

Middle English Lyrics and the *Lais* of Marie de France
Dr. Brian McFadden
British Literature I
ENGL 2323

Poems and Manuscripts

- **London, British Library, Harley 978** - Sumer is icumen in (mid 13th)
- **London, British Library, Harley 2253** – Spring, Alisoun, Sweet Jesus (c. 1340)
- **London, British Library, Sloane MS 2593** – I have a Gentil Cok, Adam Lay in Bondage, I Sing of a Maiden, Jolly Jankyn (15c)
- **Cambridge Trinity College R.3.19** – My lief is faren in lond (late 15c)
- **Oxford, Bodleian Library, Douce 139** – Fowls in the Frith (13c)
- **Oxford, Balliol College, 354 (16c) and Oxford, Bodleian Library, Eng.poet.e.1 (Late 15c)** – Abuse of Women
- **Oxford, Bodleian Library, Rawlinson MS D.913** – Irish Dancer
- **Cambridge, Gonville and Caius College, MS 383** – I lovede a child of this cuntree
- **Oxford, Bodleian, Eng.poet.a.1 (the Vernon MS) and London, British Library, Addl. 22283** - The Wily Clerk (both late 14c)
- **Oxford, Corpus Christi College 59** – In Praise of Mary (13c)
- **Oxford, Bodleian, Eng.poet.e.1** - Mary is with child (late 15c)
- **40 MSS** - Now Goeth Sun Under Wood
- **5 MSS** - Jesu Christ, my lemmon swete
- **Oxford, Bodley MS. Digby 86** (also in the Vernon MS): Contempt of the World (late 13C)

Courtly Love

- Originated in satires of Ovid, Roman writer (*Ars amatoria, Remedia amoris, Amores*)
- Andreas Capellanus - *The Art of Courtly Love* - rhetoric book on how to attract women of different classes (12th cent.)
- how to show finer feelings and emotional attachment in a very controlled sexual atmosphere; reactive
- Not necessarily, but often, sexual love; unconsummated desire (Dante, Petrarch, etc.) – ‘lovesickness’
- Disparity between the lovers’ classes/stations
- Distance/inaccessibility
- More literary than historical - few if any probably practiced it!
- Naturalness of love vs. restrictive society
 - Springtime – *reverdi* (regreening)

Chivalry

- Lat. *caballus*, Fr. *cheval* - knight, mounted soldier
- Military duties to one’s lord
- Social obligations as well
- Liege/vassal relationship
- Religious element - serves God and lord
 - in practice, social probably had more direct importance

The *Lais* texts

- Third quarter of 12th century (1173-1185) probable dates
- Only MS with all twelve: London, BL, Harley 978, early thirteenth, with some Latin texts and OF fables
- Nine complete or partial in Paris, Bibliotheque Nationale, nouv. acq. fr. 1104
- Paris, BN, fr. 2168 - *Yonec*, *Guigemar*, *Lanval*
- London, BL, Cotton Vespasian B.xiv - *Lanval* and *Yonec*
- Paris, BN, fr. 24432 - *Lanval* and *Yonec*

Who was Marie?

- We really don't know
- Most recent guess - Marie of Bolougne, daughter of King Stephen; educated in a convent, married off to Matthew of Flanders, retired to a convent sometime after 1168
- Other possibles: Marie (Plantagenet), abbess of Shaftesbury; Marie de Meulan, wife of Hugh Talbot, baron of Cleuville (Buckinghamshire, Herefordshire)
- All we know for sure - noble, educated, around the court of Henry II

The Breton *lai* and related traditions

- *Lai* - short poems, octosyllabic couplets, usually on the subject of courtly love
 - usually some form of personal crisis - situations similar to saints' lives and didactic literature, but more from a secular viewpoint
- *chanson de geste* (song of deeds) - heroic poetry about nobility
- *Fabliau* - short, humorous poem, usually sexual in content; often anti-clerical, anti-nobility satire