit qu'il en fust deus!
92 Onques chevalier ne fist Deus
Si preu d'armes conme il estoit.
Ce n'estoit pas cil qui vestoit
Sa robe d'esté en yver;
96 Plus donnoit il et gris et ver
C'uns autres de dis tanz d'avoir;
Et tot jorz voloit il avoir
Set conpaignons, ou cinc au mains.
100 Ne ja riens ne tenist as mains,
S'en le vosist, qu'en ne l'eüst.
Deduis d'oisiaus, [quant] li leüst,
Ama, que je ne despris mie;
104 Il sot d'eschés et d'escremie
Et d'autres geus plus que Tristans.
Molt bon mai ot un bien lonc tans
Et molt se fist amer as genz.
108 Il ert de cors et biaux et genz
Et frans et legiers et isneaus,
Et si estoit plus preuz que beaus
Et tot ce doit chevaliers estre.
112 Amors, qui est et dame et mestre,
En ce bon point li corut seure,
Quë ele en velt estre au deseure,
Et si veut avoir le treü
116 Du grant deduit qu'il ot eü
De mainte dame en son aage.
N'onques servise nē honmage
Ne li fist, entreues qu'il li lut.
120 Por ce qu'il ne se reconnut
N'a son honme n'a son bailleu,
Si li fist en tens et en lieu
Sentir son pooir et sa force:
124 C'onques Tristans, qui fu a force
Tonduz conme fox por Yseut,
N'ot le tierz d'ahan quë il eut
De si qu'il en ot sa pais faite.
128 Ele li a saiete traite
Par mi le cors dusqu'au panon:
La grant biauté et le doz non
D'une dame li mist el cuer.

f. 55c

To find someone to joust with him.
88 He spent so much of his time tourneying,
The knight of whom I speak,
That he wished there to be
Two tournament Mondays in a week!
92 Never had God made a knight
As skilled at combat as he.
He was not one to wear
His summer clothes in winter.
96 He gave away more grey fur and miniver
Than many ten times richer;
And every day he wished to have
Seven companions, or at least five.
100 If anyone desired anything he possessed,
Then he would receive it.
When time allowed, he enjoyed falconry,
For which I do not think badly of him;
104 He was skilled at chess and fencing
And other games, more so than Tristan.
He lived very happily for a long time
And won the affection of all.
108 He had a fair and handsome body,
Was comely, slim and nimble,
Yet his valour was greater than his beauty:
He was all a knight should be.
112 Love, who is both mistress and master,
Chose this precise moment to assail him,
Because she wanted to gain the upper hand over him,
And receive due payment
116 For the numerous pleasures he had enjoyed
With many ladies in his lifetime.
Never had he served or paid homage to her
Whilst he could get away with it.
120 Because he did not admit
To being either her vassal or her steward,
She chose the right time and place to make him
Feel her power and strength:
124 For never did Tristan, who with scissors
Had his head shaved as a madman for the sake of Iseut,
Feel even a third of the distress that our knight suffered
Until he made his peace with her.
128 She shot her arrow
Into his body, right up to the flight:
The great beauty and sweet name
Of a certain lady was implanted in his heart.

132 Or li estuet ageter puer
Toutes les autres por cestui.
De maintes s'en estoit parti
Son cuer, que nule n'en amoit;
136 Mes or set il sanz doute et voit
Qu'il li covient tot mestre ensemble
Por ceste servir, qui li semble
Li rubis de toutes biautez.
140 Li sens, la debonneretez,
La grant biauté de son cler vis
Li est, ce li est bien avis,
Devant ses eulz et jor et nuit.
144 N'est joie qui ne li ennuit,
Fors que li pensers a cesti.
De tant li a bon plet basti
Amors, qu'il la connoissoit bien;
148 C'onques nule si plesant rien
Qui fame fust n'avoit veüe,
Ce dist, et s'en tret sa veüe
A garant qu'il a dit verité.
152 'Ahi!' fet il, 'tente averté
J'ai fet de moi, et tant dangier!
Or velt Dex par cesti vengier
Celes qui m'ont seules amé.
156 Certes, mar ai desaamé!
f. 55d Fet cil qui d'Amors ert seurpris.
'Or m'a Amors en tel point pris
Qu'ele veut que son pooir sache;
160 C'onques vilains cui barbiers sache
Les denz ne fu si angoisseus!
Ce pense et dit quant il est seus;
Ne ja son vuel ne fesist el,
164 C'onques mes hom en si cruel
Point ne fu, conme Amors l'a mis.
'Las!' fet il, 'se je sui amis,
Que sera ce, s'el n'est amie?
168 Je ne sai, ne je ne voi mie,
Comment je puisse vivre un jor!
Deduiz d'errer ne de sejour
Ne m'i puet mon mal alaschier.
172 Or n'i a fors du tenir chier
Ceus qui la vont ou ele maint,
Car par ce fere ont eü maint
De lor dames joie et solaz.
176 Car m'eüst ceste fet un laz

132 Now he had to shun
All others for her.
He had withdrawn his heart from many women,
None of whom he loved;
136 But now he saw it all, and realised without any doubt
That he had to do his utmost
To serve this lady, who seemed to him
A ruby among lovely women.
140 Her wit, her breeding,
The great beauty of her bright face,
All this, or so it seemed to him, was
Night and day before his eyes.
144 Now all his pleasures wearied him,
Except that of thinking of her.
So expertly did love attack him
That he became only too aware of her power;
148 Never had he seen so pleasing
A thing in female form,
He said, and he called on his eyesight
To witness that he had told the truth.
152 'Oh!' he sighed, 'so miserly
Have I been with my love, and so aloof!
Now God wishes to use her to avenge
All those women who have loved me in vain.
156 I realise I should never have scorned them so!
Said he who was so overcome by Love.
'Now Love has me where she wants me,
And she wants me to feel her power;
160 For never did a wretch having teeth pulled
By a barber feel such pain!
This is what he thought and said when he was alone;
And as far as he was concerned he could do nothing else,
164 For never was a man dealt with
So cruelly as did Love deal with him.
'Alas!' he said, 'if I love her,
What will happen if she does not love me?
168 I do not know, nor do I ever see
How I could live a single day!
Whether I travel or stay at home, there are no pleasures
That can alleviate my suffering.
172 My only course is to befriend
Those who go to visit her,
For in this way have many
Found joy and comfort from their ladies.
176 If only the lady I love had made a noose

De ses deus braz entor le coll
Tote nuit songe que l'acol
Et qu'ele m'estraint et embrace.
180 Li esveilliers me desembrace
En ce qu'i plus me delitast;
Lors quier par mon lit et atast
Son biau cors qui m'art et esprant.
184 Mes, las! 'qui ne trueve ne prent!
C'est avenu moi et maint autre
Mainte foiz. Or ne puet estre autre;
Aler ou envoier m'estuet
188 Proier, puis qu'autre estre ne puet,
Qu'ele ait merci de moi en fin,
Et que, por Deu, ainz que je fin,
Qu'ele ait pitié de ma destresce,
192 Et que par sa grant gentillesce
Qu'ele me gart et vie et sens.
Il i avroit un mains des siens
S'ele soffroit que je morisse;
196 S'est bien droiz que de son cuer isse
Pitiez et douceurs de ses euz.
f. 57a Si cuit bien qu'i me vauroit miez
Li alers, que se g'i envoi;
200 On dit, 'N'i a tel conme soi':
Ne nus n'iroit si volentiers!
On dit pieça que li mestiers
Aprent l'ome, et la grant sofrete.
204 Puis que g'i ai parole atrete,
Il n'i a se d'aler la non
Dire qu'ele a en sa prison
Mon cuer, [qui] de gré s'i est mis.
208 Ja, devant qu'il ait non 'amis',
N'en quier[t] eschaper por destrece;
Gentillesce, pitiez, largece
La devroit a cè esmouvoir.'
212 Il s'est atornez por movoir,
Soi tierz de conpaingnons sanz plus.
Ne sai que vos dëisse plus:
Il monte, et vallet jusq'a sis.
216 Il chevauche liez et pensis
A son pensé et a sa voie;
Ses conpaingnons oste et desvoie
De la voie et de son penser,
220 Qu'il ne se puissent apenser
A la reson de son voiage.

Around my neck with her two arms!
All night I dream that I embrace her
And that she grasps me tightly and holds me close.
180 But waking up tears me away from this embrace
Before I can achieve the greatest of pleasures;
Then I search my bed and feel for
Her lovely body which burns and enflames me.
184 But, alas! 'You cannot have what you cannot find!'
This has happened to me and many others
Many times. There's nothing else for it;
I must go or send someone
188 To beg her—since I have no other option—
In the end to have mercy on me,
And for God's sake, before I die,
To take pity on my anguish,
192 And by her great kindness
To preserve my life and sanity.
There would be one less of her lieges
If she allowed me to die;
196 It is only right that from her heart should come
Compassion and from her eyes tenderness.
Indeed, I believe that I would do better
To go myself, rather than send someone;
200 'A man is his own best friend', as they say:
And no one else would go there so willingly!
They say that necessity
Is the mother of invention, as also is adversity.
204 Since I have used a proverb to support me,
All that remains is to go there
To tell her that in her prison
Lies my heart, a willing captive.
208 Never, until it earns the name 'lover',
Will it seek to escape its anguish;
Her nobility of heart, compassion and generosity
Should move her to this.'

212 He prepared to set off,
Himself and just two companions.
I do not know what else to tell you:
He mounted, accompanied by no fewer than six squires.
216 He rode out, rendered at once happy and pensive
By his plan and by his journey;
His companions he led astray, concealing from them
Both route and intention,
220 So that they would not suspect
The true reason for his journey.

Il dit qu'il chevauche a grant rage,
Celant son pensé et sa voie,
224 Tant qu'il vinrent a la monjoie
Du chastel ou cele manoit.
Fet li sires qui les menoit,
'Vëez con cis chastiaus siet bien!
228 Il nel disoit pas tant por rien
Qu'il montast as fossez n'as murs,
Con por savoir se ses eürs
L'avoit encor si haut monté
232 Qu'il parlassent de [la] bonté
De la dame qu'il va veoir.
Font cil : 'Vos devriez avoir
Grant honte, car mal avez fet,
236 Qui ançois nos avez retret
Le chastel que la bele dame,
Dont chascuns dit bien qu'el roiaume
N'a si cortoise ne si bele.
240 Or tot coi!' font il, 'que sē ele
Savoit con vos avez mespris,
Il vos venroit miex estre pris
As Turs et menez en Chaëre!
244 Il dit en sozriant a ere:
'Or seignors, or tot belement!
Menez me un [poi] mains durement,
Car je n'i ai mort deservie!
248 Il n'en est nus dont j'aie envie
Des chastiaus, se de cestui non;
Je vorroie estre en la prison
Salehadin cinc anz ou sis,
252 Par si quē il fust miens asis
Si conme est, qu'en fusse seürs,
Et qanqu'il a dedenz les murs.'
Font il: 'Vos seriez trop sire!
256 Il n'entendent pas a son dire
Le sofisme qu'il lor fesoit;
Li bons chevaliers nu disoit
Fors por oïr mon qu'il diroient.
260 Il lor demande s'i l'iroient
Veoir. 'Que feromes nos donques?'
Font cil, 'Chevaliers ne doit onques
Trespasser n'e[n] chemin n'e[n] voie
264 Bele dame, qu'il ne la voie.'
Fet cil: 'Je m'en tien bien a vos;
Et si le veil et lo que nos

He merely said he was taking a gallop,
And so hid his purpose and his destination,
224 Until they came to the roadside outpost
Belonging to the castle where she dwelt.
The young lord exclaimed to his retinue:
'See how well that castle is situated!'
228 He did not say it because there was any importance
In its ditches and walls, as much as
In order to know if his luck
Rode high enough
232 For them to speak of the excellence
Of the lady he was going to see.
They replied: 'You should be
Ashamed indeed, for you have done wrong
236 To mention the castle to us
before the beautiful lady
Of whom it is said by all that in the whole kingdom
There is not one so courtly and fair.
240 Now be silent!' they continued, 'for if she
Knew how you had wronged her,
It would be better for you to be taken
By the Turks and led off to Cairo!'
244 Then he said with a smile:
'Now, my lords, gently does it!
Go a little less hard on me,
For I have not deserved to be put to death!
248 There is not a single castle I desire,
With the exception of this one;
I would gladly be in Saladin's prison
For five or six years,
252 Provided it was handed over to me just
As it is, and that it was securely mine,
Together with all that lies within its walls.'
They replied: 'You would be taking a great deal!'
256 They did not catch in his words
The double meaning of what he was saying to them;
The good knight had phrased things
Deliberately, in order to hear what they would say.
260 He asked them if they wanted to go
And take a look. 'What else would we do?'
They replied, 'a knight should never
Pass by a beautiful lady on his travels or on a journey
264 Without seeing her.'
He replied: 'I bow to your advice,
I have made up my mind and wish us

I alons, quant resons l'aporte.'
268 Atant guenchissent vers la porte
Chascuns la teste du destrier,
Criant: 'As armes, chevalier!'
A tel voiage, tel tençon!
272 Sou frain s'en vont a esperon,
Tant qu'il vinrent en la ferté;
Il ont un novel baille outré,
Clos de fossez et de paliz.
276 Li sire avoit devant son pis
f. 57c Torné son mantel en chantel
Et seurtot d'ermine molt bel
De soie en graine et d'escureus.
280 Autretel avoit chascuns d'eus
Et chemise ridee et blanche,
Et chapel de flors et de vanche,
Et esperons a or vermaus.
284 Je ne sai comment fussent miaus
Plesamment vestu por l'esté.
Il ne sont nul leu aresté
Jusqu'au perron devant la sale;
288 Chascuns vallez encontre avale
As estriers, par fine reson.
Li seneschaus de la meson
Les vit descendre enmi la cort;
292 D'une loge ou il er[t] s'en tort
Dire sa dame la novele
Que cil la vient veoir què ele
Connoissoit bien par oïr dire.
296 N'en devint pas vermeille d'ire
La dame, ainz en ot grant merveille.
Desor une coute vermeille
Avoit esté tantost trecie;
300 Ele s'est en estant drecie,
La dame de tres grant biauté.
Ses puceles li ont geté
Au col un mantel de samit,
304 Avec la grant biauté c'ot mis
Nature en li, si con l'en conte.
Que qu'ele volt aler encontre,
Cil se hastent tant de[] venir
308 Q'ançois qu'ele peüst venir
De la chambre i sont il entré.
Au semblant que lor a mostré,
Li est il bel de [lor] venue;

To go there, since reason recommends it.’
268 Thereupon each man turned
The head of his steed towards the gate,
Crying: ‘To arms, knights!’
For such an errand, such a rivalry!
272 Riding hard and on a tight rein,
They came to the castle;
They crossed a new bailey
Enclosed by moats and palisades.
276 The knight had his mantle
Slung to the side over one shoulder,
To reveal his fine, richly-dyed silken surcoat,
lined with ermine and trimmed with miniver.
280 Each one of them had similar attire
And wore white pleated shirts.
On their heads were crowns of periwinkles and other flowers,
And on their feet were red-gold spurs.
284 I do not know how they could be
More agreeably dressed in summer.
They did not halt
Until they came to the mounting-block before the great hall;
288 A squire ran up to each of them,
Standing by their stirrups, as etiquette required.
The seneschal of the house
Saw them dismount in the courtyard;
292 He left the gallery where he stood
To tell his lady the news
That the man she knew so well
By hearsay had come to see her.
296 It was not in anger that the lady blushed,
But rather because of the great surprise this caused her.
Seated on a red cushion
she had just had her hair plaited;
300 She rose to her feet,
This most beautiful lady.
Her maids threw
A rich silk cloak around her shoulders,
304 Adding to the great beauty which,
According to all reports, Nature had bestowed upon her.
Although she wanted to go and meet them,
They came towards her in such haste
308 That even before she was able to leave
Her chamber they were already on the threshold.
Judging by the way she greeted them,
Their arrival pleased her;

312 De tant pou con ele est venue
Encontre eus se font il molt lié.
Un chainse blanc et delié
Ot vestu la preuz, la cortoise,
316 Qui trainoit plus d'une toise
Aprés li, seur les jons menuz.
f. 57d 'Sire, bien soiez vos venuz,
Et vo compaignon ambedui!
320 Dit cele qui bon jor ait hui,
Qu'ele est bien digne de l'avoir.
Si conpaignon li distrent voir
Qu'el n'est pas dame a trespasser:
324 Sa biauté les fet trespenser
Touz troi, en lor saluz rendant.
Ele prent par la main, riant,
Le signor, sel mainne seoir.
328 Or a auques de son voloir,
Quant delez li se fu assis!
Si conpaignon sont bien apris:
Asis sont, ne li firent cuivre,
332 Sor un coffre ferré de cuivre,
Aveques ses deus damoiseles.
Que qu'il se deduient a eles
En demandant plusors aferes,
336 Lor bons sires ne pensoit gueres
A eus, ainz pense a son afere;
Mes la gentil, la debonnere,
Li set bien rendre par parole
340 Reson de qanqu'il l'aparole,
Qu'ele estoit molt cortoise et sage.
Cil li met adés el visage
Les eulz por mirer sa biauté;
344 Molt les a bien pris a verté
Ses cuers, qui s'est toz en li mis;
Que de quanqu'il li ot promis,
Li tesmoingnent il ore bien,
348 Qu'il ne li ont menti de rien:
Molt li plet ses vis et sa chiere.
'Bele tresdouce amie chiere',
Fet il, 'por qui force de cuer
352 Me fet gerpir et geter puer
De toutes [autres] mon penser,
Je vos sui venuz presenter
Qanque jë ai force et pooir;
356 Si en puisse je joie avoir,

312 The short distance she moved
In their direction delighted them.
The worthy, courtly lady wore
A smooth white tunic,
316 Which trailed more than two yards
Behind her over the rushes on the floor.
'My lord, you are most welcome,
As are your two companions!'
320 Said she—may this day bring her pleasure,
For she deserves no less.
His companions had spoken the truth
When they said that this was not a lady to pass by:
324 Her beauty made all three
Marvel at her as they returned her greeting.
 Laughing, she took the lord by the hand
And led him to a seat.
328 Now he had part of his desire,
When he was seated next to her!
His companions knew what to do:
They sat down, without obtruding on him,
332 On a chest decorated with copper,
With two of her maidens.
Whilst they passed time with them,
Discussing a number of things,
336 Their good lord hardly thought
Of them, thinking rather of his own situation;
But the noble, elegant lady
Knew well how to give due reply
340 To everything he said to her,
Since she was most courtly and wise.
He constantly had his eyes on her face
To gaze upon her beauty;
344 His heart—which was devotedly hers—
Did well to appeal to his eyes,
For they duly bore full witness
To everything about her it had promised him,
348 And they did not mislead him in the slightest:
Her face and countenance pleased him enormously.
'Lovely, sweetest, dear friend',
He said, 'for whom my heart commands me
352 To shun and exclude
All others from my thoughts,
I have come to give you
All that is within my strength and power;
356 And may it bring me joy,

f. 56a

Qu'il n'est rien nule que j'ain tant
Conme vos, se Dex repentant
Me let venir a sa merci;
360 Et por ce sui ge venuz ci,
Que je veil que vos le sachiez,
Et que gentillece et pitiez
Vos en praigne, qu'il est mestiers;
364 Que qui en feroit as mostiers
Oroison, si feroit il bien,
Por ceus qui n'entendent a rien
S'a estre non loial ami.'
368 'A, sire! por l'ame de mi',
Fet ele, 'qu'avez vos ore dit?
Molt me merveil! Dont sifet dit?'
'Dame', fet il, 'je vos di voir.
372 Vos toute seule avez pooir
Sor moi, plus que dame qui vive.'
La colors l'en croit et avive,
De ce qu'il dit qu'il est toz sens.
376 Puis li a dit par molt biau sens:
'Certes, sire, je ne croi mie
Que si biaus hon soit sanz amie
Con vos estes; nus nu creroit.
380 Vostre pris en abesseroit,
Et si en vauriez molt mains—
Si biaus hon de cors et de mains,
De braz, et de toute autre rien!
384 Vos me savriez ja molt bien
Par parole parmi l'ueil trere
La plume, et ce c'on ne doit fere
Fere a entendre, par verté'
388 Bien l'a en son venir hurté
Par parole, et desfet son conte -
Si con cil qui m'aprist le conte
Le m'a fet por voir entendant.
392 Il se sueffre a mener tendant,
Qu'il n'estoit riens que tant amast.
S'uns autres la mesaamast,
Il s'en seüst bien revengier;
396 Mes il ert si en son dangier
Qu'il ne l'osoit de rien desdire.
Ainz li recommença a dire;
'Ha! dame, merci, por pitié!
400 Vostre amors m'a fet sanz faintié
Descouvrir les max que je sent.

For there is nothing I love as much
 As you, may God
 Grant me to come in repentance to his Mercy Seat;
 360 And this is why I have come here,
 For I want you to know this,
 And may nobility and compassion
 Sway you, as is only right.
 364 And whoever goes to church
 To pray for souls would also do well to pray for
 For those who apply themselves only
 To being a faithful lover.
 368 —‘Ah, my lord!’ Upon my soul’,
 She replied, ‘what did you just say?
 I am quite astounded! How do you come to speak so?’
 —‘My lady’, he said, ‘I am speaking the truth.
 372 You alone command me,
 More than any other lady alive.’
 She flushed, the colour rising in her cheeks,
 Because he said that he was entirely hers.
 376 Then she replied to him with much grace:
 ‘In truth, my lord, I do not at all believe
 That a man as handsome as you
 Has no mistress; no one would ever believe such a thing.
 380 Your reputation would suffer
 And you would lose much respect—
 Such a handsome man, with a fine figure and hands
 And arms and everything else!
 384 You would already know very well
 How to trick me with your words,
 And make me assume something
 I should not, in truth!’
 388 As he rode up to the attack she deflected him
 With her words, and undid his calculations—
 (As the person who first told me this tale
 Has given me to understand).
 392 He allowed himself to be led on a tight rein,
 For there was nothing that could please him more.
 Had another treated him with scorn
 He would have known well how to gain revenge;
 396 But he was so much in her power
 That he did not dare contradict her in anything.
 So he began once again to talk sweetly to her:
 ‘Ah! My lady, mercy, for pity’s sake!
 400 The love I have for you has, without deceit,
 Made me reveal the pangs that I feel.

Molt mal s'i acorde et asent
Vostre parole a vos biax eulz,
404 Qui m'acueillirent orains mielz
Au venir, et plus plesanment.
Or sachiez bien, certainement
Ce fu cortoisie qu'il firent;
408 Car, tres l'eure qu'il primes virent,
Ne virent nul, cë est la some,
Qui si se vousist a vostre home
Tenir, con je veil sanz faintise.
412 Douce dame, par gentillise,
Car le vos plese a essayer:
Retenez moi a chevalier
Et, qant vos plera, a ami!
416 Car ançois un an et demi
M'avrez vos fet si preu et tel,
Et as armes et a l'ostel,
Et tant de bien en mon cors mis
420 Que li nons c'on apele 'amis'—
Se Diex plet—ne m'iert ja vëez.
'Le cuidier que vos i avez',
Fet ele, 'vos en fet grant bien!
424 Je n'entendoie au regart rien
Se cortoisie non et sens;
Mes vos l'avez en autre sens
Noté folement; si m'en poise.
428 Se ge ne fusse si cortoise,
Il m'en pesast ja durement;
Mes il avient assez sovent,
Quant aucune dame vaillant
432 Fet aucun chevalier semblant
De cortoisie et d'ennor fere
Lors cuident tot lor autre afere
Cil soupirant avoir trové!
436 Par vos l'ai ge bien esprouvé:
Tout ainsi l'avez entendu.
Miex vos venist avoir tendu
La hors une roiz a colons;
440 que, se li ans estoit si lons
Et li demis con troi entier,
Ne savriez tant exploitier,
Por riens que vos seüssiez fere,
444 Que je fusse aussi debonnere
Envers vos con j'estoie orainz.
Li hom se doit bien garder ainz

f. 56c

Your words are very ill-matched
With your beautiful eyes,
404 Which just now welcomed me better
Upon my arrival, and more agreeably.
Now I assure you that they truly
Acted in a courtly manner;
408 For, since the very first time they could see,
They have in truth seen no man
Who so wished to be accepted as your vassal
As I do, in all sincerity.
412 Sweet lady, because of your nobility,
Please put it to the test:
Retain me as your knight
And, when it pleases you, as your lover.
416 For within a year and a half
You will have made me so worthy,
Both in arms and in the castle,
And instilled so much good in me,
420 That the name 'lover'
—God willing—will never be denied me.'
—'The presumption you have shown,
She replied, 'does you proud!
424 I meant nothing by my look
Except courtesy and good manners;
But you have foolishly interpreted it
In a different way; and this I regret.
428 Were I not such a well-mannered person
It would displease me greatly;
But it happens quite often,
When some noble lady
432 Shows courtliness and honour
Towards a knight,
That suitors like him rush to the conclusion
That they have achieved something quite different!
436 In you I have the proof:
This is exactly how you understood it.
You would have done better to set
A net outside to catch pigeons;
440 For, if the year and a half
Were as long as three whole years,
There is nothing you could do,
No matter how hard you tried,
444 That would lead me to be so generous
Towards you as I was before.
A man should desist from

Qu'il se vant de chose qu'il n'ait!
448 Or ne set cil, n'en dit n'en fait,
Qu'il puist fere ne devenir.
'Au mains n'en puis je pas venir,
Dame', fet il, 'que j'ai esté.
452 Pitié et debonereté
A il en vos, je n'en dout mie;
N'onques ne failli a amie
Nus en la fin qui bien amast.
456 Si me sui mis en mer sanz mast
Por noier, aussi con Tristans.
Comment que j'aie esté lonc tens
Sires de ma volenté fere,
460 A cè ai torné mon afere
Que, se je n'ai merci anuit,
Ja mes ne cuit que m'i anuit
Nule, quant g'istrai de cesti.
464 Un tel plet m'a mes cuers basti
Quë en vos s'est mis sanz congié.'
En faisant un petit ditié,
Fet ele: 'Ainz mes tele n'oï!
468 Or puet bien demorer issi,
Puis que voi que n'est pas a gas.
Encore, par Saint Nicolas,
Cuidoie que vos gabissiez!
472 'Certes, dame, se vos fussiez
Une povre garce esgaree,
Bele douce dame anoree,
Ne m'en seüsse je entremetre.'
476 Que qu'il puist dire ne prometre,
f. 56d A ce ne li puet rien valoir
Qu'il en doie ja joie avoir
De li, si ne set quë il face.
480 Li vermaus li monte en la face
Et les lermes du cuer as eulz,
Si que li blans et li vermeulz
Li moille contreval le vis.
484 Or est il bien la dame avis
Ne li fausse pas de couvent
Ses cuers, ainz set bien que sovent
L'en sovient il, aillors qu'ilue[c].
488 Certes, s'ele plorast avec,
La dame molt fesist grant bien;
Ele ne cuidast ja por rien
Qu'il deüst estre si destroiz.

Counting his chickens before they are hatched.’
448 Now he does not know, either in word or deed,
What to do or what will become of him.
‘I cannot be any worse off because of it,
My lady, than I have been.
452 Pity and generosity
Are to be found in you, I have no doubt;
Never has a lover failed to win his lady
In the end, if his love were true.
456 Thus I have put to sea without a mast,
To drown there, just like Tristan.
Although I have for a long time been
In full control of my actions,
460 I have reached such a point
That, unless tonight I meet with some compassion,
I declare that I shall never see another night,
Even if I survive this one.
464 My heart has attacked me so cruelly
That it has lodged itself in you without leave.’
Chiding him,
She said: ‘I have never heard such a thing!
468 It can be left at that
Since I see it is no joking matter.
Still, by Saint Nicholas,
I believed you were having sport with me!’
472 —‘Truly, my lady, even if you were
A poor vagrant peasant-girl,
Fair, sweet, worthy lady,
I would never bring myself to do such a thing.’
476 Whatever he may say or promise,
It did not aid
His prospects of gaining her favour;
He just did not know what to do.
480 His cheeks became crimson
And tears rose from his heart to his eyes,
Until both white and red
Streaked all down his face.
484 At this point it seemed to the lady that
Her heart was not deceiving her,
Rather she knew quite well that
She often thought of him, not merely there and then.
488 Certainly, if she were to weep with him,
The lady would have done herself much good;
She could never have imagined
That he might be so distressed.

492 'Sire', dist ele, 'n'est pas droiz
Que je ainme vos nē autrē home,
Que j'ai mon seignor molt preudome
Qui molt me sert bien et enneure.'
496 'Ha! dame', fet il, 'a bone eure!
De ce doit il estre molt liez!
[Mes se] gentillece et pitiez
Vos prenoit de moi, et franchise,
500 Ja nus qui d'amors chant ne lise
Ne vos en tenroit a pieur;
Ainz feriez au siecle honeur
Se vos me voliez amer—
504 A une voie d'outremer
Porriez l'aumosne aatir!
'Or me fetes de vos partir,
Sire!' fet ele, 'c'est plus let!
508 Mes cuers ne m'i sueffre ne let
Acorder en nule maniere;
Por ce, s'est oiseuse proiere,
Si vos proi que vos en soufrez?
512 'Ha! dame', fet il, 'mort m'avez!
Gardez, nu fetes mes por rien,
Mes fetes cortoisie et bien:
[Retenez] moi par un joel,
516 Ou par çainture ou par anel,
f. 58a Ou vos [recevez] un des miens;
Et je vos creant qu'il n'iert biens
Que chevalier face por dame—
520 Se j'en devoie perdre l'ame,
Si m'ait Dex—que je n'en face.
Vo douz vis et vo clere face
Me puent de pou ostagier;
524 Je sui toz en vostre dangier,
Qanque jē ai force et pooir.'
'Sire, je ne veil pas avoir',
Fet la dame, 'le lox sans preu.
528 Bien sai c'on vos tient a molt preu,
Et s'est pieça chose seüe.
Bien seroie ore deceüe,
Se ge vos metoie en la voie
532 De m'amor, et je n'i avoie
Le cuer: ce seroit vilenie.
Il est une grant cortoisie
D'issir hors du blasme qui puet.'
536 'Dire tot el vos en estuet,

492 'My lord', she said, 'it is not right
 That I love you or another man,
 For I have my husband who is most worthy
 And who serves me well and honours me.'
 496 —'Ah! My lady', he replied, 'how I envy him!
 That must make him so content!
 [But if] you showed kindness and compassion
 Towards me, and generosity too,
 500 Then no one who sings or reads of love
 Would think any the worse of you;
 On the contrary, you would be showing the world honour
 If you deigned to love me—
 504 You could compare the value of your good deed
 To that of a pilgrimage to the Holy Land!
 —'Pray, now allow me to depart,
 My lord!' she said, 'for shame!
 508 My heart does not allow it or
 In no wise lets me agree to it;
 Therefore it is a useless request,
 And I beg you to desist from it!
 512 —'Ah! My lady', he replied, 'You are the very death of me!
 Have a care, do not be so dismissive,
 But do something that is just and courtly:
 [Take me into your service] by giving me a jewel,
 516 Or a belt or a ring,
 Or accept one of mine;
 And I assure you that there will be no service
 A knight renders a lady—
 520 If I should lose my soul,
 God help me—that I would not accomplish.
 Your sweet face and soft features
 Can retain me for very little;
 524 I am entirely at your disposal
 Insofar as I have the strength and power.'
 —'My lord, I do not wish to have praise',
 Said the lady, 'without profit.
 528 I am well aware that you are held in high esteem,
 And that this has long been the case.
 It would be most deceitful of me
 If I were to open the way
 532 To your love, and if I had no love
 In my heart: this would be contemptible.
 It is a sign of great courtliness
 To avoid reproach whenever possible.'
 536 'You must speak otherwise,

Dame', fet il, 'por moi garir!
Se vos me lessiez morir
Sanz estre amez, ce seroit teche,
540 Se cil biaux vis plains de simplece
Estoit omecide de moi.
Il en covient prendre conroi
Prochain en aucune maniere.
544 Dame de biauté et ma[n]iere
De toz biens: por Deu, gardez il'
Cil biau mot plesant et poli
Le font en un pensé chaïr
548 D'endroit ce qu'ele velt oïr
Sa requeste, et s'en ot pitié.
El ne le tient mie a faintié
Les soupirs, les lermes qu'il pleure;
552 Ainz dit que force li ceurt seure
D'amors, qui tot ce li fet fere
Ne que jamés si debonnere
Ami n'avra, s'el n'a cestui;
556 Mes [ce] quë onques mes fors hui
N'en parla, li vient a merveille.
Avec ce penser le travaille
Resons, qui d'autre part l'opose
560 Qu'ele se gart de fere chose
Dont ele se repente au loing.
[A] celui qui ert en grant soing
Du penser ou ele ert entree,
564 A molt bele voie mostree
D'une grant cortoisie fere
Amors, qui en tant maint afere
A esté voiseuse et soutilie.
568 Entrus quë estoit la gentille
Ou grant penser ou elle estoit,
Cil tret erranment de son doit
Son anel, si l'a mis el sien;
572 Puis fist après un greignor sen,
Qui li derompi son penser,
Quë ainz ne li lut apenser
De l'anel qu'ele avoit el doit.
576 A ce qu'ele ne s'en gardoit,
'Dame', fel il, 'a vo congié!
Sachiez que mon pooir et gié
Est toz en vo conmandement.'
580 Cil se part de li erranment,
Et si conpaingnon ambedui.

My lady,' he replied, 'to save my life!
If you were to let me die unloved,
It would be a grave failing
540 If your fair face full of candour
Were to be the death of me.
We must quickly find
Some solution.
544 Most beautiful lady, skilled
In all that is good: for God's sake, see what you can do!
 These pleasing and courteous words
Led her to muse
548 Over the fact that she wanted to hear
His petition, and that she felt sorry for him.
She never doubted
His sighs and the tears he shed;
552 Rather, she said to herself, it was a powerful attack
By Love which made him act as he did,
And that she would never find such a noble
Lover as he, if she refused this man;
556 But that he had never before today
Spoken of it filled her with astonishment.
Along with these thoughts reason
Tormented her, which stated the opposing point of view:
560 That she should beware of doing something
She would regret at a later date.
He, who was all consumed
By her reverie,
564 Was shown the ingenious way
To a gesture of great elegance
By the Lady Love, who has time and again in these matters
Revealed herself to be shrewd and subtle.
568 Whilst the noble lady was
Lost in deep thought,
He quickly took his ring from
His finger and slipped it on to hers;
572 Then he did something even more skilful,
Breaking her train of thought
So that she had no time to be aware
Of the ring now on her finger.
576 And while she still noticed nothing,
'My lady', he said, 'with your permission I will leave you!
Be assured that I and all my men
Are entirely at your command.'
580 He swiftly took leave of her,
Along with his two companions.

Nus ne set la reson, fors lui,
Por qoi il s'en depart issis.
584 Il fu soupiranz et pensis;
Venuz est au cheval, si monte.
Fet cele a qui le plus en monte
De lui remettre en sa leëce:
588 'Troit s'en il a certes? Qu' est-ce?
Ce ne fist onques chevaliers!
Je cuidasse c'uns anz entiers
Li fust assez mains lonc d'un jor,
592 Por qu'il fust o moi [a] sejour:
Et il m'a ja si tost lessie!
Ahi! s'or m'i fusse plessie
Vers lui de parole ou de fet!
596 Por les faus semblanz qu'il m'a fet,
Doit on mes tot le mont meinscroire.
Qui por plorer le vosist croire,
Et por fere ses faus soupirs,
600 Si me consaut li Sains Espirs,
Ja por ce n'i perdist il rien!
Nus ne guilast ore si bien
Ne si bel, cē est or du mains!
604 Atant envoie vers ses mains
Un regart, si choisi l'anel.
Toz li sans dusqu'au doit [manel]
De son pié li esvanoï;
608 N'onques mes si ne s'esbahi,
Ne n'ot de rien si grant merveille.
La face qu'ele avoit vermeille
L'en devint trestote enpalie.
612 'Qu'est ce?' fet ele, 'Dex aïe!
Je voi ci l'anel qui fu siens!
De tant sui je bien en mon sens
Que je vi orains en son doit
616 Cestui; ce fis mon, orendroit.
Et por qoi l'a il ou mien mis?
Ja n'est il mie mes amis
Et si pens je qu'il le cuide estre.
620 Or est il, par Deu! plus que mestre
De cest art; ne sai qui l'aprist.
Diex! comment est ce qu'il me mist
A ce que je sui si soutise
624 Que je ne m'en sui garde prise
De l'anel, qu'il m'a ou doi mis?
Or dira que c'est mes amis:

No one but he knew the reason,
Behind the manner of his exit.
584 He was sighing and filled with melancholy;
He came to his horse and he mounted.
She who mattered the most to him
If he were ever to recover his happiness said:
588 'Could he really be leaving? What does this mean?
No knight has ever acted thus!
I should have thought that an entire year
Would have seemed to him to pass less quickly than a day,
592 Provided that he remained with me:
And now he has left me so soon!
Oh! How disastrous it would have been, had I been
More accommodating to him in word or deed!
596 What with the pretence he put on for me,
Everyone must be suspected.
If any woman were persuaded to believe him,
On account of his weeping and his false sighing,
600 May the Holy Spirit preserve me,
He would not have been the loser!
No one has ever played such a clever
Or neat trick, that is the least one could say!
604 Thereupon she glanced at her hands
And noticed the ring.
All her blood drained away
As far as her little toe;
608 She had never been so startled,
Nor had she ever been so astonished by anything.
Her face, which had been crimson,
Became completely pale.
612 'What is this?' she said, 'God help me!
I can see here the ring that was his!
I am sound enough in mind
To know that just now I saw it
616 On his finger; just now, I know I did.
And why has he slipped it on to mine?
He is certainly not my lover,
Yet I think that he believes he is.
620 By God, he is a past master
Of this art; I do not know who taught him.
God! How is it that he has put me
In such a state
624 That I was not sharp enough to notice
The ring that he has put on my finger?
Now he will claim to be my lover:

628 Ce fera mon, je n'en dout mie!
Dira il voir? sui je s'amie?
Nenil! por noient le droit!
Ainz li manderé orendroit
Quë il viengne parler a mi,
632 S'il veut que le tiengne a ami;
Si li dirai qu'il le repraingne.
Je ne cuit pas qu'il en mespraigne
Vers moi, s'il ne velt que jou hace.'
636 Atant conmande c'on li face
f. 58d Venir un vallet tout monté.
Ses puceles l'ont tant hasté
Qu'il li est venuz tout montez.
640 'Amis', dist ele, 'or tost, hurtez!
Poingniez après lo chevalier!
Dites li, si conme il a chier
M'amor, qu'il ne voist en avant,
644 Mes viengne arrere maintenant
Parler a moi d'un sien afere.'
'Dame', fet il, 'je quit bien fere
Vostre volenté dusqu'en son!
648 Atant s'em part a esperon
Aprés lo chevalier poingnant,
Cui Amors aloit destraingnant
De cele qui l'envoie querre.
652 En mains d'une liue de terre
L'a il ataint et retorné.
Sachiez qu'il se tint a buer né
De ce c'on l'avoit remandé
656 Il n'a pas le mes demandé
Por quoi on remandé l'avoit;
Li aneaus qu'ele avoit ou doit
Ert l'achoisson du remander.
660 Ce li fist son oirre amender,
Qu'il tarde cele qu'el le voie.
Li escuiers s'est en la voie
Du retor a lui acointiez.
664 Hé! Diex! conme il fust ore liez
Du retorner, se por ce non
Qu'il estoit en gra[n]t soupeçon
Qu'el ne li veille l'anel rendre!
668 Il dit qu'il s'iroit ainçois rendre
A Citiaus, qu'il le represist.
'Ne cuit pas qu'ele mespresist'
Fet il, 'envers moi de cele oeuvre.'

He will indeed, I have no doubt at all!
628 Will he be speaking the truth? Am I his friend?
Not at all! He would be speaking in vain!
Indeed, I will summon him at once
To come and speak with me,
632 If he wants me to consider him a friend;
And I will tell him to take it back.
I do not believe he will be offended,
If he does not want me to hate him.’
636 With this she ordered that
A mounted servant be sent to her.
Her handmaidens urged him to make such haste
That he arrived before her already on horseback.
640 ‘Friend’, she said, ‘Now quickly, get going!
Spur on after the knight!
Tell him, as he holds my friendship
Dear, not to continue on,
644 But to return at once
To speak with me on a matter concerning him.’
—‘My lady’, he replied, ‘I shall assuredly carry out
Your wishes to the letter!’
648 With that he galloped away,
Spurring on after the knight,
Whom Love was tormenting with thoughts
Of the very lady who was sending for him.
652 In less than a league
The messenger reached him and turned him back.
You can be sure that he thought himself most fortunate
To have been summoned back;
656 He did not ask the messenger
Why he had been called back;
The ring she was wearing on her finger
Was the reason for the summons.
660 This made him quicken his pace
For she was impatient to see him.
The servant became acquainted with him
On the journey back.
664 O God! How happy he would have been
To return, were it not for the fact that
He was very fearful
That she wanted to give him the ring back!
668 He said to himself that he would rather become a monk
At Cîteaux than take it back.
‘I do not think she would do me the offence’,
He added, ‘of committing such an action.’

- 672 La joie du retor li cuevre
Le penser dont il ert en doute.
[Il est venuz a tant de route]
Conme il ot vers la forterece.
- f. 59a 676 La dame, qui en grant destrece
Estoit, et sor li desfendant,
Ist de la sale descendant
Pas por pas aval le degré.
- 680 Porpenseëment et de gré
Vient en la cort por li deduire;
L'anelet voit en son doit luire
Qu'ele veut rendre au chevalier.
- 684 'S'il m'en fet ja point de dangier',
Fet ele, 'et il nu velt reprendre,
Por ce ne l'iré je pas prandre
Par ses biaux cheveus. Se je puis,
- 688 Ainz le menré desor ce puis;
Si parlerai illec a lui.
S'il nu velt prandre sanz anui,
Je rompré molt tost la parole.
- 692 Conment? je n'iere pas si fole
Que je le giete enmi ia voie!
Ou dont? en tel leu c'on nel voie:
Cë ert ou puis, n'est pas mençonge!
- 696 Ja puis n'en ert ne que de songe
Chose dite qui me messiece.
Dont n'ai gé ore esté grant piece
O mon seignor sanz vilanie?
- 700 Se cist, par sa chevalerie
Et par soupirer devant mi,
Veut ja que ju tiengne a ami
A cest premerain parlement,
- 704 Il avroit ançois durement
Deservi, se ju devoie estre!
Atant est cil entrez en l'estre
Qui de tot ce ne se prent garde.
- 708 Il voit cele que molt esgarde
Volentiers aler par la cort;
Il descent lues et vers li cort,
Si con chevaliers fet vers dame.
- 712 Si dui conpaignon ne nule ame
De l'ostel ne li font anui.
Fet il: 'Bone aventure ait hui
Ma dame, a qui je sui et iere!'
- 716 Ne l'a or en autre maniere

672 His joy at returning hid
The thoughts which made him apprehensive.
[He returned with all his retinue]
To the castle.

676 The lady, who was in much distress,
And in conflict with herself,
Left her chamber, descending
The stairway step-by-step.

680 Deliberately and by choice
She came into the courtyard to pass the time;
She caught sight on her finger of the glimmering ring
That she intended to return to the knight.

684 'If ever he makes any objection to it',
She said, 'and refuses to take it back,
I will not slap him in his face!
If I am able,

688 I will bring him over instead to this well;
Then I will talk to him there.
If he is not prepared to take it back without any fuss,
I will break off the conversation immediately.

692 How? I will not be so foolish
As to throw it down on the path!
Where then? Somewhere no one can see it:
Of course! Into the well, and that is no lie!

696 No-one will ever have occasion to say or even to imagine
Anything to my discredit about it.
Have I not lived faithfully
With my husband for a long time?

700 If simply on the strength of his chivalry
And sighing in my presence,
He wishes me to consider him as my lover
At this first conversation,

704 He would have deserved nothing but shame
If I had allowed myself to be his!
At that moment he arrived at the lady's castle,
But knew nothing about her thoughts.

708 He saw her—and most willingly his eyes followed her
As she walked in the courtyard;
He instantly dismounted and ran towards her,
As befits any knight approaching his lady.

712 Neither his two companions nor anyone
From the castle stood in his way.
He said: 'May my lady, to whom I belong,
Enjoy good fortune today!'

716 With these words, he could not exactly be accused

f. 59b

Ferue du poing lez l'oïe;
Ele a hui mainte chose oïe
Qui molt li touche pres du cuer.
720 'Sire', fet ele, 'alons la fuer
Sëoir sor ce puis por deduire.'
Or n'est il riens qui li puist nuire,
Ce dit, puis qu'el l'aqueut si bell!
724 Or cuide bien par son anel
Avoir et s'amor et sa grace.
Il n'est encor preu en la trace
Por qoi il se doive esjoïr;
728 Ainz qu'il peüst lez li seïr,
Ot il chose qui li desplet.
'Sire', fet ele, 's'il vos plet,
Dites moi, la vostre merci:
732 Cest vostre anel que je tien ci -
Por qoi le me donnastes ore?'
'Douce dame,' fet il, 'encore
Quant m'en irai si l'avrez vos;
736 Si vos dirai, ce sachiez vos—
Si nel tenez pas a faintié—
De tant vaut il miez la moitié
Qu'il a en vostre doit esté.
740 S'il vos plesoit, en cest esté
Le savroient mi anemi,
Se vos m'aviez a ami
Reçut, et je vos a amie.'
744 'En non Dieu! ce n'i a il mie'
Fet ele, 'ançois i a tot el:
Ja puis n'istré de cest ostel
Si m'aït Dex, se morte non,
748 Que vos avroiz ne cri ne non
De m'amor, por rien que je voie.
Vos n'en estes pas en la voie,
Ainz en estes molt forvoiez.
752 Tenez! je veil que vos l'aiez,
Vostre anel! que je n'en voil mie.
Ja mar me tenrez a amie,
Por garde que j'en aie fete!
756 Or se despoire, or se deshete
Cil qui cuidoit avoir tot pris.
f. 59c Fet il: 'Mains en vaudroit mes pris,
Se c'ert a certes que je voi;
760 Onques mes nule joie n'oi
Qui si tost me tornast a ire.'

Of brutalising her—far from it!
 Today she had heard many things
 That touched her close to the heart.
 720 ‘My lord’, she said, ‘let us go outside
 And take our ease, sitting together beside the well.’
 Now there was nothing to hinder him,
 He said to himself, since she welcomed him so warmly!
 724 He was now confident that, thanks to his ring,
 He would earn her love and favour.
 However, he had not yet done enough
 To allow him to rejoice;
 728 Before he could sit down beside her
 He heard something which displeased him.
 ‘My lord’, she said, ‘if you please,
 Tell me, for pity’s sake:
 732 This ring of yours that I hold here—
 Why did you give it to me just now?’
 —‘Sweet lady’, he replied, ‘you will
 Still have it when I leave;
 736 Indeed I will tell you, be assured—
 And do not think I am deceiving you—
 That its value has increased by half again
 Because it has been on your finger.
 740 Were it to please you, this summer
 My tournament opponents would be made aware
 That you had accepted me as your lover
 And I had won your favour.’
 744 —‘In God’s name! There is no question of that,’
 She said, ‘rather, the situation is quite different:
 I will never leave this house again,
 So help me God, unless as a lifeless corpse,
 748 If you were ever to win a reputation or renown
 As my lover, for any reason as far as I can see.
 You are not on the right track,
 In fact you have gone badly astray.
 752 Here! I want you to have it,
 Your ring! I want none of it.
 Woe betide you if you consider me your mistress
 Just because I had it in my keeping!’
 756 Now he despaired and grieved,
 He who thought it was all won.
 He said: ‘My reputation would be worth much less
 If what I see were to be true;
 760 Never did any joy I knew
 So quickly turn into anguish.’

‘Conment donques’, fet ele, ‘sire,
Avez i vos anui ne honte
764 De moi, a qui noient ne monte
Vers vos d’amor ne de lignage?
Je ne faz mie grant outrage
Se ge vos voil vostre anel rendre.
768 Il n’i a, voir, fors du reprendre,
Car je n’ai droit ou retenir,
Puis que je ne vos voil tenir
A ami, car je mesferoie.’
772 ‘Diex!’ fet il, ‘se ge me feroie
D’un coutel tres par mi la cuisse,
Ne me feroie tele angoisse
Conme ces paroles me font!
776 Mal fel qui destruit et confont
Ce dont on puet estre au deseure.
Trop me cort force d’Amor seure
Por vos, et met en grant destrece;
780 Ne ja mar [baëroit] a ce
Nule du mont que jel repreingne.
Ja puis, a foi, Dex ne me praigne
A bone fin, que jel prendrai!
784 Ainz l’avrez, e si vos lerai
Mon cuer avec, en vo servise;
Qu’il n’est riens qui a vo devise
Vos serve si bien ne si bel,
788 Conme entre mon cuer et l’anel.’
Fet ele: ‘N’en parlez vos onques,
Car vos en perdrîez adonques
M’acointance et ma seürté,
792 Se vos, outre ma volenté,
Me volez fere a vos m’esprendre.
Il le vos covient a reprendre!’
‘[Non] fet!’ ‘[Si] fet!’ la n’a que dire:
796 Ou vos estes molt plus que sire,
Se vostre anuis a ce m’esforce
Que vos le me voilliez par force,
Maugré mien, fere retenir.
800 Tenez! ja mes nu quier tenir.’
‘Si ferez.’ ‘Je non ferai, voir!
Volez le me vos fere avoir
A force?’ ‘Nenil, voir, amie.
804 Bien sai ce pooir n’ai ge mie:
Ce poise moi, si m’aït Diex!
Ja puis vilenie ne dues

f. 59d

—‘My lord, how can it possibly be’, she replied,
 ‘That have you received any pain or shame
 764 From me, who has no interest in you at all,
 Neither through love nor kinship?
 I am committing no great outrage
 If I wish to return your ring to you.
 768 In truth, there is nothing you can do but take it back,
 For I have no right to keep it,
 since I do not want you to be
 My lover; in fact it would be to act ill.’
 772 —‘God!’ he replied, ‘if I were to thrust
 A knife into my thigh,
 It would not inflict such pain
 As do these words!
 776 It is wrong to destroy and crush
 Something which is in your control.
 The power of love assails me greatly
 Because of you, and has me in much distress;
 780 No other woman in the world would
 So do me such ill as to insist I take back the ring.
 Upon my faith, may the Lord not receive me in heaven
 If ever I take it back!
 784 Rather you will have it, and also I will leave
 My heart with it, in your service;
 For there is nothing which, according to your desire,
 Will serve you as well or as completely,
 788 As both my heart and my ring.’
 She replied: ‘Never again speak of this,
 Since you would instantly lose
 My friendship and my trust,
 792 If you, against my wishes,
 Insist on making me angry with you.
 It is vital that you take it back.’
 —‘[No] it is not.’—‘[Yes] it is! There is nothing more to say:
 796 You are indeed far too domineering,
 Pestering me and pushing me to the point
 Of insisting by brute force
 That I keep it, against all my wishes.
 800 Here! I never wish to hold it again.’
 —‘But you will.’—‘Indeed I will not!
 Do you want to impose it on me
 By force?’—‘Indeed not, sweet friend,
 804 I understand that I do not have the power:
 I regret it, God help me!
 Never more will disgrace or grief

808 Ne m'avenroit, c'est ma creance,
Se vos en un poi d'esperance
Me metiez, por conforter.'
'Ausi bien porriez hurter
A ce perron le vostre chief,
812 [Que vous en venissiez a chief!]
Si lou que vos le repreingniez.'
'Il m'est vis que vos m'apreingniez',
Fet il, "a chanter de Renart.
816 Je me leroie ainz une hart
Lacier ou col, que jel preïssel
Ne sai que je vos en feïsse
Lonc plet, qu'au reprandre n'a rien.'
820 'Sire', fet ele, 'or voi je bien
Que ce vos fet fere enresdie,
[Qant] parole que je [vos] die
Ne vos puet au prandre mener.
824 Or vos veil jë aconjurer,
Par la grant foi que me devez,
Et proier que le reprenez,
Si chier con vos avez m'amor.'
828 Or n'i a il, en Dieu amor,
Tor c'un seul: qu'il ne li coviengne
A reprandrë, ou qu'el nu tiengne
A desloial ou a jengleus.
832 'Diex!' fet il, 'li qex de ces geus
Partiz m'est or li mains mauvais?
Or sai je bien, se ge li lais,
Ele dira je ne l'aim mie.
836 Qui tant estraint croste que mie
En saut, ce par est trop estraint!
Cis sairemenz m'a si ataint
Que li lessiers ne m'i est preuz.
840 Ançois cuit je que li miens preuz
Et m'onors i soit au reprandre,
Se je ne voil de molt mesprandre
Vers ma gentil dame anoree,
844 Qui s'amor m'a aconjuree
Et la grant foi que je li doi.
Quant je l'avrai mis en mon doi,
Si ert il siens, la ou il iert.
848 Se ge faz ce qu'ele me quiert,
Je n'i puis avoir s'enor non.
N'est pas amis qui jusqu'en son
Ne fet au voloir de s'amie;

f. 61a

Engulf me, it is my belief,
 808 If you give me
 A little hope, to encourage me.
 —‘You might as well bang
 Your head against this mounting block,
 812 [Before ever your wish comes true!]
 So I advise you to take it back.’
 —It seems to me that you are insisting’,
 He replied, ‘that I change the subject.
 816 I would rather feel the hangman’s noose
 Around my neck than take back the ring!
 I do not know what more there is to say;
 There is simply no question of my taking it back.’
 820 —‘Sir’, she said, ‘I now understand
 That obstinacy is making you do this,
 [When] nothing I can say [to you]
 Can lead you to accept it.
 824 Now I wish to beseech you,
 By the great faith that you owe me,
 And beg you to take it back,
 As your love for me is so dear to your heart.’
 828 Now, by the love of God,
 There was only one way out: he must agree
 To take it back from her, or she will take him
 To be a faithless prattler.
 832 ‘God!’ he said, ‘which one of these
 Two alternatives is the less harmful to me?
 It is quite clear, if I leave it for her,
 She will say that I do not love her at all.
 836 If one so grasps the crust that the crumb
 Is squeezed out, the grasping is too strong!
 This declaration has put me in such a situation
 Where leaving the ring for her is not in my interest.
 840 On the contrary, I think that my profit
 And honour may be served by taking it back,
 If I do not wish to behave very badly
 Towards my honoured, noble lady,
 844 Who has so beseeched me by my love for her,
 And by the great faith that I owe her.
 If I put it back on my finger,
 It will remain hers, wherever it is.
 848 If I do as she asks of me,
 I will gain nothing but honour.
 He is not a true lover who does not
 Do his lady’s bidding to the utmost;

852 Et sachiez que cil n'ainme mie
Qui riens qu'il puisse en lait a fere.
Si doi atorner mon afere
Du tot en son conmandement,
856 Car il n'en doit estre autrement
S'a la seue volenté non.
Il na noma pas par son non
Quant il dit: 'Dame, je[] prendrai
860 Par un covent: que j'en ferai,
Aprés la vostre volenté
La moie, encor ait il esté
En ce doit que je voi si bel.'
864 'Et je vos rent donques l'anel,
Par covent que vos l'en faciez.'
N'est envielliz nē esfaciez
Li sens du vaillant chevalier.
868 Tot [esprendanz] de cuer entier
Le prist tot porpenseëment,
Si le resgarde doucement.
Au rebrandre dit: 'Grant merciz!
872 Por ce n'est pas li ors nerciz,'
Fet il, 's'il vient de vo biau doit.'
Cele s'en sozrist, qui cuidoit
Qu'il le deüst remetre el sien;
876 Mes il fist un plus greingnor sen,
Dont molt grant joie li vint puis.
Il s'est acoutez seur le puis,
Qui n'estoit que toise et demie
f. 61b 880 Parfonz, si ne meschoisi mie
De l'eau, qui ert bele et clere,
L'ombre de la dame qui ere
La riens ou mont que plus amot.
884 'Sachiez', fet il, 'tot a un mot,
Que je n'en reporterai mie;
Ainz l'avra ja, ma douce amie,
La riens que j'aing miex enprés vos.'
888 'Diex!' fet ele, 'ci n'a que nos!
Ou l'avrez vos si tost trovee?'
'En non Deu, ja vos ert mostree
La preuz, la gentil qui l'avra.'
892 'Ou est?' 'En non Deu, vez la la,
Vostre bel ombre qui l'atent!
L'anel a pris, et si l'i tent.
'Tenez!' fet il, 'ma douce amie:
896 Puis que ma dame n'en velt mie,

852 And know this, that a man who desists from doing
 A thing of which he is capable does not love at all.
 And so everything I decide to do
 Must be governed by her command,
 856 Since there is nothing more for it
 Than to do her bidding.
 He did not call her by her name
 When he said: 'Lady, I will take [it]
 860 On one condition: that,
 After having done your bidding,
 I may do with it as I will, for all that it has been
 On that finger which is so beautiful to my eyes.'
 864 —'And so I return the ring to you
 On the understanding that you have set out.
 The brave knight's wits
 Had not grown old or faded.
 868 His whole heart [enflamed] with passion,
 He took it deliberately,
 And looked at it fondly.
 As he took it back, he said: 'Thanks be,
 872 That the gold has not turned black',
 He went on, 'since it has come from your lovely finger.'
 She smiled at this, believing
 That he would put it back on his own;
 876 But he did something much more meaningful,
 From which he would later gain much joy.
 He leaned against the well,
 Which was only a six-foot or more
 880 Deep, and he did not fail
 To recognise in the clear, still water
 The reflection of the lady whom
 He loved more than anything in the world.
 884 'Rest assured', he said, 'for once and for all,
 That I will not take it away;
 Rather, my sweet lady will have it at once,
 The person I love best after you.'
 888 —'God!' she said, 'there is just us here!
 Where have you found her so quickly?'
 —'In God's name, the noble, worthy lady
 Will be shown to you immediately.'
 892 —'Where is she?'—'By heavens, see her there,
 Your lovely reflection which is waiting for it!
 He took the ring, and held it out to her.
 'Here!' he said, 'my sweet lover:
 896 Since my lady wants nothing of it,

Vos le prendrez bien sanz mellee.
L'eaue s'est un petit troblee
Au chëoir que li aneaus fist;
900 Et quant li ombres se desfist,
'Vez, dame!' fet il, 'or l'a pris.
Molt en est amendez mes pris,
Quant ce, qui de vos est, l'enporte.
904 Car n'eüst or ne huis ne porte
La jus! si s'en venroit par ci,
Por dire la seue merci
De l'oneur que fete m'en a.'
908 Hé! Diex! si buer i asena
A cele cortoisie fere!
C'onques mes riens de son afere
Ne fu a la dame plesans.
912 Toz reverdis et esprenans,
Li a geté ses eulz [es] siens;
Molt vient a honme de grant sens
Qui fet cortoisie au besoing.
916 'Orainz ert de m'amor si loing
Cil hon, et or en est si prés!
Onques mes devant nê après
N'avint, puis que Adanz mort la pome,
f. 61c 920 Si bele cortoisie a home!
Ne sai comment il l'en membra
Quant por m'amor a mon ombre a
Jeté son anel enz ou puis.
924 Or ne li doi je, ne ne puis,
Plus vëer lo don de m'amor!
Ne sai por quoi je li demor,
C'onques hom si bien ne si bel
928 Ne conquist Amor par anel,
Ne miex ne doit avoir amie.'
Sachiez qu'ele nu bleça mie
Quant ele dit: 'Biaus douz amis,
932 Tot vostre cuer ont el mien mis
Cil doz mot et cil plesant fet,
Et li dons que vos avez fet
A mon ombre, en l'onor de moi.
936 Or metez le mien en vo doi:
Tenez! je vos doing conme amie.
Je cuit que vos ne l'avrez mie
Mains du vostre, encor soit il pire.'
940 'De l'onor', fet il, 'de l'Empire
Ne me fesist on pas si lié!'

You will certainly take it without argument.’
The water rippled gently
As the ring fell into it;
900 And when the reflection broke up,
‘Look, my lady’, he said, ‘now she has accepted it.
My reputation is greatly enhanced,
Since she, who emanates from you, has taken it.
904 Would that there were a door or gate
Down there! Then she could come here,
So that I might thank her
For the honour that she has done me.’
908 Oh! God! How fortunate that he embarked upon
Such a courtly gesture!
Never had anything he had done
Been so pleasing to the lady.
912 Full of emotion and passion,
She turned her eyes [to] his;
Great reward comes to the man wise enough
To be courtly when needs must.
916 ‘Just now this man was so far
From my love, and now he is so near to it!
Never, either before or after,
Since Adam bit into the apple,
920 Has a man made such an exquisite, courtly gesture!
I cannot imagine how he thought of it,
When for love of my reflection he threw
His ring into the well.
924 Nor must I, or can I
Any longer refuse him the gift of my love!
I do not know why I am keeping him waiting,
For never did a man conquer love
928 So well or so expertly with a ring,
Nor more deserve to have a lover.’
Rest assured that she did not offend him at all,
When she said: ‘Fair, sweet friend,
932 Now your heart has joined with mine
By these fine words and pleasing ways,
And by the gift that you have made
To my reflection, in my honour.
936 Now slip my ring on your finger:
Here! I give it to you as your love.
I believe that you will not value it
Less than yours, even if it is poorer.’
940 ‘Being lord of the Empire’, he said,
‘Would not make me as happy!’

Molt se sont andui envoisié
Sor le puis de tant conme il peurent.
944 Des besiers dont il s'entrepeurent
Va chascun la douçor au cuer.
Lor bel oel n'en gientent pas puer
La parole, cè est du mains!
948 De tel geu conme on fet des mains
Estoit ele dame et il mestre,
Fors de celui qui ne puet estre,
Dont il lor covendra molt bien!
952 N'i covient mes penser [de] rien
Jehan Renart a lor afere!
S'il a nule autre chose a fere
Bien puet son penser metre aillors;
956 Que puis que lor sens et Amors
Ont mis andeus lor cuers ensemble,
Du geu qui remaint, ce me senble,
Venront il bien a chief andui;
f. 61d 960 Et or s'en taise a tant meshui!
Ici fenist li Lais de l'Ombre:
Contez, vos qui savez de nombre!

They both took as much pleasure
As they could, sitting there beside the well.
944 They regaled each other with kisses
Whose sweetness penetrated them both to the heart.
Their handsome eyes did not prevent
Speech, to say the very least!
948 Both he and she felt free
To make such sport with their hands,
Except for that sport for which the occasion did not allow,
And that situation will soon be put right!
952 There is no need for Jehan Renart
To think any further about their business!
If he has other things in mind,
He would do well to direct his attention elsewhere!
956 For since their own wit and the power of Love
Have brought their hearts together,
The sport which remains, it seems to me,
They will both cope with quite well;
960 And from now on there should be silence on the matter!
Here ends the Lay of the Reflection:
Recount it all, you who know how to count!

Rejected Readings

- v. 5 *A garçon*
- v. 8 MS repeats this line in error
- v. 27 *A avoir ne amis* (see Notes)
- v. 44 *A ce qui*
- v. 48 *A qui a port de bien dire arrive* (see Notes)
- v. 75 MS *durement prist* (see Notes)
- v. 83 MS *plus que ne di*; reading from A
- v. 91 MS *Quil*
- v. 102 MS *qu'en*; reading from A
- v. 157 *A ceus qui d'Amors erent souspris*
- v. 164 MS *einsi*
- v. 197 Two folios have here been transposed in the binding and have been numbered 56 and 57 in error.
- v. 246 MS omits *poi*; reading from A
- v. 263 MS *ne...ne* (see Notes)
- v. 292 MS *ere* (hypermetric); *A s'en cort*
- v. 305 *A Nature en li. A son encontre* (see Notes)
- v. 307 MS *de venir* (bad rhyme); reading from A
- v. 308 *A issir*
- v. 311 MS *sa*; reading from A
- v. 346 *A li ont promis* (see Notes)
- v. 353 MS omits *autres*; reading from A
- v. 357 For foliation, see note to v. 197
- v. 466 *A Un petit en fesant ris, 'Gié'* (see Notes)
- v. 487 MS *ilues*
- v. 498 MS E: *gentillece*; reading from MS BNF, fr. 1553
- v. 513 *A dites*
- v. 515 MS *recevez*; reading from A
- v. 517 MS *retenez*; reading from A
- v. 547 MS *Chaoir*
- v. 554 MS *mamiere*
- v. 556 MS omits *ce*; reading from A
- v. 562 MS *De*
- v. 592 MS *as*
- v. 606 MS *mâinel*; reading from A (see Notes)
- v. 666 MS *grat*
- v. 674 MS omits; reading from A

- v. 686 MS *li liré*
- v. 780 MS *baerez*; reading from A
- v. 795 MS *si fet non fet*; reading from A
- v. 812 MS omits; reading from A
- v. 815 A *Bernart* (see Notes)
- v. 822 MS *que por p. que je die*; reading from A
- v. 839 Two folios have here been transposed in the binding and have been numbered 60 and 61 in error.
- v. 859 MS *je p.*; reading from A
- v. 868 MS *en prenant*; reading from A
- v. 890 A *par mon chief* (see Notes)
- v. 913 MS *eh*; reading from A
- v. 938 A *je cuit vos ne l'amerez mie*
- v. 952 MS *a*; reading from A

Notes on the Text

In these notes the following abbreviations are used:

Esc. = *Le Roman de l'Escoufle*

Gui. = *Guillaume de Dole*

Gal. = *Galeran de Bretagne*

For the manuscripts represented by the various *sigla*, see Introduction. The mention 'Orr' or 'Bédier' refers, unless otherwise stated, to the editions of the *Lai de l'Ombre* of these editors respectively.

5 *Oiseus*: the other MSS have *garçon*, whose meaning seems to have developed 'boy' > 'apprentice' > 'novice' > 'bungler'. Our MS's *oiseus* is possibly a slip brought about by the word's presence in v. 3, although it makes sense.

9 *S'oeuvre* is from the verb *s'aovrir*, 'to display itself, reveal itself', not from *s'aovrer*, 's'employer', 'to be used', as Bédier thought.

15 *Loit*. All the other MSS have *doit*, but *loit* (< *licet*) makes good sense here.

16-19 This graphic way of expressing impossibility is characteristic of Jehan Renart's taste for the down-to-earth image.

21 In *Gal.*, vv. 2979-83, *les bons* is synonymous with *haults homes, roys et contes*.

22-24 Allusion to the incident described in *Esc.*, vv. 6770ff.

23 *Art* is preterite tense for *arst*; cf. the rhyme *arst: hart* in *Esc.*, vv. 7195-76.

24 *Cis contes*, i.e. *Le Roman de l'Escoufle*. Guillaume, the hero of the tale, although *des bons*, i.e. 'of high degree', and enjoying the Emperor's favour, suffers much until good fortune (*eür*) befalls him once more.

27 Orr adopts the reading of ABCFG: *eür que avoir nē amis*, on the ground that *parenz nē amis*, while appropriate to the story of the *Escoufle*, does not fit the context of the *Lai de l'Ombre*; this seems an insufficient reason to emend a reading which makes acceptable sense.

34 For the intransitive use of *amesurer*, ‘to return to moderation’, cf. *Le Roman de la Rose*, vv. 3329-30: *Lors ne pot plus Dangier durer / Ains le covint amesurer* (quoted by A. Tobler and E. Lommatzsch, *Altfranzösisches Wörterbuch* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1925-).

35 Orr suggests that it would be preferable to read *se* ‘if’ rather than *sa*, which could be due to a misguided attempt on the part of a scribe to remove a supposed Picardism; cf. Old Picard feminines *se*, *be*, etc.

36 ‘If bad luck leaves him’, i.e. ‘ceases to pursue him’.

39 *Desploier* is very close in meaning to *s’aovrir* (v. 9). The other MSS have *emploier*.

39-41 The *Eslit* to whom these lines refer may well be Miles de Châtillon-Nanteuil, to whom Jehan Renart dedicated his *Guillaume de Dole*. Miles was bishop-elect to the diocese of Beauvais from 1217 until his consecration by the Pope in 1222 on his return from the Holy Land. What follows implies that Miles commissioned the *Lai de l’Ombre* before he became effectively bishop in 1222. However, see my comments in the Introduction.

41-44 We have here an example of a series of ‘grammatical rhymes’. Cf. also vv. 623-62. The use of *ce que* as a nominative is not uncommon: see Kristoffer Nyrop, *Grammaire historique de la langue française* (Copenhagen: Gyldendalske Boghandel, 1908), vol. 5, p. 277.

45 The *d(e)* links the line with the *volenté* of v. 43.

46 There is a pun on the two meanings of *rime*: ‘rhymes’ and ‘sets a course’. Cf. the pun on *conter* which ends the poem.

48 In the other MSS this line is replaced, with insignificant variants, by: *Qui a port de bien dire arrive*. Orr preserves both our MS’s reading and the above line, which he prints as v. 48a. Even if we ignore the problem of the succession of three identical rhymes, it seems unnecessary, for the sense of the passage, to deviate from either of the readings preserved by the MSS. The passage makes good sense as it stands in our MS: ‘They say, “Steer well, rhyme well”. He who comes ashore from the high seas is a fool if he upbraids the sea; for this he wins the greater esteem of kings and counts (i.e. the discerning)’.

54-55 These lines are grammatically and geographically ambiguous. If the words *de Loberaingne et d’Alemaingne* are the complement of *marche*, the latter would indicate a part of France bordering on Lorraine and Germany, both imperial territories. This is grammatically awkward and geographically vague. If the expression *de Loberaingne et d’Alemaingne* depends on *Empiere*, the grammar is clearer but the geography even vaguer, and the place indicated could be anywhere to the East or West of the frontier between France and the Empire, from Flanders to Provence. This vagueness would

appear to be deliberate; see note to vv. 62-63.

57 Orr suggests that *Perchois* is synonymous with Le Perche and that this line therefore refers to the whole breadth of the then royal domain. There is no evidence, however, that Le Perche was ever called the *Perchois*. Lecoy, who reproduces MS A, reads *Partois*, and argues convincingly that the name refers to the area around Perthes, in the modern Haute-Marne (near Châlons), see Lecoy's edition, p. xv and note to v. 57. *Le Perthois* is mentioned in *Guillaume de Dole* in what is perhaps a veiled reference to the *Lai de l'Ombre*: *En cele Champaigne hanta / uns chevaliers [...] / Si amoit une dame en France / En cele marche de Perthois* (ed. by Lecoy, vv. 661-66).

61 Gauvain, one of the heroes of the romances of the Round Table, was noted for many outstanding qualities of character.

62-63 Bédier underlines the peculiarity of the procedure whereby an author disclaims all knowledge of his hero's name and yet reveals, in minute detail, his most intimate feelings. He suggests that this deliberate vagueness as to his hero's identity, taken with the imprecision of his geographical origins (see note to vv. 54-55), is an indication that Jehan Renart was mocking one of the conventions of narrative literature. In MS A v. 62 reads: *mes nus n'oi onques son nom*, where the mockery of the convention is even more marked.

65 For this meaning of *demainne*, see Alan Hindley, Frederick W. Langley, and Brian J. Levy, *Old French-English Dictionary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

71 *S'avoir* 'to conduct oneself, to behave': cf. *Esc.*, vv. 9022-24: [...] *qui(l) n'est riens nesune / Tant sage pour gent decevoir / Com amors, qui s'i set avoir*.

75 In rectifying the omission, the form *nu*, commonly found in our MS, is preferred to MS A's *nel*.

82-83 There is a passage in Rutebeuf which curiously resembles these lines:

Douz et cortois et debonere
Le trovoit l'en en son ostel;
Mes aus armes autre que tel
Le trovast li siens anemis,
Puis qu'il s'i fust mesbez et mis.
(*La Complainte de Geoffroi de Sergines*, vv. 68-72, *Œuvres complètes de Rutebeuf*, ed. by E. Faral and J. Bastin, 2 vols (Paris: Picard, 1969), I, pp. 415-16)

90-91 Quite possibly a popular expression (cf. vv. 94-95). Since Monday sees the beginning of the week's work, the chevalier's wish that there were two Mondays in the week is indicative of his energy. It must be remembered, too, that tournaments commonly began on Mondays: see L.-A. Vigneras, 'Monday as a date for medieval tournaments', *Modern Language Notes*, 48 (1933), 80-82.

96 *Largesce* was thought to be one of the greatest social virtues of the medieval nobleman: cf. Marie de France's evocation of Lanval's generosity:

N'ot en la vile chevalier
 Ki de surjur ait grant mestier,
 Quë il ne face a lui venir
 E richement e bien servir.
 Lanval dounout les riches duns,
 Lanval aquitout les prisuns,
 Lanval vesteit les jugleurs,
 Lanval feseit les granz honours.

(Marie de France, *Lais*, ed. by A. Ewert (Oxford: Blackwell, 1944), *Lanval*, vv. 205-12)

102 Subjunctive *leüst*: one would expect here an indicative dependent on *quant*. *Leüst* is an example of the subjunctive by attraction: see L. Foulet, *Petite syntaxe de l'ancien français* (Paris: Champion, 1958), para. 308.

105 Tristan, the lover of Iseut, was famous for his skill at chess and other games, as well as for his valour, his knowledge of hunting and his talents as harpist and singer.

124-25 This refers to an episode in the legend of Tristan who, exiled by his uncle, King Mark, because of his love for his Queen, Iseut, pretended to be a madman in order to be with his beloved again. The shaven head was one of the characteristics of the madman in the Middle Ages. See, for example, Jean-Marie Fritz, *Le Discours du fou au Moyen âge* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1992), and Muriel Laharie, *La Folie au moyen âge (XI-XIIIe siècles)* (Paris: Le Léopard d'Or, 1991). In the *Folie Tristan de Berne*, Tristan is actually driven mad by love for Iseut before he thinks of acting the madman in order to be near her again. See also the *Folie Tristan d'Oxford (Le Roman de Tristan par Thomas, suivi de La Folie Tristan de Berne et de La Folie Tristan d'Oxford)*, trans. by Emmanuèle Baumgartner and Ian Short with text edited by Félix Lecoy (Paris: Champion, 2003).

134-35 There is a declension 'mistake' here: *parti son cuer* for *partis ses cuers*. Some MSS 'correct' this, thereby interfering with the rhyme. It has been suggested by A. Tobler (*Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen und Literaturen*, 85 (1980), p. 352) that, despite the evidence of the MSS, a better reading would be: *A maintes en avoit parti/son cuer*.

155 *Amer seul*, 'to love without one's love being returned'.

156 The object of *desaamé* is either the *celes* of v. 155 or 'those' in general. The elliptical turn of phrase is typical of Jehan Renart. The reading of MS 837 is perhaps more in keeping with Jehan Renart's usual versification.

176-77 Cf. *Esc.*, vv. 3370-71: *Cele li fait des siens .i. las / Entor le col, puis si le baise.*

181 MSS C and D read: *en ce que* (i.e. 'while'). Orr suggests that the true version of the lines should be *en ce que plus m'i delitast*. He rejects the possible reading *en ce qu'i plus me delitast* on the grounds that the word-order would be unusual. The reading need not, however, be rejected for that reason alone.

184 This recalls two examples found in Joseph Morawski's list of Old French proverbs, *Proverbes français antérieurs au XV^e siècle*, CFMA 47 (Paris: Champion, 1925): *Len ne puet rien prendre ou rien n'a* (# 1522); *Qui en puet avoir si en preigne* (# 1916).

187-93 Modern usage would not require the *que* of vv. 191 and 193, but the redundant repetition of *que* after a parenthesis is not unusual in Old French.

200 Another proverb: *Il n'y a tel comme soy* (Morawski, # 945).

202-03 Cf. Morawski, # 1096: *Li mestiers duit l'omme.*

206-07 The notion of the imprisonment of the heart is a commonplace of courtly literature, in particular of the courtly lyric.

222 *Il dit*, 'it says', a formula used to pick up the thread of the narrative; cf. v. 53.

237-38 The rhyme *dame: roiaume* suggests that Jehan Renart originally wrote *roiame*, which is evidence of the Picard element in his language, since in Old Picard the *i* was often effaced in the group *a + l + nasal*: cf. the rhymes *palme: basme: pasme* quoted by Charles Gossen in *Grammaire de l'ancien Picard* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1970), p. 94.

243 Possibly an allusion to Miles de Châtillon-Nanteuil, the *eslit* of v. 41, who was imprisoned in Cairo by the Saracens after the Crusaders' defeat at Damietta on 29 August 1219: see Rita Lejeune-Dehousse, *L'Œuvre de Jean Renart: contribution à l'étude du genre romanesque au Moyen Âge* (Liège and Paris: Faculté de Philosophie et Lettres, 1935), pp. 247ff. In any case, imprisonment by the Turks, as a symbol of misfortune, is frequently mentioned in medieval literature.

244 Orr suggests that *a ere* is a variant of the expression *en oirre*, 'forthwith'. He mentions a perhaps more attractive interpretation by Roques (*Mélanges de philologie offerts à Jean-Jacques Salverda de Grave à l'occasion de sa soixante-dixième année par ses amis et ses élèves* (Groningen: J.B. Wolters, 1933), p. 271; and *Romania* 59 (1933), 427-28), that *a ere* is the same as the interjection *aoirre*, which is found in *Aucassin et Nicolette*, X, 63 and a few other texts. 'L'exclamation *aere*', suggests Roques, 'me paraît avoir ici la valeur d'une exhortation au calme "He! là!; Allons, allons!"' This would be in keeping with v. 245. If this suggestion were to be accepted, our lines would read: *Il dit en sozriant, 'Aere! / Or seignors, or tot belement!...'*

255 *Sire*, both 'lord' and 'man favoured by fortune'.

257 The *sofisme* lies in the fact that the knight's companions do not know that *qanqu'il a dedanz les murs* refers to the lady of the castle.

259 The use of the affirmative particle *mon* with *oir* is unusual. It is common with *savoir*, and since the two verbs are often synonymous perhaps its use is not surprising here.

263 MS A, too, has *ne...ne...*, but its reading of v. 264, unlike that of our MS, makes sense of it: *Chevaliers ne dolt onques / Respasser ne chemin ne vole / Ou bele dame ait qu'il nel voie*.

270 Orr rejects the MS's *armes*, preferring the *dames* of MSS CDFG. The emendation seems unnecessary, as the expression is used figuratively here. The expression *as dames* occurs in *Guillaume de Dole*: 'Ça, chevalier, as dames!' (ed. by Lecoy, v. 223).

276 The verb *avoit* has a double function here: (i) as the auxiliary of *torné*; (ii) as the main verb of the phrase *et (avoit) seurtot*, etc. *Torner en chantel* implies a rakish way of wearing a cloak, slung jauntily either over the shoulder or to one side. This gives a splendid picture of the dashing young lover. Jehan Renart has a fondness for such graphic detail. See for example *Gui.*, vv. 1574-77: *Lor sires ot tret en chantel / Son mantel sor son braz senestre. / Tuit cil de la rue et de l'estre / Le resgardent a grant merveille*.

292 Orr adopts MS A's *s'en cort*, presumably because it is more typical of Jehan Renart's style. Our MS's *ere* renders the line hypermetric.

304 *Avec*, 'in addition to'. A similar use of *avec* is found in vv. 558-59.

305 The reading of MSS ABCD is *Nature en li en son encontre*, which Bédier punctuates with a full stop after *li*. This avoids the 'imperfect rhyme', as Orr calls it, but rhymes of this nature are not unknown in Jehan Renart's works, e.g. *estes: estres* in *Esc.*, vv. 4856-46; *entremetre: chançonete* in *Gui.*, vv. 2377-78; and the effacement of the letter 'r' in certain consonantal groups is well-attested: see Mildred K. Pope, *From Latin to Modern French with Especial Consideration of Anglo-Norman: Phonology and Morphology* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1966, repr. of 1952 edition), p. 396.

306-07 It is inaccurate to speak of the knights hurrying to meet the lady since they are as yet unaware that she is coming towards them.

307 The reading *de(l) venir* avoids, somewhat narrowly, a rhyme between two words which are both homophones and homonyms; *venir* in v. 307 is a verbal substantive; *venir* in v. 308 is an infinitive.

323 A reference back to vv. 261-62.

338ff There are many reminiscences in the *Roman de la Violette* of the scene which follows. See *Le Roman de la Violette ou de Gérard de Nevers, par Gerbert de Montreuil*, ed. by D.L. Buffum (Paris: SATF, 1929). For a modern French translation, see Gerbert de Montreuil, *Le Roman de la Violette*, ed. and tr. by Mireilles Demaules (Paris: Stock/Moyen Age, 1992).

346 The other MSS have *li ont promis*, where *eulz* is the subject of the verb. In our MS the subject of *li ot promis* is *ses cuers*.

359 *Let* is for *lest* (*laist*), present subjunctive.

374-75 Cf. *Esc.*, vv. 2982-83: *Sa color li croist et avive / Un cercle d'or qu'il ot el chief.*

378 The reading of the other MSS, *si preudom*, seems more appropriate at this stage of the conversation. The lady seems to know of the knight's reputation for gallantry (cf. v. 295) and alludes to it in v. 380. On the other hand, the reading *si biaux bon* prepares us for vv. 382-83.

381 The implication is that the knight would be less valiant by not having an *amie*, the thought of whom would encourage him in battle or tournament: cf. v. 414ff.

385-87 The colloquial expression *traire la plume par l'oeil a quelqu'un* appears also in *Gui.*, vv. 3473-74: *Puis li sot bien trere par l'oeil / La plume.*

403 This anticipatory use of *i*, a pre-echo of the *a* in v. 404, is common in Jehan Renart's works. *S'acorder* and *s'asentir* are legal terms and are more or less synonymous.

416-21 The *que* of v. 420 is dependent on both *tel* (v. 417) and *tant* (v. 419).

438-39 This remark is rather ambiguous. It could mean 'you would have done better to try to catch pigeons' ('because you will not catch me' being implied); or 'you would have been better employed doing something practical rather than this'. The image, with its use of everyday, down-to-earth language in a context where one would not expect it, is highly characteristic of Jehan Renart's style.

456 Orr suggests that this line inspired a passage in the *Roman de la Violette*, vv. 212-15: *Je ne sui mie en mer sans mast. / Chil est sans mast ki est amis / Quant en tel bin son cuer a mis / Ki ne set se on l'aimme point.*

457 Tristan, having been wounded by a poisoned spear in his single combat with the Morholt, asked to be placed in a ship with neither oars nor sails. The ship brought him to Ireland, where Iseut healed his wounds. Orr punctuates with a comma after *Tristans*, ending the sentence with *ferre*.

466 Orr suggests that *ditié* conceals a derivative from *digitum* and that it means 'a sign

with the finger'. The meaning here seems to be 'scolding', 'chiding', which would no doubt be accompanied by an admonitory wagging of the finger. MS A's version of this line is stylistically typical of Jehan Renart.

473 Bédier suggests that *garce esgaree* means 'fille de joie'. This hardly squares with the epithet *povre*. Orr's suggestion, 'poor vagrant lass', has the right air of commiseration.

485-86 *Ne li fausse* is a nominal clause dependent on *la dame est avis*; the use of *que* was not obligatory in such clauses in Old French.

487 *Aillors qu'ilue(c)*, 'elsewhere than here', i.e. 'not merely there and then'.

515-17 These objects were common love-tokens in the Middle Ages.

539-40 The rhyme *teche: simplece* is an indication of the Picard element in Jehan Renart's language: the form *simplece* is very common in Old Picard.

547 *Le*, Picard form of *la*. The form *chaoir* is the result of a confusion on the part of the scribe. His original probably had *chair* or *cair*, common Picard forms, which he replaced with the Francien form *chaoir*, which does not, of course, rhyme with *oir*. Orr emends to *cheir* without comment.

548 *D'endroit ce que*, 'with regard to the fact that...'. The preterite *volt* would be preferable to *velt* here.

550 This anticipatory use of *le* is characteristic of Jehan Renart. Cf. the similar use of *i* in v. 403.

558 *Le*, Picard form of *la*.

562-67 The subject of this sentence is *Amors* (v. 566).

593-94 The forms *lessie*, *plessie* are Picard (Francien *lessiee*, *plessiee*).

598-99 *Por plorer*, 'because of his weeping'. *Por fere ses faus soupirs*, 'because he was uttering feigned sighs'. There is a touch of irony in the passage vv. 598-603, and the shock the lady is about to receive is well prepared.

606 *Manel*. Orr's reading *mainuel* is incorrect, although the form *menouel* occurs in MS B. The word would seem to derive from *minellus*, influenced by *manus*. Our scribe's *manmel* is probably a misreading of *manuel* or *mainuel*. The usual meaning of *doit manel* is 'ring finger'. Its sense here is clearly 'little toe'.

623 *Soutise*, either an analogical feminine form from the masculine *soutis*, or a scribal correction for the sake of the rhyme, from *soutille* (cf. v. 567). Imperfect rhymes are not uncommon in the works of Jehan Renart.

677 *Sor li desfendant*, 'in conflict with herself', 'fighting against her inclinations'.

696-97 The contorted syntax here, and elsewhere in this episode, is indicative of the lady's agitated state of mind.

704-05 This remark is ironic, suggesting that if he wishes her to consider him as her *ami* at this first conversation simply on the strength of his chivalry and his sighing, then he would not have worked hard for it.

716-17 There is another example of this curious litotes, which is obviously of popular origin, in *Gui.*, vv. 1405-12:

‘Ele fu nee sanz pareille
Et de beauté et de simplece:
Et de son beau chanter, par est ce
Une tres douce melodie:
Nuls ne l’oït qu’autretel n’en die’.
—‘Et que sez tu?’—‘Je l’ai oïe’.
Ne le ferî pas lez l’oïe
Qui si li loe la pucele.

Cf. also a similar expression in *Esc.*, vv. 5644-45: *Sachiés qu’ele ne li a mie / A cest mot la teste brisie*. The use of the colloquialism is stylistically typical of Jehan Renart.

728 The form *seïr* (Francien *seoir*) is characteristically Picard.

773-74 *Angoisse*: the original probably had *anguisse* (to rhyme with *cuisse*), a common form in the Northern dialects, which the scribe has ‘corrected’.

776-77 Cf. *Gui.*, vv. 4984-85: *Ha! Dame, mal fet qui confont / Ce dont il puet estre an deseure!*

780 The *ne* here is a ‘negative’ *et*, which is used because of the negative attitude of the speaker: ‘Nor is there any woman’, ‘and there is no woman...’. The rhyme *destrece: a ce* is, at first sight, disturbing, but is of a type which is not unusual in Jehan Renart’s works. The *ce* has full syllabic value, whereas the *-ce* in *destrece* forms a feminine ending on an already eight-syllable line.

785-86 Although *servise* and *devise* form a visual rhyme, their endings would not rhyme in Francien (*-is; -iʒ*). In Picard, however, there was a tendency for voiced intervocalic ‘s’ to become unvoiced, and forms like *devisse* were common (see Gossen, *Petite grammaire de l’ancien picard*, para. 49). For Jehan Renart, therefore, *servise* and *devise* probably rhymed with an unvoiced final ‘s’.

796 Orr translates *sire* as ‘lord and master’; ‘husband’ might be appropriate here, as the word often has this meaning in Old French.

810-12 These lines provide a typical example of Jehan Renart's love of the colloquial expression.

814-17 Orr suggests that 'given the twice attested expression *chanter d'autre Bernart* "to change one's tune" (see Tobler-Lommatzsch, s.v. 'Bernart'), it may well be that E (our MS)'s *Renart* is wrong, although the meaning remains obscure in either case'. However, it is quite likely that Jehan Renart is referring to a precise passage in the *Roman de Renart*, where Renart is condemned to death by Noble: *Or vos metront ou col le bart, / si parlerons d'autre Renart.* (*Le Roman de Renart: édition bilingue*, ed. by M. de Combarieu et J. Subrenat, 2 vols (Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions, 1981), *Première branche*, vv. 1915-16). Here the meaning is 'We will speak of another Renart because you, the present Renart, will be dead and gone'. The whole question is complicated by the existence of the parallel expression *parler d'autre Bernart*, which occurs in other MSS's versions of the *Roman de Renart*, as in other MSS of the *Lai de l'Ombre*, and which usually has attributed to it the meaning given above. (Bernart, let us remember, is the name of the boring and sententious ass in the *Roman de Renart*). The verb used in the *Lai de l'Ombre*, however, is *chanter*, not *parler*. MS 837's *chanter de Bernart* could well mean 'to go on repeating oneself in a boring fashion (like the ass Bernart)'. On the other hand, Orr makes the plausible suggestion that, in writing *chanter de Renart*, the author of the *Lai de l'Ombre* deliberately made a pun on his own name; there is a similar passage in *Gui.*, vv. 5403-07, where the author gratuitously mentions his own name. Given the agreement of five of the MSS on *chanter de Bernart*, however, it could be that the variant *Renart* was introduced by a scribe and was not in the original version. Yet the mention of the *bart ou col* brings us back inevitably to the *Roman de Renart*. We seem to have here a perfect example of literary 'contamination'. On the one hand, the reading *chanter de Bernart* fits the context perfectly: 'It seems that you are teaching me to repeat myself *ad nauseam*,' (i.e. 'you will not take "no" for an answer'). On the other hand, the author's name and the allusion to the *Roman de Renart* support the reading *chanter de Renart*. If the latter expression is taken in the sense in which *parler d'autre Renart* is used in the *Roman de Renart*, i.e. 'to talk of something else' (since the matter is done with), perhaps the knight is saying here: 'It seems to me that you are insisting that I change the subject. Nevertheless I would rather be hanged than take the ring back'.

822 If we were to retain our MS's reading here, *puet* in v. 823 would have to be replaced by *puis*, first person present indicative of *pooir*.

832-33 One would have expected the singular *geu parti*, since a *jeu parti* offered a choice of two alternatives. The term here seems to mean 'one of two alternatives'.

836-37 An allusion to a proverbial expression: *Tant estraint on les croutes que la mie en saut* (Morawski, # 2295).

858 *Na*: MSS A and B have *nel*, 'it' being the ring, and the line means: 'He did not call it by its name', i.e. did not call it 'your ring' or 'my ring'. Orr suggests that *nel* (i.e. *ne le*), to an author whose language had Picard features, could represent *ne la*, the *la*

referring to the lady. This is not so, as the Picard feminine *le* did not combine enclitically with *ne*, *de* etc. If *na* is not merely a scribal error brought about by the proximity of *noma*, it provides an example of the enclisis of *ne la* which is not found elsewhere.

890 *En non Dieu*: the scribe may well have been induced by the presence of this expression in v. 892 to use it here. On the other hand, this kind of deliberate repetition is not uncommon in the works of Jehan Renart.

902-03 The notion that a man's reputation could be enhanced because a lady had accepted his love is a commonplace of courtly literature.

904 The construction is confused here because the author has combined two ideas: (i) 'Would that there were...'; (ii) 'Why is there not?'

938 Our MS's *avrez* may well be a scribal misreading of a version which occurs in MSS C and G: *Je cuit que vos n'en—or nel—harez mie*, 'I think that you will not hate it less than yours', where the line is ironic. It is possible that our scribe's original had *harez* or *harés* (<*hair*), which he mistook for the Picard *arés*, fut. 5 of *avoir*, and which he replaced with the Francien form *avrez*. Of the three readings preserved by the MSS (*amerez*, *harez*, *avrez*), our MS's is the weakest, although it makes perfect sense.

952-53 This rather arch expression of discretion on the part of the author is common in courtly literature—see Chrétien de Troyes' *Erec et Enide*—where a complicit veil is often drawn over moments of love-making.

962 There is a pun on *conter*, 'to relate' and 'to count'. Cf. the pun on *rimer* in v. 46.

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