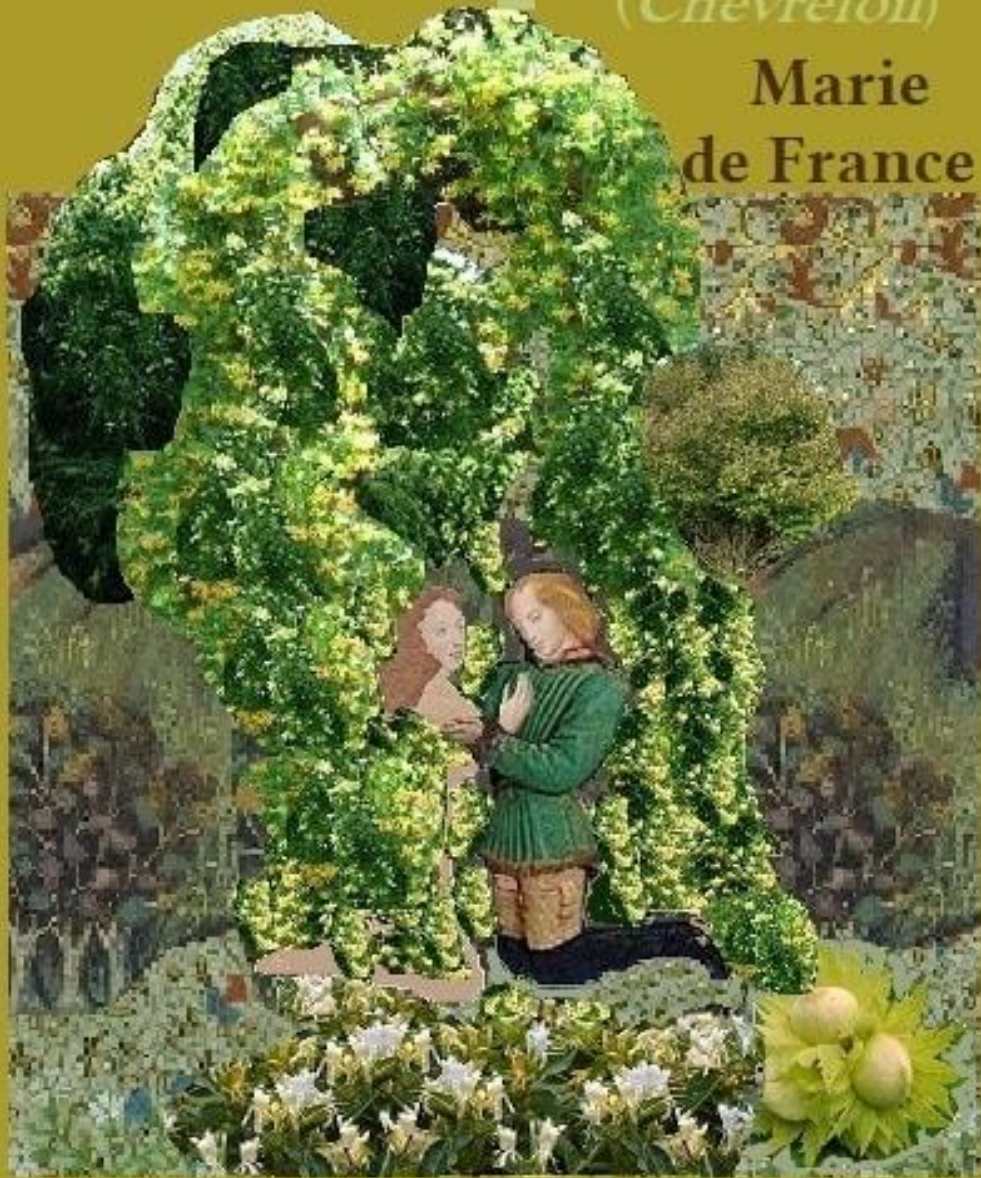


Quemar Press

Honeysuckle

(*Chevrefoil*)

Marie
de France



Translated by Katharine Margot Toohey



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Preface

Marie de France's 12th-century lai, *Honeysuckle (Chevrefoil)*, seems to re-imagine the traditional tragic Romance of Iseult and Tristan, in a chosen catalytic space - deep in a forest where the heroes interlink in communication and affection: just as, Marie writes, the honeysuckle vine of the title entwines with hazel. The forest is a sanctuary or hiding place for Tristan, exiled by the King, his uncle, for his love of Iseult, the Queen.

In Marie de France's original Anglo-Norman French text, the female protagonist is known only as 'the Queen'. Here, there is no need for her to be anything other than 'the Queen' - a title independent of her husband, the King, and something she can inhabit in this work as she acts against royal decree in endeavouring to be reunited with Tristan. In such a way, her title becomes a way of describing her self, rather than a position in a royal hierarchy.

Here, their meeting is not subject to fate, luck or chance, but happens through their own agency and ability to act - just as she steps along an alternate forest path to find him, and he carves his name on hazel in signal to her.



To mirror this fast-pace and cadence, Quemar's creative Modern English translation tries to retain the author's original four stresses to a line and driving final rhyme. While the translation is of all the original Anglo-Norman text, the original is also included for appreciation and interest, juxtaposed with the translation.

Marie de France based her work on early Breton lais and refers to historic interpretations of Iseult and Tristan's legend, as she assures that she will tell the Romance honestly, perhaps suggesting that other versions of it are fictitious. With layers of intertextuality, she begins:

'It is my wish, it is my will
to tell the Lai *Honeysuckle*,
to tell the truth now of this story,
why it came to be,
tale told to me through the ages
and I found in written pages,
tale of Tristan, tale of the Queen
about their love that was so fine.
For it they had such dolour.
They would die in a day together.'



The text seems to suggest that intervention is possible - a hiding place away from exile, moments of speaking together in forest depths that could lead to resolution:

'Unhindered, he spoke with her
and she said to him her pleasure.

Then she explained to him
how to reach agreement with the King:
this weighed on him heavily
- the one he sent away.'

Perhaps the lai ultimately suggests that this problem-solving would be most in keeping with the heroes' characterisation. Marie concludes by recounting that the character Tristan is the lai's author - a narrative device that gives the work new aspects of veracity and authoritative voice, and turns the lai itself into a communicative space for the heroes, similar to their reuniting forest. Within the lai, Tristan can exclaim in sudden first and second person:

'beautiful companion, and with us is true:
not you less me nor me less you.'



In this work exile is not insurmountable and communication is not final, whether it is letters carved in hazel, words echoed in a lai's verse, or any whisper in confidence in a forest.

Katharine Margot Toohey

Quemar Press



Honeysuckle

It is my wish, it is my will
to tell the Lai *Honeysuckle*,
to tell the truth now of this story,
why it came to be,
tale told to me through the ages
and I found in written pages,
tale of Tristan, tale of the Queen
about their love that was so fine.
For it they had such dolour.
They would die in a day together.
In my story, King Mark, angry,
at Tristan, his nephew, directed such fury
he exiled him from his land's border,
for the queen, how he loved her.
To his own country, the knight travels
to his birthplace, to South Wales.
All a year, he'd remain



without returning there again.

Here, he placed himself on the path
towards destruction, towards death.

You would wonder at this never,
for the one who loves the more
is the more pensive, the more anguished
when he has not what he wished.

So pensive now, and so anguished, Tristan
turned to leave his kingdom
unswerving to Cornwall voyaging
to be where the Queen was staying.

In the forest, he hid alone,
not wishing any to see him.



Assez me plest è bien le voil,/Del' Lai qu'hum nume Chevrefoil/Que la vérité vus en cunt/Purquoi il fut fet è dunt,/Plusurs le m'unt cunté è dit,/E jeo l'ai trové en escrit./De Tristam è de la Reïne,/De lur amur qui tant fu fine,/Dunt il éurent mainte dolor,/E puis mururent en un jur./Li Reis Markes esteit curucié/Vers Tristam sun nevuz irié;/De sa tère le cungéa,/Pur la Reïne qu'il ama./En sa Cuntrée en est alez,/En Suht-wales ù il fu nez;/Un an demurat tut entier,/Ne pot arière repeirier,/Mès puis se mist en abandun,/De mort è de destructiun./Ne vus esmerveilliez néent,/Kar ki eime mut léalment/Mut est dolenz è trèspensez,/Quant il n'en ad ses volentez./Tristam est dolent è trespensis,/Por ceo s'en vet de sun país:/En Cornuaille vait tut dreit,/La ù la Reïne maneit;/En la forest tut sul se mist,/Ne voleit pas que hum le vist.



Leaving under evening's cover

when all was resting here,



he went to the peasants then.
He lodged with the poor men.
All the while he was asking
to know news about the King.
They had heard one say
that the Barons were sent away
to go to Tintagel, travelling there
for the King wishes his Court here.
All will arrive at Pentecost season
and there will be joy and celebration,
then the Queen will be there.
Hearing these words was his cure.
Travelling here, he could hardly
not see her as she moved by.
The day the King travelled past,
Tristan came into the forest
on the path he felt sure
she would soon be near.





En la vesprée s'en eisseit,/Quant tens de herberger esteit,/Od païsans, od
povre gent,/Preneit la nuit herbergement:/Les noveles lur enquireit,/Del'
Rei cum il se cunteneit;/Ceo li dient qu'il unt oï/Que li Barun èrent
bani./A Tintagel deivent venir,/Li Reis i veolt sa Curt tenir,/A Pentecuste
i serunt tuit,/Mut i avera joie è déduit./E la Reïne i sera;/Tristam l'oï, mut
se haita,/Ele ne porrat mie aler/K'il ne la veie trespasser./Le jur que li Rei
fu méuz,/E Tristam est al bois venuz,/Sur le chemin que il saveit/Que la
Reine passer deveit,



He cut from the hazel tree
a piece to halve and square evenly.



When he had the stem ready
he wrote his name deeply
so the Queen could see, aware
that he kept his vigil here,
as for her, before, he'd done.
Indeed she had noticed then
this object well-crafted by her companion,
this stem within her vision.
This was the sum of its writing,
and he was telling her and asking;
long he'd been in this place,
staying, awaiting in this space,
to await here, here to know
the way to see her somehow.
Without her, he could hardly live,
he with her to be together, as if
surviving like the vine honeysuckle
clasped around a tree of hazel.





Une codre trencha parmi,/Tute quarreie l'a fendi/Quant il ad paré le
bastun,/De sun cutel escrit sun nun,/De la Reine s'aparceit,/Qui mut grant
garde empreneit;/Autre-feiz li fu avenu,/Que si l'aveit aparceü,/De sun
Ami bien conustra,/Le bastun quant ele le vera./Ceo fu la summe de
l'escrit/Que il l'aveit mandé è dit,/Que lunges ot ilec esté/E atendu è
surjurné,/Por atendre è por saver,/Coment il l'a péust véer;/Kar ne pot
nent vivre sanz li,/D'euls deus fu-il tut autresi,/Cume del' Chevrefoil
esteit,/Ki à la codre se preneit





It is so interlaced and bound
and all encircling tight around
that they can endure long together
but if they were severed by another,
quickly it would be the hazel's death
and that of the honeysuckle both,
beautiful companion, and with us is true:
not you less me nor me less you.



On horseback, the Queen went riding,
here her eyes all observing,
her glance noticed the carved stem
knowing every letter then.

The knights who guided her
who had travelled with her here
she called to halt at her request:
she wished to dismount and rest.

They all agreed to her order.

From her people, she went far.

She summoned her gentlewoman
of good faith to her: Brangwyn.

Away from the path, not much further
she found the one in the forest there.





Quant il est si laciez è pris;/E tut entur le fust s'est mis,/Ensemble poient
bien durer/Mès ki puis les volt désevrer,/Li codres muert hastivement,/E
Chevrefoil ensemblement;/Bele amie si est de nus/Ne vus sanz mei, ne
mei sanz vus./La Reïne vait chevachant,/Ele esgardat tut un pendant,/Le
bastun vit bien l'aperceut,/Tutes les lettres i conut./Les Chevaliers qui la
menoent,/Qui ensamble od li erroent/Si cumanda tuz arester,/Descendre



vot è reposer./Cil unt fait sun comandement,/Ele s'en vait luinz de sa
gent:/Sa Meschine apelat à sei,/Breguein qui fu de bone fei./Del' chemin
un poi s'esluina,/Dedenz le bois celui trova,



Above all living, he loved her more.

They brought forth their joy together.

Unhindered, he spoke with her

and she said to him her pleasure.

Then she explained to him

how to reach agreement with the King:

this weighed on him heavily

- the one he sent away.

For a King's ill accusation



must her friend here be gone.

When they had to leave each other
they began to weep together.

Tristan returned to Wales again
as his uncle once commanded him.

Because of this joy he had then
with the beloved friend he'd seen,
for this he wrote down
just as the Queen said to him
to keep safe those words to tell.

He knew the harp well,
from this wrote a new lai.

He named it instantly

Gotelef in English - *Honeysuckle* -
to be known in French as *Chevrefoil*.

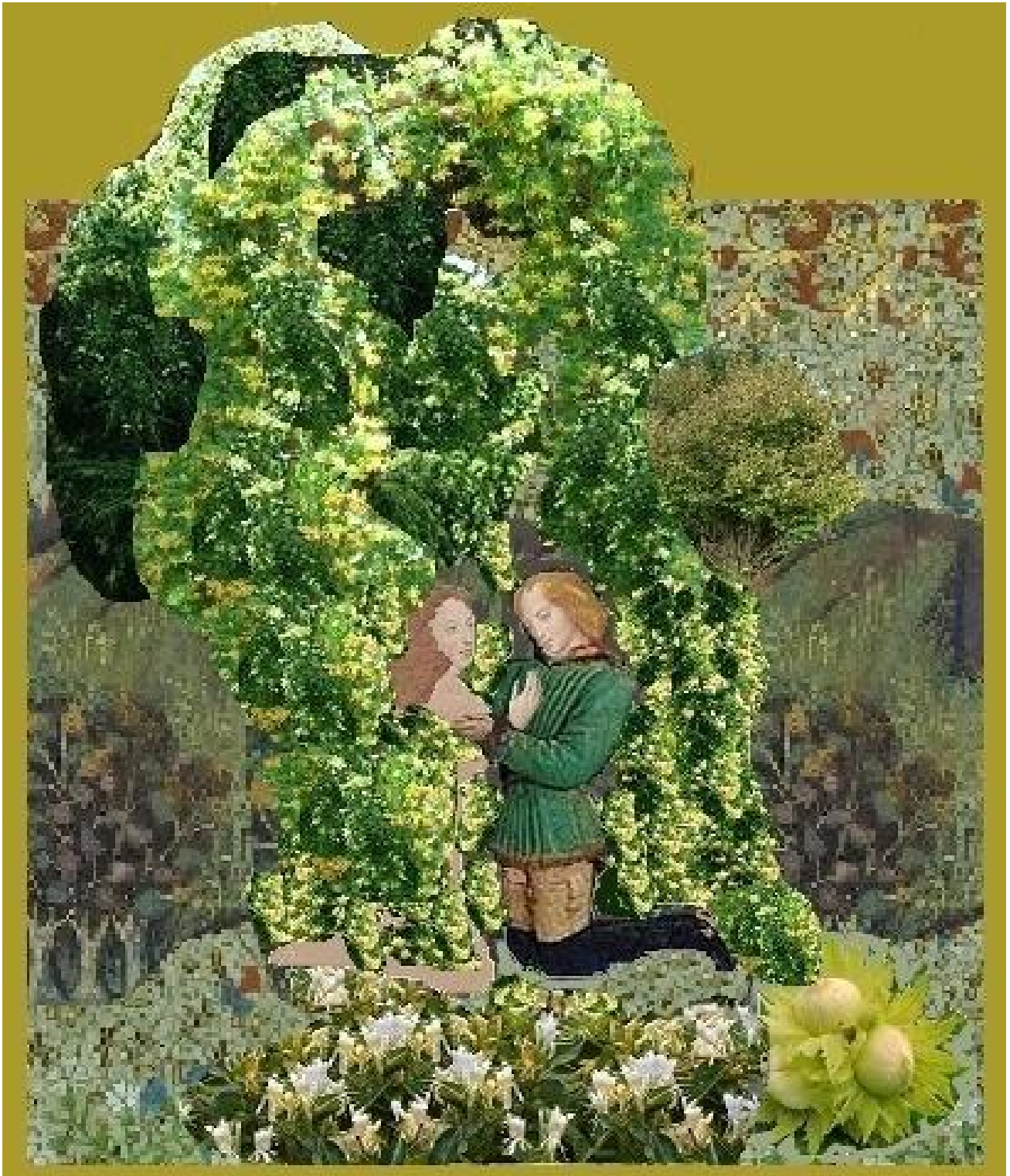
I speak this Lai's veracity
as here I tell you its story.





Qui plus l'amot que rien vivant;/Entre eus meinent joïe grant/A lui parlat
tut à leisir,/E ele li dit sun pleisir./Puis li mustra cum faitement,/Del Rei
aurat acordement./E que mut li aveit pesé/De céo qu'il ot sun cungié:/Par
encusement l'aveit fait,/A-tant s'en part sun Ami lait./Mès quant ceo vient
al désevrer,/Dunc comencent-ils à plurer./Tristam à Wales s'en r'alla/Tant
que sis Uncles le manda./Por la joïe que il ot éue/De s'Amie qu'il ot
véue,/E por ceo qu'il aveit escrit/Si cum la Reïne l'ot dit,/Por les paroles
remembrer/Tristam ki bien saveit harper,/En aveit fait un nuvel Lai/Asez
brèvement le numerai./Gotelef l'apelent en Engleis,/Chevrefoil le nument
en Franceis;/Dit vus en ai la vérité/Del' Lai que j'ai ici cunté.





The End

Fin

