

5th Preview

Marie de France's *Yonec*

Translated by Katharine Margot Toohey



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This lai's words here begun,
I will leave no work undone;
all the adventures I know
I will tell you now.

Within my thoughts within my desire
the lai is *Yonec* and I its teller
about his birth, about his father,
how his father came to his mother
the one who fathered Yonec
he was called the name Muldumarec.



Once, in another time in Britain
was there a rich and elderly man
he came from Chepstow,
and he was lord that country-through.
That city is over the Douglas river,
once was grief and transgression there;
and there transgressed by age, this man,
to carry a good heritage on,
took a wife to bear children,
for them to be his heirs then.



Of high nobility the Lady - a lady
wise in courtesy, strong in beauty -
who was to the rich man given,
if for her beauty others felt devotion.



LAI D'YWENEC.

Puisque du Lai ai coumencié,/Jà n'iert par nul travail laissié ;//Les aventures que jeo
sai/Tut prime vus les cunterai./En pensé ai et en talant/Que d'Ywenec vus cunte
avant ;/Dunt il fu nez, è de sun père,/Cum il vint primes à sa mère./Icil qui gendra
Ywenec/Il ot à nun Eudemarec.//En Bretagne aveit jadis/Uns riches Huns vielz et
ancis ;/De Caerwent fu avoez,/E du païs Sire clamez./La cité si est sor Duglas,//Jadis i
ot deul è trespas ;/Mut fu trespassez en aage./Pur ce k'il ot bon héritage,/Fame prist
pur enfans avoir/Qui après lui fussent si heir :/De haute gent fu la Pucele/Sage et
curteise et forment bele,/Ki à riche humme fu donnée/Pur sa biauté fu mult amée.





no other words could be spoken,
from there as far as Lincoln
away as far as Ireland again:
to give her to him, great the sin,
with her being beautiful and noble;
his whole mind turned watchful,
he locked her in his tower,
kept in a great paved chamber.
He had a single sister, too,
she was elderly, she was a widow:
he set her and the Lady together
to make the Lady's arrangement proper



and I think other women
were by her in another room.
The Lady spoke nothing more
than her elderly lady asked her;
so held, the years passed seven,
between them they had no children;
from this tower, she could never leave,
not for friend, not for relative,
whenever she wished to retire,
never a chamberlain, no doorkeeper,
dared enter her room at all
before her, to light a candle.
Often, the Lady was in great sorrow,
cried, sighed and lamented now:
so much, this dimmed her beauty
she did not care really
for herself, never wishing more:
fast the days grasp her:
then came the month of April,
the birds' call suddenly shrill;





Purqu'en fereie autre parole,/Ne n'ot sun per desc' à Incole ;/Ne très-que Yllande de là,/Grant péchié fist qui li duna,/Purce qu'ele ert et bele et gente;/En li garder turna s'entente,/Dedens sa tur l'a enserrée,/En une grant chambre pavée./Il ot une soë serur ;/Viele ert è vueve sanz seignur :/Ensemble od la Dame l'a mise,/Pur lui tenir plus en justise ;/Autres fames i ot ce croi,/En une autre chambre par soi./Mès jà la Dame ne parlast,/Se sa Vieille nel' commandast;/Einsi la tint plus de set ans,/Unques entre eulz n'orent enfanz ;/Ne fors de celle tur n'issi,/Ne pur parent ne pur ami./Quant el vuleit aler cuchier,/Ni ot Chamberlenc ne uissier,/Ki en la chambre osast entrer,/Ne devant lui cierge alumer./Mut ert la Dame en grant tristurs,/A lermes, à suspirs, à plurs:/Sa biauté pert en tel mesure,/Ce est ele qui n'en prent cure,/De soi méismes melz vousist,/Que au jurs hastiue la preist:/Ce fu el mois d'avril entrant,/Quant cil oisel lievent lur chant;





When in the morning awoke her lord,

he prepared to go to the woods:

her elderly lady woke then

and shut the door behind him,

doing what was wished of her,

she went to another chamber

in her hand she carried a psalter,

wanting to recite the psalms there.

The Lady wept upon waking,

and perceived the sunlight streaming

and realised that the elderly lady

had left her room now empty;

the Lady, sighing and weeping, began



to speak in tears lamenting then:

‘ Ill I was born, alas,

my fate is so hard thus:

within this tower I am captive

and but for my death I'm not to leave.

Elderly, jealous, what drives him

to hold me fast in so great a prison?

It is through so much fear and folly,

he calls all the days ‘Treachery’.

I cannot attend the church

nor hear I hear God’s Service;

if I could speak with some others

with him I would go happier.

I’d make a beautiful impression

but now I have no inclination!

Cursed be my every relation,

and everyone else in unison,

who gave me away to him

and to his body wed me then,

A strong rope that holds and ties.



Is it that he never dies?
Instead of baptism in holy water,
he was plunged in Hell's river.
Hard are his nerves, his veins hard
where flows vivid blood;
I have heard it told often
that once there could happen
adventures here in this country
that overcame all worry.
Knights would seek out ladies
as they wished, noble, in beauty:
while ladies would find lovers
in beauty, courtesy, nobility, honour.
If they were ever to be to blame,
It was only by those outside seen.
If it happened that this was
or it has never come to pass;
God, who is capable of all,
make things as I will.'
When her lament was over now,



glimpsing a great bird's shadow

she looked at a narrow window

not knowing what this was or how:



Li Sires fu matin levez,/D'aler en bois s'est aprestez :/La Vieille a fait lever sus,/Et après lui fermer les us./Cele a sun coumandement fet,/En une autre chambre s'en vet ;/En sa main porteit un sautier,/Où ele voleit verseillier./La Dame plore en esveil,/Choisi la clarté du souleil :/De la Vielle est apercée,/Qui de la chambre esteit issue ;/Mult se plaingneit è suspireit./Et en plurant se démenteit./Lasse, fet-ele, mar fui née,/Mout est dure ma destinée,/En ceste tor suis en prisun,/Jà n'en istrai se morte nun./Cist vielz jalous de quoi se tient,/Ki en si grant prisun me tient ?/Mut par est fols et esbahiz,/Il crient estre tus-jurs trahiz./Ge ne puis au mustier venir,/Ne le Servise-Dieu oïr ;/Se je poisse à gent parler,/Et en déduit o lui aler,/Ge li moustrasse biau semblant,/Jà ne n'èusse-jeo talent !/Malooit seient mi parent,/E li autre communement,/Qui à cest jalus me donèrent,/E de sun cors me marièrent./A forte corde trait è tir,/Il ne porra jamès morir?/Quant il dut estre baptisiez,/Si fu el flun d'Enfer plungiez./Durs sont li nerf, dures les vaines,/Qui de vif sanc sunt tutes plaines ;/Mut ai oï suvent cunter,/Que um souleit jadis truver,/D'avantures en cest païs,/Qui esrachoient les pensis./Chevaliers truvoient Puceles/A lor talent, gentes è beles:/E Dames truvoient des Amans,/Biax è curteis, preux è vaillans,/Si que blasmées n'en estoient,/Nés nus fors elles nes' veoient,/Se ce puet estre ne ce fu,/Onques a nul est avenu ;/Diex ki de tout a poosté,/Il en face ma volenté./Quant Elle ot fait sa plainte issi,/L'umbre d'un grant Oisel choisi,/Parmi une estreite fenestre,/Ele ne set que ce puet estre :



Into her room came soaring
a hawk with feet in jesses flying
his markings showed him in his prime
before her he perched down
there just staying briefly
as she studied him closely



change to a knight beautiful and noble.

The Lady in wonder held all.

She would not move, shivered

in fear of him, covered her head.

In great courtesy to her, the knight

was the first one there to speak:

‘Lady, do not be afraid

I am as gentle as this bird, the hawk.

If these secrets seem obscure to you,

you can trust in this assurance now.

Will you make of me your companion,

as I’ve come here for that reason?

For such time I have you loved

in my heart I have you desired!

Never could I have loved another,

will love another woman never.

I could not come to you before,

I could not from my own country venture,

If you had not summoned me then.

Now I can well be your companion.’





En la chambre volant entra,/Giez ot espiez, Ostorir sembla,/Deci ne mues fu où
désis,/Il s'est devant la Dame assis :/Quant il i ot un poi esté,/Et ele l'ot bien
esgardé,/Chevaliers biaux è gens devient ;/La Dame à merveille le tient,/Li sans li
remut è frémi,/Grant poor eut, son chief covri./Mut fu curteis li Chevaliers,/Il l'a
arésouna premiers :/Dame, fet-il, n'aiez poor,/Gentilz oisel a en Ostor :/Se li segré vus
sunt oscur/Gardez que séiez asséur./Si faites de moi vostre ami,/Pur ce su-geo venus
ici ?/Jeo vus ai longement amée,/E en mun cuer mult désirée !/Unques fors vus fame
n'amai,/Ne jamès autre ne ferai./Mès ne pooie à vus venir,/Ne fors de mun païs
issir,/Se vus ne m'èussiez requis, /Or puis bien estre vostre amis.



The Lady reassured at this
uncovers her head, she speaks
these words to the Knight in answer:
he will be companion to her
if he believe in God honestly.

Such a love as theirs could be:
caused by his great beauty;
for never in her time on any day
had been a knight so fine to see,
nor would one be lovelier to her eyes.

He: “Well spoken, lady.

It could not be wished by me
to cause you such apprehension,
such mistrust nor such suspicion.

I trust well in the Creator,
who cast you from the dolour
where Adam placed our father
by biting the apple bitter;
he is, was, and will forever
be life and light for any sinner.



If you believe me not,
here call your chaplain forth,
say you are faint in sickness,
say you want the Service,
that God set out for the world,
so that the sinner be healed:
I will take on your form, Lady,
and in your body, receive God's body.
All I will tell you, by my Truth,
you will never be in doubt of this.



La Dame se raséura,/Sun chief descuvri, si parla:/Le Chevalier a respundu/E dit
qu'elle en fera son Dru,/S'en Dieu créust et ainsi fust./Que lor amor estre péust :/Car
mut par a de grant biauté ;/Unques un jour en sun aé,/Si beau Chevalier n'esgarda,/Ne
si bel jamès ne verra./Dame, fet-il, vus dites bien/Ne voudreie pur nule rien,/Que de
moi i ait acheson,/Mescréance, ne souspeçon :/Ge croi très bien le Criatour,/Qui vus
geta de la tristour,/Où Adans nus mist nostre père,/Par le mors de la pome amère ;/Il
est, et fu et ert tuz-jors/Vie et lumière as péchéors./Se vus de ce ne me créez,/Vostre
Chapelain demandez:/Dites que mals vus asoupisse,/Si volez avoir le Servise,/Que
Diex a el munt establi,/Dont li péchéor sunt gari :/La semblance de vus prendrai,/Le
corps Dame-Dieu recevrai./Ma créance vus dirai tute,/Ja ne serez de ce en dute.



To be continued

