

Lay le Freine

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	We redeth oft and findeth ywrite -	<i>read; written; (see note)</i>
	And this clerkes wele it wite -	<i>scholars; know</i>
	Layes that ben in harping	<i>are</i>
	Ben yfounde of ferli thing.	<i>marvelous</i>
5	Sum bethe of wer and sum of wo,	<i>Some are of war</i>
	And sum of joie and mirthe also,	<i>gaiety</i>
	And sum of trecherie and of gile,	<i>guile</i>
	Of old aventours that fel while;	<i>adventures; happened once; (see note)</i>
	And sum of bourdes and ribaudy,	<i>jokes; ribaldry</i>
10	And mani ther beth of fairy.	<i>the Otherworld</i>
	Of al thinges that men seth,	<i>(see note)</i>

	Mest o love for sothe thai beth.	<i>Most of; in truth</i>
	In Breteyne bi hold time	<i>Brittany in olden times</i>
	This layes were wrought, so seith this rime.	<i>These; made</i>
15	When kinges might our yhere	<i>anywhere hear</i>
	Of ani mervailles that ther were,	<i>marvels</i>
	Thai token an harp in gle and game,	<i>took; minstrelsy</i>
	And maked a lay and gaf it name.	<i>gave</i>
	Now of this aventours that weren yfalle,	<i>have happened</i>
20	Y can tel sum ac nought alle.	<i>but not all</i>
	Ac herkneth lordinges, sothe to sain,	<i>But listen</i>
	Ichil you telle Lay le Frayn.	<i>I will</i>
	Bifel a cas in Breteyne	<i>Befell; event</i>
	Whereof was made Lay le Frain.	
25	In Ingliche for to tellen ywis	<i>In English; certainly</i>
	Of an asche for sothe it is;	<i>ash tree; (see note)</i>
	On ensauple fair with alle	<i>An example</i>
	That sum time was bifalle.	
	In the west cuntré woned tuay knightes,	<i>country; lived two; (see note)</i>
30	And loved hem wele in al rightes;	<i>each other</i>
	Riche men in her best liif,	<i>their prime</i>
	And aither of hem hadde wedded wiif.	<i>either; had</i>
	That o knight made his levedi milde	<i>one; lady</i>
	That sche was wonder gret with childe.	<i>wondrously great</i>
35	And when hir time was comen tho,	<i>then</i>
	She was deliverd out of wo.	
	The knight thonked God almight,	<i>thanked</i>
	And cleped his messanger an hight.	<i>called; in haste</i>

	"Go," he seyde, "to mi neighebour swithe,	<i>quickly</i>
40	And say y gret him fele sithe,	<i>I greet; many times</i>
	And pray him that he com to me,	
	And say he schal mi gossibbe be."	<i>godparent [of my children]; (see note)</i>
	The messanger goth, and hath nought forgete,	<i>not forgotten</i>
	And fint the knight at his mete.	<i>finds; table</i>
45	And fair he gret in the halle	<i>greet</i>
	The lord, the levedi, the meyné alle.	<i>company</i>
	And seththen on knes doun him sett,	<i>then; knees; himself</i>
	And the Lord ful fair he gret:	<i>saluted</i>
	"He bad that thou schust to him te,	<i>should; come</i>
50	And for love his gossibbe be."	
	"Is his levedi deliverd with sounde?"	<i>safely</i>
	"Ya, sir, ythonked be God the stounde."	<i>occasion</i>
	"And whether a maidenchild other a knave?"	<i>was it; or</i>
	"Tuay sones, sir, God hem save."	<i>Two sons; them</i>
55	The knight therof was glad and blithe,	
	And thonked Godes sond swithe,	<i>God's mercy quickly</i>
	And graunted his erand in al thing,	<i>request</i>
	And gaf him a palfray for his tiding.	<i>gave; palfrey; news; (see note)</i>
	Than was the levedi of the hous	
60	A proude dame and an envieous,	<i>lady; (see note)</i>
	Hokerfulliche missegging,	<i>Maliciously slandering</i>
	Squeymous and eke scorning.	<i>Disdainful; also scorning</i>
	To ich woman sche hadde envie;	<i>each</i>
	Sche spac this wordes of felonie:	<i>spoke these; malice</i>
65	"Ich have wonder, thou messanger,	

	Who was thi lordes conseiler,	<i>counselor</i>
	To teche him about to send	
	And telle schame in ich an ende,	<i>shame everywhere; (see note)</i>
	That his wiif hath to childer ybore.	<i>two children born; (see note)</i>
70	Wele may ich man wite therfore	<i>Well; each; know</i>
	That tuay men hir han hadde in bour;	<i>two; she has had; bed</i>
	That is hir bothe deshonour." 1	<i>dishonor</i>
	The messanger was sore aschamed;	<i>sorely ashamed</i>
	The knight himself was sore agramed,	<i>aggrieved</i>
75	And rebouked his levedy	<i>rebuked; lady</i>
	To speke ani woman vilaynie.	
	And ich woman therof might here	<i>each; who might have heard; (see note)</i>
	Curssed hir alle yfere,	<i>all together</i>
	And bisought God in heven	
80	For His holy name seven	<i>By; seven names; (see note)</i>
	That yif hye ever ani child schuld abide	<i>if she; bear</i>
	A wers aventour hir schuld bitide.	<i>worse; she; experience</i>
	Sone therafter bifel a cas	<i>Soon; it happened</i>
	That hirsself with child was.	
85	When God wild, sche was unbounde	<i>willed; relieved</i>
	And deliverd al with sounde.	<i>safely</i>
	To maidenchilder sche hadde ybore.	<i>Two girls</i>
	When hye it wist, wo hir was therefore.	<i>she; knew, woe</i>
	"Allas," sche seyde, "that this hap come!	<i>event</i>
90	Ich have ygoven min owen dome.	<i>given myself; doom</i>
	Forboden bite ich woman	<i>be it for any; (see note)</i>
	To speken ani other harm opon.	<i>harm of any other</i>

	Falsliche another y gan deme; The selve happe is on me sene.	<i>Falsely; did judge same event; in me seen</i>
95	Allas," sche seyde, "that y was born! Withouten ende icham forlorn. Or ich mot siggen sikerly That tuay men han yly me by; Or ich mot sigge in al mi liif	<i>(see note) Forever I am lost Either; must surely say two; have lain must say; life</i>
100	That y bileighe mi neighbours wiif; Or ich mot - that God it schilde! - Help to sle min owen child. On of this thre thinges ich mot nede Sigge other don in dede.	<i>lied about must; prevent slay; own One; I needs must Say or do</i>
105	"Yif ich say ich hadde a bileman, Than ich leighe meselve opon; And eke thai wil that me se Held me wer than comoun be. And yif ich knawelege to ich man	<i>second lover lie about myself worse acknowledge; each; (see note)</i>
110	That ich leighe the levedi opon, Than ich worth of old and yong Behold leighster and fals of tong. Yete me is best take mi chaunce, And sle mi childe, and do penaunce."	<i>lied about the lady shall be by Thought a liar; tongue; (see note)</i>
115	Hir midwiif hye cleped hir to: "Anon," sche seyde, "this child fordo. And ever say thou wher thou go That ich have o child and namo." The midwiif answerd thurchout al	<i>slay; (see note) quickly summoned; (see note) destroy always; wherever one; no more to all this</i>

120	That hye nil, no hye ne schal. 2 [The levedi hadde a maiden fre, Who ther ynurtured hade ybe, And fostered fair ful mony a yere; Sche saw her kepe this sori chere,	<i>noble; (see note)</i> <i>nurtured had been</i> <i>many a year</i> <i>sad countenance</i>
125	And wepe, and syke, and crye, "Alas!" And thoghte to helpen her in this cas. And thus sche spake, this maiden ying, "So n'olde y wepen for no kind thing: 3	<i>sigh</i> <i>decided to</i> <i>young</i>
130	But this o child wol I of-bare And in a covent leve it yare. Ne schalt thou be aschamed at al; And whoso findeth this childe smal, By Mary, blissful quene above, May help it for Godes love."	<i>one; will; carry away</i> <i>convent leave; quickly</i>
135	The levedi graunted anon therto, And wold wele that it were ydo. Sche toke a riche baudekine That hir lord brought from Costentine And lapped the litel maiden therin,	<i>agreed</i> <i>wished indeed; done</i> <i>embroidered cloth; (see note)</i> <i>Constantinople; (see note)</i> <i>wrapped; little</i>
140	And toke a ring of gold fin, And on hir right arm it knitt, With a lace of silke therin plit; And whoso hir founde schuld have in mende That it were comen of riche kende.	<i>precious</i> <i>fastened</i> <i>silk; entwined; (see note)</i> <i>mind</i> <i>she; noble kin</i>
145	The maide toke the child hir mide And stale oway in an eventide,	<i>with</i> <i>stole; evening</i>

	And passed over a wild heth.	<i>heath</i>
	Thurch feld and thurch wode hye geth	<i>Through field; wood; went</i>
	Al the winterlong night -	
150	The weder was clere, the mone was light -	<i>weather; moon</i>
	So that hye com bi a forest side;	<i>Until</i>
	Sche wax al weri and gan abide.	<i>became; weary</i>
	Sone after sche gan herk	<i>hark (hear)</i>
	Cokkes crowe and houndes berk.	<i>bark</i>
155	Sche aros and thider wold.	<i>would go; (see note)</i>
	Ner and nere sche gan bihold.	<i>Nearer and nearer</i>
	Walles and hous fele hye seighe,	<i>many; she saw</i>
	A chirche with stepel fair and heighe.	<i>steeple</i>
	Than nas ther noither strete no toun,	<i>(see note)</i>
160	Bot an hous of religioun,	<i>But</i>
	An order of nonnes wele ydight	<i>nuns; called</i>
	To servy God bothe day and night.	<i>serve</i>
	The maiden abod no lengore,	<i>tarried; longer</i>
	Bot yede hir to the chirche dore,	<i>went; door</i>
165	And on knes sche sat adoun,	
	And seyde wepeand her orisoun:	<i>weeping; prayer</i>
	"O Lord," she seyde, "Jesu Crist,	<i>(see note)</i>
	That sinful man bedes herst,	<i>Who; hears prayers of</i>
	Underfong this present,	<i>Receive</i>
170	And help this seli innocent	<i>blessed</i>
	That it mot ycrystned be,	<i>may christened</i>
	For Marie love, thi moder fre."	<i>Mary's; mother</i>
	Hye looked up and bi hir seighe	<i>She</i>

	An asche bi hir fair and heighe,	(see note)
175	Wele ybowed, of michel priis;	<i>branched; great excellence</i>
	The bodi was holow as mani on is.	<i>body; many a one</i>
	Therin sche leyd the child for cold,	
	In the pel as it was bifold,	<i>robe; enfolded</i>
	And blisced it with al hir might.	<i>blessed</i>
180	With that it gan to dawe light.	<i>dawn</i>
	The foules up and song on bough,	<i>birds</i>
	And acremen yede to the plough.	<i>farmers went</i>
	The maiden turned ogain anon,	<i>back soon</i>
	And toke the waye he hadde er gon.	<i>she had formerly gone</i>
185	The porter of the abbay aros,	
	And dede his office in the clos,	<i>prayers; vestry</i>
	Rong the belles and taperes light,	
	Leyd forth bokes and al redi dight.	<i>made ready everything</i>
	The chirche dore he undede,	<i>undid</i>
190	And seighe anon in the stede	<i>place</i>
	The pel liggen in the tre,	<i>robe lying</i>
	And thought wele that it might be	
	That theves hadde yrobbed sumwhare,	
	And gon ther forth and lete it thare.	<i>left</i>
195	Therto he yede and it unwound,	<i>went; unwound</i>
	And the maidenchild therin he fond.	<i>found</i>
	He tok it up betwen his hond,	<i>hands; (see note)</i>
	And thonked Jesu Cristes sond;	<i>mercy</i>
	And hom to his hous he it brought,	<i>home</i>
200	And tok it his douhter and hir bisought	<i>gave; (see note)</i>

	That hye schuld kepe it as sche can, For sche was melche and couthe theran. Sche bad it souke and it nold, For it was neighe ded for cold.	<i>she; care for; knew how with milk; knew about nursing suck; would not nearly dead</i>
205	Anon fer sche alight And warmed it wele aflight. Sche gaf it souke opon hir barm, And sethen laid it to slepe warm. And when the masse was ydon,	<i>fire; lit [the babe]well at once gave; bosom then mass</i>
210	The porter to the abbesse com ful son "Madame, what rede ye of this thing? Today right in the morning, Sone after the first stounde, A litel maidenchild ich founde	<i>went immediately advise you about hour</i>
215	In the holwe assche ther out, And a pel him about. A ring of gold also was there. Hou it com thider y not nere." The abbesse was awonderd of this thing.	<i>hollow don't know amazed</i>
220	"Go," hye seyde, "on heighing, And feche it hider, y pray the. It is welcom to God and to me. Ichil it help as y can And sigge it is mi kinswoman."	<i>she; in haste bring it here I will say; my; (see note)</i>
225	The porter anon it gan forth bring With the pal and with the ring. The abbesse lete clepe a prest anon,	<i>summoned</i>

	And lete it cristin in funston.	<i>had it christened at the font</i>
	And for it was in an asche yfounde,	<i>because; ash tree</i>
230	Sche cleped it <i>Frain</i> in that stounde.	<i>named; occasion (time)</i>
	(The Freyns of the "asche" is a <i>freyn</i>	<i>French; (see note)</i>
	After the language of Breteyn;	
	Forthe <i>Le Frein</i> men clepeth this lay	<i>Therefore; (see note)</i>
	More than <i>Asche</i> in ich cuntray).	<i>each</i>
235	This Frein thrived fram yer to yer.	
	The abbesse nece men wend it were.	<i>kinswoman (niece); thought</i>
	The abbesse hir gan teche and beld.	<i>bring up; (see note)</i>
	Bi that hye was of twelve winter eld,	<i>By the time she; old</i>
	In al Ingland ther nas non	<i>was not at all</i>
240	A fairer maiden than hye was on.	<i>she; one</i>
	And when hye couthe ought of manhed,	<i>knew about human nature; (see note)</i>
	Hye bad the abbesse hir wis and rede	<i>bade; instruct; advise</i>
	Whiche were her kin, on or other,	<i>Who</i>
	Fader or moder, soster or brother.	
245	The abbesse hir in conseyl toke,	
	To tellen hir hye nought forsoke,	<i>she was not forsaken</i>
	Hou hye was founden in al thing,	<i>discovered; precise detail</i>
	And tok hir the cloth and the ring,	<i>gave</i>
	And bad hir kepe it in that stede;	<i>place</i>
250	And ther whiles sche lived so sche dede.	
	Than was ther in that cuntré	
	A riche knight of lond and fe,	<i>with land and income</i>
	Proud and yong and jolive,	<i>full of life</i>
	And had nought yete ywedded wive.	<i>yet</i>

255	He was stout, of gret renoun, And was ycleped Sir Guroun. He herd praise that maiden fre, And seyde he wald hir se. He dight him in the way anon,	<i>bold named would; see set himself</i>
260	And joliflich thider he come; And bad his man sigge verrament He schuld toward a turnament. The abbesse and the nonnes alle Fair him gret in the gest halle,	<i>gaily; (see note) bade; say truly nuns all Graciously; guest</i>
265	And damisel Freyn, so hende of mouth, Gret him faire as hye wele couthe; And swithe wele he gan devise Her semblaunt and her gentrise, Her lovesum eighen, her rode so bright,	<i>sweet Greeted; well knew quickly; did discern; (see note) appearance; breeding lovely eyes; complexion; clear</i>
270	And comced to love hir anon right, And thought hou he might take on To have hir to his leman. He thought, "Yif ich com hir to More than ichave ydo,	<i>commenced how to [be] his lover I have to do</i>
275	The abbesse wil souchy gile And voide hir in a litel while." He compast another enchesoun: To be brother of that religioun. 4 "Madame," he seyde to the abbesse,	<i>suspect guile remove; an instant composed; strategy</i>
280	"Y lovi wele in al godenisse, Ichil give on and other,	<i>love you; goodness; (see note) I shall; one</i>

	Londes and rentes, to bicom your brother, That ye schul ever fare the bet When y com to have recet."	<i>Lands; rents; become better reception</i>
285	At few wordes thai ben at on. He graythes him and forth is gon. Oft he come bi day and night To speke with that maiden bright. So that with his fair bihest,	<i>With; agreed gets himself ready promise</i>
290	And with his gloseing atte lest, Hye graunted him to don his wille When he wil, loude and stille. "Leman," he seyde, "thou most lat be The abbesse, thi nece, and go with me.	<i>flattery at last She; do his desire forsake kinswoman</i>
295	For icham riche, of swich powere, The finde bet than thou hast here." 5 The maiden grant, and to him trist, And stale oway that no man wist. With hir tok hye no thing	<i>such power; (see note) acceded; trusted; (see note) stole; knew took; nothing</i>
300	Bot hir pel and hir ring. When the abbesse gan asprie That hye was with the knight owy, Sche made morning in hir thought, And hir biment and gained nought.	<i>Except realized away mourning lamented</i>
305	So long sche was in his castel That al his meyné loved hir wel. To riche and pouer sche gan hir dresse, That al hir loved, more and lesse.	<i>household She spoke so with rich and poor all loved her, both high and low</i>

	And thus sche lad with him hir liif	<i>led</i>
310	Right as sche hadde ben his wedded wiif.	<i>as if</i>
	His knightes com and to him speke,	<i>(see note)</i>
	And Holy Chirche comandeth eke,	
	Sum lordes douhter for to take,	
	And his leman al forsake;	<i>lover</i>
315	And seyde him were wel more feir	<i>told; [it] would be; proper</i>
	In wedlok to geten him an air	<i>heir</i>
	Than lede his liif with swiche on	<i>lead; such a one</i>
	Of was kin he knewe non.	<i>Of whose; not one</i>
	And seyde, "Here bisides is a knight	<i>here nearby</i>
320	That hath a douhter fair and bright	
	That schal bere his hiritage;	<i>bear; heritage</i>
	Taketh hir in mariage!"	
	Loth him was that dede to do,	<i>Reluctant; deed</i>
	Ac atte last he graunt therto.	<i>But; agreed</i>
325	The forward was ymaked aright,	<i>agreement; properly</i>
	And were at on, and treuthe plight.	<i>accorded; pledged</i>
	Allas, that he no hadde ywite,	<i>had no knowledge; (see note)</i>
	Er the forward were ysmite	<i>Before; agreement; struck</i>
	That hye and his leman also	<i>she (his bride); lover</i>
330	Sostren were and twinnes to!	<i>Sisters; (see note)</i>
	Of o fader bigeten thai were,	<i>one; begotten</i>
	Of o moder born yfere.	<i>together</i>
	That hye so ware nist non,	
	For soth y say, bot God alon. 6	
335	The newe bride was grayd with alle	<i>made ready</i>

	And brought hom to the lordes halle.	
	Hir fader com with hir, also	
	The levedi, hir moder, and other mo.	<i>many others</i>
	The bischop of the lond withouten fail	
340	Com to do the spusseyl.	<i>espousal</i>
	[That maiden bird in bour bright,	<i>(see note)</i>
	Le Codre sche was yhight.	<i>called; (see note)</i>
	And ther the gwestes had gamen and gle,	<i>merriment; glee</i>
	And sayd to Sir Guroun joyfully:	
345	"Fairer maiden nas never seen,	<i>(see note)</i>
	Better than Ash is Hazle y ween!"	<i>suspect</i>
	(For in Romaunce <i>Le Frain</i> "ash" is,	<i>French</i>
	And <i>Le Codre</i> "hazle," y-wis.)	<i>I know</i>
	A gret fest than gan they hold	<i>feast; (see note)</i>
350	With gle and pleasaunce manifold.	
	And mo than al servauntes, the maid,	
	Yhight Le Frain, as servant sped.	<i>Called</i>
	Albe her herte wel nigh tobroke,	<i>Although; heart</i>
	No word of pride ne grame she spoke.	<i>anger</i>
355	The levedi marked her simple chere,	<i>The mother noticed; (see note)</i>
	And gan to love her, wonder dere.	<i>very dearly</i>
	Scant could sche feel more pine or reuth	<i>Scarcely; pain; compassion</i>
	War it hir owen childe in sooth.	<i>Were</i>
	Than to the bour the damsel sped,	<i>bower</i>
360	Whar graithed was the spousaile bed;	<i>readied; wedding</i>
	Sche demed it was ful foully dight,	<i>thought; poorly made</i>
	And yll besemed a may so bright;	<i>ill-befitted a maiden; (see note)</i>

	So to her coffer quick she cam,	<i>went</i>
	And her riche baudekyn out nam,	<i>brocaded cloth withdrew</i>
365	Which from the abbesse sche had got;	<i>(see note)</i>
	Fayrer mantel nas ther not;	
	And deftly on the bed it layd;	
	Her lord would thus be well apayd.	<i>pleased</i>
	Le Codre and her mother, thare,	
370	Ynsame unto the bour gan fare,	<i>Together; to go</i>
	But whan the levedi that mantyll seighe,	<i>saw</i>
	Sche wel neighe swoned oway.	<i>fainted</i>
	The chamberleynt sche cleped tho,	<i>chamberlain; called then</i>
	But he wist of it no mo.	<i>knew; nothing</i>
375	Then came that hendi maid Le Frain,	<i>gentle</i>
	And the levedi gan to her sain,	<i>lady did; speak</i>
	And asked whose mantyll it ware.	<i>was</i>
	Then answered that maiden fair:	
	"It is mine without lesing;	<i>lying</i>
380	Y had it together with this ringe.	
	Myne aunte tolde me a ferli cas	<i>marvelous thing</i>
	Hou in this mantyll yfold I was,	
	And hadde upon mine arm this ring,	
	Whanne I was ysent to norysching."	<i>upbringing</i>
385	Then was the levedi astonied sore:	<i>very astonished</i>
	"Fair child! My doughter, y the bore!"	
	Sche swoned and was wel neighe ded,	<i>dead</i>
	And lay sikeand on that bed.	<i>sighing</i>
	Her husbond was fet tho,	<i>fetched then</i>

390	And sche told him al her wo, Hou of her neighbour sche had missayn, For sche was delyvered of childre twain; And hou to children herself sche bore; "And that o child I of sent thore,	<i>slandered</i> <i>Because</i> <i>two</i> <i>sent off</i>
395	In a convent yfostered to be; And this is sche, our doughter free; And this is the mantyll, and this the ring You gaf me of yore as a love-tokening." The knight kissed his daughter hende	<i>(see note)</i> <i>eagerly; (see note)</i>
400	Oftimes, and to the bisschop wende: And he undid the mariage strate, And weddid Sir Guroun alsgate To Le Frain, his leman, so fair and hend. With them Le Codre away did wend,	<i>went</i> <i>immediately</i> <i>instead</i> <i>go</i>
405	And sone was spousyd with game and gle, To a gentle knight of that countré. Thus ends the lay of tho maidens bright, Le Frain and Le Codre yhlight.]	<i>soon</i> <i>called</i>

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FOOTNOTES

LAY LE FREINE: FOOTNOTES

- 1 That is dishonor for both of them (both husband and wife)
- 2 That she will not nor she shall not (i.e., the midwife refuses to become an accomplice)
- 3 I would not weep for this kind of thing
- 4 To pretend to be a lay brother of that same religious order
- 5 I can provide for you better than you have here
- 6 That they were so, no one knew, / Except God alone, for truth I say

LAY LE FREINE: NOTES

Abbreviations: E: Ellis; H: Holthausen; L: Laurin; S: Sands; V: Varnhagen; W: Wattie; Wb: Weber; Z: Zupitza.

1-22 These lines also appear in both fifteenth-century manuscripts of *Sir Orfeo*. Although they are a composite of material taken from various lais of Marie de France, they do not appear in her lais. See Guillaume, pp. 459-60. For notes on the prologue and its use with *Sir Orfeo*, see the notes for *Orfeo*, lines 1-38. Interestingly, the prologue, like the exordium to scholarly books, tells us its own form of who, what, where, how, and why. Who told the tales? The Breton kings (so although the text doesn't claim an author, it tries to underwrite its authority by claiming to have come from lays composed by kings). Where was the tale from? Breteyne and its courtly worlds. When? In olden times. How was the tale told? Kings heard of marvelous things, picked up a harp, and preserved those marvels in lays. What? Lays can tell of many things: war, woe, joy, happiness, treachery, guile, bawdiness, jokes, the fairy

world, but most of all, of love. The introduction then focuses on its own specific subject, a fair "ensample" from long ago. For a discussion of authority, rhetoric, and prologues in theological and scholarly medieval texts (as well as their influence on literary forms), see A. J. Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988).

Obviously, the Middle English lays are somewhat removed from court and university; still, the use of the extensive introduction is connected with the tradition of the prologue in other literary genres and venues.

1 The first line suggests a literate audience, stressing reading and writing, as does the word *clerk* in line 2, although much of the lay also stresses the oral transmission of the text (see, for example, lines 20-22, 25, 233-34, 334, 347-48, 408). The MS is blurred at the end of line 1. W emends this to read [ywri]te. I follow her reading.

8 This line highlights the ancient quality of the lay, an emphasis found frequently within the texts included in this volume, to establish authority. See Chaucer's short poem, "The Former Age."

11 *thinges*. MS: *thingeth*.

26 The ash tree as a symbol for the protagonist contrasts with the hazel tree symbol used for Le Freine's sister, Le Codre. Lee Ramsey, discussing Marie de France's version of the story, notes that the ash does not bear fruit and is used for Le Freine because she cannot give Guroun a legitimate heir, until her lineage is known [*Chivalric Romances: Popular Literature in Medieval England* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), p. 114]. Perhaps irony is intended, since the ash tree first bears the child in its branches (its fruit) and because Le Freine will turn out to be the prized wife. The differences in the connotations of the twins' names contributes to the problems of signs and human abilities to read them which forms a theme within the text. Where their bodies are so similar, their names artificially set them apart as opposites. The *Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology, and Symbols* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1949), vol 1, p. 80, connects the "ash" in Scandinavian mythology to the tree of the world, Yggdrasil; the gods ripped the Ash out of the ground and formed it into Ask, the first man. In English and Scottish folklore, the ash is said to have healing powers and its sap a protection against witchcraft. The magical qualities of the tree are also recorded in Pliny who claims that snakes will not crawl over leaves from an ash tree and that a rod made from the ash tree, if it draws a circle in the dirt around a snake, will confine it so that it dies of starvation. See note to line 342 below.

29 MS: *knighteth*. Wb, V, and W all substitute "s" as I have. The West Country is often associated with Wales and with the Celtic fairy world. *Le Freine* does not, however, contain miraculous events or objects; the only things close to magic are the ring and the robe, said in Wb's continuation to have been marvelous love tokens first given Le Freine's mother by her father (lines 397-98) and then passed on with the child as a kind of protection.

29-30 The first of many doubles in the narrative, the two knights and their two wives who are living joyfully until one wife, "envious," accuses the other of adultery.

42 The role of godparent was a serious one in the Middle Ages. See Joseph Lynch, *Godparents and Kinship in Early Medieval Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), who found "more than three hundred references to baptismal kinship in Latin sources before A.D. 900" (p. 44) and who documents the rise of spiritual kinship and godsibbing throughout Western Europe in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

58 Giving gifts to the messenger who bears news of successful childbirth was common practice among the nobility in the late Middle Ages. Nicholas Orme, in his book *From Childhood to Chivalry: The Education of the English Kings and Aristocracy 1066-1530* (London: Methuen, 1984), reports "On 15 July 1273, St. Edith's Day, the wife of Nicholas, baron of Stafford, gave birth to a son in their home. Her joyful husband wrote at once to ask Roger de Pywelisdon, who lived at a distance, to come . . . to be the boy's godfather and lift him from the font" (p. 1). Orme also reports that when Edward III received news of the birth of his first son, the Black Prince, he rewarded the messenger (a yeoman) a life pension of forty marks a year. When he received news about the birth of his second son, he gave that messenger £100; and when informed of John of Gaunt's birth, he awarded the three ladies who bore the news £200 (p. 2).

60 Ellis renders *an envieous* as "malicious."

68 S translates: "And broadcast the disgrace everywhere."

69-72 The idea that twins were a sign of adultery was a popular belief in the Middle Ages, though it was condemned as ignorant by others. See Genesis 38:24 ff., which makes the superstition despicable.

77-82 The curse of the unnamed, undifferentiated "women" on Le Freine's mother is fulfilled quickly. Such curses occur often in the Breton lay. See Guenevere's self-destructive curse in *Launfal*; Emaré's "curse" of infertility on her husband for abandoning his child and his wife; the fairy king's command or *geis* on Heurodis in *Sir Orfeo*, and the *geis* Dame Triamour places on Launfal.

80 Seven Names for God were recognized in medieval Christianity. In her *Dictionary of Mythology, Folklore, and Symbols*, 3 vols. (New York: Scarecrow Press, 1962), vol. 2, pp. 1424-25, Gertrude Jobs mentions seven names for God which were particularly powerful in ancient Israel: "Adonai, Ehyeh-Asher-Ehyeh, El, Elohim, Shaddai, YHWH (in medieval Christianity, Jehovah), and Zebaoth." Jobs writes, "In the Middle Ages, God sometimes was called The Seven."

91-92 Wb translates these lines as "I blame every woman as forbidden to speak harm of another." L reads *bite* as "bithe," meaning "is." V rejects both readings. H thinks *bite* is a scribal error for "be it" and translates: "may it be forbidden to each woman" W agrees with H. Jealousy was often depicted as a woman, as were gossip and envy. See the *Romance of the Rose* and its illuminations; see also notes to *Emaré* lines 535-40, and Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the City of Ladies* I.10.5-7. In another work, Christine writes: "Envy derives straight from the pride engendered in creatures who forget their poor fragility and their evolution from nothing. Overbearing from false arrogance, the pride in their hearts makes them forget their misery and their vices and consider themselves worthy of great honors and possessions. Because every creature so frequently deceives herself, each tends to want to outshine her neighbor and to rise above her not only in virtue but in worldly estate, esteem or possessions." On slander, she writes, "A person of great courage never slanders her enemy, because malicious words are the weapons of people with little power. To use them is to admit cowardice An apt illustration of the folly of slander is the person who wanted to make war on the heavens and pointed his bow toward the clouds. The arrows fell back on his head and wounded him severely. Likewise as these . . . show, the slander a hateful person speaks against her adversary turns against the slanderer, wounding both soul and honor." *A Medieval Woman's Mirror of Honor: The Treasury of the City of Ladies*, trans. Charity Cannon Willard (New York: Persea, 1989), pp. 158, 163.

95-104 The mother lays out three options for herself. Each is stressed by the repetition of grammatical forms beginning with "or" then, in lines 105-14, she explains the reasoning which takes her to her decision to "sle" her child. This lengthy representation of the internal thoughts of a character is somewhat rare in the Breton Lay. The fourth path is proposed, in Weber's reconstruction, by a noble lady-in-waiting who suggests leaving the one twin at a convent far away (lines 128-34 below).

109 *knaweleche. V: know lethe.*

112 *Leighster* would specify a female liar.

114 In canon law, abandoning children carried consequences only if the abandonment was known and then only for the father. In the *Decretals* of Pope Gregory IX, if a father gave up his child knowingly, he lost all legal control over the child (*patria potestas*). But on the issue of infanticide, the laws were much harsher, requiring penance (as the mother indicates here). The penance for infanticide, according to the *Decretals*, ranged from a lifetime of monastic living to a year of bread and water fasting. Secular regulations prohibited infanticide, although it appears to have been practiced; see Boswell, esp. pp. 322-427, and Shulamith Shahar, *Childhood in the Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, 1990), esp. pp. 121-61. (For folklore, see Stith Thompson, pp. 300-95.)

We enjoin thee . . . that thou carry
This female bastard hence, and that thou bear it
To some remote and desert place, quite out
Of our dominions; and that there thou leave it,
Without more mercy, to its own protection
And favour of the climate.

See the echo in the falsified letter the mother-in-law writes which condemns Emaré and Segramour to the sea (*Emaré*, lines 587-97).

115-20 Because women assisted one another in childbirth, no one else, apparently, knows that the mother has delivered twins. For an actual case of the closeness that could develop between classes of women around childbirth, see the case of Agnes of Saleby, a

barren woman who, to save her dying husband's estate from falling into his brother's hands, feigned pregnancy and birth. She allegedly did this under the tutelage of a poor woman who gave her own daughter, Grace, to be Agnes's "daughter." The case is recorded by Adam of Eynsham in his life of Hugh of Lincoln, *Magna vita Sancti Hugonis*, ed. Decima L. Douie and David Hugh Farmer, 2 vols., (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson, 1961/62), vol. II, Ch. 5. The account is described quite thoroughly by Paulette L'Hermite-Leclercq, "The Feudal Order," in *A History of Women in the West II. Silences of the Middle Ages*, ed. Christine Klapisch-Zuber (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp. 204-12.

121-33 These lines are missing from the MS. They were reconstructed by Wb and have commonly been included in modern editions of the lay. Wb's reconstruction is modelled on Marie de France's *Lai le Fresne* (lines 99-115).

137-8 The richly embroidered cloth never is described; however, the token has great power. Like Emaré's robe, it will accompany Le Freine everywhere she goes and will serve to solidify her identity. Also like the cloth in *Emaré*, this one is from Constantinople.

137-44 The *baudekine* and the ring become the tokens which precipitate the recognition scene at the end of the poem. Examining Talmudic regulations regarding abandoned children, Boswell writes, "Foundlings have limited marriage rights - i.e., cannot marry into the highest four genealogical classes . . . because their parents cannot be known and there is some danger of incest Yet a foundling was exempt from these restrictions if the mode of his or her abandonment offered evidence of parental concern, suggesting that a good family had given him or her up under duress: if he was found circumcised; with limbs set; massaged with oil and powdered, wearing beads, a tablet or an amulet, suspended from a tree out of reach of animals, left in a synagogue, in moving water, or near a public thoroughfare. The absence of such attentions would be indications that the child's parents did not care about him, or possibly that he was of undesirable ancestry . . ." (p. 151). The Christian tradition reiterated aspects of the Hebraic; so, for example, the Synod of Nimes in 1252 guaranteed that abandoned children who died near a church would be buried in sanctified ground unless "written evidence or some other sign should indicate that an abandoned child found dead had not been baptized." Le Freine's mother wants it known that the baby comes from "riche kende," and the maid who abandons the baby puts her in the hollow of an ash tree right next to the "chirche dore." Interestingly, Le Freine is not baptized before she is abandoned. See Boswell, pp. 322-94.

138 MS: *fram*.

142 MS: *pilt*. This is followed by Wb and V; E reads "plit" and glosses the word as "plaited, twisted." The manuscript, *pilt*, violates the rhyme scheme.

155 An ampersand has been inserted in MS.

159 MS: *steete*; Wb and V emend to *strete*.

167 MS: *he*.

174 W suggests, "the repetition of *bi hir* is probably an error."

197 MS: *betven*.

200 MS: *his* has been inserted.

224 The abbess gives Le Freine a certain amount of protection by claiming she is her "kinswoman." Boswell cites the German *Schwabenspiegel*, a civil code: "If any father or mother abandons a child, and someone else picks it up and rears it and feeds it until it is old enough to serve, it should serve the one who saved its life. And if the father or mother should wish to reclaim . . . they must first repay whatever cost [the finder] incurred . . ." (p. 326). However, finders who raised children as servants were the only ones who exerted parental powers over the child. A finder who raised the child as her own kin or as freeborn did not acquire legal rights over the child (p. 327).

231 V and E read *freyns* as "freyn" and read her "name." Wb and Z believe *freyns* means "freynsch," or "French."

233 A deleted thorn is visible before *le*. *Lay* has been rendered as *day* in Wb.

237-38 *eld* may be either a noun alongside "winter" or an adjective where "winter" is governed by "of."

241 *manhed* is rendered as "consanguinity" in E, and L agrees. W notes that there is little to support this reading, citing the *NED* (s.v. manhead). The *MED* cites this line from *Le Freine* in its entry for "manhed" under the first meaning listed which is "human condition, nature, or form."

260 *joliflich*. MS: *Iolifich*.

267 *swithe*. MS: *swhe*. This spelling is followed by Wb and V who read this as "so"; E and Z emend to "swithe," a reading W also prefers.

280 V: *y lovi* (I love); E: *I-lovi* (beloved); Wb: *y-lovi* (beloved). W writes, "It is easiest to suppose that a "d" has been forgotten and to read *ylouid*, meaning well-beloved in a virtuous way."

295 E: *swich*; Wb: *swithe*; V: *swi-Porn-e*. The letters "c" and "t" are identical in MS. W prefers *swiche* which is also the reading by Z.

297-99 Le Freine's movements from one "world" to another happen in secrecy. Just as she was illicitly taken away from the childbed and abandoned in the tree, so here, she is illicitly taken from the convent to live as Guroun's mistress.

311-18 On the issue of class and its role here, see Harriet E. Hudson, "Construction of Class, Family, and Gender in Some Middle English Popular Romances," in Britton J. Harwood and Gillian R. Overing, eds., *Class and Gender in Early English Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), pp. 76-94. Hudson focuses on *Sir Eglamour of Artois*, *Torrent of Portengale*, *Paris and Vienne*, and *The Squire of Low Degree*, all late medieval romances. Compare the pressure placed on Arthur to marry at the beginning of *Sir Launfal*. Notice that Holy Chirche does not uphold consensual rights and instead supports a legitimate, arranged marriage of class solidarity. N.b. the Pope's dispensation granted to Syr Artyus in *Emaré*, lines 230-240.

327-34 The laws of consanguinity would identify Guroun's marriage to Le Freine's sister as an act of incest. Much written discussion surrounding the issue of abandoned children stresses the possibility that incest can result because bloodlines are not known. See the charts of consanguinity regularly appended to the *Decretum*. See also James Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); Georges Duby, *Medieval Marriage: Two Models from Twelfth-Century France*, trans. Elborg Forster (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978). For a medieval audience, the threat of incest in *Le Freine* remains potential right up until Guroun's marriage to Le Codre is annulled. This also explains why the narrator reacts so emotionally at this point in the narrative and why the text emphasizes that the two are sisters, twins, with one father and one mother.

330 MS: *twinnnes*.

341-end Fol. 263 is cut out. The initial letters in the first column are left here and there. V provides these on pp. 422-33 in a footnote. Wb provided these lines in an imaginative re-creation of Middle English translated directly from Marie de France's lay.

342 If "Le Freine," the "ash tree," holds significance, so does "Le Codre," the "hazel tree." The sisters' names both derive from trees found in Celtic mythology. A tree frequently appears at the junction of two worlds - the human and the fairy Otherworld. See the discussion in Marie-Thérèse Brouland, *Sir Orfeo: le substrat celtique du lai breton anglais* (Paris: Didier Erudition, 1990), pp. 58-69. In the *Lai du Chevrefeuille* (lines 51-54), hazel (*le Coudrier*) is the wood Tristan uses to send his message to Yseut. See also notes to line 26 above.

345-46 The irony of these lines is clear given the fact that the two women are twins.

349 Whereas the narrative began with a celebration of new birth, the final social gathering celebrates a wedding, stressing the circularity and mirroring that is common in medieval romance.

355-58 The mother's empathetic response may suggest her preconscious reaction to the servant who will turn out to be her own

daughter, but it may also show us a reformed mother. Where years before she could remain detached from her newborn and unempathetic, she now finds herself imagining or experiencing Le Freine's internal experience. The three lines also continue the pattern of presenting the most poignant emotions of the protagonist through another character's eyes or through the narrator's voice.

362 Since Le Codre and Le Freine are twin sisters, Le Freine's belief that the "spousale bed" is too shabby for "a may so bright" takes a reflexive turn. Without knowing it, when she values Le Codre and finds her deserving of the baudekyn, she values herself. The doubling here provides potentialities for psychological readings.

365 The origin of the cloth is mentioned a number of times, each time a partial truth, as no character knows the full story. See lines 137-38, 143-44, 190-94, 211-18, 241-49, 299-300, and 364-66. This information is followed by more, in lines 377, 379-84, 397-98. The last piece of information about the cloth is saved for lines 397-98 when we learn that the cloth was a gift of love, a "love-tokening," Le Freine's father had given to her mother. The cloth, like Le Freine, has a story which is not fully known, even to the audience, until the very last lines of the text, so where we know the tangle of human relationships that converge in the marriage bower, we don't know the full story of the cloth until the end of the poem. See *Emaré* for another text with a close connection between a beautiful cloth and the destiny and identity of the heroine.

395 *Wb has covent.*

399 The knight's courtesy is consistent throughout the poem. Just as he rejoiced in the births of his friend's sons, here he accepts and rejoices in the reunion with a long-lost daughter.

