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Socializing the Sorceress:

The Fairy Mistress in *Lanval*, *Le Bel Inconnu*, and *Partonopeu de Blois*

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Among the most extensive Old French developments of the traditional Celtic fairy mistress motif are the *Lanval* of Marie de France; *Le Bel Inconnu* by Renaut de Bâgé¹ and the anonymous *Partonopeu de Blois*. Though there is disagreement as to the dating of the texts, particularly the latter two, all are considered to be fairly early, with none dating after the early thirteenth century, and perhaps all three belonging to the twelfth.² They therefore provide the opportunity to study early Old French transformations of a motif which had probably been received recently as a result of the exchange of cultures in Anglo Norman England.

The fairy mistress motif as it is found in extant Celtic sources³ receives a variety of treatments, too extensive to be analyzed here. Normally, however, the story involves a woman who, on the basis of a mortal man's reputation, comes from the other world to choose him for her lover; imposes a *geis* or prohibition on him (or simply informs him of the existence of such a prohibition), which he later breaks; and then punishes him (or must stand by helplessly and watch him being punished) for his disobedience, usually by a withdrawal of her love.⁴ The *geis* is, of course, a ubiquitous motif in Celtic literature, not peculiar to the fairy mistress motif. Yet it is interesting to note that the use of *geasa* is common in Old French texts in which this motif is found.⁵

The motif is most often developed in the lai, some examples being *Désiré*, *Graelent*, and *Guingamor*, with *Lanval*, which is usually considered to post-

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date the others,⁶ probably the best known. Its use in the developing genre of romance is fairly extensive, however, though its appearances in such works as *Le Bel Inconnu* and *Partonopeu* have been recognized as introducing conflicting expectations into the longer form (e.g., Haidu and Colby-Hall).

All three of these texts make considerable use of the Celtic elements in the tale, though, not surprisingly, *Lanval* seems to be in many ways closest to the Celtic sources. For instance, unlike the case of the two romances, *Lanval*'s lady is clearly a fairy, who at the end takes her lover back to her own land, Avalon. While O'Sharkey's attempt to identify her directly with Morgain is perhaps not wholly convincing, she is the most linked of the three female figures in question to the older Celtic tales. The ending, though different from the one outlined above in that it may be described as "happy," resembles many Celtic tales, old and modern, in which a mortal is spirited away to the other world, never to be heard from again. The use of *geis* or prohibition receives an interesting twist, however, in that the lady has the power, or somehow acquires it, to remove the penalties for breaking the prohibition, and does so because of her love for *Lanval*. Such a possibility is normally absent in Celtic tradition, according to which a *geis*, once imposed, seems to be almost written on the wind, so that the very universe seems bound to enforce it. Although there is often no moral question involved in a particular *geis*, such as that imposed on Fergus never to refuse a feast (in the "Exile of the Sons of Uisliu," in *The Táin*) or on Cuchulainn never to kill a dog, the necessity of keeping one, and the problems that accrue when two *geasa* are found to be in conflict, form the basis of many Old Irish stories.⁷ As John Reinhard notes, however, Old French texts tended to use the *geis* as a means of exploring the courtly love ethic and the relations between men and women. The prohibition imposed by the lady on *Lanval* is a personal one, directly touching on their relationship, at the same time that it relates to

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the practical question of the necessity for secrecy in courtly love.⁸ It is not clear from the text whether the prohibition is actually of the lady's own doing or might be imposed from the outside, by those of her *contrée*, for she simply says:

"... Ne vus descovrez a nul humme! / ... A tuz jurs m'averiez perdue, / Se ceste amur esteit seüe" (145-8). However, her ability to unsay these words and her decision to do so invite comparison with the divine forgiveness extended to the sinner after bitter contrition. Lanval's breaking of his promise is in fact a kind of "sin" against his lady, unlike the usual breaking of a *geis*, and the final reconciliation says much about the nature of love in the view of Marie de France.⁹

Before examining other elements in the *Lanval*, we shall first look at the so-called *fées* in the two romances, and at the nature of the prohibitions they impose. Both of the *fées* are what Reinhard calls "rationalized fairies" (299), sorceresses who have learned how to do apparently magical things through study. Both, however, live in what seems at first to be a kind of "other world" setting. The Golden Island, on which the Pucele aux Blanches Mains lives, for instance, immediately calls to mind the islands of the Irish Tir na N'Og, and the palace is described in terms that emphasize both its richness and its strangeness: "Un palais i ot bon et biel; / Cil qui le fist sot d'encanter, / que nus hom nel puet deviser / De coi i fu, mais bials estoit (190-7). Yet in other ways the city seems normal enough, with a wealthy burgher population and booming trade that may help to explain where the rich stones of the palace came from. Besides, the "journey" to the island requires nothing more than crossing a bridge (after the rather formidable obstacle of the lady's *ami* is passed), since the island is cut off from land by only "uns bras del mer" (1878). As for the lady herself, Sara Sturm-Maddox rightly notes that her magic role is de-emphasized throughout the text, although she is still referred to from time to time as a "fée." She is shown as being able to foretell

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the future, create illusions, influence events around her in some rather extraordinary ways, and project her voice over a great distance. Yet there is never any indication that the hero's immediate and compelling love for her is caused by enchantment and, in fact, her apparently miraculous powers are eventually proven to be quite limited, for she is unable to prevent the hero's marriage to her rival, even though Guinglain had previously sworn to marry no one but the Pucele: "Par tos les sains qui sont el mont / Nesune feme ne prendroie / fors vos, pas ne vos mentiroie" (5354-60).

As regards the question of the prohibition and the consequences for breaking it, we note that, as in the case of *Lanval*, the prohibition is a personal and very specific one: the hero must not leave the Golden Island to attend a tournament held by King Arthur (one that has, in fact, been set up for the purpose of luring Guinglain there so he can take his place in the Arthurian society and receive his proper "reward" of a bride--the woman he has rescued--and her kingdom). The reason for the prohibition is, however, a very pragmatic one and concerns events that are totally beyond the lady's control--she has "read in the stars" (5347-51) that if he goes there he will be married. Being what he is, however (and, ironically, it is because of his superiority as an Arthurian knight that she loves him), he is unable to resist the temptation of going to the tournament, and the lady seems totally helpless to change the events in any way. In a sense, then, the breaking of this prohibition is more reminiscent of the situation in traditional Celtic stories than are the events of *Lanval* in that consequences cannot be undone. The open ending of the romance, of course, leaves open the possibility that Guinglain may find his mistress again, yet any such future liaison could only be adulterous and necessarily cause unhappiness to all concerned.¹⁰

Like this lady, the heroine of *Partonopeu de Blois*, Melior, is a sorceress who has learned the practice of magic from her father. Partonopeu's

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arrival in her land, as noted by the text's editor (vol. II, Pt. 2, 17) bears resemblance to many Celtic stories regarding passage to the other world. Like the heroes Graelent and Guingamor, Partonopeu is lured there when he gets lost on a hunt that seems to have magic elements in it. Arriving in a mysterious boat, he finds himself in a beautiful but apparently empty city. All this, however, is brought about by Melior, who has made him invisible to all the people in her city and vice versa because she wishes to marry him but cannot until he has come of age and can be accepted by her people. Like Guinglain on the Ile d'Or, he lives a pleasant but lonely existence in which his every wish is granted and he enjoys every night the favors of his lady, who has, like the ladies in the other two texts, offered herself to him freely. (This aspect of the traditional fairy mistress leads Tom Peete Cross to refer to this figure as the "forth-putting fée.") He is not, however, made a "prisoner" there, for Melior allows him to leave when he requests it (once so he can help defend the French king from attack, another time against her better judgment and with dire consequences), the only prohibition being that he must not try to see her until they are married. Though the prohibition, similar to the one in the Cupid and Psyche story, is classical rather than being specifically Celtic (there are, in fact, Graeco-Byzantine

elements in all these texts, which cannot be examined here),¹¹ Partonopeu's reason for breaking the prohibition is reminiscent of various Old French texts taken to be from Celtic sources, notably *Désiré*--his mother and a bishop persuade him to look at her because they suspect she is evil, and Partonopeu begins to suspect this as well, despite the fact that she prays to the Virgin Mary.

Like Lanval, Partonopeu is eventually forgiven for breaking the prohibition, finally marrying his lady after some rather lengthy trials. But it should be noted that the immediate consequences of breaking this prohibition are substantially different in the latter text than in the former, for here

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the lady herself suffers more severely. Because of Partonopeu's betrayal, Melior loses all power to work magic, Partonopeu's presence in the city is revealed, and Melior is publicly shamed. The effects of the prohibition thus cannot be undone, since, for reasons not explained but which must simply be accepted as part of the machinery of the text, Melior's powers are, once she accepts him as her lover, bound up with Partonopeu's loyalty and obedience. She does, of course, have the power to forgive him, and, since she never ceases to love him, she eventually wishes to take him back. But she can do so only as an "ordinary" woman (albeit an empress, since she is heir to Constantinople), not as a sorceress. And at that point, Melior is incapable of helping him extensively, for she has been offered as the reward to the victor of a tournament, and Partonopeu must defeat all the others in order to win her.

It is interesting to note that, from the breaking of the oath, the romance loses its emphasis on the mysterious and magical which color the early parts of it. Though there are some strange occurrences from time to time, most of the action is taken up with battle scenes and tournaments, following a rather standard romance pattern in which the hero must fight for and win his beloved. This change of movement is analogous to what Peter Haidu notes in *Le Bel Inconnu* in which the hero's wavering between the two ladies--the one whom he has "won" by his bravery and physical prowess and the one who offered herself to him freely--also represents a wavering between the expectations of two genres, the lai and the romance, with the romance prevailing toward the end, only to be to some extent pushed out in favor of the chanson at the very end of the work. In the case of *Partonopeu*, it seems more that the expectations of the lai are simply pushed aside, at least partially because the lai has played itself out and can no longer furnish any forward movement to the text. With the loss of Melior as sorceress, the influence of the lai is largely lost, not to be

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found again in the text.

It will be noted that, in all three texts, as in many Celtic stories, the lady chooses the hero freely, after having, arranged for him to join her in her own territory¹² with nothing being required of him but to refrain from breaking her prohibition. The difficulty in doing so, however, varies considerably, as it does in the Celtic stories involving the breaking of *geasa*. Many *geasa* are broken quite by accident or because of trickery,¹³ but in other cases, some failing of character may be involved, as when Crunniuc mac Agnomain ("The Pangs of Ulster," in *The Táin*) boasts of his wife Macha through pride. In the case of Lanval, as W.T.H. Jackson notes, it is the lady's goodness to the hero that places him in the position, where he unthinkingly breaks his promise, since it is his new material wealth that allows him to look his best and to display the natural generosity that makes him attractive to Guinevere. By giving him the means to succeed in Arthurian society, the lady actually places him in a rather dangerous position. Because of the circumstances, it is difficult to see his failure as much of a "sin" against his lady. Although the opinion of some critics (e.g., Ireland) that Lanval's revelation of the lady's existence to Guinevere is motivated by love for his lady (rather than anger at the queen's accusation of homosexuality) is perhaps idealizing the character, his hasty reaction to the queen's unexpected vulgarity and attempt to manipulate him is quite understandable, as is the lady's eventual willingness to forgive him. Although it is difficult to argue, as has been done (e.g., Koubichkine),¹⁴ that Lanval wins his lady and Avalon because he "deserves" that reward and because he really is a native of Avalon to begin with, there seems little doubt that the fairy rescues him because of the depth of her love for him, and because he gives evidence of his great love and sincere repentance. This love and the actions it inspires are clearly contrasted with the motivations of Arthurian society, which, as Jackson (18) says, is

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"hostile to all noble aspirations." The generosity, love, and forgiveness of the fairy contrast with the selfish, vain, and

domineering behavior of Guinevere, who is ready to destroy one she claims to love, while most of the Arthurian court shows itself to be blind to true merit. The Arthurian world, as portrayed here, is also a dangerous place, particularly for one who is in "luin ... de sun heritage" (28) and the "happy ending" of *Lanval* represents a rejection of it and its misplaced values. The ending is therefore pessimistic, though perhaps not as much so as it is often taken to be; it may not, for instance, be necessary to say that the kind of love presented here is portrayed as being possible only "out of this world" (Mickel, "A Reconsideration," 52), for the Arthurian world is not necessarily the "real world," and, since the lai is proposed as taking place in the past, it is possible to see that things may have changed since then, perhaps in part as a result of the events in the lai itself.

It is worthwhile to note, in this connection, that the fairy chooses a man who has sometimes been described as "alienated" (Hodgson) from society, in that he is prevented from participating fully in a society that does not recognize his merits. As Koubichkine points out, perhaps a little too poetically, he eventually goes from a form of nonexistence to "une existence complète et indestructible" (481) when he rides away to Avalon. The story makes clear that Lanval leaves little behind when he goes.

The situations of the two romance heroes are quite different, however. It is true that the Bel Inconnu is unknown in Arthurian society, which does not recognize him or know his name, while the "fée" has known and loved him for many years. She, in fact, arranges for the quest that will lead to his gaining a proper place in society,¹⁵ and she is the first to tell him his name and identity as Gawain's son. However, Guinglain is not an "alienated" character in any sense of the word; he earns his place through his own efforts and because he was clearly born to Arthur's court. At his first entrance,

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which forms a clear and amusing contrast to the awkward arrival of Chrétien's Perceval,¹⁶ he so to speak "makes a hit" at the court, where, although unknown even to himself, he is immediately welcomed as a person of quality, and Arthur makes him a knight of the Round Table when the young man insists on undertaking the dangerous quest of the Fier Baiser. The disdain he receives from the messenger Hélie rapidly dissipates when he proves it to be unfounded. In fact, the events of the entire romance, with the exception of those parts dealing with his second stay on the Ile d'Or, may be described as one triumph after another, culminating in his recognition by the Arthurian court for winning the final tournament.

When he returns to the Ile d'Or after rescuing Blond Esmérée, however, he is shown as wasting away for love in the traditional Ovidian manner, then later enjoying his love for her in a setting that, with its beautiful gardens and elaborate artwork, resembles the traditional locus amoenus.¹⁷ What the lady has to offer him, then, is not an idyllic alternative to an unsatisfactory existence, but an alternative that, for reasons not clearly explained in the text, seems to interfere with his knightly activities in the Arthurian world and to prevent him from participating fully in it. For, although he is not explicitly forbidden to leave the island, he remains there until the announcement of the tournament, and his life is largely an unchallenging, unproductive one. This means that, though happy with his lady, he cannot live the balanced existence achieved by Chrétien's heroes--for instance, Erec and Yvain--at the end of their trials. Therefore, despite the help she gives him, the Pucele becomes an impediment to him, and it is at least understandable that some earlier critics (e.g., Paris and Schofield) have found fault with the text for placing so much emphasis on the love of Guinglain and the fée, in contrast to other versions of the story, in which she is not more than a temporary diversion from his real task, the rescuing of the enchanted

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queen.

These judgments, however, fail to take into account the psychological interest generated by the extended role of the Pucele and the conflicts thus created for Guinglain, as well as the effects of the text's unusual ending. Renaut uses the fairy mistress to examine certain questions pertaining to the individual and society, as well as the nature of love. Neither the sorceress nor the Arthurian court is to be found exactly "in the right" or "in the wrong," but, because of the romance's unsatisfactory ending, at least from the hero's point of view, both are problematized, the former because she is, as will be seen later, a somewhat subversive figure who cannot be reconciled with the demands of a society of which she is not part, and the latter because of its restrictiveness and its disregard for the freedom and happiness of the

individual. While one should not say the text "fails" because its problematic ending makes it overly "realistic," as two critics (Boiron and Payen) have,¹⁸ it is accurate to point to the text's inherent pessimism. Despite Guerreau's strong arguments in favor of the social rightness of Guinglain's wedding to Blonde Esmérée, the knight's triumph at the end seems a hollow one.

The situation in *Partonopeu de Blois* is a very different one, for here it is not really a question of a conflict between two worlds for the hero's loyalty, though that is the way things at first appear. But, as stated earlier, the mysterious, otherworldly quality of Chief d'Or disappears when Melior loses her powers as a sorceress. It is true that Melior chooses Partonopeu on the basis of his merits, at a time when those merits are not accepted by her own people. Yet their refusal is based only on his age, despite which he already enjoys a very important position in the Frankish kingdom as Clovis's nephew and favorite. The strange and lonely life he lives at Chief d'Or, in which he has all he wants, delivered by unseen hands (reminiscent of Guinglain's life at the Ile d'Or, where his every

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wish is granted) is clearly shown to be a temporary measure, which will end as soon as he can be married to Melior. There is, then, no real incompatibility between Melior's "world" and Partonopeu's, any more than the fact that Arthur's court does not at first recognize Guinglain means that he does not belong there. Partonopeu is actually a worthy and very logical choice to be Melior's consort. In fact, the real problems seem to occur because of Melior's attempt to bypass the normal channels for acquiring a consort through her practice of magic. Although Melior is not condemned or even explicitly criticized for her use of magic--or for her attempt to choose her own mate when she does not apparently have the right to do so--her role becomes, to say the least, suspect. While it is clear that Partonopeu's lack of trust is considered a fault, his disobedience a kind of "sin" against his lady, the much stronger message seems to be that such actions as Melior's are dangerous and her practice of magic inappropriate. Further evidence of this is the fact that, throughout the text, while Melior remains obstinate in her anger against Partonopeu, her more reasonable sister Urraque (a clever but more "traditional" lady who rescues Partonopeu when his life is threatened by the angry crowds after he and Melior are discovered), urges her not to be so foolish and to forgive him. Presumably, then, the use of magic is not a power that Melior should be terribly concerned about losing. Partonopeu, of course, suffers from Melior's rejection, but the penalty paid by Melior is of a different order: largely as a result of having attempted to take control of her own destiny, she loses all but the most minimal control over that destiny. Her fate then becomes to be "won" and married in the standard way, much as it is Blonde Esmérée's destiny to be "won" by Guinglain. Her use of magic fails (as does that of the Pucele aux Blanches Mains), and if she is "happy" at the end of the romance, her happiness is not of her own making. The triumph of the romance over the lai in this text thus supports the triumph of the tradi-

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tional social order.

Again, the sorceresses in the two romances are not really viewed in a negative way, despite the fact that each is portrayed as volatile, particularly in contrast to the other female characters, Blonde Esmérée and Urraque, with which they cannot help but be compared. Yet both are treated with relative sympathy, particularly in comparison to later treatments of similar figures, where the sorceress is seen as a harmful, deceptive figure who keeps the hero in a prison of inactivity and temporarily prevents him from accomplishing what he needs to do. (Besides the sorceresses in other versions of *Le Bel Inconnu*--the English *Lybeaus Desconus* and Antonio Pucci's *Carduino*--Ariosto's Alcina and Spenser's Duessa come readily to mind. The classical figure of Circe seems to figure heavily in the latter two treatments, and perhaps also in the two romances under consideration here.) Melior is exonerated of any accusation of evil, while the Pucele would be, as Colby-Hall states, as worthy a bride for Guinglain as the one he eventually takes. Yet the fact that he takes the one he does is significant, as is the fact that Melior cannot marry Partonopeu until she is first humiliated and degraded to the status of passive victim, much like the enchanted queen Blonde Esmérée, who is doomed to remain in the form of a serpent until rescued by Guinglain.

The reasons why the Pucele aux Blanches Mains cannot marry Guinglain are not really made explicit in the text. After his return to the Ile d'Or, there seems to be no real impediment. Yet neither of them mentions marriage, despite the fact that the Pucele had, the first time he stayed at her castle, spoken of it strongly, and further stated that she would never allow their love to be consummated until after they were married. (Fairies, as we saw in *Lanval*, do not always keep their word, any more than do their knights.) It is also not clear why Guinglain finds himself in the forest

on the morning after he has decided to disobey his mistress and go

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to the tournament, making him come to the conclusion that he has lost her forever. (This event is reminiscent of the *First Continuations of Perceval* [vol. 1, 40 and 367] when Gawain twice finds himself mysteriously thrown out of the Grail Castle.) Nor does one really quite understand Guinglain's motivations for marrying Blonde Esmérée; certainly, a great deal of pressure has been placed on him to do so, but there is no reason to think that he is forced. One is free to suppose that he accepts the "reward" only because he has lost his *amie* forever, although this fact certainly does not exonerate him from having broken the vow he made to the Pucele never to marry anyone but her. Motivations in this text are, then, far from clear, and it is not surprising that the text has been accused of "incohérence et manque d'unité" (Boiron 18). Yet despite the apparent lack of motivation for much of what happens, partial explanations can still be found. One such explanation, that the story as Renaut found it requires marriage to Blonde Esmérée (Sturm, Paris, and Schofield) is certainly of importance, yet it is not sufficient in itself. Also important seems to be an unspoken notion that the two "worlds"--though not strictly speaking separated--are fundamentally incompatible. The Pucele's world is one in which she alone is mistress, and it is not one in which an Arthurian hero can exercise much influence. The *fée* herself is such a powerful figure that, in order to be what his society and very nature require him to be, the hero must go elsewhere. In the end, despite the best intentions in the world, the love of the hero, and the apparent sympathy of the narrator, the power of the *fée* is shown to have worked against her.

Clearly, the case of Melior is similar. But here, a different solution is found, one which might in modern terms be called a "socialization." Instead of being left behind, remaining excluded from a society to which she is fundamentally alien, this sorceress is safely incorporated back into it and rendered harmless to the society, the hero, and the

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structure of the romance. After suffering betrayal, public humiliation, degradation, loss of power, and loss of control over her own destiny, she is ready for marriage and happiness.

The treatment of the fairy mistress motif in these three texts (and in others as well) has implications for feminist theory such as that formulated by Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément in *La jeune née* (translated into English as *The Newly Born Woman*). In speaking of Michelet's *La Sorcière*, they note that the role of the sorceress is traditionally "ambiguous, antiestablishment, and conservative at the same time" (5). The latter quality comes, they say, because the sorceress always ends up being destroyed, leaving nothing but "mythical traces," although Michelet had said simply that she disappears on a black horse, never to be heard from again. In any case, since she has "touched the roots of a certain symbolic structure," she must somehow disappear, and with her disappearance, "woman's causality becomes undone." The disappearance of death of the sorceress thus serves to reinforce the culture whose contradictions she has helped to express by representing what it has tried to exclude. Noteworthy, however, is the fact that societies have at least two different ways of dealing with those it considers deviant, including the sorceress--they may be locked up or excluded, or they may be given a place in the determination of culture. The sorceress, according to Cixous and Clément, "oscillates between the two poles"(8).

These formulations may prove useful to a feminist reading of these and other texts that deal with similar feminine figures. Noteworthy is the obvious deviance of such a figure in her textual surroundings and in the context of the societies that produced these texts, as well as the impossibility of her reconciliation with the alternative structures with which she comes into conflict, unless some change occurs.

And that, precisely, is what happens to Melior. To understand the change that this character must

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undergo, it may be helpful to look at the hysteric, another figure Cixous and Clément discuss whose role is analogous to that of the sorceress but who, instead of being destroyed, is reincorporated "into the bosom of the family," never to be heard from again.

What happens to the Pucele aux Blanches Mains is less easy to explain, and the open ending of the *Bel Inconnu* must always be kept in mind. Though she remains isolated and excluded at the end, the text admits the possibility that she may still influence. Yet her major plan has failed, for reasons that seem to be her own doing, but which at first

defy logical analysis. At least part of the explanation must be that she is somehow recognized as a threat to the established order, both of the romance and of the society to which the romance is directed. Problematical though that order may be in the text, it is still the one that must prevail. The threat, however, remains attractive, and its loss is cause for grief.

Lanval's lady, rather than being so much a threat to the established order, may better be described as pointing to a structure that is incompatible with it, and thus to offer an alternative order, one in which the relationship of men and women and the nature of love would be quite different from those of twelfth-century Anglo-Norman or French society. The lady disappears, in a way much more in line with Cixous and Clément's description of the traditional sorceress, who leaves behind only "mythical traces." The fact remains that she has been seen and admired by the entire court, however, and has let them see their own shortcomings in her merits and in those of Lanval. The possibility remains that the foolish and corrupt followers of King Arthur have been somehow changed by their brief encounter with the woman from another world and by the one she took as her consort, and also by the *lais* which are still sung about them.

It will be seen that *Lanval* is the only one of the three texts that seems to imply criticism of

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those societal values that work to oppose the happiness of the knight and his fairy mistress, and to at least suggest alternatives to the usual style of human relationships permitted within the patriarchal structure of medieval Europe. Whatever significance the fairy mistress figure may have had in the older Celtic stories (and, of course, it would be fallacious to assume that these stories form a unified corpus), it acquires, as do all such adapted figures, a very different meaning in these texts. It is possible that this figure, so recently taken from a very different tradition, was at a point in the early twelfth and thirteenth centuries when it was, to return to Cixous and Clément, oscillating between two poles. Given a broad sketch of the figure herself and with the basic plot--including the fact that such unions do not generally lead to happiness ever after, except perhaps in the other world--a given writer was to some extent free to treat the figure in a variety of ways, and with varying degrees of sympathy. What seems to have happened, however, is that a figure who was in her Celtic surroundings not necessarily either good or evil came to assume strong moral connotations because of the moralizing tendencies of Christianity, which was inclined to divide the world of the unknown into categories of good and evil. Not surprisingly, and as a quick glance at the literature of the thirteenth and later centuries (and at such later documents as the *Malleus maleficarum* and the circumstances that produced it) will show, the official, Christian-dominated culture soon came to regard the sorceress as evil. While it was possible for a writer like Marie, close as she was to twelfth-century Celtic culture, to see such a figure in a very positive light (more so than her counterparts in such tales as *Désiré* and *Graelent*, which probably are closer to their Celtic sources), such a position later became difficult.

Of course, as we have already noted, the movement of romance tends to oppose that of the *lai* in that it may be expected to undermine the position of

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the fairy mistress, and so the matter is complicated in the case of the earlier romances. But it seems also clear that even these fairly early romances show a greater mistrust of the whole world of magic and the other world than do, for instance, the works of Chrétien.¹⁹ During the thirteenth century, in both verse and prose romances, the well-known shift to a more overt religiosity²⁰ seems to bring with it a condemnation of miracles not performed in the name of God, while female characters who seem to be descended from Tom Peete Crosse's "forth putting *fée*" often turn out to be the devil's helpers (e.g., in *The Third Continuation*, 187-206). Of course, a very striking example of the moral shift in regard to magic and sorcery is the most famous *fée*, Morgain herself, who, along with Merlin, comes to be considered evil and treacherous (e.g., in the prose romances and in Mallory). It is not surprising that the most readily available model of a sorceress for Ariosto and, later, Spenser was a deceptive, Circe-like figure who must be destroyed or undermined if the hero is to continue his progress.²¹

The question of the varied role of the fairy mistress--and of any kind of "*fée*" figure that may be taken to have its origins in Celtic myth and legend--is an important one to a feminist study of medieval French literature. The emergence and extended use of a figure so rich in social and mythological implications can say much about the way a

given social group regarded women and conceived of the possible roles that were available to them, and the use of such a figure by a female writer deserves particular attention. Also, the changing view of this figure from being rather sympathetic to one that was mainly regarded as evil may well point to a shift in viewpoint that involved, at least as far as the role of women goes, a repression of some of the possibilities offered by the early encounter with Celtic culture. The questions involved are, needless to say, far from simple, and they are worthy of examination from both a diachronic and synchronic point of view, so that we may understand the *fée*

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both in the context of her own textual moment and in terms of the shift in meaning over time. That, however, must be the subject of another, far more extensive study.

[For the online reader's convenience, the list of Works Cited (pp. 86-88 in the printed edition) appears at the end of the notes, where the page

numbers are out of sequence.]

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Notes

1. See Alain Guerreau for a discussion of the identity of "Renaut de Beaujeu."
2. The editor of *Le Bel Inconnu* places it prior to 1210, since it is considered to predate the *Roman de la Rose ou de Guillaume de Dole*; Alice Colby-Hall says it could have been written as late as 1230. See also the editor's introduction to *Partonopeu*.
3. Most of these sources, it must be remembered, are considered to be much more recent than the stories themselves, which are thought to date from pre-Christian times. It is, therefore, impossible to be certain what older versions of these stories were like, as well as what oral versions might have been circulating as late as Marie's day.
4. See Cross's discussion of various examples.
5. See *The Survival of Geis in Medieval Romance*, a large section of which is devoted to the fairy mistress theme. Reinhard also notes that the prohibition Chrétien's Laudine makes to Yvain not to be away for more than a year is a kind of *geis*, and

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Laudine herself reminiscent of a Celtic fairy.

6. Actually, the matter was far from clear for the time. See, e.g., Stockoe, Wathélet-Willem, and Koubichkine for differing opinions.
7. An example of the disastrous effects of the breaking of a *geis* is "The Destruction of Da Derga's Hostel, in Jeffrey Gantz's anthology.
8. See Cross for a discussion of this point.
9. For an extended discussion of love in the *Lais*, see both works by Emanuel Mickel, Jr.
10. Colby-Hall and Haidu compare the possible situation set up at the very end of the text with the traditional situation of the chanson. See also Boiron and Payen.
11. Newstead argues that the "surface" of the text is Graeco-Byzantine, while most of the material is Celtic.
12. Lanval's lady, of course, is far from her own land, yet it is still to a place she herself has chosen that her two servants lead Lanval. See, in this connection, Wathélet-Willem, who sees in the "bacins" offered to Lanval a symbol of passage to the Celtic otherworld, which Marie was able to combine with the contemporary custom of washing one's hands before dinner.
13. For instance, see Cross's discussion of *Aidead Muirchertach mac Erca*.
14. Though this study makes valid points about the dynamics of the lai, the argument for Lanval's place of origin seems to be based on his name, which is interesting, but not wholly convincing, evidence. Sienaut also believes that Lanval belongs in Avalon, an easier point to argue.
15. Ironically, she also sets in motion the machinery whereby she will lose him to the woman he rescues.
16. In contrast to the bumbling Welshman, Guinglain shows that "En lui n'avoit que enseigner" (103); and, in contrast to Arthur's distractedness in dealing with Perceval, he responds immediately to Guinglain: "Li rois li rendi ses salus,/ Qui de respondre ne fu mus" (80).
17. See Curtius's description of "The Ideal

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Landscape."

18. They say that the ending seems to be an attempt to please two components of its audience--the *bacheliers* who might be seeking their own fortunes and the ladies who might be pleased with the prospect of an adulterous liaison at the end, but that the romance "fails" because it really pleases neither group. While this may be true as far as it goes (one extant manuscript with lacunae might be considered good evidence that the text was hardly a "best-seller"), it does not address the most interesting aspects of the text.
19. There is, for instance, nothing in Chrétien to match the diabolical character of Guinglain's adventures in the *Geste Cité*, or the knight's terror in confronting these adventures, which are more reminiscent of the black hands and dark chapels of the *Continuations* than of anything in Chrétien. The knight's repeated crossing of himself and his calling on God indicate a fear for his soul.
20. An example may be seen in the Grail literature, in the later *Continuations* and in the *Vulgate Cycle*, in which the power of magic is gradually diminished and the power of Christianity strengthened.
21. This is not, of course, to overlook the playful, ironic tone of Ariosto, who has considerable fun with the sensuous encounters of Alcina and Ruggiero. The weighty moral tone of Spenser's condemnation of Duessa is absent in Ariosto.

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