

MARIE DE FRANCE

C. 1155 – 1215

Although she is widely credited with being the earliest female poet in France, and was arguably the leading female writer of the Middle Ages, little is known about Marie de France; no surviving documents refer to her life outside of her literary activity. What has come down to us are three works, which vary widely in genre: the *Lais* (c. 1155–70), a collection of short romance narratives; the *Ysopet* or *Fables* (c. 1167–89), a collection commonly accepted as the earliest translation of Aesop into French; and the less-studied *Espurgatoire de Saint Patrice* (*Legend of the Purgatory of Saint Patrick*, c. 1189), a didactic tale in which Patrick, an Irish knight, makes a spiritual journey through Purgatory.

Her name is known from the self-identification she makes in each of her texts; this occurs most forcefully and descriptively in the epilogue of the *Ysopet*:

I shall name myself so that it will be remembered;
Marie is my name, I am of France.
It may be that many clerks
will take my labor on themselves.
I don't want any of them to claim it.

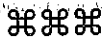
"France" itself is a slippery designation here, since it had multiple possible meanings in this period; it may be intended to convey that she was from Continental Europe instead of England, for instance, or from northern France instead of the southern Languedoc. The Norman dialect in which her works are composed suggests that Marie was native to Normandy, and lived during the latter part of the 12th century. The "King Henry" to whom she dedicates her *Lais* is usually identified as Henry II, the Angevin French king of England from 1154–89; and Marie is thought to have been a member of his court, which spoke the form of Norman dialect in which her works come down to us. It has sometimes been suggested that she was Henry's illegitimate sister Marie, who became Abbess of Shaftesbury around 1181, and who died in 1216, but without any other corroborating documents, such theories are no more than intriguing speculation. It seems very likely, however, that she was attached to the court of Henry II and his wife, Eleanor of Aquitaine, and was of noble birth; her works reveal a level of education and culture that would not usually have been available to a layperson of lower rank during this time. It is clear that she was educated in Latin, as well as French, and perhaps even in the Breton language, since she claims to have translated her *Lais* from that tongue.

The *Lais* of Marie de France are brief narratives written in octosyllabic rhyming couplets, which was the conventional literary vehicle for French romance during this time. This collection is made up of twelve stories, each prefaced by a short prologue in which Marie reveals that she is translating into French for the first time a number of "Breton *lais*." The *lais* were Celtic tales of romance that often involved elements of the fantastic. The compressed space of the form requires Marie to handle her material with considerable finesse and she recounts her tales with an economy of words and a tight narrative control that lend the romances a down-to-earth precision without sacrificing meaning or nuance.

Many of the *lais* have a strongly female focus, and in this regard offer a certain contrast to the romances of Marie's contemporaries. The works of male romancers, while treating the subject of love, often emphasized the tension between love and chivalric pursuits, and the need to balance the two in order to fulfill both personal needs and social responsibilities. Marie is largely uninterested in such

concerns, and focuses instead on the personal desires of her characters, especially those of her female characters. Her *lais* often depict intensely intimate love relationships set against a backdrop of a threatening society in which unfulfilling marriages, the arbitrary dictates of court life, and oppressive social practices hold sway.

Lanval is drawn from the larger literary universe of Arthurian legend. It recounts the tale of a knight whose inherent worth is unrecognized by the Arthurian court, and who is able to escape this uncaring and arbitrary society through the love of an otherworldly fairy figure.



Lanval

L'aventure d'un autre lai,
cum ele avient, vus cunterai.
Fait fu d'un mut gentil vassal;
en bretans l'apelent Lanval.

5 A Kardoel surjurnot li reis
Artur, li pruz e li curteis,
pur les Escoz e pur les Pís,
que destrui[ei]ent le país;
en la tere de Loengre entroënt
10 e mut sivent la damagoënt.
A la Pentecuste en esté
i aveit li reis surjurné.
Asez i duna riches duns
e as cuntes e as baruns.
15 A ceus de la table runde—
n'ot tant de teus en tut le monde—
femmes e tere departi
par tut, fors un ki l'ot servi:
ceo fu Lanval; ne l'en sovient,
20 ne nul de[s] soens bien ne li tient.
Pur sa valur, pur sa largesce,
pur sa beauté, pur sa pruesce
Fenvioënt tut li plusur;
tel li mustra semblant d'amur,
25 se al chevaler mesavenist,
ja une feiz ne l'en pleinsist.
Fiz a rei fu de haut parage,
mes luin ert de sun heritage.
De la meisné le rei fu.
30 Tut sun aveir ad despendu,

I shall tell you the adventure
of another lay, just as it happened.
It was made about a very noble vassal;
in Breton they call him Lanval.

The king was staying at Cardoel—
Arthur, the valiant and courteous—
on account of the Scots and Picts
who were ravaging the country:
they came into the land of Logres²
and repeatedly caused destruction there.
At Pentecost, in the summer,
the king had taken up residence there.
He gave many rich gifts
both to counts and to noblemen.
To the members of the Round Table—
they had no equal in all the world—
he shared out wives and land
among all except one who had served him:
that was Lanval, whom he did not remember,
nor did any of his men favor him.
For his valor, his generosity,
his beauty, his prowess,
most people envied him;
many a one pretended to love him
who wouldn't have complained for a moment
if something bad had befallen the knight.
He was a king's son, of high lineage,
but he was far from his heritage.
He was part of the king's household.
He had spent all his wealth,

¹ *Lanval* The translation is by Claire Waters, for *The Broadview Anthology of British Literature*.

² *Logres* The Celtic word for England.

- kar li reis rien ne li donā,
 ne Lanval rien ne li demanda.
 Ore est Lanval mut entrepris,
 mut est dolent e mut pensis.
 35 Seignurs, ne vus esmerveiliez:
 hume estrange descunseillez
 mut est dolent en autre tere,
 quant il ne seït u sucuys quere.
 Le chevaler dunt jeo vus di,
 40 que tant aveit le rei seryi,
 un jur muntā sur sun destre;
 si s'est alez esbaneer.
 Fors de la vilē est eissuz,
 tut sul est en un pre venuz;
 45 sur une ewe curaunt descent—
 mes sis cheval tremble, forment.
 Il le descengle, si s'en vait;
 en mi le pre vuiltrer le lait.
 Le pan de sun mantel plia
 50 desuz sun chief puis le cuchia.
 Mut est pensis pur sa mesaise;
 il ne veit chose ke li plaise.
 La u il gist en teu maniere,
 garda aval lez la riviere,
 55 [si] vit venir deus dameiseles;
 unc n'en ot veit[es] plus beles.
 Vestues ierent richement,
 lacie[es] mut estreitement
 en deus blians de purpre bis;
 60 mut par aveient bel-le vis.
 L'eisnee portout un[s] bacins,
 doré furent, bien faiz e fins;
 le veir vus en dirai sans faille.
 L'autre portout une tuaille.
 65 Eles s'en sunt alees dreit
 la u li chevaler giseit.
 Lanval, que mut fut enseigniez,
 cuntre eles s'en levad en piez.
 Celes l'unt primes salué,
 70 lur message li unt cunté:
 "Sire Lanval, ma dameisele,
 que tant est pruz e sage e bele,
 ele nus enveit pur vus;
 kar i venez ensemble od nus!
 75 Sauvement vus i cundurums;

for the king gave him nothing,
 nor did Lanval ask him for anything.
 Now Lanval is very unhappy,
 very sorrowful and anxious.
 Lords, do not wonder:
 a foreign man without support
 is very sorrowful in another land
 when he does not know where to seek help.
 The knight of whom I'm telling you,
 who had served the king so well,
 got on his horse one day
 and went off to enjoy himself.
 He went out of the town
 and came, all alone, to a meadow;
 he got down beside running water—
 but his horse trembled terribly.
 He unsaddled it and went off;
 he let it roll around in the middle of the meadow.
 He folded the end of his mantle
 and lay down with it under his head.
 He is very worried by his difficult situation;
 he sees nothing that pleases him.
 As he lay there like this,
 he looked down toward the bank
 and saw two maidens coming;
 he had never seen any more beautiful.
 They were richly dressed
 and very tightly laced
 in tunics of dark purple;
 they had exceedingly lovely faces.
 The elder was carrying basins
 of gold, fine and well made;
 I shall tell you the truth without fail.
 The other carried a towel.
 They went right along
 to where the knight was lying.
 Lanval, who was very well bred,
 got to his feet to meet them.
 They greeted him first
 and told him their message:
 "Sir Lanval, my lady
 who is most noble, wise, and beautiful,
 sent us for you;
 now come along with us!
 We will convey you safely to her.

- veez, pres est li paveilluns!" *Look, the pavilion is right here!*
 Le chevalers od eles vait; *The knight goes with them;*
 de sun cheval ne tiënt nul plait, *he takes no heed of his horse;*
 que devant li pe[sse]it al pre. *who was off grazing in the meadow.*
 80 Treskë al tref l'unt amené; *They led him up to the tent,*
 que mut fu beaus e bien asis; *which was very beautiful and well-situated.*
 La reine Semiramis; *Not Queen Semiramis,*
 quant ele ot unkes plus aveir; *when she was at her richest*
 e plus pussaunce e plus saveir; *and most powerful and wisest;*
 85 ne l'emperere Octovien *nor the emperor Octavian*
 n'esligasent le destre pam; *they could have bought the right flap.*
 Un aigle d'or ot desus mis; *A golden eagle was set on top of it;*
 de cel ne sai dire le pris, *I can't tell its value,*
 ne des cordes ne des peïssuns *nor of the cords or the stakes*
 90 que del tref tiënt les giruns; *that held the sides of the tent;*
 suz ciel n'ad rei ki[s] esligast *no king under heaven could buy them*
 pur nul aver k'il i donast. *for any wealth he might offer.*
 Dedenz cel tref fu la pucele; *Inside the tent was the maiden:*
 flur de lis [e] rose nuvelé; *her beauty surpassed*
 95 quant ele pert al tens d'esté; *the lily and the new rose*
 trespassot ele de beauté. *when they bloom in summer.*
 Ele jut sur un lit mut bel— *She lay on a very beautiful bed—*
 li drap valeient un chastel— *the sheets were worth a castle—*
 en sa chemise senglement. *in nothing but her shift:*
 100 Mut ot le cors bien fait e gent; *Her body was very elegant and comely.*
 Un cher mantel de blanc hermine; *She had thrown on for warmth*
 covert de purpre alexandrine, *a costly mantle of white ermine,*
 ot pur le chaut sur li geté. *lined with alexandrine silk.*
 Tut ot descobert le costé; *Her side was entirely uncovered;*
 105 le vis, le col e la peitrine; *her face, her neck, and her breast;*
 plus ert blanche que flur d'espine. *she was whiter than hawthorn blossom.*
 Le chevaler avant ala, *The knight went forward,*
 e la pucele l'apela; *and the maiden called to him;*
 il s'est devant le lit asis. *he sat down in front of the bed.*
 110 "Lanval," fet ele, "beus amis, *"Lanval," she said, "handsome friend,*
 pur vus vienc jeo fors de ma-tere; *for you I have come out of my own land;*
 de luinz vus sui venu[e] quere. *I have come from afar to look for you.*
 Se vus estes pruz e curteis, *If you are valiant and courteous,*
 emperere ne quens ne reis *no emperor, count, or king*
 115 n'ot unkes tant joie ne bien; *ever had such joy or good fortune;*
 kar jo vus aim sur tute rien." *for I love you more than anything."*
 Il l'esgarda, si la vit bele; *He looked at her; and saw she was beautiful;*
 amurs le puint de l'estencele, *love stung him with a spark*
 que sun quor alume e esprent. *that lit and inflamed his heart.*
 120 Il li respunt avenantmënt. *He responded fittingly.*

- "Bele," fet il, "si vus pleiseit
 e cele joie me aveneit
 que vus me vousisiez amer,
 ja [ne savriez] rien commander
 125 que jeo ne face a mien poeir,
 turt a folie u a saveir,
 Jeo frai voz comandemanz;
 pur vus guerpilai tutes genz,
 Jamés ne queor de vus partir:
 130 ceo est la rien que plus desir."
 Quant la meschine l' oï parler,
 celui que tant la peot amer,
 s'amur e sun cors li otreie.
 Ore est Lanval en dreite veie!
 135 Un dun li ad duné aprés:
 ja cele rien ne vudra més
 quë il nen ait a sun talent;
 doinst e despense largement,
 ele li troverat asez.
 140 Mut est Lanval bien herbergez:¹
 cum plus despendra richement,
 plus averat or e argent.
 "Ami," fet ele, "ore vus chasti,
 si vus comant e si vus pri,
 145 ne vus descouverez a nul humme!
 De ceo vus dirai ja la summe:
 a tuz jurs m'avriez perdue,
 se ceste amur esteit seïe;
 jamés ne me purriez veïr
 150 ne de mun cors seïsine aveïr."
 Il li respunt que bien tendra
 ceo que ele li comaundera.
 Delez li s'est al lit couchiez.
 Ore est Lanval bien herbergez.
 155 Ensemble od li la relevee
 demurat tresque a l[a] vespree,
 e plus i fust, se il poïst,
 e s'amie lui consentist.
 "Amis," fet ele, "levez sus!
 160 Vus n'i poëz demurer plus.
 Alez vus en, jeo rémeindrai
 mes un[e] chose vus dirai:
 quant vus vodrez od mei parler,
 "Beautiful one," he said, "if it pleased you,
 that such joy should come to me
 as to have you consent to love me,
 you could never command anything
 that I would not do to the best of my power,
 be it folly or wisdom.
 I will do what you command;
 for you I will give up everyone.
 I never wish to part from you:
 this is what I most desire."
 When the maiden heard him speak,
 he who could love her so well,
 she granted him her love and her body.
 Now Lanval is on the right path!
 She gave him still one more gift:
 he will never again want anything
 without having as much of it as he likes;
 let him give and spend generously,
 she will provide him with enough.
 Lanval is very well situated:
 the more richly he spends,
 the more gold and silver he will have.
 "Friend," she said, "now I warn you,
 I command and beg you,
 tell no one about this!
 I will tell you the whole truth:
 you would lose me forever
 if this love should be known;
 you could never see me again
 or have possession of my body."
 He replies that he will certainly hold to
 what she commands.
 He lay down beside her on the bed:
 now Lanval is well lodged.
 All afternoon he stayed with her
 until the evening,
 and he would have stayed longer, if he could
 and his beloved had consented.
 "Friend," she said, "get up!
 You can't stay here any more.
 You go on, I will remain—
 but one thing I will tell you:
 when you want to talk with me,

¹ *Mut... herbergez* Other manuscripts have here, "mut est Lanval bien *assenez*" (Lanval is very well provided for) and some editors prefer this reading, since the line as it stands is repeated below at l. 154.

- ja ne savez cel liu penser, there is no place you can think of
 165 u nuls puist aver sa amie; where one could have his beloved
 sanz reproece, sanz vileinie, without reproach or villainy;
 que jeo ne vus seie en present that I will not be with you at oncé
 a fere tüt vostre talent; to do all your will;
 nul humme fors vus ne verra no man but you will see me
 170 ne ma parole nen orra. or hear my words."
 Quant il l'oi, mut en fu liez; When he heard this, he was delighted;
 il la baisa, puis s'est dresciez; he kissed her, then got up.
 Celes que al tref l'amenerent The maidens who had brought him to the tent
 de riches dras le cunreerent; covered him with rich clothes;
 175 quant il fu vestu de novel, when he was newly dressed,
 suz ciel nen ot plus bel dancel there was no handsomer young man under
 heaven.
 N'esteit mie fous ne vileins. He was not at all foolish or base.
 L'ewe li donent a ses meins They gave him water for his hands
 e la tuaille a [es]suier; and the towel to dry them;
 180 puis li portent a manger; then they brought him to the table.
 Od s'amie prist le super; He took supper with his beloved;
 ne feseit mie a refusét. he by no means refused.
 Mut fu servi curteisement, He was served very courteously;
 e il a grant joie le prent; and accepted it with great joy.
 185 Un entremés i ot plenér; There was an excellent extra dish
 que mut pleiseit al chevalier; that greatly pleased the knight;
 kar s'amie baisout sovent for he often kissed his lady
 e acolot estreitement. and embraced her closely.
 Quant del manger furent levé, When they had gotten up from the table,
 190 sun cheval li unt amené. they brought him his horse;
 Bien li unt la sele mise; They have put its saddle on well;
 mut ad trové riche servisé. it has been richly looked after.
 Il prent cingé, si est muítez; He took his leave and mounted;
 vers la cité s'en est alez. he went toward the city.
 195 Suvent esgärde ariere sei. Several times he looks back.
 Mut est Lanval en grant esfrei; Lanval is greatly troubled;
 de s'aventure vait pensaunt he goes along thinking about his adventure
 e en sun curage d[o]taunt. and worrying to himself.
 Esbatz est, ne seit que creir, He is astonished, he doesn't know what to
 think,
 200 il ne la quide mie a veir. he doesn't believe he will see her again.
 Il est a sun ostel venuz; He arrives at his lodging;
 ses hummes treve bien vestüz. he finds his men handsomely dressed.
 Icele nuit bon estel tient; That night he keeps a rich table,
 mes nul ne sot dunt ceo li vient. but no one knew where he got this from:
 205 N'ot en la vile chevalier There was no knight in the town
 ki de surjur ait grant mestier, who greatly needed sustenance

- quē il ne face a lui venir
 e richement e bien servir.
 Lanval donout les riches duns,
 210 Lanval aquitout les prisuns,
 Lanval vesteit les juleürs,
 Lanval feseit les granz honors:
 n'i ot estrange ne privé
 a ki Lanval nen ust doné.
 215 Mut ot Lanval joie e deduit:
 u seit par jur u seit par nuit,
 s'amic peot veer sovent,
 tut est a sun comandement.
 Ceo m'est avis, memes l'an,
 220 après la feste seint Johan,
 d'ici qu'a trente chevalier
 si erent alé esbanier
 en un vergier desuz la tur:
 u la reine ert a surjur.
 225 Ensemble od eus [esteit] Walwains
 e sis' cusins, li beaus Ywains.
 E dist Walwains, li françes, li pruz,
 que tant se fist amer de tuz:
 "Par Deu, seignurs, nus feimes mal
 230 de nostre cumpainun Lanval,
 que tant est larges e curteis,
 e sis peres est riches reis;
 que od nus ne l'avum amené."
 Atant se sunt ariere turné;
 235 a sun ostel rev[un]t ariere,
 Lanval ameinent par preere
 A une fenestre entaille
 s'esteit la reine apuie [e].
 treis dames ot ensemble od li.
 240 La maisné [le rei] choisi;
 Lanval choisi e esgarda.
 Une des dames apela;
 par li manda ses dameiseles,
 les plus quointes [e] les plus beles:
 245 od li si irrunt esbainier,
 la u cil sunt al vergier.
 Trente en menat od li e plus;
 par les degrez descendent jus.
 Les chevalers encuntre vunt,
 250 que pur eles grant joie unt.
 Il les unt prises par les mains;
- whom Lanval does not have brought to him
 and well and richly served.
 Lanval gave rich gifts,
 Lanval ransomed prisoners,
 Lanval clothed minstrels,
 Lanval did great honor:
 there was no stranger or dear friend
 to whom Lanval did not give.
 Lanval had great joy and pleasure:
 he can see his beloved often,
 whether by day or by night;
 she is entirely at his command.
 That same year, as I understand,
 after the feast of St. John,
 as many as thirty knights
 were going out to enjoy themselves
 in a garden below the tower
 where the queen was staying.
 Gawain was with them
 and his cousin, the handsome Yvain.
 Gawain, the noble, the valiant,
 who made himself so beloved by everyone, said,
 "By God, my lords; we have done wrong
 not to have brought along with us
 our companion Lanval,
 who is so generous and courteous,
 and whose father is a rich king."
 They turned back at once;
 they go back to his lodging
 and persuade Lanval to accompany them.
 The queen was leaning
 on a window ledge;
 she had three ladies along with her.
 She saw the king's household;
 she saw Lanval and noticed him.
 She called one of her ladies;
 she got her to send for her maidens,
 the most elegant and lovely:
 they will go to enjoy themselves with her
 there where the men are in the orchard.
 She took thirty or more of them with her;
 they go down by the stairs.
 The knights, who are delighted to see them,
 go to meet them.
 They took the ladies by the hand;

- cil [parlément] ni ert pas vilains. the conversation was not unrefined.
 Lanval s'en vait a une part, Lanval wanders off by himself,
 mut luin des autres. Ceo li est tant quite far from the others. It seems long to him
 255 que s'amie puist tenir, until he might have his beloved,
 baiser, acoler e sentir; kiss, embrace, and touch her;
 l'autrui joie prise petit; he values little another's joy
 si il n'ad le suen' delit. if he does not have what pleases him.
 Quant la reine sul le veit, When the queen sees him alone,
 260 al chevaler en va tut dreit; she goes right to the knight;
 lunc lui s'asist, si l'apela, she sat by him and spoke to him,
 tut sun curage li muistra: she showed him all her feelings:
 "Lanval, mut vis'ai honuré
 e mut chere m'ut amé.
 265 tute m'amur poëz avoir; You can have all my love;
 kar me dites vostre voleir. tell me your desire!
 Ma drüerie vus'otrei; I am willing to be your lover;
 mut devez estre lié de mei." you should be delighted with me."
 "Dame," fet il, "lessëz m'ester!
 270 Jeo n'ai cure de vus amër.
 Lungement ai servi le rei; For a long time I have served the king;
 ne li voil pas mentir ma fei. I don't want to betray my faith to him.
 Já pur vus ne pur vostre amur
 ne mesfrâi a mun seignur."
 275 La reine s'en curuça; The queen became furious at this;
 irie[e] fu, si mesparla. in her anger, she spoke wrongly.
 "Lanval," fet ele, "bien le quit,
 vuz n'amez gueres cel delit. you have no interest in that pleasure.
 Asez le m'ad humme dir sovent
 280 que des femmez n'avez talent.
 Vallez avez bien aféitez,
 ensemble od eus vus dedüiez.
 Vileins cüarz, mauveis failliz;
 mut est mi sifës maubailliz
 285 que pres de lui vus ad suffert;
 mun escient que Deus en pert!"
 Quant il l'oï, mut fu dolent;
 del respundre ne fu pas lent.
 Teu chose dist par maltalent
 290 dunt il se repenti sovent.
 "Dame," dist'il, "de cel mestier
 ne me sai jëo nient aidier;
 mes jo aim, [e] si sui amis
 cete ke deit aver le pris
 295 sur tutes celes que jeo sai.
 E une chose vus dirai,

- bien le sachez a descobert; . . . know it well and openly;
 une de celes ke la sert, . . . any one of her servants,
 tute la plus povre meschine, . . . even the poorest maid,
 300 vaut meuz de vus, dame reïne, . . . is worth more than you, lady queen,
 de cors, de vis e de beauté, . . . in body, face, and beauty,
 d'enseignement e de bunté. . . in manners and goodness.
 La reïne s'en par[t] atant, . . . The queen leaves at once
 en sa chambrë en vaît plurant. . . and goes into her chamber, crying.
 305 Mut fu dolente e curuciee . . . She was very upset and angry
 de ceo k'il [l']out [si] avilee. . . that he had insulted her in this way.
 En sun lit malade cucha; . . . She took to her bed, sick;
 jamés, ceo dit, ne levera . . . never, she said, would she get up
 si li reis ne l'en feseit dreit . . . if the king did not do the right thing
 310 de ceo dunt ele se plein[d]reit. . . about the complaint she would make to him.
 Li reis fu del bois repeiriez; . . . The king returned from the woods;
 mut out le jur esté haitiez. . . he had had a very pleasant day.
 As chambres la reïne entra. . . He went into the queen's rooms.
 Quant ele le vit, si se clamma; . . . When she saw him, she made her appeal;
 315 as piez li chiet, merci erie, . . . she falls at his feet and asks for mercy
 e dit que Lanval l'ad hunie. . . and says that Lanval has shamed her.
 De drüerie la requist; . . . He asked her to be his lover;
 pur ceo que ele l'en escundist, . . . because she refused him,
 mut [la] laidi e avila. . . he insulted her greatly and said ugly things.
 320 De tele amie se vanta, . . . He boasted of such a beloved,
 que tant iert cuinte e noble e fiere . . . one who was so elegant, noble, and proud,
 que meuz valut sa chamberere, . . . that her chambermaid,
 la plus povre que [la] serveit, . . . the poorest girl who served her,
 que la reïne ne feseit. . . was worth more than the queen.
 325 Li reis s'en curuçat forment; . . . The king got extremely angry;
 juré en ad sun serement: . . . he swore an oath that
 si il ne s'en peot en curt defendre, . . . if Lanval cannot defend himself in court,
 il le ferat arder u pendre. . . he will have him burnt or hanged.
 Fors de la chambre eissi li reis, . . . The king went out of the chamber
 330 de ses baruns apelat treis; . . . and called three of his nobles;
 il les enveit pur Lanval, . . . he sends them for Lanval,
 quë asez ad dolur e mal, . . . who has sorrow and trouble enough.
 A sun [o]stel fu reyenuz; . . . He had gone back to his lodging;
 il s'est[eit] bien aparceüz . . . it was quite evident to him
 335 qu'il aveit perdue s'amie: . . . that he had lost his beloved;
 descobert ot la drüerie, . . . he had revealed their love.
 En une chambre fu tut suls, . . . He went into a chamber by himself,
 pensis esteit e anguissus, . . . anxious and distraught;
 s'amie apele mut sovent, . . . he calls on his beloved over and over,
 340 mes ceo ne li valut neent. . . and it does him no good at all.
 Il se pleigneit e suspirot, . . . He lamented and sighed,

	d'ures en autres se pasmot;	he fainted repeatedly;	
	puis li crie cent feiz merci	then a hundred times he begs her to have pity	
	que ele par[ol]t a sun ami.	and appear to her beloved.	
345	Sun quor e sa buche maudit;	He cursed his heart and his mouth;	390
	ceo est merveille k'il ne s'ocit.	it's a wonder he does not kill himself.	
	Il ne seit tant crier ne braire	He cannot cry out or wail	
	ne debatre ne sei detraire	or reproach or torment himself	
	que ele en veulle merci avoir	enough to make her take pity on him;	
350	sul tant que la puisse veoir.	even enough that he might see her.	
	Oi las, cument se cuntendra?	Alas, what will he do?	395
	Cil ke li reis ci enveia,	Those the king sent there	
	il sunt venu, si li unt dit	arrived, and said to him	
	que a la cuît voisë sanz respit:	that he must go to the court without delay:	
355	li reis l'aveit par eus mandé,	the king had sent the order through them,	400
	la reine l'out encusé.	the queen had accused him.	
	Lanval i vait od sun-grant doel;	Lanval goes there in his great sorrow;	
	il l'eüssent ocis [sun] veoil.	they could have killed him for all he cared.	
	Il est devant le rei venu;	He came before the king;	
360	mut fu dolent, taisanz è mu;	he was very sorrowful; silent and unspeaking.	405
	de grant dolur mustre semblant.	showing the appearance of great sorrow.	
	Li reis li dit par maltalant,	The king says to him angrily;	
	"Vassal, vus me avez mut mesfait!	"Vassal, you have done me a great wrong!	
	Trop començastes vilein plait	You began too base a suit	
365	de mei hunir e aviler	to shame and revile me	
	e la reine leïdengier.	and insult the queen.	
	Vanté vus estes de folie:	You boasted foolishly:	410
	trop par est noble vostre amie,	your beloved is far too exalted	
	quant plus est bele; sa meschine	when her maid is more beautiful	
370	e plus vaillante que la reine."	and worthy than the queen."	
	Lanval defent la deshonur	Lanval denies the dishonor	
	e la hunte de sun seignur	and shame of his lord	
	de mot en mot, si cum il dist,	word by word, just as he said it,	415
	que la reine ne requisé;	for he had not requested the queen's love;	
375	mes de ceo dunt il ot parlé	but he acknowledged the truth	
	reconut il la verité,	of what he had said	
	de l'amur dunt il se vanta:	concerning the love about which he boasted:	
	dolent en est, perdue l'a.	he is sorrowful, for he has lost her.	420
	De ceo lur dit qu'il'en ferat	Concerning this he says that he will do	
380	quanque la curt esgarderat.	whatever the court judges best.	
	Li reis fu mut vers li irez;	The king was quite furious with him;	
	tuz ses hummés ad enveiez.	he sent for all his men	
	pur dire dreit que il en deit faire,	to say rightly what he must do;	425
	que hum ne li puis[se] a mal retraire.	so that no one would speak ill of it.	
385	Cil unt sun commandement fait,	They did what he ordered,	
	u eus seit bel, u eus seit lait.	whether they liked it or not:	

- Comunement i sunt alé,
 e unt jugé e esgardé
 que Lanval deit avoir un jur;
 mes plegges truisse a sun seignür
 qu'il atendra sun jugement
 e revendra en sun present;
 si serat la curt esforcie[e],
 kar n'i ot dunc fors la maisne[e].
- 390 They all went off together
 and judged and decided
 that Lanval should have his day in court;
 but he must provide guarantees for his lord
 that he will await his judgment
 and return to his presence:
 a larger court will be gathered,
 for now there was no one there but the
 household.
- 395 Al rei revienent li barun,
 si li mustrent la reisun.
 Li reis ad plegges demandé.
 Lanval fu sul e esgaré;
 n'i aveit parent nē ami.
- The nobles return to the king,
 and explain to him their judgment.
 The king demanded guarantees.
 Lanval was alone and in great distress;
 he had no family or friends.
- 400 Walwain i vait, ki l'a plevis,
 e tuit si cumpain un après.
 Li reis lur dit: "E jol vus les
 sur quanke vus tenez de mei,
 teres e fieus, chescun par sei."
- Gawain goes to act as a guarantor for Lanval,
 and all his companions after him.
 The king says to them: "I commend him to you
 on the basis of whatever you may hold of me,
 lands and fiefs, each one for himself."
- 405 Quant plevis fu, duñc n'[i] ot el;
 alez s'en est a sun ostel.
 Li chevaler l'unt conveé;
 mut l'unt blasmé e chastié
 k'il ne face si grant dolur,
 e maudient si fol'amür.
- Once the pledge was made, there was
 nothing more to do;
 Lanval went off to his lodging.
 The knights went along with him;
 they greatly rebuked and counseled him
 not to be in such sorrow,
 and they cursed such mad love.
- 410 Chescun jur l'aloënt veer,
 pur ceo k'il voleient saveir
 u il beüst, u il mangast;
 mut dotouent k'il s'afolast.
- Every day they went to see him,
 for they wanted to know
 if he was drinking, if he was eating;
 they greatly feared that he would do himself
 harm.
- 415 Al jur que cil orent numé,
 li barun furent asemblé.
 Li reis e la reine i fu,
 e li plegge unt Lanval rendu.
 Mut furent tuz pur li dolent:
 jeo quid k'il en i ot teus cent
 ki feüssent tut lur poeir
 pur lui sanz pleit delivre aveir;
 il iert retté a mut grant tort.
- On the day that they had named
 the nobles gathered.
 The king and queen were there,
 and the guarantors brought Lanval.
 Everyone was very sad for him:
 I believe that there were some hundred there
 who would have done anything in their power
 to free him without a trial;
 he was very wrongly accused.
- 420 Li reis demande le recort
 sulunc le cleim e les respuns;
 ore est trestut sur les baruns:
 Il sunt al jugement alé,
 mut sunt pensifz e esgaré
- The king demands the verdict
 according to the charges and the defense;
 now it is entirely up to the nobles.
 They went to sit in judgment,
 very anxious and dismayed

	del franc humme d'autre pais	over the noble man from another country	470
430	quē entre eus ert si entrepris.	who was in such trouble among them.	
	Encumbrier le veulent plusur	Many want to find him guilty	
	pur la volenté sun seignur.	according to their lord's wishes.	
	Ceo dist li quoens de Cornwaïlle:	The count of Cornwall said;	
	"Ja endreit [nus] n'i avera faille;	"We must not fall short;	475
435	kar ki que en plurt e ki que en chant,	for whoever may weep or sing,	
	le dreit estuet ater avant:	the law must take precedence.	
	Li reis parla vers sun vassal;	The king has spoken against his vassal,	
	que jeo vus oi numer Lanval;	whom I hear you call Lanval;	
	de felunie le retta	he accused him of a crime	480
440	e d'un mesfait l'acheisuna,	and brought charges of wrongdoing against	
		him,	
	d'un'amur dunt il se vanta;	concerning a love of which he boasted;	
	e ma dame s'en curuça.	which made my lady angry.	
	Nuls ne l'apele fors le reis;	No one accuses him but the king;	
	par cele fei ke jeo vus dei,	by the faith I owe you,	
445	ki bien en veut dire le veir,	whoever wants to speak the truth,	485
	ja n'i deüst respuns avoir,	there would not even be a case	
	si pur ceo nun que a sun seignur	except that to the name of his lord	
	deit [hum] par tut fairē honor.	a man should do honor in everything.	
	Un serement l'engagera,	Lanval can affirm this by oath,	
450	e li reis le nus pardura:	and the king will turn him over to us for	490
		judgment.	
	E s'il peot aver sun guarant	And if he can have his guarantor—	
	e s'amie venist avant	if his lady should come forward	
	e ceo fust veir k'il en deüst,	and what he said about her,	
	dunt la reine se marist,	which made the queen angry, was true—	495
455	de ceo avera il bien merci,	then he will certainly receive mercy,	
	quant pur viltē nel dist de li.	since he did not say it out of baseness.	
	E s'il ne peot garant avoir,	And if he cannot produce proof,	
	ceo li devum faire saveir:	we must make him understand this:	
	tut sun servise perde del rei,	he loses all his service to the king	500
460	e sil deit cungeer de sei."	and must take his leave of him."	
	Al chevaler unt envéé,	They sent to the knight,	
	si li unt dit e nuntié	and they told him and announced	
	que s'amie face venir.	that he should make his beloved come	
	pur lui tencer e garantir.	to defend and bear witness for him.	505
465	Il lur dit qu'il ne poeit:	He told them that he could not:	
	ja pur li sucurs n'en avereit,	he would never get help from her.	
	Cil s'en rev[un]t as jugeürs;	They go back to the judges,	
	ki n'i atendent nul sucurs.	who expect no help from that quarter.	
	Li reis les hastot durement	The king urged them fiercely.	510

¹ *d'un'amur ... honor* Lines 441–49 appear in a different order in the manuscript: 443–48, 442, 441. This emendation is made by most editors.

- 470 pur la reine kis atent;
 Quant il deveient departir,
 deus puceles virent venir
 sur deus beaus palefreiz amblanz.
 Mut par esteient avenanz;
 475 de cendal purpre sunt vestues,
 tut senglement a lur char nues.
 Cil les esgardou volenters,
 Walwain, od li treis chevalers,
 vait a Lanval, si li cunta;
 480 les deus puceles li mustra.
 Mut fu haitié, forment li pie
 qu'il li deüst si ceo ert [s] amie.
 Il lur ad dit ne seït ki sunt
 ne dunt vienent ne u eles vunt.
 485 Celes sunt alees avant
 tut a cheval; par tel semblant
 descendirent devant le deis,
 la u seït Artur li reis.
 Eles furent de grant beuté,
 490 si unt curteusement parlé:
 "Reis, fai tes chambers delivrer
 e de pa[il]es encurtiner,
 u ma dame puïst descendre
 si ensemble od vus veut ostel prendre."
 495 Il lur otria mut volenters,
 si appela deus chevalers:
 as chambres les menerent sus.
 A cele feiz ne distrent plus.
 Li reis demande a ses baruns
 500 le jugement e les respuns
 e dit que mut l'unt curucié
 de ceo que tant l'unt delaié.
 "Sire," funt il, "nus departimes
 pur les dames que nus veïmes;
 505 [nus n'i avum] nul esgart fait.
 Or recumencerum le plait."
 Dunc assemblerent tut pensif;
 assez i ot noise e estrif.
 510 Quant il ierent en cel esfrei,
 deus puceles de gent cunrei—
 vestues de deus pa[il]es freis,
 chevauchent deus muls espanneis—
- for the sake of the queen who was waiting;
 Just as they were about to make their ruling,
 they saw two maidens coming
 on two beautiful brisk palfreys.
 They were extremely lovely;
 they were dressed in purple raffeta
 down to their bare skin.
 Everyone gazed at them eagerly;
 Gawain, and three knights with him,
 went to Lanval and told him;
 he showed him the two maidens.
 He was very happy, and begged him
 to say whether this was his beloved.
 Lanval tells them that he does not know who
 they are
 or where they come from or where they are
 going.
 The maidens went along
 on their horses; in this fashion
 they got down in front of the dais
 where King Arthur was sitting.
 They were very beautiful
 and spoke courteously:
 "King, make your chambers ready
 and spread out silks
 where my lady can step
 if she wants to take lodging with you."
 He very willingly granted this to them,
 and called two knights:
 they led them up to the chambers.
 At that time they said no more.
 The king asks his nobles
 for the judgment and the verdict
 and says that they have made him very angry
 by delaying for so long.
 "Sire," they say, "we broke off our discussion
 on account of the ladies that we saw;
 we have not made a decision.
 Now we will resume the trial."
 Then they gathered, quite concerned;
 there was a great deal of noise and debate.
 While they were in this disarray,
 they saw coming down the road
 two maidens of noble bearing,
 dressed in cool silks,

	virent venir la rue aval.	riding two Spanish mules:	
	Grant joie en'eurent li-vassal;	The vassals were delighted by this;	
515	entre eus dient que ore est gariz Lanval li pruz e li hardiz.	they say to each other that now Lanval, the bold and strong, is cured.	56
	Yweins i est a lui alez, ses cumpainuns i ad'menez.	Yvain went to him, taking his companions with him.	
	"Sire," fet il, "rehaitez-vus!	"Sir," he said, "rejoice!	
520	Pur amour Deu, parlez od nus! Ici viennent deus dameiseles mut acemees e mut beles:	For the love of God, speak to us! Here come two maidens, very elegant and beautiful:	56'
	ceo est vostre amie vereiment!"	surely it is your beloved!"	
	Lanval respunt hastivement	Lanval answers hastily	
525	e dit qu'il pas nes'avoit ne il nes'etnut ne nes'amot.	and says that he neither claimed them nor knew them nor loved them.	570
	Atant furent celes venues, devant le rei sunt descendues.	Just then the maidens arrived and dismounted before the king.	
	Mut les loerent li plusur de cors, de vis e de color;	Many people greatly praised their bodies, faces and coloring;	
530	n'i ad cele meuz ne vausist que unkes la reine ne fist.	both of them were certainly worth more than the queen ever was.	575
	L'aisnee fu curteise e sage, avenantment dist sun message:	The elder was courteous and wise; she spoke her message becomingly:	
535	"Reis, kar nus fai chambres baillier a oés ma dame herbergier; ele vient ici a tei parler."	"King, make ready rooms for us to receive my lady; she is coming here to speak to you."	580
	Il les cumandë a mener od les autres quë aincëis viendrent.	He orders that they be taken to the others who had arrived previously.	
540	Unkes des muls nul plai[t] ne'tindrent.	They need not worry about the mules:	585
	Quant il fu d'eles deliverez, puis ad tuz ses baruns mandez	When he had sent them off, he ordered all his nobles	
	que le jugement seit renduz: trop ad le jur esté tenuz.	that the judgment be given: too much of the day had been taken up.	
545	La reine s'en curuceit, quë si lunges les atëdeit.	The queen was getting angry that she was kept waiting so long by them.	590
	Ja departissent a itant, quânt par la vile vient errant	They were about to take a decision, when through the town comes	
	tut a cheval une pucele:	a maiden riding on a horse:	
550	en tut le secle n'ot plus bele.	there was no lady in the world more beautiful.	595
	Un blanc palefrei chevachot, que bel e stief la portot.	She was riding a white palfrey, which carried her well and gently.	
	Mut ot bien fet e col e teste:	It had a well-shaped neck and head:	
	suz ciel nen ot plus bele beste.	there was no more beautiful animal under heaven.	
555	Riche atur ot al palefrei:	The palfrey was richly harnessed:	600
	suz ciel nen ad quëns ne rei ki tut [le] p[e]üst eslegier:	no count or king under heaven could have afforded it all.	

- sanz tere vendre u engagier. without selling or mortgaging land,
 Ele iert vestue en itel guise: She was dressed in this manner:
 560 de chainsil blanc e de chemise, in a shift of white linen,
 que tuz les costez li pareient, which let both her sides be seen,
 que de deus parz laciez esteient. as it was laced on either side,
 Le cors ot gent, basse la hanche; She had a lovely body, a long waist,
 le col plus blanc que neif sur branche, a neck whiter than snow on a branch,
 565 les oïlz ot vairs e blanc le vis, grey-green eyes and white skin,
 bele buche, neis bien asis, a beautiful mouth, a well-formed nose,
 les surcilz bruns, e bel le frunt dark eyebrows and a lovely forehead—
 e le chef cresp e aukes blunt; and curling golden hair;
 fil d'or ne gette tel luir no golden thread casts such a gleam,
 570 cum sun chevel cunter le jur. as did her hair in the sun.
 Sis manteus fu de purpre bis; Her mantle was dark purple;
 les pans en ot entour li mis. she had wrapped its ends around her,
 Un espervier sur sun poin tient; She holds a falcon on her fist,
 e un leyerer après lui vient. and a greyhound runs behind her.
 575 Il n'ot al burc petit ne grant There was no one in the town, great or small,
 ne li veillard ne li enfant not the old men or the children,
 que ne l'alassent esgarder. who did not go to look at her,
 Si cum il la veent errer, As they saw her pass,
 de sa beauté n'iert mie gas. there was no joking about her beauty.
 580 Ele venoit meins que le pas. She came along quite slowly.
 Li jugeür, que la veieient, The judges, who saw her,
 a [grant] merveille le teneient; considered it a great marvel;
 il n'ot un sul ki l'esgardast there was not one who looked at her
 de dreite joie ne s'eschaufast. who did not grow warm with sheer joy.
 585 Cil ki le chevaler amoënt Those who loved the knight
 a lui veneient, si li cuntouent came to him, and told him
 de la pucele ki venoit, of the maiden who was coming,
 si Deu plest, que le delivereit; who, if it pleased God, would set him free:
 "Sire cumpain, ci-en vient une, "Sir companion, here comes one
 590 mes ele n'est pas faye ne brune; who is not tawny nor dark;
 ceo'st la plus bele del mund, she is the loveliest in the world,
 de tutes celes, k'è i sunt." of all the women who live."
 Lanval l'oï, sun chief dresça; Lanval heard this, he lifted his head;
 bien la cunut; si suspira. he knew her well, and sighed.
 595 Li sanc li est munté al vis; The blood rose to his face;
 de parler fu aukes hastifs, he was very quick to speak,
 "Par fei," fet il, "ceo est m'amiel "In faith," he said, "it is my beloved!
 Or m'en est gueres ki m'oçis, Now I care little who may kill me,
 si ele n'ad merci de mei; if she does not take pity on me;
 600 kar gariz sui, quant jeo la vei." for I am cured when I see her."
 La damë entra al palais; The lady entered the palace;
 unc si bele n'i vient mais. such a beauty had never come there.

- Devant le rei est descendue
 si que de tuz iert bien [veüe].
 605 Sun mantel ad laissié ch[e]iër,
 que meuz la puissent veer.
 Li reis, que mut fu enseigniez,
 il s'est encuntre lui dresciez,
 e tuit li autre l'enüferent,
 610 de li servir se présenterent.
 Quant il l'orent bien esgardée
 e sa beauté forment loëe;
 ele parla en teu mesure,
 kar de demurer nen ot curé;
 615 "Reis, jéo ai amé un tñen vassal:
 veez le ici, ceo est Lanval!
 Acheisuné fu en ta curt.
 Ne vuil mie que a mal li turt
 de ceo qu'il dist; ceo sachez tu
 620 que la reïne ad tort eü:
 unc nul jur ne la requist.
 De la vantance kē il fist,
 si par me peot estre aquitez,
 par voz baruns seit deliverez!"
 625 Ceo qu'il jugerunt par dreit
 li reis otrie ke issi seit:
 N'i ad un sul que n'ait jugié
 que Lanval ad tut desrainié.
 Deliverez est par lur esgart,
 630 e la pucele s'en départ.
 Ne la peot li reis retenir;
 assez gēnt ot a li servir.
 Fors de la sale aveient mis
 un grant perrun de marbre bis,
 635 u li pesant humme muntoent,
 que de la curt le rei [aloent]:
 Lanval esteit münté desus.
 Quant la pucele ist fors a l'us,
 sur le palefrei, detriērs li,
 640 de plain eslais Lanval sailli.
 Od li s'en vait en Avalun,
 ceo nus recuntent li Bretun,
 en un isle que mut est beaux;
 la fu ravi li dameiseaus.
 645 Nul hum n'en oī plus parler,
 ne jéo n'en sai avant cunter.
- She dismounted before the king
 so that she was quite visible to all.
 She let her mantle fall
 so that they could see her better.
 The king, who was very well-bred,
 got up to meet her,
 and all the others honored her
 and offered themselves to serve her.
 When they had looked at her well
 and greatly praised her beauty,
 she spoke in this way,
 for she did not wish to delay:
 "King, I have fallen in love with one of your
 vassals:
 you see him here, it is Lanval!
 He was accused in your court:
 I do not wish it to be held against him,
 concerning what he said; you should know
 that the queen was wrong:
 he never asked for her love.
 And concerning the boast he made,
 if he can be acquitted by me,
 let your nobles set him free!"
 The king grants that it should be so,
 that they should judge rightly.
 There was not one who did not judge
 that Lanval was completely exonerated.
 He is freed by their judgment,
 and the maiden takes her leave.
 The king cannot detain her;
 she had enough people to serve her.
 Outside the hall was set
 a great block of dark marble,
 where heavy men mounted,
 who were leaving the king's court:
 Lanval got up on it.
 When the maiden came through the gate,
 with one leap Lanval
 jumped on the palfrey, behind her.
 With her he went to Avalon;
 so the Bretons tell us,
 to a very beautiful island;
 the young man was carried off there.
 No one ever heard another word of him;
 and I can tell no more.

MIDDLE ENGLISH LYRICS

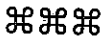
The Middle English poems in this section are for the most part difficult to date with any precision. In some cases they draw on relatively sophisticated lyric traditions from continental sources, but very largely they seem to be rooted in popular traditions that were probably already old when the earliest surviving copies of these poems were made. Like most short medieval poems that have survived, they are anonymous. From the familiarity with medieval Latin exhibited in some of the poems and their survival in manuscripts containing Latin alongside English (and French) texts, we may infer that many were read and quite possibly written by clerics—though even in these cases the authors may well have been adapting existing popular materials. Such poems have by convention been referred to for centuries as “medieval lyrics,” though the term has been thought by some to be both anachronistic (the earliest appearance of the word “lyric” in English is in 1581) and somewhat misleading; in tone and subject matter many of these poems have little in common with the poems we have become accustomed to think of as “lyrical.”

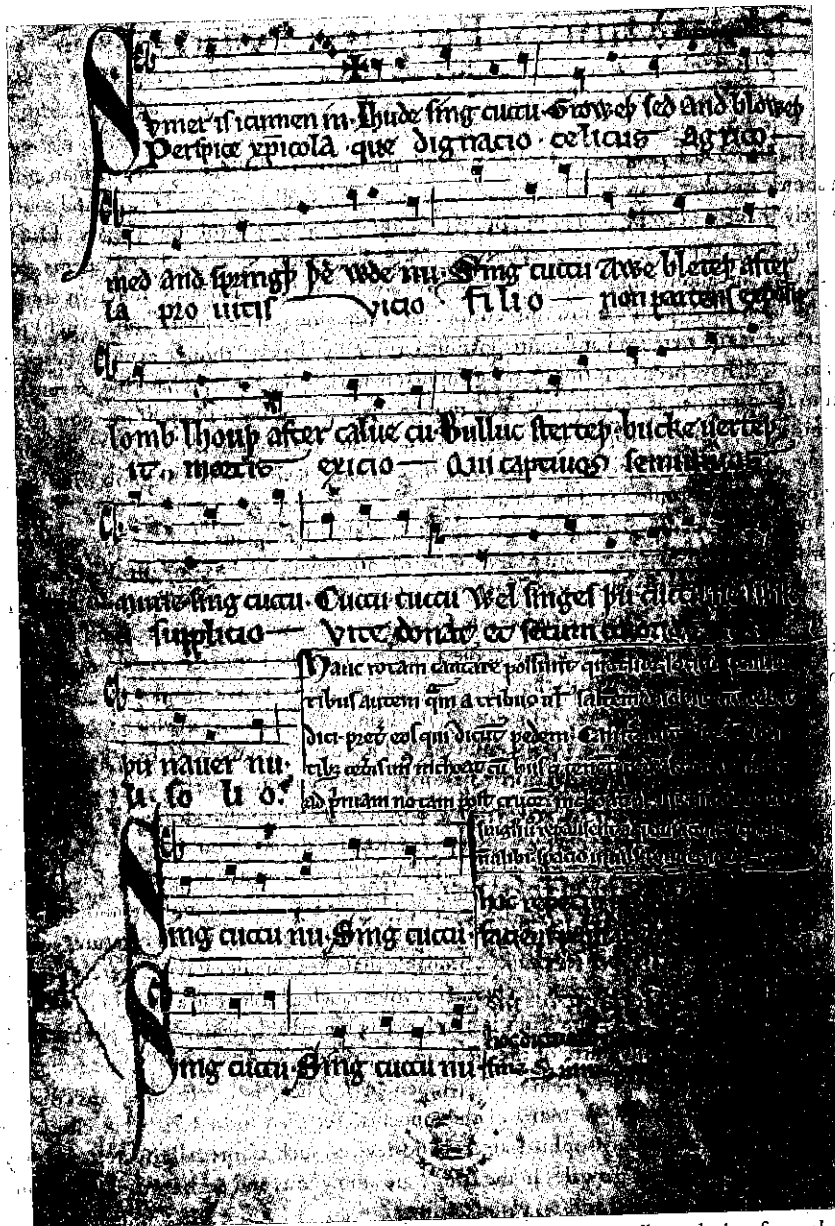
The majority of medieval lyrics that have survived deal with religious subjects, the most common being devotion to Jesus or the Virgin Mary (or both), often with a focus on Christ's Passion as it is linked to the theme of salvation and sacrifice, or Mary's roles as intercessor and suffering mother (“Stond well, moder, under Rode”). Other religious lyrics contemplate Adam's fall and the transitory nature of life (“Farewell this world, I take my leve forever”), or the importance of constancy in faith. A number of religious lyrics draw on the conventions of secular literature, employing the topoi of so-called courtly love. Such is the case, for example, in “I sing of a maiden,” in which Christ appears as a lover-knight and Mary is depicted as an unblemished maiden who chooses Christ as her son in the way that a secular poem might depict a lady bestowing her favor on a lover.

Modern readers may find a more immediate appeal in the lyrics that deal with secular themes. Earthly love is a frequent subject of these poems, sometimes dwelling on the perceived virtue and attractiveness of the beloved (“Betwene Mersh and Averil”), sometimes employing lewd word play (“I have a gentil cock”), and often taking the form of a lover's lament or complaint about a beloved's absence (“My lefe is faren in a lond”). Satires against women (such as “Of all creatures women be best”) are common; most authorities think it probable that these medieval lyrics were all (or almost all) written by men, even those written in a woman's voice (such as “I lovede a child of this cuntree”).

The range of emotion and expression in the lyrics is remarkably wide. Some poems are light-hearted celebrations of the pleasures of the ale-house (“Bring us in good ale”) or the simple joy of experiencing nature's abundance (“Sumer is icumen in”). There is a refreshing directness (and sometimes a refreshing crudity) to many of these poems. Yet even those lyrics that clearly aim at comic entertainment can employ sophisticated poetic devices, such as internal rhyme, wordplay and allegory. Some lyrics (such as “Foweles in the frith”) are ambiguous and perhaps ambivalent in their content, capable of both secular and religious readings.

We do not know how many of these poems were set to music, but the practice was apparently common; several manuscripts have come down to us that provide music to accompany their lyrics.





Harley Manuscript 978, now in the British Museum, is a miscellany dating from the second half of the thirteenth century; it was compiled and transcribed by monks at Reading Abbey. The page shown here provides the music as well as the English words to "Sumer is icumen in," which remains perhaps the best known of all medieval lyrics. Between the lines alternative words in Latin (focused on the "celicus agricola," or heavenly farmer) are provided by the monks.

Sumer°
Sing,
Sing, cucu

Sumer is icu
Lhude° sing,
Groweth sed'
And springt
Sing, cuccu.

Awe° bleteth
Lhouth after
Bulluc sterte
Murie° sing,
Cuccu, cucc
Well singes 1
Ne swik thu
—EARLIER I

Foweles°
The fiss
And I mon
Much sorw
For beste of
—LATER 13°

¹ cuccu, nu
² Groweth sed
the wood nov
³ Lhouth ...
⁴ Bulluc ... s
merrily!
⁵ Well singes
⁶ mon ... wo
⁷ For ... bloe

Sumer is icumen-in

Sumer° is icumen° in *summer / has come*
 Sing, cuccu, nu.¹ Sing, cuccu.
 Sing, cuccu. Sing, cuccu, nu.

Sumer is icumen in—
 Lhude° sing, cuccu. *loudly*
 Groweth sed° and bloweth° med° *seed / blooms / meadow*
 And springh the wude° nu²— *wood*
 Sing, cuccu.

Awe° bleteth after lomb, *ewe*
 Lhouth after calve cu,³
 Bulluc sterteth, bucke verteth,
 Murie° sing,⁴ cuccu. *merry*
 Cuccu, cuccu,
 Well singes thu,⁵ cuccu— *thou*
 Ne swik thu naver nu!⁵
 —EARLIER 13TH CENTURY

Foweles in the frith

Foweles° in the frith,⁶ *birds / wood*
 The fisses° in the flod,⁶ *fishes / river, stream*
 And I mon waxe wod.⁶
 Much sorw I walk with
 For beste of bon and blod.⁷
 —LATER 13TH CENTURY

Betwene Mersh and Averil

Betwene Mersh° and Averil,⁸ *March / April*
 When spray beginneth to springe,⁸
 The lutel° fowl hath hire will *little*
 On hire lud to singe.⁹
 5 Ich-libbe° in love-longinge *I live*
 For semlokest° of alle thinge— *the most fair, seemly*
 He° may me blisse bringe; *she*
 Ich am in hire baundoun.⁹ *power, control*
 An henty hap ich habbe ihent!¹⁰
 10 Ichot° from Hevene it is me sent.¹⁰ *I know*
 From alle wimmen my love is lent,
 And light on Alisoun.¹¹

On hue hire hair is fair enough,
 Hire browe browne, hire eye blake;
 15 With lossum chere he° on me logh,¹² *she*
 With middle small and well imake.¹² *fashioned*
 Bote° he me wolle° to hire take, *unless / will*
 For to ben hire owen make.¹³
 Longe to liven ichulle° forsake,
 20 And feye fallen adoun.¹⁴ *I shall*

Nightes when I wende° and wake— *twist, turn*
 Forthy mine wonges waxeth won¹⁵—
 Levedy,¹⁵ all for thine sake, *lady*
 Longinge is ilent me on.¹⁶
 25 In world nis non so witer mon

⁸ *When ... springe* When twigs/shoots begin to grow.

⁹ *The lutel ... singe* The little bird has her wish to sing in her language.

¹⁰ *An henty ... ihent* I have received a fair fortune!

¹¹ *From alle ... on Alisoun* My love is taken from all women, and falls upon Alisoun.

¹² *With lossum ... logh* With beautiful face she laughed at me.

¹³ *For to ... make* To be her own lover/companion.

¹⁴ *Longe ... adoun* I shall not live long, and fated to die, fall down.

¹⁵ *Forthy ... won* Therefore my cheeks grow pale.

¹⁶ *Longinge ... on* Longing has fallen on me.

¹ *cuccu, nu* Cuckoo, now.

² *Groweth sed ... wude nu* Seed grows and meadow blooms, and the wood now brings forth growth.

³ *Lhouth ... cu* The cow lows after the calf.

⁴ *Bulluc ... sing* The bullock starts, the buck breaks wind, sing merrily!

⁵ *Well singes ... naver nu* You sing well, cuckoo—now never cease!

⁶ *mon ... wod* Must go mad.

⁷ *For ... blod* For beast of bone and blood.

That all hire bounte tell con:¹
 Hire swire is whittore then the swon,²
 And fairest may in toun.³

30 Ich am for wowing^o all forwake,^o *wooing / exhausted*
 Wery so water in wore,⁴
 Lest eny reve me my make,
 Ich habbe iyirned yore.⁵
 Betere is tholien while sore
 Then mournen evermore.⁶
 35 Geynest^o under gore,⁷ *fairest*
 Herkne to my roun!⁹ *song, cry*
 —LATER 13TH CENTURY—EARLY 14TH CENTURY

Stond well, moder, under Rode

“Stond well, moder,^o under Rode.^o *mother / rood; cross*
 Behold thy sone with glade mode^o— *mind, heart*
 Blithe^o moder might thou be.” *joyful*
 “Sone, how shulde I blithie stonde?”
 5 I se thine fet,^o I se thine honde,^o *feet / hands*
 Nailed to the harde Tree.”
 “Moder, do wey^o thy wepinge. *away*
 I thole^o deth for monkinde— *suffer*
 For my gult^o thole I non.” *sin*
 10 “Sone, I fele the dedestoude:^o *hour of death*
 The swerd is at mine herte gronde,
 That me bihet Simeon.”⁸

¹ *In world ... con* In the world there is no man so wise that he could tell all her virtue.

² *Her swire ... swon* Her neck is whiter than the swan.

³ *And ... in toun* And she is the fairest maiden in town.

⁴ *Ich am ... in wore* I am all wearied from wooing, as weary as water on the shore.

⁵ *Lest ... yore* Lest any deprive me of my beloved, whom I have yearned for for so long.

⁶ *Betere ... evermore* It is better to suffer miserably for a while than to mourn forever.

⁷ *Geynest under gore* Loveliest under clothing (a common expression meaning “most beautiful”).

⁸ *The swerd ... Simeon* The sword that Simeon promised me has pierced the bottom of my heart. See Luke 2.25–35.

“Moder, thou rewe all of thy bern:⁹
 Thou woshe^o away the bloody tern^o— *wash / tears*
 15 It doth me worse then my ded.”¹⁰ *death*
 “Sone, how may I teres werne:¹⁰
 I se the bloody stremes erne^o *run*
 From thine herte to my fet.”

“Moder, now I may thee seye,^o *say*
 20 Betere is that ich one deye¹¹
 Then all monkunde^o to helle go.” *mankind*
 “Sone, I se thy body beswungen,^o *hung*
 Fet and honden thourhout stongen^o— *pierced*
 No wonder thah me be wo.”¹²

25 “Moder, now I shall thee telle,
 Yef I ne deye thou gost to helle:¹³
 I thole ded for thine sake.”
 “Sone, thou art so meke and minde,¹⁴
 Ne wit me naht, it is my kinde¹⁵
 30 That I for thee this sorewe make.”

“Moder, mercy, let me deye!
 For Adam out of helle beye,^o *to redeem*
 And his kun that is forlore.”¹⁶
 “Sone, what shall me to rede:¹⁷
 35 My peine pineth me to dede.¹⁸
 Lat^o me deye thee before.” *let*

“Moder, now thou might well leren^o *learn*
 Whet sorewe haveth that children beren,¹⁹
 Whet sorewe it is with childe gon.”

⁹ *rewe ... bern* Have pity on your child.

¹⁰ *how ... werne* How may I deny my tears?

¹¹ *Betere ... deye* It is better that I alone die.

¹² *No wonder ... wo* No wonder though I grieve.

¹³ *Yef ... helle* If I do not die you will go to hell.

¹⁴ *meke and minde* Gentle and thoughtful.

¹⁵ *Ne wit ... kinde* Do not blame me, it is my nature.

¹⁶ *kun ... forlore* Kin that is lost.

¹⁷ *what shall ... rede* What shall I do?

¹⁸ *peine ... dede* Pain tortures me to death.

¹⁹ *sorewe ... beren* Sorrow they have who bear children.

“Sorewe, iwit
 Bote it be the
 More sorewe

“Moder, rew
 For now thou
 Thou thou b
 “Sone, help e
 Alle tho that
 Maiden, wif

“Moder, may
 The time is c
 The thridde^o
 “Sone, I will
 I deye, iwis, d
 So soreweful

When he ros
 Hire blisse s
 Blithe moder
 Levedy, for d
 Besech thy s
 Thou be our

Blessed be th
 Let us never
 Thourh thy
 Louerd,^o for
 That thou sh
 Thou bring
 Amen.

—LATER 13TH

¹ *rew ... care*

² *wost ... fare*

³ *clene maiden-*

⁴ *So soreweful ...*

⁵ *Levedy ... bli-*

⁶ *of sunnes lisse*

⁷ *ayein oure fo*

40 "Sorewe, iwis,° I con thee telle!
Bote it be the pine of helle,
More sorewe wot° I non."

"Moder, rew of moder care,¹
For now thou wost of moder fare,²
45 Thou thou be clene maiden-mon."³
"Sone, help at alle nede
Alle tho that to me grede,^o
5 Maiden, wif and fol wimmon."^o

"Moder, may I no lengore° dwelle.
50 The time is come I shall to helle.
The thridde° day I rise upon."^o
"Sone, I will with thee founden.^o
I deye, iwis, for° thine wounden,^o
So soreweful ded nes never non."⁴

55 When he ros tho° fell hire sorewe,
Hire blisse sprong the thridde morewe:^o
Blithe moder were thou tho.
Levedy, for that ilke blisse,⁵
Besech thy sone of sunnes lisse—⁶
60 Thou be oure sheld ayein oure fo.⁷

Blessed be thou, full of blisse,
Let us never Hevene misse,
Thourh thy swete sones might.
Louerd,° for that ilke blod.
65 That thou sheddest on the Rod,
Thou bring us into Hevene light.
Amen.

—LATER 13TH CENTURY—EARLY 14TH CENTURY

¹ rew ... care Pity a mother's care.

² wost ... fare Know of motherhood.

³ clene maiden-mon Pure virgin.

⁴ So soreweful ... non There was never such a sorrowful death.

⁵ Levedy ... blisse Lady, for that same joy.

⁶ of sunnes lisse Relief of sins.

⁷ ayein oure fo Against our foe.

I lovede a child of this cuntree

*Were it undo that is ido,
I wolde bewar.⁸*

I lovede a child of this cuntree,^o
And so I wende° he had do me;⁹
5 Now myself the sothe° I see,
That he is far.^o

He seide to me he wolde be true,
And change me for non other new;
Now I sikke° and am pale of hue,
10 For he is far.

He said his sawes° he wolde fulfille;
Therfore I let him have all his wille;
Now I sikke and mourn stille,¹⁰
For he is far.

—C. 14TH CENTURY

I have a gentil cock

I have a gentil° cock,
Croweth° me day;
He doth° me risen erly
My matins° for to say.

5 I have a gentil cock,
Comen he is of gret:^o
His comb° is of red coral,
His tail is of jet.

I have a gentil cock,
10 Comen he is of kinde:
His comb is of red coral,
His tail is of inde.^o

⁸ *Were it ... bewar* If whatever done could be undone, I would be careful (possibly a refrain to be repeated following each stanza).

⁹ *I lovede ... do me* I loved a young man of this country, and so I believed he also loved me.

¹⁰ *stille* Continually.

His legges ben of asor,¹
 So gentle and so smale;
 15 His spores^o arn of silver whit
 Into the wortewale.²

His eynen^o arn of cristal,
 Loken^o all in aumber:^o
 And every night he percheth him:
 20 In mine ladye's chaumber.
 —EARLIER 15TH CENTURY

I sing of a maiden

I sing of a maiden
 That is makeles:^o
 King of alle kinges
 To here sone she ches.³
 5 He cam also^o stille^o
 Ther his moder was,
 As dew in Aprille
 That falleth on the grass.

He cam also stille
 10 To his moderes bowr,^o
 As dew in Aprille
 That falleth on the flowr.

He cam also stille
 Ther his moder lay,
 15 As dew in Aprille
 That falleth on the spray.

Moder and maiden
 Was never non but she:⁴
 Well may swich^o a lady
 20 Godes moder be.
 —EARLIER 15TH CENTURY

¹ *ben of asor* Are like azure.

² *Into the wortewale* Up to the root (of the cock's spur).

³ *To here ... ches* She chose for her son.

⁴ *Moder ... but she* Never was any but she both mother and maiden.

Adam lay ibounden

Adam lay ibounden,^o
 Bounden in a bond:
 Foure thousand winter
 Thought he not too long.
 5 And all was for an apple,
 An apple that he tok,
 As clerkes^o finden
 Wreten in here^o book.

Ne hadde the apple take ben,⁵
 10 The apple taken ben,
 Ne hadde never our Lady
 A ben Hevene Quen.⁶
 Blissed be the time
 That apple take was!
 15 Therefore we moun^o singen,
 "Deo gracias!"⁷
 —EARLIER 15TH CENTURY

Farewell this world, I take my leve forever

Farewell this world, I take my leve forever,
 I am arrestid^o to appere affore^o
 Godis face.
 O mercyfull God, Thow knowest that I had lever^o
 Than all this worldis good to haue an owre^o space
 5 For to make aseth^o for my gret trespac.
 My harte, alas, is brokyn for that sorow.
 Som be this day that shall not be tomorow.

This world, I see, is but a chery fayre,⁸
 All thyngis passith and so moste I algate.^o
 10 This day I satt full royally in a chayre
 Tyll sotyll^o deth knokkid at my gate
 And vnvised^o he said to me, "Chekmate!"
 Loo,^o how sodynly he maketh a devorce^o

⁵ *Ne hadde ... ben* Had the apple never been taken.

⁶ *A ben ... Quene* Been Queen of Heaven.

⁷ "Deo gracias!" i.e., *Deo gratias*. Latin: Thanks be to God!

⁸ *is but ... fayre* Is only a cherry festival (i.e., is passing or transient, like the time of cherry harvest).

And wo.
 corse

Speke so
 I haue n
 treas
 From de
 But my
 I see thi
 Wold Ge
 I say no

This fey
 Promote
 But at la
 Whan hi
 gile.^o
 Experyer
 comp
 Thynkyr
 For foly a

Farewell
 no m
 I moste c
 But in th
 Is Requie
 Whan I f
 Graunte
 That she
 Beati mo
 Humiliat
 —15TH C

B
 FI

¹ *in triste*
 confidence.

² *Requiem* l
 the dead).

³ *Beati ...*
 I am humbl

And wormes to fede^o here he hath layde my^r
corse.^o

feed / corpse

15 Speke softe, ye folkis,^o for I am layde a^o slepe:^r folkis / to
I haue my dreme,^o in triste is myche^r dream, vision
reason.¹

From dethis^o hold fayn^o wold I make a lepe death's / glad
But my wisdom ys torned into feble^o reason: weak

I see this worldis joye lastith but a season.

20 Wold God I had remembrid this beforne!

I say no more but beware of an horn^o.^r summons (?)

This febyll world, so false and so vinstable,
Promoteth his lovers but for a lytill while,
But at last he geveith them a bable^o

bauble, toy

25 Whan his payntid trowth^o is torned into
gile.^o

painted truth / deceit

Experyence cawsith^o me the trowth to
compile,^o

causes / gather

Thynkyng this: to^o late, alas, that I began;

too

For foly and hope disseyeth^o many a man.^r tricks, deceives

Farewell my frendis, the tide^o abidith^o time / waits for
no man;

30 I moste departe hens^o and so shall ye,

hence

But in this passage^o the beste songe that I can

journey

Is Requiem Eternam.² I pray God grant it me.

Whan I haue endid all myn adversite^o

adversity

35 Graunte me in paradise to haue a mancyon,^o

mansion

That shede his blode for my redempcion.

Beati mortui qui in Domino moriuntur.

Humiliatus sum vermis.³

—15TH CENTURY

Bring us in good ale

Bring us in good ale, and bring us in good ale,
Fore our blessed Lady sak,^o bring us in sake
good ale.

¹ *in triste ... treason* Proverbial: "in trust is much treason," i.e., confidence is often deceived.

² *Requiem Eternam* Latin: Eternal rest (a requiem is a mass sung for the dead).

³ *Beati ... vermis* Latin: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord. I am humbled by (or with) worms.

Bring us in no browne bred, fore that is mad of brane;⁴
Nor bring us in no whit bred, fore therin is no game:
5 But bring us in good ale.

Bring us in no befe, for ther is many bones;
But bring us in good ale, for that goth downe at
ones,^o

once

And bring us in good ale.

Bring us in no bacon, for that is passing fat;

10 But bring us in good ale, and give us inought^o enough
of that.

And bring us in good ale.

Bring us in no mutton, for that is ofte lene;⁵

Nor bring us in no tripes, for they be seldom clene:
But bring us in good ale.

15 Bring us in no egges, for ther ar many shelles;
But bring us in good ale, and give us nothing elles,^o else
And bring us in good ale.

Bring us in no butter, for therin ar many heres;^o hairs
Nor bring us in no pigges flesh, for that will mak
us bores:^o

boars

20 But bring us in good ale.

Bring us in no podinges, for therin is all gotes blod;⁶
Nor bring us in no venison, for that is not for our good:
But bring us in good ale.

Bring us in no capon's^o flesh, for that is ofte
der;^o

fowl's / dear, costly

25 Nor bring us in no dokes^o flesh for they slobber in
the mer:^o

ducks' / pond

But bring us in good ale.

—LATER 15TH CENTURY

⁴ *mad of brane* Made of bran.

⁵ *ofte lene* Often lean.

⁶ *gotes blod* I.e., goat's blood puddings.

Of all creatures women be best

*Of all creatures women be best,
Cuius contrarium verum est.¹*

In every place ye may well see
That women be trewe^o as tirtill^o on tree, *true / turtle-dove*
Not liberal^o in langage but ever in secree,² *licentious*
And gret joye amonge them is for to be.

The stedfastnes of women will never be don,
So gentil^o, so curtes^o, they be everichon,³ *noble / courteous*
Meke^o as a lambe, still^o as a stone, *meeke / quiet*
Croked^o nor crabbed^o find ye none. *perverse / twisted*

Men be more cumbers^o a thousandfold,
And I mervail^o how they dare be so bold *troublesome*
Against women for to hold, *marvel*
Seeing them so pascient^o, softe and cold. *patient*

For tell a woman all your counsaile
And she can kepe it wonderly well:
She had lever^o go quik^o to hell *rather / alive*
Than to her neighbour she wold it tell.

Now say well by women or elles^o be still, *else*
For they never displeas man by ther will:

To be angry or wroth they can no skill,⁴
For I dare say they think non^o ill. *no*

Trow ye that women list to smater,⁵
Or against ther husbandes for to clater?^o *make noise*
Nay! they had lever fast, bred and water,
Then for to dele^o in suche a matter. *deal, act*

To the tavern they will not go,
Nor to the alehous never the mo^o. *more*
For, God wot^o, ther hartes wold be wo^o. *knows / sorry*
To spende ther husbandes money so.

—LATER 15TH CENTURY

My lefe is faren in a lond⁶

My lefe is faren in a lond—
Alas! why is she so?
And I am so sore bound
I may nat com her to.
She hath my hert in hold,^o *imprisoned*
Where-ever she ride or go,
With trew love a thousandfold.

—LATER 15TH CENTURY

¹ *Cuius ... est* Latin: The opposite of this is true.

² *in secree* In secret, i.e., discreet.

³ *they be everichon* Is each one.

⁴ *can no skill* Are completely unable.

⁵ *Trow ye ... smater* Do you believe that women enjoy chattering?

⁶ *My lefe ... lond* My love has gone away (to another land). This lyric is referred to in Chaucer's *Nun's Priest's Tale* (1.112).