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TRANSFORMING LOVERS AND MEMORIALS IN OVID AND MARIE DE FRANCE

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Late medieval authors were fascinated by classical literature, by what for all practical purposes functioned as the literary canon for readers and writers of the twelfth through the fourteenth centuries. As made clear by earlier scholarship — which often, however, interpreted medieval reception of classical literature as badly understood — medieval writers did not simply honour or completely authorize their predecessors. Indeed, more comfortable with the idea of tradition than slavish imitators are, medieval poets transformed classical texts in any number of ways, often feeling at liberty to change even critical narrative elements in the process. They did so, apparently, for different purposes, but one of the most interesting, it seems to me, was to explore what writing meant in their own literary circles.

Reading and Transformation: Marie de France and Ovid

Against what intuitively seems likely, such transformations of classical material often occur in narratives that only subtly invoke literary ancestors and that (unlike, for instance, the *romans antiques*) do not owe an obvious debt of plot and characters to their predecessors. The twelfth-century *lais* of Marie de France offer particularly good examples, especially since her narrator evinces an awareness of borrowing from the past. Indeed, she announces

in the General Prologue that she will avoid mapping her own writing onto Latin (and hence, authoritative) narratives:

començaï a penser
 D'aukune bone estoire faire
 E de latin en romaunz traire;
 Mais ne me fust guaires de pris [. . .]
 Des lais pensai, k'oïz aveie [. . .]
 Plusurs en ai oï conter,
 Nes voil laissier ne oblier. (General Prologue, 28–40)

[I began to think about making some good stories and about translating from Latin into the vernacular, but that would not bring me esteem . . . then I thought about the *lais* I'd heard . . . I've heard many of them recited, I don't wish to neglect nor forget them.]¹

Choosing not to translate Latin narratives, Marie's narrator opts for apparently less esteemed, vernacular material, which she nonetheless shapes to include authorities, *auctores*. "Guigemar," for example, contains the *lais*' most overt allusion: a mural of Venus throwing Ovid's book of love into the flames and excommunicating its readers (233–44).² At first glance, the allusion poses no contradiction, since it seems to be aligned with the General Prologue's rejection of Latin authorities. However, when considering the implication that the old, jealous husband commissioned the mural, readers need to modify that message since, in the world of the *lai*, he is a despicable character (e.g., "Guigemar" 229–31, 245). Moreover, the *lai* ends by uniting the lovers, thereby suggesting that destroying Ovid's book is in any case a hopeless task and that rather than a recommendation to Marie's readers, the mural is intended, perhaps, to represent figuratively the husband's state of mind.³ More importantly here, by glossing the mural through narrative action, Marie qualifies its overt criticism of the classical *auctor*'s text.

This qualification is important, since with it Marie is able to signal other messages as well. Thus, in excommunicating readers, Venus draws attention to the act of reading in and of itself. Additionally, in depicting readers and their *auctor* as disruptive renegades who must be silenced, the mural suggests they are powerful, and responsible, agents in the goddess's world. Not only is reading, then, a self-conscious theme, but reading the mural against the entire *lai* further implies a related theme, the necessity to read carefully and consciously. Finally, such messages imply that readers have varying abilities—from those who myopically follow the literal (in this case, accepting the mural as definitive) to those who read holistically and figuratively, a subject that Marie explores in a number of her *lais*.⁴

A similar metaliterary framework situates my reading of Marie's "Deus Amanz" (254 lines) and Ovid's tale of Pyramus and Thisbe as recounted in *Metamorphoses* IV.51-167 (117 lines). With this pairing, I plan to sketch how Marie sets up apparent criticism of Ovid to suggest differences among readers, as she does with "Guigemar" 's mural. In "Deus Amanz," moreover, Marie uses these differences to explore glossing, and consequently, the relationship between a writer highly conscious of the reading process (whom I shall call the "readerly writer") and prior texts.⁵

In comparing the two, I necessarily assume there is some relation of influence, although the establishing of that influence is not my goal here.⁶ Rather, the aspect of the poets' relationship I find intriguing is that Marie does not focus on the writer in the reader — as might be expected of someone probing the dynamics of glossing — but focusses on the reader in the writer.⁷ Hence, her perspective is a rhetorically informed one, rhetoric being the art that examines how to bring audiences (or readers) over to the speaker's (or writer's) point of view.⁸ Emphatically rhetorical, profound and perceptive reading for Marie, as well as for Ovid, culminates in the creating of narratives that stimulate yet other narratives.

In order to explore these issues, I rely upon a rhetorically situated semi-otic analysis, relying on Ciceronian rhetorical theory and scholars like Maria Corti and Paul Ricoeur to do so. Important in such a reading are: (1) the emphasis on structural rather than isolated rhetorical traits, thereby, for example, preferring narrative architecture over the singling out of figures of speech; (2) the poems' signals to read such traits against what Corti calls the "literary system," which includes not only what is generally referred to as the literary canon but also all those minor narratives, conventions, and rhetorical traditions that allow *litterati* to read and understand; and (3) both poets' metaliterary focus on typically rhetorical as opposed to typically logical dynamics.

Since Marie's transformation of Ovid is the subject of my reading, the first of these three factors, structural traits, will involve Marie's reversal of Ovidian elements, the juxtaposition of apparently contradictory elements, and *structural* emphasis on pertinent material (by, for example, granting many lines to an image or idea). The second involves Marie's invitation to readers to explore the metaliterary by counting on them to be participants in the literary system. As Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner has recently shown, Marie not only echoes Ovidian material (if not Ovid himself), she also makes intertextual use of other elements — such as fairy tale motifs, vernacular poetry, or scholarly references to knowledge — in a manner that encourages

the *literati* in her audience to take the time to piece them together. Finally, Marie gives typically rhetorical clues to do precisely that by drawing attention to the dynamics of the metaphor, rather than, for example, to a more typically logical concern, such as a narrative's *seriatim* structure, its linearly evolved sense of causality, or instances of simple allegory with their one-to-one correspondences.

Importantly, Marie's attention to the metaphor modulates echoes of Ovidian poetry partly through her handling of the *translatio studii et imperii topos* (the transferral of culture and empire), as implied in the General Prologue,⁹ a topos also central to Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and which I can only refer to here in passing. Conventionally, the topos records the descent of empires and cultures spiralling from the fall of Troy to the founding of Rome to, from the medieval perspective, other European nations—all achieved through the efforts of eponymous heroes, warriors as *translatores imperii*. Ovid's Latin collection profiles the *translatio* topos more clearly than does Marie's, since it aims to recast Greek myths from creation to Ovid's present, including the critical episode of Aeneas's flight from Troy to the founding of a nation that will evolve into the glorious Roman empire. In tracing the *translatio* topos, however, Ovid does not follow the heroes. Rather, he offers explanations for the world through love-inspired metamorphoses,¹⁰ or to use the Latin term, which also means "metaphors," through *translationes*.¹¹

The more subtle *translatio* is the one that Marie observes as well. She writes:

Li philosophe le saveient,
 Par eus meismes entendeient,
 Cum plus trespassereit li tens,
 Plus serreient sutil de sens
 E plus se savreient garder
 De ceo k'i ert a trespasser. (General Prologue 17-22)

[Philosophers knew it, they understood among themselves that the more time passes, the subtler in sense they would become and the more they would know how to take care of that which was to be passed along.]¹²

Aware of the *translatio* topos as a means for transferring power and culture from kingdom to kingdom, both poets focus on the *translatio studii* in particular, which they treat as containing a richness that spills over into ever new transformations, *translationes*. As such, their treatment plays against the more typical streamlining effect of the *translatio* topos, which underscores not the individual transformations, but the diachronically structured transferral process itself.¹³

As it turns out, this is a particularly effective strategy, since the *translatio* topos also clusters about it the canonical literatures of both Augustan Rome and late medieval western Europe, thereby functioning as a potential metaphor, *translatio*, for intertextuality and allowing Marie's interplay with Ovid's tale to resonate against this backdrop and profile literary concerns economically. As Douglas Kelly describes it:

Translatio is itself a lingering over old matter. But it is also an expansion of vision and knowledge about that matter. The inquiry and *studium* that *translatio* supposes show that new truths may be uncovered in what the ancients left obscure. ("*Translatio studii*" 305-06)

For both poets, the ordinarily understated part of the *translatio*, the *translatio studii*, grants *literati*, the readers and writers who make up the literary system, creative responsibility.

Both Ovid and Marie, that is, probe the relationship between readers and writers (the ultimate *translatores studii*) by creating multiple perspectives in love stories. Their lovers reflect the activities of readers and writers, transforming them into *translatores studii* as well, a point neatly formulated in Geoffrey Chaucer's later treatment of a similar complex in *Troilus and Criseyde*, in which he refers to his poet-narrator as someone who "Loves servantz serve."¹⁴ What I hope to demonstrate in this article is that Marie's reading of Ovid explores *translatio* as going beyond their shared focus on the intersection between literature and love, even beyond their expression of this focus in metaliterary terms. As palely intimated in her General Prologue's rejection of a mere *translation* project, Marie suggests that *translatio* can only be faithful to an admired and beloved *auctor* when it transforms, when it shifts perspectives on the old, since transformation alone allows the past, literature, to regenerate, to remain vibrant for writers and readers in generations to come.

Pyramus and Thisbe, *Deus Amanz*, Lovers as Different as Night and Day

In the first place, many critics agree that Ovid's tale of Pyramus and Thisbe directly influences Marie's "Deus Amanz."¹⁵ In order to see such influence at work, however, they must read beyond the surface, since narrative levels differ considerably, and instead focus on the effects of unalterable passion. This is in and of itself instructive, because it underscores that Marie's *translatio* defines reading as an act inherently dependent on continual, non-linear movement among various levels of meaning.

Ovid's tale relates how parental disapproval incites two young lovers to elope. Having arranged to meet in the woods, Thisbe unfortunately arrives first, sees a lioness bloodied from a meal, and flees for protection. But the heroine also drops her veil, which the animal paws, and which Pyramus shortly thereafter finds. Misreading the signs, the hero kills himself in despair. Thisbe returns, sees curiously darkened berries, finds Pyramus, and comprehends what has occurred. She has, in other words, deciphered the clues and reconstructed his story. Finding her own responsibility too great, she kills herself. Finally, the lovers' parents bury their ashes in one urn, while the berries perennially display their new colour, stained from the lovers' blood.

Marie's tale, although also about tragically thwarted love, guides her two unnamed lovers through a quite different series of events, starting with the element of parental hindrance. In the *lai*, the girl's widowed father, the King, proclaims that anyone wishing to marry the Princess must carry her up the neighboring mountain without stopping. The fairy tale motif at first proceeds along due course: many try, none succeed, and hopes are dashed until the girl's chosen decides to take the dare. Veering from convention, however, little confidence is displayed regarding the boy's physical prowess; the girl sends him to her learned Aunt in Salerno for a potion that will give him superhuman strength while she fasts. As he carries her up the mountain, unexpectedly, he is moved by the cheers of the crowd and refuses to drink. He completes the task only to die from exhaustion at the top. She then scatters the contents of the bottle onto the mountain — which, in time, sprouts lush vegetation, rich in "herbe" that had taken "racine" [228-29] — before she too dies from a broken heart. Finally, the King buries them in one tomb atop the mountain.

These two summaries make it clear that although underlying similarities exist, Marie does not map the narrative level of her *lai* onto Ovid's tale.¹⁶ When comparing narrative levels, her *lai*'s relation to Ovid's tale is unlike, for instance, the Old French *Enéas*, which clearly draws from Vergil's epic for characters and narrative outline.¹⁷ Thus, in Ovid, it is Thisbe's error that initiates the tragic consequences, while in "Deus Amanz," it is the boy's mistaken judgment that proves fatal. Again different, Ovid's lovers die through desperate acts of self-imposed and immediate violence, while Marie's lovers die from less directed, less tangible forces: physical exhaustion and spiritual surrender. As a final example, Marie's King is more sharply delineated than are the shadowy parents of Ovid's story; he even likes the boy, although not as his daughter's lover.

In sum, the narrative-level differences work similarly to "Guigemar" 's mural, since here too events appear to be inspired by disapproval of the Ovidian text. Thus, Marie's lovers agree consciously not to elope and to act in public on their hidden love (84-102). Likewise, none of the nighttime drama of Ovid's poem is present in Marie's *lai*, which is dominated by the daytime glare of the public eye (e.g., 71-74). Indeed, Ovid's nighttime lovers seem to function as a warning to Marie's daytime pair. However, as in "Guigemar," Marie's apparently negative *translatio* of Ovid actually functions as a touchstone against which she can modulate the *lai* in counterpoint to the Latin tale's own multiple levels.

Marie achieves this effect partly by making her night and day echo Ovid's own connotations, connotations that involve vision and perspectives, old and new, also the essential constituents of the metaphor. A metaphor, after all, shifts perspectives from old to new.¹⁸ Thus, for both Ovid and Marie, night and day appear to be opposites. For one, night is associated with the dark, the mysterious, and the secretive, while day gathers about it all the connotations associated with light, such as public display, clarity, and rationality. Night and day further relate as opposites in terms of vision. Thus, at night, perception is enhanced, enchanted, magnified, selective, and focussed on single objects. The day, however, allows an entire panorama to be viewed, encouraging attention to surfaces.

In spite of these contrasting traits, night and day are also, clearly, part of the same unit. Ovid underscores their contiguity, for example, as he sets the stage for the lovers to elope, "et lux . . . praecipitur aquis, et aquis nox exit ab isdem" [IV.91-92: "the sun went plummeting down into the waters and left from the same waves"].¹⁹ Opposites are joined to create a rhythm, rather than to mark a division, a rhythm that is frequently referred to in terms of flux and evokes the motion of waves. Ovid makes this point towards the end of the *Metamorphoses* in language that removes time from the strictures of linearity:

nihil est toto, quod perstet, in orbe.
 cuncta fluunt, omnisque vagans formatur imago;
 ipsa quoque absiduo labuntur tempora motu,
 non secus ac flumen; neque enim consistere flumen
 nec levis hora potest: sed ut unda inpellitur unda
 urgueturque eadem veniens urgueturque priorem,
 tempora sic fugiunt pariter pariterque sequuntur
 et nova sunt semper; nam quod fuit ante, relictum est,
 fitque, quod haut fuerat, momentaque cuncta novantur.

(xv.177-85; cf. 252-59)

[There is nothing in all the world that keeps its form. All things are in a state of flux, and everything is brought into being with a changing nature. Time itself flows on in constant motion, just like a river. For neither the river nor the swift hour can stop its course; but, as wave is pushed on by wave, and as each wave as it comes is both pressed on and itself presses the wave in front, so time both flees and follows and is ever new. For that which once existed is no more, and that which was not has come to be; and so the whole round of motion is gone through again. (trans. Miller)]

These traits characterizing night and day play a vital role in Ovid's tale and collection, against which Marie seems to orchestrate a gloss. Thus, the nighttime mystery engulfing Pyramus and Thisbe's daytime acquaintance is counterpointed by Marie's lovers, who bring their secretive alliance into the daytime arena of public approbation. Apparently a critical gloss, Marie's reversal creates contiguity, allowing her daytime panorama to echo, and contrast with, Ovid's nighttime tale. She thereby refines the glossator's concern with end results — such as historical contextualizing, plot analysis, and moral evaluation — that position the reader as an endpoint, a recipient. Author-to-reader interchange necessarily occurs in linear time, but reading need not mirror its strictures. Thus, Marie's gloss expands and counterpoints Ovid's themes — the writer's concern for fluid relations with the past, for softening the unrelenting linear progress of time, for creating wavelike rhythms among texts that return *litterati* to them time and again, for positioning readers as potential poets — for all these rhythms that allow the literary system to rejuvenate.

Memorials and Literature

The tendency to conceive of movement and time in linearly restricted terms encourages a long-range, chronicling vision that two-dimensionalizes detail, a model that also occurs in both authors. Thus, at the very end of the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid's narrator proclaims:

Iamque opus exegi, quid nec Iovis ira nec ignis
nec poterit ferrum nec edax abolere vetustas...
parte tamen meliore mei super alta perennis
astra ferar, nomenque erit indelebile nostrum,
quaque patet domitis Romana potentia terris,
ore legar populi, perque omnia saecula fama,
siquid habent veri vatum praesagia, vivam. (xv.871–79)

[Now I finished my artwork, which neither Jove's ire, nor flame, nor sword, nor hungry time can destroy. By the still superior part of me I will be carried

above the high stars, and my name will be indelible. Wherever Roman power appears in dominated lands, I will be special in the mouths of people. And through all ages, in fame, if the seers' predictions have some truth, I shall live.]

Emphasizing linearity in his hope of creating a memorial of his poem, the narrator projects into the future. Marie reveals these same tendencies at the beginning of her collection, in the General Prologue, as exemplified by the lines quoted above, describing how philosophers passed texts along to their descendants — linearly, from one to the next.

Linearity is linked in both poets' collections with attempts to memorialize. Yet, as will be seen, both poets further suggest that the attempt to memorialize may, ironically, encourage stagnation. Indeed, it proves quietly striking to move from these diachronically informed lines in both collections to the specific tales and to note that both stories end with remorseful parents who erect monuments to the lovers. The public ceremonies commemorating the lovers suggest the dominance of daytime rationality that buries passion with static markers of separation. The markers or "vehicles" of the memorials — the urn in the Latin tale and the marble tomb on the French mountain top — then, belie a "tenor" that speaks to spiritual, undying love, a consequence of wholehearted allegiance to the seduction of nighttime vision.

It does not take much rumination to see how these memorials, these metaphors, are complicated by a sense of poignant irony. The lovers' passion, for example, is perceived as undying only because they do die. Similarly, the "actual" memorials can invoke that specific tenor only when the tales generating them are known, only for those "readers" who are already familiar with the lovers' tale; otherwise, the memorials operate as simple signs signifying the deaths of loved ones. For the uninitiated reader, they thus function as neat endings to the lovers' tales, even though they are intended, ideally, to rekindle memories, to keep stories alive, undying, for future audiences.

These ironies should come as no surprise. Although made with the lovers in mind, the memorials are authored by their parents, those who had attempted to shape their children's tales in other directions and who had little comprehension for precisely the kind of love the memorials commemorate. The lovers, in contrast, bury one another in their passion. Ovid is almost explicit about this — gazing upon each other for the last time, "ad nomen Thisbes oculos a morte gravatos/ Pyramus erexit visaque *recondidit illa*" [iv.145–46, emphasis added: "At Thisbe's name, Pyramus raised his eyes, heavy from death, and *buried* her face (i.e., closed his eyes)"].

Left to themselves, without ameliorating narratives (like the two tales themselves), these memorials would actually encourage stagnation, a two-dimensional response to the conventional markers of death.²⁰ Neither poet, however, allows them to stand alone, preferring to provide glosses in perennially recurring counter-memorials. Ovid thus juxtaposes the urn to the ever-returning colour of the mulberry bush, "vota tamen tetigere deos, tetigere parentes;/ nam color in pomo est, ubi permaturuit, ater,/ quodque rogis superest, una requiescit in urna" [IV.164-66: "(her) offerings thus touched the gods, touched the parents; for the color in the fruit is, when it matures, dark, and that which remains from the funeral pyres rests in one urn"]. Marie similarly juxtaposes the static marble memorial (246) to the newly fecund mountain:

Li muns en fu bien arusez;
 Mut en ad esté amendez
 Tuz li païs e la cuntree:
 Meinte bone herbe i unt trovee
 Ki del beivrë orent racine [. . .]
 Par le conseil de celes genz
 Desur le munt les enfüirent. (225-49)

[The mountain was well sprinkled with it; much it healed all the land and the country: many a good herb found there took root from the potion (. . .) On advice of the villagers, they buried them on the mountain top.]

In both of these stories, the organic counter-memorials function as living markers, which underscore the non-linear, seasonal need to return, to create again and again. These are memorials that can keep the lovers' tales alive; stone edifices, obviously, cannot regenerate.

As such, the natural memorials become metaphors for living literature, for tales that generate other stories, even if translated and transformed into different forms and visions. In Marie, as treated in more detail below, the newly lush vegetation is subtly marked as a regenerative memorial through her rhetorically effective, extended attention to the potion that causes the vegetation to flourish (113-16, 137-52, 178-229). Ovid, on the other hand, accomplishes a similar effect in part by making the mulberries into the nominal point of the tale. That is, the lovers' story is told by one of the Minyeides, sisters who attempt to shut out the raucous society of Dionysian devotees, preferring their weaving and telling of tales over the god's rites. It is only after naming several possible stories that could be related to wile away the time that one of Minyas's daughters decides to relate not the tale of Pyramus and Thisbe, as one might suppose, but rather *the tale of the mulberries*:

“an, quae poma alba ferebat,/ ut nunc nigra ferat contactu sanguinis arbor” [IV.51–52: “or how the tree which bore white fruit now bears fruit blackened by contact with blood”]. Furthermore, in the tale itself, Thisbe expressly prays that the parents allow them to be joined in death (IV.155–57) and that the gods allow the new color of the mulberries to remain as a *memorial* to them, “‘gemini monimenta cruoris’” (IV.161). Thus, Ovid underscores the regenerative memorial in a way that makes obvious its juxtaposition to, and superiority over, the urn.

By juxtaposing organic metaphors with static memorials, both authors open up the tales’ endings, implying a metaliterary afterlife of wave upon wave of stories.²¹ Thus, Ovid and Marie see literature as potentially fertile in spite of its limits. They are not daunted by the linearly induced silence of the written text, which, as Plato argues in his *Phaedrus*, defines it as inferior, since it cannot answer questions and moreover allows any reader, prepared or not, to have access to it.²² Indeed, the rhetorically conscious poet might very well make her or his task the unsettling of the type of complacency that allows readers to follow a story’s trail to a two-dimensionalizing, stagnation-inducing end. By creating paradoxes, tensions, ambiguities, and open endings, these poets can inspire *literati* to return to their narratives time and again, even perhaps transforming them with each subsequent reading.

Readers in the Tale

To discourage static complacency, Ovid and Marie place mirrors of readers in their tales, as is intimated by the juxtaposed memorials. Thus, the parents are primarily readers who have rational, daytime vision and ignore the mysteries of passion, while attempting to adhere to civilization’s dictates of separation—whether that involves the separating of homes by walls, of lovers from one another, or of death from life through memorials that attempt to confine death to inanimate edifices. The lovers, on the other hand, have more complex responses. Perhaps most strikingly, they have startling perceptive abilities that are hampered only by the narrow focus of nighttime vision.

In the Roman tale, for example, Ovid posits early on the lovers’ enhancing, focussed, and poetic nighttime vision as the enabler of their exchanges:²³

fissus erat tenui rima, quam duxerat olim,
cum fieret, paries domui communis utrique.
id vitium nulli per saecula longa notatum —

quid non sentit amor? — primi vidistis amantes
et vocis fecistis iter. (iv.65–69)

[There was a split wall with a thin crack, which emerged long ago when the wall was made, the wall which was shared by two houses. This fault wasn't noted by anyone for many generations — but what doesn't love sense? — you lovers saw it first and made it into a channel for speech.]

Moreover, once their enhancing vision finds the crack, the lovers transform and create. They personify the wall — cursing it for being an obstruction (like their parents), kissing it (as if it were themselves), and blessing it (as if it were a go-between) for allowing them to speak with one another (e.g., iv.71–77). Carefully reading until they find the aperture, the lovers then effusively and poetically transform perspectives from old to new and demonstrate their skill as readerly writers. Thus, the wall, a conventional sign of societal division, is transformed into a complex metaphor for union.

In addition to providing the contact point for the lovers to communicate, then, the wall functions as a metaphor for the tensions characterizing the lovers' situation. For them, it is a go-between, themselves, and their parents. Moreover, as profound readerly writers, Pyramus and Thisbe also "educate" Ovid's readers, who must accordingly adjust vision to allow for the wall's many meanings. Perhaps most importantly, what becomes apparent upon reading more deeply is how the lovers' creativity proliferates, as their insistence on making divisions into opportunities for union exemplifies. Thus, Pyramus and especially Thisbe also transform Ninus's tomb and the urn from markers of separation into the hope for union. In this light, the wall not only functions as a metaphor for creative vision. It also becomes a metaphor for the metaphor, tracing first in the lovers' personifications how a perspective-shifting metaphor is created, as well as how, over time, a metaphor must change form (vehicles, such as the tomb and the urn) in order to continue to inspire other new creations.

In addition to portraying the activity of focussed and profound readers, Ovid also displays how these very same readers may falter, as seen in Thisbe's encounter with the lioness at night (iv.96–101). She reads the lioness, that is, in terms of its conventional fierceness, missing the signs of its satiety (iv.97–98) and thereby sets the stage for Pyramus's further misreading of the resulting synecdoche, the blood on her veil (iv.107–09). Ovid underscores the characters' responses as readerly by encouraging the same kind of responses in his audience; certainly, readers not familiar with the tale may very well read as Thisbe did, with attention fixed on the animal's potential rapacity and a conviction that the lioness's sudden appearance cannot be a mere

coincidence. Even in so apparently simple a tale, then, readers miss vital clues, just as Thisbe does, a point which Ovid brings home through the veil. Thus, although her veil plays such a crucial role, it is Thisbe's quiet exit from home to their rendezvous that attracts attention as part of that conventional suspense inching her escape along. In fact, the veil is only intimated in that she "fallitque suos adopertaque vultum" [IV.94: "tricked her <family> and hid her face"].

Regardless of her panic-stricken misreading, Ovid does finally portray Thisbe as a readerly writer who sees well beyond the surface. As she returns to the mulberry tree, "oculis animoque requirit" [IV.129: "seek(ing him) with eyes and soul"], she eagerly considers how she will *tell* Pyramus her tale of perils, "quantaque vitarit narrare pericula gestit . . ." (IV.130, emphasis added). Arriving there, she is struck by the suddenly darkened colour of the tree's fruit (IV.132), a transformation that she registers without comprehension. But as she takes in Pyramus's final gaze and her own veil, she comprehends well enough to pull together the veil and the sword and to understand that somehow her flight caused his death (IV.147-49). As is the case with readerly writers, Thisbe has the vision to re-create.

With such markers, Ovid implies that the three overlooked signs — the lioness's satiety, the veil, and the mulberries' new colour — are visible only upon knowing the tale, or when a reader's night-enhanced vision can discern the tiny apertures that static convention's pervasive influence had hidden from detection. In contrast, Marie neither hides nor misleads; rather, she brings all into the open, while concomitantly working with structural emphasis and implied juxtapositions or contiguities. Thus, her two lovers seem intent on demonstrating that they do not have the same type of nighttime, enhancing yet focussed, vision imperiling Ovid's lovers. Indeed, rather than desperately searching for some contact point that will enable communication and inspire creation, her lovers proceed rationally, constraining their vision to daytime demands.

No hasty elopement, no terror of the night, Marie's lovers respect rules and conventions, even those patently designed, like the King's task, to sustain division. The boy, for example, at first hesitates to act on their love, being satisfied with clandestine meetings, "Mes li vallez se purpensa/ Que mieuz en voelt les maus souffrir/Que trop haster e dunc faillir" [76-78: "The boy reflected that he would rather suffer these ills than to try too hastily only to fail"]. The girl too distances herself from recourse to ill-considered action, as exemplified in her response to his request that they elope. Unwilling to yield to the uncontrollable seduction of the night, she frames her

response in references to advice, knowledge, and letters — epistles (110) *and* literature, as implied by the many meanings of *aventure* (111):

“Jeo nel vodreie curucier.	100
<i>Autre cunseil</i> vus estuet prendre, Kar cest ne voil jeo pas entendre.	
En Salerne ai une parente, Riche femme, mut ad grant rente.	104
Plus de trente anz i ad esté; <i>L'art de phisike ad tant usé</i> <i>Que mut est saive de mescines.</i>	
<i>Tant cunuist herbes e racines,</i>	108
Si vus a li volez aler E mes lettres od vus porter <i>E mustrer li vostre aventure,</i> <i>Ele en prendra cunseil e cure:</i>	112
Teus leituaires vus durat E teus beivres vus baillerat Que tut vus recunforterunt E bone vertu vus durrunt.”	116

[100–16, emphasis added: “I don’t want to anger him. You should make *other plans*, since I won’t listen to <yours>. In Salerno, I have a relative, a rich woman, with much property. She’s been there more than 30 years; she’s *sowell practiced in the art of medicine that she’s very knowledgeable about medicines. Much she knows about herbs and roots.* If you would go to her, take along *my letters, and present your tale/adventure/fortune, she will consider and ponder it:* and such potions she will give you, such drinks she will turn over to you, that they will comfort you and give you good strength.”]

Such self-conscious attention to knowledge suggests that Marie’s lovers learn from the Ovidian pair. As members of the *litterati*, they have “read” the story, or similar ones, and know what will happen if they lose control.

In spite of the rational trappings gracing their actions, however, they are passionate lovers, as revealed when the boy refuses to take the potion and the girl dies of love for him. Similarly, in the closing lines of this passage — beginning with the mention of letters — the girl invests the medicines (107–08) with fantastical qualities (113–16). Having attempted to wall themselves off from the irrational, Marie’s lovers are informed by the same enchanted, magnifying, and selective perspective of the night that inspires Pyramus and Thisbe, suggesting a wavelike return to, an implied contiguity with, Ovid’s tale.

Furthermore, the lines above create a series of tensions between day- and nighttime visions; the girl’s gloss on her Aunt counterpoints her inspired

vision of the potion, the Aunt's experience and knowledge is linked to magic, and the boy's plea that they elope is transformed into a quest. Marie gathers tensions here, however, only to separate them once the boy sets on his journey. Thus, many lines are devoted to the boy's journey and transfer, *translatio*, of the potion (151-87), which has the power to effect a perspective-shifting transformation:

Un tel beivre li ad chargié,
 Ja ne serat tant travaillez
 Ne si ateinz ne si chargiez,
 Ne li resfreschist tut le cors,
 Neïs les vaines ne les os,
 E qu'il nen ait tute vertu
 Si tost cum il l'avra beü. (144-50)

[(The Aunt) trusted him with a potion, such that no matter how tired he was, or how strained or burdened, it would refresh his whole body, even the veins and the bones, and he would have all the (necessary) strength as soon as he would drink from it.]

Indeed, as such, the potion functions as a metaphor for the metaphor and hence plays against Ovid's wall.

In spite of these potentially fertile perspectives on the potion, the metaphor, its mystery, soon dissipates after these lines. The narrator painstakingly records the transfer of the potion into the bottle (151), the boy's journey back to Pitres (153-56), preparations for his carrying (*translatio*) the girl up the mountain (165-76), his remembering to take the vial with him (178-79), and his confidence that he can entrust the flask to the princess (185-87). Marie's protracted attention to the potion's *translatio* thus imitates the march of time and its effects on metaphors, while it emphasizes the boy's attempt to adhere to his beloved's advice and reveals his literal vision, his daytime focus on panoramic surfaces. For him, the potion is the vial — a talisman, a sign emptied of meaning, a dead metaphor. Indeed, in the very next lines, the narrator blurts out that the potion is useless because of the boy's excess, his lack of balance or *mesure* (188-89). Her outburst points to the boy's problem; he remembers the vial, but forgets its significance.

As with Ovid's wall, then, the potion too is a metaphor for the metaphor, but one, as read by the boy, divested of power. By transferring emphasis from the lovers to the potion's *translatio* in the last lines, Marie follows the path of a single metaphor. Rather than chart the constant change a metaphor's vehicle must undergo in order to continue to inspire — as Ovid does with the wall, tomb, and urn — Marie glosses a segment of Ovid's path,

the process of conventionalizing. Similarly, while Ovid depicts a cascading of misreadings — first Thisbe's, then Pyramus's — Marie focusses on one reader's simplifying of a text and its gloss.

At the same time, however, Marie also emphasizes the Princess's readerly activity. It is her gloss that accompanies the potion into the *lai* and her informed warnings that remind the boy that he should drink the potion. She is a learned glossator, but one who does not understand until the end of the *lai* how to be a readerly writer. As a consequence, she cannot convince her lover as he struggles up the mountain to integrate the powerful drink into their *aventure*. She does not know how to reach him, thereby contrasting with the General Prologue's narrator while echoing Thisbe's equally helpless response to the lioness. Upon seeing her beloved dead, however, the girl learns how to transform their ending into a beginning, as implied when the wise Aunt's "herbes e racines" (108) materialize in the mountain's flourishing vegetation — the "bone herbe" that take "racine" [228–29: "good herbs, root"]. It was the Princess who introduced the herbs into the *lai* and into a literate context; it is she who spills the potion onto the mountain. The Princess's final act is one of a readerly writer. Like Thisbe's prayer to the gods, she responds to her beloved's silence by emphasizing the forces that could give life to their tale, that could reinvigorate the metaphor. Left for others to gather, to transform, perhaps, into other medicines (228–29), the *herbes et racines* may now be integrated into new *aventures*. Marie underscores this point by echoing the *lai*'s opening lines in her ending, by juxtaposing the tomb and closure (4; 246) with the telling of tales (2, 5; 251–54).

The potion, then, is presented as a sign easily misread and requiring careful and profound readerly writers. To deepen this association, Marie integrates other material, such as medical knowledge, another meaning of *translatio* important to the Middle Ages as well as to Ovid (xv.760–854) — the transferral of saintly remains — and fairy tale elements like the expectation that the hero will succeed. Moreover, she also seems to invoke Tristan and Iseut. Too complex a relationship to detail here, I would like to sketch how the stories seem to intertwine by using the only *lai* in Marie's collection that openly treats the legend, the very short "Chevrefoil" ("The Honey-suckle," 118 lines).

The two *lais* differ almost completely on their narrative levels. "Chevrefoil" records how a meeting between the famed lovers is achieved by Tristan's signalling Iseut, who is travelling through a forest at a point in time when he had been exiled by King Mark, but when she knows that her husband wishes

his return. A *lai* that *must* be read in terms of other texts, it assumes knowledge of the lovers, whose story is referred to only in brief, general outline (e.g., "Chevrefoil," 7-18, 97-101). For readers familiar with their tale, however, it must seem odd that although their deaths are referred to (10), the love philter impelling Tristan and Iseut to love is never overtly mentioned. Importantly here, the potion is furthermore at the centre of all the critical differences between the two pairs of lovers. For example, in the Tristan legend, the love philter is intended to instill love in Iseut and Mark, while in "Deus Amanz," the Aunt's potion is brewed to give the boy strength. Similarly, the Pitreans were already in love before obtaining the potion, unlike Tristan and Iseut, who only fall in love upon mistakenly drinking the potion. As a final illustration, Iseut's love philter forces secrecy which leads to the deceptions that culminate in their separate deaths, deaths without final understanding of their love, while the potion from Salerno was intended to allow the open union of the young lovers, who at least die together, publicly.

Marie's silence on the potion, moreover, echoes how the title of the Tristan *lai* works. Curiously, although its title is emphasized in the opening and closing verses ("Chevrefoil," 2-3, 114-16), the honeysuckle itself never appears in the *lai* except as a figure of speech; without the honeysuckle, the narrator explains, the hazel dies ("Chevrefoil," 68-76). It is the hazel that Tristan carves and transforms into a sign and that Iseut comprehends in an instant from afar ("Chevrefoil," 80-82). The honeysuckle need not be named nor seen; its implied intertwining with the hazel is understood, because when it comes to clandestine meetings, the lovers are experienced readerly writers, who — unlike Pyramus and Thisbe and the *deus amanz* — know how to read and create passion in hidden as well as in open spaces.

Echoing the readers who know the Tristan legend and need not be told that the potion caused their tragedy, the hazel need not be accompanied by the honeysuckle for the lovers to comprehend. When readers are familiar with the material, Marie suggests, new tales may be created by inventing new metaphors. Marie thereby echoes Ovid, while simultaneously counterpointing the boy's reading of the vial: he conflates surface with the potion, accepting the vehicle as that which wields power. Tristan and Iseut, in contrast, read passion in every vehicle. As a result, their love trysts, their *aventures*, proliferate endlessly. The *lai* itself is yet another tale inspired by their vision, vision created by the love philter. Indeed, the fecundity of their potion-induced perspective is also alluded to in the *lai*. Thus, Tristan and Iseut's many *aventures* ("Chevrefoil," 5-6) will continue, as implied by the inscribed hazel branch and by the ending, in which Tristan writes a

lai about the encounter (“Chevrefoil,” 112–13), and the narrator insists on naming *Tristan’s lai* in two languages (“Chevrefoil,” 114–18).

Just as the honeysuckle only appears figuratively in the story, so too the love philter is nowhere to be seen, except, perhaps, in its transferred, transformed version as the mysterious potion captivating the Princess. Both *lais* thus counterpoint and echo Ovid’s tale, whose wavelike rhythms of passion and tragic love are anchored in metaliterary movement that juxtaposes endings and beginnings — all rhythms made possible through readerly writers. As Marie puts it:

Es livres ke jadis feseient,
 Assez oscurement diseient
 Pur ceus ki a venir esteient
 E ki aprendre les deveient,
 K’i peüssent gloser la lettre
 E de lur sen le surplus mettre. (General Prologue, 11–16)

[In the books that were made then <things> were obscurely said for those who were to come afterwards and learn from them, they who could gloss the letter and from their wisdom supply more.]

In Marie’s presentation of the term, true glossing, readerly writing, signals the urge for renewal.

As can be seen by both Ovid and Marie’s exploration of the metaphor and how it enables poetic vision, the impulse to change old to new stems from the continual need to create that propels the literary system; metaphors and literature exist, that is, because traditional formulae lose their efficacy. Indeed, the daughter of Minyas who prized the tale of Pyramus and Thisbe since “quoniam vulgaris fabula non est” [IV.53: “since it is not a tale known to everyone”] has at least partly understood how to stimulate regeneration. Put another way, transformation and regeneration can occur only if metaphoric vision prevails. As Paul Ricoeur argues, “metaphor is the rhetorical process by which discourse unleashes the power that certain fictions have to redescribe reality” (*Rule 7*).

Living Memorials in Ovid and Marie

The inherent problem of whether a text lives on or not depends in part on readers to be creative and not myopically focussed, a message emphasized by both poets in the frameworks to their tales. Ovid’s daughter of Minyas, for example, shuns the irrational frenzies of Dionysian rites for the apparently dispassionate activity of weaving and telling tales. As if to demonstrate

their superiority, the sisters separate themselves off to narrate stories that feature irrational lovers: Pyramus and Thisbe, Mars and Venus, the Sun and Leucothoe, and Salmacis and Hermaphroditus. Apparently rational, they nonetheless exhibit their own narrow focus in doing so, preferring to set up divisions that will prevent the inspiration of mystery. In response, Bacchus transforms them into bats and their tapestries into grape and ivy vines. What may seem to be fierce or frenzied and hence advisably separated off cannot, in the end, be contained by divisions or monuments; they intermingle. Nature's lioness seeks an artifact of society (the veil) upon which to leave her imprint, death may regenerate vision, and Bacchus accepts drama as sacrifice.²⁴ As a result, points of contact — such as the wall, the tomb, the urn, the berries, and narratives such as those the Minyides tell — open up possibilities for creation as well as for separation and destruction.

As bats, the daughters of Minyas blindly flutter as they learn the power of the god's passion. Almost as if in response, the implied candle shedding light on the poet's labored, nocturnal activity in Marie's General Prologue — "Soventes fiez en ai veillié!" [42: "In making them, I often kept vigil"] — seems to offer up the perfect counterpoint; it links the passion impelling the creative process with laborious attention to the poet's craft. Indeed, exemplifying while underscoring that very message is Marie's careful orchestration of echoes. Thus, at the beginning of the *lai*, the narrator introduces "Deus Amanz" as "mut oïe" [2: "much heard of"] and reveals shortly thereafter, that the two children currently lie (8) on top of "un haut munt merveilles grant" [9: "a high mountain marvelously large"]. Not only does this introduction tie the beginning explicitly to the end, the choice of words further echoes back to the very beginning of the entire collection, where the narrator refers to the poetic process:

Quant uns granz biens est mult oïz,
 Dunc a primes est il fluriz,
 E quant loëz est de plusurs,
 Dunc ad espandues ses flurs. (General Prologue, 5-8)

[When a great good is much heard of, then for the first time it flourishes, and when it is praised by many, then it has generated blossoms.]

Vines, herbs, roots — to inspire, poetry must "fluriz." Although imprisoned in time and dependent upon a potentially stagnating, static form, poetry need not be a lifeless memorial; it can be shaped to encourage perspectival shifts. With tensions and ambiguities that deepen narratives, poetry can elicit such praise and admiration from readerly writers that it inspires

further transformations. These, in turn, may form undulations in the literary system's inexorable movement from one memorable instance back and forth to another.

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NOTES

¹ Edition used: Jean Rychner, ed. *Les Lais de Marie de France*. Unless otherwise noted, translations are mine. For the General Prologue, I have consulted the translation in Alfred Foulet and K.D. Uitti.

² Although Rychner proposes that the book is Ovid's *Remedia* (see note), as argued by Herman Braet, Marie leaves the specific Ovidian referent ambiguous, perhaps to suggest various interpretations.

³ See, however, Glyn S. Burgess, who argues Marie's aversion to Ovid (135). R.W. Hanning also interprets Marie, while using Ovidian topoi, as nonetheless anti-Ovidian. On the other hand, Antoinette Knapton proposes that Marie uses Ovid's Hercules in the fashioning of Guigemar (26 *passim*); Christoph März points to Ovidian influence in the love wounds suffered by Guigemar; and M.L. Stapleton suggests that Marie adopts and refashions Ovid, recognizing in him a kindred spirit (295).

⁴ This seems most obvious in "Le Chaitivel," which depicts the Lady's intent to write a lai and her Knight's response; see SunHee Kim Gertz 369–77.

⁵ Marie's General Prologue patently reveals poetic concerns — e.g., the careful selection of material that will bring renown (29–31) and seriousness towards the craft (42). It further presents the narrator as a readerly writer, a poet concerned that past literature be read deeply (17–22), as underscored in the reference to Priscian, *the Latin auctor* for grammar — the "ars recte loquendi et poetarum enarratio" [art of speaking correctly and interpreting poets]. That is, Priscian authoritatively implies the ability to read, to interpret, to gloss the past. See W.T.H. Jackson, who argues that through "Lanval" Marie uses conventions to critique them.

⁶ Regarding the generally accepted relation between Marie and Ovid, see, for example, Kristine Brightenback, "The *Metamorphoses*." Also see note 3 above. Influence is a difficult relationship to establish, especially once clear allusions are abandoned. For example, Barbara J. Bono traces characteristics of Vergil's Dido and Aeneas in couples ranging from Augustine and Monica to Antony and Cleopatra. As improbable as this may seem, she makes a solid case on the basis of her close readings. Her premises are nevertheless problematic, since the traits extracted from Vergil's pair become so generalized that they could have stemmed from other sources. On the other hand, E. Talbot Donaldson examines two authors whose relation of influence is generally accepted. Calling the traditional influence study the attempt to uncover the substructure of one work in another, he treats the less tangible analysis as an attempt to get at the infrastructure of influence. He thus argues that Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* also influenced Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*.

⁷ In contrast, the glossator as the writer in the reader might approach literature from a grammatical stance, correcting, analyzing, and interpreting. See Susan Noakes, who explores reading as portrayed by writers, moving between models of reading centred in the author (*exegesis*) and in the reader (*interpretation*).

⁸ Douglas Kelly, *The Art of Medieval French Romance* documents and explores how Old French poets integrated Latin rhetoric into their own poetics.

⁹ For example, it uses *trespasser* (19, 22) and *traire* (30), both of which are related to Latin *transferre*. See R. Howard Bloch on *traire*'s inclusion of "translate," "transmit," and "transform" as meanings (54–55). Also see Kristine Brightenback, "Remarks on the 'Prologue'; and Foulet and Uitti.

¹⁰ Brooks Otis writes, "[i]t is not the hero or patriot but the lover that dominates both the epic and the imagination of Ovid" (277).

¹¹ By shifting perspectives from old to new, the metaphor allows the poet to capture complexities in telegraphic form, to express them in linearly bound terms and nonetheless create a sense of fullness. Its essence, then, is transforming transferral. The *Rhetorica ad Herennium* defines it as follows: "Translatio est cum verbum in quandam rem transferetur ex alia re, quod propter similitudinem recte videbitur posse transferri" [Caplan's translation, iv.xxxiv.45: "Metaphor occurs when a word applying to one thing is transferred to another, because the similarity seems to justify this transference"]. Geoffrey of Vinsauf underscores its ability to change old to new: "Instruit iste modus transsumere verba decenter. / Si sit homo de quo fit sermo, transferor ad rem / Expressae similem; quae sit sua propria vestis / In simili casu cum videro, mutuor illam / Et mihi de veste veteri transformo novellam" [lines 770–74: [Gallo's trans. "This way teaches how to adopt words (i.e. use a metaphor) fittingly. If a person is to be depicted by some word, then I transfer the description to some similar thing; when I see an appropriate garment (vehicle) in a similar case, I will borrow it and transform my old garment (vehicle) into a new one.]] Similarly, Paul Ricoeur, "Metaphor and the Main Problem of Hermeneutics," examines the metaphor as involving a contextual change of meaning that often uses commonplaces as its guidelines, and is furthermore reliant on its audience for the novelty of emergent meaning. A detailed analysis is given in Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor*. Also useful here is the proposal of Wolf Paprotté and René Dirven that "[m]etaphor is now considered an instrument of thought, and a transaction between the constructive effects of context, imagistic and conceptual representation, and general encyclopaedic knowledge" (ix). It is useful to read their collection against Ricoeur's *Rule of Metaphor*; Max Black, *Models and Metaphors*; and George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*. Also see *New Literary History* 6:1 (1974), a special issue on the metaphor.

¹² See Alexandre Leupin on the difficulty of interpreting these complex lines and for bibliography on Marie's much discussed General Prologue.

¹³ For its use in historiography, see Werner Goetz. Astute literary readings include Douglas Kelly, "*Translatio Studii*," and Michelle A. Freeman.

¹⁴ 1.15. Edition used: *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd ed.

¹⁵ See, for example, Kristine Brightenback, "The *Metamorphoses* and Narrative *Conjointure*" 8–9; Ernest Hoepffner, 125; and C. Segre, 845–53.

¹⁶ I can only mention here the effect of gentle humour in Marie's portrait of the lovers, which I see as located in the narrator, who draws readers into sharing her view and in the process creates dissonance that further glosses Ovid. In Ovid, there is also gentle humour, but I see it as located in Ovid's use of silencing.

¹⁷ Although certainly, on its underlying levels, the *Enéas* too richly transforms its classical referent. See, for example, Stephen G. Nichols uses Augustine as intertext (62–67).

¹⁸ See note 12.

¹⁹ Edition used: Frank Justus Miller.

²⁰ Elizabeth Closs Traugott argues that we organize and interpret experience through conventional and dead metaphors. Moreover, Winfried Nöth examines the metaphor's relation to convention and meaning to conclude, "the metaphoric sign departs from semiotic structure of the language system in its conventionality and may again become part of convention" (4).

²¹ On signs, communication, and the tension between monuments and metamorphosis in Ovid's tale, see also Charles Segal. On Marie's open endings see Bruckner, 199-206, who discusses the *lais'* interplay between closure and open-ended transmission; Evelyn Birge Vitz, who argues that Greimas cannot be effectively applied to the *lais*, using the endings as examples; and Donald Maddox, who argues that the *lais* proceed by the continual exclusion of a third subject, while creating the impression that the ending has further narrative potential.

²² Translation used: *Phaedrus* (275), trans. Walter Hamilton, p. 97.

²³ Ovid's association of the fissure with communication is suggested even earlier in his attention to their inability to exchange words; prior to their discovery, Pyramus and Thisbe first "speak" only by nods and signs, "nutu signisque loquuntur" (IV.63).

²⁴ See Adrien Bruhl, 122-32, 141-44, who argues that Ovid is inspired by Dionysus, as seen in his section on Pythagoras at the end of the *Metamorphoses*.

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